

Groton Daily Independent

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**2 HOUR
LATE START**

Groton Area Schools will be starting 2 hours late today. OST will open at 7 a.m.

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
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Friday, March 22

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.
School Lunch: Cheese sticks, peas.
Senior Menu: Tuna noodle hot dish with peas, California blend vegetables, Swedish apple square, whole wheat bread.

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



Saturday, March 23

East River Destination Imagination Tournament at Webster
Billy Shilhanek benefit at the Groton Legion, 3 p.m.
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.
Groton Lions Easter Egg Hunt, 10 a.m., Groton City Park
Spring Vendor Fair, 10 a.m., GHS Gym
Men's Bowling Tournament, 1 p.m., Jungle Lanes
St. John's Lutheran: Questioning confirmands, 5 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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1440

In partnership with **smartasset**[™]

The US Department of Justice yesterday filed a suit against Apple, alleging the tech giant violated antitrust laws in the smartphone market by making it exceedingly challenging for third parties to integrate with iPhones. The company has argued the policies are needed to maintain a high-quality user experience for their software.

Brain-computer interface company Neuralink released a video yesterday purporting to show a quadriplegic patient who had received one of its implants playing a game of online chess with his mind. The nine-minute video features 29-year-old Nolan Arbaugh, who was paralyzed from the shoulders down in 2015 after a diving accident. Arbaugh became the first human patient to undergo the implant trial with Neuralink in January.

Shareholders are expected to vote today on whether to merge publicly traded shell company Digital World Acquisition with Trump Media and Technology Group, the owner of former President Donald Trump's Truth Social platform. If approved, Trump Media could go public as soon as next week, more than doubling Trump's \$2.6B net worth.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NCAA women's basketball tournament first round tips off today as men's first round continues.

Global music revenue hit \$28.6B in 2023, a 10% rise from 2022 and the highest sales figure since 1999, unadjusted for inflation.

Warner Bros Discovery to launch Max streaming service in 25 European countries beginning in May. M. Emmet Walsh, character actor known for roles in "Blade Runner" and "Knives Out," dies at 88.

Science & Technology

Scientists perform first successful transplant of a genetically edited pig organ into a living human recipient; operation was the first to be carried out in person, not in a coma.

Analysis of recovered documents suggests that religious text previously attributed to William Shakespeare's father was written by the famous playwright's sister, Joan.

Researchers develop method to create artificial chromosomes, a potential breakthrough in delivering gene therapy treatments.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow +0.7%, Nasdaq +0.2%), reaching new record closing levels. Reddit shares soar 70% intraday in Wall Street debut before closing up 48% at \$50.44 per share, from initial public offering price of \$34 per share.

US existing home sales unexpectedly rise 9.5% month-over-month in February, the largest monthly gain in a year; median home price of \$384,500 is up 5.7% from a year ago, marking highest median home price for any February on record.

Swiss National Bank becomes first major bank to cut interest rates, moving ahead of the European Central Bank and US Federal Reserve. Turkey's central bank raises key interest rate to 50% to curb annual inflation of 67%.

Politics & World Affairs

House to vote on \$1.2T federal funding package; deal would head to the Senate ahead of tonight's midnight deadline. Sen. Bill Menendez (D-NJ) to resign after current term ends in 2024; Menendez under indictment for bribery charges.

US CIA Director William Burns heads back to the Middle East to join Israel-Gaza cease-fire talks.

Two suspects remain at large following escape from Idaho prison after shooting and injuring two officers; state officials issued a \$2M bond for the primary assailant.

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Indoor NSU Track Meet Results

Mens Results

Shot Put - Finals

6. Holden Sippel, 40' 7.75
11. Karter Moody, 37' 2.5
29. Ashton Holmes, 29' 1.25
31. Drew Thurston, 26' 1

Womens Results

55 Meter Dash - Finals

2. Laila Roberts, 7.72
5. Kella Tracy, 8.19

55 Meter Dash - Prelims

3. Laila Roberts, 7.93
5. Kella Tracy, 7.94
9. Rylee Dunker, 8.09
24. Jerica Locke, 8.72
29. Kayla Lehr, 8.80
50. Addison Hoffman, 9.42

200 Meters - Finals

2. Laila Roberts, 28.94
5. Rylee Dunker, 29.43
7. McKenna Tietz, 29.61
11. Jerica Locke, 30.90
25. Talli Wright, 32.63
27. Elizabeth Fliehs, 32.78
29. Kayla Lehr, 32.90
41. Hannah Sandness, 35.19

400 Meters - Finals

1. Ashlynn Warrington, 1:11.69
6. Elizabeth Fliehs, 1:14.76

800 Meters - Finals

1. Taryn Traphagen, 2:33.81
2. Faith Traphagen, 2:35.34

1600 Meters - Finals

- 11 Faith Traphagen, DNS

55m Hurdles - Finals

2. McKenna Tietz, 9.73
4. Talli Wright, 11.20
6. Emerlee Jones, 11.57
7. Teagan Hanten, 11.68

55m Hurdles - Prelims

1. McKenna Tietz, 10.03
5. Teagan Hanten, 11.65
6. Talli Wright, 11.68
8. Emerlee Jones, 12.19
9. Hannah Sandness, 12.45

4x400 Relay - Finals

1. Faith Traphagen, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Ashlynn Warrington, 4:37.98

Shot Put - Finals

2. Emma Kutter, 31' 4.5
6. Faith Fliehs, 29' 6.5
10. Avery Crank, 26' 3.5
11. Ashley Johnson, 25' 5.5
20. Kayleigh McGannon, 20' 3
21. Emma Davies, 19' 7
24. Emily Overacker, 18' 0.5

High Jump - Finals

7. Emerlee Jones, 4' 6

Long Jump - Finals

4. Laila Roberts, 14' 7.75
12. Anna Fjeldheim, 13' 0
14. Teagan Hanten, 11' 11.75
15. Addison Hoffman, 10' 10.75

Triple Jump - Finals

6. Emerlee Jones, 26' 6.25
7. Teagan Hanten, 25' 6.25

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2024 Groton Area Elementary

Kindergarten Roundup (Screening) for children turning

5 on or before September 1, 2024

Friday, April 5, 2024

If your child is currently attending Junior Kindergarten at Groton Area Elementary school, please DISREGARD this notice. Your teacher will be sending information if necessary.

Packets are being sent home this week with information regarding KG Roundup. These would apply to families who have children eligible for KG and JK this coming 2023-2024 school year who are not currently enrolled in our school. Please contact the school if you do not receive a packet. We do not have all children in our census. Thank you!!!



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Death Notice: Nora Rix

Nora Rix, 93, of Aberdeen and formerly of Groton passed away March 21, 2024 at Angelhaus in Aberdeen. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

So much going on in Groton! Thank you for shopping locally!

2024 Groton Spring Vendor Fair

Stop and shop from a variety of Crafters and Vendors! Also enjoy some lunch while you shop! There will also be an Auction table & all proceeds will go to Make-A-Wish Foundation!

Where: Groton High School Gym
502 N 2nd St. Groton, SD 57445

When: Saturday, March 23rd 2024

Time: 10:00am - 3:00pm



March 23, 2024 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym



Groton Lions Club Lunch starting at 11am

\$10 MEAL DEAL includes BBQ, Chips, Bottled Water & Dessert
Beverages & individual items for sale as well!

GROTON LIONS CLUB ANNUAL EASTER EGG HUNT

Saturday, March 23rd @10am sharp!
Groton City Park

3 age groups: 3 and under, 4-6 & 7-10

Your Lions Club Members will be filling & hiding nearly 1200 Easter eggs!

Alternate date is March 30th.



MARCH 23RD, 10AM-3PM

EXTENDED SHOPPING HOURS!

COMMON CENTS Community Thrift Store



209 N MAIN ST.

- Eat
- Shop
- Buy

GROTON

LOCAL

#57445

Chamber Of Commerce

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EMPLOYMENT

Dairy Queen in Groton is hiring! If you're looking for a fun job with lots of variety, look no further! We're looking for energetic, smiling people – we provide free meals, uniforms, competitive wages, fun atmosphere and flexible scheduling. Part-time – day, evening, week-end shifts available. We will work with your schedule. Stop in today and pick up an application.

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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. 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.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Investigation shuts down texting, email, tablet-based phone calls for inmates and families

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 21, 2024 6:00 PM

The South Dakota Department of Corrections has suspended tablet-based phone calls, texting and email services for inmates and their families due to what the DOC has described as "an investigation pending resolution" tied to inmate tablet computers.

The tablets are provided at no cost to the state by the private company GTL, which also contracts with the DOC for inmate telephone services. The state is responsible for setting up a wireless network and managing the distribution of tablets and sale of headphones.

The state gets a cut of the money inmates spend to use tablet services, and families are able to deposit money for their inmates using GTL platforms. Inmates can send messages, make phone calls, play digital games, listen to music, take courses and access legal research using the tablets. The tablets replaced physical law libraries in 2017.

Some services, such as the law libraries and basic education courses, are free for inmates to use. Other services, like music streaming, can cost 3 to 5 cents per minute. Family members pay 25 cents per message; inmates pay 13 cents per message.

Inmates are not allowed to use social media or otherwise surf the out-of-prison internet with their tablets, but their friends and family members had been able to communicate using the ConnectNetwork website or a mobile app called "Getting Out" until about two weeks ago.

Inmate messages and emails, like landline and tablet phone calls, are subject to monitoring.

DOC Public Information Officer Michael Winder, who does not take phone calls from the media, confirmed last week via email that messaging has been suspended indefinitely, but that inmates are still able to use the shared telephones in each facility and to send and receive letters.

The DOC posted a notice about the tablet service suspension to its website on Wednesday, calling it an "investigation pending resolution," and saying the restrictions began on March 8.

Winder did not immediately respond to questions about any potential security breach related to the tablets, the number of shared phones available in each facility or any potential security impact from the sudden shutdown of tablet communication. It affects approximately 3,700 inmates across facilities in Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Pierre, Yankton and Springfield.

South Dakota Searchlight reached out to GTL's media email address to ask about network security issues, but has yet to receive a response.

Wesley Jarabek, an inmate at the DOC's minimum security unit in Rapid City, said he calls his wife and children two or three times a day at a cost of 6 cents per minute, until recently using a tablet or a landline. On a landline, which is now the only option, inmates in Rapid City get five free minutes each day, he said, and pay for 20 minutes a time after that.

He said tablet calls are preferable. Calls made via tablet aren't subject to the 20-minute limit, and he can place a tablet call nearly any time of day, without waiting in line or talking in louder common areas.

At this point, he said, he and his fellow inmates are waiting as long as 45 minutes in line at peak times to use one of the six landlines in the unit.

"The tension is rising due to the lack of phones in here," Jarabek said Monday. "I know that like yesterday there was almost a physical fist fight over phones ... we can't call on the tablets, we can't message, and having to stand and wait forever to get in line for the phone is aggravating."

The loss of messaging has been frustrating, as well, he said, in part because his wife can no longer send photos of the family or relay quick bits of information to keep him connected.

Word in the halls is that the shutoff is related to a security threat, he said.

"As far as what we've been told is that somebody from inside the prison hacked the GTL system and was making threats to some type of staff," said Jarabek.

Members of a Facebook support group for the families of South Dakota inmates have expressed frustration, as well, and some posted messages to say they've heard similar explanations from their incarcerated loved ones.

One of them, Nieema Thasing of Brookings, was frustrated by sudden error notices when she tried messaging "my guys" last week. She called Amber Pirraglia, the DOC's director of prisons, but Pirraglia did not tell her about threats or hacking, only that the messaging system was under investigation.

Thasing posted her summary of the conversation to the Facebook group in hopes of shedding some light on the situation. She was frustrated first by the error messages from GTL, but also by the lack of an explanation for the families who deposit funds in inmate accounts to stay in touch.

"It was 'Hey, you're going to be down for a while,' and not saying exactly why," Thasing said.

Tablets have become more common in correctional settings since 2017, the year they first arrived at the South Dakota DOC. The Minnehaha County Jail allows inmates to check out tablets for a fee, and started doing so at the same time the DOC tablets arrived. That county jail, located in Sioux Falls, has a fee-based system for messaging, but also offers free e-books to inmates. Warden Mike Mattson told South Dakota Searchlight that inmates can also earn entertainment credits through the completion of tablet-based coursework.

Helene Duhamel, spokesperson for the Pennington County Sheriff's Office, said her West River county is exploring the possibility of tablet availability at the Rapid City jail.

Both the Juvenile Services Center and county jail have "chirpers," which are slightly larger than a cell phone and can be used for text messaging. At the jail, inmates pay a fee for messaging, Duhamel said. At the juvenile facility, the use of the devices is a reward.

"It's an incentive to behave," Duhamel said.

U.S. House passes Johnson's bill seeking to lessen China's control of international supply chains

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 21, 2024 4:40 PM

The U.S. House voted 393-24 Thursday to approve South Dakota Rep. Dusty Johnson's bill targeting China's control of international supply chains. The bill would allow the Federal Maritime Commission to investigate foreign shipping business practices and allow for data standardization in supply chains.

It also cracks down on LOGINK, a logistics management platform operated by China, by banning its use in the U.S. by port operators and marine terminals that use federal grant money, according to news outlet Freight Waves.

Johnson, a Republican, introduced the Ocean Shipping Reform Implementation Act in March 2023 with California Democratic Rep. John Garamendi. Johnson dubbed the bill "Ocean Shipping Reform 2.0" because it goes beyond 2022's Ocean Shipping Reform Act.

"House passage of OSRA 2.0 gets us one step closer to further securing our ocean shipping supply chains," Johnson said in a news release. "The FMC needs authority to crack down on China's unfair shipping practices."

The original act was meant to protect American businesses and consumers from price gouging by foreign liners, Garamendi said in the press release.

Representatives of manufacturers, retailers, agriculture producers and transportation associations said the bill would improve efficiency, workforce and safety priorities for industries dependent on such trade

and transportation, according to the news release.

"Those new regulations are making major strides in ensuring that trucking fleets of all sizes, as well as American agricultural shippers and others moving goods through our ports, are treated fairly by foreign-owned shipping lines," said Henry Hanscom, of the American Trucking Associations.

The new bill will help correct the United States' trade imbalance with countries like China, Garamendi added.

The bill will head to the Senate next.

U.S. Senate passes Rounds-Tester measure to block Paraguayan beef imports

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MARCH 21, 2024 4:03 PM

The U.S. Senate easily passed a resolution Thursday to repeal a Biden administration rule allowing beef imports from Paraguay.

The measure, introduced by Democrat Jon Tester of Montana and Republican Mike Rounds of South Dakota, passed on a bipartisan 70-25 vote. The resolution was made under the Congressional Review Act, which allows Congress to undo executive branch rules within a certain timeframe.

The resolution targets a final rule the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service issued in November that allowed for importation of Paraguayan beef that met certain conditions, including that foot-and-mouth disease had not been diagnosed in the region for at least a year.

Until then, the U.S. had not allowed Paraguayan beef imports since 1997.

Tester and Rounds, who represent major beef-producing states, filed a Congressional Review Act resolution this month to reverse the rule.

They each took to the Senate floor Thursday to advocate for the measure.

Though the risk of foot-and-mouth disease may be low, the effects of just one outbreak would be disastrous for beef producers, Tester said.

"The truth is the administration butchered this decision," Tester said. "I have serious concerns that Paraguay does not currently meet the animal health standards that are in place to award access to our markets."

"American producers work tirelessly to produce the safest, highest-quality and most affordable beef in the entire world," Rounds said. "Our consumers should be able to confidently feed their families beef that has met the rigorous standards required within the United States."

A similar resolution has been introduced in the House by Rep. Ronny Jackson, a Texas Republican.

Last U.S. case in 1929

Foot-and-mouth disease is a virus that affects animals with split hooves, including common livestock like cows, pigs and sheep.

The U.S. last had a reported case in 1929, but other countries have seen more recent outbreaks. Paraguay reported an outbreak in 2012.

As of September 2022, cattle in South America were 98.6% free of the virus, according to the Pan American Health Organization. That was up from 85% in 2010.

The rule requires that meat can be exported if foot-and-mouth disease has not been diagnosed in the region for at least 12 months, if the meat comes from premises where the disease has not been present during the animals' lifetimes and if the animals were inspected before and after death.

Geopolitical concerns

President Joe Biden's administration opposed the congressional resolution, saying the USDA had gone through a robust review process and determined Paraguayan imports were low risk.

In a statement of administration policy, the White House said the rule would have minimal effect on

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domestic beef production and that overturning it would harm relations with Paraguay.

The resolution would "mark a significant setback in the United States-Paraguay bilateral relationship," the Tuesday statement read, noting that U.S. adversaries including Russia and China ban Paraguayan beef over geopolitical disagreements.

"This resolution would amplify the false narratives pushed by our adversaries that the United States is not a reliable economic partner," the administration statement said.

Tester, who is seeking reelection this year in a state that has trended increasingly Republican, has often bucked his party on issues affecting rural interests. He said geopolitical concerns were driving the administration move.

"I think the State Department is having a lot of influence on this decision," he said.

Tester, the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, said he is appreciative of the need to work with allies. But he said that objective shouldn't compromise food safety.

"I share my colleagues' concerns about what's going on in China and Russia right now," he said. "I understand the importance of strengthening alliances with partners all over the world, including Paraguay. But I'm telling you that we shouldn't do it on the backs of hardworking American ranchers."

Under the November rule, Paraguayan imports would be subject to the same quota level applied to countries in Latin America and elsewhere, the White House said. In part due to the quota, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service expected about 6,500 metric tons of Paraguayan beef would reach the U.S. annually.

U.S. inspectors haven't visited Paraguayan sites since 2014, Tester and Rounds said in their speeches Thursday.

U.S. House panel debates boost for WIC in Agriculture funding bill

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MARCH 21, 2024 8:35 PM

WASHINGTON — A U.S. House appropriations panel reviewed the Biden administration's request to increase the U.S. Department of Agriculture's budget for fiscal 2025 Thursday, with Republicans asking pointed questions about a proposal to boost a popular low-income nutrition program.

The hearing came less than two weeks after Congress passed a months-delayed appropriations bill for the USDA for the current fiscal year. Lawmakers have yet to finish a multi-year farm bill that is also delayed.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack advocated for Congress to pass the farm bill – legislation to authorize federal farm and nutrition programs – this year, and highlighted the ways the department is working to prevent funding shortfalls for critical programs for low-income families.

"We create a meaningful economic opportunity in rural America by improving critical infrastructure, supporting a clean energy economy and investing in a higher quality of life for those who live, work, play and raise their families in rural America," Vilsack said in his opening statement.

Republicans on the panel took issue with the \$25.1 billion budget request, an increase of \$2.2 billion from the recently enacted fiscal 2024 law.

Backfilling WIC

The budget requests a total of \$7.73 billion for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC. That number is \$700 million above the recently enacted fiscal 2024 levels.

Subcommittee Chair Andy Harris of Maryland grilled Vilsack on the reason for the larger request for fiscal 2025.

Vilsack said the increase is needed because Congress took so long to pass fiscal 2024 funding, and only provided USDA with flat funding levels in short-term continuing resolutions, the agency had to transfer resources from other nutrition programs to avoid a \$1 billion shortfall for WIC.

"Part of the reason why we have the request that we have is to refill those transfers," Vilsack said.

WIC provides nutrition assistance to about 6.7 million infants, young children and pregnant and post-

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partum patients per month.

"There is a limited amount of resources for all of the programs funded by this bill," Harris said. "I think it is reasonable, and quite frankly it is our job as appropriators, to ask questions about the estimates for all of the programs, including WIC."

Democrats on the panel defended the increase to WIC, and advocated for protections to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which is authorized by the farm bill.

The top Democrat on the panel, Rep. Sanford Bishop of Georgia, said that the budget reflects a "growing demand for WIC funding as participation continues to rise."

"We must rise to meet this critical funding need," Bishop said of the WIC program.

The top Democrat on the full House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, said she was intrigued by USDA's proposal to backstop WIC funding, "so we do not face (a) nutrition assistance cliffhanger like we just went through."

Crawfish, oranges and shrimp

Some lawmakers did not question Vilsack about USDA's budget request, but instead asked him specific questions about agriculture-related crises in their districts and whether the department could help them.

Louisiana GOP Rep. Julia Letlow said a major drought has put the "crawfish industry on life support." She said the crawfish are a more-than-\$300 million commodity in her state, and she asked Vilsack if USDA could provide economic assistance to affected producers.

Vilsack said that he was happy to work with her and would have to check that the department has that discretion.

Democratic Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida asked Vilsack about an update on the USDA's research on citrus greening, which is one of the most severe citrus diseases. She said Florida citrus growers have been struggling with the crop loss due to the disease.

"The problem is the cost of it is fairly significant," Vilsack said. "I think that's the next hurdle, is how do we get the cost down so that it's available to producers."

Alabama GOP Rep. Jerry Carl asked Vilsack about adding domestic shrimp to a USDA list of foods to be used in school lunches in order to create "a sustainable path forward" for the industry.

USDA allows schools to use USDA Foods entitlement dollars to buy domestically grown food through an approved list.

Vilsack said that USDA would have to first see if there is a demand and availability for domestic shrimp and if it's "something that school districts can afford."

Iowa GOP Rep. Ashley Hinson said she was concerned with foreign entities – mainly China – buying U.S. farmland and the reliance on foreign entities for supplies relating to agriculture.

Congressional support for limiting foreign entities' and individuals' access to U.S. agricultural land has grown in recent years, with a focus on China. USDA records have shown that China owns fewer than 1% of U.S. farmland.

Vilsack said that USDA is updating its handbooks and process for how it collects data on land purchases and loans "to make sure we are doing the best job we can of identifying circumstances where land transactions occur."

He added that there will always be challenges to that tracking system because there are more than 3,000 county offices across the country and tracking those purchases would require USDA to have a centralized database.

Vilsack also said that USDA is investing in fertilizer, because the U.S. was "over-reliant on Russia, Belarus, so we have to look at ways where we can be more self-reliant."

He also noted that in Iowa, where Vilsack was governor from 1999 to 2007, China is the top purchaser of soybeans.

"So it's a delicate conversation that we have with our No. 1 customer, at the same time, somebody who we're deeply concerned about," Vilsack said.

Massive \$1.2 trillion spending package that would avert a shutdown released by Congress

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT, ARIANA FIGUEROA, JACOB FISCHLER AND ASHLEY MURRAY -
MARCH 21, 2024 9:47 AM

WASHINGTON — Congress released the final six government funding bills early Thursday, starting off a sprint toward the Friday midnight deadline to wrap up work that was supposed to be finished nearly six months ago.

The bipartisan agreement on the \$1.2 trillion spending package, which emerged just before 3 a.m., came less than two weeks after the U.S. House and Senate approved the other six annual appropriations bills.

This package includes the spending measures for some of the most crucial functions of the federal government — the departments of Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Labor, State and Treasury.

The bill would also fund Congress, the Executive Office of the President, the judiciary and the Social Security Administration.

The 1,012-page spending package provides money for hundreds of programs, including many that lawmakers will tout on the campaign trail heading toward the November elections. Included:

U.S. troops and civilian Defense Department employees will receive a 5.2% pay raise retroactive to Jan. 1, 2024.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's new headquarters project — which has not only divided Democrats and Republicans, but the congressional delegations from Virginia and Maryland — will receive \$200 million for construction on the Greenbelt, Maryland, site via the General Services Administration.

States will get \$55 million in new Election Security Grant funding.

Customs and Border Protection as well as Immigrations and Customs Enforcement will get more than \$4 billion in funding increases.

Child care and early learning programs at the Department of Health and Human Services will receive a \$1 billion increase in funding. The boost will go toward the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which provides grants to state, territorial and tribal agencies, and Head Start, which provides funding to local grantees.

The U.S. Capitol Police will receive a 7.8% funding increase.

Afghans who assisted the United States during the war would be eligible for an additional 12,000 Special Immigrant Visas.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA, the primary aid organization in Gaza, would be stripped of U.S. funding after Israel accused agency employees of taking part in Oct. 7 attacks.

Weekend work possible

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Thursday morning the package clears "another hurdle towards our ultimate goal of funding the federal government."

"This funding agreement between the White House and Congressional leaders is good news that comes in the nick of time: When passed it will extinguish any more shutdown threats for the rest of the fiscal year, it will avoid the scythe of budget sequestration and it will keep the government open without cuts or poison pill riders," he said. "It's now the job of the House Republican leadership to move this package ASAP."

After the House votes to approve the package, likely Friday, Schumer said, "the Senate will need bipartisan cooperation to pass it before Friday's deadline and avoid a shutdown."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, said Wednesday during a press conference he expected senators would be in session this weekend to take final votes on the package.

"My assumptions and what I've told our members is we're likely to be here this weekend. That will be determined, however, by how long it stays in the House," McConnell said.

"And when it's over here, what we have recently done — and I think hopefully will work again — is that

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in return for a certain number of amendments, we can finish it quicker, hopefully, than putting us in the position of shutting down the government," McConnell added.

Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said in a written statement the package would claw back \$20.2 billion from the Internal Revenue Service funding that Democrats included in their signature climate change and tax package and \$6 billion in unused COVID-19 funds.

On immigration, the funding package "cuts funding to NGOs that incentivize illegal immigration and increases detention capacity and the number of Border Patrol Agents to match levels in the House-passed appropriations bill and the Secure the Border Act (H.R. 2)," he said, referring to non-governmental organizations.

The package also includes funding for the nation's defense. "This FY24 appropriations legislation is a serious commitment to strengthening our national defense by moving the Pentagon toward a focus on its core mission while expanding support for our brave men and women who serve in uniform," Johnson said. "Importantly, it halts funding for the United Nations agency which employed terrorists who participated in the October 7 attacks against Israel."

More than \$1B to reduce child care costs

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, said in a written statement that she was "proud to have secured \$1 billion more to lower families' child care costs and help them find pre-K — a critical investment to help tackle the child care crisis that is holding families and our economy back."

"From day one of this process, I said there would be no extreme, far-right riders to restrict women's reproductive freedoms — and there aren't," Murray said. "Democrats stood firm to protect a woman's right to choose in these negotiations and focused on delivering investments that matter to working people."

Democratic lawmakers, Murray said, "defeated outlandish cuts that would have been a gut punch for American families and our economy — and we fought off scores of extreme policies that would have restricted Americans' fundamental freedoms, hurt consumers while giving giant corporations an unfair advantage, and turned back the clock on historic climate action."

The House and Senate must debate and approve the measure in less than two days under the stopgap funding agreement, otherwise a weekend funding lapse would begin. If it went on beyond the brief period of the weekend, a partial government shutdown would begin.

The House can easily hold a vote within that timeline, but the Senate will need to reach agreement among all 100 of its members in order to avoid casting votes past that benchmark.

Here's a look at where Congress increased funding and where it cut spending on these six government funding bills for fiscal year 2024, which began back on Oct. 1.

Defense

Congress plans to spend \$824.5 billion on the Defense spending bill, which predominantly funds the Pentagon, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

That bill includes funding for a 5.2% pay raise for military and civilian defense employees that will be retroactive to Jan. 1, 2024. The basic allowance for housing will increase by 5.4% and the basic allowance for sustenance will increase by 1.7%.

That total spending level would be divvied up among several core programs, including \$176.2 billion for military personnel, an increase of \$3.5 billion; \$287.2 billion for operations and maintenance, \$9.1 billion above current levels; \$172 billion for procurement of military equipment, \$9.8 billion more than the enacted level; and \$148.3 billion for research and development, an \$8.6 billion increase, according to a House GOP summary and a summary from House Democrats.

The Israeli Cooperative Missile Defense Programs would get \$300 million for research and testing as well as \$200 million for procurement, including for the Iron Dome and David's Sling. An additional \$300 million would go toward the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

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Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Jon Tester, a Montana Democrat, said in a statement the bill “will invest in our ability to stay ahead of the threat of China, defend our country from foreign adversaries while standing firm with America’s allies, and take care of our servicemembers and their families.”

The joint explanatory statement that accompanies the bill calls on the Department of Defense to look into why the military is having difficulty recruiting.

“The Military Services are in the midst of one of the greatest recruiting crises since the creation of the all-volunteer force,” it says. “Since retention of enlisted servicemembers remains strong, those who continue to serve will promote to more senior grades, leaving a distressing shortfall in junior enlisted servicemembers, who account for 40 percent of the total active U.S. military force. The Nation needs America’s youth to strongly consider uniformed service.”

The package calls on the Defense Department to “conduct an independent survey to better understand the failure of recruitment efforts by the services,” according to House Republicans’ summary of the bill.

The secretary of Defense must also brief the Defense Appropriations subcommittees on a proposal to increase the pay for junior enlisted troops.

Financial Services and General Government

The Financial Services and General Government bill — which funds the U.S. Treasury Department, Executive Office of the President, judiciary and more than two dozen smaller programs — would receive \$26.1 billion in funding. That’s about \$1.1 billion below the current funding levels for those programs.

Senate FSGG Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Chris Van Hollen, a Maryland Democrat, said in a written statement the “bipartisan legislation invests in these critical priorities for our nation and more — including providing key resources to tackle the opioid epidemic and the necessary funding to build the new FBI headquarters in Greenbelt, Maryland.”

“Building an economy that works for everyday Americans requires supporting our small businesses and community-based lenders, protecting consumers, building out our broadband infrastructure, and ensuring the security of our financial system,” Van Hollen said.

The Department of Treasury would receive \$14.2 billion, a \$22.9 million reduction to its current funding levels. Of that total funding level, \$12.3 billion would go to the Internal Revenue Service, equal to its current funding, and \$158 million would go toward the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, according to a bill summary from House Democrats.

The Judiciary would get more than \$8.6 billion to operate the U.S. courts, including the District Courts, Courts of Appeals and other judicial services. That funding level is an increase of nearly \$170 million.

