

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 26, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 274 ~ 1 of 76

## School 2 hours late

Due to the weather and road conditions, the Groton Area School District will start 2 hours late on Tuesday, March 26, 2024. There will be no morning OST.

The FFA trip and Scrubs camp for today are canceled.

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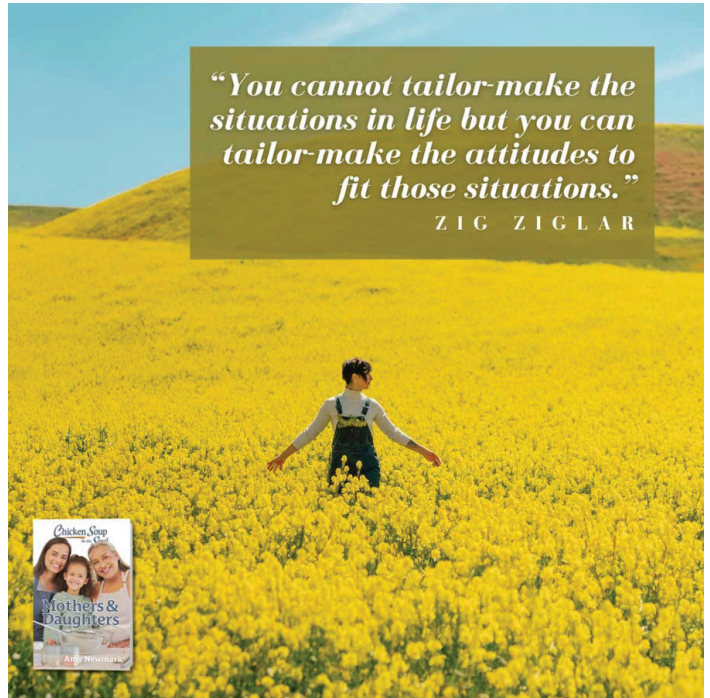
[23- Lottery Numbers](#)

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**Today on GDILIVE.COM**

**Opt-Out meeting at 6 p.m. at the GHS Gym followed by the regular school board meeting at the Library Conference Room.**

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



*"You cannot tailor-make the situations in life but you can tailor-make the attitudes to fit those situations."*

ZIG ZIGLAR

## Tuesday, March 26

School Board Meeting 6 p.m., GHS Gym  
School Breakfast: Waffles.  
School Lunch: Hot dogs, baked beans.  
Indoor track meet at Northern State University  
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, pineapple/mandarin oranges, breadstick.  
United Methodist: No Bible Study.

## Wednesday, March 27

School Breakfast: Egg bake.  
School Lunch: Cheese nachos.  
Senior Menu: Beef stew, buttermilk biscuit, Waldorf salad, sherbet.  
United Methodist: Communion coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Lent Bible Study, 7 p.m.  
Groton CM&A: Easter Cantata performed at Aberdeen Alliance, 7 p.m.  
Stations of the Cross, 7 p.m., St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church (will be livestreamed)

## **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**<sup>™</sup>

The US Supreme Court will hear arguments today on whether to restrict access to abortion medication mifepristone, a technique used for roughly 60% of abortions in the US last year. A 2023 lower court ruling to ban pandemic-era mail deliveries and telemedicine prescriptions of the drug, as well as limit its use to seven weeks, was put on hold in April. A high court decision is expected in June.

Israel canceled a diplomatic visit by its senior advisers to Washington, DC, yesterday after the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and the unconditional release of all hostages. The approval comes after four previous attempts failed.

Boeing CEO David Calhoun announced yesterday he would depart his position at the end of the year, a decision that followed a series of safety issues at the plane manufacturer. The head of the company's commercial airplane unit, Stan Deal, will resign immediately, while the board chairman, Lawrence Kellner, won't run for reelection in May.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Comedian and actor Kevin Hart becomes 25th recipient of prestigious Mark Twain Prize for American Humor. Golden Globes tapped to air on CBS for next five years.

Brazilian soccer star Dani Alves released from prison after posting \$1.1M bail while appealing rape conviction. Tiger Woods' tech-infused golf league TGL set to launch January 2025, one year later than anticipated after the league's dome collapsed in November.

Sean "Diddy" Combs' residences in Miami and Los Angeles raided by federal officials amid ongoing investigations of sex trafficking and sexual assault.

## Science & Technology

European regulators announce probes against Google, Apple, and Meta, the first set of investigations under the European Union's new Digital Markets Act antitrust law.

Engineers use large language models to help robots predict motions to allow them to self-correct after mistakes, continue on without needing human intervention.

Honeybee colonies in the Pacific Northwest at risk of collapse as temperatures warm; study suggests older worker bees emerge earlier in the spring, grow fatigued and die before new replacement workers emerge.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow -0.4%, Nasdaq -0.3%) to start shortened trading week. Truth Social owner Trump Media and Technology Group to begin trading today on Nasdaq under stock ticker DJT.

Civil fraud trial of former cryptocurrency giant Do Kwon begins in New York; Kwon, who will be tried in absentia, is accused of driving a \$45B crash of the TerraUSD and Luna coins in 2022. Adam Neumann reportedly submits bid to buy back WeWork for over \$500M.

Electric vehicle startup Lucid Motors raises \$1B from affiliate of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. Electric vehicle startup Fisker shares halted after falling 28% since Friday on news of potential deal collapse with large automaker.

## Politics & World Affairs

New York appeals court temporarily pauses enforcement of \$454M judgment in former President Donald Trump's civil business fraud case if Trump posts a lowered bond of \$175M within 10 days as appeals process plays out. Trump's hush money trial set to begin April 15 with jury selection.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) signs legislation banning children under 14 from signing up for social media accounts while requiring parental permission for 15 and 16 year olds; the law, effective Jan. 1, is expected to be challenged.

US charges group of China-linked hackers with conspiracy to commit computer intrusion and conspiracy to commit wire fraud, accuses group of spending 14 years targeting US and foreign critics, businesses, and political figures.

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**SOUTH DAKOTA  
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

## Global issues, local impacts: New SD group to push trade

Bart Pfankuch

**South Dakota News Watch**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – As a former national security adviser to former Vice President Mike Pence and a woman who grew up in small-town South Dakota, Army Col. Andrea Thompson of Sioux Falls is uniquely positioned to serve on a new coalition that will put a Rushmore State focus on political and economic issues of global importance.

Thompson will be one of about 75 thought leaders statewide who will serve on the new South Dakota advisory committee of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC), a bipartisan national group that seeks to define and strengthen America's role in worldwide governmental, economic and diplomatic affairs.

The South Dakota state advisory committee of USGLC is the 33rd state chapter to advise the national group. It hopes to usher in new opportunities for the state and its leaders to expand knowledge and understanding of global affairs and the worldwide marketplace. The panel will also seek to provide South Dakota businesses and individuals with opportunities to expand into new international markets.

The new state chapter will launch during a global affairs conference in Sioux Falls on Wednesday, March 27. Speakers include U.S. Sen. John Thune, former South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Col. Thompson.

"This is really just another resource for our community leaders, our business leaders, our political leaders to gain insight on areas of the world that we might not now be familiar with," Thompson said.

### **Access to new opportunities**

Thompson grew up in Pierre, attended the University of South Dakota and spent 28 years in the Army, serving tours as an intelligence officer in Iraq and Afghanistan. She then joined the U.S. State Department as national security adviser to the vice president and undersecretary of state for arms control and international security.

Thompson retired from the Army in 2016 and returned to South Dakota in November 2023 to become CEO of the Dakota State University Applied Research Corp., now under construction in northwest Sioux Falls.

Thompson, who serves on the national board of USGLC, said the new state committee will bring together leaders in industry, the nonprofit sector, education, agriculture, politics and the faith-based community to focus on two major objectives.

"It allows us to educate and inform the U.S. and international communities about what South Dakota brings to the economy and it gives us access to senior leaders and decision-makers that we may not normally have access to," Thompson told News Watch in an interview.

The committee will be co-chaired by Daugaard and Jim Abbott, former president of the University of South Dakota.

The South Dakota committee will create new lines of communication with leaders in a wide range of fields from other states, in Washington and across the world, Thompson said.

"I find that almost all of our problems can be solved with communication," she said. "I've told our soldiers, my government peers and business leaders that we're better together when we share ideas and when we share the lessons learned by others."

### **'We bring America together'**

USGLC CEO Liz Schrayner told News Watch that the breadth of leadership within the national organization and on state committees provides a forum for greater understanding of the United States' role on the global stage and in expanding economic opportunities for all Americans.

The Washington Post once referred to the USGLC as the "Strange Bedfellows Coalition," a moniker that Schrayner shares with pride.

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"We bring together America," she said. "Leaders who believe that America needs to be engaged in the world and who support that idea through our diplomacy and our development understand that it matters to America's economic security and our values."

Schrayer said the time is right to launch an advisory committee in South Dakota, where 1 in 5 jobs is related to trade, \$12 billion in agricultural products are exported each year, and nearly 1,000 in-state businesses export more than \$2.5 billion in goods and services a year.

"What matters globally, matters locally," she said. "South Dakotans believe and see and live the ideal that South Dakota matters to the world and that the world matters to South Dakota."

## **Creating new economic pathways**

The new advisory committee will enable South Dakota leaders from all walks of life and commerce to develop a stronger understanding of world events and how crises around the world affect life and business in the state, Schrayer said.

The state committee will create new pathways for South Dakota leaders to share the state's story of success with governmental and industry leaders in the U.S. and around the world, she said.

"There's so much that South Dakota has to be proud of," Schrayer said, noting the state's role in helping to feed the world and having strong leaders in Congress.

Luke Lindberg, CEO of South Dakota Trade, a statewide business development group launched in 2023, said the new committee will help the state play a greater role in the international marketplace and in advising national leaders on global affairs.

"What happens overseas does impact our state's producers and manufacturers, our national security and our way of life," said Lindberg, who will also serve on the March 27 panel. "It's an exciting time to see more momentum of South Dakotans being willing to step forward and say that this stuff matters."

## **Bipartisanship an important element**

Lindberg said the bipartisan nature of the USGLC in Washington and within the South Dakota committee is important to the continued success of the organization. The apolitical nature of the committee will allow members to focus on the big picture of maintaining strong American presence in global affairs and advocating for a strong international affairs budget within federal government.

Conflicts and upheaval on the global political stage do have an effect on South Dakotans and the state economy, Lindberg said. As examples, he noted that the state agricultural industry is affected by the war in Ukraine or from Chinese aggression toward Taiwan, and that airmen and women stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base might be called on at anytime to engage in U.S. military interests abroad.

"Our farmers have the propensity to ramp up production and deliver necessary foods around the world," he said. "And that's a good opportunity for us to demonstrate American leadership and make an impact back here in the heartland."

– This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization. Read more in-depth stories at [sdnewswatch.org](http://sdnewswatch.org) and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact Bart Pfankuch at [bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org](mailto:bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org).



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**This mobile home at the mobile home park on the north edge of Groton was gutted by fire Monday afternoon. The Groton Fire Department responded to the fire call; however, the fire spread quickly and everything inside was burned up. The Reuben Olson family had been living in it for several years. There were no injuries. (Photo by Paul Kosel)**

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## Gov. Noem Signs Nation's First Med Ed Bill

**Measure Stops Abortion Lobby Misinformation from Endangering Women**

Pierre, S.D. – Gov. Kristi Noem has signed the South Dakota Med Ed Bill to protect pregnant women's lives from abortion misinformation. Sponsored by Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt (R), Sen. Erin Tobin (R), Rep. Joh Hansen (R), Rep. Oren Lesmeister (D), and 26 other lawmakers, the bipartisan bill establishes materials to educate medical professionals on the ability and necessity of providing emergency care to pregnant women under South Dakota's life at conception law.

The South Dakota Med Ed Bill is the first legislation of its kind drafted to end the confusion caused by the abortion lobby through direct education to doctors. Other states have taken similar steps administratively, including Oklahoma and Kentucky attorneys general issued advisory opinions.

Kelsey Pritchard, state public affairs director for SBA Pro-Life America, celebrated the victory for South Dakota moms:

"We thank Gov. Noem for making South Dakota the first state to protect women's lives with a Med Ed law. Regardless of political affiliation or whether someone is pro-life or pro-choice, South Dakotans of all philosophies can celebrate that moms will be better protected through direct education to our doctors on their ability to exercise reasonable medical judgment in all situations.

"Though every state with a pro-life law allows pregnant women to receive emergency care, the abortion industry has sown confusion on this fact to justify their position of abortion without limits. With many in the media refusing to fact-check this obvious lie, other states should look to South Dakota in combatting dangerous abortion misinformation."

The bill passed overwhelmingly on the floors of both chambers and through House and Senate state affairs committees with only one instance of opponent testimony. The sole group that publicly spoke against the Med Ed legislation was the ACLU.

Under HB 1224, the materials will be established through the Department of Health and with input from the attorney general, medical professionals and legal experts. The video will cover the details of the state's abortion law, the most common medical conditions that threaten the life or health of a pregnant woman, the standards of care for treating a pregnant woman in a medical emergency, and a practitioner's ability to use reasonable medical judgment in all situations.

The Texas Medical Board is currently considering a request for the clarification of the state's 'life of the mother' provision. The board held a public hearing on Friday. SBA Pro-Life America is recommending the board adopt Med Ed materials educating doctors and refuting the lie pro-life laws prevent women from receiving medical care.

15 N Main St. - Ste. 101  
Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460  
Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Bones need strong muscles for support.  
Not exercising weakens those supporting muscles.  
Weak muscles put more stress on joints. - Mayo Clinic



## Homsombath assists in the GHS office



Alexandria (Alex) Homsovbath is the new voice on the phone when you call the high school. "This is my third year here, so I'm not really 'new' anymore," she smiled.

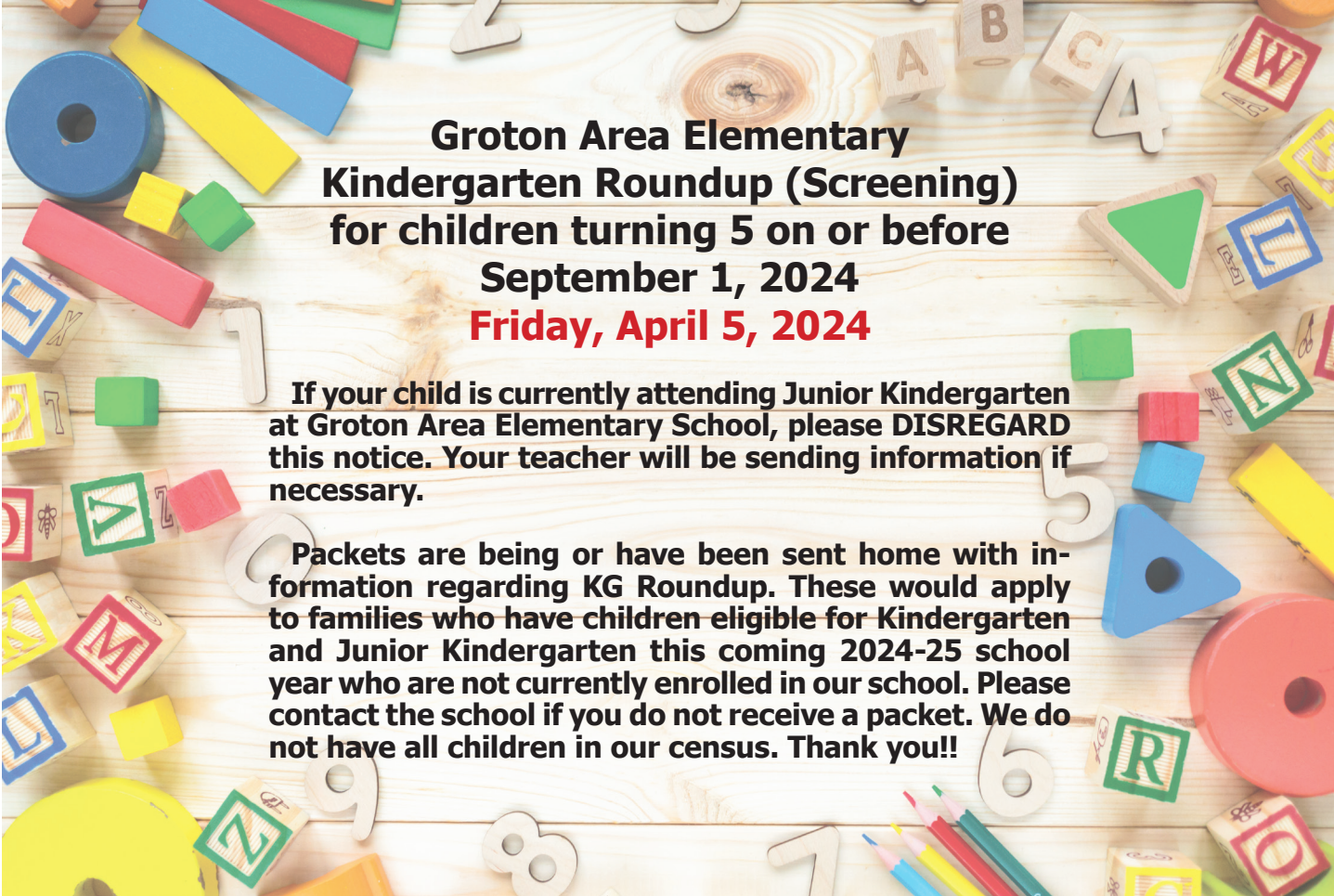
When Kathy Harry retired, Melissa Ulmer filled her position for one year. Sue Wattier started the following year without any other help in the office. Then she was relieved when Alex applied and was hired.

"My husband and I are from St. Cloud, Minnesota, and were looking for new opportunities when we decided to settle here," Homsovbath explained. "We actually live in Ferney so the commute is nice and short!"

"We have an eight year old son who is in the second grade at Groton Elementary," she smiled. "Obviously we come to school together while my husband goes various places for his painting jobs, a business he owns by himself."

"My job here is to cover study halls, substitute in various classrooms when necessary, handle lunch count, and do a variety of other tasks that need to be done on a daily basis," Homsovbath listed.

- Dorene Nelson



## 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 or have been sent home with information regarding KG Roundup. These would apply to families who have children eligible for Kindergarten and Junior Kindergarten this coming 2024-25 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!!**

## 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.**

.....

**Position available for full-time Public Works Laborer. Formal training and/or experience preferred. Salary negotiable DOE. Benefits include medical insurance, life insurance, and SD State Retirement. Please send application and resume to the City of Groton, PO Box 587, Groton, SD 57445, or email to [city.doug@nvc.net](mailto:city.doug@nvc.net). Applications will be accepted until 5pm on April 16, 2024. Full job description and application may be found at <https://www.grotonsd.gov/o/grotoncity/page/employment-options>. For more information, please call 605-397-8422. Equal opportunity employer.**

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## That's Life by Tony Bender

### Snow business

The wind is moaning, the bare trees rocking to and fro, but that's it so far. Dylan and Ben took their computers with them back to Bismarck where they live when they're not in Ashley working at the newspaper.

With a possible Snowmageddon rolling in, we decided to work remotely. Better safe than stupid. The Ashley Tribune has been coming out on a weekly basis for 123 years, and to the best of my knowledge, has never missed a publication. The Wishek Star was interrupted during WWII but has been going weekly since then. It's been nip and tuck a few times. If it can happen, it has.

Through last year's relentless winter, and of course through the COVID years, I swear we worked more from the dining room table than the office. You can do a lot with fiber optics and a generator.

As he left, Dylan expressed skepticism about the possibility of a March blizzard. He was gone before I could mention the March Blizzard of 1966 or the April Blizzard of 1997 when he was just a toddler. After several days of being marooned on the farmhouse we rented south of Hettinger, with no electricity, they finally cleared the roads and a highway patrolman gave us a ride to the motel where we took 45-minute hot showers. The patrolman carried Dylan over a 20-foot snowbank to the road.

It's hard to explain the Blizzard of 1966 without pictures because it seems impossible, other worldly, another planet. I remember our two and a half story home in Edgeley had a snowbank extending from the roof far into the next block. Later, we sledged from the roof.

It was a three-day storm with snowfall totals as great as 38 inches and drifts as high as 40 feet. About 20 people died in the Dakotas and Minnesota. As happened again in 1997, tens of thousands of livestock died. I seem to remember that in the Edgeley area we got 36 inches. Winds gusted to 70 mph, sculpting the snow into huge abstract drifts.

Next door in a small mobile home the two women teachers who lived there—twins, I think—were blocked in with just one man—my dad—and a grain scoop between them and freedom. It must have taken him hours to dig out from our front porch before he got to the trailer. No small feat.

We've probably all seen the pictures of people walking on snowbanks level with phone lines, buried freight trains that looked like toys compared to the walls of snow around them. At my grandfather's dairy farm near Gackle, a snowbank reached to the peak of his big barn, again, providing a once-in-a-lifetime sledding opportunity. I marvel that my grandfather cleared the yard with a 1940's era Co-op loader tractor. No cab.

Comparatively, I'm a guy who manages to get my Bobcat buried, and that takes some doing, but he managed with chains on a two-wheel tractor. He was like Evel Knievel with a tractor. He knew exactly the capabilities of his machines. I wouldn't ride with him on the drawbar when he was doing wheelies up a muddy hill. He wasn't showing off. He just knew what he needed to do to make that hill. His motto I think was "Give `er hell."

I'm still prudent when it comes to winter driving. If it's bad outside, you'll find me at home. In meteorologists I trust. Of course, when we were teenagers, we were out of our minds. We were also tough enough to dig and push Al Cat's '72 Chevy aqua short box truck out of trouble. Not that we didn't have to knock on a farmer's door at midnight now and again to explain why we were four-wheeling section lines. That pickup was pretty good in snow—probably better than the F-150 I drive today—so when we buried it, it was buried.

At least we had four wheel drive. I remember Doug Bra racing his hopped-up bright yellow '63 Chevy Impala across the snow-covered pastures and then cranking the wheel. Cookies! Lord, he was hard on that car. And law enforcement. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that he'd tear the transmission out every weekend and spend the next week putting another one in just so he could do it again.

So far, we've had a pretty uneventful winter, and I'm good with that. I've got plenty of snow memories. Don't need no more.



## Fifth Graders take second at YMCA Tournament

Pictured in back left to right, are Coach Ryan Tracy, Carter Boerger, Grady Zeck, Ivan Schwan, Ryland Blackwood, Colton Morehouse and Coach Jason Rowen; in front, left to right, are Kinton Tracy, Mason Locke, Hank Hill and Graydn Rowen.

The Groton Area 5th grade team placed second in the Aberdeen Family YMCA 50th Annual Interstate Boys Basketball Tournament held March 22 - 23, 2024.

Ivan Schwan and Kinton Tracy were selected as Most Valuable Players in the four games. The MVP is voted on by the officials. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



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## Easter Baskets by Tina ~ 605-397-7285



Fire truck Easter basket with a light up cup three mystery eggs, a light up football, a space game, blue peeps bubbles and a blue fan



It has a blue speaker , pink bubbles a blue fan, and stress carrot a stuffed bunny with three clear Easter bunnies with jelly beans in side them



The stuff inside it a cup that lights up, a stuffed cow, a bow with a arrow toy, a shooter game, a blue peeps bubble and a green bubble fan



The stuff that's in this basket yellow peeps bubbles a duck puzzle, a stuffed bunny, four mystery colored Easter eggs with prize inside a jump rope, a cup that lights up on top and a pink fan with bubbles in it





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **COMMENTARY**

## **School boards have local control, until Legislature knows better** by DANA HESS

**MARCH 25, 2024 2:59 PM**

After the last legislative session, school board members across the state have to wonder whatever happened to local control. It seems that now the state aid their school districts receive will come with conditions.

The 2024 Legislature stepped in to tell school districts two ways that they have to spend their funding: They approved a bill that sets a \$45,000 minimum salary for teachers, effective July 1, 2026. School districts that fail to meet the salary benchmark risk an accreditation review or could be dealt a \$500-per-teacher deduction in state funding.

The same bill requires school districts to spend 97% of the increase in state aid on teachers' compensation — which includes salaries and benefits — effective July 1 of this year. The unaccounted for 3% is laughably explained as giving the school districts flexibility to spend on other salaries, programming and transportation. Imagine being handed a dollar and told that 97 cents needed be to spent on a certain item, but the other 3 cents, well, you can go crazy with that.

This isn't the first time the Legislature has told school districts how to spend their funding. A half-percent increase in the state sales tax was used to raise teacher pay in 2016. That bumped South Dakota's teacher pay ranking all the way up to 47th in the nation. It has since fallen back to 49th.

The recent action by the Legislature amounts to an unfunded mandate. Schools will get a 4% raise in state funding this year, but nothing to boost salaries to \$45,000. That's a salary mark that 37 school districts don't currently hit.

State aid to education is tied to enrollment. Imagine the delight of small, rural school districts that are seeing their enrollments slide, which in turn cuts their state funding, at the same time that the Legislature mandates a minimum salary for teachers.

"I know we've heard a lot of questions on sustainability of a bill like this and I think, in the future, this type of bill will lead to future discussions of funding, funding per student and how we fund education," said Sen. Sydney Davis, a Republican from Burbank, in a South Dakota Searchlight story.

Davis' look to the future is exactly what's wrong with school funding in South Dakota. Lawmakers are continually unable to hit on a solution for how to fund education. While that plan changes year-to-year, all school districts have to look forward to are more discussions that could lead to more questionable solutions. In the meantime, teacher pay in the state will continue to be a bottom-dweller.

At least in 2016, when the Legislature told school districts how to spend their money, they had the good manners to come up with some extra funding. This time the message from lawmakers is, "Here's your mandate, if it doesn't work, we'll try something else."

School districts aren't blameless for the state's low ranking in teacher pay. There are too many school districts where teacher pay is not a priority. Those are the same schools that complain when it's difficult to find teachers to work for such low wages.

School districts in this state deserve a funding formula that doesn't change with the whims of the Legislature. Teachers in this state deserve a wage that's not a national embarrassment. To do that, lawmakers are going to have to come up with a funding source.

Dictating how school districts spend a 4% increase in funding isn't going to raise teachers' salaries by much and will likely shortchange other aspects of school budgets. It's obvious that the Legislature wants to micromanage the way school districts spend their funding. If that micromanagement doesn't come with extra funding, it's a dereliction of their legislative duty.

Lawmakers profess to be happy that each school district in South Dakota is locally controlled. That is, they're happy with local control until they get a better idea about how school districts should operate. The bill just passed by the Legislature doesn't amount to progress on teacher pay. It's just another nail in the coffin of local control.

## Q&A: Thune adapts to the political 'reality we live with' as he seeks leadership post

BY: SETH TUPPER - MARCH 25, 2024 7:00 AM

It may seem illogical for John Thune to run for Senate Republican leader after he was booed by Republicans in his own state, but as Thune says, "these aren't normal times."

The booing happened in September. Former President Donald Trump headlined a South Dakota Republican Party fundraiser in a Rapid City arena packed with 7,000 people. Thune did not attend.

