

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, March 29

No school - Easter Break
Emmanuel Luther: If no community service, worship at Emmanuel at 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Good Friday service, 7 p.m.
Good Friday service at 7 p.m. at Groton C&MA.

Saturday, March 30

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



Sunday, March 31

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

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

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**[™]

Former cryptocurrency tycoon Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced to 25 years in prison yesterday for crimes connected to the collapse of the now-defunct trading platform FTX. The 32-year-old MIT graduate was found guilty in November on seven counts of fraud, conspiracy, and money laundering; he had faced a maximum sentence of 110 years.

Superstar singer-songwriter Beyoncé released her country-centric eighth studio album "Cowboy Carter" at midnight, the second in an album trilogy after 2022's "Renaissance." The release follows the success of single "Texas Hold 'Em," which became the first track by a Black woman to top Billboard's country music chart last month.

Dengue cases in the Americas were up three times higher in January through March compared to the same period last year. The news comes as Puerto Rico issued a public health emergency this week over the mosquito-borne illness, infecting 100 million to 400 million people annually.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Life magazine to be relaunched in print and digital by model Karlie Kloss and her husband, investor Josh Kushner; comes more than two decades after the original print edition was shuttered by Time Inc.

Dine-in movie theater chain Alamo Drafthouse, with 40 national locations, explores sale to several Hollywood studios after having filed for bankruptcy in 2021.

NCAA women's basketball Sweet 16 tips off today; see schedule and predictions for every matchup ... and men's Sweet 16 continues.

Science & Technology

Amazon launches AI-powered app to image and store the vein structure in a user's hand, allowing sign-up for its palm recognition service directly from a smartphone.

Final Delta IV Heavy launch scheduled for this afternoon (1:30 pm ET) from Cape Canaveral, Florida; model, debuted in 2004, is the world's largest rocket fueled entirely by liquid hydrogen.

Engineers demonstrate new device to efficiently turn carbon dioxide into carbon monoxide, the precursor for useful chemical products; material uses a catalyst attached to DNA strands like molecular tetherballs.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.1%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq -0.1%); S&P 500 up 10.2% over the first quarter of 2024, marking best first quarter since 2019.

Home Depot purchases materials provider SRS Distribution in deal valued at \$18.3B, largest purchase in Home Depot's history.

Wealth of top 1% in the US, defined as those owning over \$11M, reaches record \$44.6T; gains driven by year-end stock gains.

Politics & World Affairs

South Carolina congressional map to remain as drawn for 2024 election; lower court ruled it unconstitutional due to racial gerrymandering, reversed decision after months-long delay by Supreme Court. House Oversight Committee invites President Joe Biden to testify in impeachment inquiry April 16.

International Court of Justice orders Israel to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza to address worsening famine; reiterates call for Hamas to release Israeli hostages. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas announces new cabinet.

Suspected shooter charged in the killing of New York police officer Jonathan Diller at a traffic stop. Suspect charged in Illinois stabbing rampage. New York City to test gun detection technology in subways.

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Tietz named to Class A All-State First Team

Groton Area senior Lane Tietz was named to the first team of the Class A All-State team, voted on by the South Dakota Basketball Coaches Association.

Tietz averaged 21.2 points, 3.5 rebounds, and three assists per game. He also shot 38.5% from long range on the year. Tietz, who plans to play at Dakota State, was also the Class A boys Spirit of Su award recipient.

Groton Area Head Coach Brian Dolan, said, "It's been a privilege to coach Lane over the past 5 seasons. Being named to the South Dakota basketball coach association All-State team is a deserving honor. Lane has had an outstanding high school career and he has bright days ahead of him. We are excited to watch him the next 4 years at DSU!"

Others on the first team were Sioux Falls Christian junior forward Griffen Goodbary, Dakota Valley senior forward Jaxson Wingert, Sioux Valley senior forward/center Alec Squires, Hamlin junior guard Easton Neuendorf and Pine Ridge sophomore guard Marvin Richard III.