It provides \$129 million for salaries and expenses of the U.S. Supreme Court and \$20 million to care for the building and its grounds, according to the joint explanatory statement.

The bill includes \$791 million in funding for the District of Columbia, a decrease of \$1 million. That includes \$40 million in residential tuition support, \$30 million in emergency and security costs, \$8 million in upgrades to sewer and water treatment and \$4 million in HIV/AIDS testing and treatment, according to a bill summary from House Democrats.

The Executive Office of the President would receive about \$872.5 million — a \$6 million decrease from the 2023 fiscal level, according to a bill summary from Democrats.

That includes \$114 million for the Office of Administration, \$19 million for the National Security Council, \$22 million for the Office of National Cyber Director and \$457 million for the National Drug Control Policy.

The bill would provide the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission with about \$151 million in funding, a decrease of \$1.5 million. The bill bars CPSC from issuing a ban on gas stoves, “which would reduce consumer choice,” according to a House GOP bill summary.

That policy provision would prohibit CPSC from “promulgating, implementing, administering, or enforcing any regulation to ban gas stoves as a class of products,” according to the explanatory statement.

CPSC has not made any regulatory action to ban gas stoves. Agency officials have expressed concern about indoor air quality of gas stoves and the agency is researching the impacts on human health of those

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indoor gas emissions.

The Election Assistance Commission would receive a cut of \$280,000 in funding for a total level of \$27.7 million.

A total of \$55 million from that allocation would go toward Election Security Grants "to make payments to states for activities to improve the administration of elections for Federal office, including to enhance election technology and make election security improvements," according to the explanatory statement.

Homeland Security

Congress plans to spend \$62 billion on the Department of Homeland Security, including upgrading technology to screen for narcotics like fentanyl at U.S. ports of entry and an additional \$495 million in funding to hire 22,000 border patrol agents.

The bill provides U.S. Customs and Border Protection with \$19 billion, a \$3 billion increase above current levels, and more than \$9.6 billion to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, an increase of \$1.1 billion.

It puts in place policy requirements for detention centers, such as barring contracts with private companies that do not meet inspection standards, and providing an additional \$3 million to expand the use of ICE body cameras, according to the explanatory statement.

The legislation would require the Department of Homeland Security to publish data on the 15th of every month on the total detention capacity and the number of "got aways" and people "turned back" at the southern border, according to the joint explanatory statement.

DHS refers to people as "got aways" when an individual is observed making an unauthorized entry into the U.S. and is not turned away, or apprehended. That data is not publicly available.

The Office of the Secretary and Executive Management would get \$404 million, an increase of about \$20 million. About \$30 million of that funding would go "to support the safe reunification of families who were unjustly separated at the U.S.-Mexico border by the Trump Administration," according to House Democrats' summary of the bill.

The bill provides \$5.1 billion for Enforcement and Removal Operations, an increase of \$900 million above current funding. Of that, \$355 million would go toward 41,500 detention beds.

The bill would appropriate \$11.8 billion for the U.S. Coast Guard, a \$122.7 million boost; \$10.6 billion for the Transportation Security Administration, an increase of \$1.2 billion; and \$25.3 billion for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, a funding cut of \$72.9 million.

The FEMA funding would go toward several projects, with \$20 billion of those funds for disaster relief.

Labor-HHS-Education

The bill would appropriate \$13.7 billion for the Labor Department, \$145 million less than current funding levels and \$79 billion for the Education Department, a cut of \$500 million, according to the House GOP summary.

The Health and Human Services Department would get \$116.8 billion, or about \$3.9 billion less than the \$120.7 billion provided during the last fiscal year. The House Democrats' summary of the bill, however, says that when earmarks are factored into the total spending level, HHS would get a \$955 million increase.

Senate Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee Chair Tammy Baldwin, a Wisconsin Democrat, said in a written statement the bill "helps take on the fentanyl and opioid crisis, expand access to affordable child care, invest in critical mental health and affordable health care programs, and connect Americans with the education and workforce training they need to land good-paying jobs."

Funding for HHS would go to numerous health programs, including a \$300 million increase to the National Institutes of Health for a total spending level of \$48.6 billion.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would get \$9.2 billion, more than \$4.5 million above its current funding level.

Title X family planning grants would get \$286 million in funding, the same amount they currently receive,

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despite House Republicans proposing to completely eliminate the program.

The Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, a central component of the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the mpox outbreak, would get \$3.6 billion, a \$5 million increase.

Of that total spending level, \$1 billion would go toward the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority and \$980 million would go to the Strategic National Stockpile. That represents an increase of \$65 million and \$15 million, respectively.

The bill includes a \$1 billion increase in funding for child care and early learning programs within HHS, according to Senate Democrats' summary of the legislation.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant would see a \$725 million, 9%, increase in funding compared to current levels, for a total appropriation of \$8.8 billion. Another \$12.27 billion would go toward Head Start programs, a boost of \$275 million over the current level.

"Sustained annual increases to our federal investments in child care and Head Start are critical in tackling the child care crisis and helping to ensure more families can find and afford the quality, affordable child care and early childhood education options they need," Senate Democrats' summary says. "With the new investments provided in this bill, annual discretionary funding for CCDBG and Head Start over the last three fiscal years has increased by \$4.4 billion."

The Education Department's spending would go to numerous initiatives, including \$24.6 billion for student financial aid programs.

Pell Grants, which go to about 7 million lower-income college students, would continue to have a maximum award of \$7,395 during the 2024-2025 academic year. The Federal Work Study program for college students would also get equal funding at \$1.2 billion.

The Labor-HHS-Education bill continues to include the so-called Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funding from being used for abortions with exceptions for rape, incest, or the life of the pregnant person.

The decades-old provision, first added in the 1970s in a slightly different form, affects patients in federal health care programs like Medicaid and Medicare.

Similar provisions on abortion access exist throughout many of the other government funding bills.

Legislative Branch

The Legislative Branch Appropriations bill includes \$6.75 billion for operations in the Capitol, including funding related to the summer's party conventions and the presidential inauguration in January 2025.

The bill would boost funding for the U.S. Capitol Police to \$792 million, a 7.8% increase from fiscal 2023.

The measure includes funding for retention and recruitment programs of Capitol Police officers, including student loan payments and tuition reimbursements. Capitol Police officers, the force responsible for security at the Capitol complex, reported lower morale in the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

"This is an essential investment in democracy and oversight that bolsters the legislative branch's capacity to better serve the public," said Sen. Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat who chairs the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee. "This bill delivers the funding and infrastructure required for the U.S. Capitol Police to safeguard the Capitol complex and keep it accessible to the public."

A joint explanatory statement accompanying the bill says the measure would allow \$2 million for Capitol Police to protect members of Congress outside the Capitol complex but within the Washington, D.C., region. Members have experienced increased threats in recent years.

The measure also includes funding for quadrennial events related to the presidential election.

Capitol Police would receive \$3.2 million for overtime to support the national political conventions — Republicans' in Milwaukee and Democrats' in Chicago — over the summer and to prepare for the inauguration in January.

Inauguration Day is in the next fiscal year, which begins in October, but expenses associated with preparing for it could be incurred this year. The bill would allocate nearly \$3.7 million for salaries and expenses associated with the inauguration.

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The bill would provide \$16.6 million for Capitol grounds, House and Senate offices and the Capitol Power Plant.

The measure includes a provision that would claw back unspent funds from members' Representational Allowances, the accounts that reimburse senators and representatives for official expenses. Unspent funds from those accounts would be used to pay down the national debt.

The measure includes a longstanding policy freezing members' pay.

State-Foreign Operations

Congress plans to allocate just over \$58.3 billion for the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development and other related programs, including refugee emergency assistance and diplomatic activities.

Republican lawmakers are touting an overall cut to the bill — down from last year's \$59.7 billion total.

The bill includes \$11.8 billion for the U.S. State Department and USAID and \$10.3 billion for international development, including a loan to the International Monetary Fund to provide economic relief for some of the world's poorest nations.

The bill allocates \$10 billion for global health initiatives that focus on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, as well as providing vaccination programs for children.

Of that health funding, Democrats cheered that the bill "protects longstanding funding," as highlighted by Murray's office, for family planning and reproductive health services in poor nations around the globe, for which nearly \$524 million is allocated, remaining at the same level as the current spending level.

Funding appropriated to the president for multilateral assistance to international organizations and programs — ranging from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to programs for victims of torture — is set to drop to \$436.9 million from last year's funding level of \$508.6 million.

That reduction, in part, reflects current political tension over the Israel-Hamas war.

Absent from the bill are funds to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA, a primary humanitarian organization in the Palestinian Gaza Strip and West bank territories. Many Western nations cut UNRWA funding after Israel accused 13 of its employees of taking part in the Oct. 7 attacks and many more of sympathizing with Hamas and other militant groups. The agency received \$75 million from the U.S. in fiscal year 2023.

Another notable absence from the bill is funding for the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, which received \$17.5 million from the U.S. in last year's funding bill.

Republicans celebrated the elimination of funding for the agency's inquiry into human rights abuses in Palestinian territories, which the UN Human Rights Council opened after a flare up of violence in May 2021. The inquiry began to collect evidence of war crimes "committed by all sides" shortly after Hamas attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 and taking roughly 240 hostages.

The bill will meet the annual U.S. \$3.3 billion commitment to Israel this year among the \$8.9 billion in security assistance to foreign governments.

The funding roadmap for U.S. international activities extends several programs, notably authorizing an additional 12,000 Special Immigrant Visas for Afghans who assisted the U.S. during its war in Afghanistan.

Iowa drops lawsuit as EPA approves summer sale of E15 in 2025

BY: CLARK KAUFFMAN - MARCH 21, 2024 6:00 AM

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird announced what she called "a resounding victory" over the Biden administration on Tuesday as the EPA approved the year-round sale of E15 motor fuel beginning in 2025.

Bird, a Republican, said the sale of E15, a 15% ethanol blend, will provide a cheaper and cleaner option at the gas pump next summer when the new rule takes effect.

"Today's victory is a win for families and farmers across the state," Bird said in a written statement. "While the EPA dragged its feet, we fought back."

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In April 2022, a group of Midwest governors that included South Dakota's Gov. Kristi Noem petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency for a rule that would allow their states to sell E15 gasoline during the summer in addition to the previously approved fall, winter and spring seasons. In August 2023, Bird and Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers filed a lawsuit against the EPA, challenging the agency over its failure to act on the proposal.

On Tuesday, after the EPA announced it was approving the year-round sale of E15 beginning next year in the states that had requested it, Bird said she'd be dropping the lawsuit.

Monte Shaw of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association said that the EPA's decision was overdue, and he commended Reynolds and Bird for their actions.

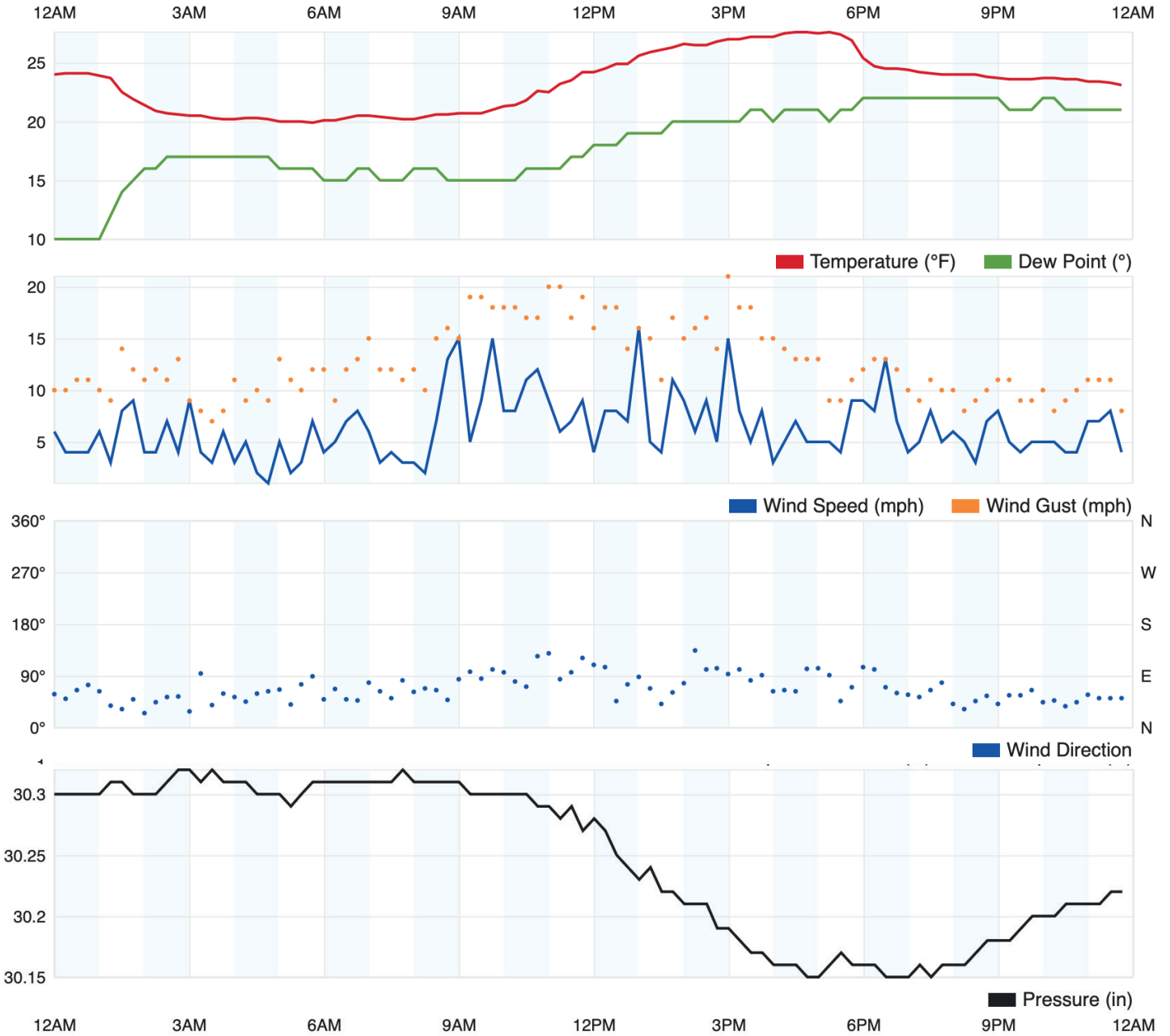
"There is no doubt that Bird's actions spurred the decision forward at critical moments," he said. "We appreciate her defending the clear rights of governors under the Clean Air Act."

In February, the South Dakota Legislature passed and Gov. Noem signed a bill that will allow gas stations to claim a fuel tax refund of up to 5 cents per gallon of E15 fuel sold.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today




20%

Slight Chance
Snow then
Mostly Cloudy

High: 31 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 8 °F

Saturday




70%

Snow Likely


High: 30 °F

Saturday Night



90%

Sunday



100%

Snow and
Patchy
Blowing Snow

Low: 22 °F

Snow and
Patchy
Blowing Snow

High: 31 °F



Winter Weather Expected

March 21, 2024
3:54 PM

Tonight

Key Messages

- A Winter Weather Advisory for northeastern SD and west-central MN
- Snow accumulations of 2-5 inches possible northeast of a line from Eureka to Milbank with locally higher amounts closer to the ND/SD/MN border
- A second system moves in Saturday with light snow then intensifies Sunday and Monday

NEW

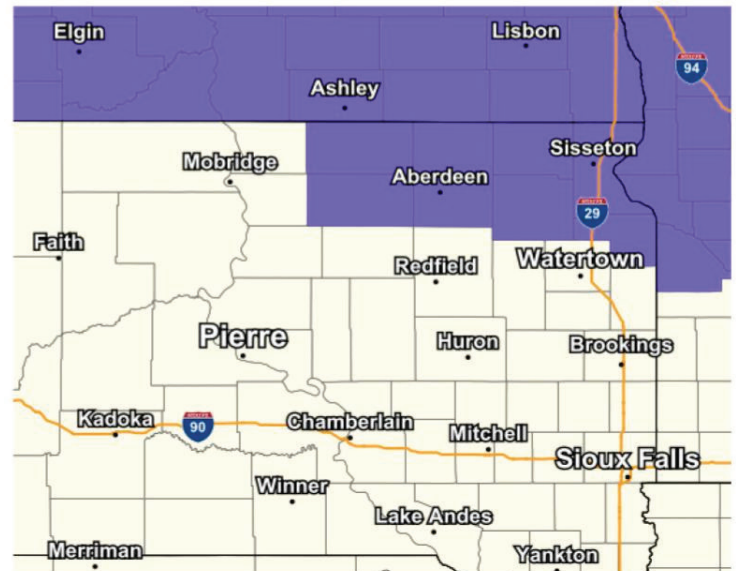
Important Updates

- Snow amounts increased slightly tonight across the Prairie Coteau region

Next Scheduled Weather Update

- Friday morning

Winter Weather Advisory



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

There is a Winter Weather Advisory for northeast SD and west-central MN tonight for snow accumulations of 2-5 inches (locally higher closer to the ND/SD/MN border).

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Significant Winter Storm Upcoming

March 21, 2024
4:08 PM

	Timing Precipitation Type & Intensity												Period of Peak Snow Intensity			
	3/23 Sat				3/24 Sun				3/25 Mon				3/26 Tue			
	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm
Aberdeen	75%	75%	75%		85%	95%	100%	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%	40%	30%		
Britton	45%	75%	75%		90%	100%	100%	100%	95%	85%	80%	70%	55%	40%	30%	
Brookings	60%	60%	55%		75%	95%	100%	100%	95%	85%	85%	75%	60%	55%	40%	25%
Chamberlain	40%	40%	35%	40%	75%	85%	90%	90%	85%	75%	70%	60%	45%	35%		
Clark	65%	65%	65%		85%	95%	100%	100%	95%	90%	80%	70%	50%	35%	25%	
Eagle Butte	70%	70%	55%	55%	85%	90%	100%	100%	85%	70%	45%	30%				
Ellendale	70%	80%	80%		85%	100%	100%	100%	90%	70%	70%	55%	40%	30%		
Eureka	30%	90%	90%	70%	90%	100%	100%	100%	90%	70%	60%	40%	30%			
Gettysburg	50%	75%	75%	55%	85%	95%	100%	100%	90%	75%	60%	45%	30%			
Huron	60%	60%	45%		80%	95%	95%	95%	90%	80%	80%	70%	55%	45%	35%	
Kennebec	55%	55%	35%	45%	80%	85%	95%	95%	90%	80%	65%	45%	30%			
McIntosh	55%	85%	85%	60%	90%	100%	100%	100%	80%	55%	40%					
Milbank		30%	60%	60%	85%	95%	100%	100%	95%	95%	90%	80%	60%	45%	35%	25%
Miller	35%	70%	70%	45%	80%	95%	100%	100%	90%	80%	75%	60%	35%			
Mobridge	45%	85%	85%	55%	85%	95%	100%	100%	85%	60%	50%	35%				
Murdo	60%	60%	30%	55%	80%	80%	95%	95%	90%	80%	80%	60%	40%			
Pierre	60%	60%	40%	50%	80%	90%	95%	95%	90%	75%	55%	40%				
Redfield	70%	70%	60%		80%	95%	100%	100%	95%	80%	75%	65%	40%	30%		
Sisseton	35%	60%	65%		85%	95%	100%	100%	95%	90%	85%	75%	60%	45%	35%	
Watertown	45%	60%	60%		80%	95%	100%	100%	95%	90%	85%	75%	55%	40%	25%	
Webster	50%	70%	70%		85%	95%	100%	100%	95%	85%	85%	75%	55%	40%	30%	
Wheaton		50%	60%		80%	95%	100%	100%	95%	90%	80%	65%	60%	45%	35%	25%

What We Know

A Colorado Low will bring moderate to heavy snow to the Dakotas/Minnesota Saturday night through Monday. Snow accumulation totals will vary significantly but there is the potential for some areas to exceed 6 to 12 inches.

What We Don't Know

Still some uncertainty regarding specific totals, total duration or peak winds...but evidence continues to increase that this system will have a significant impact on travel across the region.

What You Can Do

Continue to monitor the latest forecast from reliable/reputable sources... Its also probably time to start making alternative arrangements if you have travel plans!

Created: 2 pm CDT Thu 3/21/2024. Shows most impactful weather for the period beginning at the time shown. Weather symbols display where Probability of Precipitation ≥ 25%.

- Fz Rain + - Wintry Mix + - Snow +



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Another system will affect the region this weekend with heaviest snowfall currently expected Sunday through Tuesday morning. Accumulations of 6 to 12+ inches are possible across the area. Stay tuned for more details.

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Winter Storm Watch!

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE

National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

420 AM CDT Fri Mar 22 2024

Corson-Campbell-McPherson-Brown-Walworth-Edmunds-Dewey-Potter-Faulk-Spink-Clark-Codington-Hamlin-Deuel-Stanley-Sully-Hughes-Hyde-Hand-Jones-Lyman-Buffalo-

Including the cities of McIntosh, Herreid, Eureka, Aberdeen, Mobridge, Ipswich, Isabel, Gettysburg, Faulkton, Redfield, Clark, Watertown, Hayti, Clear Lake, Fort Pierre, Onida, Pierre, Highmore, Miller, Murdo, Kennebec, and Fort Thompson

420 AM CDT Fri Mar 22 2024 /320 AM MDT Fri Mar 22 2024/

...WINTER STORM WATCH IN EFFECT FROM SATURDAY EVENING THROUGH LATE MONDAY NIGHT...

* WHAT...Blizzard conditions possible. Total snow accumulations in excess of 8 inches possible. Winds could gust as high as 55 mph.

* WHERE...Portions of central, north central and northeast South Dakota.

* WHEN...From Saturday evening through late Monday night.

* IMPACTS...Travel could be very difficult to impossible. Widespread blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute. Strong winds could cause tree damage.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Prepare for possible blizzard conditions. Continue to monitor the latest forecasts for updates on this situation.

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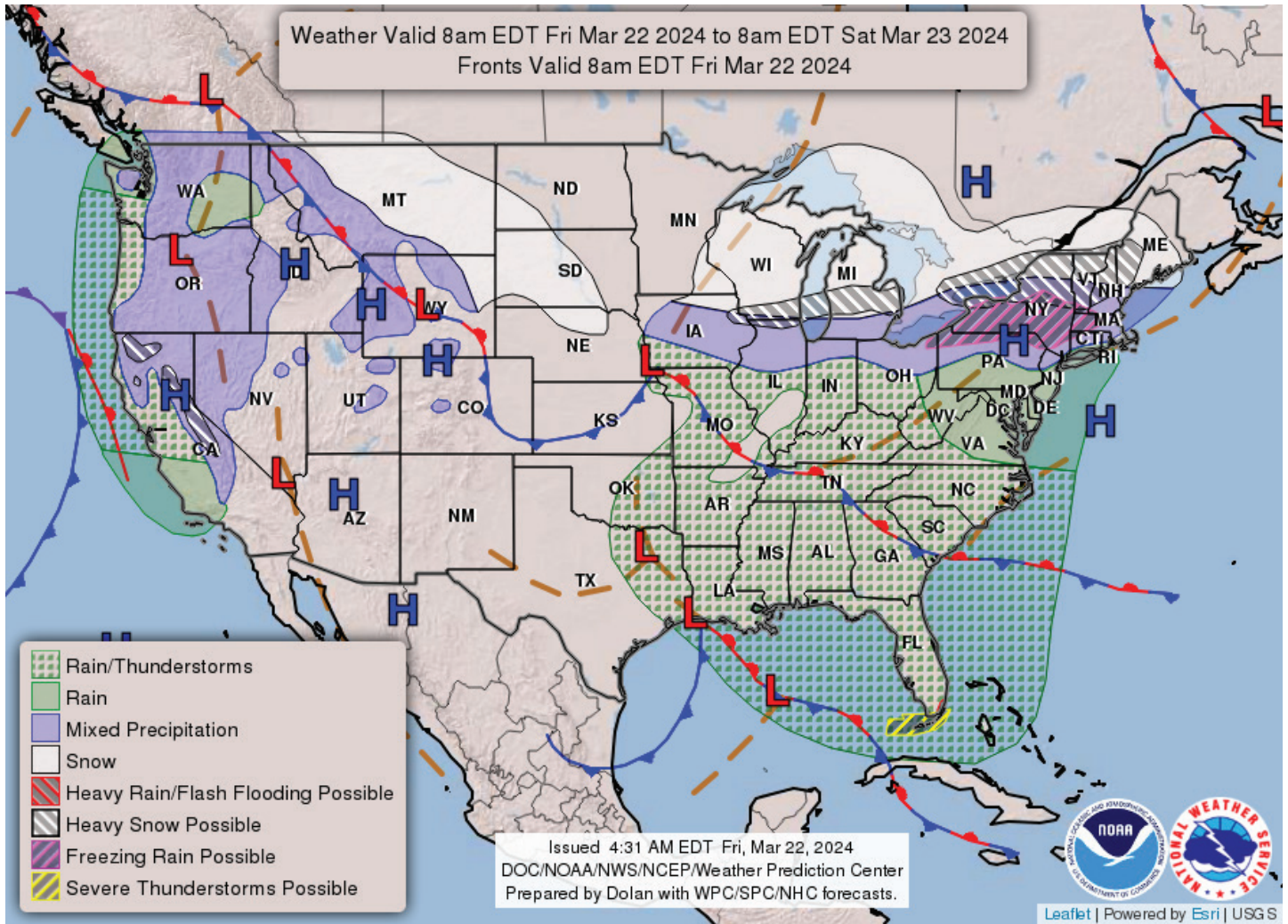
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 28 °F at 4:34 PM
Low Temp: 20 °F at 5:38 AM
Wind: 21 mph at 11:06 AM
Precip: : 0.00 4.25 inches of snow

Day length: 12 hours, 21 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 79 in 1907
Record Low: -16 in 1899
Average High: 45
Average Low: 22
Average Precip in March.: 0.58
Precip to date in March: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.75
Precip Year to Date: 0.07
Sunset Tonight: 7:49:33 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:26:35 am



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Today in Weather History

March 22, 1966: The blizzard began on the 22nd in the west, moving southeastward into Nebraska and then moving northeastward across the southeastern part of South Dakota. Winds up to 50 mph caused blowing snow, which reduced visibility to near zero. Seven to 8 inches of snow fell on the plains of South Dakota with up to 2 feet in the Black Hills. Traffic was paralyzed due to snow-blocked roads. Schools and many businesses were closed. One death was attributed to the storm to exposure and exhaustion. A heart attack indirectly caused one death in Sioux Falls.

March 22, 1987: Snowmelt and rainfall caused some rivers and small streams to rise to very high levels in central South Dakota. Lowland flooding around the basins occurred, submerging some minor roads and streets. Also, high water levels and ice damaged some railroad bridges between Wakpala and Mahto in Corson County.

March 22, 2009: A stretch of warmer weather occurred from March 14th to 17th, which resulted in high temperatures in the 40s and low 50s. The snow depth in Fargo on the 14th was 15 inches, with a melted water equivalent of 3.10 inches. By the 17th, the snow depth in Fargo had dropped to 6 inches. The snow was followed by a couple of colder days, which temporarily slowed down any additional snowmelt. The second period of warmer weather began on March 20th and continued through the 24th. During this period, high temperatures again climbed into the 40s and low 50s. Most of the remaining snow in Fargo melted during this stretch of warm weather, with the Fargo snow depth falling from 2 inches to 0. Conditions were about the same in Grand Forks, with the snow depth dropping to 0 by the 24th. These two warm-ups resulted in the quick response in river levels, especially across the southern Red River Valley and west-central Minnesota. The Red River also rosed, especially in the southern part of the Red River Valley. With all the runoff moving into the river systems, water covered many roads and resulted in numerous road closures. The water covered entire sections of land as well and threatened many homes. A winter storm event on March 24th and 25th brought more snow to the region, along with a turn to colder temperatures. This resulted in the first crest for many rivers in the southern Red River Valley and west-central Minnesota. However, river levels at most points along the Red River continued to stay high. Another winter storm event hit much of the area March 30th to 31st, dropping up to 2 feet of snow in the southern Red River Valley. There was a lot of moisture in this new snow, with snow to liquid ratios of less than 10 to 1. This set the stage for continued flooding into April and early May. The North Dakota Governor issued a statewide disaster declaration on March 13 in anticipation of spring flooding. Most counties in eastern North Dakota later received a Presidential Disaster Declaration.

1888: Chicago's morning low dips to one degree below zero, the latest sub-zero Fahrenheit reading in the city's history. This record still stands today.

1893: The first tornado was recorded in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on this date. It destroyed 14 buildings and injured four people as it passed through the center of town. There was minor damage to the Weather Bureau office, which was located at Grand and Robinson in south Oklahoma City.

1920: A spectacular display of the "Northern Lights" was visible as far south as Bradenton FL, El Paso, TX and Fresno, CA. At Detroit MI, the display was described "so brilliant as to blot out all-stars below the first magnitude."

1936 - A great flood crested on rivers from Ohio to Maine. The flood claimed 107 lives and caused 270 million dollars property damage. (David Ludlum)

1954 - Six to ten inch rains caused the Chicago River to overflow its banks. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - An intense storm produced heavy snow in the southern and central Rockies, and high winds from southern California to West Texas. Wolf Creek Pass CO received 24 inches of snow, and winds gusted to 69 mph at Ruidoso NM. Blizzard conditions were reported in eastern Colorado. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Rain and high winds battered the Northern Pacific Coast Region, with wind gusts to 78 mph at Ocean Shores WA. The high winds uprooted trees and down power lines. Ten cities in the northeastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date. Eight cities in the central U.S. reported record highs. Southerly winds gusting to 60 mph helped push the mercury at Ottumwa IA to a record warm reading of 83 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

"IT MAY BE MY LAST"

It began as a day like any other day. James Galway, a brilliant flutist, was happily walking to his morning rehearsal. While crossing a street, a speeding motorcyclist hit him and shattered the bones in both of his legs and one arm.