When Thune's picture appeared on a video board, many in the crowd voiced their disapproval. He heard about it later from members of his Rapid City field office.

"They said, 'There were a lot of people from other states. That wasn't all South Dakotans,'" Thune recalled, laughing at the attempt to spare his ego. "Nevertheless, that's a lot of Republicans booing."

Thune eventually endorsed Trump, but not until last month, after it was clear the former president would once again be the party's nominee. The endorsement came three days before Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell announced his plan to relinquish the title of Senate minority leader.

McConnell will step down in November, when Senate Republicans will elect his successor. Thune is currently the minority whip, which is the No. 2 Republican Senate position. He and the former whip, John Cornyn of Texas, are the leading candidates to succeed McConnell.

It's a full circle moment for Thune. He won his Senate seat by beating then-Minority Leader Tom Daschle, a Democrat, in 2004.

Now 63 years old and serving his fourth Senate term after three House terms, Thune spoke recently with South Dakota Searchlight about his ambition to succeed McConnell, his thoughts on Trump, and more. Following are Searchlight's questions and Thune's answers, edited for length and clarity.

The last time you were up for reelection, you thought about not running. How do you go from that to seeking a leadership role that you might hold until you're 82 years old, if you follow McConnell's lead?

Well, I don't expect to serve that long. I think Senator McConnell was more the exception than the rule in terms of his longevity, and he obviously got a lot done and leaves big shoes to fill.

But, honestly, as I thought about running for reelection, one of the things that kind of motivated me to do it was the idea that this possibility might come along.

What's in it for South Dakota if you get the leadership job?

Everybody says, "You ran against Daschle and you made the argument that his leadership position was hurting the state." And that was because at that time, the national party, the Democrat Party, was moving way left of where South Dakota was, and in many ways his leadership role got him significantly out of sync with people in South Dakota.

I think the majority of South Dakotans' views on the big issues of the day sync up nicely with the Republican Party, and so I think it's a chance to put South Dakota's agenda on the national agenda and do things that are good for our state, and make sure that we have a voice in the major decisions that are made.

When was the last time you saw Tom Daschle?

I haven't seen Tom in a good long time. I'm trying to remember when the last time would have been. Sometimes there are events in South Dakota where we may be at the same place, or even for that matter out here in Washington, but I typically haven't had a chance to interact with him.

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On the rare occasions when you have interacted, what's that been like?  
Well, as they say, time heals, right?

Does it really? That seems hard to believe, given how bitterly fought that race was. I think the more time that passes, the less hard those memories are for people. But at one point we were obviously political adversaries. When you're in politics, you take positions and have to articulate your views in a way that helps your team succeed.

He's got the luxury now of having been out of politics for some time, and I think that gives you a different perspective. I was out of politics for a while after my first Senate race, too [a loss to then-Sen. Tim Johnson, a Democrat, in 2002]. But eventually you move on, and I sort of feel like that's been true. I think that both of us realize that this, in a way, is a business, and when you're in that business, there's a certain set of rules you play by, but you're still humans and still care about a lot of the same things, while you have different views on the issues. So I try and take that broader perspective, and I hope he does, too.

Twenty years ago you were a Republican hero for beating Daschle. Then, last year at a South Dakota rally for Trump that you did not attend, you were booed by an arena full of people. How do you process that?

The one thing that I keep in perspective is that I certainly haven't changed my views. I have the same conservative, core values that I've had my entire time in public life and prior to it. I think that these days, politics sometimes revolves around personalities more so than it does the issues. But if you look at the core values — the things that I ran on and ran for — that's still the same person I am. But I would say that obviously the party, in many ways, is a different party than it was back then.

What's your place in today's Republican Party?

Just bringing right-of-center, conservative, common sense to the big issues of the day, whether it's how we deal with the border, how we deal with the economy, some of the cultural issues. I'm still about limited government, personal freedom coupled with individual responsibility, economic freedom, free markets, free enterprise, strong national defense. Those are the core Republican values that I hold dear and that I want to be able to advocate here in Washington.

Gov. Kristi Noem's forthcoming book is titled "No Going Back." The description from the publisher says she "explains how the country is not going back to the Republican Party of the 2000s. And that's a good thing." So it sounds like she's saying the party should move on from people like you. How do you respond to that?

Things have changed. We're more animated these days by the personality of Donald Trump, and that's the reality we live with and deal with if you want to be involved in public life. That's kind of where our voters are, and you have to listen to your voters.

But I also think there are some of these principles that to me are transcendent. And I think if you present your views and articulate the things you believe in, I still believe that you can do that with the strength of your convictions, and knowing that many times you're going to disagree and disagree strongly with people on the other side of the aisle or the other side of the issue, but you can still do it in a way that is respectful and hopefully appeals to people's hopes and aspirations rather than preying on their fears.

I'm guessing you probably know President Biden fairly well from his time in the Senate, and I wonder, would it be easier for you to work with him than Trump, at least on a personal level?

Everybody brings their own personality to this, but I would much rather have a President Trump — who I'm going to agree with on the issues probably 95% of the time, although there'll be some differences — than a President Biden, whose positions on the issues and the direction he's leading the country is very contrary to where I believe we ought to be headed.

I've conveyed that in conversations with former President Trump that if he's successful — and I think he very well could be — and if we get the majority back in the Senate and I have a leadership role there, we want to hit the ground running and get to work for the American people.



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And I think that if you come into this and you're motivated by that more than anything else, you can put aside some of whatever the personality differences are that you have, and try to focus on the greater good.

Will Trump influence the leader race?

I don't know the answer to that. Right now we have 49 Republican senators — hopefully after the election it'll be a slightly higher number — and those are the people that ultimately are going to vote. It's a secret ballot election. The former president's views and influence are certainly felt here in the Senate like they are everywhere else. But at the end of the day, I think this is going to be about relationships and what people want to see in the future leader for the Senate.

Obviously, they're going to want somebody who can work with the president, and I've had that conversation with a number of my colleagues and conveyed that directly to the former president that I believe that if he's the next president, we want to do everything we can to make him successful on behalf of the American people.

Earlier you mentioned being out of politics after you lost a race in 2002. That could've been the end of your political career. What's it been like to go from that to running for Republican Senate leader?

Sometimes there are things you can control in your life and things you can control in politics, and sometimes there are things you can't. And I've been blessed to be on both sides — on the short side of an election from which I learned lessons, and on the winning side. I'm grateful to the good Lord for the lessons you learn in the good times and the bad times, and certainly I'd much rather win than lose. It was more fun in '04 than it was in '02, let's put it that way.

But you learn lessons either way, and I think having lost an election, there's a certain humility that comes with that. You're very humbled by that, and I think that helped shape the way I approach work and life more generally, that you're grateful for the opportunities but realize that they're all temporary, and you want to make the most of what you've been given in the amount of time we have here.

## More than 26,000 self-managed abortions may have occurred post-Dobbs, study shows

BY: ELISHA BROWN - MARCH 25, 2024 5:05 PM

Self-managed abortions rose by more than 26,000 in the six months after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* nearly two years ago, according to a peer-reviewed study published Monday in *JAMA*, the American Medical Association's journal.

Researchers determined that an increase of approximately 27,838 online orders of abortion pills between July and December 2022 corresponded to the findings of an additional 26,055 medication abortions reported outside the formal health care system, the study found.

The *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling in June 2022 overturned the federal right to abortion, returning the decision to the states and leading to 14 with near-total abortion bans.

The study was published a day before the nation's highest court is set to hear arguments in a case over the federal approval of mifepristone, one of two drugs used for medication abortions. A decision in favor of an anti-abortion group could limit access to mifepristone, even in states with protective abortion laws.

Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine, an anti-abortion group of physicians, is asking the court to rule that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration should revert to pre-2016 mifepristone regulations. The change would reduce mifepristone's use from 10 weeks gestation to seven, alter the dosage, require three in-person visits, and only allow doctors to provide medication abortions, among other restrictions.

Lawyers for the Biden administration are urging the court to keep the current regulations on the drug. Hundreds of studies point to the pill's safety. Since the FDA approved mifepristone in 2000, 32 deaths have been associated with the drug's use as of December 2022.

Regardless of the outcome, the *JAMA* research suggests that some people in states with strict abortion bans have found ways to terminate their pregnancies outside of a clinician setting.

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"Given the increases we've seen and reductions in access, we could make a good guess that a lot of these pills are going to states with those bans," said Abigail Aiken, a University of Texas at Austin public affairs professor and the study's lead author.

Researchers analyzed data provided by telemedicine organizations — such as Aid Access, an international abortion pill provider, community networks and online vendors. Community networks — organizations run by volunteers that sometimes work offline or through hotlines and provide pills at no-cost to recipients — accounted for more than half of all abortion pill orders. Online vendors are websites that give various price options for buying abortion medications.

Post-Dobbs, there was an estimated monthly average of 5,931 provisions — orders — of abortion pills from those main sources. That's a 322% increase from a pre-Dobbs average of 1,407 provisions per month, according to the study.

Despite the availability of abortion pills, Aiken said some people may not want to terminate a pregnancy without clinician support. She noted from her previous 2016 research in Ireland, before the country legalized abortion in 2018, feelings associated with self-managed abortion, including isolation.

"They oftentimes wanted to connect with the formal health care setting," Aiken said. "They were experiencing prolonged symptoms and wanted to make sure they didn't need help."

Aiken's latest study broadens the scope of research on medication abortions since the end of Roe.

Abortions through telehealth increased post-Dobbs, according to a Society of Family Planning #WeCount report published last month. They made up 16% of all reported abortions as of September 2023. Before Dobbs, just 4% of all abortions were telehealth abortions.

"Telehealth abortion has really had a huge impact," Ushma Upadhyay, a professor at the University of California, San Francisco's Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, told States Newsroom in February. "We're addressing unmet need that existed in those states, even before Dobbs. I think that a lot of the unmet need in the blue states is being met, as well as people traveling from states with abortion bans."

A report released last week by the Guttmacher Institute showed that 63% of all clinician-provided abortions in the U.S. last year were medication abortions.

There were more than 1 million abortions provided in the formal health care system in 2023, the largest number since 2012. In 2020, medication abortions made up 53% of all abortions, according to the institute.

The data "helps paint the picture of the extreme need that we are experiencing around reproductive health in this country," said Monica Simpson, the executive director of SisterSong, a Georgia-based reproductive justice organization.

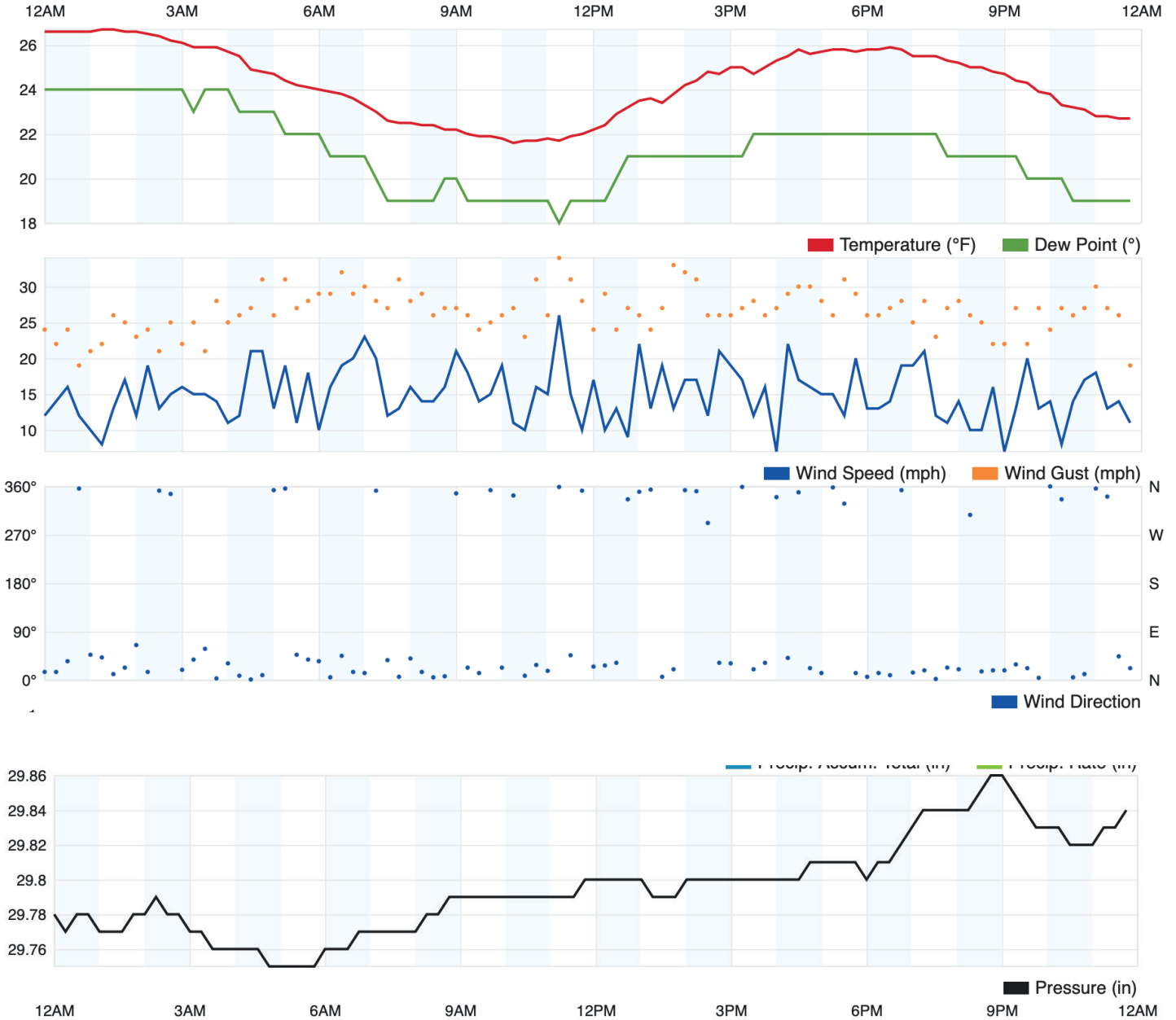
Simpson said a Supreme Court decision restricting medication abortion access would create a scenario similar to the aftermath of the Alabama Supreme Court ruling that said frozen embryos are "unborn children." That ruling brought fertility services in the state to a standstill until the governor signed legislation providing criminal and civil immunity to IVF providers and patients.

"Our opposition — these anti-abortion extremists — this is what they want. They want to intentionally create chaos around us," she said.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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Today



Patchy  
Blowing Snow  
and Blustery

High: 23 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 1 °F

Wednesday



Sunny

High: 26 °F

Wednesday  
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 5 °F

Thursday



Sunny

High: 37 °F



## Windy Conditions Continue Today

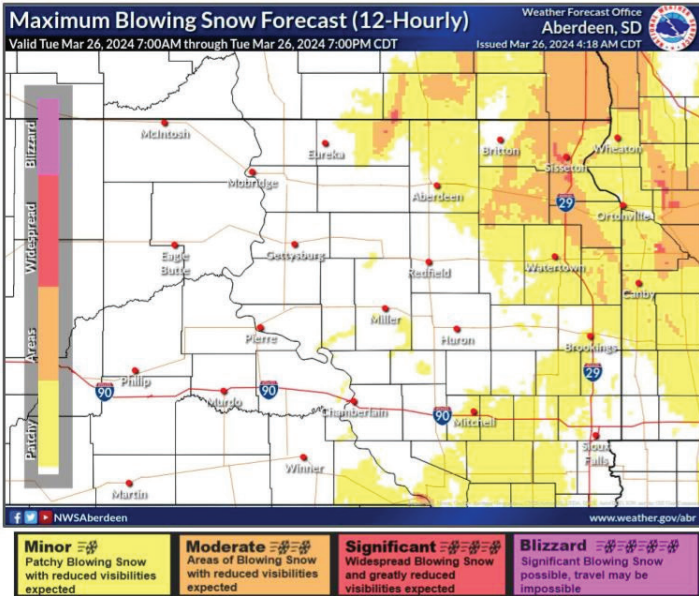
March 26, 2024  
4:44 AM

Lingering blowing/drifting snow impacts, mainly eastern areas.

- Minor to Moderate blowing snow impacts for eastern areas today, including I-29 & US Hwy 12

### Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	3/26 Tue																
	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm
Aberdeen	35	36	36	37	36	36	33	31	31	30	30	28	26	25	24	22	21
Britton	35	37	37	37	37	37	36	35	35	33	33	31	30	28	25	25	24
Brookings	39	39	38	38	37	36	35	35	33	33	32	31	29	28	24	21	17
Chamberlain	32	32	31	30	30	29	28	28	26	25	25	24	22	21	16	13	10
Clark	37	38	38	39	38	38	37	36	36	35	33	32	30	28	26	24	23
Eagle Butte	28	26	26	28	28	28	26	25	24	24	23	23	22	20	16	15	13
Ellendale	37	37	39	40	38	39	37	35	35	33	32	30	30	26	25	24	24
Eureka	31	31	32	31	32	31	30	30	29	29	28	28	26	25	23	22	20
Gettysburg	32	33	35	33	33	33	30	30	29	29	29	28	26	25	23	21	20
Huron	38	37	37	36	36	33	32	31	31	30	30	28	26	24	22	20	18
Kennebec	32	33	33	33	33	32	31	31	31	29	28	26	24	22	18	15	14
McIntosh	28	26	26	28	29	29	30	28	29	28	29	29	26	25	21	17	15
Milbank	36	40	41	40	38	38	37	37	37	35	33	32	30	28	26	25	24
Miller	32	33	33	32	32	32	30	30	29	29	26	26	24	22	20	18	17
Mobridge	30	30	29	29	29	29	28	28	28	26	26	26	26	25	21	20	16
Murdo	29	29	29	30	31	30	30	28	28	26	25	24	22	20	17	14	12
Pierre	29	28	28	28	28	28	28	25	26	26	25	25	23	22	17	13	10
Redfield	35	36	37	37	35	35	33	31	31	30	30	28	26	24	22	21	20
Sisseton	40	41	41	41	41	40	39	38	38	38	37	35	32	31	30	30	28
Watertown	36	38	39	38	38	37	36	35	36	36	33	32	31	28	26	25	23
Webster	39	43	43	43	41	41	39	39	39	39	38	37	35	32	31	30	28
Wheaton	35	37	37	38	38	37	36	36	36	35	33	32	30	26	25	24	23



Our storm system is winding down, with just some lingering light snow across northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota this morning. Additional accumulations will be less than an inch. Otherwise, expect windy conditions to continue, with areas of blowing and drifting snow throughout the day. Untreated roads may be icy and snow covered, so use caution when traveling today.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 27 °F at 12:51 AM

Low Temp: 22 °F at 10:16 AM

Wind: 34 mph at 11:12 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 33 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 74 in 1905

Record Low: -13 in 1964

Average High: 47

Average Low: 24

Average Precip in March.: 0.70

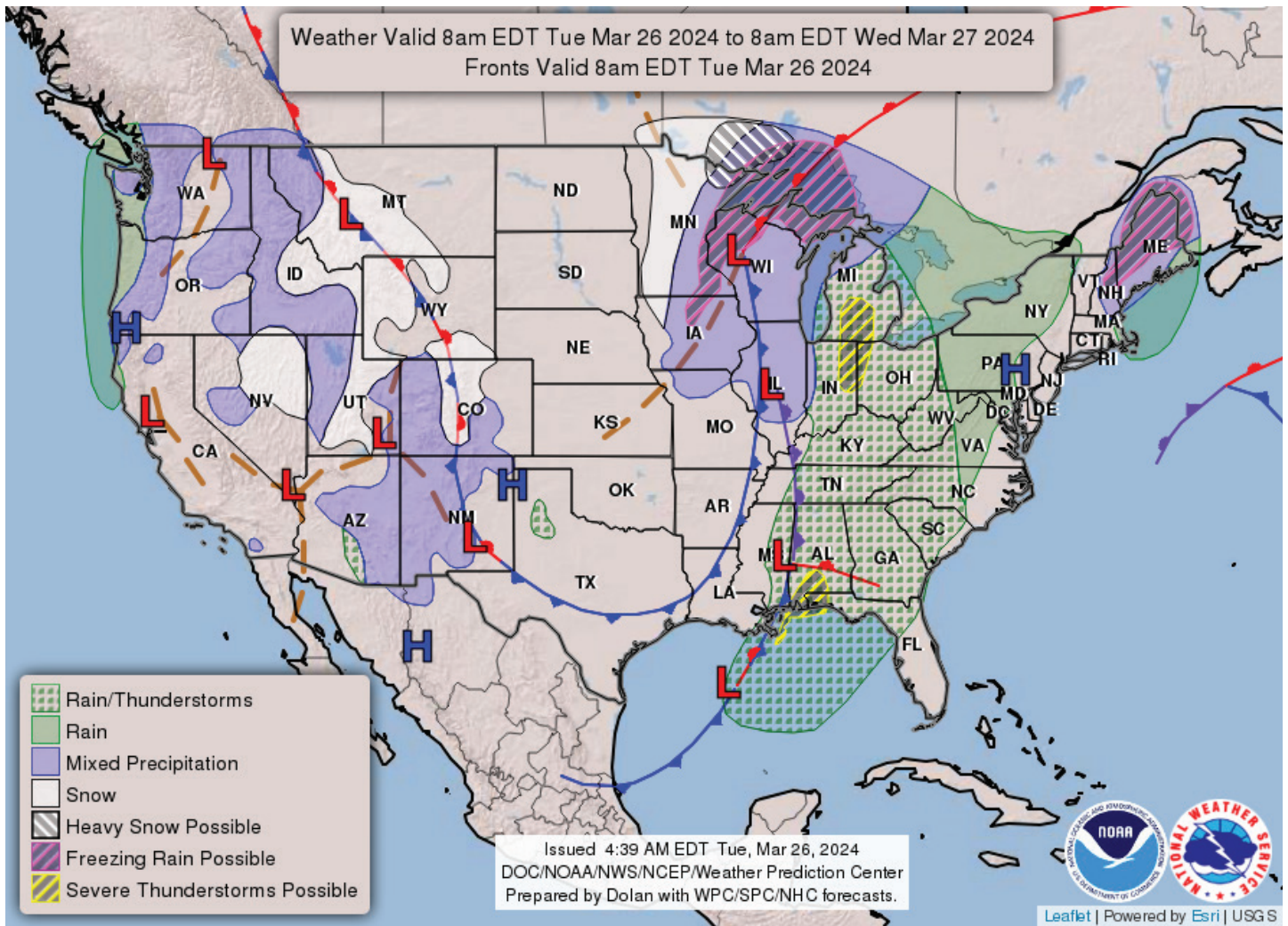
Precip to date in March: 0.78

Average Precip to date: 1.87

Precip Year to Date: 0.85

Sunset Tonight: 7:54:46 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:18:58 am





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## Today in Weather History

March 26, 1977: During the early morning, severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 1 mile NE of Watertown in Codington County. Also, hail up to 1.50 inches in diameter fell in Milbank, Grant County.

March 26, 1995: Heavy snow fell over most of central South Dakota, as well as in the northern Black Hills. Heavier accumulations included 14 inches at Murdo, 13 inches at Lead, and 12 inches at Eureka, and Leola. Only a few traffic accidents were reported, although many other vehicles slid into ditches. There was some damage to power lines and poles. Some livestock losses were feared, as the snow fell during the calving season, although this could not be assessed in the short term.

March 26, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across the Northern Plains brought heavy snow from 6 to 15 inches in a band across much of central and northeast South Dakota from the evening to the early morning hours. Schools were delayed or canceled and road travel was difficult, if not impossible. Some snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Stephan, Willow Lake, Harrold, Miller, and near Hoven; 7 inches at Hayti, east of Hayes, and Eagle Butte; 8 inches at Highmore and Doland; 9 inches at Orient, Bryant, and near Onida; 10 inches at Gettysburg and Faulkton; 11 inches at Seneca and Redfield. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included: 12 inches 23 miles north of Highmore; 13 inches near Agar; 15 inches 24 miles north of Highmore.

1913 - The Ohio River Basin flood reached a peak. Ten inch rains over a wide area of the Ohio River Basin inundated cities in Ohio, drowning 467 persons, and causing 147 million dollars damage. The Miami River at Dayton reached a level eight feet higher than ever before. The flood, caused by warm weather and heavy rains, was the second mostly deadly of record for the nation. (David Ludlum)

1948: Good Friday tornadoes moved from Terre Haute to Redkey, Indiana killing 20 people. About 80% of the town of Coatesville was destroyed, and 16 people were killed. The Coatesville Carnegie Library was a total loss. The path was a half mile wide.

1954 - The temperature at Allaket, AK, plunged to 69 degrees below zero. (The Weather Channel)

1971 - Parts of northern and central Georgia experienced their worst snow and ice storm since 1935. Two day power outages ruined two million eggs at poultry hatches. Two persons were killed when a tree landed on their car. (25th-26th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front crossing the Plateau Region produced high winds in Utah causing some property damage. Winds gusted to 51 mph at Salt Lake City. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Twenty cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 73 degrees at Flagstaff AZ, 90 degrees at Sacramento CA, 95 degrees at Santa Maria CA, 95 degrees at Los Angeles CA, 99 degrees at Tucson AZ, and 100 degrees at Phoenix AZ set records for March. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - The Easter Bunny brought record warm temperatures to the central U.S. while such records were still welcome. A dozen cities reported record warm readings, including Dodge City KS with an afternoon high of 88 degrees. Strong southerly winds gusted to 51 mph at Dodge City, and reached 55 mph at Salina KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Fair weather prevailed across the nation for the second day in a row. Freezing temperatures were reported in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region in the wake of an early spring snowstorm. Afternoon highs were again in the 70s and 80s in the southeastern U.S., and for the ninth day in a row, temperatures in the southwestern U.S. reached the 90s. (The National Weather Summary)

2009: The proof is in the pudding - A NOAA Weather Radio can save your life. Near Belk, AL, a family was alerted to a tornado by their weather radio; they went to their storm cellar. They heard the "jet roar" of the EF1 tornado as it damaged their home; they were unhurt.



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### FACING REALITY

Linus approached Charlie Brown in a comic strip and boldly asked, "Charlie Brown, do you want to know what the trouble is with you?"

"No," he answered.

"That's the trouble with you, Charlie Brown," screamed Linus. "You don't want to know what the trouble is with you!"

Charlie Brown is not the only one with that problem.

Few want to hear or accept the fact that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." But, not wanting to listen to that fact, does not change anything.

To refuse to hear something does not mean that it was not said. And, if we deny something does not mean that it is not true. Sin is sin, and it comes in all sizes and shapes, colors and containers, with many options and countless opportunities.

We all seem to have a Charlie Brown attitude. Few want to admit that we have broken God's laws or that we have refused to follow the teachings of Jesus. But, Paul said all have sinned and fallen short of God's plan. That "all" includes every one of us.