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Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #19 Results

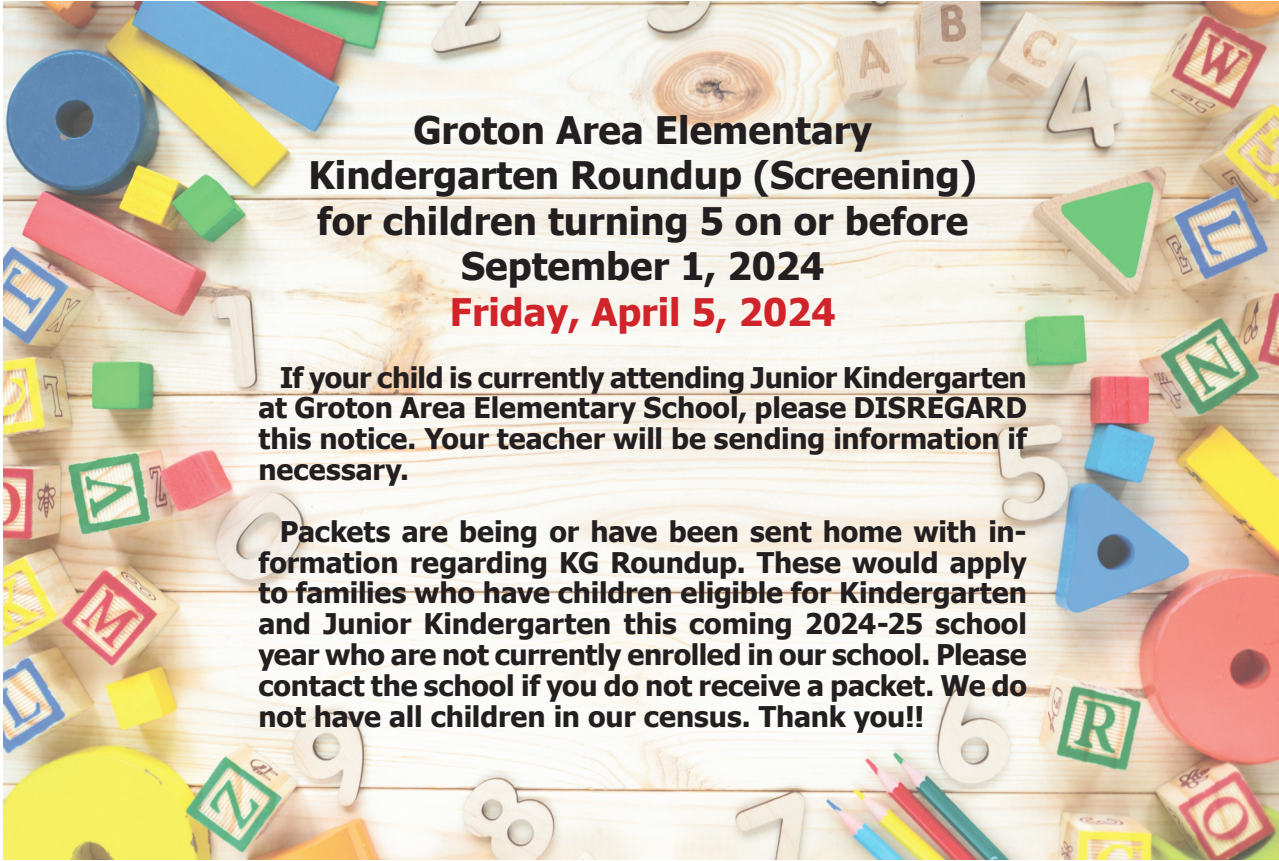
Team Standings: Shihtzus – 14, Coyotes – 12, Chipmunks- 11, Cheetahs – 10, Jackelopes – 9, Foxes – 4

Men's High Games: Lance Frohling – 246, Tony Waage – 208, Roger Spanier – 196

Women's High Games: Darci Spanier – 165, Sue Stanley – 162, Vicki Walter – 161

Men's High Series: Roger Spanier – 549, Lance Frohling – 526, Tony Waage – 513

Women's High Series: Darci Spanier – 443, Vicki Walter – 440, Karen Spanier – 424



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!!