He was rushed to the hospital, and the orthopedic surgeons immediately began a lengthy operation as they attempted to repair the damage. Unfortunately, the bones did not heal as quickly or properly as they had anticipated. As a result, he had to remain in the hospital for many months. As he left the hospital, he said, "It took quite a while to pick up the pieces."

While he was still recovering from the accident, he told a fellow-musician, "I decided from the moment I left the hospital, I would play every concert, record every album, give every performance and live every day as though it may be my last." He summed it all up by saying that his new goal in life was to make sure that every time he played, his performance would be as near to perfection as God wanted it to be!

No doubt that is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, "Whatever you may do, do all to the glory and honor of God!"

There is a two-fold implication in this verse: Whatever we do is a choice. And, with that choice, if we are a Christian, there is an opportunity to bring honor and glory to God. So, not only are our decisions critical but with each one we make, we represent Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, guide us in each of our choices. Make us conscious of everything we do, knowing that we are always representing You by the way we live. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31



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: 03.19.24

24 46 49 62 66 7

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$977,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 56 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.20.24

3 16 29 44 50 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,350,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 11 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.21.24

10 11 32 40 41 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 26 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.20.24

6 9 10 11 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$28,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 26 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.20.24

7 9 10 26 43 24

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 55 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.20.24

13 22 27 54 66 9

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$750,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 55 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

No. 2 seed Iowa State uses big runs to start each half and bury South Dakota State, 82-65

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Basketball Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — T.J. Otzelberger was none too pleased with Iowa State's first-round draw in the NCAA Tournament, not because the coach thought his Big 12 tourney champs had done enough to warrant a No. 1 seed but because of who the Cyclones would face Thursday night.

South Dakota State, the school that gave him his big break as a college head coach, and Eric Henderson, who was his top assistant back in those days and has kept the Jackrabbits on the winning track in his place.

"Didn't like the matchup when it came out. Didn't want to play those guys," Otzelberger admitted, shortly after the Cyclones put together big runs to start each half of an 82-65 victory. "I care about a lot of people on their side, dear friends, so yeah, there's that part of it."

"At the same time," Otzelberger said, "proud of our guys. They did the hard work. They worked for this opportunity."

Milan Momcilovic looked nothing like a freshman while pouring in 19 points for the Cyclones. Tamin Lipsey had 17 with seven assists, and Keshon Gilbert finished with 15 points, helping them avenge an embarrassing first-round loss to Pittsburgh a year ago. They advanced to a second-round matchup with seventh-seeded Washington State in the East Region.

"We don't get to control who we play," Otzelberger said. "We just need to be prepared and ready to rise to the challenge."

South Dakota State (22-13) showed plenty of gumption after allowing Iowa State to open on a 17-3 run, cutting the deficit in half by the break. But the Cyclones blitzed the Jackrabbits to start the second half, too, going on a 14-5 run to pull away.

Zeke Mayo hit four 3s and had 19 points for South Dakota State, which has given plenty of NCAA Tournament teams scares over the years but remains winless in seven tries at March Madness. William Kyle III added 14 points and Charlie Easley finished with 11.

"I hope T.J. wins a national championship," said Henderson, who shared a high-five and a hug with him at game's end, "and then I saw the pairings and hoped he would lose in the first round. Now, I hope he wins the national championship again."

The Cyclones were coming off a blowout of then-No. 1 Houston in the most lopsided Big 12 title game ever, and it looked as if Gilbert — that tourney's MVP — and his teammates picked up right where they left off. The Cyclones made life miserable for South Dakota State with their relentless defense, and they kept turning every steal and loose ball into easy layups at the other end.

Or dunks. Hason Ward threw down alley-oops from three different teammates on three straight possessions on that big early run.

"The way he can get them from 12 feet, and our guys look for them, is special," Otzelberger said.

The Jackrabbits eventually bounced back, getting their own highlight dunk in the process: Matt Mims, the lone player left from Otzelberger's tenure at South Dakota State, heaved a pass from the midcourt line that Kyle threw down to an audible gasp from the crowd.

When Mayo scored just before halftime, the Summit League champs were within 40-33 with momentum on their side.

"We fought back," Mayo said. "We fought really hard."

The Jackrabbits just didn't have enough.

The bigger, deeper and much faster Cyclones did exactly what they did to start the game to start the second half, putting together another run out of the locker room to rebuild their cushion. And this time, they never let off the gas the rest of the way.

Ward even threw down a fourth alley-oop dunk to put an exclamation mark on the win.

"We start fast, come out of the box, we play off our defense — we did that to start the game," Otselberger said. "We did that to start the second half. That's who we are. That's who we will continue to be. When we do that, we can play at a really high level."

UP NEXT

Iowa State will be playing Washington State for the first time on Saturday. The Cougars advanced with a come-from-behind win over Drake, getting 20 points from Isaac Jones and 17 from Jaylen Wells in their 66-61 victory.

Spring snowfall in parts of northern US follows mild winter of canceled ski trips and festivals

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — After a season with very little snow, a blast of snowy weather could dump a foot or more in some northern states, just as spring officially arrives.

Parts of Montana, the Dakotas, Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin are under winter weather advisories, with snow expected to start falling Thursday in some areas. Minnesota could see a foot of snow over the weekend, and parts of New England could also see 12 to 18 inches (30 to 45 centimeters) in the coming days.

"It seems like it is supposed to be in like a lion and out like a lamb," said Brian Hurley, a senior meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center. "Now it just seems like it was flipped for a lot of these areas: In like a lamb and out like a lion."

The spring follows a wild winter, with record heat in February allowing for golf in Wisconsin and outdoor food trucks in Minnesota.

The weather has been so unseasonably warm that many tulips in Pella, Iowa, bloomed in advance of the city's famed Tulip Time Festival in early May. Organizers plan to use hundreds of wooden tulips to supplement the blooms.

The Minnesota Ice Festival, which was supposed to include an ice carving competition, ice-skating rink and a record-setting 18,000 square foot (1,670 square meter) ice maze, had to be canceled.

"I barely even put on a jacket," said Minnesota Ice CEO Robbie Harrell, who canceled the event. "Born and raised here in Minnesota. I personally cannot ever remember such a brown winter. It is almost sad."

Now that his trees are budding with spring blooms, snow is coming.

"Let's get that curveball in there," he lamented. "We will get a little taste of winter."

It is one of the oddest years ever for Rachel Schindele, of Woodland Resort, which offers ice fishing packages at Devil's Lake in North Dakota.

"We definitely got on the ice later than we usually would," she said. "And we definitely had times when we weren't on the ice for safety reasons."

A native of the state, she has seen snow often in March and sometimes even in April. "So that part of it, getting snow itself, isn't strange," she said. "It is more the timing of the snow versus the rest of the year. This year our snow accumulation was pretty much nonexistent."

In Montana, business was down by 30% early in the season at the Whitefish Mountain Resort, said spokesman Chad Sokol. Conditions later improved, but some of the resorts at lower altitudes had mid-season closures.

"It was definitely a logistical challenge," Sokol said, adding that as the season comes to an end, the business shifts from out-of-town visitors to local season pass holders.

"I am sure," he said, "they will be coming in droves to catch this last storm."

Lutsen Mountains ski resort in northern Minnesota also was cheering the snow, posting on Facebook: "Get ready to dust off those skis and snowboards because Mother Nature has a treat in store for us!"

A mishmash of systems get the credit — or the blame, depending on who you ask — for this spring snowstorm.

The National Weather Service said a potent storm system rapidly strengthening over eastern Maine is

already producing heavy snow. Forecasters are predicating that by Saturday, parts of Maine, as well as Vermont and New Hampshire, will be coated with at least 8 inches (20 centimeters) of snow.

Meanwhile, another system has already started spreading light to moderate snow from northeast Montana to the Dakotas, and is expected to expand into the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes by Friday. Another system will arrive on its heels, entering from the West Coast on Friday and spreading precipitation inland.

Additional heavy snow will continue into early next week across much of the northern Plains, the National Weather Service said.

In North Dakota, Huff-area farmer and rancher Kenny Graner began preparing on Tuesday for the snow that fell Wednesday night by making added space in barns and calf shelters to keep newborn calves dry — “probably one of the most important aspects in our industry,” so the calves don’t get wet and chilled, he said.

“We prepared. We were expecting the worst,” Graner said. An inch (2.54 centimeters) of snow fell at his place. He’ll keep the same preparations for a storm yet to come.

“We’d rather see rain in April and May than snowstorms in March,” Graner said.

In Wisconsin, where record-setting warmth in February contributed to the first tornadoes the state has ever seen in that month, forecasts called for anywhere from 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7.6 centimeters) across southern parts of the state by Friday afternoon.

Madison, the state capital, braced for up to 5 inches (12.7 cm) and Milwaukee was set to get up to 6 inches (15.2 cm). Up to 5 inches (12.7 cm) was expected to fall on Lake Geneva, where organizers were forced to cut the city’s annual winter ice festival short due to February’s warm temperatures.

Grand Rapids, Michigan, expected to receive around 4 inches (10.2 cm). The storm was expected to just clip the Chicago area, with forecasts calling for rain and snow but little accumulation.

Temperatures won’t be particularly cold, mostly in the 20s and 30s, said Hurley, of the Weather Prediction Center.

“Some of these areas are going to see maybe their heaviest snow of the season, if you call it a new season,” he said. “We will call it the cool season.”

More than 100 iconic cherry trees in Washington are being cut down. So long, Stumpy

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The sun is setting on Stumpy, the gnarled old cherry tree that has become a social media phenom. This year’s cherry blossom festivities in Washington will be the last for Stumpy and more than 100 other cherry trees that will be cut down as part of a multiyear restoration of their Tidal Basin home.

Starting in early summer, crews will begin working to replace the crumbling seawall around the Tidal Basin, the area around the Jefferson Memorial with the highest concentration of cherry trees. The work has been long overdue, as the deterioration, combined with rising sea levels, has resulted in Potomac waters regularly surging over the barriers.

The twice-daily floods at high tide not only cover some of the pedestrian paths, they also regularly soak some of the cherry trees’ roots. The \$133 million project to rebuild and reinforce the sea wall will take about three years, said Mike Litterst, National Park Service spokesman for the National Mall.

“It’s certainly going to benefit the visitor experience, and that’s very important to us,” Litterst said. “But most of all, it’s going to benefit the cherry trees, who right now are every day, twice a day, seeing their roots inundated with the brackish water of the Tidal Basin.” Litterst said entire stretches of trees to the water, as wide as 100 yards, or 90 meters, have been lost and can’t be replaced “until we fix the underlying cause of what killed them in the first place.”

Stumpy remains alive, if in rough shape.

Plans call for 140 cherry trees — and 300 trees total — to be removed and turned into mulch. When the project is concluded, 277 cherry trees will be planted as replacements.

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The mulch will protect the roots of surviving trees from foot traffic and break down over time into nutrient-rich soil, "so it's a good second life" for the trees being cut down, Litterst said.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is widely considered to be the start of the tourist season in the nation's capital. Organizers expect 1.5 million people to view the pink and white blossoms this year, the most since the pandemic. Already, large numbers of cherry blossom fans are being drawn to the area as the trees approach peak bloom.

Stumpy became a social media star during the pandemic fever dream of 2020. Its legacy has spawned T-shirts, a calendar and a fanbase. News of Stumpy's final spring has prompted people to leave flowers and bourbon and had one Reddit user threatening to chain themselves to the trunk to save the tree.

The good news on Stumpy is that the National Arboretum plans to take parts of the tree's genetic material and create clones, some of which will eventually be replanted at the Tidal Basin.

The regular flooding at the Tidal Basin — sea levels have risen about a foot since the the seawall was built in the early 1990s — is just one of the ways climate change has impacted the cherry trees. Rising global temperatures and warmer winters have caused peak bloom to creep earlier in the calendar.

This year's peak bloom, when 70% of the city's 3,700 cherry trees will be flowering, should start between Saturday and Tuesday. By comparison, the 2013 peak bloom began on April 9. Leslie Frattaroli, national resources program manager for the Park Service, told The Associated Press in February that peak bloom could come in the middle of March by 2050.

"All the timing is off," he said. "It's a huge cascading effect."

Another weather side effect: A mid-March cold snap in the D.C. area should actually extend this year's bloom past the predicted April 9 ending.

For visitors and cherry blossom enthusiasts, the annual tradition of a stroll on the Tidal Basin under the flowers is a core Washington experience.

Jorge and Sandra Perez make a point of coming every year from Stafford, Virginia.

"Yes, we have cherry blossoms in my community, but it's a completely different feel when you see all of them bloom together," Sandra said. "And you can walk through, you know, the trees under it and smell it. And it's just it's a beautiful view."

They also came looking for Stumpy, having heard the legend and knowing this would be its final spring.

"It's actually beautiful," Jorge said. "So it's sad to see him leave."

The Latest | Blinken meets Israeli leaders as UN prepares to vote on a cease-fire resolution

By The Associated Press undefined

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Israeli leaders in Tel Aviv on Friday on the final stop in his sixth urgent trip to the region since the start of the war.

Blinken said he would share alternatives to Israel's planned ground assault into the southern Gaza town of Rafah during talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his War Cabinet.

The United Nations Security Council will vote Friday on a U.S.-sponsored resolution declaring "the imperative of an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war. In a statement overnight, European Union leaders called "for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and the provision of humanitarian assistance."

So little food has been allowed into Gaza that up to 60% of children under 5 are now malnourished, compared with fewer than 1% before the war began, World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Thursday.

The Health Ministry in Gaza raised the territory's death toll Thursday to nearly 32,000 Palestinians. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise Oct. 7 attack out of Gaza that triggered the war, and abducted another 250 people. Hamas is still believed to be holding some 100 people hostage,

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as well as the remains of 30 others.

Currently:

- Blinken says an Israeli assault on Gaza's Rafah would be a mistake, and isn't needed to defeat Hamas.
- Israel says Rafah is Hamas' last major stronghold in the Gaza Strip, and it's determined to launch an offensive.
- The U.N. will vote on a U.S. resolution declaring that an immediate cease-fire in Gaza is imperative.
- U.S. House speaker says he plans to invite Netanyahu to address the Congress.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

EUROPEAN UNION UNANIMOUSLY CALLS FOR A CEASE-FIRE IN GAZA

BRUSSELS — After five months of fighting in Gaza and tens of thousands of casualties, the 27 European Union countries have overcome their differences and agreed to call for a cease-fire.

In a statement overnight, EU leaders called "for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and the provision of humanitarian assistance."

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, said the EU position is largely in line with that of the United States. It comes as the United Nations Security Council prepares to vote later Friday on a U.S.-sponsored resolution declaring "the imperative of an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war.

EU countries have long been divided over their support for Israel and the Palestinians, and the U.N. vote will be a fresh public test of their unity. In December, two EU members voted against calling for "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire" while four countries abstained.

BLINKEN ARRIVES IN ISRAEL FOR TALKS WITH NETANYAHU OVER THE WAR IN GAZA

TEL AVIV, Israel — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for what were expected to be fractious talks over the war in Gaza as public differences over the conflict have intensified.

It's the final stop in Blinken's sixth urgent diplomatic mission to the Middle East, and he started the brief six-hour visit Friday with a one-on-one meeting with Netanyahu followed by a larger gathering with Israel's war Cabinet aimed at convincing them not to proceed with plans for a large-scale military offensive in the southern city of Rafah that many fear could make an already disastrous humanitarian crisis in Gaza even worse.

"A major military operation in Rafah would be a mistake, something we don't support," Blinken said Thursday in Cairo, where he met with top diplomats from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. "And, it's also not necessary to deal with Hamas, which is necessary."

Instead, Blinken will present Netanyahu with alternatives for dealing with Hamas in Rafah in discussions that will continue next week when Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and a separate delegation of senior Israeli officials visit Washington. Netanyahu agreed to send the delegation in a Monday phone call with U.S. President Joe Biden — their first conversation in a month amid the widening divisions.

Blinken's brief visit to Israel, which was announced only Wednesday and was not part of his original Mideast itinerary, comes as top intelligence officials from the U.S., Israel, Egypt and Qatar were to meet in Doha to hammer out details of a proposed cease-fire-for-hostages deal. Qatar, and to a lesser extent Egypt, are the main interlocutors with Hamas, which has thus far rebuffed offers the negotiations have produced.

UN SECURITY COUNCIL WILL VOTE ON US RESOLUTION FOR AN 'IMMEDIATE AND SUSTAINED CEASE-FIRE' IN GAZA

The United Nations Security Council is set to vote on a United States-sponsored resolution declaring that "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is "imperative" to protect civilians and enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to more than 2 million hungry Palestinians.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said she was optimistic that the new, tougher draft resolution would be approved Friday by the 15-member council.

The draft being put to a vote “determines” — which is a council order — “the imperative of an immediate and sustained cease-fire,” with no direct link to the release of hostages taken during Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel, which was in the previous draft. But it would unequivocally support diplomatic efforts “to secure such a cease-fire in connection with the release of all remaining hostages,” and emphasizes “the urgent need to expand the flow of humanitarian assistance to civilians in the entire Gaza Strip.”

Russia’s deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky said Moscow will not be satisfied “with anything that doesn’t call for an immediate cease-fire,” saying it’s what U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is pressing for and what “everybody” wants. He questioned the wording of the draft, asking, “What’s an imperative? I have an imperative to give you \$100, but ... it’s only an imperative, not \$100.”

The Security Council has already adopted two resolutions on the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, but none calling for a cease-fire.

Allergy season arrived early in US. Here’s how to keep pollen from ruining your spring

By DEVI SHASTRI AP Health Writer

Allergy season is here — and it’s earlier and stronger than expected.

More than 80 million Americans deal with itchy eyes, runny nose and other symptoms of seasonal allergies, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

The level of misery people will face depends on where they live and what they’re allergic to, but there are things you can do to feel better.

Pollen counts were high early

Dr. Rachna Shah usually starts looking at pollen counts in the Chicago area in April. But she peeked at her data in mid-February, and saw tree pollen was already at a “moderate” level.

“This season has been so nuts,” said Shah, an allergist and director of the Loyola Medicine Allergy Count. “Granted, it was a pretty mild winter, but I didn’t expect it to be so early.”

Shah said she believes this season will be longer than other years, assuming the weather remains warm. Experts say climate change has led to longer and more intense allergy seasons.

Which cities have it the worst?

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America issues an annual ranking of the most challenging cities to live in if you have allergies, based on over-the-counter medicine use, pollen counts and the number of available allergy specialists. This year, the top five were Wichita, Kansas; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Greenville, South Carolina; Dallas; and Oklahoma City.

Dr. Nana Mireku is an allergist in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and said “people are pretty miserable right now and allergists are pretty busy.”

Which pollens cause allergies?

There are three main types of pollen that cause seasonal allergies. Earlier in the spring, tree pollen is the main culprit. After that grasses pollinate, followed by weeds in the late summer and early fall.

Some of the most common tree pollens that cause allergies include birch, cedar, cottonwood, maple, elm, oak and walnut, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Grasses that cause symptoms include Bermuda, Johnson, rye and Kentucky bluegrass.

Pollen trackers can help you plan your day

The best and first step to controlling allergies is avoiding exposure. That’s easier said than done when everyone wants to enjoy spring weather.

To prevent allergy issues, keep windows closed at home and in the car, avoid going out when pollen

counts are highest and change clothes when you get home.

Pollen trackers can help with planning. The American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology tracks levels through a network of counting stations across the U.S. Counts are available at its website and via email.

How to relieve allergy symptoms

The first thing to figure out is what specifically you're allergic to, Mireku said, and many Americans are allergic to several things at once. Allergists can run tests for different triggers.

Over-the-counter nasal sprays can help relieve symptoms, but they take a while to kick in, so it's best to start them in early March, Shah said.

Antihistamines are another option. Shah said she's seen some patients benefit from switching to a similar brand if one stops working, but said that there isn't much broader data to back the recommendation.

For young children and people who have to take many different allergy medications, immunotherapies in the form of shots and oral drops can help desensitize the immune system to allergens, treating symptoms at their root.

Russia attacks Ukrainian electrical power facilities, including major hydroelectric plant

By HANNA ARHIROVA and JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia attacked electrical power facilities in much of Ukraine, including the country's largest hydroelectric plant, causing widespread outages and killing at least three people, officials said Friday.

Energy Minister German Galushchenko said the nighttime drone and rocket attacks were "the largest attack on the Ukrainian energy sector in recent times. The goal is not just to damage, but to try again, like last year, to cause a large-scale disruption of the country's energy system."

The attacks caused a fire at the Dnipro Hydroelectric Station, which supplies electricity to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest nuclear power installation.

The main 750-kilovolt power line to the plant was cut off, International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Grossi said early Friday. A lower-power backup line was working, he said.

The plant is occupied by Russian troops, and fighting around the plant has been a constant concern because of the potential for a nuclear accident.

The dam at the hydroelectric station was not in danger of breaching, the country's hydroelectric authority said. A dam breach could not only disrupt supplies to the nuclear plant but would potentially cause severe flooding similar to what occurred last year when a major dam at Kakhovka further down the Dnieper collapsed.

One person was killed and at least eight injured in the Russian attack, said Zaporizhzhia regional governor Ivan Fedorov.

Attacks on energy facilities in the Kharkiv region caused blackouts, and other attacks were reported in areas of western Ukraine far from the front lines. Two people died in the Khmelnytskyi region, according to the Internal Affairs Ministry.

"The world sees the targets of Russian terrorists as clearly as possible: power plants and energy supply lines, a hydroelectric dam, ordinary residential buildings, even a trolleybus. Russia is fighting against the ordinary life of people," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Friday on the Telegram messaging app.

Russian officials said Friday that one person died and at least three were injured in Ukrainian shelling of areas near the border.

The governor of the Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said a woman was killed when a shell hit nearby while she was walking her dogs and that two others were injured. The town of Tetkino in the Kursk

region was shelled, injuring one person, said Gov. Roman Starovoit.

Both regions have been subject to shelling and drone attacks in recent weeks and officials have said that attempts by Ukrainian fighters to cross into Russian territory have been repelled.

A Modi rival is arrested. Now, supporters of the opposition leader are protesting in India's capital

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Supporters of an anti-corruption crusader and one of India's most consequential politicians of the past decade held protests Friday against his arrest, which opposition parties say is part of a crackdown by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government before national elections.

Arvind Kejriwal, who is New Delhi's top elected official, was arrested Thursday night by the federal Enforcement Directorate, which is controlled by Modi's government. The agency accused his party and ministers of accepting 1 billion rupees (\$12 million) in bribes from liquor contractors nearly two years ago.

Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party, or Common People's Party, denied the accusations and said they were fabricated. The party said Kejriwal will continue to be Delhi's chief minister while it fights the accusations in court.

Adding to the party's troubles, as part of the same case, the agency also arrested Kejriwal's deputy Manish Sisodia and AAP lawmaker Sanjay Singh in 2023.

In the lead up to the general election, which starts April 19, India's opposition parties accuse the government of misusing its power to harass and weaken its political opponents to gain an unfair advantage in the polls. They point to a spree of raids, arrests and corruption investigations against key opposition figures. Meanwhile, some probes against erstwhile opposition leaders who later defected to Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party have been dropped.

"It looks like harassment because only opposition leaders are being singled out," said political commentator Neerja Chowdhury, adding that there's been no probe against anyone in the BJP. "It's not a level playing field."

The BJP denies using law enforcement agencies to target the opposition and says the agencies act independently.

On Friday, hundreds of AAP supporters and some senior party leaders clashed with the police, who whisked a number of them away in buses.

"This is dictatorship. All this is done to win the national polls," said AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj, referring to the BJP.

Kejriwal's AAP is part of a broad alliance of opposition parties called INDIA, the main challenger to Modi's BJP in the elections to be held in April-June.

His arrest is another setback for the bloc, and came after the Congress party accused the government Thursday of crippling the party by freezing its bank accounts in a tax dispute. But it has also led to a rare show of strength by the opposition figures who slammed the move as undemocratic, and accused Modi's party of misusing the agency to weaken them.

"A scared dictator wants to create a dead democracy," Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said about the arrest in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

"India is under an undeclared Emergency. Our democracy stands critically endangered today," said Raghav Chadha, a lawmaker from the AAP.

Meanwhile, the BJP's spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said Kejriwal's party was playing the "victim card," and that the leader should resign from his chief minister post.

The Enforcement Directorate has investigated many key opposition leaders and others have faced a variety of legal sanctions.

In January, the agency arrested Hemant Soren — who was, until then, the chief minister of eastern Jharkhand state — for allegedly facilitating an illegal land sale. Soren's party denies the accusations.

Gandhi was convicted of criminal libel in 2023 after a complaint by a member of Modi's party. A two-year

prison sentence disqualified him from parliament for a time, until the verdict was suspended by a higher court.

Kejriwal launched the AAP in 2012 and campaigned on a promise to rid the Indian political system and governance of corruption and inefficiency. The party's symbol — a broom — and its promise to sweep the administration of graft struck a chord with Delhi residents.

The party won the Delhi state legislature election a year later, when he became the chief minister — a feat he repeated in 2015 and 2020. Kejriwal's party also governs northern Punjab state.

Modi has previously said his party is targeting 370 seats out of 543 in the upcoming national polls. To achieve that, experts say the BJP will have to repeat its electoral triumph in 2019, in which they won an overwhelming majority of the seats in northern India, including all seven seats in Delhi.

Chowdhury, the commentator, said Kejriwal is the star face of his party. "He's very politically savvy and in Delhi, the AAP has goodwill — their tie-up with the Congress for the elections would have posed a challenge for the BJP to pull that off again."

"But the big question is: Will Kejriwal's arrest galvanize voters? The investigations against opposition leaders so far has not had the kind of traction they may have expected," Chowdhury said, "but now with this arrest, will public opinion start to turn?"

Kentucky's loss to unheralded Oakland crushes millions of March Madness brackets

By MARK ANDERSON AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Kentucky's 80-76 loss to Oakland on Thursday night didn't just end a bunch of perfect brackets. It all but ruined many when it comes to the big picture.

The third-seeded Wildcats were picked in 95% of brackets in the ESPN Tournament Challenge to beat the 14th-seeded Golden Grizzlies. What's more, 74.21% had Kentucky making the Sweet 16, 28.84% reaching the Final Four and 6.5% winning the national championship.

Kentucky's exit erased a lot of perfect brackets, and by the end of the first full day of the NCAA Tournament, only 1,825 remained at ESPN.

March Madness Live, the NCAA's official site, reported only 0.005% of brackets were flawless. The number at CBS was 0.09% before the conclusion of the day's last games.

Those having No. 8 seed Mississippi State and No. 6 seed BYU advance out of the first round also took big hits. Each school was predicted to get through the first round in more than 9 million ESPN brackets.

Mississippi State lost 69-51 to Michigan State, and BYU was beaten 71-67 by Duquesne.

A record 22.6 million brackets were filled out on ESPN's site, up 15% over last year.

UConn was named the champion on 32.3% of brackets submitted on CBS' site, far away the most popular choice. Purdue was next at 12.3%, followed by Houston at 11.9% and North Carolina at 8.9%.

All four are No. 1 seeds, and at 3.8% are the most likely Final Four, according to the brackets. The next closest at 2% includes No. 2 seed Arizona in place of North Carolina out of the West Region.

Mountain West tournament champion New Mexico, the 11 seed in the West, was the most popular double-digit pick to advance to the Sweet 16 at 14%.

UConn also was the favorite in the ESPN Tournament Challenge at 24.7%, followed by Houston at 13.6% and Purdue at 10.1%.

Sheldon Jacobson, who runs the BracketOdds website, said most people don't take the proper approach to filling out their brackets, choosing games from the first round to the championship game.

"Pick the best team you like in each of the regions and then build your bracket from there," Jacobson said. "When you do that, you're actually eliminating some of the risk of making mistakes in the other parts of the bracket. It's very counterintuitive, but that's what our research paper showed."

NCAA Tournament Latest: NC State delivers another Day 1 upset

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By The Associated Press undefined

The Latest on the first full day of the NCAA Tournament:

N.C. State delivers another Day 1 upset

N.C. State needed to win its conference tournament just to get into the NCAA Tournament.

The Wolfpack are now headed to the second round after becoming the fifth double-digit seed to win in the first full day of the bracket with an 80-67 win over No. 6 Texas Tech.

The 11th-seeded Wolfpack played their way into the bracket by winning the ACC tournament as a No. 10 seed, knocking off North Carolina in the title game.

N.C. State used a 14-4 run to go up 14 and made 14 of 23 shots in the second half to earn a shot at fellow underdog Oakland in Saturday's second round.

FINAL: Kansas 93, Samford 89

Samford was a popular upset pick against injury-plagued Kansas.

The 13th-seeded Bulldogs nearly pulled it off, coming within seconds — and an apparently errant foul call — of potentially knocking off the Jayhawks.

Samford trailed 90-89 with about 15 seconds left when A.J. Staton-McCray was called for a foul as Kansas' Nick Timberlake went up for a dunk. Replays showed Staton-McCray somehow got all ball for what should have been called a block. The play wasn't reviewable.

Timberlake hit both free throws, the Bulldogs missed a hurried 3 and the Jayhawks moved on to face No. 5 seed Gonzaga in the second round.

FINAL: Washington State 66, Drake 61

Washington State made the most of its first trip to the NCAA Tournament in 16 years.

Isaac Jones scored 20 points and the seventh-seeded Cougars made the key plays down the stretch to pull out a 66-61 win over No. 10 Drake.

Washington State was one of the surprises in college basketball this season, earning its first trip to the NCAA Tournament since 2007 after being picked to finish 10th in the Pac-12.

The Cougars earned an at-large bid into the bracket and survived a back-and-forth game against the Bulldogs to move into the second round against No. 2 seed Iowa State.