Denying the fact of sin will not keep us from sinning nor eliminate the penalty that comes from being disobedient to God. No one is foolish enough to believe that if they deny the reality of death, they will live forever. We must all admit and accept what is: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life!"

Prayer: Open our hearts, Father, to the truths in Your Word and the reality of sin and salvation. May we look to You in faith, believing that You alone can save us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Romans 3:23



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:  
03.22.24

3 8 31 35 44 16

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$1,100,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 38  
Mins 50 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.23.24

5 7 12 41 52 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$2,400,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 53 Mins 50  
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.24.24

5 19 30 37 45 13

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 8 Mins 50  
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.23.24

6 11 16 25 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$33,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 8  
Mins 50 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.23.24

18 24 43 46 47 11

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 37 Mins 50  
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.23.24

6 23 25 34 51 3

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$800,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 37 Mins 50  
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

## News from the Associated Press

### Spring storm lashes central US with snow and threatens South with severe weather

By JIM SALTER and WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

Snow, rain and gusting winds lashed a large swath of the Central U.S. on Monday, dashing spring hopes, as the South braced for thunderstorms and possible tornadoes and as the risk of wildfires in southern Texas reached critical levels.

The storm hit with parts of the country still in recovery mode from their own severe weather, particularly in the Northeast. Tens of thousands of people still lacked power in Maine, where a storm coated parts of the state in thick ice.

The new storm was expected to bring strong winds, sleet, freezing rain and snow to a broad swath from the Dakotas to the Gulf Coast through Tuesday.

"A lot of people get excited because they think the spring is coming in and the winter's over, but since I've been little, every time there's that one last snowstorm that we always get, and here it is," said Jarvis Smith, of Golden Valley, Minnesota, as he shoveled snow.

Warnings or advisories for blizzard or winter storm conditions covered much of Minnesota and parts of Wisconsin, upper Michigan, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas.

In northern parts of Minnesota and Wisconsin, snow could fall as fast as 2 inches (5 centimeters) per hour, the National Weather Service said.

"Blowing and falling snow will significantly reduce visibility, and blizzard conditions will persist into Tuesday across portions of the Plains and northern Minnesota," the weather service said in an update at 4 p.m. Monday. "Travel may be very difficult or impossible at times. Power outages and tree damage are possible in some areas due to heavy snow, icing, and strong winds. Also, plan on slippery roads."

Wind warnings or advisories stretched from Iowa to Appalachia and down to the Gulf Coast. Severe thunderstorms with a threat for tornadoes and other damaging winds were possible in east Texas and the Lower Mississippi Valley. Strong storms, some producing tornado warnings, had already made their way through parts of Oklahoma and Texas on Sunday night.

The storm was largely expected to spare the Twin Cities area after socking it Sunday with heavy snow. The state patrol reported about 400 crashes since Sunday that injured over 20 people and killed at least two.

Some schools in Minnesota closed. Almost three dozen flights were canceled at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, and more than 100 were delayed.

In South Dakota, traffic moved slowly overnight along a section of Interstate 29 where trucks struggled to make it up a slick hill. Conditions remained slippery in the eastern third of the state, but no fatal accidents were reported.

"I think they (drivers) are accustomed to it," said Brad Reiners, of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety, crediting warnings ahead of the blast. "They took heed pretty well."

Road conditions were treacherous throughout central Nebraska, where up to 8 inches (20.32 centimeters) of snow was expected through Tuesday. Several inches of snow had already fallen by midday Monday. A long stretch of Interstate 80 was closed in both directions.

Weather officials in south Texas warned of gusty, dry conditions that could rapidly spread fires.

Parts of the Northeast got slammed over the weekend, too. Vermont, New Hampshire and most of Maine got buried in snow that measured more than 2 feet (0.6 meters) in some areas, toppling trees and causing car crashes. Tens of thousands of people from Maine to New York remained without power early Monday.

Repair crews in Maine had succeeded in cutting outages from 200,000 over the weekend to less than 50,000 by late Monday afternoon.

Nearly three-quarters of an inch of ice was recorded at Portland's airport, said Justin Arnott, of the National Weather Service in Gray, Maine. But the weather outlook was good for utility workers, with no



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bitter cold in the forecast and no fast melt that could threaten flooding.

Areas farther inland got fluffy snow coveted by skiers. Bryant Pond, Maine, recorded 25 inches (63.50 centimeters), and Pinkham Notch, New Hampshire, had just shy of 30 inches (76.20 centimeters).

## **Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is expected to announce his VP pick for his independent White House bid**

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Robert F. Kennedy Jr. plans to announce his running mate Tuesday as he races to secure a place on the ballot for his independent campaign for president.

In advance of an event Tuesday in Oakland, Kennedy and his aides have circulated the names of several contenders, including celebrities with no political experience. Those names include NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers and "Dirty Jobs" star Mike Rowe as well as former Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura. Speculation most recently has centered on Nicole Shanahan, a lawyer and philanthropist who bankrolled a Super Bowl ad for Kennedy.

"This announcement is really going to shake up the political establishment," Kennedy said in a video he posted on social media last week.

Kennedy's campaign has spooked Democrats, who are fighting third-party options that could draw support from President Joe Biden and help Republican former President Donald Trump. As they head into a 2020 rematch, Biden and Trump are broadly unpopular with the U.S. public and will compete for the votes of people who aren't enthusiastic about either of them.

Without the backing of a party, Kennedy faces an arduous task to get on the ballot, with varying rules across the 50 states. He's picking a running mate now because about half of the states require him to designate one before he can apply for ballot access.

The requirement is already bedeviling Kennedy's ballot access effort in Nevada, where Democratic Secretary of State Francisco Aguilar said in a March 7 letter to independent candidates that they must nominate a vice presidential candidate before collecting signatures. The letter came days after Kennedy's campaign announced he'd collected enough signatures in the state. If Aguilar's opinion survives a likely legal challenge, Kennedy will have to start again in collecting just over 10,000 signatures in the state.

"This is the epitome of corruption," said Paul Rossi, a Kennedy campaign lawyer, in a statement Monday, accusing Aguilar of doing the bidding of the Democratic National Committee.

Kennedy has secured access to the ballot in Utah. He and an allied super PAC, American Values 2024, say they've collected enough signatures to qualify in several other states, including swing states Arizona, Nevada and Georgia, but election officials there have not yet signed off.

Kennedy is a descendant of a storied Democratic family that includes his father, Robert F. Kennedy, who was a U.S. senator, attorney general and presidential candidate, and his uncle former President John F. Kennedy.

He began his campaign as a primary challenge to Biden but last fall said he'd run as an independent instead.

Kennedy was a teenager when his father, known as RFK, was assassinated during his own presidential campaign in 1968. RFK Jr. built a reputation of his own as an activist, author and lawyer who fought for environmental causes such as clean water.

Along the way, his activism has veered into conspiracies and contradicted scientific consensus, most infamously on vaccines. Some members of his family have publicly criticized his views. Dozens of Kennedy family members sent a message when they posed with Biden at a St. Patrick's Day reception at the White House in a photo his sister Kerry Kennedy posted to social media.

RFK Jr. is leveraging a network of loyal supporters he's built over years, many of them drawn to his anti-vaccine activism and his message that the U.S. government is beholden to corporations.

The Democratic National Committee, meanwhile, is gearing up to take on Kennedy and other third-party options, including No Labels, a well-funded group working to recruit a centrist ticket. The effort is overseen

by veteran strategist Mary Beth Cahill, whose resume includes chief of staff to the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, another of RFK Jr.'s uncles.

Many Democrats blame Green Party candidates for Al Gore's loss to George W. Bush in 2000 and Hillary Clinton's loss to Trump in 2016.

## Israel and Hamas dig in as international pressure builds for a cease-fire in Gaza

By TIA GOLDENBERG, JACK JEFFERY and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday vowed to press ahead with Israel's offensive and blasted a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a pause in the fighting, saying it had emboldened Hamas to reject a separate proposal for a cease-fire and hostage release.

As the war in Gaza grinds through a sixth month, each side has publicly insisted that its own idea of victory is in reach and rejected international efforts to stem the bloodshed.

Netanyahu has said Israel can achieve its aims of dismantling Hamas and returning scores of hostages if it expands its ground offensive to the southern city of Rafah, where over half of Gaza's population has sought refuge, many in crowded tent camps.

Hamas has said it will hold onto the hostages until Israel agrees to a more permanent cease-fire, withdraws its forces from Gaza and releases hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants. It said late Monday that it has rejected a recent proposal that fell short of those demands — which, if fulfilled, would allow it to claim an extremely costly victory.

Netanyahu said in a statement that the announcement "proved clearly that Hamas is not interested in continuing negotiations toward a deal and served as unfortunate testimony to the damage of the Security Council decision."

"Israel will not surrender to Hamas' delusional demands and will continue to act to achieve all the goals of the war: releasing all the hostages, destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities and ensuring that Gaza will never again be a threat to Israel."

The war has killed over 32,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its tally but says women and children make up about two-thirds of those killed. The fighting has left much of the Gaza Strip in ruins, displaced most its residents and driven a third of its population of 2.3 million to the brink of famine.

An Israeli strike late Monday on a residential building in Rafah where three displaced families were sheltering killed at least 16 people, including nine children and four women, according to hospital records and relatives of the deceased. An Associated Press reporter saw the bodies arrive at a hospital.

On Monday, the Security Council finally managed to pass a resolution calling for a cease-fire as the United States abstained instead of vetoing the measure, angering Israel in a major escalation of tensions between the two close allies. The resolution calls for the release of all hostages held in Gaza but did not condition the cease-fire on it.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz told Army Radio on Tuesday that the resolution had emboldened Hamas by signaling that international pressure would end the war without it having to make any concessions.

"The message delivered to Hamas yesterday ... is that you don't have to hurry," Katz said.

The war began on Oct. 7, when Hamas-led militants stormed across the border and attacked communities in southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 others. It is still believed to be holding about 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others, after most of the rest were freed in November in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent several weeks trying to negotiate another cease-fire and hostage release, but those efforts appeared to have stalled.

Hamas said late Monday that Israel has not responded to its core demands of a "comprehensive cease-fire, an (Israeli) withdrawal from the Strip, the return of displaced people and a real prisoner exchange."

Majed al-Ansari, a spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry of Qatar, which is currently hosting the talks,

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told reporters that the negotiations were still ongoing, without providing details.

Hamas has previously proposed a phased process in which it would release all the remaining hostages in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the opening of its borders for aid and reconstruction, and the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants serving life sentences.

Netanyahu has vowed to resume Israel's offensive after any hostage release and keep fighting until Hamas is destroyed, saying it's the only way to prevent a repeat of the Oct. 7 attack. But he has provided few details about what would follow any such victory and has largely rejected a postwar vision outlined by the U.S.

That approach has brought him into increasingly open conflict with President Joe Biden's administration, which has expressed mounting concern over civilian casualties while supplying Israel with crucial military aid and backing Israel's aim of destroying Hamas. The U.S. had vetoed previous U.N. resolutions calling for a cease-fire.

The White House has urged Israel not to undertake a major ground operation in Rafah, warning that it could cause a humanitarian catastrophe. The administration was set to brief visiting Israeli officials on an alternative approach, but Netanyahu called off their visit in response to the U.S. abstention at the U.N.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant is in Washington on a separate trip, however, and is to meet with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Tuesday.

## **Cargo ship hits Baltimore's Key Bridge, bringing it down. Several people believed to be in water**

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — A container ship rammed into a major bridge in Baltimore early Tuesday, causing it to snap in a few places and plunge into the river below. Several vehicles fell into the chilly waters, and rescuers were initially searching for at least seven people.

Two people were pulled from the waters, one in serious condition, according to Baltimore Fire Chief James Wallace. He said authorities "may be looking for upwards of seven people" but he said that number could change. It was not clear if the two rescued were included in the seven.

The vessel appears to have crashed into one of the supports of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, according to a video posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. The ship caught fire, and thick, black smoke billowed out of it.

"This is a dire emergency," Kevin Cartwright, director of communications for the Baltimore Fire Department, told The Associated Press. Though he said it was too early to know how many people were affected, he called the collapse a "developing mass casualty event."

The temperature in the river was about 47 degrees Fahrenheit (8 degrees Celsius) in the early hours of Tuesday, according to a buoy that collects data for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Cartwright added that some cargo appeared to be dangling from the bridge, which spans the Patapsco River at the entrance to a busy harbor. The river leads to the Port of Baltimore, a major hub for shipping on the East Coast. Opened in 1977, the bridge is named for the writer of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore declared a state of emergency and said he was working to get federal resources deployed. The FBI was also on the scene.

Synergy Marine Group — which owns and manages the ship called the "Dali" — confirmed the vessel hit a pillar of the bridge at about 1:30 a.m. while it was in control of two pilots. It said all crew members, including the pilots, were accounted for and there are no reports of any injuries.

Several vehicles were on the bridge at the time, including one the size of a tractor-trailer truck, according to Cartwright.

From a vantage point near the entrance to the bridge, jagged remnants of its steel frame were visible protruding from the water, with the on-ramp ending abruptly where the span once began.

A vessel called Dali was headed from Baltimore to Colombo, Sri Lanka, as its final destination, according to Marine Traffic and Vessel Finder. The ship was flying under a Singapore flag, WTOP radio station

reported, citing Petty Officer Matthew West from the Coast Guard in Baltimore.

Mayor Brandon M. Scott and Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski Jr. posted that emergency personnel were responding and rescue efforts were underway.

"All lanes closed both directions for incident on I-695 Key Bridge. Traffic is being detoured," the Maryland Transportation Authority posted on X.

In 2001, a freight train carrying hazardous materials derailed in a tunnel in downtown Baltimore and caught fire, spewing black smoke into surrounding neighborhoods and forcing officials to temporarily close all major roads into the city.

## **Bird flu, weather and inflation conspire to keep egg prices near historic highs for Easter**

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Egg prices are at near-historic highs in many parts of the world as the spring holidays approach, reflecting a market scrambled by disease, high demand and growing costs for farmers.

It's the second year in a row consumers have faced sticker shock ahead of Easter and Passover, both occasions in which eggs play prominent roles.

While global prices are lower than they were at this time last year, they remain elevated, said Nan-Dirk Mulder, a senior global specialist with Dutch financial firm RaboBank's RaboResearch Food and Agribusiness division. Mulder doesn't expect them to return to 2021 levels.

In the United States, the average price of a dozen eggs was \$2.99 in February, down from \$4.21 last year, according to government data. Still, that's significantly more than the \$1.59 cents per dozen consumers were paying in February 2021.

In Europe, egg prices are 10% to 15% lower than last year but still about double what they were in 2021, Mulder said.

One major culprit is avian flu. Outbreaks of the deadly respiratory disease were reported in Europe, Africa and Asia in 2020 and spread to North America in 2021. In 2022 alone, more than 131 million poultry worldwide died or were culled on affected farms, according to the World Health Organization.

Outbreaks are continuing. In December, the U.S. confirmed cases in 45 commercial flocks and 33 backyard flocks, affecting 11.4 million birds, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In South Africa, egg prices soared after 40% of laying hens were killed late last year due to the respiratory disease, Mulder said. A tray of six eggs cost 25.48 South African rand (\$1.34) last month, up 21% from February 2023.

Even when avian flu dissipates, it can take a long time for the egg market to settle. It takes a farm three to six months to replenish a flock, so during that time, egg supplies are lower and prices rise, said Emily Metz, president of the American Egg Board, a marketing organization.

If farms restock with too many chickens, it can drive prices down. That's what happened in the U.S. last summer when egg prices plunged to \$2 per dozen.

"It's supply and demand searching out. You have to have a profitable price," David Anderson, a professor and extension economist for livestock and food marketing at Texas A&M University, said.

And profits can be hard for farmers to come by during periods of inflation. Chicken feed represents up to 70% of a farmer's costs, and feed prices doubled between 2020 and 2022, Mulder said. Weather, COVID-related disruptions and the war in Ukraine – which drove up the price of wheat and other crops -- were all contributors.

In Nigeria, the cost of a crate of eggs has doubled since the beginning of the year due to weakened currency, the removal of fuel subsidies and high costs for farmers.

Teslimat Abimbola, who runs a poultry farm in the southern city of Ibadan, said 25 kilograms of feed that cost 2,500 Nigerian naira (\$1.78) in 2020 now costs 13,000 naira (\$9.23). Abimbola has lost some customers as a result of price increases.



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"Many farms have been forced to shut down due to the high costs of rearing chickens," Abimbola said. The government of Lagos State, Nigeria's biggest economic center, has implemented a subsidy program to help consumers deal with the increased costs of eggs.

Elsewhere, government regulations play a part in lifting egg prices. Multiple states, including California and Massachusetts, have passed cage bans for egg-laying hens since 2018; this year, bans are set to take effect in Washington, Oregon and Michigan.

Converting to cage-free facilities is a big investment for farmers, and consumers may not always realize that's a factor in the higher prices they see at the grocery store, Metz said. She anticipates such conversion costs will eventually fall as more farms make the changeover.

Price peaks are inevitably followed by price drops, and egg prices will eventually settle into more normal patterns. In the short term, the holiday demand that picks up every Easter will ease heading into summer, Anderson said. Meanwhile, improving biosecurity measures should help blunt the impact of avian flu, he said.

Lyncoya Ilion, who teaches cooking classes and runs a catering business called Catered by Coya in Brown Deer, Wisconsin, says she's noticed egg prices inching back up over the last two to three months but hopes she won't have to pass her costs onto clients.

"I haven't had to increase prices yet because I'm anticipating that the egg prices will decrease again soon," Ilion said.

That's a good bet. In the U.S., egg prices are expected to decrease around 2.8% this year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That won't put them back to pre-COVID levels, but it should give some relief.

"People really love eggs, and they notice when that price fluctuates," Metz said. "Our farmers wish it wasn't such a sharp up and down as well. It makes everything challenging."

## Biden and Harris team up for health care event in North Carolina

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will promote their health care agenda on Tuesday in North Carolina, a battleground state that Democrats hope to flip in their favor after falling short to Donald Trump in the last two presidential elections.

Fourteen years after President Barack Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, the White House still sees health care as a winning issue during a campaign where Biden has sometimes found himself on the defensive when it comes to immigration or the economy. Republicans have opposed Biden's signature initiatives to lower medical costs, and they've seized opportunities to restrict abortion rights after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

"That's the split screen on health care you will see on clear display," said Anita Dunn, a senior adviser. "President Biden, Vice President Harris and Democrats want to expand access, make health care more affordable for everyone and defend reproductive freedom. Republicans want to gut health care, raise prices and rip away those basic reproductive freedoms even more than they have already been endangered."

North Carolina is Biden's final stop in his tour of battleground states after his State of the Union earlier this month, which jumpstarted a frenzied travel schedule as the Democratic president makes his case for a second term in a likely rematch with Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee.

The state is also a health care success story for the president. The American Rescue Plan, a pandemic recovery measure signed by Biden, included financial incentives for states to expand Medicaid coverage for low-income residents. North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, was able to use the money, which amounted to \$1.8 billion, to persuade Republican lawmakers to go along with his plan. More than 600,000 residents are expected to qualify.

The visit from Biden and Harris comes on the same day that the U.S. Supreme Court hears oral arguments in a case about access to mifepristone, a widely used abortion pill. An eventual ruling could further restrict access to abortion.

The White House has tried to make mifepristone more available as one of its few opportunities to protect

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women's ability to end their pregnancies.

"We will continue to fight back against unprecedented attacks on women's freedom to make their own health decisions," press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

After speaking about health care in Raleigh, Biden and Harris will also attend a campaign fundraiser in the city. They've built a significant cash advantage over Trump, with \$155 million cash on hand at the end of the first quarter of the year. Trump had \$37 million.

Biden's approval ratings on health care are among his highest on a range of issues, but he remains underwater there too. According to a February poll from The Associated Press and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 42% of U.S. adults approve of Biden's handling of health care while 55% disapprove.

KFF, a health policy research firm, conducted its own poll in November and found that 59% of U.S. adults trust the Democratic Party to do a better job addressing health care affordability issues. Only 39% said the same about Republicans. There was a similar divide in trust when it came to access to mental health care, prescription drug costs and the future of the Affordable Care Act, Medicare and Medicaid.

"I'm a person who believes that good policy is also good politics, that when people feel like policies are in place that are helping and benefiting them in their communities, then you now have loyal supporters," said Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, a Democrat.

Moore said he sympathized with voters who did not believe that Biden had made a significant impact on issues like healthcare, but he stressed the administration's record on policies like lowering prescription drug prices and capping the cost of insulin.

"Nothing happens by accident, it's because you have leaders who are prioritizing it," he said.

Trump has never detailed his health care proposals despite campaigning since 2016 on a promise to end the Affordable Care Act and replace it with something else.

"The cost of Obamacare is out of control, plus, it's not good Healthcare. I'm seriously looking at alternatives," he wrote in a post on his Truth Social site in November.

However, healthcare has not been a prominent issue in his 2024 campaign as Trump instead focuses on immigration, inflation and the wars in Europe and the Middle East.

Polls show a tight race between Biden and Trump this year, and Democrats hope to create another potential path to victory in North Carolina.

Although Democrats have failed to win a U.S. Senate seat or a presidential race there since 2008, Trump beat Biden in North Carolina by just 1.3 percentage points in 2020. The White House has repeatedly highlighted federal injections of funds for transportation, rural broadband and other initiatives while dispatching top administration officials to the state.

Democrats also want to exploit what they view as weaknesses among Republican candidates for statewide offices. For example, the party's nominees for governor and state schools superintendent, Mark Robinson and Michele Morrow, have a history of inflammatory comments.

"We're seeing a Republican slate at the statewide level that is filled with MAGA extremists that ultimately is going to hurt the Republicans' chances of winning the state again," state Sen. Jay Chaudhuri of Raleigh, the chamber's Democratic whip, said Monday in an interview. "As we get closer to November, I think independents that are critical in winning the state will be able to see how extreme the Republican ticket is from top to bottom."

Democrats hope that unaffiliated voters, the largest category in the state, will cool to Trump in part based on worries that his election along with Robinson and Morrow could make businesses question relocating to a state that is currently riding an economic boom.

"It's clear that Republicans have nominated a slew of candidates that want to throw us right back into the culture wars," said Cooper, the Democratic governor, last week. "And Donald Trump is right on top of that, driving the train on this."

## Black coaches are rare in soccer.

### Is this because of a lack of diversity in the boardroom?

By JAMES ROBSON AP Soccer Writer

MANCHESTER, England (AP) — Ricky Hill packed his bags and prepared to uproot his life again. Next stop: Chicago. The former England international soccer player is accustomed to making sacrifices and traveling far to build his coaching career, an effort he says has been stymied because he is Black.

"It is something that I hate to do because home is where the heart is," Hill said of leaving behind his wife of 38 years and his 99-year-old mother to chase a rare management opportunity.

Racism has long permeated the world's most popular sport, with players subjected to racist chants and taunts online. While soccer governing bodies such as FIFA and UEFA have taken steps to combat the abuse of players, the lack of diversity in the upper ranks at major clubs remains an unsolved problem.

"It's two fights for equality," Hill told The Associated Press.

Hill — who as a teenager in the 1970s was among the first generation of Black players in England — says he routinely faced racist abuse from fans when he played for Luton Town.

"You would hear songs about you, see people spitting, that kind of vitriolic behavior."

That racism, he says, has continued to hold him back in the pursuit of his top-flight coaching dream.

"The difficulty we've had as racially diverse individuals and Black individuals, specifically, is there is no way of showing your worth as a coach or manager without actually having the opportunity to do so," he said.

The issue needs to be considered "through a Black lens," Delroy Corinaldi, co-founder of the British-based advocacy group Black Footballers Partnership, told The AP.

A BFP report in 2022 found that while some 43% of players in England's Premier League are Black, only 4% land coaching jobs in English professional soccer. There are currently only two Black managers in the Premier League.

#### WIDER PROBLEM

Under-representation is not just an English problem. There are only two Black head coaches in France's Ligue 1, one in Italy's Serie A, and none in the top divisions of Spain and Germany.

Wilfried Nancy, who is French, built his coaching career with Montreal in Canada and he now leads Ohio's championship-winning Columbus Crew. He is the only Black head coach in MLS.

Nancy is puzzled by the lack of diversity in soccer coaching in Europe and the U.S.

"A lot of people like me, we have a lot of competency, but they don't have the opportunity for the moment to do it," he said.

Hill is standing up to racism in the sport. In 2022, he sued MLS and the USL Championship claiming discrimination after repeatedly being overlooked for jobs despite his decorated coaching career with Tampa Bay Rowdies and in Trinidad and Tobago.

#### WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

A lack of diversity in boardrooms may be the root of the problem.

The Football Association in England launched a leadership diversity code in 2020, setting hiring targets to address inequality. Yet its most recent report in November said workforce representation still does not reflect the diversity of players. Of last season's hires, the report said, 9% of senior leaders, 11% of team operations, 16% of coaches and 9% of senior coaches were Black, Asian or of mixed heritage.

FA chief executive Mark Bullingham admits there is "still a huge amount of work to be done."

Burnley coach Vincent Kompany, who is Black, said this must be addressed to effect real change.

"If you have a boardroom that's diverse, you can't brush things under the carpet," Kompany said.

The Premier League's Coach Inclusion and Diversity Scheme aims to increase minority representation in coaching. The initiative provides coaches with a bursary and work placements.

Yet the BFP's latest report found that non-Black former players are 50% more likely than their Black counterparts to progress into management in England, and Black managers or assistants are 41% more likely to be fired.

"They are less likely to get in. Once they get in they are less likely to get promoted. And once they do



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get promoted they are more likely to get fired," one of the report's authors, Stefan Szymanski, a professor of sport management at the University of Michigan, told AP. "I'd like to hear what an explanation of this is, other than racism."

## TOP JOBS

Two of the biggest coaching jobs in soccer will become available at the end of the season. And while it is not yet clear who will fill the positions at Liverpool and Bayern Munich, it's highly unlikely the successful candidates will be Black.

The standout favorite is Xabi Alonso, who is less than two years into his first job as head coach with Bayer Leverkusen. Alonso, who is white, had a distinguished playing career with Liverpool, Real Madrid and Bayern, and Bayer is on course to win the German title this season.

"You have to be fair. Who's qualified to do that job?" former Premier League player Troy Deeney told AP. "Part of the argument isn't to just say, 'Give Black people, women, whoever you think is marginalized, just give them the job.' Who's the Black manager that's doing really well at the moment that deserves that job?"

Ruud Gullit, then one of the most celebrated players in the world, became the Premier League's first Black manager when he was appointed by Chelsea in 1996. Multiple Champions League-winner Clarence Seedorf was hired by Italian giant AC Milan in 2014. He lasted only four months.

But high-profile Black players are more commonly hired as coaches to low-level teams.

Former England internationals Paul Ince and Sol Campbell began their managerial careers with then-fourth division team Macclesfield. Ince's only top-flight job was with Blackburn in 2008. He was fired after less than six months and has not been hired by a Premier League club since.