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City is sending out mailers to all residents



It was a busy day at City Hall on Thursday as the office staff worked on getting a mailer assembled to all of city's customers. Kellie Locke, Douglas Heinrich and April Abeln worked diligently through the day and stuffed 624 envelopes.



Groton Postmaster Mindy Vandervorst received the tote of envelopes from the City of Groton.

In the mailing is information about Lead-Free South Dakota and customers need to complete a survey. This is part of the Environmental Protection Agency of eliminating lead pipes in the United States.

The mailing includes a letter from Wastewater Superintendent Dwight Zerr, outlining the new sump pump ordinance where only a 24-hour notice is required before a fine of up to \$500 a day can be imposed.

The city is switching to a new system where customers can review and pay their bill on-line. It is noted that if you switch your autopay to the new PSN system, you will be charged a \$2 transaction fee. Do nothing if you want to keep your current autopay in place. The letter outlines the policy. A letter also outlines how to view and pay your bill on-line and you can now go paperless with your bill.

Another form included in the mailing updates the contact information that the city has on file.

So watch your mail for the envelope stuffed with information from the City of Groton.

DANR Announces More Than \$172 Million for Statewide Environmental Projects

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) announced the Board of Water and Natural Resources has approved \$172,554,815 in grants and loans for drinking water, wastewater, storm water and solid waste projects in South Dakota.

The \$172,554,815 total consists of \$20,007,550 in grants and \$152,547,265 in low-interest loans, including \$10,986,600 in principal forgiveness to be administered by the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"I am pleased to announce this financial assistance is available," said DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts. "Safe and reliable water, wastewater, and solid waste infrastructure help protect our environment and strengthen communities for our kids and grandkids."

Funds were awarded from DANR's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program, Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program, Solid Waste Management Program, Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program, and the Water Environment Fund to the following:

Aberdeen received a \$10,000,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to construct a 1.5-million-gallon elevated tower and transmission pipeline in the northeast part of Aberdeen to address the need for additional water for existing users in that area of town. The loan terms are 3.5 percent for 20 years.

Alcester received a \$1,530,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$766,000 in principal forgiveness to televise the entire collection system to determine the condition of aging sewer lines, followed by relining and replacement of select lines and manholes. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Aurora received a \$1,751,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan, a \$1,030,800 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Construction Grant, and \$601,400 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to construct a 250,000-gallon elevated water tower to replace the existing tower and 1,400 feet of water main. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Clear Lake received a \$3,500,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace the main lift station, valve vault, the force main pipe to the primary cell of the wastewater treatment system, and upgrades to 1,800 feet of storm sewer pipe and storm sewer structures. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Clear Lake also received a \$3,694,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace existing water main and appurtenances in the northwest portion of the city including approximately 7,000 feet of PVC water main. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Colton received a \$323,748 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace a segment of sanitary sewer currently inaccessible due to proximity of adjacent buildings. This project will include connection to the existing upstream and downstream manholes, an addition of new manholes, and approximately 550 feet of PVC sanitary sewer main. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Colton also received a \$766,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace approximately 1,180 feet of existing cast iron pipe servicing its business district. These improvements will reduce maintenance due to water main breaks on this segment of pipe. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

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Dakota Mainstem Regional Water System received a \$1,000,000 Water Environment Fund Appropriation grant to conduct a feasibility study to determine the viability and costs to provide water and system interconnects throughout east central and southeastern South Dakota to assure water availability to meet current user needs and provide for future growth.