FINAL: Tennessee 83, Saint Peter's 49

Saint Peter's bid for another Cinderella run came to a crashing halt.

All-American Dalton Knecht scored 23 points and No. 2 seed Tennessee dominated the 15th-seeded Peacocks from the start in an 83-49 win in the Midwest Region.

Saint Peter's added a massive dose of madness to March in 2022 with a run to the Elite Eight. The Peacocks were no match for the ultra-athletic Vols, falling into a 26-point hole by halftime.

Tennessee cruised from there to earn coach Rick Barnes a shot at his former team, Texas, in Saturday's second round.

Gohlke lifts Oakland over Kentucky

Jack Gohlke took the first star turn of the NCAA Tournament, pushing Oakland past mighty Kentucky.

Gohlke made 10 3-pointers — one shy of the tourney record — and No. 14 Oakland pulled off the biggest upset of March Madness so far with an 80-76 win over No. 3 Kentucky in the South Region.

Gohlke went 10 for 20 from the arc, finishing just short of the single-game record set by Loyola Marymount's Jeff Fryer against Michigan in 1990.

Gohlke scored 32 points to send the Grizzlies into Saturday's second round against Texas Tech or N.C. State.

Gohlke took 335 shots this season and all but eight were from 3. He doesn't even shoot layups during warmups.

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FINAL: Gonzaga 86, McNeese 65

That upset pick of McNeese over Gonzaga? The Zags blew it out of the bracket.

Graham Ike had 16 points and 10 rebounds, and No. 5 Gonzaga dominated from start to finish in an 86-65 win over McNeese in the Midwest Region.

Gonzaga led by 17 at halftime and stretched it to 35 to earn a spot in Saturday's second round against Kansas or Samford.

Anton Watson had 13 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists for the Zags.

FINAL: Iowa State 82, South Dakota State 65

Iowa State cruised into the second round. The second-seeded Cyclones shot a blistering 58% in an 82-65 win over No. 15 South Dakota State in the East Region.

Milan Momcilovic scored 19 points and Tamin Lipsey added 17 to send Iowa State into the second round against Washington State or Drake.

Longhorns reach Round 2

No. 7 seed Texas overcame a shaky shooting night to grind out a 56-44 win over No. 10 Colorado State in the Midwest Region.

Texas used a 25-3 run to lead 27-11 at the half, holding the Rams scoreless over the final 6:50.

Colorado State rallied to pull within six, but Texas stretched the lead back out to move into the second round against Tennessee or Saint Peter's.

The Longhorns went 1 for 14 from the 3-point arc but held the Rams to 29% from the floor.

Gohlke for 3

Oakland's Jack Gohlke doesn't even shoot layups during layups.

The graduate student, who dropped seven 3-pointers – the last a banked shot while falling backward – in the first half against Kentucky, attempted only 3s when the Grizzlies warmed up after halftime.

Gohlke was one of the last Oakland players to leave the locker room and he joined his teammates in a huddle where they yelled "finish" before taking the floor.

A-10 rising

The Atlantic-10 got two teams into NCAA Tournament when Duquesne won the conference tournament and Dayton received an at-large bid.

Now the conference has two teams into the second round for the first time since 2016.

No. 11 seed Duquesne had the bracket's first upset, knocking off sixth-seeded BYU 71-67 in the East Region for their first NCAA Tournament win since 1969.

Dayton followed Duquesne into the second round by rallying from a 17-point deficit to beat Nevada 63-60 in the West Region.

Duquesne faces No. 3 Illinois and Dayton plays No. 2 Arizona in Saturday's second round.

Oregon scores another win for 11 seeds

A second No. 11 seed is on to the second round.

Jermaine Couisnard scored a school NCAA Tournament-record 40 points against his former team and Oregon knocked off No. 6 seed South Carolina 87-73 in the Midwest Region.

The Ducks join fellow No. 11 seed Duquesne, a 71-67 winner over BYU, in the second round.

Couisnard, who played three seasons at South Carolina before transferring, scored 26 points in the second half as the Ducks pulled away.

Oregon moves on to play No. 3 Creighton, coach Dana Altman's former team, on Saturday.

FINAL: Dayton 63, Nevada 60

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DaRon Holmes II scored eight of his 18 points during a massive second-half run and No. 7 seed Dayton rallied from a 17-point deficit to beat No. 10 Nevada 63-60 in the West Region.

The Wolf Pack closed the first half on a 16-0 run, but the Flyers answered with a 20-2 run to go up 59-58. Nevada had two chances to tie after Dayton went up three but missed both.

The Flyers move on to face No. 2 seed Arizona on Saturday.

UConn's Edwards says she'll turn pro

UConn women's basketball star Aaliyah Edwards will be playing in her final NCAA Tournament.

The Huskies star center made her announcement Thursday on social media. Edwards had one more year of eligibility remaining and could have joined teammate Paige Bueckers, who announced during UConn's senior night last month that she would suit up for the Huskies next season.

Edwards, an honorable mention All-American, is expected to be a first-round pick in the WNBA draft. UConn, a No. 3 seed, opens play Saturday at Gampel Pavilion against No. 14 seed Jackson State.

No. 3 Illinois rallies past Morehead State

Marcus Domask had the 10th triple-double in men's tournament history, and third-seeded Illinois rallied past 14th-seeded Morehead State 85-69 in the first round of the East Region.

Illinois trailed 45-43 about 3-1/2 minutes into the second half. The Illini scored 32 of the game's next 41 points to take total control.

Next up for Illinois: Duquesne on Saturday.

How's your bracket? It's likely good ... for now

Look, you aren't going to have a perfect bracket. But halfway through Day 1, you're likely still in pretty good shape.

BYU's loss to Duquesne knocked nearly 9.4 million brackets out of the perfect ranks on ESPN.com, and Mississippi State's loss to Michigan State was the first defeat for 9.3 million others.

(For some reason, 66,720 folks picked Wagner to beat North Carolina. We presume you're all alums.)

But so far, you're probably still good.

FINAL: North Carolina 90, Wagner 62

The top seeds in the West are through to Round 2.

North Carolina eased away from 16th-seeded Wagner 90-62 in a first round matchup.

Awaiting the Tar Heels: Michigan State on Saturday. Again.

This will be the sixth time the Heels and Spartans meet in the tournament. North Carolina has won each of the previous five, the last four of them as a No. 1 seed.

The last tournament meeting for the two storied programs was the 2009 title game, won 89-72 by North Carolina.

On 14th-seeded Colgate, and why 13 matters

Colgate is a No. 14 seed, set to take on No. 3 Baylor on Friday in the West Region.

A 13 seed seems more fitting.

Here's why: 13, an unlucky number to many, is lucky for Colgate. Coach Matt Langel is in his 13th year, and that's just the beginning of this tale.

Per Colgate lore, in 1817, "13 men gathered and offered 13 prayers and \$13." They crafted 13 articles for a constitution that led to Colgate's creation.

But Langel isn't superstitious.

"For me, it's been an awesome season and a special season, but nothing to have to do with 13," he said.

By the way, Colgate is an underdog Friday by 13.

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FINAL: Arizona 85, Long Beach State 65

Dan Monson's run at Long Beach State is over.

Second-seeded Arizona pulled away in the second half and moved into the second round of the West Region by topping 15th-seeded Long Beach State 85-65.

It was the final game for Monson at LBSU. The coach was fired by the school earlier this month.

Arizona will play either Dayton or Nevada on Saturday.

Terrence Shannon Jr. sparks Illinois comeback against Morehead State

Terrence Shannon Jr. willed No. 3 Illinois to three come-from-behind wins in the Big Ten Tournament, and he might have to do the same against No. 14 Morehead State.

Riley Minix, Kalil Thomas and Jordan Lathon made three straight 3s in rapid succession to get Morehead State out to a 9-0 lead before two minutes were gone.

The Illini were within four points at the first media timeout thanks to Shannon scoring nine of his team's first 13.

FINAL: Creighton 77, Akron 60

Creighton is into the second round after the third-seeded Bluejays topped 14th-seeded Akron 77-60 in the Midwest Region.

A 10-0 second-half run provided breathing room and Creighton kept control the rest of the way.

The Bluejays will play either sixth-seeded South Carolina or 11th-seeded Oregon on Saturday.

Freeman ties the Admiral

Akron center Enrique Freeman's remarkable career now includes an impressive bit of history.

The 6-foot-7 Freeman recorded the 31st double-double of the season during the Zips' opening-round game against Creighton. That ties Hall of Famer David Robinson's NCAA record for double-doubles in a season. Robinson reached double figures in points and rebounds 31 times while playing at the Naval Academy in 1985-86.

Duquesne's Dambrot can't retire yet

Duquesne coach Keith Dambrot has a wonderful problem. He's still employed.

Dambrot is retiring when Duquesne's season ends. The Dukes delayed that until at least Saturday by topping BYU in their tourney opener on Thursday.

"They just don't want me to retire, I guess," Dambrot told truTV in the televised on-court postgame interview. "I'm trying to get to the promised land and they want me to keep coaching."

Read more: No. 11 Duquesne knocks off No. 6 BYU

It's 56 and counting for Tom Izzo

Tom Izzo in March (and sometimes April) tends to mean good stuff for Michigan State.

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The Spartans' win over Mississippi State was Izzo's 56th NCAA Tournament win at Michigan State. Only three coaches have won more tourney games at one school. Mike Krzyzewski won 101 at Duke, Dean Smith won 65 at North Carolina and Jim Boeheim won 62 at Syracuse.

March Madness melee

There's been a melee in the opening minutes of the second half between BYU and Duquesne when the Cougars' Noah Waterman and the Dukes' Fousseyni Drame simultaneously grabbed the rebound and took it together to the floor.

Drame appeared to be the instigator, rolling back on top of Waterman on the floor as official Pat Driscoll jumped between them. Players from both teams surrounded them as if it was a schoolyard fight and Driscoll appeared to be a bit shaken up.

Officials reviewed the play on the courtside monitor and both players were given a technical foul.

A better in-game experience

One thing the NCAA has improved is keeping fans at games in the loop on what's happening elsewhere in the tournament. At halftime at CHI Health Center in Omaha, where BYU and Duquesne were playing, the game between Creighton and Akron in Pittsburgh was played on the video board hanging above the arena floor. CHI Health Center is the home court of the Bluejays and a lot of their fans were interested in the game.

That kind of look-in used to be rare. But these days, now that most fans can watch any game they want on their phones anyway, it makes sense to show other games on the massive screens in every arena.

BYU is bloodied and bumming vs Duquesne

Just about everything has gone wrong for sixth-seeded BYU in the first half.

Lead guard Dallin Hall has tissues shoved up both of his nostrils to plug his bloody nose, Richie Saunders was doubled over after taking an elbow to his midsection and Spencer Johnson even lost a shoe while trying to play some defense.

Not the kind of start the Cougars envisioned as they try to snap a four-game NCAA tourney losing streak. They trailed 17-10 midway through the first half in Omaha, Nebraska.

Izzo's Spartans look good early

Tom Izzo and Michigan State eked into March Madness but look good so far. Tyson Walker has a couple 3-pointers and the ninth-seeded Spartans lead eighth-seeded Mississippi State 20-8 just before the mid-way point of the first quarter.

March Madness could be on the way out

Tracking the changes upending college sports can be as frenetic as flipping between all the games going down over the first week of March Madness. Ultimately, those changes could impact what America's favorite basketball tournament looks like in the future — or whether it exists at all.

News about athlete compensation, player unions and realignment dominate discussions. Everything in college sports is open for discussion, interpretation and adjustment. That includes the industry's most hallowed tradition, the NCAA basketball tournaments, which begin this week and will stretch from coast to coast.

The bottom line behind it all is money.

Read more about how changes to college sports are impacting March Madness.

BYU's Khalifa plays while observing Ramadan

BYU forward Aly Khalifa will play against Duquesne on Thursday without having any food or drink after sunrise as he observes Ramadan during the NCAA Tournament.

The native of Alexandria, Egypt, probably could have taken an exception to one of the Five Pillars of Islam because of travel involved in the college basketball tournament. But instead, he chose to work with the BYU sports science and medicine staff to ensure he could play while observing the fast.

Khalifa planned to wake up at about 4:30 a.m. Thursday to eat and pray, then head to the arena for an 11:40 a.m. tipoff.

Read more: [BYU's Aly Khalifa](#).

For Tom Izzo, a 26th straight tourney bid wasn't a layup

March Madness kept Tom Izzo sleepless for more than 24 hours before he heard and saw Michigan State made it into a 26th consecutive NCAA Tournament.

The Hall of Fame coach said he had one of the most anxious days of his career on Sunday, sensing his record-breaking streak might get snapped after the Spartans started No. 4 in the AP Top 25 preseason poll and finished an uneven season with five losses in seven games.

Izzo was able to exhale — and get some much-needed sleep — because Michigan State (19-14) was placed in the West Region as a No. 9 seed and matched up with No. 8 seed Mississippi State (21-13) on Thursday in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Read more about Tom Izzo's 26th March Madness bid.

Health could help to decide this year's tourney

Bill Self feels pretty good about Hunter Dickinson's availability for the NCAA Tournament. The Kansas coach frankly has no idea what to expect of his other All-America candidate, Kevin McCullar Jr.

And he's not the only one fretting the health of their teams. Whether it's Marquette star Tyler Kolek's oblique injury or Houston big man J'Wan Roberts dealing with some leg soreness, injuries could play a big role in what transpires over the next three weeks.

Read more about what injuries could impact this year's tournament.

As India's election nears, some Bollywood films promote Modi politics by embracing Hindu nationalism

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — The movie trailer begins with an outline of the iconic glasses worn by Mohandas Gandhi, the leader who helped India win independence from the British colonialists in 1947. In the backdrop of a devotional song that Gandhi loved, the outline slowly morphs into what appears like his face.

Then, a raucous beat drops, followed by a rap song. A face is finally revealed: not Gandhi, but an actor who plays the independence leader's ideological nemesis, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar — the man considered the fountainhead of Hindu nationalism in India.

It is the same ideology Prime Minister Narendra Modi has harnessed to cement his power as his ruling party makes strides in its quest to turn the secular country into a Hindu nation.

The glorified biopic on the early 20th-century Hindu nationalist ideologue — called "Swatantra Veer Savarkar," or "Independent Warrior Savarkar" — hits Indian theatres Friday, just weeks ahead of a national vote that is set to determine the political direction of the country for the next five years. The movie coincides with a cluster of upcoming Bollywood releases based on polarizing issues, which either promote Modi and his government's political agenda, or lambast his critics.

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Analysts say the use of popular cinema as a campaign tool to promote Hindu nationalism feeds into a divisive narrative that risks exacerbating the already widespread political and religious rifts in the country.

Raja Sen, a film critic and Bollywood screenwriter, said movies used to represent a mix of nationalistic cinema and films promoting national integration.

"That appears to be fast changing," Sen said. "The scary part is that these films are being accepted now. It is truly frightening."

For more than a century, Bollywood has unified India, a country riven with religious, caste and political divide. It's been a rare industry where religion has been least influential in deciding the success of filmmakers and actors. Bollywood films have also championed political diversity and religious harmony.

That culture, however, appears to be under threat.

Under Modi's Hindu nationalist government, many filmmakers have made movies on bygone Hindu kings extolling their bravery. Boisterous and action-packed movies valorizing the Indian Army have become box office successes. Political dramas and biopics that eulogize Hindu nationalists are the norm.

In most of these films, the stock villains are medieval Muslim rulers, leftist or opposition leaders, free thinkers or rights activists — and neighboring Pakistan, India's arch rival.

The biopic on Sarvarkar, who advocated for India's future as a Hindu nation, is emblematic of this broader trend.

Two more upcoming films claim to reveal a conspiracy about a 2002 train fire in western Gujarat state that ignited one of the worst anti-Muslim riots in India. More than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in riots. It was a hugely controversial episode in Modi's political career, as he was the chief minister of Gujarat at the time.

Another film claims to expose the "anti-national agenda" of a university in the capital, New Delhi. The film is loosely based on Jawaharlal Nehru University, one of the country's premier liberal institutions that has become a target of Hindu nationalists and leaders from Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

Many past films with similar themes became box office successes. Modi's party often publicly endorsed them despite criticism of his government for stifling dissent.

In February, Modi himself praised "Article 370," a film that celebrated his government's controversial decision to strip Indian-controlled Kashmir of its special status and statehood in 2019. Some film reviewers called the movie "factually incorrect" and a "thinly veiled propaganda film" favoring the government.

"The Kerala Story," the ninth-highest grossing Hindi film of 2023, was widely panned for inaccuracies in depicting Christian and Hindu girls from India's southern Kerala state who were lured to join the Islamic State. The film was banned in two states ruled by opposition parties, who said it was Islamophobic and would destroy religious harmony.

At the same time, at least three states ruled by Modi's party made tickets to see the film tax-free and held mass screenings. Modi himself endorsed viewing the film during a state election rally.

Sudipto Sen, the film's director, said the movie exposed the "nexus between religious fundamentalism and terrorism" through a human story, and did not vilify Muslims.

"You can't ignore the emotional appeal of these films. In fact, every state government should endorse them," Sen said.

Another of Sen's films, based on Maoist insurgency in central Indian jungles, was released March 15. Its primary villains, apart from the insurgents, were rights activists and left-leaning intellectuals. One critic called it "two hours of diatribe against communism."

While such films have been applauded by India's right, other Bollywood movies have fallen into the crosshairs of Hindu nationalists.

Right-wing groups have frequently threatened to block the release of films they deem offensive to Hinduism. Hindu activists often make calls on social media to boycott such films.

Some filmmakers caught up in India's increasingly restrictive political environment say they're resorting to self-censorship.

"People like me feel disempowered," said Onir, a National Award-winning filmmaker who goes by just one name.

Onir has made widely acclaimed films highlighting LGBTQ+ rights. In 2022, Onir wanted to make a movie inspired by a former Indian army major who falls in love with a local man in disputed Kashmir, where armed rebels seeking independence or a merger with Pakistan have fought Indian rule for decades. The film's script was rejected by India's defense ministry because it was "distorting the image of Indian army," the filmmaker said.

"Look at the films that are getting released now. Any film that goes against the government's narrative is called anti-national. There is no fair ground. In fact, there is an atmosphere of fear," Onir said.

Polarizing films — which Onir noted constitute most of the recent releases, while movies focusing on discrimination against minorities face hurdles — tend to make big money, signaling the appetite for such content.

Some say the rise in divisive films reflects opportunism among filmmakers.

"The idea that this is the way to success has permeated into Bollywood," said Raja Sen, the critic and screenwriter.

He said such films make good business sense because of the noise they generate, even though they serve as the cinematic equivalent of "WhatsApp forwards" — a reference to misinformation and propaganda spread on the social messaging platform.

"Indian films need an artistic rebellion. I hope we can start seeing that," Sen said.

The UN will vote on a US resolution declaring that an immediate cease-fire in Gaza is imperative

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United Nations Security Council is set to vote on a United States-sponsored resolution declaring that "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is "imperative" to protect civilians and enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to more than 2 million hungry Palestinians.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said she was optimistic that the new, tougher draft resolution would be approved Friday by the 15-member council.

The draft being put to a vote "determines" — which is a council order — "the imperative of an immediate and sustained cease-fire," with no direct link to the release of hostages taken during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, which was in the previous draft. But it would unequivocally support diplomatic efforts "to secure such a cease-fire in connection with the release of all remaining hostages."

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky said Moscow will not be satisfied "with anything that doesn't call for an immediate cease-fire," saying it's what U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is pressing for and what "everybody" wants. He questioned the wording of the draft, asking, "What's an imperative? I have an imperative to give you \$100, but ... it's only an imperative, not \$100."

"So, somebody's fooling around, I think, (with the) international community," the Russian envoy said.

The Security Council had already adopted two resolutions on the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, but none calling for a cease-fire.

Russia and China vetoed a U.S.-sponsored resolution in late October calling for pauses in the fighting to deliver aid, protection of civilians, and a halt to arming Hamas. They said it didn't reflect global calls for a cease-fire.

The U.S., Israel's closest ally, has vetoed three resolutions demanding a cease-fire, the most recent an Arab-backed measure supported by 13 council members with one abstention on Feb. 20.

A day earlier, the U.S. circulated a rival resolution, which has gone through major changes during negotiations before Friday's vote. It initially would have supported a temporary cease-fire linked to the release of all hostages, and the previous draft would have supported international efforts for a cease-fire as part of a hostage deal.

The vote will take place as Blinken, America's top diplomat, is on his sixth urgent mission to the Middle East since the Israel-Hamas war, discussing a deal for a cease-fire and hostage release, as well as post-

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war scenarios.

Nate Evans, the spokesperson for the U.S. Mission to the United Nations who announced the Friday morning vote, said: "This resolution is an opportunity for the Council to speak with one voice to support the diplomacy happening on the ground and pressure Hamas to accept the deal on the table."

Meanwhile, the 10 elected members of the Security Council have been drafting their own resolution, which would demand an immediate humanitarian cease-fire for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan that began March 10 to be "respected by all parties leading to a permanent sustainable cease-fire."

It also demands "the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages" and emphasizes the urgent need to protect civilians and deliver humanitarian aid throughout the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel that triggered the war, and abducted another 250 people. Hamas is still believed to be holding some 100 people hostage, as well as the remains of 30 others.

In Gaza, the Health Ministry raised the death toll in the territory Thursday to nearly 32,000 Palestinians. It doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

The international community's authority on determining the severity of hunger crises warned this week that "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza, where 70% of people are experiencing catastrophic hunger. The report from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative, or IPC, warned that escalation of the war could push half of Gaza's total population to the brink of starvation.

The U.S. draft would express "deep concern about the threat of conflict-induced famine and epidemics presently facing the civilian population in Gaza as well as the number of undernourished people, and also that hunger in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels."

It would emphasize "the urgent need to expand the flow of humanitarian assistance to civilians in the entire Gaza Strip" and lift all barriers to getting aid to civilians "at scale."

The draft was being put in "blue" Thursday night, which is the final form required for a vote.

After closed council consultations on Gaza late Thursday, France's U.N. Ambassador Nicolas de Rivière told reporters: "There is a desire to take action, no one wants to procrastinate, so we hope that a decision can be made by tomorrow (Friday) evening."

"There are two options: Either the U.S. text is adopted and then we'll move to the next phase of this crisis management," he said, "or the text is not adopted and then the draft of the elected members will come to the table and put to the vote, and I hope it will be adopted."

Israel faces mounting pressure from even its closest allies to streamline the entry of aid into the Gaza Strip and to open more land crossings, and come to a cease-fire agreement. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to move the military offensive to the southern city of Rafah, where some 1.3 million displaced Palestinians have sought safety. Netanyahu says it's a Hamas stronghold.

The final U.S. draft eliminated language in the initial draft that said Israel's offensive in Rafah "should not proceed under current circumstances." Instead, in an introductory paragraph, the council would emphasize its concern that a ground offensive into Rafah "would result in further harm to civilians and their further displacement, potentially into neighboring countries, and would have serious implications for regional peace and security."

For the first time in a U.N. resolution, the U.S. draft would condemn "all acts of terrorism, including the Hamas-led attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, as well as its taking and killing of hostages, murder of civilians, and sexual violence, including rape."

Burkina Faso's security forces are killing more civilians. Survivors detailed 1 village's massacre

By SAM MEDNICK and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Women slain with babies wrapped against their bodies, lifeless children intertwined together, a 2-month-old face-up on the ground with puppies crawling on his tiny frame. The scenes

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were horrifying, but the 32-year-old farmer felt he had to document them, as proof of the carnage in his central Burkina Faso village.

More than a dozen relatives were killed Nov. 5 when security forces attacked with mounted pickup trucks, guns and drones, he told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, for fear of retaliation. He said he hid for hours in a neighbor's compound and took a series of photos before fleeing the next morning.

Dozens more were killed that day in Zaongo village, according to his account and that of two other survivors, as well as a U.N. report citing government figures. The images the man sent AP and the interviews with the three survivors are rare firsthand accounts amid a stark increase in civilian killings by Burkina Faso's security forces as the junta struggles to beat back a growing jihadi insurgency and attacks citizens under the guise of counterterrorism.

Most attacks — including the slaying of children by soldiers at a military base last year, uncovered in an AP investigation — go unpunished and unreported in a nation run by a repressive leadership that silences perceived dissidents.

More than 20,000 people have been killed since jihadi violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group first hit the West African nation nine years ago, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, a U.S.-based nonprofit. The fighting has divided a once peaceful population, blockaded dozens of cities and led to two military coups.

Civilian deaths at the hands of security forces increased by 70% from 2022 to 2023 — to 735 people killed from 430, ACLED figures show.

Burkina Faso's government spokesman didn't respond to requests for comment about the Nov. 5 attack. Previously, officials have denied killing civilians and said jihadis often disguise themselves as soldiers.

The three survivors told AP they're certain the men were security forces, not jihadis. They describe them wearing military uniforms, one with a Burkina Faso flag fastened to him as he tried to warn a group of civilians that anyone found alive would be killed. The farmer saw a helicopter flying toward the village in the attack's aftermath — those are used solely by the military, not insurgents.

The United Nations urged the government to conduct an independent and transparent investigation into the attack, hold those responsible accountable, and compensate victims and families, said Seif Magango, spokesperson for the U.N. Human Rights Office.

Burkina Faso's prosecutor's office said it opened an investigation, but four months later, survivors said they've had no news.

"THEY MASSACRED THEM"

It was early morning when the farmer heard gunshots in the distance. He was cultivating land a few miles from home with his father, he said, and they returned to the village to wait it out.

Violence in Namentenga province is frequent, locals said — it's common to hear shootings and see soldiers on patrol.

But this Sunday was different.

About 3 p.m., the farmer said, hundreds of men — most in military fatigues — stormed through on motorbikes and trucks and started indiscriminately killing people.

He hid at the neighbor's home, he said, and after hours of gunshots, the man with the Burkina Faso flag entered, warning people to stay out of sight.

"The soldier told us that his colleagues were in the other compound," the farmer said. "He said he didn't want to hurt us, but if the others realized we were still alive, they'd kill us."

When the guns stopped that evening, he said, he left the compound and saw Zaongo littered with dead and injured men, women and children. Among them were his father, two brothers, a sister and her four children.

His uncle's body lay under a pile of several children. His 63-year-old father was by the door of their house. "These people sought shelter in their huts, but they massacred them," the farmer said.

THE JUNTA TODAY

It's unclear what prompted the attack, but locals said most times, security forces think villagers are working with the extremists.

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Since seizing power in the second coup in September 2022, the junta led by Capt. Ibrahim Traoré has threatened rights groups and journalists and carried out attacks against civilians — potential war crimes under international law.

Military drone strikes late last year claiming to target Islamic fighters killed at least 60 people at two markets and a funeral in Burkina Faso and neighboring Mali, according to Human Rights Watch.

The junta is on a war footing as it tries to beat back the jihadis, who've overtaken more than half the country, according to conflict analysts and Sahel region experts. It's using a new general mobilization law to expand its crackdown and force people into combat.

The junta is distancing itself from regional and Western nations that don't agree with its approach. This year, it left the West African regional economic bloc known as ECOWAS and created an alliance with Mali and Niger, also run by military juntas battling jihadi insurgencies.

The junta severed military ties with former colonial ruler France. Officials have welcomed several dozen Russians tasked in part with keeping the junta in power, according to several conflict experts and a diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the matter.

In November, days after the Zaongo massacre, 50 Russians arrived in Burkina Faso to protect the junta, influence public opinion and provide security services, said Lou Osborn with All Eyes on Wagner, a project focusing on the Russian mercenary group, which operates in a handful of African countries.

While the Wagner Group's future has been uncertain since leader Yevgeny Prigozhin died in a suspicious plane crash last year, its presence in Burkina Faso is part of the group's new and more visible phase of influence, Osborn said. A pro-Russian association called the Africa Initiative has been established and is staffed with former Prigozhin employees, she said.

Its goal, initiative president Soumaila Azenwo Ayo told AP, is promoting Russian and Burkina Faso culture and language, in part through its new radio program, "Russian Hour."

Africa is key to Russia politically and economically as it seeks allies amid its war in Ukraine. But Wagner mercenaries have been accused by rights groups and civilians of committing human rights atrocities in the countries where it operates, including the killing of 300 people at a Mali village in 2022. An increased Burkina Faso presence would bring fear of even more civilian deaths.

The United States said it has cut and suspended assistance to Burkina Faso's military but still supplies nonlethal equipment to civilian security forces such as the national police. In January, it delivered nearly 100 bikes and pickups.

In a statement, the State Department said it has provided \$16 million in "counterterrorism capacity building assistance" to Burkina Faso since 2022.

"We are not aware of any diversion or misuse of recent equipment," it said. "We take allegations seriously and will continue to monitor and evaluate use of our security assistance."

Some analysts said continued U.S. aid sends the wrong message.

"Other countries around the world are seeing and watching and saying to themselves, 'I can also jail all of my opponents, kill civilians under the guise of counterterrorism efforts and also play friendship with Russia, China — and the US will still give me all the toys I've asked for,'" said Aneliese Bernard, a former State Department official specializing in African affairs who runs a risk advisory group.

CIVILIANS IN THE MIDDLE

During the Nov. 5 attack, men in military uniforms speaking French and local language Moore called for all men to leave their houses, a 45-year-old mother told AP.

Peering through the window of the home where she hid, she said, she saw relatives being killed — more than 15 in all.

She said she was spotted by a soldier, who motioned for her to lie down and stay silent. The men dressed, looked and sounded like the soldiers who regularly pass through the village inspecting people's documents, she said.

The third survivor who spoke to AP, a 55-year-old man from Zaongo, said villagers had been accused of working with the jihadis because they refused to join tens of thousands of volunteer fighters serving

alongside Burkina Faso's military.