Meanwhile, Campbell's ex-England teammate, Frank Lampard, who is white, has held three Premier League coaching positions on the back of his one year at second division Derby.

Deeney was hired as head coach of fourth-tier Forest Green Rovers in December, but was fired less than a month later. He remains determined.

"If the reports coming out are suggesting the scale is tipped not in my favor, it doesn't mean I don't play the game. It just means I've got to play the game harder than everybody else," he said.

Hill had a four-month spell as manager of Luton, then in the third tier of English soccer, and has struggled to find work in England ever since. He has just taken a position as executive director of Evolution Soccer in suburban Chicago.

"The industry is such that everyone wants to stay in it and only a certain number of people can," he said. "But, disproportionately, Black people do not manage to stay within the game at a far greater rate than anyone else."

## A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

Inspiration could be drawn from the U.S., where the formerly white-dominated NFL implemented rules to try to level the playing field for people of color seeking positions as head coaches, general managers and executives.

The Rooney Rule requires teams to interview at least one person of color for a head coach position, and if any team loses a minority coach or executive to another team, it is awarded compensatory picks in upcoming drafts.

The system has paid off.

In the NFL, four minority head coaches have been hired this year and there's a record nine coaches of color entering the 2024 season.

A similar scheme was adopted by England soccer's lower divisions in 2019, but statistics show diversity remains an issue.

Last week, the government introduced legislation to create an independent regulator in English soccer. Szymanski said this could push clubs to commit to diversity where FA and Premier League incentives have failed.

"I would say voluntary arrangements have shown themselves not to be satisfactory," he said. "You need some kind of regulation to push the clubs to embrace change."

## Trump's social media company starts trading on Nasdaq with a market value of almost \$6.8 billion

NEW YORK (AP) — As Donald Trump's social media company begins trading publicly Tuesday, would-be investors might ask themselves if the stock is too pricey and potentially too volatile.

Trump Media & Technology Group Corp. was acquired Monday by a blank-check company called Digital World Acquisition Corp. Trump Media, which runs the social media platform Truth Social, now takes Digital World's place on the Nasdaq stock exchange.

Trump Media debuts with a stock price near \$50 and a market value of about \$6.8 billion. Many of Digital World's investors were small-time investors either trying to support Trump or aiming to cash in on the mania, instead of big institutional and professional investors. Those shareholders helped the stock more than double this year in anticipation of the merger going through.

They're betting on a company that has yet to turn a profit. 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. In a recent regulatory filing, the company cited the high rate of failure for new social media platforms, as well as the company's expectation that it will lose money on its operations "for the foreseeable future" as risks for investors.

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

On Monday, Trump appeared in court in New York at hearing for a criminal case involving hush money payments made to cover up claims of marital infidelity. Afterwards, Trump told reporters that "Truth Social is doing very well. It's hot as a pistol and doing great."

However, Trump Media has yet to disclose Truth Social's user numbers — although that should change now that the company is public. Research firm Similarweb estimates that Truth Social 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 other "alt-tech" 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.

Besides competition in the social media field, Trump Media faces other risks — including to some degree Trump, who will have a nearly 60% ownership stake in the company.

Trump Media, which is based in Palm Beach, Florida, said in a regulatory filing that it "is highly dependent on the popularity and presence of President Trump." If the former president were to limit or discontinue his relationship with the company for any reason, including due to his campaign to regain the presidency, the company "would be significantly disadvantaged."

Acknowledging Trump's involvement in numerous legal proceedings, the company noted that "an adverse outcome in one or more" of the cases could negatively affect Trump Media and Truth Social.

Another 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.

If recent trading activity is any indication, investors could be in for a bumpy ride. Digital World shares more than doubled this year ahead of a shareholder vote on the merger with Trump Media. After the vote Friday, shares dropped almost 14%, but Monday they rebounded strongly with a gain of 35%.

## Here are the big hurdles to the global push to build up renewable energy

By The Associated Press undefined

The world's governments have agreed they want to triple renewable energy by 2030, a goal laid out at the U.N. climate summit in December.

But right now, the post-pandemic global economy is throwing up obstacles that will need to be overcome if the goal is going to be met.

Here are the big hurdles to solar, wind and other renewable energy projects:

COSTLY CREDIT

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Central banks in Europe and the U.S. have raised interest rates to combat inflation. That hits renewables harder than it does investment in fossil fuel projects.

Renewables have much higher up-front costs to build wind farms, solar arrays and more, and that borrowing costs money. After that, operating costs are negligible since the wind and sun are free, of course — but high interest rates have made it harder to get new projects off the ground.

In many cases, the answer is raising the agreed price of the electricity flowing to the grid to cover the added costs.

## INFLATION

Everything costs more these days — not just food and rent, but the electric cables, power turbines, construction materials and services needed to build wind or solar installations. One exception: solar panels have plunged in price due to massive Chinese production.

## SNARLED SUPPLY CHAINS

Order backlogs and supply delays are growing because there are shortages of skilled engineers, raw materials and a lack of manufacturing capacity for complex machinery needed for renewable energy projects.

An order for a new wind turbine or a transformer to connect to the grid can take months or longer to arrive than it did before the COVID-19 pandemic.

## NOT IN MY BACKYARD

So-called NIMBY syndrome remains an issue in many places. Germany's southern region of Bavaria, for example, is known for resisting the noise and appearance of wind turbines in its scenic landscape.

Installations have lagged in Bavaria and other regions despite the German government's push for more renewable energy after losing affordable Russian natural gas used to heat homes, generate electricity and power factories.

## WORSE TROUBLES IN DEVELOPING WORLD

Low-income countries have long faced much higher borrowing costs than the richer parts of the globe because government subsidies or other credit guarantees are uncertain.

The result is that the same solar park if built today costs twice as much in Ghana as it would in the U.S. because of interest rates alone, according to Todd Moss, a former State Department official who heads the Energy for Growth Hub in Washington.

## Japan approves plan to sell fighter jets to other nations in latest break from pacifist principles

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Cabinet on Tuesday approved a plan to sell future next-generation fighter jets that it's developing with Britain and Italy to other countries, in the latest move away from the country's postwar pacifist principles.

The contentious decision to allow international arms sales is expected to help secure Japan's role in the joint fighter jet project and part of a move to build up the Japanese arms industry and bolster its role in global security.

The Cabinet also endorsed a revision to Japan's arms equipment and technology transfer guidelines to allow coproduced lethal weapons to be sold to countries other than the partners.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said the changes are necessary given Japan's security environment, but stressed that Japan's pacifist principles remain unchanged.

"In order to achieve a fighter aircraft that meets the necessary performance and to avoid jeopardizing the defense of Japan, it is necessary to transfer finished products from Japan to countries other than partner countries," Hayashi told reporters, adding that Tokyo will follow a strict approval process for jet sales. "We have clearly demonstrated that we will continue to adhere to our basic philosophy as a peaceful nation," he said.

Japan has long restricted arms exports under the country's pacifist constitution, but has rapidly taken



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steps to deregulate amid rising regional and global tensions, especially from nearby China.

The decision on jets will allow Japan to export lethal weapons it coproduces to other countries for the first time.

Japan is working with Italy and the U.K. to develop an advanced fighter jet to replace its aging fleet of American-designed F-2 fighters, and the Eurofighter Typhoons used by the U.K. and Italian militaries.

Japan, which was previously working on a homegrown design to be called the F-X, agreed in December 2022 to merge its effort with a British-Italian program called the Tempest. for deployment in 2035. The joint project, known as the Global Combat Air Program or GCAP, is based in the U.K.

Japan hopes the new plane will offer advanced capabilities Japan needs amid growing tensions in the region, giving it a technological edge against regional rivals China and Russia.

Because of its wartime past as aggressor and the devastation that followed its defeat in World War II, Japan adopted a constitution that limits its military to self-defense. The country long maintained a strict policy to limit transfers of military equipment and technology and ban all exports of lethal weapons.

Opponents have criticized Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government for committing to the fighter jet project without providing an explanation to the public or seeking approval for the major policy change.

To address such concerns, the government is limiting exports of codeveloped lethal weapons to the jet for now, and has promised that no sales will be made for use in active wars.

The government also assured that the revised guideline for the time being only applies to the jet and that it would require Cabinet approval to do so. Potential purchasers will be also limited to the 15 countries that Japan has signed defense partnership and equipment transfer deals with.

Recent polls suggest that public opinion is divided on the plan.

In 2014, Japan began to export some nonlethal military supplies, and in a latest move last December, it approved a change that would allow sales of 80 lethal weapons and components that it manufactures under licenses from other countries back to the licensors. The change cleared the way for Japan to sell U.S.-designed Patriot missiles to the United States, helping replace munitions that Washington is sending to Ukraine.

In its decision, the Cabinet said that the arms export ban on finished products would hinder efforts to develop the new jet, and limit Japan to a supporting role in the project. Italy and the U.K. are eager to make sales of the jet in order to defray development and manufacturing costs.

Kishida sought Cabinet approval before signing the GCAP agreement in February, but it was delayed by resistance from his junior coalition partner, the Buddhist-backed Komeito party.

The change also comes as Kishida is planning an April state visit to Washington, where he is expected to stress Japan's readiness to take on a greater role in military and defense industry partnerships.

Exports would also help boost Japan's defense industry, which historically has catered only to the country's Self Defense Force, as Kishida seeks to build up the military. Despite its effort over the past decade, the industry has still struggled to draw customers.

## Some Republicans who supported Nikki Haley are still refusing to back Donald Trump

By MEG KINNARD and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Now that Nikki Haley has shuttered her presidential campaign, one person who voted for her refuses to back former President Donald Trump and plans to reluctantly vote for President Joe Biden.

Another Haley primary supporter acknowledges that he was probably always a "closet Trump fan" and will vote for the former president again in November.

The former U.N. ambassador's base was never big enough to seriously challenge Trump before he clinched a third straight Republican nomination. But in what's shaping up to be a tight rematch between Trump and Biden, the apparent splintering of Haley's voters and donors could hurt Trump's general election chances, particularly in battleground states full of suburban voters who remain dubious of a Trump

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return to the White House.

For now, interviews with Haley's supporters suggest they could go in a variety of directions — some backing Trump, some going to Biden and others seeking third-party options or avoiding making a decision about the presidential race yet.

Haley has not spoken publicly since leaving the race and urging Trump to reach out to all Republicans. She has not endorsed Trump and suggested she may not at all.

"She said it's up to him to earn the support of those who supported her, and he's got to earn it," said Eric Tanenblatt, a longtime GOP donor who was Haley's Georgia campaign's co-chairman. "Right now, I'm definitely not there. It tells me there are things that are still up in the air among other key Haley donors waiting for a sign."

The Trump campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

A reluctant return to Trump for some voters

Glenn Swanson caucused for Haley after seeing her campaign in his hometown of Cedar Falls, Iowa. At the time, the retired architect said he was open to a Trump alternative. Now, he's coming back to the candidate he supported in both 2016 and 2020, despite his concerns about the four felony indictments and other civil cases facing Trump.

"For sure I'm going to vote for Trump," Swanson said in an interview. "In a sense I was kind of a closet Trump fan all along, but I really wanted to see if somebody else would emerge to get away from some of the drama."

John Wynstra, a database administrator who attended that same event, had been deciding between Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis before choosing to caucus for her. Wynstra said he's strategically supporting Trump and the party's platform — as a stance primarily against Biden — although he seemingly left the door open to possibly supporting a third-party candidate like Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

"I will vote against Joe Biden and the Democrats," Wynstra said this week. "If Kennedy were viable and if his positions were palatable, I would consider him."

In Haley's home state of South Carolina, high school teacher Michael Burgess said that save an unlikely independent run by Haley or a moderate like former Rep. Liz Cheney, he would be supporting Biden and criticized Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement.

"I will reluctantly vote Biden," Burgess said. "We can survive bad policy, but we cannot survive the destruction of the Constitution at the hands of a morally bankrupt dictator lover in Trump who, supported by his congressional MAGA minions, would do just that."

Her donors say they haven't heard from Trump camp

Like many who were drawn to Haley, Tanenblatt, who was her Georgia campaign's co-chairman, became disenchanted with Trump for what he called "inflammatory rhetoric," chiefly in the wake of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack by his supporters on the Capitol.

But he also says Trump's opposition to military aid to Ukraine is a fundamental policy difference. Tanenblatt has talked individually with former Haley supporters weighing a role with No Labels, the third-party group that is moving forward with attempting a unity ticket of opposing party presidential and vice-presidential nominees.

By and large, Haley's donors have paused, with key bundlers noting they have not heard from Trump's team as well as their reluctance to make any decisions.

"I really think there's a period of recalibrating for a number of us who were very involved in Nikki's campaign. This was a calling, something bigger than any one of us," said Simone Levinson, a Florida-based Haley fundraiser who hosted events for her in New York and Florida.

Those donors could be helpful to Trump were they to come to the former president's side.

For now, Trump and national Republicans are lagging far behind Biden and national Democrats in fundraising, with Trump's campaign and allied groups holding \$37 million cash on hand at the end of February compared to the \$155 million in Democratic coffers.

In one sign of her influence going forward, Haley ended last month with \$11.5 million, just days before

she suspended her campaign. That's slightly more than the Republican National Committee at \$11.3 million.

## 'Duty to warn' guided US advance warning of the Moscow attack. Adversaries don't always listen

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. warning to Russia couldn't have been plainer: Two weeks before the deadliest attack in Russia in years, Americans had publicly and privately advised President Vladimir Putin's government that "extremists" had "imminent plans" for just such slaughter.

The United States shared those advance intelligence indications under a tenet of the U.S. intelligence community called the "duty to warn," which obliges U.S. intelligence officials to lean toward sharing knowledge of a dire threat if conditions allow. That holds whether the targets are allies, adversaries or somewhere in between.

There's little sign Russia acted to try to head off Friday's attack at a concert hall on Moscow's edge, which killed more than 130 people. The Islamic State's affiliate in Afghanistan claimed responsibility, and the U.S. said it has information backing up the extremist group's claim.

John Kirby, the Biden administration's national security spokesman, made clear that the warning shouldn't be seen as a breakthrough in U.S.-Russian relations or intelligence-sharing. "Yeah, look, there's not going to be security assistance with Russia and the United States," Kirby told reporters Monday.

"We had a duty to warn them of information that we had, clearly that they didn't have. We did that," Kirby said.

Such warnings aren't always heeded — the United States has dropped the ball in the past on at least one Russian warning of extremist threats in the United States.

Here's a look at the duty to warn, how it came about, and how it can play out when American intelligence officers learn militants are poised to strike.

### AHEAD OF THE ATTACK, A CLEAR US WARNING

On March 7, the U.S. government went public with a remarkably precise warning: The U.S. Embassy in Moscow was monitoring unspecified reports that "extremists have imminent plans to target large gatherings in Moscow, to include concerts." It warned U.S. citizens in Moscow to avoid big events over the next 48 hours.

U.S. officials said after the attack that they had shared the warning with Russian officials as well, under the duty to warn, but gave no details how.

Putin's public reaction was dismissive. Three days before the attack, he condemned what he called "provocative statements" from the West about possible attacks within Russia. Such warnings were aimed at intimidating Russians and destabilizing the country, he said.

### DUTY TO WARN

The U.S. emphasis on sharing threat warnings increased after al-Qaeda's Aug. 7, 1998, attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. While dozens of U.S. citizens and government employees of different nationalities were killed, Kenyans made up the majority of the victims.

In 2015, then national intelligence director James Clapper formalized duty to warn in an official directive: The U.S. intelligence community bore "a responsibility to warn U.S. and non-U.S. persons of impending threats of intentional killing, serious bodily injury or kidnapping."

The order also spelled out occasions when intelligence officials could waive the duty to warn and stay silent despite looming danger. That includes when the target is an assassin or other extreme bad guy, or when disclosing the warning could "unduly endanger" U.S. personnel or their sources, those of intelligence partners among foreign governments, or their intelligence or defense operations.

### SHARED WARNINGS AND THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

The intelligence community under former President Donald Trump faced accusations it had failed to warn U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi of a complex plot by Saudi officials that ended with his 2018 killing



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inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Media foundations say U.S. intelligence agencies did not respond to requests for any records showing whether they knew of the plot in advance.

Under the Biden administration, the sharing of threats to other governments has flourished, although there's no way to know of any threats that the U.S. intelligence community may have decided to let play out, without warning the targets.

Strategic U.S. dissemination of intelligence hit a high point in the months before Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. That's when the U.S. opted to declassify key intelligence on Russia's invasion plans to rally allies and Ukraine, and — unsuccessfully — to pressure Russia to call off its troops.

In a Foreign Affairs article this spring, CIA Director William Burns spoke of a growing awareness of the value of "intelligence diplomacy" — the strategic use of intelligence findings to bolster allies and confound adversaries.

## SHARING ISN'T ALWAYS CARING

The duty to warn doesn't mean the other side has a duty to listen. That's especially so when the other side is an adversary.

In January, a U.S. official said, Americans had given a similar warning to Iranian officials ahead of bombings in the Iranian city of Kerman. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for that attack, twin suicide bombings that killed 95 people.

It's not clear if the warning led to any additional security precautions at the event, a commemoration of the 2020 killing of an Iranian general by a U.S. drone strike.

In 2004, another adversary, the government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, an anti-U.S. populist, was "suspicious and incredulous" when U.S. officials relayed a warning of an extremist plot to kill him, Stephen McFarland, a former U.S. diplomat in Central and South America, said Monday on X.

That kind of deep distrust has often kept threat warnings from landing as intended when it comes to Russia and the United States. That's true even with common dangers that both face, including the Islamic State and al-Qaida.

Historically, Russians can regard any U.S. attempt at counterintelligence cooperation against that kind of shared threat as naive, and look for any openings to use it for political gain or to undermine U.S. intelligence-gathering, Steven Hall, a longtime U.S. intelligence official in the former Soviet Union, wrote after his retirement in 2015.

In 2013, it was U.S. officials who, tragically, failed adequately to follow up on a Russian warning, a U.S. government review concluded later.

Concerned the man posed a threat to Russia as well, Russia's Federal Security Service in 2011 warned U.S. officials that a U.S. resident, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was an adherent of extremist groups. After U.S. officials concluded Tsarnaev was not a threat in the U.S., he and his younger brother planted bombs along the route of the Boston Marathon, killing three people and injuring hundreds.

## Authorities searched Diddy's properties as part of a sex trafficking probe. Here's what to know

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In the first nine months of 2023, Sean "Diddy" Combs triumphantly performed at the MTV VMAs, released an R&B album that garnered a Grammy nomination and was a suitor to buy the BET network.

But several lawsuits filed late last year raised allegations of sexual assault and rape against Combs — one of hip-hop's most recognizable names as a performer and producer.

The music mogul's homes in Los Angeles and Miami were searched Monday by federal agents with Homeland Security Investigators and other law enforcement. Officials said the searches were connected to an investigation by federal authorities in New York.

The officials spoke to The Associated Press on conditions of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss details of the investigation. Combs' attorney and other representatives didn't immediately

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respond to a request for comment, and his whereabouts are unknown.

Although Diddy was embroiled in one high-profile business dispute for part of 2023, it was a case filed by his former girlfriend and R&B singer Cassie that opened the door to other claims of sexual violence. Combs has vehemently denied the allegations.

It is not clear whether the search is related to any of the allegations raised in the lawsuits, which include one from a woman who claims Combs raped her when she was 17.

Here are some things to know about Combs and the investigation.

## WHO IS DIDDY?

Combs is among the most influential hip-hop producers and executives of the past three decades. He built one of music's biggest empires, blazing a trail with several entities attached to his famous name. He is the founder of Bad Boy Records and a three-time Grammy winner who has worked with a slew of top-tier artists including Notorious B.I.G., Mary J. Blige, Usher, Lil Kim, Faith Evans and 112.

The music mogul created the fashion clothing line called Sean John, was associated with a well-known vodka brand and launched Revolt TV network, which focuses on music and social justice issues targeting African Americans. He also produced the reality show "Making the Band" for MTV.

In 2022, BET honored Combs with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his ability to shape culture through his career.

Combs won Grammys for his platinum-selling 1997 album "No Way Out" and the single "I'll Be Missing You," a song dedicated to the late Notorious B.I.G. who was killed earlier that year. He won another Grammy for "Shake Ya Tailfeather" with Nelly and Murphy Lee.

Last year, Combs released his fifth studio album "The Love Album: Off the Grid," which was nominated for best progressive R&B album at February's Grammy Awards, which he did not attend. The album was his first solo project since his 2006 chart-topping "Press Play," which had two top 10 hit singles: "Last Night" with Keyshia Cole and "Come to Me" featuring Nicole Scherzinger.

In 2004, Combs played Walter Lee Younger in the Broadway revival of "A Raisin in the Sun," which aired as a television adaptation four years later. He's also appeared in films including "Get Him to the Greek" and "Monster's Ball."

## WHAT SPARKED THE LAWSUITS?

In November, Combs' protege and singer Cassie sued him for alleging years of sexual abuse including rape. The lawsuit alleged he forced her to have sex with male prostitutes while he filmed them.

Combs and Ventura began dating in 2007 and had an on-and-off relationship for more than a decade.

The suit was settled the day after it was filed, but the lawsuits against Combs kept coming against.

Combs had said in a December statement, "I did not do any of the awful things being alleged."

In February, a music producer filed a lawsuit alleging Combs coerced him to solicit prostitutes and pressured him to have sex with them. Combs' attorney Shawn Holley has said of those allegations that "we have overwhelming, indisputable proof that his claims are complete lies."

Another of Combs' accusers was a woman who said the rap producer raped her two decades ago when she was 17.

The filings detail acts of sexual assault, beatings and forced drugging allegedly committed in the early 1990s by Combs, then a talent director, party promoter and rising figure in New York City's hip-hop community.

## ANY REPRECUSIONS FROM THE LAWSUITS?

Last year, Combs stepped down as chairman of his cable television network Revolt amid the sexual abuse allegations against him.

Revolt announced Combs' decision via social media. It's not clear if he will ever return to the media company — which said Combs previously had "no operational or day-to-day role" at the network.

"This decision helps to ensure that Revolt remains steadfastly focused on our mission to create meaningful content for the culture and amplify the voices of all Black people throughout this country and African diaspora," the network said.

The network had been preparing to celebrate its 10th anniversary.

Combs also created an online marketplace called Empower Global that featured Black-owned brands. The website for the curated marketplace is still active, but shows no products being sold.

## WHAT HAPPENED WITH DIAGEO?

Earlier this year, Combs withdrew the lawsuit filed last year against Diageo as part of a settlement with the London-based spirits giant.

Combs said the company didn't make promised investments in Ciroc vodka and DeLeon tequila — two brands Combs promoted in the past — and treated them as inferior "urban" products. He also accused Diageo of racism.

In court filings, Combs said Diageo leadership told him race was one of the reasons it limited distribution to "urban" neighborhoods. Combs said he was also told some Diageo leaders resented him for making too much money.

In legal filings, Diageo accused Combs of resorting to "false and reckless" allegations "in an effort to extract additional billions" from the company.

Combs' reputation took a serious hit after the lawsuit was filed. Diageo became the sole owner of Ciroc and DeLeon after the lawsuit was withdrawn.

## Shohei Ohtani says he never bet on sports, interpreter Ipppei Mizuhara stole money, told lies

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Shohei Ohtani said Monday he never bet on sports or knowingly paid any gambling debts accumulated by his longtime interpreter, Ipppei Mizuhara.

Instead, the Los Angeles Dodgers star claims his close friend lied to him for years and stole millions from the two-time MVP.

Ohtani gave his version of events during a news conference at Dodger Stadium, five days after Mizuhara was fired by the Dodgers following reports from the Los Angeles Times and ESPN about his alleged ties to an illegal bookmaker and debts well over \$1 million.

"I am very saddened and shocked someone whom I trusted has done this," the Japanese star said while sitting next to Will Iretton, the team's manager of performance operations, who translated.

"Ipppei has been stealing money from my account and has been telling lies," Ohtani said. "I never bet on sports or have willfully sent money to the bookmaker."

Ohtani spoke for nearly 12 minutes in a small room packed with dozens of reporters, describing several ways in which Mizuhara deceived him. Wearing a Dodgers cap and sweatshirt, Ohtani read quickly in Japanese from a document and did not take questions.

Ohtani, 29, still attempted to answer the most important question by repeatedly emphasizing he was never knowingly involved in gambling. He provided no details on how Mizuhara might have been able to steal his money to pay gambling debts.

"I never bet on baseball or any other sports or never have asked somebody to do it on my behalf, and I have never gone through a bookmaker to bet on sports and was never asked to assist betting payment for anyone else," Ohtani said.

Ohtani left the Los Angeles Angels in December to sign a record \$700 million, 10-year contract with the Dodgers. Ohtani and Mizuhara had been daily companions from Ohtani joining the Angels in 2018 until last week, when Mizuhara's gambling became public.

Ohtani hasn't addressed the Dodgers in a group since Mizuhara's firing, but he had explained himself to several Dodgers individually, manager Dave Roberts said. Veterans Kiké Hernández and Joe Kelly attended Ohtani's news conference to emphasize the players' support of their new teammate.

"I think Shohei was very honest in his take of what happened," Roberts said. "I know that for me, the organization, we support him. I got a lot of questions answered as far as what he knew, what he didn't know, and I'm looking forward to kind of just moving forward, letting the authorities take care of it, and just focus on baseball. I was proud of him to sit up here and give his take on things."



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The IRS has confirmed that Mizuhara and Mathew Bowyer, the alleged illegal bookmaker, are under criminal investigation through the agency's Los Angeles field office.

Mizuhara told ESPN on March 19 that Ohtani paid his gambling debts at the interpreter's request, saying the bets were on international soccer, the NBA, the NFL and college football. MLB rules prohibit players and team employees from wagering — even legally — on baseball, and also ban betting on other sports with illegal or offshore bookmakers.

ESPN said Mizuhara changed his story the following day, claiming Ohtani had no knowledge of the gambling debts and had not transferred any money to bookmakers.

"All of this has been a complete lie," Ohtani said. "Ippei obviously basically didn't tell me about the media inquiry. So Ippei has been telling everyone around that he has been communicating with me on this account to the media and my team, and that hasn't been true."

Ohtani said he first became aware of Mizuhara's gambling problem during a team meeting after last Wednesday's season-opening victory over San Diego in Seoul, South Korea.

Ohtani said the meeting was a shock — and because Mizuhara was speaking to the team in English, Ohtani struggled to understand everything that was being said.

"Just prior to the meeting, I was told by Ippei, 'Hey, let's talk one to one in the hotel after the meeting,'" Ohtani said. "So up until that team meeting, I didn't know that Ippei had a gambling addiction and was in debt. Obviously I never agreed to pay for the debt or make payments to the bookmaker, and finally when we went back to the hotel, that was when I found out that he had a massive debt, and it was revealed to me during that meeting that Ippei admitted that he was sending money using my account to the bookmaker. At that moment, it was an absurd thing that was happening and I contacted my representatives at that point."

Ohtani spoke before the Dodgers lost 6-0 to the Angels in an exhibition game at Chavez Ravine.