Elkton received a \$936,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$934,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund Water Quality grant to continue replacing vitrified clay sewer main including 3,530 feet of sewer main and associated sewer structures. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Elkton also received a \$778,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$222,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Construction grant to continue replacing cast iron water main piping south of the railroad tracks. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Faith received a \$1,250,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$620,000 in principal forgiveness to construct a new elevated water storage tower and make improvements to adjacent water mains to connect to the system. The city previously received funding in September 2022 and March 2021 for this project. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Gary received a \$2,015,822 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$815,000 in principal forgiveness to televise the existing system and replace existing clay sanitary sewer main and manholes and rehabilitate lateral service lines. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Green Valley Sanitary District received a \$2,763,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with 100 percent principal forgiveness, a \$237,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund Water Quality grant, and a \$2,000,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to remove septic system and install a centralized sewer collection system.

Hudson received a \$648,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$647,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to replace wastewater collection line and sewer services as well as stormwater collection lines impacted by the wastewater line replacement. The city previously received funding in May 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Hudson also received a \$1,107,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$782,000 in principal forgiveness to replace existing pressurized water storage tanks with a ground water storage tank and booster system, as well as replacing aging water distribution lines and installing water main loops. The city previously received funding in May 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.5 percent for 30 years.

Iroquois received a \$1,900,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,137,000 in principal forgiveness to replace the main lift station and force main. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Kadoka received a \$800,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace vitrified clay pipe in its sanitary sewer collection system and replace adjoining manholes and service lines. The city previously received funding in April 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Kingbrook Rural Water System received a \$14,500,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to construct 15.5 of transmission main and other facilities to enhance the reliability of the existing water system and add capacity to the DeSmet WTP service area. The loan terms are 3.50 percent for 30 years.

Lake Preston received a \$2,653,600 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,063,600 in principal

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forgiveness to replace aged sanitary sewer mains, sewer service lines, manholes and related appurtenances. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Lake Preston also received a \$2,492,100 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$2,118,200 in principal forgiveness to replace aged cast iron water mains, service lines, valves, hydrants, and related appurtenances. The loan terms are 3.5 percent for 30 years.

Lincoln County Rural Water System received a \$3,078,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to construct a second connection to Lewis & Clark Regional Water System including a meter building, process piping, site piping, electrical equipment, and all other necessary appurtenant work. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Mobridge received a \$7,350,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to construct new final clarifiers, repurpose existing tanks for new treatment processes and to implement a sludge dewatering system to improve biosolids processing and disposal. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Niche Sanitary District received a \$220,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan, a \$821,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund Water Quality grant, and a \$656,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to install a centralized collection system and connect to Summerset with a gravity sewer and lift station including new collection mains, service lines, and pumping systems. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

North Brookings Sanitary & Water District received a \$1,597,450 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$761,550 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to reline sanitary sewer lines and rehabilitate manholes throughout the wastewater collection system. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Parker received a \$1,669,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan for wastewater improvements. The project will replace existing vitrified clay pipe with PVC and replace existing storm water infrastructure. The city previously received funding in April 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Parker also received a \$1,215,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$862,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Construction grant to replace cast iron water main and loop portions of distribution system. The city previously received funding in April 2022 for this project. The terms of the loan are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Parkston received a \$1,500,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to install an ammonia removal system, a disinfection system, dredge treatment ponds, and restore wastewater treatment pond capacity. This project will improve effluent quality and allow the facility to meet discharge limits. The city previously received a funding package in April 2022 for this project. The terms of the loan are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Pierre received a \$1,303,200 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$325,800 Solid Waste Management Program grant to construct a fourth landfill disposal cell to provide uninterrupted landfill disposal services to customers. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 10 years.

Platte received a \$370,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan for exterior rehabilitation of its water storage structures. The terms of the loan are 3.25 percent for 10 years.

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Rapid City received a \$35,000,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to build out its South Water Reclamation Facility and decommission its North Plant. The city previously received funding in April 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.5 percent for 20 years.

Seneca received a \$440,800 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$321,800 in principal forgiveness to install new water meters and install several new water mains to loop lines, removing dead-end water main lines. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Sioux Falls received a \$23,130,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to continue the Basin 15 project by connecting the stopping point of phase 1 and extending infrastructure south of 12th street for approximately one mile. The Basin 15 sewer expansion project will open over 1,200 acres of land in the northwest part of Sioux Falls for future development. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 20 years.