Recruiting is part of the junta's strategy, but residents said this has only contributed to civilian killings as volunteers round up anyone they suspect of ties to the extremists. It also provokes jihadis to attack communities with volunteers, they said.

Civilians are increasingly caught in the middle as violence intensifies. More than 2 million have been displaced and tens of thousands face severe hunger, according to the U.N. The insecurity makes it hard for aid groups to get assistance to those who need it.

At least 74 civilians were killed in connection with a weekslong convoy carrying food and aid in December, according to ACLED. They were killed by both the military and jihadis, two aid workers told AP on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak about the matter. One worker said the jihadis accused the civilians of providing information to the convoy's armed escort.

An internal report for aid workers seen by AP said soldiers escorting the food supplies "fired on suspected accomplices" of jihadi-affiliated fighters.

"WE'RE FRIGHTENED"

Four months after the attack, survivors fear that bodies still lie on the ground rotting in Zaongo, now occupied by jihadis. Some relatives were able to return about a week after the deaths, but there were too many bodies and not enough time to bury them all, they said. They've been unable to get back since.

It's still unclear how many people were killed – reports from survivors, the U.N. and aid groups vary, from 70 to more than 200.

Survivors are displaced in different parts of the country. They're calling on the government to hold the killers accountable while living in fear that it could happen again.

"We never thought that so many people could be killed at once," said the surviving woman who spoke to AP.

"When a door slams or a child shouts, we're frightened. If we go back there, we'll just die."

Cheating on your spouse is a crime in New York. The 1907 law may finally be repealed

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — For more than a century, it has been a crime to cheat on your spouse in New York.

But adultery may soon be legal in the Empire State thanks to a bill working its way through the New York Legislature, which would finally repeal the seldom-used law that is punishable by up to three months behind bars.

Adultery bans are still on the books in several states across the U.S., though charges are also rare and convictions even rarer. They were traditionally enacted to reduce the number of divorces at a time when a cheating spouse was the only way to secure a legal split.

Adultery, a misdemeanor in New York since 1907, is defined in state code as when a person "engages in sexual intercourse with another person at a time when he has a living spouse, or the other person has a living spouse." Just a few weeks after it went into effect, a married man and a 25-year-old woman were the first people arrested under the new law after the man's wife sued for divorce, according to a New York Times article from the time.

Only about a dozen people have been charged under New York's law since 1972, and of those, just five cases have netted convictions, according to Assemblyman Charles Lavine, who sponsored the bill to appeal the ban. The last adultery charge in New York appears to have been filed in 2010 against a woman who was caught engaging in a sex act in a public park, but it was later dropped as part of a plea deal.

Lavine says it's time to throw out the law given that it's never enforced and because prosecutors shouldn't be digging into what willing adults do behind closed doors.

"It just makes no sense whatsoever and we've come a long way since intimate relationships between consenting adults are considered immoral," he said. "It's a joke. This law was someone's expression of moral outrage."

Katharine B. Silbaugh, a law professor at Boston University who co-authored "A Guide to America's Sex Laws," said adultery bans were punitive measures aimed at women, intended to discourage extramarital affairs that could throw a child's parentage into question.

"Let's just say this: patriarchy," Silbaugh said.

New York's bill to repeal its ban has already passed the Assembly and is expected to soon pass the Senate before it can move to the governor's office for a signature.

The law almost was removed from the books in the 1960s after a state commission tasked with updating the entire penal code found the ban practically impossible to enforce. The commission's leader was quoted at the time as saying, "this is a matter of private morality, not of law."

The panel's changes were initially accepted in the Assembly, but the chamber restored the adultery law after a politician argued its elimination might appear like the state was endorsing infidelity, according to a 1965 New York Times article.

Another Times article from the period also detailed pushback from at least one religious group that argued adultery undermined marriages and the common good. The penal code changes were eventually signed into law, with the adultery ban intact.

Most states that still have adultery laws classify them as misdemeanors, but Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Michigan treat adultery as felony offenses. Several states, including Colorado and New Hampshire have moved to repeal their adultery laws, using similar arguments as Assemblyman Lavine.

There also are lingering questions over whether adultery bans are even constitutional.

A 2003 Supreme Court decision that struck down sodomy laws cast doubt on whether adultery laws could pass muster, with then-Justice Antonin Scalia writing in his dissent that the court's ruling put the bans in question.

However, in the court's landmark 2022 decision that stripped away abortion protections, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that the Supreme Court "should reconsider" its sodomy law decision, as well as its decision legalizing same-sex marriage, in light of its newer interpretation of Constitutional protections around liberty and privacy.

The high court's hypothetical stance on adultery laws might be mostly academic fodder given how rare it is for such a charge to be filed.

Milei's first 100 days: Argentines struggle to make ends meet as support for president remains high

By DÉBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Sergio Gómez, a store owner in Buenos Aires, spends his days behind an empty counter, one nearly as empty as the large refrigerators in which he used to freeze meat. Above him, a blackboard displays outdated prices for the different cuts that he no longer sells.

The small grocery store he and his wife opened eight months ago is no longer viable. Sales plummeted at the beginning of the year as a sharp increase in grocery prices forced thousands of Argentines to modify their spending habits.

"First we decided to shut down part of the store and just sell meat and vegetables, but because of rising inflation and fewer people coming in, we had to shut down the butcher shop," said the 51-year-old butcher. "Now we have to shut down altogether. We can't go on. We don't have the resources."

Gómez and his wife are among a large group of Argentines who say their economic situation is worse now than a year ago as a consequence of a series of austerity and deregulation measures ordered by President Javier Milei in his first 100 days in office.

Milei, a far-right economist, has said the measures are needed to help Argentina dodge the hyperinflation caused by populist policies of his predecessor, the left-of-center Alberto Fernández.

The burden of this inheritance explains in part the unprecedented tolerance expressed by many Argentines, whose support for their president remains strong — despite the worsening of their living conditions in the short term.

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"How are we to blame Milei?" asked Carla Cavallini, Gómez's wife. "I voted for him, and I have peace of mind, because he has been doing everything he said he would do. We knew this was going to happen," she said referring to the dire economic situation they're experiencing.

A February survey by local pollster D'Alessio Irol/Berensztein found that 81% of 1,018 respondents nationwide say their economic situation is now worse off than a year ago. Still, Milei maintains an approval rating of 43% and, among his voters in the November runoff, support rises to 75%, according to the same poll.

A self-described anarcho-capitalist, Milei took office in December and almost immediately announced a series of shock measures, including a 50% devaluation of the nation's currency, in hopes of eventually bringing the roaring inflation under control.

His government has also cut funding to provinces, eliminated some state subsidies to transportation and energy and ended a price control policy which was used by his predecessors as a tool to contain inflation.

But Milei's measures brought about an increase in prices, particularly in food and medicine. Monthly inflation in December reached 25.5%, the highest in three decades. Poverty skyrocketed in January to more than 50% and consumption collapsed to levels comparable to 2001, when a social outbreak put an early end to the then government.

"I am fully aware of what is happening in Argentina," Milei said in a recent interview. "What happens is that correcting 100 years of disasters is not going to be free of charge, especially when it comes to the aberrations of the last 20 years," he said referring to the policies implemented by Argentina's center-left governments.

"Half of the population thinks that in the long term things will be fine. We have never seen this in any previous crisis," said Fernando Moiguer, a consultant who has measured the social mood of Argentines every month for a quarter of a century.

Overall, he says, Argentines feel that what was done before failed. "What they want (now) is someone to come and dismantle everything so we can be like the countries around us that don't have as many problems as we do."

A March survey by Moiguer found that 56% of 1,300 respondents considered that Milei's adjustment and deregulation measures are "adequate" to improve the country's economic situation.

Milei, for his part, maintains that his measures are bearing fruit.

Inflation slowed to 13.2% in February, compared to 20.6% in January. The U.S. dollar, long prominent in Argentina, has stabilized while the fiscal deficit decreased, something that was welcomed by investors and the International Monetary Fund, to which Argentina is tied by a \$45 billion loan it contracted in 2018.

Yet, low-income Argentines are left to take drastic measures on their own to survive.

Ambar Imoberdoff, a 72-year-old retiree, started singing boleros and tangos in one of the busiest corners of Buenos Aires, because her pension — of roughly \$140 a month — is not enough to buy food, medicine and pay for taxes and public services.

"These last few months have been terrible," she said as she took a break before turning on the speaker and grabbing the microphone. "I think not for myself, but for the grandparents, some of whom can't walk or do anything. I can walk, I can sing."

Thanks to her impromptu recitals, Imoberdoff, who is a widow and has no children, says she can earn up to \$200 on a good night during the weekends. "God has given me a spirit of not giving in to things. Death is going to find me standing and singing," she said.

Unlike her, 34-year-old Yohanna Torres wishes the weekends would end quickly. She does not measure time in hours but in the meals she and the four children she cares for skip. From Monday to Friday, she says, they eat at least once a day in a community kitchen in a suburb south of Buenos Aires.

"Saturdays and Sundays last an eternity because I don't have bread to eat," said Torres, who is unemployed and receives the equivalent of \$200 per month in social assistance. Most of that money is used to care for her 2-year-old daughter Luján, who suffers from the respiratory consequences of COVID-19 that she contracted a few weeks after birth.

"I come to the soup kitchen because I don't have anything to eat. If this shuts down, I'm going to go out and steal."

Analysts acknowledge Milei still holds an important core of support among Argentines, but many wonder how long it will last.

"If society is determined that it wants to change, that it needs to change, the limits are going to be extended," said Moiguer. "Of course everything has a limit. ... What this society needs is some kind of verifier that buys time along the way."

He uses the metaphor of a child going from having a fever of 107 degrees to having his temperature drop to 99 degrees.

"A break in fever is the first sign that the doctor's treatment was the right one," said Moiguer.

Blinken says an Israeli assault on Gaza's Rafah would be a mistake and isn't needed to defeat Hamas

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

CAIRO (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday a major Israeli ground assault on the southern Gaza town of Rafah would be "a mistake" and "unnecessary" to defeating Hamas, underscoring the further souring of relations between the United States and Israel.

Blinken, on his sixth urgent Mideast mission since the war began in October, spoke after huddling with top Arab diplomats in Cairo for discussions on efforts for a cease-fire and Gaza's post-conflict future. He said an "immediate, sustained cease-fire" with the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas was urgently needed and that gaps were narrowing in indirect negotiations that U.S., Egypt and Qatar have spent weeks mediating. Those negotiations are to continue at a senior level in Qatar on Friday.

Blinken heads to Israel on Friday to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his War Cabinet. The growing disagreements between Netanyahu and President Joe Biden over the prosecution of the war will likely overshadow those talks — particularly over Netanyahu's determination to launch a ground assault on Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians have sought refuge from devastating Israeli ground and air strikes further north.

Netanyahu has said that without an invasion of Rafah, Israel can't achieve its goal of destroying Hamas after its deadly Oct. 7 attack and taking of hostages that triggered Israel's bombardment and offensive in Gaza.

"A major military operation in Rafah would be a mistake, something we don't support. And, it's also not necessary to deal with Hamas, which is necessary," Blinken told a news conference in Cairo with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. A major offensive would mean more civilian deaths and worsen Gaza's humanitarian crisis, Blinken said, adding that his talks on Rafah in Israel on Friday and discussions between senior U.S. and Israeli officials next week in Washington will be to share ideas for alternative action.

The U.S. position on a Rafah operation has shifted significantly in recent days. Initially, U.S. officials said they could not support a major incursion into the city unless there was a clear and credible plan for getting civilians out of harm's way. Now, U.S. officials said they have concluded there is no credible way to do that, given the density of the population of more than a million people. They say now that other options, including specifically targeted operations against known Hamas fighters and commanders, are the only way to avoid a civilian catastrophe.

But Netanyahu, on a roughly 45-minute call with GOP senators on Wednesday, pledged to ignore warnings about a Rafah operation. He also took aim at Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's condemnation last week of the civilian death toll in Gaza and his call for new elections in Israel in a speech that Biden later said was "good."

Netanyahu stressed that Israel would move ahead in Rafah, according to senators who participated in the meeting. Sen. John Kennedy, a Louisiana Republican, said Netanyahu "made it very clear that he and the people of Israel intend to prosecute the war to the full extent of their power and that he would not be dictated to by Senator Schumer or President Biden."

Netanyahu has been accused by Israeli critics of undermining bipartisan American support by cultivating close ties with Republican leaders.

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As Blinken and the Arab ministers met, Gaza's Health Ministry raised the territory's death toll to nearly 32,000 Palestinians since the war began on its soil. Also, U.N. officials stepped up warnings that famine is "imminent" in northern Gaza.

The Cairo talks gathered Blinken with the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as a top official from the Palestine Liberation Organization, the internationally recognized body representing the Palestinian people. They also discussed ways to increase urgent humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza by land, air and sea.

In an earlier meeting with Blinken, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi stressed the need for an immediate cease-fire and warned against the "dangerous repercussions" of any Israeli offensive in Rafah, according to a statement issued by el-Sissi's spokesperson.

Both parties renewed their rejection of the forced displacement of Gazans and agreed on the importance of taking all necessary measures to ensure the arrival of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, the statement said.

Blinken said "gaps are narrowing" in talks over a cease-fire but that more work was needed. "There are still real challenges," he said. "We've closed some gaps but there are still gaps."

Netanyahu's office said Thursday that the head of the Mossad spy agency will return to Qatar on Friday to meet with CIA chief William Burns and other key mediators in the talks. The office said Thursday that Qatar's prime minister and Egypt's intelligence chief would also join the talks.

Meanwhile, the United States said it would seek a vote Friday on a revised and tougher U.N. resolution demanding "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" to protect civilians and enable humanitarian aid to be delivered. The resolution is notable because it does not directly tie the release of the hostages to the need for a cease-fire.

Still, Blinken said the two must go hand-in-hand. "There is an urgent need for an immediate, sustained cease-fire with the release of hostages," he said.

Netanyahu has also rejected the Biden administration's repeated remonstrations that Israel's long-term security cannot be assured without the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

A clear path and deadline for the formation of a Palestinian state are key requirements for Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations to normalize relations with Israel, something Netanyahu is keen to achieve. Blinken spent much of his time in Jeddah with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discussing the normalization process, which would also include U.S.-Saudi agreements.

With tensions running high after not speaking for a month, Biden and Netanyahu held a phone call on Monday during which Netanyahu agreed to send a team of experts to Washington to discuss the Rafah plans. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant will also visit Washington separately next week.

The war began after Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise Oct. 7 attack out of Gaza that triggered the war, and abducted another 250 people. Hamas is still believed to be holding some 100 people hostage, as well as the remains of 30 others.

Is Donald Trump's Truth Social headed to Wall Street? It comes down to a Friday vote

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's return to the stock market could be right around the corner.

All eyes are on a vote scheduled for Friday by shareholders of Digital World Acquisition Corp., a publicly traded shell company that is looking to merge with the former president's media business. The deal's approval would open the door for Trump Media & Technology Group, whose flagship product is the social networking site Truth Social, to soon begin trading on the Nasdaq stock market in Digital World's place.

If the merger is greenlit, which is likely, Trump stands to receive a sizeable payout. He would own most of the combined company — or nearly 79 million shares. Multiply that by Digital World's current stock price of more \$42, and the total value of Trump's stake could surpass \$3 billion.

The prospect of the deal arrives at a time the presumptive Republican presidential nominee is facing his most costly legal battle to date: a \$454 million judgment in a fraud lawsuit.

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But even if the Digital World merger is approved Friday, Trump wouldn't be able to immediately cash out his windfall, unless some things change, due to a "lock-up" provision that prevents company insiders from selling newly issued shares for six months.

Trump's earlier foray into the stock market didn't end well. Trump Hotels and Casino Resorts went public in 1995 under the symbol DJT — the same symbol Trump Media will trade under. By 2004, Trump's casino company had filed for bankruptcy protection and was delisted from the New York Stock Exchange.

Digital World listed many of the risks its investors face, as well as those of the Truth Social owner, if Trump Media also goes public.

One risk, the company said, is that Trump would be entitled to vote in his own interest as a controlling stockholder — which may not always be in the interests of all shareholders. Digital World also cited the high rate of failure for new social media platforms, as well as Trump Media's expectation that it would lose money on its operations "for the foreseeable future."

Trump Media lost \$49 million in the first nine months of last year, when it brought in just \$3.4 million in revenue and had to pay \$37.7 million in interest expenses.

Trump Media and Digital World first announced their merger plans in October 2021. In addition to a federal probe, the deal has faced a series of lawsuits leading up to Friday's vote.

Truth Social launched in February 2022, one year after Trump was banned from major social platforms including Facebook and Twitter, the platform now known as X, following the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. He's since been reinstated to both but has stuck with Truth Social as a megaphone for his message.

Trump promoted Truth Social in a post on the social media network Thursday evening, saying: "TRUTH SOCIAL IS MY VOICE, AND THE REAL VOICE OF AMERICA!!! MAGA2024!!!"

Trump Media doesn't disclose Truth Social's user numbers. But research firm Similarweb estimates that it had roughly 5 million active mobile and web users in February. That's far below TikTok's more than 2 billion and Facebook's 3 billion — but still higher than rivals like Parler, which has been offline for nearly a year but is planning a comeback, or Gettr, which had less than 2 million visitors in February.

Law enforcement officials in Texas wonder how they will enforce migrant arrest law

By SEAN MURPHY and ERIK VERDUZCO Associated Press

SANDERSON, Texas (AP) — During the nine hours that Texas was allowed to arrest and deport people who illegally enter the U.S., Sheriff Thaddeus Cleveland never changed his tactics with migrants in his remote border county.

Not because he opposes the idea. There's just no practical way to do it, said the sheriff of Terrell County, where last year an average of about 10 people each day were caught crossing the border from Mexico.

"We don't have a van that we can use to transport people in," said Cleveland, whose county touches more than 50 miles (80 kilometers) of border, most of which is an unforgiving rocky desert landscape.

Texas' extraordinary expansion into immigration enforcement remained on hold Thursday after a whirl of legal action that included the Supreme Court allowing it to take effect Tuesday while sending it back to an appellate court for further review. Shortly before midnight, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals put the law known as Senate Bill 4 back on hold.

The confusion along Texas' vast border during that brief window revealed that many sheriffs were unprepared, unable or uninterested in enforcing SB4 in the first place. For months, Texas has made urgent appeals to judges that the state cannot afford to wait for tougher border measures. But given a chance to test Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's latest provocation with the Biden administration over immigration, there was no indication any law enforcement agency in Texas tried.

Defiance from the Mexican government, which said it would not accept any migrants whom Texas attempts to send back across the border, and caution among law enforcement officials cast uncertainty over what a full implementation would look like.

The law would allow any Texas law enforcement officer to arrest people suspected of entering the coun-

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try illegally. But Smith County Sheriff Larry Smith, the president of the Texas Sheriff's Association, said the law will have little effect in his jurisdiction in East Texas, which is far closer to neighboring Louisiana and Oklahoma than Mexico.

"Our office won't have much to do with Senate Bill 4 unless we're working with one of our brother sheriffs or sister sheriffs on the border," Smith said, "because you have to be able to prove they came across the border illegally. And unfortunately you can't do that this far into the state of Texas without violating some of their rights.

"If we start going and talking to everybody and asking for papers, where do we stop?" Smith said.

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. The law says they are to be sent to ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border, even if they are not Mexican citizens. Migrants who don't leave could face arrest again under more serious felony charges.

In court, Texas has argued the law mirrors the U.S. government's immigration enforcement. The Justice Department has argued that it is a clear violation of federal authority and would create chaos at the border.

Abbott reminded a crowd at a conservative policy conference in Austin this week that even with SB4 on hold, Texas could still arrest migrants who trespass on private property. That more limited operation began in 2021. On Thursday, Abbott said razor wire fencing the state installed in El Paso was being redoubled after a group of migrants breached a barrier and rushed past several Texas National Guard members attempting to hold them back.

Like many sheriffs and law enforcement officers who say they support the new law, Cleveland faces serious logistical problems in how to implement it. His county has fewer than 1,000 residents, his jail has a capacity for just seven people and the closest port of entry is a drive of more than 2 1/2 hours away.

"We'll continue to do what we do: turn over people we apprehend to the U.S. Border Patrol and then wait for the courts to figure out what they're going to do," Cleveland said.

Typical calls to Cleveland's office about migrants who may have entered the U.S. illegally involve people who have traversed miles of high desert with limited supplies hoping to find work.

In responding to a call from a landowner on Thursday, Cleveland encountered a 32-year-old migrant from Mexico trying to make his way to pick strawberries in Florida. He engaged him in conversation in Spanish, asked if he needed food or water and brought him to a holding room at his office to wait for Border Patrol.

"The vast majority that we catch, illegal aliens, are no different than me or you," Cleveland said. "I enjoy having conversations with them in Spanish, finding out where they're from, finding out where they're going, things of that nature."

Republican legislators wrote the law so that it applies in all of the state's 254 counties, although Steve McCraw, the director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, has said he expects it will mostly be enforced near the border.

About 100 sheriffs visited the state Capitol in Austin on Wednesday to express support to Abbott for the new law, but their responses were mixed about how they would actually enforce it.

Still, the fear among residents was palpable at a regular meeting Wednesday at a community center in a southwest Houston neighborhood that is home to many Latino and immigrant families. Police Chief Tony Finner was asked numerous questions about the law and what reassurances he could provide people who may now not want to report crimes because they fear being arrested over their immigration status.

One woman told Finner in Spanish that the new law is "fracturing the relationship between the community and the police. It's creating an image of the police as the enemy when in reality they are the ones that protect us."

Ruben Perez, the special crimes bureau chief in the Harris County District Attorney's Office, sought to reassure residents, saying the law is not in effect and the U.S. Constitution protects everyone.

"We don't care whether you're here legally or illegally or whether you got here legally or illegally. We are going to protect you," he said, prompting applause. "That's the message that I want to leave."

White former officers get sentences of 10 to 40 years in torture of 2 Black men in Mississippi

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG and EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday finished handing down prison terms of about 10 to 40 years to six white former Mississippi law enforcement officers who pleaded guilty to breaking into a home without a warrant and torturing two Black men in an hourslong attack that included beatings, repeated uses of stun guns and assaults with a sex toy before one of the victims was shot in the mouth.

U.S. District Judge Tom Lee called the culprits' actions "egregious and despicable" and gave sentences near the top of federal guidelines to five of the six men who attacked Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker in January 2023.

The case drew condemnation from top law enforcement officials in the country, including Attorney General Merrick Garland. In its grisly details, local residents saw echoes of Mississippi's history of racist atrocities by people in authority. The difference this time is that those who abused their power paid a steep price for their crimes, the victims' attorneys said.

"The depravity of the crimes committed by these defendants cannot be overstated," Garland said Thursday.

Brett McAlpin, 53, who was the fourth highest-ranking officer in the Rankin County Sheriff's Office, received a sentence of about 27 years on Thursday. McAlpin nodded to his family in the courtroom. He offered an apology before he was sentenced but did not look at the victims as he spoke.

"This was all wrong, very wrong. It's not how people should treat each other and even more so, it's not how law enforcement should treat people," McAlpin said. "I'm really sorry for being a part of something that made law enforcement look so bad."

The only defendant who didn't receive a prison term at the top of the sentencing guidelines was Joshua Hartfield, 32, a former Richland police officer who did not work in a sheriff's department with the others and was not a member of a "Goon Squad." He was the last of the six former officers sentenced over three days this week, months after they all pleaded guilty.

Before giving Hartfield a 10-year sentence Thursday, Lee said Hartfield did not have a history of using excessive force and was roped into the brutal episode by one of the former deputies, Christian Dedmon. Lee said, however, that Hartfield failed to intervene in the violence and participated in a cover-up.

Lee sentenced Dedmon, 29, to 40 years and Daniel Opdyke, 28, to 17.5 years on Wednesday. He gave about 20 years to Hunter Elward, 31, and 17.5 years to Jeffrey Middleton, 46, on Tuesday.

Arguing for a lengthy sentence, federal prosecutor Christopher Perras said McAlpin was not technically a member of the Goon Squad but "molded the men into the goons they became."

Parker told investigators that McAlpin functioned like a "mafia don" as he instructed the officers throughout the evening. Prosecutors said other deputies often tried to impress McAlpin, and Opdyke's attorney said Wednesday that his client saw McAlpin as a father figure.

The younger deputies tried to wrap their heads around how they had started off "wanting to be good law enforcement officers and turned into monsters," Perras said Thursday.

"How did these deputies learn to treat another human being this way? Your honor, the answer is sitting right there," Perras said, pointing at McAlpin.

In March 2023, months before federal prosecutors announced charges in August, an investigation by The Associated Press linked some of the deputies to at least four violent encounters with Black men since 2019 that left two dead and another with lasting injuries.

The officers invented false charges against the victims, planting a gun and drugs at the scene of their crime, and stuck to their cover story for months until finally admitting that they tortured Jenkins and Parker. Elward admitted to shoving a gun into Jenkins' mouth and firing it in what federal prosecutors said was meant to be a "mock execution."

The terror began Jan. 24, 2023, with a racist call for extrajudicial violence when a white person complained to McAlpin that two Black men were staying with a white woman at a house in Braxton. McAlpin

told Dedmon, who texted a group of white deputies asking if they were "available for a mission."

"No bad mugshots," Dedmon texted — a green light, according to prosecutors, to use excessive force on parts of the body that wouldn't appear in a booking photo.

Dedmon also brought Hartfield, who was instructed to cover the back door of the property during their illegal entry.

Once inside, the officers mocked the victims with racial slurs and shocked them with stun guns. They handcuffed them and poured milk, alcohol and chocolate syrup over their faces. Dedmon and Opdyke assaulted them with a sex toy. They forced them to strip naked and shower together to conceal the mess.

After Elward shot Jenkins in the mouth, lacerating his tongue and breaking his jaw, they devised a cover-up. The deputies agreed to plant drugs, and false charges stood against Jenkins and Parker for months.

McAlpin and Middleton, the oldest in the group, threatened to kill other officers if they spoke up, prosecutors said. In court Thursday, McAlpin's attorney Aafram Sellers said only Middleton threatened to kill them.

Sellers also questioned a probation officer about details submitted to the judge. When federal investigators interviewed the neighbor who called McAlpin, that person reported seeing "trashy" people at the house who were both white and Black, Sellers said. That called into question whether the episode started on the basis of race, he argued.

Federal prosecutors said the neighbor referred to people at the home as "those people" and "thugs." The information included in the charging documents, which the officers did not dispute when they pleaded guilty, revealed some of them used racial taunts and epithets throughout the episode.

Majority-white Rankin County is just east of Jackson, home to one of the highest percentages of Black residents of any major U.S. city. The officers shouted at Jenkins and Parker to "stay out of Rankin County and go back to Jackson or 'their side' of the Pearl River," court documents say.

Attorneys for several of the deputies said their clients became ensnared in a culture of corruption that was encouraged by leaders in the sheriff's office.

Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey revealed no details about his deputies' actions when he announced they had been fired last June. After they pleaded guilty in August, Bailey said the officers had gone rogue and promised changes. Jenkins and Parker called for his resignation and filed a \$400 million civil lawsuit against the department.

Bailey, who was reelected without opposition in November, said in a statement Thursday that he is "committed to the betterment of this county" and will work "with the honest, hard-working men and women currently with this department" to make Rankin County safer.

In a statement read by his attorney Thursday, Jenkins said he "felt like a slave" and was "left to die like a dog."

"If those who are in charge of the Rankin County Sheriff's Office can participate in these kinds of torture, God help us all," Jenkins said. "And God help Rankin County."

Police track down escaped Idaho prison gang member and accomplice, say pair may have killed 2 on run

By GENE JOHNSON and MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

Police on Thursday arrested two white supremacist gang members — an Idaho prison inmate and the accomplice who helped him escape — following an attack on corrections officers at a Boise hospital, and investigators are looking into whether they killed two people while on the run.

Skylar Meade, the escaped inmate, and Nicholas Umphenour, the man who police say shot two Idaho corrections officers early Wednesday to break Meade out of custody, were arrested after a brief car chase Thursday afternoon in Twin Falls, about 130 miles (209 kilometers) from the hospital.

Authorities said during a news conference Thursday that they were investigating two homicides, in Clearwater County and Nez Perce County, which borders Washington state. Both victims were men. Police found shackles at the scene of one of the killings and "that's one of the ways we tied them together," Idaho State Police Lt. Colonel Sheldon Kelley said.

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The Clearwater County Sheriff's Office said via Facebook that it received a request for a welfare check Wednesday evening and deputies found a man who had died. The suspects were several hours out of the county when the call came in, according to the office. No further details were released.

Meade, 31, was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2017 for shooting at a sheriff's sergeant during a high-speed chase. Umphenour was released from the same prison — the Idaho Maximum Security Institution in Kuna, south of Boise — in January. The two had at times been housed together, were both members of the Aryan Knights prison gang, and had mutual friends in and out of prison, officials said.

No shots were fired during the arrest, police said.

The attack on the Idaho Department of Correction officers came just after 2 a.m. Wednesday in the ambulance bay of Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center, as they were preparing to return Meade to the prison. He had been brought to the hospital earlier in the night because he injured himself, officials said.

After the ambush, one officer shot by Umphenour was in critical but stable condition, police said, while the second wounded officer had serious but non-life-threatening injuries. A third corrections officer also sustained non-life-threatening injuries when a responding police officer — mistakenly believing the shooter was still in the emergency room and seeing an armed person near the entrance — opened fire.

Correction Director Josh Tewalt said Thursday one guard had been released from the hospital, and the other two are stable and improving.

The department is reviewing its policies and practices in light of the escape, he said.

"We're channeling every resource we have to trying to understand exactly how they went about planning it," Tewalt said.

The Aryan Knights is a gang that formed in the mid-1990s in Idaho's prison system to organize criminal activity for a select group of white people in custody as well as outside prison walls, according to the U.S. attorney's office in the district of Idaho.