Roberts said Ohtani also will play at his former home stadium Tuesday when the Dodgers play their final exhibition in Anaheim. Their next regular-season game is Thursday against St. Louis.

Ohtani grounded out twice and walked while batting second as the Dodgers' designated hitter. The slugger got a loud ovation from the Los Angeles crowd each time he came to the plate against Reid Detmers, who pitched alongside Ohtani in the Angels' rotation for the past two seasons.

Detmers sent Ohtani reeling backwards with a Ball 4 fastball that accidentally came close to hitting the star.

Ohtani smiled and looked slightly shaken as he took first base — an appropriate cap to an uncomfortable day at the ballpark.

"To summarize how I am feeling right now, I am just beyond shocked," Ohtani said. "It is really hard to verbalize how I am feeling at this point. The season is going to start, so I am going to let my lawyers handle matters from here on out. I am completely assisting in all investigations that are taking place right now."

## US and Israeli defense chiefs to meet Tuesday as tensions rise over Gaza

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will meet with Israel's minister of defense on Tuesday and discuss ways to defeat Hamas other than conducting a ground invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah, the Pentagon said, at a time of rising tensions between the two countries.

Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, told reporters Monday that Austin's planned morning meeting with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant is still on, even though Israel abruptly canceled the visit of a high-level delegation to Washington this week.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled the visit in protest over Monday's U.N. Security Council decision calling for an immediate cease-fire. The U.S. abstained, deciding not to use its veto power, and the resolution passed 14-0.

"There are ways to go about addressing the threat of Hamas, while also taking into account civilian safety. A lot of those are from lessons, our own lessons, conducting operations in urban environments," Ryder said. "I would expect the conversations to cover those kinds of things."

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Israel says it cannot defeat Hamas without going into Rafah, where it says the group has four battalions composed of thousands of fighters.

Israel's offensive has killed over 32,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and driven a third of Gaza's population to the brink of starvation. It was launched in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, which killed some 1,200 people.

Hamas-led militants also took around 250 people hostage. They are still holding around 100 hostages, and the remains of around 30 others, after most of the rest were freed during a cease-fire last year in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

The United Nations Security Council resolution calls for a cease-fire during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Netanyahu accused the U.S. of "retreating" from a "principled position" by allowing the vote to pass without conditioning the cease-fire on the release of hostages.

The dispute signals an erosion in the U.S.-Israel relationship that has been under a microscope for months as the military assault on Hamas continues, escalating the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby said the U.S. was disappointed in the decision to cancel the delegation's visit this week. He said the talks with Gallant would likely include some of what the U.S. had planned to discuss with the Israeli delegation on the possible Rafah invasion.

The White House was aiming to talk to the Israelis about possible alternatives to a ground invasion of Rafah.

Gallant met Monday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan. Kirby said those meetings, however, had not been intended as a replacement for the delegation meetings.

## Ukraine ramps up spending on homemade weapons to help repel Russia

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine needs any edge it can get to repel Russia from its territory. One emerging bright spot is its small but fast-growing defense industry, which the government is flooding with money in hopes that a surge of homemade weapons and ammunition can help turn the tide.

The effort ramped up sharply over the past year as the U.S. and Europe strained to deliver weapons and other aid to Ukraine, which is up against a much bigger Russian military backed by a thriving domestic defense industry.

The Ukrainian government budgeted nearly \$1.4 billion in 2024 to buy and develop weapons at home — 20 times more than before Russia's full-scale invasion.

And in another major shift, a huge portion of weapons are now being bought from privately owned factories. They are sprouting up across the country and rapidly taking over an industry that had been dominated by state-owned companies.

A privately owned mortar factory that launched in western Ukraine last year is making roughly 20,000 shells a month. "I feel that we are bringing our country closer to victory," said Anatolli Kuzmin, the factory's 64-year-old owner, who used to make farm equipment and fled his home in southern Ukraine after Russia invaded in 2022.

Yet like many aspects of Ukraine's war apparatus, its defense sector has been constrained by a lack of money and manpower — and, according to executives and generals, too much government red tape. A more robust private sector could help root out inefficiencies and enable factories to churn out weapons and ammunition even faster.

The stakes couldn't be higher.

Russia controls nearly a quarter of Ukraine and has gained momentum along the 1,000 kilometer (620 mile) front line by showing a willingness to expend large numbers of troops to make even the smallest of advances. Ukrainian troops regularly find themselves outmanned and outgunned, and this has contributed to falling morale.

"You need a mortar not in three years, you need it now, preferably yesterday," said Taras Chmut, director of the Come Back Alive Foundation, an organization that has raised more than \$260 million over the past decade to equip Ukrainian troops with machine guns, armored vehicles and more.

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## WARTIME ENTREPRENEURS

Kuzmin, the owner of the mortar factory, fled the southern city of Melitopol in 2022 after Russia invaded and seized his factory that mostly made spare parts for farm equipment. He had begun developing a prototype for mortar shells shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, when it illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula.

Kuzmin took over a sprawling warehouse in western Ukraine last winter. His long-term goals include boosting production to 100,000 shells per month and developing engines and explosives for drones.

He is just one of many entrepreneurs transforming Ukraine's weapons industry, which was dominated by state-owned enterprises after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Today, about 80 percent of the defense industry is in private hands — a mirror image of where things stood a year ago and a stark contrast with Russia's state-controlled defense industry.

Each newly made projectile is wrapped in craft paper and carefully packed into wooden crates to be shipped to Romania or Bulgaria, where are loaded with explosives. Several weeks later, they're shipped back and sent to the front.

"Our dream is to establish a plant for explosives," said Kuzmin, who is seeking a partner to make that happen.

## OBSTACLES TO GROWTH

Ukraine's surge in military spending has occurred against a backdrop of \$60 billion in U.S. aid being held up by Congress and with European countries struggling to deliver enough ammunition.

As impressive as Ukraine's defense sector transformation has been, the country stands no chance of defeating Russia without massive support from the West, said Trevor Taylor, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, a London-based think tank.

"Ukraine is not capable of producing all the munitions that it needs for this fight," Taylor said. "The hold up of \$60 billion of American help is really proving to be a significant hindrance."

Russia is also pumping more money into its defense industry, whose growth has helped buffer its economy from the full brunt of Western sanctions. The country's defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, recently boasted of huge increases in the manufacture of tanks, drones and ammunition.

"The entire country has risen and is working for our victory," he said.

Compared with last year, Ukraine's output of mortar shells is about 40 times higher and its production of ammunition for artillery has nearly tripled, said Oleksandr Kamyshin, Ukraine's minister of strategic industries. There has also been a boom in drone startups, with the government committing roughly \$1 billion on the technology — on top of its defense budget.

"We now produce in a month what we used to produce in a year," said Vladislav Belbas, the director general of Ukrainian Armor, which makes a wide array of military vehicles.

For the Ukrainian army's 28th brigade, which is fighting near Bakhmut, delays in foreign weapon supplies haven't yet posed any problems for troops "because we are able to cover our need from our own domestic production," said Major Artem Kholodkevych.

Still, domestic weapons factories face a range of challenges — from keeping up with changing needs of battlefield commanders, to their own vulnerability to long-range Russian missile strikes.

But perhaps the greatest immediate hindrance is a lack of manpower.

Yaroslav Dzera, who manages one of Ukrainian Armor's factories, said he struggles to recruit and keep qualified workers, not least because many of them have been mobilized to fight.

## CUTTING THROUGH RED TAPE

Weapons companies say another roadblock to growth is bureaucracy.

The government has tried to become more efficient since the war began, including by making its process for awarding contracts more transparent. But officials say the country has a long way to go.

Shortly before he was replaced by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's former top general, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, highlighted the problem in an essay he wrote for CNN, saying Ukraine's defense sector remained "hamstrung" by too many regulations and a lack of competition.



In spite of the challenges, one success story has been Ukraine's drone industry. Ukrainian-made sea drones have proven to be an effective weapon against the Russian fleet in the Black Sea.

There are around 200 companies in Ukraine now focused on drones and output has soared — with 50 times more deliveries in December compared with a year earlier, according to Mykhailo Fedorov, the country's minister of digital transformation.

Russia's war in Ukraine is not a standoff over whose got better drones or missiles, said Serhii Pashynskyi, head of the National Association of Ukrainian Defense Industries trade group.

"We have a war of only two resources with Russia — manpower and money," he said. "And if we learn to use these two basic resources, we will win. If not, we will have big problems."

## Supreme Court hears arguments Tuesday in case that could restrict access to abortion medication

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is hearing arguments Tuesday in its first abortion case since conservative justices overturned the constitutional right to an abortion two years ago. At stake is the ease of access to a medication that was used in nearly two-thirds of all abortions in the U.S. last year.

Abortion opponents are asking the justices to ratify a ruling from a conservative federal appeals court that would limit access to mifepristone, one of two drugs used in medication abortions.

The high court's return to the abortion thicket is taking place in a political and regulatory landscape that was reshaped by the abortion decision in 2022 that led many Republican-led states to ban or severely restrict abortion.

That ruling had immediate political consequences and the outcome in the new case, expected by early summer, could affect races for Congress and the White House.

The practical consequences of a ruling for abortion opponents would be dramatic, possibly halting the delivery of mifepristone through the mail and at large pharmacy chains, reducing the period in pregnancy when it can be used from 10 to seven weeks and ending increasingly popular telehealth visits at which the drug can be prescribed.

The administration and drug manufacturers warn that such an outcome also could undermine the FDA's drug approval process more widely by inviting judges to second-guess the agency's scientific judgments.

Anti-abortion doctors and medical organizations argue that the FDA's decisions in 2016 and 2021 to relax restrictions on getting the drug were unreasonable and "jeopardize women's health across the nation." The administration and New York-based Danco Laboratories, which makes mifepristone, respond that the drug is among the safest the FDA has ever approved.

In one possible resolution, the justices could avoid touching on the more politically sensitive aspects of the case while preserving access to mifepristone. The administration and Danco argue that the challengers lack the legal right, or standing, to sue. If the high court agrees, it would essentially dismiss the case and erase the appellate ruling.

Another abortion case already is on the docket. Next month, the justices will hear arguments over whether a federal law on emergency treatment at hospitals must include abortions, even in states that have otherwise banned them.

The mifepristone case began five months after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Abortion opponents initially won a sweeping ruling nearly a year ago from U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a Trump nominee in Texas, which would have revoked the drug's approval entirely. The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals left intact the FDA's initial approval of mifepristone. But it would reverse changes regulators made in 2016 and 2021 that eased some conditions for administering the drug.

The Supreme Court put the appeals court's modified ruling on hold, then agreed to hear the case, though Justices Samuel Alito, the author of the decision overturning *Roe*, and Clarence Thomas would have allowed some restrictions to take effect while the case proceeded.

Mifepristone is one of two drugs, along with misoprostol, used in medication abortions. Their numbers

have been rising for years. More than 6 million people have used mifepristone since 2000. Mifepristone is taken first to dilate the cervix and block the hormone progesterone, which is needed to sustain a pregnancy. Misoprostol is taken 24 to 48 hours later, causing the uterus to contract and expel pregnancy tissue.

Health care providers have said that if mifepristone is no longer available or is too hard to obtain, they would switch to using only misoprostol, which is somewhat less effective in ending pregnancies.

## Feds search Sean 'Diddy' Combs' properties as part of sex trafficking probe, AP sources say

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two properties belonging to music mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs in Los Angeles and Miami were searched Monday by federal Homeland Security Investigations agents and other law enforcement as part of an ongoing sex trafficking investigation by federal authorities in New York, two law enforcement officials told The Associated Press.

It's not clear whether Combs was the target of the investigation. The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss details of the investigation and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

In a statement, Homeland Security Investigations said it "executed law enforcement actions as part of an ongoing investigation, with assistance from HSI Los Angeles, HSI Miami, and our local law enforcement partners."

A spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan declined to comment.

Messages to Combs' lawyers and other representatives seeking comment were not immediately returned.

A police line was set up around the Los Angeles house in the wealthy Holmby Hills neighborhood near Beverly Hills. Helicopter video from KABC-TV showed a group of agents with vests that indicated they were from Homeland Security Investigations gathered in the home's backyard near the pool. A command post was set up outside the house and agents were still entering and leaving hours after the search began.

There have been several sexual assault lawsuits filed against Combs in recent months.

In February a music producer filed a lawsuit alleging Combs coerced him to solicit prostitutes and pressured him to have sex with them. Combs' attorney Shawn Holley has said of those allegations that "we have overwhelming, indisputable proof that his claims are complete lies."

Combs' former protege and girlfriend, the R&B singer Cassie, sued him in November alleging years of sexual abuse, including rape. The lawsuit said he forced her to have sex with male prostitutes while he filmed them. The suit was settled the day after it was filed.

Another of Combs' accusers was a woman who said the rap producer raped her two decades ago when she was 17.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they come forward publicly as Cassie did.

Combs had said in a December statement, "I did not do any of the awful things being alleged."

Douglas Wigdor, an attorney who represents Cassie and another woman who sued Combs, said in a statement Monday, "Hopefully, this is the beginning of a process that will hold Mr. Combs responsible for his depraved conduct."

It is not clear whether the search is related to any of the allegations raised in the lawsuits.

Combs is among the most influential hip-hop producers and executives of the past three decades. Formerly known as Puff Daddy, he built one of hip-hop's biggest empires, blazing a trail with several entities attached to his famous name. He is the founder of Bad Boy Records and a three-time Grammy winner who has worked with a slew of top-tier artists including Notorious B.I.G., Mary J. Blige, Usher, Lil Kim, Faith Evans and 112.

Combs created the fashion clothing line Sean John, launched the Revolt TV channel with a focus on music, and produced the reality show "Making the Band" for MTV.

His latest album, "The Love Album - Off the Grid," was released last year days after Combs was honored at the MTV VMAs. It was nominated for best progressive R&B album at February's Grammy Awards, which

the rapper-mogul did not attend.

The entertainment industry has been beset with a steady stream of career-ending sexual misconduct allegations in the years since stories about movie mogul Harvey Weinstein spawned the #MeToo movement in 2017. Weinstein and "That '70s Show" star Danny Masterson are each serving prison sentences after rape convictions. Dozens of civil lawsuits have been filed against prominent figures.

The music industry has not faced a reckoning to the same degree, but singer and producer R. Kelly is serving a prison sentence for sexually abusing young fans, seven women have sued hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons alleging he raped them and two women have sued Aerosmith singer Steven Tyler alleging sexual assault.

Weinstein, Masterson and Kelly are appealing their convictions, and Simmons has denied all of the allegations against him. One lawsuit against Tyler has been dismissed and he is contesting the other.

## UN demand for Gaza cease-fire provokes strongest clash between US and Israel since war began

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United Nations Security Council on Monday issued its first demand for a cease-fire in Gaza, with the U.S. angering Israel by abstaining from the vote. Israel responded by canceling a visit to Washington by a high-level delegation in the strongest public clash between the allies since the war began.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused the U.S. of "retreating" from a "principled position" by allowing the vote to pass without conditioning the cease-fire on the release of hostages held by Hamas.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby said the administration was "kind of perplexed" by Netanyahu's decision. He said the Israelis were "choosing to create a perception of daylight here when they don't need to do that."

Kirby and the American ambassador to the U.N. said the U.S. abstained because the resolution did not condemn Hamas. U.S. officials chose to abstain rather than veto the proposal "because it does fairly reflect our view that a cease-fire and the release of hostages come together," Kirby said.

The 15-member council voted 14-0 to approve the resolution, which also demanded the release of all hostages taken captive during Hamas' Oct. 7 surprise attack in southern Israel. The chamber broke into loud applause after the vote.

The U.S. vetoed past Security Council cease-fire resolutions in large part because of the failure to tie them directly to the release of hostages, the failure to condemn Hamas' attacks and the delicacy of ongoing negotiations. American officials have argued that the cease-fire and hostage releases are linked, while Russia, China and many other council members favored unconditional calls for a cease-fire.

The resolution approved Monday demands the release of hostages but does not make it a condition for the cease-fire for the month of Ramadan, which ends in April.

Hamas said it welcomed the U.N.'s move but said the cease-fire needs to be permanent.

"We confirm our readiness to engage in an immediate prisoner exchange process that leads to the release of prisoners on both sides," the group said. For months, the militants have sought a deal that includes a complete end to the conflict.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres tweeted: "This resolution must be implemented. Failure would be unforgivable."

The U.S. decision to abstain comes at a time of growing tensions between President Joe Biden's administration and Netanyahu over Israel's prosecution of the war, the high number of civilian casualties and the limited amounts of humanitarian assistance reaching Gaza. The two countries have also clashed over Netanyahu's rejection of a Palestinian state, Jewish settler violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the expansion of settlements there.

In addition, the well-known antagonism between Netanyahu and Biden — which dates from Biden's tenure as vice president — deepened after Biden questioned Israel's strategy in combating Hamas.



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Then Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Biden ally, suggested that Netanyahu was not operating in Israel's best interests and called for Israel to hold new elections. Biden signaled his approval of Schumer's remarks, prompting a rebuke from Netanyahu.

During its U.S. visit, the Israeli delegation was to present White House officials with its plans for a possible ground invasion of Rafah, a city on the Egyptian border in southern Gaza where over 1 million Palestinian civilians have sought shelter from the war.

Last week, Netanyahu rebuffed a U.S. request to halt the planned Rafah invasion - vowing during a visit by Secretary of State Antony Blinken to act alone if necessary. Blinken warned that Israel could soon face growing international isolation, while Vice President Kamala Harris said Israel could soon face unspecified consequences if it launches the ground assault.

The Security Council vote came after Russia and China vetoed a U.S.-sponsored resolution Friday that would have supported "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israeli-Hamas conflict. That resolution featured a weakened link between a cease-fire and the release of hostages, leaving it open to interpretation, and no time limit.

The United States warned that the resolution approved Monday could hurt negotiations to halt the hostilities, raising the possibility of another veto, this time by the Americans. The talks involve the U.S., Egypt and Qatar.

Because Ramadan ends April 9, the cease-fire demand would last for just two weeks, though the draft says the pause in fighting should lead to "a lasting sustainable cease-fire."

The U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said the resolution "spoke out in support of the ongoing diplomatic efforts," adding that negotiators were "getting closer" to a deal for a cease-fire with the release of all hostages, "but we're not there yet."

She urged the council and U.N. members across the world to "speak out and demand unequivocally that Hamas accepts the deal on the table."

Thomas-Greenfield said the U.S. abstained because "certain edits" the U.S. requested were ignored, including a condemnation of Hamas.

The resolution, put forward by the 10 elected council members, was backed by Russia and China and the 22-nation Arab Group at the United Nations.

Under the United Nations Charter, Security Council resolutions are legally binding on its 193 member nations, though they are often flouted.

Algeria's U.N. ambassador, Amar Bendjama, the Arab representative on the council, thanked the council for "finally" demanding a cease-fire.

"We look forward to the commitment and the compliance of the Israeli occupying power with this resolution, for them to put an end to the bloodbath without any conditions, to end the suffering of the Palestinian people," he said.

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, told the council that the vote "must be a turning point" that leads to saving lives in Gaza and ending the "assault of atrocities against our people."

Shortly before Monday's vote, the elected members changed the final draft resolution to drop the word "permanent" from its demand that a Ramadan cease-fire should lead to a "sustainable" halt in fighting apparently at the request of the United States.

Russia complained that dropping the word could allow Israel "to resume its military operation in the Gaza Strip at any moment" after Ramadan and proposed an amendment to restore it. That amendment was defeated because it failed to get the minimum nine "yes" votes — with three council members voting in favor, the United States voting against, and 11 countries abstaining.

Since the start of the war, the Security Council has adopted two resolutions on the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, but none has called for a cease-fire.

More than 32,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed during the fighting, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The agency does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

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Gaza also faces a dire humanitarian emergency. A report from an international authority on hunger warned last week that "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza and that escalation of the war could push half of the territory's 2.3 million people to the brink of starvation.

The United States has vetoed three resolutions demanding a cease-fire in Gaza, the most recent an Arab-backed measure on Feb. 20. That resolution was supported by 13 council members with one abstention, reflecting the overwhelming support for a cease-fire.

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

They again vetoed a U.S. resolution Friday, calling it ambiguous and saying it was not the direct demand to end the fighting that much of the world seeks.

That vote became another showdown involving world powers that are locked in tense disputes elsewhere, with the United States taking criticism for not being tough enough against its ally Israel, even as tensions between the two countries rise.

Thomas-Greenfield accused Russia and China on Monday of using the Gaza conflict "as a political cudgel, to try to divide this council at a time when we need to come together."

## **New York City to send 800 more officers to police subway fare-beating**

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City plans to intensify a crackdown on subway fare-beating by sending at least 800 police officers specifically to keep watch on turnstiles, officials announced Monday.

It's the latest in a string of recent moves to address concerns about safety and unruliness in the nation's busiest subway system. Hours after the announcement, a person was shoved onto the tracks in East Harlem as a train was approaching the station. The train could not stop and the person was struck and was pronounced dead at the scene, the New York Police Department said.

A 45-year-old man was taken into custody. NYPD said the incident was unprovoked.

The NYPD said earlier Monday it plans to deploy hundreds of uniformed and plainclothes officers this week to deter fare evasion.

"The tone of law and order starts at the turnstiles," department Transit Chief Michael Kemper said at a news conference. Chief of Patrol John Chell said the additional officers would fan out to various stations, based on crime, ridership statistics and community complaints.

Data shows the crackdown on fare-skippers is already under way. Over 1,700 people have been arrested on a charge of turnstile-jumping so far this year, compared to 965 at this time in 2023. Police have issued fare evasion tickets to over 28,000 people so far this year.

A single subway ride is \$2.90, though multiple-ride and monthly passes can cut the cost. Officials have complained for years that fare evasion costs the city's transit system hundreds of millions of dollars a year. However, the policing of turnstile-jumpers has drawn scrutiny of tickets and arrests that disproportionately affected Black and Hispanic people, at least in some past years.

Police and Mayor Eric Adams, a former transit officer himself, in recent weeks have suggested some links between fare-skipping and violence on the trains.

Subway safety fears have proven difficult to put to rest since people in New York and other cities emerged from COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns to a 2021 spurt in crime.

After taking office in 2022, Adams rolled out a plan to send more police, mental health clinicians and social service outreach workers into the subways.

Police reports of major crimes in the transit system dropped nearly 3% from 2022 to 2023, and officials said Monday that overall crime so far this month is down 15% compared to last year.

But worries ratcheted up after some shootings and slashings in the last few months, prompting the NYPD to say in February that it was boosting underground patrols. Earlier this month, Gov. Kathy Hochul — like Adams, a Democrat — announced she was sending National Guard troops to help conduct random bag checks in the underground system.

Hours before Monday's news conference, a man was stabbed multiple times on a subway train in a dispute over smoking, police said. A suspect was arrested.

## Trump's New York hush money case is set for trial April 15

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The first of Donald Trump's four criminal trials will begin April 15, a Manhattan judge ruled Monday after tearing into the former president's lawyers for what he said were unfounded claims that the hush-money case had been tainted by prosecutorial misconduct.

Judge Juan M. Merchan scoffed at the defense's calls to delay the case longer or throw it out entirely because of a last-minute document dump that had bumped the first-ever trial of a former president from its scheduled Monday start. Trump vowed to appeal the ruling.

Barring another delay, the presumptive Republican nominee will be on trial as a criminal defendant in just three weeks — an inauspicious homecoming in the city where he grew up, built a real estate empire and gained wealth and celebrity that propelled him to the White House.

The trial, involving allegations related to hush money paid during Trump's 2016 campaign to cover up marital infidelity claims, had been in limbo after his lawyers complained about a recent deluge of nearly 200,000 pages of evidence from a previous federal investigation into the matter.

Trump's lawyers accused Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office of intentionally failing to pursue evidence from the 2018 federal investigation, which sent Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen to prison. They contended prosecutors working under Bragg, a Democrat, did so to gain an unfair advantage in the case and harm Trump's election chances. Cohen, now a vocal Trump critic, is poised to be a key prosecution witness against his ex-boss.

Merchan bristled at the defense's claims at a hearing Monday, saying the DA's office had no duty to collect evidence from the federal investigation, nor was the U.S. attorney's office required to volunteer the documents. What transpired was a "far cry" from Manhattan prosecutors "injecting themselves in the process and vehemently and aggressively trying to obstruct your ability to get documentation," the judge said.

"It's just not what happened," Merchan said.

Merchan grew impatient, pressing Trump lawyer Todd Blanche to cite even a single legal precedent for his argument.

When the lawyer couldn't, the judge laid into him, saying: "You're literally accusing the Manhattan DA's office and the people assigned to this case of engaging in prosecutorial misconduct and of trying to make me complicit in it. And you don't have a single cite to support that position."

Assistant District Attorney Matthew Colangelo said the number of relevant, usable, new documents in the recently provided evidence "is quite small" — around 300 records or fewer. Trump's lawyers contend thousands of pages are potentially important and require painstaking review. They argued the delayed disclosures warranted dismissing the case or at least pushing it off three months.

"We are not doing our jobs if we don't independently look at the new material," Blanche told the judge. "Every document is important."

The DA's office denied wrongdoing and 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 the trial was originally supposed to start. Merchan, who earlier this month postponed the trial until at least mid-April to deal with the evidence issue, told defense lawyers that they should have acted sooner if they believed they didn't have all the records they wanted.

Trump complained about the ruling outside court, renewing his complaint that the case is "election interference."

"This is a case that could have been brought three and a half years ago. And now they're fighting over days because they want to try and do it during the election. This is election interference. That's all it is. Election interference and it's a disgrace," the former president said.

The hearing took place the same day a New York appeals court granted Trump a dose of good news by



agreeing to hold off collection of his \$454 million civil fraud judgment — if he puts up \$175 million within 10 days.

The dueling developments underscored New York's place as an epicenter of Trump's legal peril. Though the hush money case is seen as less consequential than his other prosecutions — which charge him with conspiring to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and illegally retaining classified documents — it has taken on added importance given that it's the only one that appears likely for trial in the coming months.

The trial will begin with jury selection, a potentially arduous task given the publicity surrounding the case and Trump's wild unpopularity in heavily Democratic Manhattan.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to charges that he falsified business records, a felony punishable by up to four years in prison, though there is no guarantee a conviction would result in jail time. Manhattan prosecutors say Trump did it as part of an effort to protect his 2016 campaign by burying what he says were false stories of extramarital sex. Trump on Monday repeated to reporters his claims that the case is a "witch hunt" and "hoax."

Prosecutors allege that Trump falsely logged payments to Cohen, then his personal lawyer, as legal fees in his company's books when they were for his work covering up stories that might embarrass Trump. That included \$130,000 he'd paid porn actor Stormy Daniels on Trump's behalf, so she wouldn't publicize her claim of a sexual encounter with him years earlier.

Trump's lawyers say the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses, not cover-up checks.