Sioux Falls also received a \$590,000 Solid Waste Management Program grant to upgrade the supervisory control and data acquisition systems for the Landfill Leachate and Landfill Gas Systems Control Upgrades project.

Sioux Rural Water System received a \$11,252,165 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$600,000 in principal forgiveness to construct parallel and new pipelines, replace pumps, install a well, provide service to an existing mobile home park, and construct a new ground storage reservoir. The loan terms are 3.5 percent for 30 years.

South Eastern Council of Governments received a \$500,000 Solid Waste Management Program grant to recapitalize its regional revolving loan fund program. This funding allows SECOG to provide low-interest loans for solid waste management and recycling projects in the region.

Southern Black Hills Water System received a \$1,584,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,597,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to install a new well, booster pump station, water storage tank, a new chlorination system, a SCADA system, and water main to connect the Paramount Point and Spring Creek Acres Service areas. Southern Black Hills Water System previously received a funding package in April 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Spring Creek/Cow Creek Sanitary District received a \$3,627,880 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to construct a new wastewater treatment system to meet current permit limits and provide for planned future growth. The sanitary district previously received a funding package in April 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Vermillion received a \$4,211,500 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to extend sewer services to the Northeast basin to allow for future development. The loan terms are 3.5 percent for 20 years.

Viborg received a \$512,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to expand existing sanitary sewer collection and storm sewer systems to accommodate the development of future industrial sites. The project includes extension of PVC sanitary sewer main, installation of storm sewer main, and associated appurtenances. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Water Investment in Northern South Dakota (WINS) received a \$5,000,000 Water Environmental Fund Appropriation grant to provide up to 42.1 million gallons per day of treated drinking water to the northeast South Dakota region. The project is a collaboration between the city of Aberdeen, BDM Rural Water System, and WEB Water Development Association and consists of 148 miles of pipeline and associated water treatment and storage infrastructure.

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Western Dakota Regional Water System received a \$1,000,000 Water Environment Fund Appropriation grant to conduct a feasibility study to determine the viability and costs of providing over 58 million gallons of water per day throughout western South Dakota to assure water availability in case of a long-term drought, meet current user needs, and provide for future growth.

Winner received a \$500,000 Solid Waste Management Program grant to purchase an existing solid waste handling facility and equipment to include a walking floor trailer, used semi tractor, four roll off containers, a mini excavator to facilitate the loading of garbage within the facility, and standardized solid waste containers for individual and commercial use.

Worthing received a \$1,078,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$722,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund Water Quality grant for the Wastewater Treatment Facility Improvements project. This project includes the rehabilitation of an existing lagoon to include ammonia removal treatment equipment and constructing new sanitary sewer and storm sewer collection pipes. The city previously received funding in April 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.75 percent for 30 years.

Appropriations from the Water Environment Fund and Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program are funded in part by revenues from the Petroleum Release Compensation Tank Inspection fee and the sale of lotto tickets. These appropriations provide funding for water, wastewater, and watershed projects. The Legislature annually appropriates dedicated water and waste funding for State Water Resources Management System projects in the form of Water Environment Fund Appropriations and the Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program through the Governor's Omnibus Water Funding Bill.

The Solid Waste Management Program provides grants and loans for solid waste disposal, recycling, and waste tire projects. The Legislature annually appropriates dedicated funding for the Solid Waste Management Program through the Governor's Omnibus Water Funding Bill.

The State of South Dakota and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fund the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Programs, which provide low-interest loans for wastewater, storm water, water conservation, nonpoint source projects, and public drinking water system projects. The programs are funded through a combination of federal appropriations, loan repayments, and bonds.

The board approved the funding at yesterday's meeting in Pierre.