In 2021, Harlan Hale, described as a leader in the group, was sentenced to life in prison for his role in a plot to traffic drugs behind bars and use violence to collect unpaid debts. In a court document, federal prosecutors described the Aryan Knights as a "scourge" within the state's prison system.

"The hate-fueled gang engages in many types of criminal activity and casts shadows of intimidation, addiction, and violence over prison life," prosecutors wrote.

In 2022, the Anti-Defamation League counted 75 different white supremacist prison gangs in federal or local facilities in at least 38 states. The ADL said two of the largest such groups, the Aryan Circle and Aryan Brotherhood of Texas, had at least 1,500 members.

Mark Pitcavage, a senior research fellow for the ADL's Center on Extremism, estimates that the Aryan Knights has approximately 150 members behind bars and roughly 100 more on the streets. He said the group operates in other states, including Washington and Oregon.

"With all white supremacist prison gangs, the ideology takes a backseat to the organized crime. That's just a given," he said. "They use that as a sort of a glue to help keep them together and help keep them loyal to the gang."

Pitcavage said white supremacist prison gangs are a very different phenomenon from neo-Nazi groups like Aryan Nations, which had a compound in north Idaho at its peak in the 1980s and 1990s.

Recently, Meade had been held in a type of solitary confinement called administrative segregation because officials deemed him a severe security risk, Tewalt said.

Meade had been escorted in the ambulance and at the hospital by a uniformed, unarmed officer wearing a ballistic vest, tailed by two armed officers, Correction officials said.

Security for transporting Meade to the hospital from prison was enhanced because of his violent history, but the department will review their overall policies for transporting inmates to hospitals, Tewalt said.

The attack came amid a wave of gun violence at hospitals and medical centers, which have struggled to adapt to the rise of threats.

No charges to be filed in fight involving Oklahoma nonbinary teen

Nex Benedict, prosecutor says

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press
OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) —

No criminal charges will be filed against the Oklahoma teens involved in a high school bathroom fight with Nex Benedict, the nonbinary 16-year-old whose death following the altercation was ruled a suicide, the county district attorney said Thursday.

Tulsa County District Attorney Steve Kunzweiler said in a statement that after reviewing the investigation by the Owasso Police Department, he agreed with an assessment from detectives that the fight between the teen and three girls was an "instance of mutual combat" and that charges were not warranted.

"When I review a report and make a decision to file a charge I must be convinced — as is every prosecutor — that a crime was committed and that I have reasonable belief that a judge or jury would be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that a crime was committed," Kunzweiler said. "From all the evidence gathered, this fight was an instance of mutual combat."

Kunzweiler also said Owasso police uncovered a "suicide note" written by Benedict, although he declined to say what the note said. The state medical examiner determined last week that Benedict's death in February was a suicide caused by a drug overdose.

"An important part of the Owasso Police Department's investigation was the discovery of some brief notes, written by Benedict, which appeared to be related to the suicide," Kunzweiler said. "The precise contents of the suicide note are a personal matter which the family will have to address within the privacy of their own lives."

An attorney for Benedict's family, Jacob Biby, said he didn't expect the family to comment Thursday on the district attorney's decision. In a statement last week, however, the family called on schools, administrators and lawmakers to come together and push for reforms that seek to end bullying.

"Reforms creating school environments that are built upon the pillars of respect, inclusion and grace, and aim to eliminate bullying and hate, are the types of change that all involved should be able to rally behind," Benedict's family said.

The death of Benedict, who was nonbinary, which means they didn't identify as strictly male or female, and used they/them pronouns, has served as a flashpoint for LGBTQ+ rights groups over bullying in schools and has drawn attention from Oklahoma's governor, Republican Kevin Stitt, and Democratic President Joe Biden.

In video footage from the hospital the day of the altercation, Benedict explains to an officer that the girls had been picking on them and their friends because of the way they dressed. Benedict claims that in the bathroom the students said "something like: why do they laugh like that," referring to Benedict and their friends.

"And so I went up there and I poured water on them, and then all three of them came at me," Benedict tells the officer from a hospital bed.

Paramedics responded to the family's house and performed CPR before rushing Benedict to the hospital, where the teen later died.

Benedict's family has said there had been harassment because of the teen's nonbinary identity, and federal officials have opened an investigation into the school district, according to a letter sent earlier this month by the U.S. Department of Education.

Owasso Public Schools confirmed in a statement that the district received notice of the investigation and called the allegations unsupported and without merit.

In his statement on Thursday, Kunzweiler said that while securing a criminal conviction requires a standard of proof "beyond a reasonable doubt," he noted the burden of proof in a civil case is significantly less.

"Whether or not individuals may choose to seek legal counsel for remedies in the civil realm of the court system is a decision best left to them," he said. "The scope of those inquiries are not as limited as the question of criminal/delinquent conduct which I was asked to address in this case."

New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez says he won't run in Democratic primary

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey said Thursday he won't run in the Democratic primary as he faces federal corruption charges, but he left open the possibility that he would reenter the race as an independent later this year if he is exonerated at a trial.

Menendez's announcement comes four days before a state deadline to file to run in the June 4 Democratic primary that's already being contested by Rep. Andy Kim and New Jersey first lady Tammy Murphy. The almost 10-minute video shows Menendez speaking about his decades in Congress, pushing for aid for his state, including for Superstorm Sandy recovery and COVID-19 relief.

"The present accusations I am facing of which I am innocent and will prove so will not allow me to have that type of dialogue and debate with political opponents," he said in a video posted on social media. "You deserve to hear from those who wish to represent you about what they would do for you and your families in the future. Therefore I will not file for the Democratic party this June."

Menendez said he's hopeful that he will be exonerated at trial and could run as an "independent Democrat" in the general election.

The decision comes as Menendez fights federal bribery charges, along with his wife, Nadine, and three business associates.

Menendez and his spouse are charged with taking bribes of gold bars, cash and a Mercedes-Benz in return for the senator's help with projects pursued by three New Jersey businessmen. In return for the haul, Menendez helped one of the men get a lucrative meat-certification deal with Egypt, taking actions favorable to the Egyptian government, according to prosecutors. An additional indictment said Menendez helped another associate get a deal with a Qatari investment fund.

The senator, his wife and two of the three business associates have pleaded not guilty. One of the business associates has pleaded guilty and agreed to testify in the case.

Menendez's retreat from the Democratic primary sets the stage for Murphy and Kim to vie to be the party's standard bearer in a deep blue state that hasn't elected a Republican to the Senate since 1972.

Murphy is a first-time candidate who's running with the backing of influential party insiders. Kim is a three-term congressman who's centered his campaign in part on upending the state's unique ballot design, widely viewed as favoring candidates preferred by county party insiders.

"I will win in November even if I have to beat Menendez and a Republican simultaneously," Kim said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

Murphy said in a post on X that the state needs a senator focused on issues confronting families in New Jersey.

"Senator Menendez continues to place himself ahead of what's best for New Jerseyans and the Democratic Party as a whole. He shouldn't have the privilege of serving in the Senate in any capacity," she said.

The stakes are high, with Democrats competing to hold on to their narrow control of the Senate.

Republicans have their own primary unfolding, featuring southern New Jersey businessman Curtis Bashaw, Mendham Borough Mayor Christine Serrano Glassner and former TV news reporter Alex Zdan.

Menendez, who's serving a third full term in the Senate, has been elected to office at every level in the state. His stature among Democrats withstood an earlier federal corruption trial that ended in a hung jury and saw him reelected in 2018 with the full-throated endorsement of his party.

This time, though, Democrats called for his resignation soon after the Justice Department's case was unsealed. The day after the first indictment in September, Kim announced his campaign.

Menendez, who has espoused a defiant tone since the indictment was announced, mingled that with conciliation in his more than nine-minute video.

"I know many of you are hurt and disappointed in me with the accusations I'm facing," he said. "Believe me, I am disappointed at the false accusations as well. All I can ask of you is to withhold judgement until

justice takes place.”

The son of Cuban immigrants and an attorney by training, Menendez was a Union City, New Jersey, school board member at age 20 and went on to become the mayor of the city, where he still has deep roots.

His own biography touts the fact that he wanted to fight corruption early in his political career, testifying against Union City officials and building a reputation as tough. From there, he was elected to the state Assembly, then the state Senate before heading to the U.S. House.

Menendez was appointed to be a U.S. senator in 2006 when the seat opened up after Jon Corzine, the incumbent at the time, became governor.

He was elected outright in 2006 and again in 2012 and 2018. He served as chair of the influential Senate Foreign Relations Committee beginning in 2013, but lost that post after the earlier indictment. He regained the position after federal prosecutors did not renew charges in that case, which ended in a mistrial.

He again was forced to give up that position after he was indicted in 2023.

Lorrie Moore wins National Book Critics Circle award for fiction, Judy Blume also honored

NEW YORK (AP) — Lorrie Moore won the prize for fiction on Thursday, while Judy Blume and her long-time ally in the fight against book bans, the American Library Association were given honorary prizes by the National Book Critics Circle.

Moore, best known as a short-story writer, won the fiction prize for her novel, “I Am Homeless if This Is Not My Home.”

Committee chair David Varno said in a statement that the book is a heartbreaking and hilarious ghost story about a man who considers what it means to be human in a world infected by, as Moore puts it, ‘voluntary insanity.’ It’s an unforgettable achievement from a landmark American author.”

Blume was the recipient of the Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award.

The committee cited the way her novels including “Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret” have “inspired generations of young readers by tackling the emotional turbulence of girlhood and adolescence with authenticity, candor and courage.”

It also praised her role as “a relentless opponent of censorship and an iconic champion of literary freedom.”

The American Library Association was given the Toni Morrison Achievement Award, established to honor institutions for their contributions to book culture. The committee said the group had a “longstanding commitment to equity, including its 20th century campaigns against library segregation and for LGBT+ literature, and its perennial stance as a bulwark against those regressive and illiberal supporters of book bans.”

Blume, who accepted her award remotely from a bookstore she runs in Key West, Florida, thanked the ALA for “their tireless work in protecting our intellectual freedoms.”

The awards were handed out at a Thursday night ceremony at the New School in New York.

Other winners included poet Safiya Sinclair, who took the autobiography prize for her acclaimed memoir “How to Say Babylon,” about her Jamaican childhood and strict Rastafarian upbringing.

Jonny Steinberg won the biography award for his “Winnie and Nelson: Portrait of a Marriage,” about Nelson and Winnie Mandela.

Kim Hyesoon of South Korea won for poetry for her “Phantom Pain Wings.”

For translation, an award that honors both translator and book, the winner was Maureen Freely for her translation from the Turkish of the late Tezer Özlü’s “Cold Nights of Childhood.”

Tahir Hamut Izgil won the John Leonard Prize for Best First Book for his “Waiting to Be Arrested at Night: A Uyghur Poet’s Memoir of China’s Genocide.”

The prize for criticism went to Tina Post for “Deadpan: The Aesthetics of Black Inexpression,” and Roxanna Asgarian won the nonfiction award for “We Were Once a Family: A Story of Love, Death, and Child Removal in America.”

Besides Blume and the library association, honorary awards were presented to Washington Post critic Becca Rothfield for excellence in reviewing and to Marion Winik of NPR's "All Things Considered" for service to the literary community.

The book critics circle, founded in 1974, consists of hundreds of reviewers and editors from around the country.

Appeals court orders judge to probe claims of juror bias in Boston Marathon bomber's case

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A federal appeals court on Thursday ordered the judge who oversaw Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's trial to investigate the defense's claims of juror bias and determine whether his death sentence should stand.

A three-judge panel of the Boston-based 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals did not throw out Tsarnaev's death sentence. Defense lawyers had pushed for that while claiming bias by two people who sat on the jury that convicted him for his role in the bombing that killed three people and injured hundreds near the marathon's finish line in 2013.

But the appeals court found that the trial judge did not adequately probe Tsarnaev's allegations, and sent the case back to the judge for a new investigation. If the judge finds that either juror should have been disqualified, he should vacate Tsarnaev's sentence and hold a new penalty-phase trial to determine whether Tsarnaev should be sentenced to death, the appeals court said.

"And even then, we once again emphasize that the only question in any such proceeding will be whether Tsarnaev will face execution; regardless of the outcome, he will spend the rest of his life in prison," it said.

The U.S. attorney's office in Massachusetts declined to comment Thursday. The Justice Department can either ask the full 1st Circuit to hear the matter or go to the U.S. Supreme Court. Lawyers for Tsarnaev didn't immediately respond to emails seeking comment on the decision.

It's the latest twist in the long-running case, which has already been argued in front of the U.S. Supreme Court once. The high court in 2022 reinstated the death sentence imposed on 30-year-old Tsarnaev after the 1st Circuit threw out the sentence in 2020. The circuit court found then that the trial judge did not sufficiently question jurors about their exposure to extensive news coverage of the bombing. The Supreme Court justices voted 6-3 in 2022 when they ruled that the 1st Circuit's decision was wrong.

The 1st Circuit took another look at the case after Tsarnaev's lawyers urged it to examine issues the Supreme Court didn't consider. Among them was whether the trial judge wrongly forced the trial to be held in Boston and wrongly denied defense challenges to seating two jurors they say lied during questioning.

Despite a moratorium on federal executions imposed by Attorney General Merrick Garland, the Justice Department has continued to push to uphold the death sentence in Tsarnaev's case. The moratorium came after former President Donald Trump's administration put to death 13 inmates in its final six months.

Oral arguments before the three-judge 1st Circuit panel more than a year ago focused on two jurors Tsarnaev's lawyers say were dishonest during the lengthy jury selection process.

One of them said she had not commented about the case online, but she had retweeted a post calling Tsarnaev a "piece of garbage." Another juror said none of his Facebook friends had commented on the trial, even though one had urged him to "play the part" so he could get on the jury and send Tsarnaev to "jail where he will be taken care of," defense attorneys say. Tsarnaev's lawyers raised those concerns during jury selection, but say the judge chose not to look into them further.

William Glaser, a Justice Department lawyer, acknowledged during oral arguments before the 1st Circuit appeals court that the jurors made inaccurate statements, but said other disclosures suggested they misremembered rather than lied. He argued that the trial judge did nothing wrong.

The appeals court said there are potentially "innocuous" explanations for the jurors' conduct, like they forgot about their social media posts or misunderstood the judge's questions. But the trial judge's "error was in failing to conduct an inquiry sufficient to rule out the more pernicious explanations," the appeals

court said.

The appeals court panel voted 2-1 in favor of sending the case back down for more investigation into the jurors. Those who supported the idea were Judges William Kayatta Jr. and O. Rogeriee Thompson, who were both nominated to the court by President Barack Obama.

Judge Jeffrey Howard, who was nominated by George W. Bush, dissented, writing that there was "ample basis for the district court to arrive at the judgment that the two jurors in question were not improperly biased."

Tsarnaev's guilt in the deaths of Lingzi Lu, a 23-year-old Boston University graduate student from China; Krystle Campbell, a 29-year-old restaurant manager from Medford, Massachusetts; and 8-year-old Martin Richard, of Boston, was not at issue in the appeal, only whether he should be put to death or imprisoned for life.

Defense lawyers argued that Tsarnaev had fallen under the influence of his older brother, Tamerlan, who died in a gun battle with police a few days after the April 15, 2013, bombing.

Tsarnaev was convicted of all 30 charges against him, including conspiracy and use of a weapon of mass destruction and the killing of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Police Officer Sean Collier during the Tsarnaev brothers' getaway attempt.

Prosecutors told jurors that the men carried out the attack to punish the United States for its wars in Muslim countries. In the boat where Tsarnaev was found hiding, he had scrawled a confession that referred to the wars and wrote, among other things, "Stop killing our innocent people and we will stop."

Southern Baptists pick a California seminary president to lead its troubled administrative body

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

A top Southern Baptist administrative body has selected its first permanent leader in nearly two-and-a-half years, a time when it has navigated a tumult of controversies ranging from a sexual abuse scandal to financial struggles — to its own stumbling efforts to find a new president.

Jeff Iorg, the longtime president of the Southern Baptist Convention's only seminary outside of the denomination's historic Bible Belt heartland, is the incoming president and CEO of the denomination's Executive Committee. He was elected unanimously Thursday by committee members meeting near Dallas.

Iorg has been president of Gateway Seminary since 2004. He oversaw a change in name and location for the school in 2016, when the former Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary relocated its main campus from the San Francisco area to Ontario, California, near Los Angeles. It now has multiple campuses in the West and online. Total full- and part-time enrollment is 1,499, according to data from the Association of Theological Schools.

Iorg had recently announced plans to retire from the seminary but agreed to be considered for the Executive Committee post, which he will start on May 13.

Iorg said he is grateful for the denomination he is serving. In a Thursday news conference, he said he "came to faith in Jesus Christ because of the witness of a Southern Baptist church" and has degrees from a denominational college and seminaries.

He and his wife are "the product of Southern Baptists, and we're grateful at this juncture in life to serve Southern Baptists," Iorg said.

"Leadership matters, and Dr. Iorg is a leader among leaders," said Philip Robertson, chairman of the committee, which handles day-to-day business for the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Iorg succeeds Ronnie Floyd, who resigned in October 2021 as president amid internal rifts over how to handle an investigation into the SBC's response to sexual abuse. Floyd and other committee members resigned after a majority on the committee agreed to waive attorney-client privilege for an independent review of its handling of clergy sexual abuse in the denomination.

The waiver raised fears it would heighten the denomination's legal liability, but it also gave Guidepost

Solutions, the firm conducting the investigation, a more candid look. Guidepost's 2022 report concluded that top SBC officials responded to abuse survivors with "resistance, stonewalling and even outright hostility."

In May 2023, the committee voted down a nomination of its own chairman, Jared Wellman, to be president, after some had urged the committee instead to consider Willie McLaurin, its interim president. McLaurin, who led the committee for more than a year after Floyd's departure, was the first African American leader of any SBC entity.

But McLaurin resigned in August 2023 after it came to light that he had presented false information about his educational qualifications on his resume. And a candidate to succeed him as interim president also withdrew, citing family health issues.

Iorg acknowledged the committee faces an array of challenges, from responding to the abuse crisis to tight finances, while saying he would keep it focused on its mission of "getting the gospel to the nations."

Asked at the news conference whether he had plans for implementing any of the 17 recommendations for the Executive Committee in the Guidepost report in relation to the abuse crisis, Iorg said he would need to re-read the report in detail and familiarize himself with the recommendations. "I take that report very seriously, and I think it deserves consideration and action," he said. "I'm just not prepared to say today how I would respond on any individual one of those things."

Asked about a section of the report in which women staff members of the Executive Committee had said they were subject to demeaning and patronizing treatment, Iorg said his own record indicates how he would lead.

"I have a long track record of promoting women in ministry leadership, supervising women in a ministry organization, and doing it effectively in ways that I think, demonstrate a pattern of how I will act at the Executive Committee," he said.

The committee is still navigating responses to sexual abuse. Survivors and their advocates disputed its recent claim that it was no longer under a Department of Justice investigation over its handling of abuse cases, and they criticized the committee for authorizing a legal brief that urged a Kentucky court to restrict lawsuits over abuse.

It cut some staff and contracting positions in 2023 amid tight finances.

US calls for vote Friday on UN resolution declaring that immediate Gaza cease-fire is 'imperative'

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United States called for a vote Friday on a newly revised and tougher U.N. resolution declaring that "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is "imperative" to protect civilians and enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to more than 2 million hungry Palestinians.

In the previous draft, the Security Council did not make such a declaration. Instead, it would have supported international efforts for a cease-fire as part of a hostage deal.

The new draft obtained Thursday by The Associated Press "determines" — which is a council order — "the imperative of an immediate and sustained cease-fire," with no direct link to the release of hostages taken during Hamas' surprise attack in Israel on Oct. 7. But "toward that end" it would unequivocally support diplomatic efforts "to secure such a cease-fire in connection with the release of all remaining hostages."

After the 15 Security Council members met behind closed doors Thursday afternoon to discuss Gaza, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said when asked if the U.S. draft would be adopted: "I am optimistic. That's why it took us so long, because we worked so hard."

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador, Dmitry Polyansky, told reporters that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is pressing for an immediate cease-fire and if the resolution calls for an immediate cease-fire "we will, of course, support it."

But he questioned the wording of the U.S. draft, asking: "What's an imperative? I have an imperative to give you \$100, but ... it's only an imperative, not \$100."

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"So, somebody's fooling around, I think, (with the) international community," Polyansky said. "We are not satisfied with anything that doesn't call for immediate cease-fire. I think everybody is not satisfied with this. Even Secretary Blinken is not satisfied."

Blinken is on his sixth urgent mission to the Middle East since the Israel-Hamas war began, discussing a deal for a cease-fire and hostage release as well as post-war scenarios.

Nate Evans, the spokesman for the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, issued a statement while the Security Council was holding closed Gaza consultations announcing that the U.S. would bring the resolution to a vote Friday morning.

"This resolution is an opportunity for the Council to speak with one voice to support the diplomacy happening on the ground and pressure Hamas to accept the deal on the table," Evans said.

Meanwhile, the 10 elected members of the Security Council have been drafting their own resolution that would demand an immediate humanitarian cease-fire for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began March 10, to be "respected by all parties leading to a permanent sustainable cease-fire."

It also would demand "the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages" and emphasize the urgent need to protect civilians and deliver humanitarian aid throughout the Gaza Strip.

That draft had not yet been put in "blue," which is the final form required for a vote.

France's U.N. ambassador, Nicolas de Riviere, told reporters that "there is a desire to take action, no one wants to procrastinate, so we hope that a decision can be made by tomorrow evening."

"We need a cease-fire right now," he said. "There are two options: Either the U.S. text is adopted and then we'll move to the next phase of this crisis management, or the text is not adopted and then the draft of the elected members will come to the table and put to the vote, and I hope it will be adopted."

The Health Ministry in Gaza raised the death toll in the territory Thursday to nearly 32,000 Palestinians. It doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel that triggered the war, and abducted 250 people. Hamas is still believed to be holding some 100 people hostage as well as the remains of 30 others.

The international community's authority on determining the severity of hunger crises warned this week that "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza, where 70% of people are experiencing catastrophic hunger. The report from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative, or IPC, warned that escalation of the war could push half of Gaza's total population to the brink of starvation.

The U.S. draft would express "deep concern about the threat of conflict-induced famine and epidemics presently facing the civilian population in Gaza as well as the number of undernourished people, and also that hunger in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels." It would emphasize "the urgent need to expand the flow of humanitarian assistance to civilians in the entire Gaza Strip" and lift all barriers to getting aid to civilians "at scale."

Israel faces mounting pressure from even its closest allies to streamline the entry of aid into the Gaza Strip and open more land crossings and for a cease-fire. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to move the military offensive to the southern city of Rafah, which he says is a Hamas stronghold. Some 1.3 million displaced Palestinians have sought safety in Rafah.

The final U.S. draft eliminated language in the initial draft that said Israel's offensive in Rafah "should not proceed under current circumstances." Instead, in an introductory paragraph, the council would emphasize its concern that a ground offensive into Rafah "would result in further harm to civilians and their further displacement, potentially into neighboring countries, and would have serious implications for regional peace and security."

For the first time in a U.N. resolution, the U.S. draft would condemn "all acts of terrorism, including the Hamas-led attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, as well as its taking and killing of hostages, murder of civilians, and sexual violence, including rape."

Biden and Trump ask voters if they're 'better off' than they were 4 years ago. It's complicated

By ZEKE MILLER and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — “Are you better off today than you were four years ago?” Rarely have voters’ answers to that question been so complicated.

Former President Donald Trump asked the time-tested question of his supporters in all-caps Monday on his Truth Social platform. President Joe Biden did the same three times over this week during a trio of Texas fundraisers as he closed out a swing through the southwest.

Each candidate is hoping the answer skews in his favor — but the verdict may well hinge on whether people are reflecting back on the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of their pocketbooks or some broader sense of well-being.

Four years ago, the country was in the throes of a nationwide shutdown due to the coronavirus, with surging joblessness and a cratering stock market. Now the presumptive Democratic and Republican nominees are hurtling toward a rematch in which the virus for most Americans is but a traumatic memory, markets are up and unemployment is at or near record lows.

If the handling of the once-in-a-century outbreak defined the 2020 presidential race, it appears that voters have other things on their minds as they consider their choices in 2024.

“Speaking of Donald Trump, just a few days ago, he asked the famous question at one of his rallies: Are you better off today than you were four years ago?” Biden told donors this week. “Well Donald, I’m glad you asked that question, man, because I hope everyone in the country takes a moment to think back when it was like in March of 2020.”

From there, Biden plunged into a recitation of dark moments from the early days of the pandemic, when hospital emergency rooms were overcrowded, first responders were risking their lives to care for the sick and some nurses resorted to wearing trash bags due to the scarcity of personal protective equipment.

Trump, for his part, tosses out a wider net in reflecting on the American psyche.

“Under the Trump administration, you were better off, your family was better off, your neighbors were better off, your communities were better off, and our country was far, far, far better off; that’s for sure,” he said at a rally this month. “America was stronger and tougher and richer and safer and more confident.”

“You have wars that never would have taken place,” Trump claimed. “Russia would have never attacked Ukraine. Israel would have never been attacked. You wouldn’t have had inflation.”

The “are you better off” prompt traces its roots to the 1980 presidential race, when Ronald Reagan skewered then-incumbent President Jimmy Carter during a televised debate and catapulted himself to the White House.

In a February AP-NORC poll, just 24% of Americans said they were better off than they were when Biden became president, while 41% said they were worse off and 34% said neither. Majorities also said the country as a whole and the national economy were worse off than when Biden became president.

Biden aides contend that the question — like other polling barometers of presidential performance — has been overtaken by partisanship. They say their internal surveys have shown that voters tend to block out the pandemic from their memories unless reminded of it, and that when asked about Trump they tend to think of the pre-pandemic years rather than 2020.

Insisting that they are focused on meeting voters where they are, Biden’s team had not intended to put the Reagan question to voters. But once Trump chimed in, Biden was quick with a rejoinder.

Speaking to well-heeled Texas donors Biden reminded his audience that four years ago, morgues were being set up outside of hospitals because so many people were dying, unemployment shot up, the stock market sank and grocery store shelves were bare. Trump, at the time, was disregarding the advice of his public health experts and pushing unproven treatments on the public.

“Remember when he said inject bleach?” Biden asked in Houston. After some chuckles, Biden continued: “I think he must’ve done it.”

Concurrently, Biden’s team released an ad highlighting some of Trump’s most controversial moments

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from 2020, including the bleach comment, his self-assessment that he'd rate his response to the pandemic a "10" and his reflection on virus deaths that "it is what it is."

Trump's national press secretary Karoline Leavitt pushed back at Biden's claims in a statement.

"Joe Biden and his media allies can cherry-pick numbers from the worst of the COVID crisis all they want, but Americans know Biden has been a disaster and they were far better off under President Trump, which is why President Trump continues to crush Biden in the polls," she said.

Trump earned abysmal marks from voters four years ago for his handling of the pandemic, which cost him the White House, and more than 1.1 million people in the U.S. would go on to die from COVID-19. But the majority of those deaths occurred during Biden's presidency as he struggled to contain new variants and to drive up vaccination rates for the life-saving shots that were developed during Trump's term.

The "better-off" answer, then, can go in multiple directions.

"Today, the answer is unequivocally 'it depends,'" said Republican strategist Alex Conant. "The pandemic is over, but nobody blames Trump for causing the pandemic or credits him with the vaccines that ended it. The economy is doing well, but only after a bout of historic inflation that people are still upset about. For most voters, the answer isn't clear — which is why the outcome of the election itself is unclear this far out."

He added: "I don't think any voters want to go back to the dark days of 2020, but judging by the poll numbers, most voters don't like 2024 very much either."

In some ways, many voters did feel better off during the pandemic — because of massive dollops of government aid. Their bank accounts grew dramatically in size, while the closures tied to the coronavirus kept inflation and interest rates extremely low. Government borrowing is what paid for those perceived gains, as budget deficits totaled \$3.1 trillion in 2020 and nearly \$2.8 trillion in 2021, according to the Office of Management and Budget.

Average annual incomes spiked with each of the three rounds of pandemic aid. In March 2021, the bottom 50% of U.S. earners saw their average disposable income after inflation jump to \$46,000 as they received money from Biden's coronavirus relief, according to economists at The University of California, Berkeley. Average disposable income has since dipped to \$26,100 in March 2023. As a result, people may feel worse off, even though their incomes are actually higher than they were before the pandemic broke out in early 2020.

Biden, though, is trying to put a forward-looking slant on the backward-looking question, as he aims to keep the contrast with Trump central to his reelection campaign.

"The problem isn't just going back to where Trump had the country. It's where he wants to take us now," he told donors.

He concluded: "Folks, it's not about me. It's about him."

How Europe's regulatory battle with Apple could signal what's to come for American consumers

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — It'll likely take years before the U.S. government's massive antitrust lawsuit against Apple is resolved — but the iPhone maker's troubles with European regulators offer a glimpse of what changes American customers may see down the line.

The U.S. lawsuit seeks to stop Apple from undermining technologies that compete with its own apps in areas such as streaming, messaging and digital payments. The Department of Justice also wants to prevent the tech giant from building language into its contracts with developers, accessory makers and consumers that lets it obtain or keep a monopoly.

These are similar to themes that the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm and top antitrust enforcer, and Apple have been wrangling over for years.

EU antitrust watchdogs have launched multiple antitrust cases accusing Apple of violating the 27-nation bloc's competition laws, while also imposing tough digital rules aimed at stopping tech companies from cornering digital markets.

Brussels' efforts will soon start to have an impact on the way the company does business and the experience iPhone users have in Europe. And the changes could signal what's to come for U.S. Apple users — if the Justice Department has its way, at least.