Cohen pleaded guilty in 2018 to federal campaign finance violations related to the Daniels payoff. He said Trump directed him to arrange it, and federal prosecutors indicated they believed him, but Trump was never charged.

Trump's lawyers said Bragg's office turned over just a fraction of materials from that investigation last June. The material hasn't been made public. But Trump's lawyers said in a court filing that some of it is "exculpatory and favorable to the defense." The sharing of evidence, called discovery, is routine in criminal cases and is intended to help ensure a fair trial.

Bragg's deputies have insisted they "engaged in good-faith and diligent efforts to obtain relevant information" from the federal probe. They argued in court filings that Trump's lawyers should have spoken up earlier if they believed those efforts were lacking.

Prosecutors maintain that, in any event, the vast majority of what ultimately came is irrelevant, duplicative or backs up existing evidence about Cohen's well-known federal conviction.

## **Court agrees to pause collection of Trump's massive civil fraud judgment if he puts up \$175M**

By JENNIFER PELTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York appeals court on Monday agreed to hold off collection of former President Donald Trump's more than \$454 million civil fraud judgment if he puts up \$175 million within 10 days.

If Trump does, it will stop the clock on collection and prevent the state from seizing the presumptive Republican presidential nominee's assets while he appeals. The appeals court also halted other aspects of a trial judge's ruling that had barred Trump and his sons Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr., the family company's executive vice presidents, from serving in corporate leadership for several years.

In all, the order was a significant victory for the Republican ex-president as he defends the real estate empire that vaulted him into public life. The development came just before New York Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat, was expected to initiate efforts to collect the judgment.

Trump, who was attending a separate hearing in his criminal hush money case in New York, hailed the ruling and said he would post a bond, securities or cash to cover the \$175 million sum in the civil case. Speaking in a courthouse hallway, Trump revisited his oft-stated complaints about civil trial Judge Arthur Engoron and the penalty he imposed.

"What he's done is such a disservice and should never be allowed to happen again," said Trump, who

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argues that the fraud case is discouraging business in New York.

James' office, meanwhile, noted that the judgment still stands, even if collection is paused.

"Donald Trump is still facing accountability for his staggering fraud," the office said in a statement.

Trump's lawyers had pleaded for a state appeals court to halt collection, claiming it was "a practical impossibility" to get an underwriter to sign off on a bond for such a large sum, which grows daily because of interest. The Trump attorneys had earlier proposed a \$100 million bond, but an appellate judge had said no late last month.

Monday's ruling came from a five-judge panel in the state's intermediate appeals court, called the Appellate Division, where Trump is fighting to overturn Engoron's Feb. 16 decision. Trump attorneys Alina Habba and Christopher Kise characterized Monday's ruling as a key first step.

Siding with the attorney general after a months-long civil trial, Engoron found that Trump, his company and top executives lied about his wealth on financial statements, conning bankers and insurers who did business with him. The statements valued Trump's penthouse for years as though it were nearly three times its actual size, for example.

Trump and his co-defendants denied any wrongdoing, saying the statements actually lowballed his fortune, came with disclaimers and weren't taken at face value by the institutions that lent to or insured him. The penthouse discrepancy, he said, was simply a mistake made by subordinates.

Engoron ordered Trump to pay \$355 million, plus interest. Some co-defendants, including Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump, were ordered to pay far smaller amounts. Monday's ruling also puts those on hold if the \$175 million bond is posted.

After James won the judgment, she didn't seek to enforce it during a legal time-out for Trump to ask the appeals court for a reprieve from paying up.

That period ended Monday, though James could have decided to allow Trump more time.

James told ABC News last month that if Trump doesn't have the money to pay, she would seek to seize his assets. She didn't detail the process or specify what holdings she meant, and her office has declined more recently to discuss its plans. Meanwhile, the office has filed notice of the judgment, a technical step toward potentially moving to collect.

Trump maintained on social media on Friday that he has almost \$500 million in cash, but he said at a news conference on Monday that he'd like to be able to use some on his presidential run. He asserted that James and Engoron, who's also a Democrat, "don't want me taking cash out to use it for the campaign."

If the penalty is ultimately upheld, the attorney general could go after Trump's bank and investment accounts. There's also the possibility of going through a legal process to seize properties such as his Trump Tower penthouse, aircraft, Wall Street office building or golf courses, and then seeking to sell them.

But that could be complicated in Trump's case.

"Finding buyers for assets of this magnitude is something that doesn't happen overnight," noted Stewart Sterk, a real estate law professor at Cardozo School of Law.

Under New York law, filing an appeal generally doesn't hold off enforcement of a judgment. But there's an automatic pause if the person or entity posts a bond covering what's owed.

Many defendants are able to get such a bond, but "judgments of this size are rare," said Joshua Naftalis, a former federal prosecutor now in private practice.

"What makes this one unusual is someone who is subject to an enormous amount of money and has to come up with it himself," Naftalis said.

The ex-president's lawyers have said underwriters wanted 120% of the judgment and wouldn't accept real estate as collateral. That would mean tying up over \$557 million in cash, stocks and other liquid assets, and Trump's company needs some left over to run the business, his attorneys have said.

They asked an appeals court to freeze collection without his posting a bond. The attorney general's office objected, saying he hadn't explored every option for covering the amount.

The appeals court "chose a middle ground" by still requiring Trump to put up money but lowering the amount, Naftalis said.

## Republicans threaten to hold Attorney General Garland in contempt over Biden documents case

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans threatened to hold Attorney General Merrick Garland in contempt of Congress if he did not turn over unredacted materials related to the special counsel probe into President Joe Biden's handling of classified documents.

In a letter Monday — obtained by The Associated Press — Reps. James Comer and Jim Jordan demanded that Garland comply with the subpoena the two Republican chairmen sent last month as part of their emerging investigation into Special Counsel Robert Hur's decision not to charge the president.

Comer, chair of the Oversight Committee, and Jordan, chair of the Judiciary Committee, ordered the Justice Department to turn over the unredacted audio and transcripts of Hur's hourslong interviews with Biden and his ghostwriter by April 8.

"If you fail to do so, the Committees will consider taking further action, such as the invocation of contempt of Congress proceedings," the two lawmakers wrote.

The Justice Department reacted to the letter late Monday, saying the department "has been extraordinarily transparent with Congress" throughout the process.

"The Attorney General released Mr. Hur's report to Congress and made no redactions or changes, the Department provided documents to Congress including a copy of the President's interview transcript, and Mr. Hur testified before Congress for more than five hours about his investigation," Emma Dulaney, a department spokesperson, said in a statement to AP. "Given the Department's ongoing and extensive cooperation, we hope they will reconsider this unnecessary escalation."

The threat is just the latest tension point between Republicans and the GOP-appointed federal prosecutor who appeared before lawmakers two weeks ago for a more than four-hour interrogation surrounding his 345-page report that questioned Biden's age and mental competence but ultimately recommended no criminal charges for the 81-year-old president. Hur said that he found insufficient evidence to make a case that would stand up in court.

"What I wrote is what I believe the evidence shows, and what I expect jurors would perceive and believe," Hur said. "I did not sanitize my explanation. Nor did I disparage the president unfairly."

Despite his defense, Hur faced an onslaught of criticism from both sides of the aisle for the commentary in his report and the decision to withhold pressing charges against Biden.

Hours before his testimony, the Justice Department released a redacted transcript that provided a more nuanced picture of the roughly yearlong investigation, filling in some of the gaps left by Hur's and Biden's accounting of the exchanges.

Republicans, including Comer and Jordan, have insisted for the past year that unlike Biden, former President Donald Trump has been treated unfairly in his own Justice Department case for mishandling classified documents. During the hearing, GOP members reiterated that while Biden was let off the hook, Trump has been singled out and vilified, questioning if the facts of the two cases were all that different.

Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., called it a "glaring double standard."

"Donald Trump's being prosecuted for exactly the same act that you documented Joe Biden committed," he told Hur.

However, there are major differences between the two probes. Biden's team returned the documents after they were discovered, and the president cooperated with the investigation by voluntarily sitting for an interview and consenting to searches of his homes. Trump, by contrast, is accused of enlisting the help of aides and lawyers to conceal the documents from the government and seeking to have potentially incriminating evidence destroyed.



## Putin says Islamic extremists raided concert hall but attack masterminds are yet to be found

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Monday that the gunmen who killed 139 people at a suburban Moscow concert hall are "radical Islamists," but he repeated his accusation that Ukraine could have played a role despite Kyiv's strong denials.

Two days after the Islamic State's Afghanistan affiliate claimed responsibility for Friday night's attack at the music venue, Putin acknowledged during a meeting with government officials that the killings were carried out by extremists "whose ideology the Islamic world has been fighting for centuries."

Putin, who declared over the weekend that the four attackers were arrested while trying to escape to Ukraine, said investigators haven't determined who ordered the attack, but that it was necessary to find out "why the terrorists after committing their crime tried to flee to Ukraine and who was waiting for them there."

The IS affiliate claimed it carried out the attack, and U.S. intelligence said it had information confirming the group was responsible. French President Emmanuel Macron said France has intelligence pointing to "an IS entity" as responsible for the attack.

Despite all signs pointing to IS, Putin continued to suggest Ukrainian involvement — a claim Ukraine roundly has roundly rejected, accusing Putin of trying to drum up fervor in his war efforts.

"We are seeing that the U.S., through various channels, is trying to convince its satellites and other countries of the world that, according to their intelligence, there is allegedly no Kyiv trace in the Moscow terror attack — that the bloody terrorist act was committed by followers of Islam, members of the Islamic State group," Putin said during the meeting with top law enforcement officials.

He added that "those who support the Kyiv regime don't want to be accomplices in terror and sponsors of terrorism, but many questions remain."

The attack Friday night at the Crocus City Hall music venue on Moscow's western outskirts left 139 people dead and more than 180 injured, proving to be the deadliest in Russia in years. About 100 people remained hospitalized, officials said.

Putin warned that more attacks could follow, alleging possible Western involvement. He didn't mention the warning about a possible imminent terrorist attack that the U.S. confidentially shared with Moscow two weeks before the raid. Three days before the attack, Putin denounced the U.S. Embassy's March 7 notice urging Americans to avoid crowds in Moscow, including concerts, calling it an attempt to frighten Russians and "blackmail" the Kremlin ahead of the presidential election.

The four suspected attackers, all Tajikistan nationals, were remanded by a Moscow court Sunday night with carrying out the attack and ordered to remain in custody pending the outcome of the official investigation.

Russian media reported that the four were tortured while being interrogated, and they showed signs during their court appearance of having been severely beaten. Russian officials said all four pleaded guilty to the charges, which carry life punishment, but their condition raised questions about whether their statements might have been coerced.

Russian authorities reported that seven other suspects have been detained, and three of them were remanded by the court Monday on charges of being involved in the attack.

As they mowed down concertgoers with gunfire, the attackers set fire to the vast concert hall, and the resulting blaze caused the roof to collapse.

The search operation will continue until at least Tuesday afternoon, officials said. A Russian Orthodox priest conducted a service at the site Monday, blessing a makeshift memorial with incense.

Russian officials and lawmakers have called for anyone involved in the attack to be severely punished. Some have called for the restoration of capital punishment, which has been outlawed since 1997.

During Sunday's court hearing, three of the suspects showed signs of heavy bruising, including swollen faces. One of them was in a wheelchair in a hospital gown, accompanied by medical personnel, and sat with his eyes closed throughout. He appeared to have multiple cuts.

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Another had a plastic bag still hanging over his neck and a third man had a heavily bandaged ear. Russian media reported Saturday that one suspect had his ear cut off during an interrogation. The Associated Press couldn't verify the report or videos purporting to show this.

Dmitry Medvedev, who was Russia's president from 2008-12 and now serves as deputy head of Security Council chaired by Putin, called for the killing of "everyone involved. Everyone. Those who paid, those who sympathized, those who helped. Kill them all."

Margarita Simonyan, head of the state-funded television channel RT, argued that even the death penalty — currently banned in Russia — would be "too easy" a punishment.

Instead, she said they should face "lifelong hard labor somewhere underground, living there too, without the opportunity to ever see light, on bread and water, with a ban on conversations and with a not very humane escort."

Russian human rights advocates condemned the violence against the men.

Team Against Torture, a prominent group that advocates against police brutality, said in a statement that the culprits must face stern punishment, but "savagery should not be the answer to savagery."

It said the value of any testimony obtained by torture was "critically low," and "if the government allows for torture of terrorism suspects, it may allow unlawful violence toward other citizens, too."

Net Freedoms, another Russian group that focuses on freedom of speech cases, said Medvedev's remarks, as well as Putin's recent call on security services to "punish traitors without a statute of limitation no matter where they are," made against the backdrop of "demonstrative torture of the detained ... effectively authorize extrajudicial killings and give instructions to security forces on how to treat enemies."

"We're seeing the possible beginning of the new Great Terror," Net Freedoms said, referring to mass repressions by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. The group foresees more police brutality against suspects in terrorist-related cases and a spike in violent crimes against migrants.

Abuse of suspects by law enforcement and security services isn't new, said Sergei Davidis of the Memorial human rights group.

"We know about torture of Ukrainian prisoners of war, we know about mass torture of those charged with terrorism, high treason and other crimes, especially those investigated by the Federal Security Service. Here, it was for the first time made public," Davidis said.

Parading beaten suspects could reflect a desire by authorities to show a muscular response to try to defuse any criticism of their inability to prevent the attack, he said.

The concert hall attack was a major embarrassment for Putin and came less than a week after he cemented his grip on Russia for another six years in a vote that followed the harshest crackdown on dissent since Soviet times.

Many on Russian social media questioned how authorities and their vast security apparatus that actively surveils, pressures and prosecutes critics failed to prevent the attack despite the U.S. warning.

Citing the treatment of the suspects, Davidis told AP that "we can suppose it was deliberately made public in order to show the severity of response of the state."

"People are not satisfied with this situation when such a huge number of law enforcement officers didn't manage to prevent such an attack, and they demonstrate the severe reaction in order to stop these accusations against them," he said.

The fact that the security forces did not conceal their methods was "a bad sign," he said.

IS, which fought Russian forces that intervened in the Syrian civil war, has long targeted the country. In a statement posted by the group's Amaq news agency, the IS Afghanistan affiliate said it carried out an attack in Krasnogorsk, the suburb of Moscow where the concert hall is located.

In October 2015, a bomb planted by IS downed a Russian passenger plane over Sinai, killing all 224 people aboard, most of them Russian vacationers returning from Egypt.

The group, which operates mainly in Syria and Iraq but also in Afghanistan and Africa, has claimed responsibility for several attacks in Russia's volatile Caucasus and other regions in past years. It recruited fighters from Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union.

## Boeing CEO to step down in management shake-up as manufacturing issues plague storied plane maker

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

A leadership shake-up at Boeing, including news Monday that its top executive plans to step down, highlights the difficult path facing the iconic aircraft manufacturer as it tries to navigate through yet another safety crisis.

CEO David Calhoun, who has been under unrelenting pressure since a panel blew off a Boeing 737 Max jetliner during a January flight, said he would retire at the end of the year. He said the decision to leave was his and the timing would allow for an orderly transition.

The head of the company's commercial airplanes unit, Stan Deal, is already out. Boeing said he was replaced immediately by Stephanie Pope, a fast-rising insider who just became chief operating officer on Jan. 1.

In a third high-profile decision, board Chairman Lawrence Kellner, a former Continental Airlines chief, won't stand for reelection in May, Boeing said. A former Qualcomm CEO who was appointed to succeed Kellner will lead the search for Calhoun's replacement.

Calhoun was on the Boeing board during its worst time — the crashes of two 737 Max planes in 2018 and 2019 that killed 346 people. He leaves with the company under intense scrutiny from regulators and lawmakers since a door-plug panel blew off a brand-new Alaska Airlines Max jet in midflight on Jan. 5.

Investigators say bolts that help keep the panel in place were missing after repair work at the Boeing factory.

The Federal Aviation Administration reviewed Boeing's 737 factory near Seattle and gave the company failing grades on nearly three dozen aspects of production. The company has until late May to give the FAA a plan for improvement. In the meantime, the federal agency is limiting production of 737s.

The FBI recently told passengers from the Alaska Airlines flight that they might be victims of a crime.

Airline executives have expressed their frustration with Boeing, and even minor incidents involving jets the company produced are attracting extra attention.

In a note to employees on Monday, Calhoun called the Alaska Airlines blowout a "watershed moment for Boeing" that requires a "total commitment to safety and quality at every level of our company."

"The eyes of the world are on us, and I know we will come through this moment a better company, building on all the learnings we accumulated as we worked together to rebuild Boeing over the last number of years," he said.

Boeing's most significant effort to improve quality has been opening discussions about bringing Spirit AeroSystems, which builds fuselages for the Max and many parts for that and other Boeing planes, back into the company.

Mistakes made at Spirit, which Boeing spun off nearly 20 years ago, have compounded the company's problems. Bringing the work of the supplier back in-house would, in theory, give Boeing more control over the quality of manufacturing key airplane components.

Calhoun said the two companies were making progress in talks "and it's very important."

Calhoun had been a Boeing director since 2009 when he became CEO in January 2020, replacing Denis Muilenburg, who was fired in the aftermath of the Max crashes. In 2021, Boeing's board raised the mandatory retirement age for CEO to keep Calhoun in the job.

He oversaw the Max's return to service after a worldwide grounding that lasted nearly two years, and orders for the plane quickly picked up. Since then, however, a series of manufacturing flaws have delayed deliveries of new 737s and larger 787 Dreamliners to airlines, forcing the carriers to reduce growth plans.

Boeing has not filed its proxy statement for 2023, but previous filings show that Calhoun received compensation valued at more than \$64.6 million from 2020 through 2022. Almost all of it was in the form of stock awards, options and bonuses.

The company, based in Arlington, Virginia, has lost more than \$23 billion since Calhoun took over, although

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most of that is residual damage from the two Max crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia. Boeing shares have fallen more than 40% in that time – 24% since the Alaska incident, through trading on Friday.

Last week, Chief Financial Officer Brian West warned that Boeing burned between \$4 billion and \$4.5 billion more cash than it expected in the first quarter as it slowed down airplane production after the Alaska Airlines accident.

The company tapped former Qualcomm CEO Steven Mollenkopf to become the new board chairman and lead the search for Calhoun's replacement.

Some Boeing critics in Congress said the shake-up in the top ranks is not enough and that Boeing needs to worry more about safety and less about producing more airplanes. That view is shared by a leading Boeing whistleblower.

"It is going to be hard to fix the culture, but the people at Boeing (who build planes) are capable of it," said Ed Pierson, a former manager at Boeing's 737 factory who is now director of a safety foundation. "Those employees need to feel valued and supported instead of (management) just directing them and pressuring them to produce planes."

The focus on Boeing since early January took some of the surprise out of Monday's news. Citi analyst Jason Gursky called the shake-up "both predictable and thoughtful."

Some analysts had viewed the fast-rising Pope as a likely successor to Calhoun. Gursky said, however, that her move to lead commercial airplanes opens the way for an outsider to become CEO.

Before her promotion to chief operating officer at the beginning of the year, Pope, 51, was president and CEO of Boeing's services business, where she dealt with both airline and military customers. She served as chief financial officer of the airplanes division before that.

Richard Aboulafia, a longtime aerospace analyst and now a consultant at AeroDynamic Advisory, said the management shake-up "is likely to be a pivotal moment in Boeing's history, and probably a very positive one," but the outcome depends on the next CEO.

Rebuilding Boeing will be "very hard, and a long road," Aboulafia said. Putting people with technical skill in higher leadership positions would be a plus, he said.

He said Patrick Shanahan — a former Boeing executive and acting U.S. defense secretary during the Trump administration who has led Spirit AeroSystems since the fall — would be a "great choice."

Cai von Rumohr, an aerospace analyst at financial services firm TD Cowen, said the management changes are "a partial step toward changing its culture to underscore safety and rebuild investor confidence in the company." He said the fact that Calhoun gave more than eight months' notice will help the Boeing board make "a considered decision" instead of "a knee-jerk reaction."

The CEO of Irish airline Ryanair, a major Boeing customer, welcomed the management changes, including the replacement of Deal at the head of the commercial airplanes division. Michael O'Leary said in a video posted on X that Deal did a good job at Boeing sales, "but he's not the person to turn around the operation in Seattle, and that's where most of the problems have been in recent years."

Shares of The Boeing Co. rose about 1% in trading Monday.

## Russian massacre suspects' homeland is plagued by poverty and religious strife

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — The four men charged with the massacre at a Moscow theater have been identified by authorities as citizens of Tajikistan, some of the thousands who migrate to Russia each year from the poorest of the former Soviet republics to scrape out marginal existences.

Along with grinding poverty, Tajikistan is rife with religious tensions. Hard-line Islamists were one of the main forces opposing the government in a 1990s civil war that devastated the country. The militants claiming responsibility for the Moscow massacre that killed 139 people — a branch of the Islamic State group in neighboring Afghanistan — reportedly recruit heavily from Tajikistan.



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The four suspects who were arraigned in a Moscow court late Sunday on terrorism charges appeared to have been beaten or injured during their detention. One was wheeled in on a gurney clad only in a hospital gown.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday described the suspects as "radical Islamists," and he repeated his accusation that Ukraine might have played a role despite its strong denials.

Here is a look at the people, militant groups and political history connected to the Moscow attack:

## THE SUSPECTS

The eldest defendant is Dalerdzhon Mirzoyev, 32, who may have been living in Russia illegally. He was shown sitting in a glass cage in the courtroom with a black eye and bruised face.

Mirzoyev reportedly had obtained a three-month residency permit in the city of Novosibirsk, but it had expired. In video of his interrogation shared on Russian social media, he reportedly says he recently was living in a Moscow hostel with another of the suspects. The court said he is married and has four children, but it was unclear if he was employed.

Saidakrami Murodali Rachabalizoda, 30, is apparently unemployed. Registered as a resident in Russia, he could not remember in what city, according to Russian news reports. When he appeared in court, his head was awkwardly bandaged after Russian officers reportedly sawed off one of his ears.

Shamsidin Fariduni, 25, apparently had the most stable life of the four suspects. He was registered in Krasnogorsk, the Moscow suburb where the killings took place, and worked in a flooring factory. He reportedly told interrogators that he was offered 500,000 rubles (about \$5,425) to carry out the attack — the equivalent of about 2.5 years of the average wage in Tajikistan.

Mukhammadsobir Fayzov, 19, was brought into the courtroom on a gurney, with a catheter attached and one eye injured or missing, and he appeared to fade in and out of consciousness. He had worked as an apprentice in a barbershop in the declining textile-mill city of Ivanovo, but reports said he left that job in November.

## ISLAMIC TENSIONS IN TAJIKISTAN

As many as 1.5 million Tajik migrants are estimated to be in Russia after fleeing the poverty and unemployment that plague their landlocked, mountainous country. An array of mineral resources are present in Tajikistan, but the industry has been slow to develop because of belated foreign investment and poor geological data, among other factors.

Although its nearly 10 million people are overwhelmingly Muslim, tensions connected to Islam are common.

Islamists were a key opponent during a 1992-97 civil war in which the government killed as many as 150,000 people and devastated the economy. When the war ended, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon took steps to sharply curtail religious freedoms.

The government limited how many mosques could be built, prohibited women and children under 18 from attending mosques at all, and banned religious instruction outside the home for children. Critics say the limits encouraged people to turn to underground and radical Muslim factions via the internet.

Tajikistan has not made any official statement about the arrest of the four men suspected in the attack. But Rahmon was quoted by his government's press service as telling Putin in a phone call that "terrorists have neither nationality, nor a homeland, nor religion."

## ISLAMIC STATE VS. RUSSIA

Most attacks tied to Islamic extremists that afflicted Russia in the past quarter century were committed by Chechen separatists, such as the 2004 Beslan school seizure that killed more than 300 people — or were blamed on them, as in the 1999 apartment bombings that triggered the second Russia-Chechnya war.

But attacks that began in 2015 were claimed by or attributed to the Islamic State group. The group opposed Russia's intervention in Syria, where Moscow sought to tip the balance in favor of President Bashar Assad's forces.

The U.S. government has said it had intelligence confirming IS was responsible for the weekend attack in Moscow.

After IS declared a caliphate in large parts of Syria and Iraq in June 2014, thousands of men and women from around the world came to join the extremist group. Those included thousands from the former Soviet

Union, among them hundreds from Tajikistan.

One of the most prominent figures to join IS was Gulmurod Khalimov, who was an officer with Tajikistan's special forces before defecting and joining IS in Syria in 2015. In 2017, the Russian military said Khalimov was killed in a Russian airstrike in Syria.

IS claimed responsibility for the 2015 bombing of a Russian airliner that was bringing tourists home from the Egyptian resort Sharm al-Sheik. Two years later, it claimed to be behind the suicide bombing of a subway train in St. Petersburg that killed 15 people.

Two weeks before the Moscow theater massacre, Russian officials said they had wiped out members of an IS cell that was planning to attack a synagogue. Earlier in the month, it reported killing six IS fighters in the Ingushetia region adjacent to Chechnya.

## Moscow theater shooting fans flames of a disinformation war

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Flames were still leaping from the Moscow concert hall besieged by gunmen when Russian officials began suggesting who was really to blame. They presented no evidence, only aspersions and suspicion and counterfactual speculation, but in Russia's eyes the culprit was clear: Ukraine.

The allegations that Ukraine, now in its third year of fighting after Russia invaded, was behind Friday's attack that killed at least 137 people, were the first salvo in a disinformation war that has clouded the hearts and minds of people trying to come to grips with the shocking attack.

First came Dmitry Medvedev, the former Russian president who was once regarded as a mild reformer but who has become a vehement hawk since the start of the Ukraine war.

"Terrorists understand only retaliatory terror ... if it is established that these are terrorists of the Kyiv regime, it is impossible to deal with them and their ideological inspirers differently," he wrote on the Telegram message app about 90 minutes after first news came of the attack.

While not overtly accusing Ukraine, the strong implication was in line with Russia's portrayal of Ukraine as a nest of vipers and suggested that Russia was prepared to step up its air assaults on Ukraine, which already had notably intensified in recent days.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry quickly grabbed the baton, not only rejecting Russia's accusations but suggesting that the brutal shootings and fire may have been a false flag operation. A ministry statement Friday evening referenced the 1999 apartment bombings that many critics have suggested were done by Russian security agents to justify launching the second Chechnya war.

"There are no red lines for (President Vladimir) Putin's dictatorship. It is ready to kill its own citizens for political purposes, just as it has killed thousands of Ukrainian civilians during the war against Ukraine as a result of missile attacks, artillery shelling and torture," the ministry said at the time.

The claim of responsibility by a cell of the Islamic State did nothing to quiet the accusations, even though the group is a reliable villain to almost every country and despite Russia having claimed to have thwarted an IS-planned assault on a synagogue this month.

The United States' confirmation of the IS claim only hardened Russia's position.

"On what basis do officials in Washington draw any conclusions about anyone's innocence in the midst of a tragedy? If the United States has or had reliable information in this regard, then it must be immediately transferred to the Russian side," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

"If there is no such data, then the White House has no right to issue indulgences to anyone," she said.