EMPLOYMENT

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

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

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Groton Area Third Quarter Honor Roll

Seniors

4.0 GPA: Emily Clark, Hannah Monson, Camryn Kurtz, Holden Sippel, Claire Heinrich, Kyleigh Englund, Lydia Meier, Abigail Jensen, Emma Schinkel, Anna Bisbee, Faith Fliehs, Anna Fjeldheim, Ashlyn Sperry
3.99-3.50: Colby Dunker, Lexi Osterman, Sydney Leicht, Lane Tietz, Ava Wienk, Cadence Feist, Carly Guthmiller, Logan Ringgenberg, Dillon Abeln, Karsyn Jangula, Shea Jandel, Bradin Althoff, Jackson Garstecki
3.49-3.00: Bryson Wambach, Jacob Zak, Layne Hanson, Kate Profeta

Juniors

4.0 GPA: Gretchen Dinger, Axel Warrington, Payton Mitchell, Faith Traphagen, Elizabeth Fliehs, Blake Pauli, Emma Kutter, Laila Roberts, Logan Pearson, Diego Eduardo Nava Remigio
3.99-3.50: Kennedy Hansen, Brooklyn Hansen, Kaden Kampa, Kayla Lehr, Turner Thompson, Jeslyn Kosel
3.49-3.00: Kellen Antonsen, Easten Ekern, Carter Simon, Abby Yeadon, Korbin Kucker, Brevin Fliehs, Divya Pelmelay, Karrah-Jo Johnson, Ashlyn Johnson

Sophomores

4.0 GPA: Carly Gilbert, Jerica Locke, Jaedyn Penning, Nathan Unzen
3.99-3.50: Ryder Johnson, De Eh Tha Say, Gage Sippel, Mia Crank, Karsten Fliehs, Talli Wright, Raelee Lilly, Natalia Warrington, Rylee Dunker, Aiden Meyers, Paisley Mitchell, London Bahr, Keegen Tracy, Logan Warrington, Hannah Sandness
3.49-3.00: Breslyn Jeschke, Benjamin Hoeft, Garrett Schultz, Karter Moody, Cambria Bonn, Olivia Stiegelmeier, Jayden Schwan, Cali Tollifson, Lincoln Krause

Freshmen

4.0 GPA: Liby Althoff, Kira Clocksene, Teagan Hanten, Carlee Johnson, Emerlee Jones, Ashlynn Warrington
3.99-3.50: Brody Lord, Kella Tracy, Colt Williamson, Taryn Traphagen, McKenna Tietz, Halee Harder, Avery Crank, Addison Hoffman Wipf, Leah Jones, Zander Harry, Blake Lord, Claire Schuelke, Aiden Strom
3.49-3.00: Skyler Kramer, Gavin Kroll, Brenna Imrie, Alyssa Beauchamp, Dylan Alexander Lopez Marin, Hailey Pauli, Walker Zoellner, Hayden Zoellner, Jackson Hopfinger, Logan Clocksene

Eighth Graders

4.0 GPA: Makenna Krause
3.99-3.50: Thomas Schuster, Layne Johnson, Sydney Locke, Chesney Weber, Addison Hoeft, Ethan Kroll, Elizabeth Cole, Mya Feser, Kyleigh Kroll, Rylie Rose, Ryder Schelle, Easton Weber, Rylen Ekern, Taryn Thompson, Jace Johnson, Gracie Pearson, Karson Zak, Ruelle Gilbert, Alex Abeln, Brayden Barrera
3.49-3.00: Brysen Sandness, Wyatt Wambach, Kinsley Rowen, John Bisbee, Ella Kettner, Braeden Fliehs, Aimee Heilman, Kason Oswald, Owen Sperry

Seventh Graders

4.0 GPA: Neely Althoff, Wesley Borg, Abby Fjeldheim, Zachary Fliehs, Tevan Hanson, Brooklyn Spanier, Novalea Warrington
3.99-3.50: Aspen Beto, Asher Johnson, Kolton Antonsen, Madison Herrick, Lincoln Shilhanek, Sydney Holmes
3.49-3.00: Arianna Dinger, Connor Kroll, Logan Olson, Kenzey Anderson, Jordan Schwan, Tenley Frost, Aurora Washenberger, Samuel Crank, Madison Little, Adeline Kotzer, Wesley Morehouse