Here's a closer look:

MUSIC STREAMING

Music streaming users typically weren't able to pay for their Spotify subscriptions directly through their iPhone apps. They couldn't even be informed by email of subscription prices, promos and offers by Spotify or other music streaming services. That's because Apple puts tight restrictions on apps that compete with its own Apple Music service.

But when Spotify complained to the European Union, antitrust regulators opened a yearslong investigation that resulted in an order for Apple to stop such behavior and came with a whopping 1.8 billion euro (\$2 billion) fine aimed at deterring the company from doing it again.

Margrethe Vestager, the European Commission's competition chief, said Apple's practices were "illegal" and "impacted millions of European consumers who were not able to make a free choice as to where, how and at what price to buy music streaming subscriptions."

PAYMENTS

Apple tried to resolve a second EU antitrust case by proposing to let third party mobile wallet and payment service providers access the tap and go payment function on its iOS operating system.

Apple offered the concession to the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm and top antitrust enforcer, after it accused the company in 2022 of abusing its dominant position by limiting access to its mobile payment technology.

The commission had been examining whether Apple Pay's rules require online shops to make it the preferred or default option, effectively shutting out rival payment systems. It had also been investigating concerns that it limits access for rival payment systems to the contactless payment function on iPhones.

The commission is still mulling the offer. It has been seeking feedback from "interested parties" on the proposals before making a decision on the case.

APP STORES

Apple has long maintained that there can be only one app marketplace — its own — on iPhones and other iOS devices. But a sweeping set of new EU regulations that recently took effect has forced the company to open up its so-called "walled garden" and allow third-party app stores to compete.

The EU's Digital Markets Act is a broad rulebook that targets Big Tech "gatekeeper" companies with a set of do's and don'ts that they'll have to abide by. One of its goals is to break up closed tech ecosystems that lock consumers into one company's products or services.

Under the DMA, tech companies won't be able to stop consumers from connecting with businesses outside their platforms. So Apple has been forced to allow people in Europe to download iPhone apps from stores not operated by the U.S. tech giant — a move it's long resisted.

In a sign of that reluctance, EU regulators said they wanted to question Apple over accusations that it blocked video game company Epic Games from setting up its own app store. But Apple later reversed course and cleared the way for Fortnite maker Epic to set up its rival app store.

US surgeons transplant a gene-edited pig kidney into a patient for the first time

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Doctors in Boston have transplanted a pig kidney into a 62-year-old patient, the latest experiment in the quest to use animal organs in humans.

Massachusetts General Hospital said Thursday that it's the first time a genetically modified pig kidney has been transplanted into a living person. Previously, pig kidneys have been temporarily transplanted into brain-dead donors. Also, two men received heart transplants from pigs, although both died within months.

The patient, Richard "Rick" Slayman of Weymouth, Massachusetts, is recovering well from the surgery

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last Saturday and is expected to be discharged soon, doctors said Thursday.

Dr. Tatsuo Kawai, the transplant surgeon, said the team believes the pig kidney will work for at least two years. If it fails, Slayman could go back on dialysis, said kidney specialist Dr. Winfred Williams. He noted that unlike the pig heart recipients who were very sick, Slayman is "actually quite robust."

Slayman had a kidney transplant at the hospital in 2018, but had to go back on dialysis last year when it showed signs of failure. When dialysis complications arose requiring frequent procedures, his doctors suggested a pig kidney transplant, he said in a statement released by the hospital.

"I saw it not only as a way to help me, but a way to provide hope for the thousands of people who need a transplant to survive," said Slayman, a systems manager for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

The transplant surgery took four hours, with 15 people in the operating room who applauded when the kidney turned pink and started making urine, doctors said at a news conference. "It was truly the most beautiful kidney I have ever seen," said Kawai.

Dr. Parsia Vagefi, chief of surgical transplantation at UT Southwestern Medical Center, called the announcement "a big step forward." But echoing the Boston doctors, he said studies involving more patients at different medical centers would be needed for it to become more commonly available.

The experiment marks the latest development in xenotransplantation, the term for efforts to try to heal human patients with cells, tissues, or organs from animals. For decades, it didn't work — the human immune system immediately destroyed foreign animal tissue. More recent attempts have involved pigs that have been modified so their organs are more humanlike — increasing hope that they might one day help fill a shortage of donated organs.

More than 100,000 people are on the national waiting list for a transplant, most of them kidney patients, and thousands die every year before their turn comes.

Pigs have long been used in human medicine, including pig skin grafts and implantation of pig heart valves. But transplanting entire organs is much more complex than using highly processed tissue. The kidney implanted in Slayman was provided by eGenesis of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The pig was genetically edited to remove harmful pig genes and add certain human genes to improve its compatibility.

Slayman's case was challenging, doctors said. Even before his first transplant, he had trouble being on dialysis and needed dozens of procedures to try to remove clots and restore blood flow. He became "increasingly despondent and depressed over his dialysis situation. At one point ... he literally said 'I just can't go on like this,'" said his kidney doctor, Williams.

The Food and Drug Administration gave special permission for Slayman's transplant under "compassionate use" rules.

US Jews upset with Trump's latest rhetoric say he doesn't get to tell them how to be Jewish

By PETER SMITH and TIFFANY STANLEY Associated Press

Since the start of his political career, Donald Trump has played on stereotypes about Jews and politics. He told the Republican Jewish Coalition in 2015 that "you want to control your politicians" and suggested the audience used money to exert control. In the White House, he said Jews who vote for Democrats are "very disloyal to Israel."

Two years ago, the former president hosted two dinner guests at his Florida residence who were known to make virulent antisemitic comments.

And this week, Trump charged that Jewish Democrats were being disloyal to their faith and to Israel. That had many American Jews taking up positions behind now-familiar political lines. Trump opponents accused him of promoting antisemitic tropes while his defenders suggested he was making a fair political point in his own way.

Jonathan Sarna, American Jewish history professor at Brandeis University, said Trump is capitalizing on tensions within the Jewish community.

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"For people who hate Donald Trump in the Jewish community, certainly this statement will reinforce their sense that they don't want to have anything to do with him," he said. "For people who like Donald Trump in the Jewish community, they probably nod in agreement."

To many Jewish leaders in a demographic that has overwhelmingly identified as Democratic and supported President Joe Biden in 2020, Trump's latest comments promoted harmful antisemitic stereotypes, painting Jews as having divided loyalties and that there's only one right way to be Jewish religiously.

"That escalation of rhetoric is so dangerous, so divisive and so wrong," said Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest U.S. Jewish religious denomination. "This is a moment when Israel needs there to be more bipartisan support."

But Matt Brooks, CEO of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said the president's comments must be heard in context of the Israel-Hamas war and Democratic criticisms of the state of Israel.

"What the president was saying in his own unique style was giving voice to things I get asked about multiple times a day," Brooks said. "How can Jews remain Democrats in light of what is going on?" He contended the Democratic Party is "no longer the pro-Israel bastion it used to be."

More than 31,800 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli offensive that followed Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and took hostages. Much of northern Gaza has been leveled, and officials warned famine is imminent.

Trump's comments followed a speech by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the country's highest-ranking Jewish official. Schumer, a Democrat, last week sharply criticized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza. Schumer called for new elections in Israel and warned the civilian toll was damaging Israel's global standing.

"Any Jewish person that votes for Democrats hates their religion," Trump retorted Monday on a talk show. "They hate everything about Israel."

A cascade of Jewish voices, from Schumer to the Anti-Defamation League to religious leaders, denounced Trump's statement.

In a statement to The Associated Press on Wednesday, the Trump campaign doubled down, criticizing Schumer, congressional Democrats' support of Palestinians and the Biden administration's policies on Iran and on aid to Gaza.

"President Trump is right," said Karoline Leavitt, national press secretary for the Trump campaign.

Jeffrey Hert, an antisemitism expert at the University of Maryland, disagrees with Schumer's call for a cease-fire in Gaza, but believes most Democrats support Israel — and he said a second Biden term would be better for it than a second Trump one.

"If (Trump) loses the 2024 election, his comments prepare the way for blaming the Jews for his defeat," Hert said. "The clear result would be to fan the flames of antisemitism and assert that, yet again, the Jews are guilty."

Sarna saw Trump as trying to appeal to politically conservative Jews, particularly the small but fast-growing Orthodox segment, who see Trump as a defender of Israel.

Also, about 10% of U.S. Jews are immigrants, according to a 2020 Pew Research Center report. Sarna said significant numbers are conservative.

At the same time, Democrats face the tension between their Jewish constituency, which is predominantly pro-Israel, and its progressive wing, which is more pro-Palestinian.

Sarna said that while it may seem odd to focus so much attention on subsections of a minority population, "elections in America are very close, and every vote counts."

Conservative commentator Ben Shapiro said Tuesday on his podcast that Trump "was making a point that, frankly, I have made myself, which is that Jews who are voting Democrat do not understand the Democratic Party." Shapiro, who practices Orthodox Judaism, contended the party "overlooks antisemitism" within its ranks.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, the CEO of T'ruah, a rabbinic human rights organization, said Trump has no business dictating who's a good Jew.

"By insinuating that good Jews will vote for the party that is best for Israel, Trump is evoking the age-

old antisemitic trope of dual loyalty — an accusation that Jews are more loyal to their religion than to their country, and therefore can't be trusted," she said. "Historically, this accusation has fueled some of the worst antisemitic violence."

In his own time in office, Trump's policy "of supporting Prime Minister Netanyahu and the settler agenda only endangered Palestinians and Israelis and made peace more difficult to achieve," Jacobs said.

Pittsburgh-based journalist Beth Kissileff — whose husband, a rabbi in the Conservative denomination of Judaism, in 2018 survived the nation's deadliest antisemitic attack — said it was highly offensive for Trump to be a "self-appointed arbiter" of what it means to be Jewish.

"Chuck Schumer had every right to say what he said," Kissileff added. "Just because we're Jews, it doesn't mean we agree with everything the (Israeli) government is doing. We have compassion for innocent Palestinian lives."

Brooks, of the Republican Jewish Coalition, defended the former president against antisemitism charges, pointing to his presidential record as an example of proof.

Trump pursued policies that were popular among American Christian Zionists and Israeli religious-nationalists, including moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and supporting Jewish settlements in occupied territories. His daughter Ivanka is a convert to Orthodox Judaism, and her husband and their children are Jewish. The couple worked as high-profile surrogates to the Jewish community during Trump's administration.

Trump's core supporters include white evangelicals, many of whom believe the modern state of Israel fulfills biblical prophecy. Prominent evangelicals who support Zionism have also been criticized for inflammatory statements about Jewish people.

Sixty-nine percent of Jewish voters in 2020 supported Biden, while 30% supported Trump, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate conducted in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago. That made Jewish voters one of the religious groups where support for Biden was strongest. Also, 73% of Jewish voters in 2020 said that Trump was too tolerant of extremist groups.

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson said Trump's comments are "in a complex middle zone" — not explicitly antisemitic, but reliant on such tropes.

American Jews base their votes on a complex mix of issues and values, "among them inclusion, diversity, climate change, civil rights," said Artson, a leader within Conservative Judaism. "While they love Israel diversely, many of us also care about the wellbeing and self-determination of Palestinians."

Trump's lawyers keep fighting \$454M fraud appeal bond requirement

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump's lawyers kept pressing an appellate court Thursday to excuse him from covering a \$454 million fraud lawsuit judgment for now, saying he'd suffer "irreparable harm" before his appeal is decided.

The financial requirement is "patently unjust, unreasonable and unconstitutional," one of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee's lawyers, Clifford Robert, wrote in a letter to a New York appeals court.

It's the latest in a flurry of arguments and counterarguments that Trump's attorneys and New York state lawyers are making ahead of Monday, when state Attorney General Letitia James can start taking steps to collect the massive sum — unless the appeals court intervenes.

James, a Democrat, said last month she was prepared to seek to seize some of Trump's assets if he can't pay, though it wasn't clear how quickly that might unfold. In recent weeks, her office has filed formal notice of the judgment against Trump, a step that could later allow the state to move to collect.

James' office has declined to comment on its plans.

Trump's lawyers want the court to hold off collection, without requiring him to post a bond or otherwise cover the nine-figure judgment, while he appeals the outcome of his recent civil business fraud trial.

Judge Arthur Engoron ruled that Trump, his company and key executives deceived bankers and insurers

by producing financial statements that hugely overstated his fortune. The defendants deny the claims.

The judge ordered Trump to pay \$355 million in penalties, plus interest that already has pushed the total over \$454 million and is growing daily. That doesn't count money that some co-defendants were ordered to pay.

Appealing doesn't, in itself, halt collection. But Trump would automatically get such a reprieve if he puts up money, assets or an appeal bond covering what he owes.

The presumptive Republican nominee's lawyers said earlier this week that he couldn't find anyone willing to issue a bond for the huge amount.

They added that underwriters insisted on cash, stocks or other liquid assets instead of real estate as collateral and wanted 120% of the judgment, or more than \$557 million. Trump's company would still need to have cash left over to run the business, his attorneys have noted.

Lawyers for James maintained in a filing Wednesday that Trump could explore other options. Among the state's suggestions: dividing the total among multiple bonds from different underwriters, or letting a court hold some of the former president's real estate empire while he appeals.

Robert, Trump's attorney, said in his letter Thursday that the divide-and-bond strategy wouldn't make a difference because it still would require \$557 million in liquid assets as collateral. Having a court hold real estate during the appeal is "impractical and unjust" and essentially amounts to what a court-appointed monitor already has been doing, Robert wrote.

Making Trump cover the judgment in full while he appeals "would cause irreparable harm," Robert added.

Trump called the bond requirement "crazy," in all capital letters, in a post Wednesday on his Truth Social platform.

"If I sold assets, and then won the appeal, the assets would be forever gone," he wrote.

Meanwhile, Engoron issued an order that expands the monitor's oversight of Trump's company. Notably, the company must now tell the watchdog about any efforts to get bonds.

The monitor, a retired federal judge, has been keeping tabs on the company's financial statements, asset valuations and other doings since 2022. Engoron's ruling last month previewed plans for an "enhanced" role for her.

Messages seeking comment on the monitor's new purview were sent to Trump's lawyers and to the attorney general's office.

US Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas says Texas immigration law is unconstitutional

By SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said Thursday that a Texas law giving state authorities the power to arrest and deport migrants who have entered the country illegally is unconstitutional.

"It is our strongly held view as a matter of law that SB4 (the Texas law) ... is unconstitutional and it is our hope and confidence that the courts will strike it down with finality," Mayorkas said during a joint news conference with Guatemala President Bernardo Arévalo in the Guatemalan capital.

The Texas law passed last year would allow the state to arrest and deport people who enter the U.S. illegally. The U.S. Justice Department has challenged the law as a clear violation of federal authority.

A three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard arguments on the Texas law Wednesday, but did not rule. The law is on hold for now.

In an interview with The Associated Press later Thursday, Mayorkas added that "Should SB4 be permitted to proceed, we are very concerned about the effect it would have and the chaos that it could bring to the challenge of border migration."

Mayorkas described the U.S.-led regional strategy toward immigration as seeking to "build lawful, safe and orderly pathways for people to reach safety from their place of persecution and, at the same time, returning people to their countries as a consequence when they do not take advantage of those lawful

pathways.”

Among those safe pathways is a U.S. effort to streamline the process for those seeking U.S. asylum in the region through so-called safe mobility offices. They allow migrants to start the process where they are rather than making the dangerous and costly journey to the U.S. border.

Guatemala’s safe mobility office, unlike some others like Colombia’s, is only open to Guatemalans seeking U.S. protection. One of the requests made by Mayorkas’ delegation was that Guatemala allow the safe mobility office to process requests for migrants from other countries, according to a Guatemalan official who requested anonymity because the issue was still under discussion.

Asked during the joint news conference if the U.S. government had asked Guatemala to sign a safe third country agreement, which Guatemala’s previous president had agreed to during the Trump administration, Mayorkas did not directly answer. Such an agreement would require migrants from other countries passing through Guatemala to seek protection from the Guatemalan government rather than at the U.S. border.

Asked again in the interview with the AP, Mayorkas said that Guatemala could be a safe destination for some migrants, but that he deferred to Arévalo’s administration on that.

The U.S. has sought to improve cooperation with countries along the migrant route, including Guatemala, Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Ecuador, but Mayorkas acknowledged that it has been more challenging in Nicaragua and Venezuela, where the U.S. has strained relations with those governments.

Arévalo explained the talks in similar terms. “We are operating under the principle that the immigration phenomenon is a regional phenomenon and that for that reason has to have answers framed in the collaborative efforts of different countries,” he said.

Mayorkas also offered words of support for the Guatemalan leader, whose election victory last year was challenged and whose party still faces prosecution from Guatemala’s attorney general.

“We know that the forces of corruption continue to seek to threaten democracy and the well-being of the people of Guatemala and beyond,” Mayorkas said. “The United States stands with President Arévalo and his fight for democracy against the forces of corruption and for the people of Guatemala.”

Prosecutors say Donald Trump’s hush money trial should start April 15 without further delay

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York prosecutors on Thursday urged a judge to start Donald Trump’s hush money criminal trial on April 15, saying the defense’s calls for further delays or dismissal of the former president’s case because of a last-minute evidence dump were a “red herring.”

The vast majority of records that Trump’s lawyers received in recent weeks — more than 100,000 pages from a prior federal investigation into the matter — were “entirely immaterial, duplicative or substantially duplicative” of evidence they’d already been given, the Manhattan district attorney’s office said.

One batch containing 31,000 documents had fewer than 270 that were relevant to Trump’s case and had not previously been given to his lawyers, prosecutors said. The U.S. attorney’s office in Manhattan finished giving evidence to Trump’s lawyers on March 15.

Trump pleaded not guilty last year to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in what prosecutors said was an effort to hide arrangements to bury damaging stories during his 2016 presidential campaign.

His lawyers’ “grab-bag of meritless discovery arguments is the latest of a long series of attempts to evade responsibility for the conduct charged in the indictment,” Assistant District Attorney Matthew Colangelo wrote.

In all, about 10 million pages of evidence have been turned over to Trump’s lawyers since his indictment a year ago, including grand jury minutes, bank records, witness statements, cell phone data, and records from his company, the Trump Organization, Colangelo said.

Judge Juan M. Merchan last week postponed the trial until at least mid-April after Trump’s lawyers complained that their preparations were being hampered by the late arrival of evidence from the 2018 federal

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investigation that sent his former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen to prison.

Cohen, now an outspoken critic of Trump, is poised to testify against him as a star prosecution witness in the hush-money case. The D.A.'s office did not oppose Merchan's 30-day delay but said it would fight the defense's attempts to put the trial off any longer.

Trump's criminal trial had been scheduled to begin Monday. The hush-money case is among four criminal indictments against the presumptive Republican nominee as he campaigns to retake the White House.

Instead, on Monday, Merchan will hold a hearing to assess "who, if anyone, is at fault" for the late evidence, whether it hurt either side and whether any sanctions are warranted. Trump is expected to attend.

The hush money case centers on allegations that Trump aimed to hide the true nature of payments to Cohen, who paid porn actor Stormy Daniels \$130,000 to suppress her claims of an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump years earlier. Trump has denied her claims. His lawyers argue the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses and not part of any cover-up.

Trump's lawyers have said some of the recently arriving evidence appears to be "exculpatory and favorable to the defense." Prosecutors argue it mostly pertains to Cohen's unrelated federal convictions, though that material could come in handy to Trump's lawyers in seeking to undermine Cohen's credibility.

Trump's lawyers want a 90-day delay, but they've also asked Merchan to dismiss the case entirely, alleging the late disclosures amount to prosecutorial misconduct and violate rules governing the sharing of evidence. That sharing process, called discovery, is routine in criminal cases and is intended to help ensure a fair trial.

Prosecutors said in a court filing Thursday that the Trump legal team's allegations were "wholly unfounded, and the circumstances here do not come close to warranting the extreme sanctions" that are being sought.

They said there was no discovery violation because evidence-sharing rules apply only to material in their possession — not evidence kept by outside parties. They've also blamed Trump's lawyers for bringing the time crunch upon themselves by waiting until Jan. 18 to subpoena the records from the U.S. attorney's office — a mere nine weeks before jury selection was supposed to start.

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.

Cohen broke with Trump in 2018 after a decade working for him and soon pleaded guilty to campaign finance violations related to the hush-money payments, as well as unrelated charges of making false statements on a bank loan application, evading taxes related to his taxi industry investments and lying to Congress.

Cohen went to prison for about a year before being released to home confinement because of the COVID-19 pandemic. He became an outspoken Trump foe and is poised to be a key prosecution witness against Trump. Trump and his lawyers, meanwhile, contend Cohen is untrustworthy.

In their case against Cohen, federal prosecutors said the hush money payments were made to benefit Trump and occurred with his knowledge — but they stopped short of accusing Trump of directly committing a crime.

The Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, which provides legal advice and guidance to federal agencies, has maintained that a sitting president cannot be indicted. Federal prosecutors didn't revive their investigation once Trump left the White House after losing the 2020 election to Democrat Joe Biden.

Reddit, the self-anointed 'front page of the internet,' soars in Wall Street debut

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Reddit's stock soared in its Wall Street debut as investors pushed the value of the company close to \$9 billion seconds after it began trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Reddit, which priced its IPO at \$34 a share, debuted Thursday afternoon at \$47 a share. At the close of

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trading, it was up 48% at \$50.44, backing off a peak of \$57.80.

"This volatility is not surprising because there has been a lot of buzz around Reddit," Reena Aggarwal, director of Georgetown University's Psaros Center for Financial Markets and Policy, noted.

When Reddit's price initially jumped, she explained, some investors who got an allocation may have sold their shares to cash in on the gains, bringing it back down. She noted that this could continue in the stock's early days.

Reddit's IPO will test the quirky company's ability to overcome a nearly 20-year history colored by uninterrupted losses, management turmoil and user backlashes to build a sustainable business.

The interest surrounding Reddit stems largely from a large audience that religiously visits the service to discuss a potpourri of subjects that range from silly memes to existential worries, as well as get recommendations from like-minded people.

About 76 million users checked into one of Reddit's roughly 100,000 communities in December, according to the regulatory disclosures required before the San Francisco company goes public. Reddit set aside up to 1.76 million of 15.3 million shares being offered in the IPO for users of its service.

Per the usual IPO custom, the remaining shares are expected to be bought primarily by mutual funds and other institutional investors betting Reddit is ready for prime time in finance.

Reddit's moneymaking potential also has attracted some prominent supporters, including OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, who accumulated a stake as an early investor that has made him one of the company's biggest shareholders. Altman owns 12.2 million shares of Reddit stock, according to the company's IPO disclosures.

By the tech industry's standards, Reddit remains extraordinarily small for a company that has been around as long as it has. Thursday's opening debut valuation of \$9 billion, for example, is still far below the \$1.2 trillion market value boasted by Meta Platforms — whose biggest social media service Facebook was started just 18 months earlier than Reddit.

Reddit has never profited from its broad reach while piling up cumulative losses of \$717 million. That number has swollen from cumulative losses of \$467 million in December 2021 when the company first filed papers to go public before aborting that attempt.

In the recent documents filed for its revived IPO, Reddit attributed the losses to a fairly recent focus on finding new ways to boost revenue.

Not long after it was born, Reddit was sold to magazine publisher Conde Nast for \$10 million in deal that meant the company didn't need to run as a standalone business. Even after Conde Nast parent Advance Magazine Publishers spun off Reddit in 2011, the company said in its IPO filing that it didn't begin to focus on generating revenue until 2018.

Those efforts, mostly centered around selling ads, have helped the social platform increase its annual revenue from \$229 million in 2020 to \$804 million last year. But the San Francisco-based company also posted combined losses of \$436 million from 2020 through 2023.

Reddit outlined a strategy in its filing calling for even more ad sales on a service that it believes companies will be a powerful marketing magnet because so many people search for product recommendations there.

The company also is hoping to bring in more money by licensing access to its content in deals similar to the \$60 million that Google recently struck to help train its artificial intelligence models. That ambition, though, faced an almost immediate challenge when the U.S. Federal Trade Commission opened an inquiry into the arrangement.

Since Thursday just marks Reddit's first day on the public market, Aggarwal stressed that the first key measure of success will boil down to the company's next earnings call.

"As a public company now they have to report a lot more ... in the next earnings release," she said. "I'm sure the market will watch that carefully."

Reddit also experienced tumultuous bouts of instability in leadership that may scare off prospective investors. Company co-founders Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian — also the husband of tennis superstar Serena Williams — both left Reddit in 2009 while Conde Nast was still in control, only to return years later.

Huffman, 40, is now CEO. Although his founder's letter leading up to this IPO didn't mention it, Huffman touched upon the company's past turmoil in another missive included in a December 2021 filing attempt that was subsequently canceled.

"We lived these challenges publicly and have the scars, learnings, and policy updates to prove it," Huffman then wrote. "Our history influences our future. There will undoubtedly be more challenges to come."

Wall Street debut of Trump's Truth Social network could net him stock worth billions on paper

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Wall Street debut of Donald Trump's Truth Social network could give him stock worth billions of dollars on paper. But the former president probably will not be able to cash it out right away, unless some things change.

The longer-term outlook for the business is highly questionable. Trump's company has said it expects to continue losing money for a while, and at least one expert says it's likely worth far less than the stock market suggests.

Trump's pending return to Wall Street comes down to a vote scheduled for Friday by shareholders of a company named Digital World Acquisition Corp., which at the moment is essentially just a pile of cash. The corporation hopes to merge with Trump Media & Technology Group, the company behind Truth Social that goes by TMTG. If the shareholders approve the deal, TMTG could soon see its stock trading on the Nasdaq in Digital World's place.

Here's a look at the proposal and Trump's role in it.

WHAT HAPPENS FRIDAY?

Shareholders of Digital World are scheduled to vote on whether to approve a merger with TMTG, where Trump is the chairman. Digital World is what's called a special purpose acquisition company, or SPAC, or "blank-check company."

SPACs raise cash and then hunt for companies to merge with. Such deals give the target companies a potentially quicker and easier way to get their stocks onto the New York Stock Exchange or Nasdaq. The arrangement lets them avoid some of the paperwork associated with traditional initial public offerings of stock, or IPOs.

For investors, SPACs offer a way to get into hyped, potentially faster-growing companies such as TMTG, the DraftKings betting service or SoFi banking.

DO SHAREHOLDERS EVER SAY NO?

It happens, but only rarely. This vote looks likely to pass given how high Digital World's stock has jumped on excitement about Trump. It finished Thursday at \$42.81 per share. It's already up nearly 145% so far this year, towering over the roughly 10% gain for the S&P 500 index.

Many of Digital World's investors are small-time investors who are either fans of Trump or trying to cash in on the mania, instead of big institutional and professional investors.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE SHAREHOLDERS APPROVE?

Digital World will merge with TMTG. The stock will continue to trade under Digital World's ticker, DWAC, possibly for a couple of days to a couple of weeks, experts say. Then at some point, companies in SPAC deals usually announce that their stock will begin trading under the new ticker symbol.

Trump's company hopes to trade under the ticker symbol DJT, the former president's initials. The same ticker symbol was used by Trump Hotels & Casino Resorts before it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2004.

HOW MUCH WILL TRUMP GET?

Trump will own most of the new, combined company, or nearly 78.8 million shares, which would account for at least 58%. Multiply that by Digital World's current stock price of more than \$40, and the total value could surpass \$3 billion.

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TRUMP NEEDS CASH, RIGHT? CAN HE SELL RIGHT AWAY?

Trump faces a \$454 million judgment in a fraud lawsuit, among other financial burdens. But he cannot sell easily for at least six months. That's because major TMTG shareholders will be under what's called a "lock-up" provision, a common restriction on Wall Street that keeps big, early investors from immediately dumping their shares. Such sales could tank the stock's price.

Investors under the lock-up deal cannot sell, lend, donate or encumber their shares for six months after the close of the deal. Legal experts say "encumber" is a powerful word that could prevent Trump from using the stock as collateral to raise cash before six months have elapsed.

There are a few exceptions, such as by transferring stock to immediate family members. But in such cases, the recipients would also have to agree to abide by the lock-up agreement.

SO DEFINITELY NO CASH RIGHT AWAY?

Digital World could waive the lock-up agreement before the deal closes. Or, in what some legal experts say could be a more likely path, the new company's board could decide to alter the lock-up agreement after the deal closes.

Such a decision by the board could open those directors up to legal scrutiny. They would need to show they're doing it to benefit shareholders.

But if the value of Trump's brand is key to the company's success, and if easing the lock-up agreements could preserve that brand, it could make for a case that would at least spare board members' lawyers from getting laughed out of court immediately.

Some companies' boards in the past have altered lock-up agreements to allow investors to sell earlier.

WHO WILL BE ON THIS COMPANY'S BOARD?

Mostly people put forth by TMTG, including the former president's son, Donald Trump Jr., if all goes as expected. Former Republican Rep. Devin Nunes would be a director and the company's CEO.

Also on the board would be Robert Lighthizer, who served as Trump's U.S. trade representative, and Linda McMahon, who ran the Small Business Administration under Trump.

IS THIS A SAFE INVESTMENT?

Every stock has risks. Digital World has filed 84 pages with U.S. regulators to list many of its risks and those of TMTG.

One risk, the company said, was that as a controlling stockholder, Trump would be entitled to vote his shares in his own interest, which may not always be in the interests of all the shareholders generally.

It also cited the high rate of failure for new social media platforms, as well as TMTG's expectation that the company will lose money on its operations "for the foreseeable future." The company lost \$49 million in the first nine months of last year, when it brought in just \$3.4 million in revenue and had to pay \$37.7 million in interest expenses.

"It's losing money, there's no way the company is worth anything like" what the stock price suggests, said Jay Ritter, an IPO specialist at the University of Florida's Warrington College of Business.

"Here, given the stock price is so divorced from fundamental value, it's kind of the same issue that came up with meme stocks," he said, recalling companies whose share prices once soared far beyond what professionals considered rational. "With AMC and GameStop, the price was way above fundamental value, and there's the question of: Can you get out before the music stops?"