All that was on Friday.

On Saturday, Russian officers chased down four suspects in the Bryansk region, about 350 kilometers (210 miles) south of Moscow. Bryansk is on the border with Ukraine and Russians were outraged.

"Now we know in which country these bloody bastards planned to hide from persecution – Ukraine," Zakharova said.

In the afternoon, Putin, having waited about 19 hours to address the nation about the bloodshed, claimed without presenting evidence that the suspects were aiming to pass through a border "window" that had

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been arranged in advance.

How such passage could be arranged between warring countries was also unexplained. On Monday, Putin said the attackers were "radical Islamists," but that it still needed to be explained why they tried to flee to Ukraine.

Over the weekend, digital bystanders chimed in on social media and messaging services. Some found it suspicious that the United States in early March had issued a warning saying it had intelligence indicating an imminent terrorist attack.

To some, that suggested that Washington didn't give enough information to Russia about what it knew. To others, it indicated that Russian security services were too inept to fend off an attack even when warned.

Overtly bogus information also came in the attack's wake. Russia's state broadcaster NTV ran a video that appeared to show Ukraine's top security official, Oleksiy Danilov, say, "Is it fun in Moscow today? ... I would like to believe that we will arrange such fun for them more often."

But it turned out to be an AI-generated deepfake, said digital sleuth Shayan Sardarizadeh of the BBC.

For some, implications and manipulation were too subtle and they chose all-out assertions.

"Ukraine did it. They will pay," American commentator Jackson Hinkle, who recently interviewed Zakharova, wrote on X. Hinkle regularly spreads false information on social media. The Russia-Ukraine war has been one of his frequent targets, with Hinkle often posting content that furthers Russia's disinformation narratives.

## Big brands could pivot easily if TikTok goes away. For many small businesses, it's another story

By HALELUYA HADERO and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — If content creators and corporate executives made TikTok videos about the platform's possible U.S. demise, disco diva Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" could supply the soundtrack.

Sure, businesses that built strategies around TikTok and promote products there would prefer not to seek eyeballs on another app. Smaller firms and solo entrepreneurs are bound to feel more pain in the event of a breakup. But if the popular video-sharing service remains under Chinese ownership and Congress bans it, many companies would learn to get along.

A lot of "What ifs" still surround a bill the U.S. House passed this month that would mandate TikTok's Beijing-based parent company, ByteDance, to sell its stake in the platform within six months or face a nationwide ban. It's unclear when the Senate will take up the legislation or if it will approve a ban when it does.

Big brands that have relied on TikTok to reach younger consumers do not appear to be panicking as they wait to see what happens in Washington. But they also have started planning. Some are retooling promotional campaigns that were originally intended just for TikTok. Many are testing alternatives and prioritizing work with influencers who have sizable followings on multiple social media platforms.

"I'm not the kind of marketer who wants to put all their eggs in one basket anyway," said Jeremy Lowenstein, chief marketing officer for the makeup brand Milani Cosmetics. "We can always pivot. And like any technology, there will always be something new to try."

To be sure, brands like Los-Angeles-based Milani will lose a valuable tool if TikTok isn't welcome in the U.S. anymore. Last year, sales of a new Milani mascara spiked after an influencer couple known as The Lipstick Lesbians posted a TikTok video about it, Lowenstein said. He's already looked at alternative apps like Flip, a little-known shopping platform that allows users to earn money by reviewing beauty items and then buying them from featured brands.

Another cosmetics company, Oakland, California-based e.l.f. Beauty, created a viral sensation with a 2019 TikTok campaign that used an original song to explain the company's name stood for "eyes. lips. face." E.l.f. also was one of the first beauty brands to join TikTok Shop, the platform's e-commerce arm, during the U.S. beta testing.

E.l.f.'s chief marketing officer, Kory Marchisotto, said the in-app shop, which allows viewers to buy prod-

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ucts from seller accounts and videos, is doing well. But she noted that Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts and other venues also offer short real-time videos, unlike when TikTok stood alone.

"We'll take that incredible muscle that we built and develop and go with it wherever our community wants to go next, and they have always been the signal that has carried us," Marchisotto said.

Some marketing agencies are telling brands to take basic precautions in case Congress ends up sending TikTok out the door. Billion Dollar Boy, a New York-based influencer marketing agency, has encouraged clients to spread their influencer spending across platforms, Edward East, the agency's founder and group CEO said.

Well-established TikTok influencers, including beauty and fashion gurus, continue posting regularly on the app. But they're also posting exclusive content on Instagram or YouTube or devoting more attention to their other social media accounts, said Nicla Bartoli, the vice president of sales at The Influencer Marketing Factory, an agency that works to pair content creators and brands.

Jasmine Enberg, a principal analyst at research firm eMarketer, thinks a TikTok ban would have a bigger effect on businesses today than a few years ago. Even though Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts provide competition, they haven't cracked the magic formula of a TikTok video in driving sales, Enberg said.

"Even though you can replicate the technology, you can't really replicate the culture, and people aren't behaving necessarily in the same way as they are on TikTok," she said.

TikTok does not receive the same level of ad revenue as Instagram and Facebook, according to data from eMarketer, but the firm predicts that it will surpass the other two this year in terms of the percentage of users that will make at least one purchase that originates on the platform.

"I think the impact will be felt across the board" if TikTok goes away, Enberg said "But it will be much more dramatic for small and medium businesses, as well as creator-founded businesses."

Toy company Cepia LLC, which was behind the 2009 holiday hit Zhu Zhu Pets, began investing in TikTok a decade later with the launch of Cats vs. Pickles, a collection of plush toys. Compared to other social networks, the platform has proven the best for telling stories about products and building a community of fans, Laura Frerichs, Cepia's head of marketing, said.

To introduce Decora Girlz, its new fashion doll line, the medium-sized company based in St. Louis, Missouri, invited 30 influencers with a strong presence on TikTok - most of them children - to FAO Schwarz in Manhattan this month.

Since the launch event, the doll line has amassed more than 53 million social impressions — the number of times Decora Girlz-related posts were viewed across social media platforms, according to Cepia.

Yet the toy industry is used to adapting, Frerichs observed, and would again in a post-TikTok market. Until 10 years ago, Cepia focused its advertising on three TV channels — Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and the Disney Channel.

"The world has really changed now very quickly," Frerichs said.

Deborah Mayer, who has sold new and pre-owned handbags and other designer goods out of her New Jersey home for 16 years, understands that all too well. Early last year, TikTok recruited her business for the live component of TikTok Shop.

Mayer says her sales have jumped 50% since October largely due to purchases made during Debsluxurycloset's live-streamed displays, which can draw more than a thousand viewers. She estimates that 60% of her revenue now comes from TikTok, which would make a ban "devastating."

"We put a lot of time and effort building up this platform," Mayer, 52, said. "It would be a year of work down the drain."

A classified Senate briefing on TikTok held Wednesday prompted several senators to say legislation that would force ByteDance to sell on national security grounds was urgent. Others indicated they would prefer to consider a variety of proposals rather than rush to pass the House bill.

In a tacit acknowledgement that congressional action could be unpopular with the millions of Americans who use the app, some senators called for making a public case about TikTok's alleged dangers.



## **The IRS has 940,000 unclaimed tax refunds from 2020 that are about to expire. Is one of them yours?**

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The IRS is warning taxpayers that they may be leaving more than \$1 billion on the table.

The federal tax collector said Monday that roughly 940,000 people in the U.S. have until May 17 to submit tax returns for unclaimed refunds for tax year 2020, which total more than \$1 billion nationwide.

The average median refund is \$932 for 2020. Texas (93,400), California (88,200), Florida (53,200) and New York (51,400) have the largest amount of people potentially eligible for these refunds.

IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel said in a statement: "We want taxpayers to claim these refunds, but time is running out for people who may have overlooked or forgotten about these refunds. There's a May 17 deadline to file these returns so taxpayers should start soon to make sure they don't miss out."

For people who need to file a return, the IRS advises taxpayers to request their W-2, 1098, 1099 or 5498 from their employer or bank — or order a free wage and income transcript using the "Get Transcript Online" tool at IRS.gov.

Taxpayers typically have three years to file and claim tax refunds, otherwise the money becomes the property of the U.S. Treasury.

Generally the deadline to claim old refunds falls around the April 15 tax deadline, but this year the three-year window for 2020 unfiled returns was postponed to May 17, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. But if taxpayers haven't filed a return for tax year 2021 and 2022, any 2020 refunds would be withheld until they file for those years as well to make sure they don't owe.

Werfel said "some people may not realize they may be owed a refund. We encourage people to review their files and start gathering records now, so they don't run the risk of missing the May deadline."

Tax season officially began on January 29.

According to the latest tax season statistics, more than 71.5 million individual tax filings have been submitted to the IRS this season.

## **As Boeing turbulence persists: A look at past crashes and safety issues involving the plane maker**

NEW YORK (AP) — Boeing keeps hitting more and more turbulence.

The American plane maker has been under intense pressure since early January, when a panel blew off a brand-new Alaska Airlines 737 Max midflight. That's spotlighted a lengthy series of safety and manufacturing problems that have piled up for Boeing over the years — including two devastating crashes that also involved Max jets.

Leadership shakeups have arrived amid this turmoil, too. On Monday, Boeing announced that CEO David Calhoun would be stepping down from his post at the end of the year as part of broader management changes.

"The eyes of the world are on us," Calhoun wrote to a note to employees, adding that the decision to leave was his and that he believed Boeing "will come through this moment a better company." Calhoun became CEO in 2020, after his predecessor was fired following the deadly 2018 and 2019 Max crashes.

Beyond newer Max jets, Boeing been in the news for mishaps arising from some its older models, including a Delta Air Lines-operated 757 jet losing a nose wheel during takeoff in January and a post-flight inspection that revealed a missing panel on a 737-800 flown by United Airlines earlier this month. Those incidents spotlight issues with the planes' maintenance, for which the airlines are responsible.

Here's a look at some of Arlington, Virginia-based Boeing's recent woes.

### **THE CRASHES**

The bulk of criticism and investigations swirling around Boeing today center on the company's Max jets. There are two versions of the aircraft in service: the Max 8 and the Max 9, which is the larger of the two.

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Boeing began working on the Max in 2011 as an answer to a new, more fuel-efficient model from European rival Airbus. The company billed it as an updated 737 that wouldn't require much in the way of additional pilot training — a key selling point for what has become Boeing's best-selling airplane.

But the Max did include significant changes, some of which Boeing downplayed — most notably, the addition of an automated flight-control system designed to help account for the plane's larger engines. Boeing didn't mention the system, called MCAS, in airplane manuals, and most pilots didn't know about it.

That system was implicated in two crashes that killed 346 people. The first occurred when a Max 8 operated by Indonesia's Lion Air plunged into the Java Sea in October 2018 — and the second in March 2019, when an Ethiopian Airlines 737 Max 8 crashed nearly straight down into a field six minutes after takeoff from Addis Ababa.

Boeing agreed to pay \$2.5 billion to settle a Justice Department investigation, admitting that employees misled regulators about the safety of the 737 Max. The amount included a \$500 million fund for victims' families, though lawsuits continue.

All Max jets were grounded worldwide for nearly two years while the company made changes to the flight-control system. Investigations revealed what a congressional panel called a "horrific culmination" of failed government oversight, design flaws and inaction at Boeing.

## MORE MAX TROUBLES

January's mid-air blowout on an Alaska Airlines flight over Oregon also involved a Max jet, which is still under multiple federal probes, including a criminal investigation from the FBI. Regulators say bolts that help keep the door-plug panel in place were missing after repair work on the aircraft at a Boeing factory.

The Max suffered a series of production issues leading up to that incident. Just weeks prior, Boeing asked airlines to check the jets for a potential loose bolt in the rudder control system after an international operator found a bolt with a missing nut during routine maintenance. In a separate case, Boeing found that an undelivered aircraft had a nut that was not properly tightened.

The FAA also recently told pilots to limit use of an anti-ice system on the Max because the inlets around the engines could overheat and break away. Boeing in December asked the agency for a safety waiver while it develops a long-term fix. The company needs the exemption to begin delivering its new, smaller Max 7 to customers.

Last year, Boeing reported a problem with fittings on Max jets where the fuselage meets the vertical section of the tail. Boeing said its Wichita, Kansas-based supplier, Spirit AeroSystems, used a "non-standard manufacturing process" on some of the planes.

Boeing and Spirit also said they discovered improperly drilled fastener holes in the aft pressure bulkhead, which maintains pressure when planes are at cruising altitude, on the fuselages of some models of the 737 Max. Boeing said the flaws could delay the deliveries of some new jets but did not pose an immediate hazard in those already flying.

## ENGINE FIRES AND FLAT TIRES

Federal safety officials are still investigating an engine fire that was discovered on a United Airlines Boeing 737 Max after the plane landed in Newark, New Jersey, last June. The flight crew noticed a fire warning indication as the plane taxied in, shut down the engine and discharged a fire suppressant. There was no visible smoke or fire, but maintenance crews found a fuel leak as well as soot and heat damage.

Also under investigation is what prompted the emergency landing in Wichita, Kansas, of a Denver-bound United Airlines flight in December. Passengers reported hearing a rumbling and an engine fire was discovered after it landed. No one was injured.

In 2021, a Boeing 777's right engine fan blade broke off shortly after takeoff from Denver with 239 people onboard. No one was injured. The National Transportation Safety Board blamed inadequate inspection of the fan blades as well as the "insufficient frequency" of the manufacturer's recommendation for inspections.

Earlier this month, a landing-gear tire fell off a United Airlines Boeing 777 leaving San Francisco, and an American Airlines 777 made an emergency landing in Los Angeles with a flat tire.

## PREVIOUS CABIN HOLES

In 2018, a woman died when a piece of engine housing ripped off a Southwest Airlines-operated Boeing

737 and shattered the window she was sitting next to. She was partially sucked out of the plane as it lost cabin pressure before other passengers pulled her back in — an example of the sort of tragedy that was avoided during January's incident over Oregon.

On a separate Southwest-operated flight back in 2011, passengers heard an explosion as a chunk of the plane's roof opened at nearly 35,000 feet (10,700 meters).

The plane made an emergency landing and no one was seriously hurt, though two people passed out from a lack of oxygen: a flight attendant who fell and broke his nose, and a passenger who tried to help him.

The NTSB blamed "extremely poor manufacturing technique," saying many of the rivet holes on the plane's exterior skin had been badly drilled.

## 787 ISSUES

Boeing's two-aisle 787 has also been plagued by manufacturing problems that have sporadically held up deliveries.

In June, the company said it was inspecting fittings on part of the tail called the horizontal stabilizer "for a nonconforming condition."

Most recently, 787 deliveries were halted last year while federal regulators looked over documentation of work that was done on new planes.

## **Guns and sneakers were seized from a man accused of killing a pregnant Amish woman, police say**

By MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Police investigating the killing a pregnant Amish woman in rural Pennsylvania seized six guns, a variety of ammunition and a pair of sneakers that may match tread marks left at the crime scene during searches of the suspect's home and vehicle, documents show.

Search warrant documents released over the weekend said 23-year-old Rebekah Byler suffered "multiple sharp force wounds" to her neck and was shot in the head during the Feb. 26 attack at her home.

Two counts of homicide and other charges against truck driver Shawn Christopher Cranston were forwarded to county court for trial after a preliminary hearing on March 15.

In a newly released search warrant affidavit, a state trooper said Rebekah Byler's 2-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son were present during the killing and the boy told investigators a man wearing sneakers had killed his mother.

Rebekah Byler's husband, Andy Byler, and a woman who had been driving him and another man to look at roofing jobs returned to the Byler home around lunchtime to discover her body in the living room. The children were unharmed.

During the preliminary hearing, Trooper Shea Sedler testified that red and black Nike sneakers were found under a mattress inside a camper at Cranston's residence in Corry. Sedler said the shoe pattern was similar to what he photographed inside Rebekah Byler's home.

Police also took DNA and fingerprints from Cranston, who has been jailed without bail since his March 2 arrest.

Cranston's public defender, Gary Alan Kern, has not returned messages seeking comment. At the preliminary hearing, Kern argued prosecutors had not identified a motive or produced a murder weapon.

Tire treads from Cranston's Jeep appeared to match tire impressions collected from muddy ground at the crime scene, police said.

A camera on a business across the street from Cranston's home recorded someone fitting his description carrying items to the camper and starting a fire in the hours after Rebekah Byler was killed, police said. Detectives said they hoped to remove "burn pile remnants" from Cranston's home.

Along with two counts of homicide, Cranston, 52, also faces burglary and trespassing charges.

Police wrote that they were zeroing in on Cranston within a day of Byler's killing and soon seized his trash, where they found a glove that resembled a piece of glove found at the homicide scene.

Neighbors in Corry told police that Cranston's nickname is "Rumble" and he has been the sergeant-at-

arms for a motorcycle club in Erie. One neighbor said Cranston usually carried a small, black pistol.

Andy Byler told police that about two weeks before his wife was killed, a man matching Cranston's general description showed up at their home after 9 p.m. and inquired about buying the house, according to an affidavit.

Police said people who live several miles from the Byler home told them they had odd experiences since early December with a driver named Shawn whose phone number led investigators to Cranston. They told them Shawn, dressed in all black and with a small, black pistol in a belt holder, parked a Jeep in their driveway.

He "was walking around their property looking aimlessly into their fields and his speech made no sense," Trooper Samuel Hubbard wrote two days after Cranston's arrest. They said "Shawn" was about 50 years old, tall and heavy-set with gray hair.

"He was inquiring as to when and where they attend church and that he wished to go with them," Hubbard wrote.

## **A major European nature protection plan stumbles at the final hurdle. 'How could we give that up?'**

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — A major European Union plan to better protect nature in the 27-nation bloc and fight climate change was indefinitely postponed Monday, underscoring how farmers' protests sweeping the continent have had a deep influence on politics.

The deadlock on the bill, which could undermine the EU's global stature on the issue, came less than three months before the European Parliament election in June.

The member states were supposed to give final approval to the biodiversity bill on Monday following months of proceedings through the EU's institutional maze. But what was supposed to be a mere rubber stamp has now turned into its possible perpetual shelving.

"How could we give that up? How could we say 'We decided not to restore nature,'" a disappointed Irish Environment Minister Eamon Ryan said. "Not deliver on the protection of biodiversity is a shocking statement to the rest of the world," he added, urging diplomatic pressure so that the bill could belatedly still be approved.

The chances of that happening weren't looking good.

"It is clear to everyone that there is this huge deadlock. And it is not going to be easy to get out of this considering the upcoming elections," Dutch Climate Minister Rob Jetten said.

The Nature Restoration plan is a part of the EU's European Green Deal that seeks to establish the world's most ambitious climate and biodiversity targets, and make the bloc the global point of reference on all climate issues.

The bill is part of an overall project that aims for Europe to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, demanding short and medium-term changes and sacrifices from all parts of society to reap the benefits in a generation.

"If you want to reach climate neutrality, you also have to look in the broader perspective of protecting biodiversity, strengthening the nature in Europe," Jetten said, stressing that such initiatives were necessary.

Ryan agreed.

"It's all connected," he said. "You cannot put climate change to one side and forget nature restoration."

Even if the plan had a rough ride through the EU's approval process, the watered-down version was supposed to sail through the final vote.

Under the complicated voting rules, a qualified majority representing 15 of the 27 member states and 65% of the population was needed. It was thought that threshold was safe, until Monday.

"It seems that we don't have a qualified majority anymore because ... Hungary has changed its vote. We have to understand why they do that," said Alain Maron, a Belgian regional climate minister who chaired the meeting of the EU environment ministers.



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The change of heart follows weeks of relentless protests from farmers across the bloc who have argued that reams of environmental laws governing the way they work are driving them toward bankruptcy at a time when food security and self-sufficiency are becoming essential again as Russia's war on Ukraine rages on.

"It is very important to keep flexibility for member states," said Aniko Raisz, Hungary's environmental minister. When asked if her country could change its position again, Raisz said she "can't promise anything," while stressing the importance of the agricultural sector across Europe.

"We have to be realistic, and we have to keep in mind all these sectors," she said.

Monday's postponement was the EU's latest concession in reaction to protests that have affected the daily lives of tens of millions of EU citizens and cost businesses tens of millions of euros because of transportation delays. Others have included shelving legislation on tighter pesticide rules, loosening checks and controls on farms, and requirements to let some land lie fallow.

Under the plan, member states would have to meet restoration targets for specific habitats and species, to cover at least 20% of the region's land and sea areas by 2030. But quarrels over exemptions and flexibility clauses allowing members to skirt the rules plagued negotiations.

Last month, the bill was adopted in European Parliament by a 329-275 vote with 24 abstentions after the center-right Christian Democratic European People's Party decided to vote against it. Environmentalists and the Greens group were in rapture, thinking it was the last stumbling block.

Despite the long droughts, big floods and heat waves that have swept through many areas in Europe, the postponement of any vote signals a possible pause on such environmental actions to protect economic competitiveness.

## **Indonesia's military arrests 13 elite soldiers who are accused of involvement in a torture video**

By NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia's military said Monday it has arrested 13 elite troops accused of involvement in a video showing the torture of an indigenous Papua man believed to be a member of a separatist group.

The video that emerged in recent days on social media shows men who appear to be soldiers kicking, beating and dunking the man in a barrel of water.

"This is a violation of the law and we will act according to the applicable laws and regulations," army spokesperson Brig. Gen. Kristomei Sianturi told a news conference, adding: "This is what we regret, that the Indonesian military or Indonesian army never taught, never approved any violence in asking for information."

Sianturi said the incident occurred at a post for the border security task force in Puncak, a mountainous district of Central Papua province, on Feb. 3.

At least five men are seen in the video beating a man, taunting him with racist slurs and slicing into his back with a machete.

Sianturi said all 13 suspects had been detained at the military police's maximum security detention center in West Java for further investigation.

Papua Military Chief Maj. Gen. Izak Pangemanan told reporters the abuse began after a shootout between security forces and separatist rebels suspected of burning a public health facility in Omukia village, 300 meters (yards) from a military post. Security forces arrested three men while others fled.

On the way to a police station, one of the men jumped from the car with his hands tied behind his back. His head hit a rock and he died on the way to a health facility, Pangemanan said.

Another man, seen in the video and identified as Definus Kogoya, tried to escape, Pangemanan said. Security forces recaptured him and tortured him at a military post in Gome in an effort to get information on the whereabouts of others, he said.

Kogoya's condition has recovered after medical treatment and he has been returned to local police,

Pangemanan said.

The video has sparked an outcry in Indonesia and from rights activists.

"This incident is cruel torture that truly destroys the instinct of justice," said Usman Hamid, executive director of Amnesty International Indonesia. He said statements by military and government officials about their humane approach in the Papua region have become meaningless.

Conflicts between indigenous Papuans and Indonesian security forces are common in the impoverished Papua region, a former Dutch colony in the western part of New Guinea that is ethnically and culturally distinct from much of Indonesia. Papua was incorporated into Indonesia in 1969 after a U.N.-sponsored ballot that was widely seen as a sham. Since then, a low-level insurgency has simmered in the mineral-rich region.

Conflict there has spiked in the past year, with dozens of rebels, security forces and civilians killed.

Sebby Sambom, a spokesperson for the West Papua Liberation Army, the military wing of the pro-independence Free Papua Organization whose members are accused of burning the health facility, urged the United Nations to take action.

"This is shown that Indonesian military and police are real barbaric," Sambom said.

## **'Obviously the mistake was made': Big East remains unbeaten in NCAA Tournament after only 3 bids**

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Since a disappointing Selection Sunday for the Big East, when all its bubble teams got left out of the NCAA field, the conference has not lost a game in the tournament.

Defending national champion UConn, Marquette and Creighton advanced to the Sweet 16, the Huskies rounding out a 6-0 weekend for the Big East with a 75-58 second-round victory over Northwestern on Sunday night.

Three NCAA bids for the Big East was its fewest since 1993, a surprising development because the league was generally considered among the best Division I conferences this season. Now it is the only multibid conference to get through the first week of the tournament without losing a game.

"When you're on the bubble, it's precarious when these things happen. But, yes, I think the teams that are left are finding a way to send a bit of a message here," Big East Commissioner Val Ackerman said at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, where UConn was playing. "That the Big East is one of the elite basketball conferences in the country."

After an ugly performance by Virginia in the First Four, the Atlantic Coast Conference also asserted itself during the first weekend of the tournament after what was viewed as a down regular season for the traditional basketball power conference.

The ACC has four teams in the Sweet 16, the most of any conference: Duke, North Carolina, North Carolina State and Clemson advanced to the regional semifinals that start Thursday.

There are more teams from the 919 area code in North Carolina (three) left in the tournament than from either the Big 12 (two) or Southeastern Conference (two). Those conferences tied for the most bids with eight.

The Big Ten got two of its six teams through to the regional semifinals, including Midwest top seed Purdue. The West Coast Conference and Pac-12 each put one team in the Sweet 16.

The Mountain West had six teams in the field, but only San Diego State remains alive. The fifth-seeded Aztecs will face UConn in a rematch of last year's championship game on Thursday in the East Region semifinal in Boston.

Ackerman said five bid-stealers, conference tournament winners that would not have gotten in the tournament otherwise, likely cost the Big East at least one more team in the field of 68 — Seton Hall was one of the committee's first four out — and maybe more.

She also said the Big East plans to ask the NCAA to re-assess the NET ranking metric the selection committee uses to help pick the field.

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"They were looking at factors that we have to better understand, is how I would say it," Ackerman said about the committee's assessment of the Mountain West compared to the Big East. "But we think we're better than three bids. Know we are."

UConn coach Dan Hurley and Clemson coach Brad Brownell have both accused other conferences, notably the Big 12 and Mountain West, of gaming the NET rankings by playing weak out-of-conference schedules.

Sixth-seeded Clemson advanced to the West Region semifinals by beating Baylor of the Big 12 on Sunday. "You've seen how other leagues that got the bids that our league deserved have underperformed," Hurley said Sunday night.

Hurley said the Big East coaches have a group text that has been blowing up.

"I know everyone is fired up to see us continue to push and rep the league at a high level. I know Val is excited, too," he said. "Obviously, the mistake was made."

## Bracket not busted: All top 8 seeds advance to Sweet 16 in chalky March Madness

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

March Madness arrived with visions of chaos. Based on last year's bracket, there was little reason to doubt it.

The only surprise so far has been the lack of pandemonium.

The top two seeds from each region are headed to the Sweet 16 for just the fifth time. One double-digit seed will join them. Most of the Cinderellas that put the madness in March busted out of the bracket long before midnight.

The bluebloods and big boys — many of them, anyway — are going to the regionals and they all want more.

"I didn't come back to make the Sweet 16," Purdue big man Zach Edey said after the Boilermakers' 106-67 victory over Utah State. "I came back to make a run, a deep run. Nobody is satisfied with where we are now."

Last year's Final Four was unlike any other, a bracket-busting foursome with no teams seeded better than No. 4 for the first time since the bracket expanded in 1979.

Reigning national champion UConn has looked good in its bid to repeat this year, but there wasn't a dominant team during the regular season, opening the door for what was expected to be a wild NCAA Tournament.

It didn't happen.

The upsets that punctuate March have been limited — 13-seed Yale and 12-seeds James Madison and Grand Canyon and 14th-seeded Oakland are all headed home. The only true buzzer-beater was a tying 3-pointer by Texas A&M's Andersson Garcia to force overtime against Houston. The average margin of victory the first two rounds was 15.8 points, second-highest since 1985.

Purdue erased some of the disappointment of last year's first-round flameout with a pair of lopsided wins, setting up a Sweet 16 matchup with a Gonzaga team back in the underdog role. Fellow No. 1 seeds North Carolina, UConn and Houston also are through.

The Cougars were the only ones tested, needing overtime to beat Texas A&M 100-95. No other game involving a No. 1 seed was closer than 16 points.

No. 2 seeds Arizona, Tennessee, Marquette and Iowa State also advanced, marking the fifth time — first since 2019 — that all eight top-two seeds reached the Sweet 16 since the start of seeding in 1979.

Also in are No. 3 seeds Illinois and Creighton, along with fourth-seeded Duke and Alabama. The average seed for the Sweet 16 is a chalky 3.3, right behind the 3.1 in 2019 and 2009.

Double-digit seeds

Oakland's Jack Gohlke took the first big star turn of the NCAA Tournament, pouring in 10 3-pointers — second-most ever — in the 14th-seeded Golden Grizzlies' upset win over No. 3 seed Kentucky. Gohlke hit six more 3s against N.C. State, but the Wolfpack outlasted Oakland in overtime to reach the Sweet 16

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for the first time since 2015.

That leaves No. 11 seed N.C. State, which had to win the ACC tournament just to get into the bracket, as the only double-digit seed left after San Diego State blew out No. 13 Yale in the final game of the second round.

"I think that's what March is about," N.C. State big man DJ Burns said. "Some teams got here by winning their conference just like us and that doesn't mean they're a bad team."

Powerhouse ACC

The ACC had what was considered a down year with just five teams making the NCAA Tournament.

Virginia bowed out in the First Four, but top-seeded North Carolina, Duke, Clemson and N.C. State are all through to the Sweet 16, giving the ACC a sparkling 8-1 record through the first two rounds.

The ACC is the sixth league to get four teams through to the Sweet 16 since the NCAA Tournament expanded in 1985. The Big East was the last to do it, in 2003.

Big East beast

Big East coaches, players and fans were frustrated with the bracket reveal when just three teams made it into the bracket.

The league is rolling so far with three teams getting through to the Sweet 16 and a 6-0 record.

UConn is looking good in its bid to become the first repeat champion since Florida in 2006-07, winning its first two games by an average of 28 points.

Marquette ended its early-exit woes, reaching the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2016. Creighton is also into the regional round after coming within seconds of reaching the Final Four a year ago.

"You've see how other leagues that got the bids that our league deserved has underperformed," UConn coach Dan Hurley said. "Obviously the mistake was made. It sucks."

Big ratings

The limited buzzer beaters and lack of Cinderella runs haven't squashed interest in this year's NCAA Tournament.

The NCAA said the first round on Thursday averaged a record 8.5 million viewers across CBS and the Turner channels and Friday's games drew 8.6 million, second-most ever. Interest climbed even more for Saturday's second-round games, averaging 10.8 million viewers, another record.

## As Biden tours the country and visits swing states, Trump is fundraising and playing golf

By JILL COLVIN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Joe Biden visited five cities in a multiday trip last week, former President Donald Trump was hardly seen in public, spending most of his time in South Florida.

Trump has held just a single public campaign event since he locked up the Republican presidential nomination on March 12: a rally in Ohio funded not by his campaign but by backers of a Senate candidate whom he had endorsed. The events page on his campaign website has had nothing listed.

Biden, meanwhile, has been barnstorming the country. After a trip to North Carolina on Tuesday, the Democratic president will have touched down in all of the 2024 swing states in the less than three weeks since his State of the Union address.

The differing approaches reflect the deficits each side is facing.

Trump's campaign faces a serious money shortfall and mounting legal bills as he fights four criminal indictments. His focus in recent weeks has been on wooing potential donors as his campaign builds its infrastructure across battleground states to catch up to Democrats, who have a significant head start.

For Biden, 81, the tempo is a message in and of itself as he aims to combat persistent voter concerns about his age. Whoever wins in November will be the oldest president to be inaugurated, though polls find that voters see the issue as more pressing for Biden. Trump is 77.

Both sides are projecting confidence and accusing the other of trying to hide its candidate's problems.



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Biden "looks like a lost puppy any time he ventures onto the campaign trail," said Trump spokesperson Karoline Leavitt, who accused Biden's campaign of limiting his events to "stops at field offices with a few paid staffers who look less enthused than attendees at a funeral."

Trump, she went on to say, "is greeted by crowds of enthusiastic Americans everywhere he goes, and he will continue to hold massive rallies around the country with tens of thousands of supporters who want to 'Make America Great Again.' Joe Biden's campaign is a failing, boring, disaster. President Trump is building the greatest political movement in history."

Biden campaign spokesperson Ammar Moussa disagreed.

"We are two weeks into the general election and Donald Trump can't raise money, is hiding at his country club, and is letting convicts and conspiracy theorists take over his campaign," he said in a statement. "That is not a winning strategy."

Biden's team is trying to sell the public on his accomplishments as concerns persist that voters are unaware of what he's done in office and are instead focused on frustrations over high grocery costs and concerns about the sharp rise in illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border.

"We have not been talking to folks about the issues that President Biden has been delivering on," said Yolanda Bejarano, the state Democratic chairwoman in Arizona, where Biden campaigned last week. "That's what we are determined to do."

His aides have packaged his campaign stops with official White House events designed to promote his policy agenda and legislative achievements.

Trump has been spending his days in and around his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida — fundraising, hosting elected officials who frequently visit, and meeting aides.

But Trump has also made time for other pursuits. He recently said he won two championships at his Palm Beach golf club, writing on his social media site that they were "very exciting" wins on a "GREAT and difficult course." He visited his golf club in West Palm Beach on Sunday to accept two trophies from a cheering audience.

Trump faces a slew of pressing legal challenges. That includes a Monday deadline to pay more than \$454 million in fines and interest. If Trump doesn't come up with the money, New York's attorney general could start the process of seizing his assets.

Instead of his signature large rallies, aides say, Trump has been attending fundraising events five to six days a week. That includes lunches and dinners that bring in immediate cash as well as relationship-building meetings that could result in future checks.

On Thursday, his super political action committee held a \$100,000-per-person roundtable with Hispanic leaders at his golf club in Doral, Florida, according to a copy of the invitation obtained by The Associated Press.

"There is great enthusiasm in the community," said Miami-Dade County Commissioner Kevin Cabrera, one of the hosts.

Not holding events also saves the campaign cash it does not have to waste. Trump's rallies cost "half a million a pop," Trump senior advisor Chris LaCivita said in a podcast interview last year.

Federal campaign finance filings released last week showed Trump's political operation at a serious disadvantage and struggling to catch up to Biden and the Democratic Party, which raised \$53 million last month and ended February with \$155 million cash on hand.

Trump's campaign and his Save America political action committee, two key groups in his political operation, reported raising a combined \$15.9 million in February and ended the month with more than \$37 million on hand.

The empty public calendar is also a reflection of scheduling changes. Trump had been planning to spend much of the next six weeks in court at his New York hush money trial, which was supposed to begin Monday. That trial has since been postponed, forcing the campaign to readjust. (Trump is expected to attend a Monday hearing.)

But even without public events, the developments in Trump's legal cases as well as a steady stream of

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inflammatory statements — like his assertion that Jews who vote for Democrats hate their religion and Israel — ensure he dominates news cycles.

That assertion came in one of a series of interviews he has done with friendly broadcasters since becoming his party's presumptive nominee, including a sit-down with right-wing British leader Nigel Farage.

Some allies of the former president argue that holding fewer rallies helps him not only by saving money but by limiting opportunities for him to go off-script and say something that might alienate swing voters.

The campaign, however, rejected that thinking and said it has no intention of running the kind of "basement campaign" that Trump aides assailed Biden for running in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Trump flouted the guidance of his own government's public health experts on social distancing and mask wearing, holding rallies and White House events before vaccines were available, like a reception for his Supreme Court nominee that became a superspreader event.

Biden has also brought in tens of millions of dollars for his campaign in recent weeks. On Thursday, he'll raise even more at a joint event with former Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton in New York that may break party fundraising records for a single event.

Otherwise, he has been favoring smaller, more intimate events — joining a family for a meal at their kitchen table, popping into small businesses and meeting supporters in backyards.

Like Trump's, his campaign questions the value of expensive-to-produce rallies this far from Election Day. And there are real concerns about his ability to fill a room given still-flagging Democratic enthusiasm as well as the protests he faces from voters angry over his support for Israel's war against Hamas.

The smaller events are designed to produce short social media moments that resonate with Biden's target voters online and reach audiences that would probably miss more conventional campaign stops.

Last week, he met several dozen supporters in Reno, Nevada, center of the state's sole swing county, before heading to south-central Phoenix, where he mingled with about 80 people at a storied Mexican restaurant as his campaign launched a coalition called "Latinos con Biden-Harris," or "Latinos with Biden-Harris."

"I need you badly, I need the help," Biden told them. "Look, there's only about six or seven states that are going to determine the outcome of this election. They're toss-up states, and this is one of them."

## North Korea says Japan's prime minister offered to meet with leader Kim Jong Un soon

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Monday that Japan's prime minister has offered to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un but stressed that prospects for their countries' first summit in about 20 years would depend on Tokyo tolerating the North's weapons program and ignoring its past abductions of Japanese nationals.

Japan acknowledged it has been trying to arrange a bilateral summit but dismissed North Korea's preconditions for such a meeting as unacceptable, dimming the prospects that Kim and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida would hold a summit any time soon.

Observers say Kim wants improved ties with Japan as a way to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its allies, while Kishida wants to use possible progress in the abduction issue, a highly emotional issue for Japan, to boost his declining approval rating at home. After admitting in 2002 that it had abducted 13 Japanese nationals, North Korea allowed five to return home but said the others had died. Japan believes some were still alive.

In a statement carried by state media, Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, who also is a senior official, said that Kishida recently used an unspecified channel to convey his position that he wants to meet Kim Jong Un in person "as soon as possible."

She said there would be no breakthrough in North Korea-Japan relations as long as Kishida's government is engrossed in the abduction issue and interferes in the North's "exercise of our sovereign right," appar-

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ently referring to the North's weapons testing activities. Simply deciding to hold a summit is not enough to improve "relations full of distrust and misunderstanding," she said.

In February, Kim Yo Jong issued a similar statement, saying North Korea was open to inviting Kishida to Pyongyang but that it would only be possible if Tokyo stopped taking issue with North Korea's legitimate right to self-defense and the abduction issue.

Kishida, speaking in a parliamentary session, said that a meeting with Kim is "crucial" to resolve the abduction issue and that his government has been using various channels to discuss the possible summit. Japanese government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters later Monday that dropping the abduction issue in talks with North Korea is "not acceptable."

North Korea and Japan don't have diplomatic ties, and their relations have been overshadowed by North Korea's nuclear program, the abduction issue and Japan's 1910-45 colonization of the Korean Peninsula. Japan's colonial wrongdoing is a source of on-again, off-again wrangling between Tokyo and Seoul, as well.

After years of denial, North Korea acknowledged in an unprecedented 2002 summit between Kim Jong Il, the late father of Kim Jong Un, and then-Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi that its agents had kidnapped the 13 Japanese. Japan believes North Korea used them to train spies in Japanese language and culture.

Koizumi made a second visit to North Korea and met Kim Jong Il again in 2004, the last summit between the two countries.

Talk of a possible new summit comes amid concerns that North Korea could further intensify its weapons testing activities in what is an election year both in the U.S. and South Korea. Experts say North Korea would aim to use an enlarged weapons arsenal to win concessions from the U.S., such as relief from sanctions imposed because of Pyongyang's nuclear program.

"While North Korea may be waiting out elections in South Korea and the United States before reengaging those countries in diplomacy, it probably wants to strengthen its hand by developing weapons and driving wedges between U.S. allies," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul. "Kishida feels political urgency to address the abductions issue and is thus showing diplomatic effort."

The impoverished North also likely thinks about possible Japanese economic assistance it could receive if the two countries normalized their ties, said analyst Moon Seong Mook with the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy. He said North Korea could seek the current value of the Japanese assistance that South Korea received when those two countries normalized their ties in 1965 — \$500 million — or more.

Moon said Kishida likely won't defy Japanese public opinion to make concessions on the abduction issue, or defy U.N. resolutions that ban North Korea's nuclear program. Easley said a Kim-Kishida summit is unlikely because Pyongyang appears unwilling to address its historical kidnapping of Japanese citizens and Tokyo is unable to relax sanctions on North Korea.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said Monday it was closely communicating with Japan on Tokyo-Pyongyang contacts and the North Korean nuclear issue. It said that South Korea, the U.S. and Japan are working closely together to return North Korea to a path of denuclearization.

North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile arsenals pose a major security threat to Japan as well as South Korea and the United States. The three countries have expanded their trilateral training exercises in response to the North's provocative run of weapons tests since 2022. Japan and South Korea are two of America's key allies in the region, together hosting about 80,000 U.S. troops in their territories.

Earlier Monday, North Korea's state media reported that Kim Jong Un supervised a tank exercise and encouraged his armored forces to sharpen war preparations in the face of growing tensions with South Korea.

While most analysts doubt Kim is genuinely preparing for war, South Korean officials have raised the possibility of smaller provocations in border regions, including the disputed western sea boundary between the Koreas that has been the site of bloody skirmishes in past years.

## Energy agency announces \$6 billion to slash emissions in industrial facilities

By ISABELLA O'MALLEY and JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

The Biden administration announced \$6 billion in funding Monday for projects that will slash emissions from the industrial sector — the largest-ever U.S. investment to decarbonize domestic industry to fight climate change.

The industrial sector is responsible for roughly 25% of all the nation's emissions, and has proven difficult to decarbonize due to its energy-intensive, large-scale operations.

Iron, steel, aluminum, food and beverage, concrete and cement facilities are some of those involved in this initiative. Recipients of the funding, which is coming from the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, include 33 demonstration projects in more than 20 states.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said during a call with news media that the technologies being funded are "replicable," "scalable," and will "set a new gold standard for clean manufacturing in the United States and around the world." White House climate adviser Ali Zaidi said this funding aims to eliminate 14 million metric tons of pollution each year, equivalent to taking about 3 million cars off the road.

Among the funded projects:

—Century Aluminum Company plans to build the first new U.S. primary aluminum smelter in 45 years. The plant would double the size of the current U.S. primary aluminum industry while avoiding an estimated 75% of emissions from a traditional facility, with its energy-efficient design and use of clean energy, according to DOE.

—Constellium in Ravenswood, West Virginia, is going to operate a first-of-its-kind zero-carbon aluminum casting plant and install low-emission furnaces that can use clean fuels such as hydrogen. The company produces aluminum for a range of products including cars and planes.

—Kraft Heinz will install heat pumps, electric heaters and electric boilers to decarbonize food production at 10 facilities, including in Holland, Michigan.

—Cleveland-Cliffs Steel Corporation in Middletown, Ohio, will retire one blast furnace, install two electric furnaces, and use hydrogen-based ironmaking technology. The project aims to eliminate 1 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year from the largest supplier of steel to the U.S. automotive industry.

—Heidelberg Materials US, Inc. will build a system that captures and stores carbon underground at its plant in Mitchell, Indiana. The project aims to capture at least 95% of the carbon dioxide released by the cement plant, which will prevent 2 million tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each year.

"I think the United States can be a leader here," said Mike Ireland, president and CEO of the Portland Cement Association, a non-profit that promotes cement and concrete. Ireland said the innovative cement and concrete technologies being scaled in the U.S. can be adopted by developing countries in the Global South to build highways and buildings in a more sustainable way.

There are not many U.S. plants that manufacture virgin steel, and even fewer make virgin aluminum, so tackling emissions at even just a few facilities could make an outsized contribution to reducing the country's carbon footprint, said Todd Tucker at the Roosevelt Institute, the nonprofit partner of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. Once the methods for decarbonizing are proven, the technology could be exported globally for a more dynamic climate benefit, added Tucker, the think tank's director of industrial policy and trade.

Decarbonizing the electricity and transportation sectors has been at the center of the climate conversation and there are generous federal subsidies for the solutions, mainly using renewable energy for power generation and adopting electric vehicles, Tucker said.

But he noted it's harder to cut emissions in heavy industries that rely on fossil fuels for creating the high heat and chemical reactions needed for their operations.

"Getting this off the ground with these first few projects is going to be really useful for convincing industry that this transition is possible, and also, importantly, convincing Wall Street that this transition is possible," Tucker said. "The first trick is showing it's viable in one project. Once you do that, then the private and public sectors can come up with strategies for the rest of the problem."



The production of new aluminum in the U.S. has been precipitously declining in recent decades, especially the past few years, largely because of energy costs, said Annie Sartor, aluminum director at the green industry advocacy organization Industrious Labs. The process uses a tremendous amount of electricity that's about 40% of the cost, Sartor said.

"These facilities have historically been located near cheap fossil energy. And today, 21st century coal, or coal and gas, are no longer cheapest," she said. "These facilities that are reliant on fossil energy to operate can't compete in the global market for aluminum. And they're closing."

The investment for Century Aluminum Company is game-changing, Sartor said, because shifting to producing new aluminum with 100% clean energy will help the climate, stabilize the industry and create jobs.

## **Abducted as babies in the 1970s, these Argentines found a way toward their true identity**

By MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Claudia Poblete can't help it. On certain days, as she passes in front of a church, she automatically crosses herself while her children gaze at her with confusion.

She didn't raise them as Catholics — as she was — because her spirituality has shifted.

In 2000, Poblete didn't go by her current name. She was called Mercedes Landa, and before a judge showed her a DNA test result that confirmed her true identity, she was unaware that she was among hundreds of babies who were abducted during the Argentine dictatorship.

Poblete is one of the 133 "recovered grandchildren" of Argentina. Now adults, they were found by their biological families years after their parents went missing when the military took power on March 24, 1976.

Until democracy was restored in 1983, at least 30,000 people had disappeared. Many of them were militants whose mothers started gathering at Buenos Aires' main square and later became known as the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.

Many of the Mothers had children who were detained and tortured inside military facilities that resembled concentration camps. Others were transported on planes from which they were thrown alive into the sea.

Some of the Mothers knew that their daughters or daughters-in-law were pregnant, but dozens more found out through survivors' testimonies. And so, under the impression that their children were killed but their grandchildren survived, they started searching for them and created a human rights organization called Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

Poblete knew of their existence, but the lieutenant colonel who she thought was her father told her that they were "crazy" women who wanted revenge on the military. And Poblete, who called him "dad" for half her life, never suspected he lied.

"I didn't know about the abducted children," Poblete said.

She was eight months old when her family was taken to an illegal detention center in November 1978. Once there, she was abducted from her mother and handed to a military doctor who looked for a family willing to keep her. Soon after, Ceferino Landa and his wife registered Poblete as their biological daughter and called her Mercedes.

"For almost 21 years, they never even told me that I could be adopted," the now 46-year-old Poblete said. "They always maintained the lie."

To prevent her from finding the truth, "Merceditas" — as they called her — was not allowed to walk by herself on the streets. She could not travel alone, read books of her choice or watch TV shows that were not approved by Landa. She attended a Catholic school without suspecting that the church was complicit with the military who broke her biological family apart.

"It has been investigated and proven that members of the Catholic Church participated in torture sessions and took confessions from people in clandestine centers," said Mayki Gorosito, executive director of a museum founded in the former Navy School of Mechanics. Known as ESMA, it housed the most infamous illegal detention center during the dictatorship.

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Inside these detention centers, several priests and nuns were aware of the illegal adoptions. Outside, at Catholic schools where irregularities of birth certificates were easy to spot, the personnel didn't raise any flags.

"My grandfather told me that, when he was looking for me and my mother, he approached the chaplain of my school to ask for information," Poblete said. But the priest remained silent. "That complicity is impossible to reconcile with a supposedly Christian vision."

It took her years to share her story publicly and to let go of the guilt that many recovered grandchildren share.

"I carried a lot of responsibilities I was not supposed to," said Pedro Alejandro Sandoval, who the Grandmothers found in 2004.

He, like Poblete, kept in touch with his "appropriators" — the couples who pretended to be their parents — for years and didn't embrace his biological relatives immediately. "It was not until the trial that I started to feel free," Sandoval said.

The searches of the Grandmothers began in different ways. In the late 1970s, with no resources at hand, they used to wait outside kindergartens in the hope of finding resemblances between the infants and their disappeared children. But then, in 1987, the Argentine government took up their cause.

Through the National Commission for the Right to Identity (known for its Spanish initials, CONADI) and the National Genetic Data Bank — both of which were specifically created to aid the Grandmothers — the search was institutionalized.

At least 1,000 Argentines approach these organizations annually, said Manuel Goncalves Granada, a recovered grandchild who recovered his identity in 1997 and currently works at CONADI.

The commission addresses requests from Argentines suspecting they could have been abducted as babies, but also looks into reports from people who report suspicious behavior. Sandoval, for instance, was found through an investigation that was launched after a neighbor reported that something was not right with his adoptive family.

Once a judge has a case of illegal appropriation and a DNA test confirms identity theft, the appropriators of the abducted babies could be imprisoned and a trial might take place.

Sandoval learned about the detention of the military officer who said he was his father through a newspaper article. "Former commander Víctor Rei arrested for falsification, concealment and the theft of a minor," the headline read.

"The people who raised me, whom I called 'mom' and 'dad' for over 26 years, suddenly became my appropriators," Sandoval said. "The process to assimilate — that took time."

For decades, he said, he felt like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: one person with two identities fighting each other. "I was the same person, but I unfolded myself all the time," Sandoval said.

Unlike Poblete, who was registered by her parents after she was born, Sandoval was born at ESMA and therefore was not named by his family. So, when the time came to choose a new name, he picked Pedro, to honor his mother — who he learned wanted to call him that — and kept Alejandro, because that's who he was for half his life.

For the recuperated grandchildren of Argentina, their names are deeply linked to the reconstruction of their identity. Many want to assume the names of their biological families — last names included — as if their parents lived on through the names they so proudly bear.

"I will never listen to their voices, but I'm getting to know them through different ways," Sandoval said.

He refers to his parents as "my old man" or "my old woman," as if he could chat with them every day.

"I can tell you stories about my parents," he said. "There is something magical. DNA is much bigger than we all believe."

Both Sandoval and Poblete encourage all Argentines who doubt their upbringings to approach the Grandmothers because, if abducted as babies, the deceit orchestrated by the military in the 1970s could pass on to future generations.

"One is not really free if there's a lie in between," Poblete said. "Freedom starts when you know the truth and, once knowing it, you can choose."

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## Today in History: March 26

### Bodies of 39 members of Heavens Gate cult are discovered

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 26, the 86th day of 2024. There are 280 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 26, 1997, the bodies of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate techno-religious cult who committed suicide were found inside a rented mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California.

On this date:

In 1812, an earthquake devastated Caracas, Venezuela, causing an estimated 26,000 deaths, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1827, composer Ludwig van Beethoven died in Vienna at age 56.

In 1945, during World War II, Iwo Jima was fully secured by U.S. forces following a final, desperate attack by Japanese soldiers.

In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Baker v. Carr*, gave federal courts the power to order reapportionment of states' legislative districts.

In 1973, the soap opera "The Young and the Restless" premiered on CBS-TV.

In 1979, a peace treaty was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and witnessed by President Jimmy Carter at the White House.

In 1982, groundbreaking ceremonies took place in Washington, D.C., for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

In 1988, Jesse Jackson stunned fellow Democrats by soundly defeating Michael S. Dukakis in Michigan's Democratic presidential caucuses.

In 1992, a judge in Indianapolis sentenced former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson to six years in prison for raping a Miss Black America contestant. (Tyson ended up serving three years.)

In 2010, the U.S. and Russia sealed the first major nuclear weapons treaty in nearly two decades, agreeing to slash the former Cold War rivals' warhead arsenals by nearly one-third.

In 2013, Italy's top criminal court overturned the acquittal of American Amanda Knox in the grisly murder of British roommate Meredith Kercher and ordered Knox to stand trial again. (Although convicted in absentia, Knox was exonerated by the Italian Supreme Court in 2015.)

In 2014, Osama bin Laden's son-in-law, Sulaiman Abu Ghaith (SOO'-lay-mahn AH'-boo gayth), was convicted in New York for his role as al-Qaida's fiery chief spokesman after 9/11. (He was later sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2018, a toxicology report obtained by The Associated Press revealed that the late pop superstar Prince had levels of fentanyl in his body that multiple experts described as "exceedingly high."

In 2020, the U.S. surpassed official Chinese government numbers to become the country with the most reported coronavirus infections.

In 2021, Dominion Voting Systems filed a \$1.6 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox News, saying the cable news giant falsely claimed that the voting company rigged the 2020 election.

In 2022, President Joe Biden said in Poland that Vladimir Putin "cannot remain in power," dramatically escalating the rhetoric against the Russian leader after his brutal invasion of Ukraine.

In 2023, Ukraine's government called for an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council to "counter the Kremlin's nuclear blackmail" after Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed plans to station tactical atomic weapons in Belarus.

Today's Birthdays: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is 89. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is 84. Author Erica Jong is 82. Journalist Bob Woodward is 81. Singer Diana Ross is 80. Rock singer Steven Tyler (Aerosmith) is 76. Singer and TV personality Vicki Lawrence is 75. Actor Ernest Thomas is 75. Comedian Martin Short is 74. Country singer Ronnie McDowell is 74. Movie composer Alan Silvestri is 74. Rock musician Monte Yoho is 72. Former Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao is 71. Radio talk show host Curtis Sliwa is 70. Country singer Dean Dillon is 69. Country singer Charly McClain is 68. TV personality Leeza Gibbons

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is 67. Actor Elia English is 65. Actor Jennifer Grey is 64. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Marcus Allen is 64. Actor Billy Warlock is 63. Actor Eric Allan Kramer is 62. Basketball and College Basketball Hall of Famer John Stockton is 62. Actor Michael Imperioli is 58. Rock musician James Iha is 56. Country singer Kenny Chesney is 56. Movie director Martin McDonagh is 53. Actor Leslie Mann is 52. Actor T.R. Knight is 51. Rapper Juvenile is 49. Actor Amy Smart is 48. Actor Bianca Kajlich (KY'-lihk) is 47. Moderator Margaret Brennan (TV: "Face the Nation") is 44. Actor Sterling Sulieman is 40. Actor Keira Knightley is 39. Rapper J-Kwon is 38. Actor Carly Chaikin is 34.