Justice Department sues Apple, alleging it illegally monopolized the smartphone market

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE, LINDSAY WHITEHURST, FRANK BAJAK and MIKE BALSAMO Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Thursday announced a sweeping antitrust lawsuit against Apple, accusing the tech giant of engineering an illegal monopoly in smartphones that boxes out competitors, stifles innovation and keeps prices artificially high.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in New Jersey, alleges that Apple has monopoly power in the smart-

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phone market and leverages control over the iPhone to “engage in a broad, sustained, and illegal course of conduct.”

“Apple has locked its consumers into the iPhone while locking its competitors out of the market,” said Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. Stalling the advancement of the very market it revolutionized, she said, it has “smothered an entire industry.”

Apple called the lawsuit “wrong on the facts and the law” and said it “will vigorously defend against it.”

The suit takes aim at how Apple allegedly molds its technology and business relationships to “extract more money from consumers, developers, content creators, artists, publishers, small businesses, and merchants, among others.”

That includes diminishing the functionality of non-Apple smartwatches, limiting access to contactless payment for third-party digital wallets and refusing to allow its iMessage app to exchange encrypted messaging with competing platforms.

It specifically seeks to stop Apple from undermining technologies that compete with its own apps -- in areas including streaming, messaging and digital payments -- and prevent it from continuing to craft contracts with developers, accessory makers and consumers that let it “obtain, maintain, extend or entrench a monopoly.”

The lawsuit — filed with 16 state attorneys general — is just the latest example of aggressive antitrust enforcement by an administration that has also taken on Google, Amazon and other tech giants with the stated aim of making the digital universe more fair, innovative and competitive.

“The Department of Justice has an enduring legacy taking on the biggest and toughest monopolies in history,” said Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter, head of the antitrust division, at a press conference announcing the lawsuit. “Today we stand here once again to promote competition and innovation for next generation of technology.”

Antitrust researcher Dina Srinivasan, a Yale University fellow, compared the lawsuit’s significance to the government’s action against Microsoft a quarter century ago — picking a “tremendous fight” with what has been the world’s most prosperous company.

“It’s a really big deal to go up and punch someone who is acting like a bully and pretending not to be a bully,” she said.

President Joe Biden has called for the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission to vigorously enforce antitrust statutes. While its stepped-up policing of corporate mergers and questionable business practices has met resistance from some business leaders — accusing the Democratic administration of overreach — it’s been lauded by others as long overdue.

The case seeks to pierce the digital fortress that Apple Inc., based in Cupertino, California, has assiduously built around the iPhone and other popular products such as the iPad, Mac and Apple Watch to create what is often referred to as a “walled garden” so its hardware and software can seamlessly offer user-friendly harmony.

The strategy has helped Apple attain an annual revenue of nearly \$400 billion and, until recently, a market value of more than \$3 trillion. But Apple’s shares have fallen by 7% this year even as most of the stock market has climbed to new highs, resulting in long-time rival Microsoft seizing the mantle as the world’s most valuable company.

Apple said the lawsuit, if successful, would “hinder our ability to create the kind of technology people expect from Apple — where hardware, software, and services intersect” and would “set a dangerous precedent, empowering government to take a heavy hand in designing people’s technology.”

“At Apple, we innovate every day to make technology people love — designing products that work seamlessly together, protect people’s privacy and security, and create a magical experience for our users,” the company said in a statement. “This lawsuit threatens who we are and the principles that set Apple products apart in fiercely competitive markets.

Apple has defended the walled garden as an indispensable feature prized by consumers who want the best protection available for their personal information. It has described the barrier as a way for the iPhone

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to distinguish itself from devices running on Google's Android software, which isn't as restrictive and is licensed to a wide range of manufacturers.

"Apple claims to be a champion of protecting user data, but its app store fee structure and partnership with Google search erode privacy," Consumer Reports senior researcher Sumit Sharma said in a statement.

The lawsuit complains that Apple charges as much as \$1,599 for an iPhone and that the high margins it earns on each is more than double what others in the industry get. And when users run an internet search, Google gives Apple a "significant cut" of the advertising revenue those searches generate.

The company's app store also charges developers up to 30 percent of the app's price for consumers.

Critics of Apple's alleged anticompetitive practices have long complained that its claim to prioritize user privacy is hypocritical when profits are at stake. While its iMessage services is sheathed from prying eyes by end-to-end encryption, that protection evaporates the moment someone texts a non-Apple device.

But Will Strafach, a mobile security expert, said that while he believes Apple needs reigning in, he's concerned that the Justice Department's focus on messaging may be misplaced and could weaken security and privacy.

"I am quite glad that access to SMS messages is restricted," said Strafach, creator of the Guardian Firewall app.

He notes that a number of apps, ostensibly for weather and news, on iPhones have secretly and persistently sent users' GPS data to third parties. Strafach said he is concerned weakened Apple security "could open the door to stalkerware/spouseware, which is already more difficult to install on Apple devices compared to Android."

However, prominent critic Cory Doctorow has complained that while Apple has blocked entities like Facebook from spying on its users it runs its "own surveillance advertising empire" that gathers the same kinds of personal data but for its own use.

"Apple has a history of clandestine deals with surveillance giants like Google, and (CEO) Tim Cook gave Uber a slap on the wrist instead of an app store ban when (the ride-sharing company) built a backdoor to spy on iPhone users who had already deleted Uber's app," noted Sean O'Brien, founder of Yale's Privacy Lab.

Fears about an antitrust crackdown on Apple's business model haven't just contributed to the drop in the company's stock price, there also is concern it lags behind Microsoft and Google in the push to develop products powered by artificial intelligence technology.

Antitrust regulators made it clear in their complaint that they see Apple's walled garden mostly as a weapon to ward off competition, creating market conditions that enable it to charge higher prices that have propelled its lofty profit margins while stifling innovation.

"Consumers should not have to pay higher prices because companies break the law," said Attorney General Merrick Garland. Left unchallenged, Apple would "only continue to strengthen its smartphone monopoly," he added.

William Kovacic, a former chairman of the Federal Trade Commission who teaches at George Washington University, said he expects the core of Apple's defense to be that it is not at all a monopoly in the smartphone market. Justice Department lawyers have built a "high-quality" argument of harm in the 88-page indictment with "impressive excerpts from the firm's own documents," he said.

But don't expect a verdict until 2026 — which means the case could easily drag on with appeals.

The case escalates the Biden administration's antitrust siege, which has already triggered lawsuits against Google and Amazon accusing them in engaging in illegal tactics to thwart competition, as well as unsuccessful attempts to block new acquisitions by Microsoft and Meta Platforms.

In addition the FTC sued Facebook in 2020 over its acquisitions of Instagram and WhatsApp.

Kovacic predicts antitrust action by the FTC or Justice Department against Microsoft over its relationship with OpenAI is "coming up around the corner," and "the two agencies are fighting over who will handle that better."

"They foreshadowed this would be their agenda and they're filling out the agenda the way they said," he added. "These are all high-stakes matters, and you can expect an intense and aggressive defense."

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Apple's business interests are also entangled in the Justice Department's case against Google, which went to trial last fall and is headed toward final arguments scheduled to begin May 1 in Washington, D.C. In that case, regulators are alleging Google has stymied competition by paying for the rights for its already dominant online search engine to be the automatic place to handle queries on the iPhone and a variety of web browsers in an arrangement that generates an estimated \$15 billion to \$20 billion annually.

With the Justice Department mounting a direct attack across its business, Apple stands to lose even more.

Congress unveils \$1.2 trillion plan to avert federal shutdown and bring budget fight to a close

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lawmakers introduced a \$1.2 trillion spending package Thursday that sets the stage for avoiding a partial government shutdown for several key federal agencies this weekend and allows Congress, nearly six months into the budget year, to complete its work funding the government through September.

Democrats were able to swat back scores of policy mandates and some of the steeper budget cuts that House Republicans were seeking to impose on nondefense programs, though House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., highlighted some wins, including a nearly 24% increase in detention beds for migrants awaiting their immigration proceedings or removal from the country.

This year's spending bills were divided into two packages. The first one cleared Congress two weeks ago, just hours before a shutdown deadline for the agencies funded through the bills.

Now Congress is focused on the second, larger package, which includes about \$886 billion for the Defense Department, a more than 3% increase from last year's levels. The 1,012-page bill also funds the departments of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Labor, and others.

"Congress must now race to pass this package before government funding runs out this Friday," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

Nondefense spending will be relatively flat compared with the prior year, though some agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, are taking a hit, and many agencies will not see their budgets keep up with inflation.

When combining the two packages, discretionary spending for the budget year will come to about \$1.66 trillion. That does not include programs such as Social Security and Medicare, and financing the country's rising debt.

The House is expected to take the measure up first on Friday. House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., urged Republicans to vote for the measure, noting that more than 70% of the spending goes to defense.

"At a time when the world's on fire, more than ever, we need to make sure that we are properly funding our nation's defense and supporting our troops," Scalise said.

Then it would move to the Senate where senators would have to agree on taking it up expeditiously to avoid a partial shutdown. Usually, such agreements include votes on proposed amendments to the bill.

Johnson described the bill as a serious commitment to strengthening national defense while expanding support for those serving in the military. The bill provides for a 5.2% pay increase for service members.

In promoting the bill, Republicans cited several ways it would help Israel. Most notably, they highlighted a prohibition on funding through March 2025 for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, which is the main supplier of food, water and shelter to civilians in Gaza.

Republicans are insisting on cutting off funding to the agency after Israel alleged that a dozen employees of the agency were involved in the attack that Hamas conducted in Israel on Oct. 7.

But the prohibition does concern some lawmakers because many relief agencies say there is no way to replace its ability to deliver the humanitarian assistance that the United States and others are trying to send to Gaza, where one-quarter of the 2.3 million residents are starving.

Democrats emphasized that humanitarian assistance will increase globally though, by about \$336.4 million.

Sen. Patty Murray, the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, also highlighted a \$1 billion increase

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for Head Start programs and new child care centers for military families. Democrats also played up a \$120 million increase in funding for cancer research and a \$100 million increase for Alzheimer's research.

"We defeated outlandish cuts that would have been a gut punch for American families and our economy," said Murray, D-Wash.

She also said Democrats successfully fought off numerous policy measures, known as riders, that House Republicans were seeking to add.

"From Day 1 of this process, I said there would be no extreme, far-right riders to restrict women's reproductive freedoms — and there aren't, she said.

Among the policy provisions that House Republicans did secure was a requirement that only allows for the American flag and "other official flags" to fly over U.S. diplomatic facilities. Under the Biden administration, U.S. embassies have been invited to fly the pride flag or light up with rainbow colors in support of the LGBTQ community.

There is also a provision that prevents the Consumer Product Safety Commission from banning gas stoves. But the White House has said President Joe Biden would not support a ban, and the commission, an independent agency, says no such ban was in the works.

The spending in the bill largely tracks with an agreement that former Speaker Kevin McCarthy worked out with the White House in May 2023, which restricted spending for two years and suspended the debt ceiling into January 2025 so the federal government could continue paying its bills.

Shalanda Young, director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, told lawmakers Thursday that last year's agreement, which became the Fiscal Responsibility Act, will save taxpayers about \$1 trillion over the coming decade.

McCarthy, R-Calif., was ousted from the speaker's role a few months after securing the debt ceiling deal. Eight Republicans ended up joining with Democrats in removing McCarthy as speaker. And some of those unhappy with that deal also expressed misgivings about the latest package.

"I hope there will be some modest wins. Unfortunately, I don't expect that we will get much in the way of significant policy wins based on past history and based on our unwillingness to use any kind of leverage to force policy wins, meaning a willingness to walk away and say no," said Rep. Bob Good, R-Va.

Work on the spending bills has been more bipartisan in the Senate. Murray issued a joint statement after the bill's release with Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, urging colleagues to vote for it.

"There is zero need for a shutdown or chaos — and members of Congress should waste no time in passing these six bills, which will greatly benefit every state in America and reflect important priorities of many senators," Murray and Collins said.

Johnson said that after the spending package passes, the House would next turn its attention to a bill that focuses on aiding Ukraine and Israel, though lawmakers are scheduled to be away from Washington for the next two weeks. The Senate has already approved a \$95.3 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, but Johnson has declined to bring that up for a vote.

Higher temperatures mean higher food and other prices. A new study links climate shocks to inflation

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Food prices and overall inflation will rise as temperatures climb with climate change, a new study by an environmental scientist and the European Central Bank found.

Looking at monthly price tags of food and other goods, temperatures and other climate factors in 121 nations since 1996, researchers calculate that "weather and climate shocks" will cause the cost of food to rise 1.5 to 1.8 percentage points annually within a decade or so, even higher in already hot places like the Middle East, according to a study in Thursday's journal *Communications, Earth and the Environment*.

And that translates to an increase in overall inflation of 0.8 to 0.9 percentage points by 2035, just caused by climate change extreme weather, the study said.

Those numbers may look small, but to banks like the U.S. Federal Reserve that fight inflation, they are

significant, said study lead author Max Kotz, a climate scientist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany

"The physical impacts of climate change are going to have a persistent effect on inflation," Kotz said. "This is really from my perspective another example of one of the ways in which climate change can undermine human welfare, economic welfare."

And by 2060, the climate-triggered part of inflation should grow, with global food prices predicted to increase 2.2 to 4.3 percentage points annually, the study said. That translates to a 1.1 to 2.2 percentage point increase in overall inflation.

Gernot Wagner, a climate economist at Columbia University's business school who wasn't part of the research, said what he calls "climateflation" is "all too real and the numbers are rather striking."

Kotz and European Bank economists looked at 20,000 data points to find a real world causal link between extreme weather, especially heat, and rising prices. They then looked at what's projected in the future for climate change and saw sticker shock.

Usually when economists talk inflation and climate change, it's about rising energy prices in response to efforts to curb warming, but that's only part of the problem, Kotz said.

"There are these productivity shocks that we know about from climate change, from the weather phenomena caused by climate change, from heat waves and so forth to reduce agricultural productivity," Kotz said. "Those also then have a knock-on effect on food inflation, on headline inflation."

The study points to 2022's European heat wave as a good example. The high heat cut food supplies, causing food prices to rise two-thirds of a percentage point and overall inflation to jump about one-third of a percentage point, Kotz said. Prices rose even higher in Romania, Hungary and parts of southern Europe.

"I find the main result on the historic relationship between regional temperature anomalies and national inflation to be credible," said Frances Moore, an environmental economist at the University of California, Davis who wasn't part of the study. "The findings are important. Price variability in essential goods like food is very painful to consumers."

Kotz said the analysis found the inflationary pressure on food and other prices is worse in areas and seasons that are hotter. So Europe and North America may not be hit as hard as the Global South, which could afford it less, he said.

Russia fires 31 missiles at Kyiv in the first attack in weeks as people scramble for cover in subway

By HANNA ARHIROVA and ANTON SHTUKA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia fired more than two dozen missiles at Kyiv before dawn on Thursday, attacking the Ukrainian capital for the first time in six weeks and sending panicked residents flooding into the relative safety of the subway system in a scene reminiscent of the first weeks of the war.

Air defenses shot down all 31 of the missiles, though the falling wreckage still damaged apartment buildings and injured 13 people, including a child, officials said.

An estimated 25,000 people, including about 3,000 children, took shelter in the city's subway stations as air raid sirens wailed for about three hours, officials said.

Survivors, some in tears as emergency workers treated them in the streets, recounted narrowly escaping from their homes after being jolted awake by loud bangs at around 5 a.m.

Raisa Kozenko, a 71-year-old whose apartment lost its doors and windows in the blast, said her son jumped out of bed just in time. "He was covered in blood, in the rubble," she said, trembling from shock. "And all I can say is ... the apartment is completely destroyed."

Russia has attacked civilian areas since the war started in February 2022 in an apparent effort to demoralize Ukrainians and break their will to fight. But the attack Thursday hardened Kozenko's will to prevail.

"I believe in our victory. We will prevail no matter what," she told The Associated Press.

Russia launched two ballistic missiles and 29 cruise missiles against the capital, and they arrived at roughly

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the same time from different directions, Ukrainian authorities said. The attack occurred hours after a visit to Kyiv by President Joe Biden's top foreign policy adviser, Jake Sullivan.

Kyiv has better air defenses than most other Ukrainian cities and regions, including sophisticated systems provided by Western allies. The missile interception rate is frequently high, rendering Russian attacks on the capital significantly less successful than early on in the war. Other places, including the port city of Odesa, are more vulnerable and have sustained heavy damage from Russian missiles.

Ukrainian officials warn that their resources are stretched thin and that they need considerably more Western weapons if they are to keep fighting Russia's invasion.

The heavy attack on Kyiv came a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened to "respond in kind" to recent Ukrainian aerial attacks on the Russian border region of Belgorod, which have embarrassed the Kremlin and which Russian officials say have killed civilians.

At a Wednesday event at the Kremlin, Putin said Russia "can respond in the same way regarding civilian infrastructure and all other objects of this kind that the enemy attacks. We have our own views on this matter and our own plans. We will follow what we have outlined."

Five people were injured in an attack Thursday on the Belgorod region that damaged homes and a sports stadium, Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Russia's Ministry of Defense said it stopped 10 rockets over the region.

In Kyiv, an 11-year-old girl and a 38-year-old man who were injured in Thursday's attack were hospitalized, the city administration said. Eight other people suffered light injuries, according to Mayor Vitali Klitschko.

Ukraine's Emergency Service said about 80 people were evacuated from their homes.

Falling wreckage from the intercepted missiles set fire to at least one apartment building, burned parked cars and left craters in streets and a small park. Some streets were littered with debris, including glass from shattered windows.

Mariia Margulis, 31, said a decision to stay in the hallway throughout the attack saved her family.

"The blast wave blew out all the windows on the side where everything happened," she said. "My mom was supposed to sleep in that room, but I asked her to move to the corridor in time, which saved us."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged the country's Western partners to send more air defense systems so they can be distributed to other parts of the country where missile strikes have become more common.

"Every day, every night such ... terror happens," he said on Telegram after Thursday's attack. "World unity is capable to stop it by helping us with more air defense systems."

Zelenskyy said Russia doesn't have missiles that can evade U.S.-made Patriots and other advanced air defense weapons.

European Union leaders were considering new ways to help boost arms and ammunition production for Ukraine at a summit in Brussels on Thursday.

Russia has largely turned its attention to other Ukrainian cities, targeting them with drones and ballistic missiles.

On Wednesday, Russian ballistic missiles killed five people and injured nine in the eastern Kharkiv region.

Yamamoto chased after 1st inning of debut as Padres beat Dodgers 15-11 for 2-game South Korea split

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — After chasing Yoshinobu Yamamoto from his major league debut after one inning and scoring their most runs ever against the Los Angeles Dodgers, San Diego's Xander Bogaerts was sad to leave the Gocheok Sky Dome.

"We got to come here more," he said.

Jake Cronenworth tied a career high with four hits and had four RBIs as the Padres outlasted the Dodgers 15-11 on Thursday night after Los Angeles fired Shohei Ohtani's interpreter following allegations of

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illegal gambling.

Interpreter Ippei Mizuhara was let go from the team Wednesday following reports from the Los Angeles Times and ESPN about alleged ties to an illegal bookmaker.

Ohtani hit three deep flyouts on a 1-for-5 night, including a sacrifice fly, and was 3 for 10 with two RBIs in the series. He did not speak with reporters.

"I hope Sho is good, but you know, at the end of the day we have to make sure we take care of our jobs," said Mookie Betts, who had six RBIs along with four hits that included the first home run of the major league season. "No matter what cards we're dealt, we better go play them."

Yamamoto and Dodgers manager Dave Roberts insisted Mizuhara's situation didn't contribute to the defeat.

"I feel regret that I just couldn't keep the team in the game from the get-go, so I do feel the responsibility for it," Yamamoto said through a translator. "I just got to get ready for the next outing."

San Diego gained a split in the opening two-games series, Major League Baseball's first games in South Korea. After the Dodgers rebounded from a 9-2 deficit and closed to 12-11, Manny Machado hit a three-run homer in the ninth off J.P. Feyereisen.

San Diego outit the Dodgers 17-16, and Los Angeles made three errors that led to a pair of unearned runs. Luis Campusano had three hits and 20-year-old center fielder Jackson Merrill got his first two major league hits.

Yamamoto (0-1) signed a \$325 million, 12-year contract, a record amount for a pitcher that created high expectations. San Diego batted around against the two-time Pacific League MVP, and he left with a 45.00 ERA, allowing five runs, four hits, one walk, a hit batter and a wild pitch. Cronenworth's two-run triple, Ha-Seong Kim's sacrifice fly, Campusano's RBI double and Tyler Wade's run-scoring single built a 5-1 lead.

"Just didn't have the command and so it's not about the stuff," Roberts said. "When you're a command guy, which he's been his entire career, his life, and you just misfire, get behind in counts, hit batters, that's just not who he is. ... He's an easy guy that you know he'll bounce back from this."

Bogaerts hit a two-run single in a four-run third off Michael Grove.

Michael King (1-0) won in his Padres debut following his acquisition in the trade that sent Juan Soto to the New York Yankees. King allowed three runs in 3 1/3 innings.

Robert Suarez got four outs for the save after 26-year-old right-hander Stephen Kolek made his major league debut, getting charged with two runs in the eighth.

Padres starter Joe Musgrove gave up five runs, seven hits and two walks in 2 2/3 innings.

Dodgers third baseman Max Muncy allowed Campusano's first-inning bouncer to get under his glove and down the line for an RBI double, had Fernando Tatis Jr.'s third-inning grounder kick off his glove into left for an error as a run scored, then allowed José Azocar's seventh-inning grounder to bounce off his glove for a run-scoring error. Muncy hit an inning-ending popup that stranded two runners in the eighth.

In the second season of the pitch clock, the game took 3 hours, 42 minutes, a day after the opener lasted 3:05. Bogaerts struck out for the final out in the eighth when a pitch clock-violation was called by plate umpire Andy Fletcher with a 1-2 count.

Mike Schildt got his first win as Padres manager.

"A lot of courage, a lot of toughness, a lot of fight," he said. "A really big identity game for our group."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Bogaerts jammed the ring finger of his left hand while sliding into second base when tagging up in the seventh.

UP NEXT

Dodgers: They host the Los Angeles Angels on Sunday and Monday, then play at Anaheim on Tuesday in the annual exhibition Freeway Series. They resume the season March 28 in their home opener against St. Louis.

Padres: They are home against Seattle in exhibitions at Petco Park on Monday and Tuesday, then resume the season hosting San Francisco in a four-game series starting March 28.

Nearly 8 in 10 AAPI adults in the US think abortion should be legal, an AP-NORC poll finds

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With abortion rights poised to be one of the major issues in the 2024 election, a new poll shows that Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States are highly supportive of legal abortion, even in situations where the pregnant person wants an abortion for any reason.

The poll from AAPI Data and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that nearly 8 in 10 Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders think abortion should be legal in all or most cases. They're also supportive of federal government action to preserve abortion rights: Three-quarters of AAPI adults say Congress should pass a law guaranteeing access to legal abortions nationwide.

By comparison, an AP-NORC poll conducted last June found that 64% of U.S. adults think abortion should be legal in all or most cases, and 6 in 10 U.S. adults overall say Congress should pass a law guaranteeing access.

AAPI adults are more likely than Americans overall to identify as Democrats, which may partially explain why their levels of support for legal abortion are higher than among the general population. But even among Democrats, AAPI adults are more supportive of legal abortion later in pregnancy. AAPI Democrats are especially likely to support legal abortion without any limits — more than half of this group say abortion should be legal in all cases, compared to 40% of Democrats overall.

AAPI Republicans are also more likely than Republicans overall to support a law guaranteeing access to legal abortion nationwide. More than half (57%) of AAPI Republicans think abortion should be legal in at least some cases, compared to 38% of Republicans in general. About half (51%) of AAPI Republicans also think Congress should pass a law guaranteeing access to legal abortion nationwide, while only 32% of Republicans overall want this to happen.

Although AAPI voters are a fast-growing demographic with a particularly large presence in states like California, Texas and New York, their attitudes can often not be analyzed in other surveys because of small sample sizes, among other issues. This survey is part of an ongoing project focusing on AAPI Americans' views.

High turnout in areas with large AAPI communities could help Democrats in competitive House districts, and a broader conversation about whether nonwhite voters are shifting to the right may lead to more courting of AAPI voters. The survey's findings suggest that abortion could be a strong issue for Democratic candidates who are looking to reach AAPI communities, and a challenge for Republicans.

"It saddens me how politics got involved in this, and they really shouldn't have," said Debra Nanez, a 72-year-old retired nurse in Tucson, Arizona, and an Independent voter. Nanez identifies as Asian, Native American and Hispanic. "It's a woman's body. How can you tell us what we can do with our bodies, what we can keep and what we cannot keep? It's ridiculous."

While an AP-NORC poll conducted in October 2022 found that more than 4 in 10 Americans overall trust Democrats to do a better job of handling the issue of abortion, while only 2 in 10 have more trust in Republicans, the poll released Thursday shows that the trust gap between the parties is wider for AAPI adults. Fifty-five percent of AAPI adults trust Democrats on abortion policy, while only 12% trust Republicans.

More than half of AAPI adults were born outside the U.S., according to the survey. For many of those immigrants and their first-generation American children, abortion isn't just viewed as health care — it can also be seen as a right that was not afforded to them in their countries of origin, said Varun Nikore, executive director of AAPI Victory Alliance, a progressive political advocacy organization.

"I think it has to do with some sort of home country attitudes that are sort of pervasive, but also the strong feeling we've had rights and we've had access to health care, and now we don't want to lose something that we had. And it could be that we also came to this country to have better access to health care than we did before," Nikore said.

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Nearly 6 in 10 AAPI adults don't want Congress to pass a law preserving states' ability to set their own laws allowing or restricting abortion, and only 14% support the passage of a law banning access to abortions nationwide.

Joie Meyer, 24, is a health care consultant in Florida, where abortions are prohibited after 15 weeks of pregnancy. She said that given that other nearby states like Alabama and Georgia have even more restrictive abortion laws, she would have to travel far to receive the procedure.

"I'm 24 and maybe some people my age are having children, but if I were to get in that position to be pregnant, I don't think I would feel ready," she said. "So, that would be something that I would have to think about."

Meyer, who was born in China but has lived in the U.S. since an infant, has made plans with a friend in California in case she does need an abortion. Flying across the country might be more time-consuming than driving to the nearest state that provides abortion, but she said she wants to know that she'll be with someone who can take care of her during the recovery.

"Even if there's a closer state, would I want to do that alone and have to really navigate that physical and emotional pain alone? Not really," Meyer said.

The poll of 1,172 U.S. adults who are Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders was conducted from Feb. 5-14, 2024, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based Amplify AAPI Panel, designed to be representative of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Today in History: March 22, Jimmy Carter becomes longest living US president

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, March 22, the 82nd day of 2024. There are 284 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 22, 2019, former President Jimmy Carter became the longest-living chief executive in American history; at 94 years and 172 days, he exceeded the lifespan of the late former President George H.W. Bush.

On this date:

In 1765, the British Parliament passed the Stamp Act to raise money from the American colonies, which fiercely resisted the tax. (The Stamp Act was repealed a year later.)

In 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed a measure outlawing polygamy.

In 1894, hockey's first Stanley Cup championship game was played; home team Montreal Hockey Club defeated Ottawa Hockey Club, 3-1.

In 1941, the Grand Coulee hydroelectric dam in Washington state officially went into operation.

In 1945, the Arab League was formed with the adoption of a charter in Cairo, Egypt.

In 1963, The Beatles' debut album, "Please Please Me," was released in the United Kingdom by Parlophone.

In 1978, Karl Wallenda, the 73-year-old patriarch of "The Flying Wallendas" high-wire act, fell to his death while attempting to walk a cable strung between two hotel towers in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

In 1988, both houses of Congress overrode President Ronald Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act.

In 1993, Intel Corp. unveiled the original Pentium computer chip.

In 1997, Tara Lipinski, at age 14 years and 10 months, became the youngest ladies' world figure skating champion in Lausanne, Switzerland.

In 2010, Google Inc. stopped censoring the internet for China by shifting its search engine off the mainland to Hong Kong.

In 2012, coroner's officials ruled singer Whitney Houston died by drowning, but that heart disease and cocaine use were contributing factors.

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In 2017, a knife-wielding man plowed a car into pedestrians on London's Westminster Bridge, killing four people, then stabbed an armed police officer to death inside the gates of Parliament before being shot dead by authorities.

In 2020, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered all nonessential businesses in the state to close and nonessential workers to stay home. Kentucky Republican Rand Paul became the first member of the U.S. Senate to report testing positive for the coronavirus; his announcement led Utah senators Mike Lee and Mitt Romney to place themselves in quarantine.

Today's Birthdays: Actor William Shatner is 93. Actor M. Emmet Walsh is 89. Actor-singer Jeremy Clyde is 83. Singer-guitarist George Benson is 81. Writer James Patterson is 77. CNN newscaster Wolf Blitzer is 76. Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber is 76. Actor Fanny Ardant is 75. Sportscaster Bob Costas is 72. Country singer James House is 69. Actor Lena Olin is 69. Singer-actor Stephanie Mills is 67. Actor Matthew Modine is 65. Actor-comedian Keegan-Michael Key is 53. Actor Will Yun Lee is 53. Olympic silver medal figure skater Elvis Stojko (STOY'-koh) is 52. Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., is 51. Actor Guillermo Diaz is 49. Actor Anne Dudek is 48. Actor Cole Hauser is 49. Actor Kellie Williams is 48. Actor Reese Witherspoon is 48. Rock musician John Otto (Limp Bizkit) is 47. Actor Tiffany Dupont is 43. Rapper Mims is 43. Actor Constance Wu is 42. Actor James Wolk is 39.