Sixth Graders

4.0 GPA: Axel Abeln, Hudson Eichler, Amelia Ewalt, Gavin Hanten, Liam Johnson, Liam Lord
3.99-3.50: Sophia Fliehs, Asher Zimmerman, Jameson Penning, Aubrie Lier, Ryder Schwan, Trey Tietz
3.49-3.00: Ilyanna Dallaire, Haden Harder, Andi Gauer, Trayce Schelle, Elias Heilman, Keegan Kucker, Nolan Bahr, Kyson Kucker, Rowan Patterson

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Easter Baskets by Tina ~ 605-397-7285



Only
\$20
each



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



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



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 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>

Most tribes were completing financial audits prior to Noem call for scrutiny

Governor called for 'single audits' after comments on crime on reservations

BY: AMELIA SCHAFER, RAPID CITY JOURNAL/ICT - MARCH 28, 2024 4:06 PM

RAPID CITY, S.D. – South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem issued a statement this week calling for the Biden administration to conduct single audits of all federal funds given to the nine Oceti Sakowin tribes in South Dakota.

In a letter to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland and U.S. Comptroller Gene Dodaro, Noem asked for comprehensive single audits of federal funds given to the nine tribes in South Dakota.

Specifically, Noem, a Republican, asked for an OMB Circular-A-133 audit, which is an organization-wide financial statement and federal-awards audit of a non-federal entity which expends \$750,000 or more in federal funds per year.

"If single audits of these tribes have been occurring, it is not transparent as single audits are not publicly available," Noem said in the March 26 letter. "I encourage members of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs and U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to demand a review of each single audit, inquire as to why an audit is not complete, and report on how each tribe is managing audit findings to improve eligibility for federal programs."

Tribes are already required by law to have audited financial statements and compliance audits. The Single Audit Act requires an annual audit of all non-federal entities that spend over \$750,000 in Federal Financial Assistance, including tribes, every fiscal year.

Records from the Federal Audit Clearinghouse, a searchable database of organizations, show prior to 2020 a majority of the nine tribes in South Dakota regularly completed detailed audits. Following 2020, the process became difficult for tribes according to leaders. An influx of funding for COVID-19 relief caused issues backlogging the process and overwhelming the treasurers.

In a January 2024 Oglala Sioux Tribe Tribal Council meeting, Treasurer Cora White Horse reported the 2020 audit is estimated to be completed by May 2024, the 2021 audit by August 2024 and the 2022 audit by December 2024.

The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and Standing Rock Sioux Tribe all completed audits for the 2022 fiscal year, the most recently available period. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe's 2022 and 2021 audits are available to the public and can be downloaded via the Federal Audit Clearinghouse.

In the statement, Noem said she is calling for a financial audit to verify the need for more law enforcement funding provided to tribal nations while also reiterating her claim that drug cartels are operating on tribal land in South Dakota.

Noem's letter referenced Oglala Sioux Tribe President Frank Star Comes Out's Dec 20, 2023 testimony to the U.S. Committee on Indian Affairs in support of OST's lawsuit against the federal government. In the testimony, Star Comes Out cites a lack of law enforcement presence to drug cartel movement on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Noem did not respond to a request for comment, instead referring back to the March 26 press release.

"I stand ready to advocate for more public safety dollars and have even shown a willingness to use state resources to fill the gap that the Bureau of Indian Affairs has left. But there must be accountability and

transparency to further these efforts," Noem said in the letter.

On March 13, comments made by Noem at a town hall meeting in Mitchell, S.D. and Winner, S.D. sparked outrage amongst tribal governments in South Dakota. During the Mitchell town hall Noem attributed low graduation and attendance rates to a perceived "lack of parental involvement." At the Winner town hall, she alleged tribal governments are benefitting from cartel presence on their reservations.

In the days following these comments, the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and Standing Rock Sioux Tribe all condemned Noem's statements.

"Governor Noem's wild and irresponsible attempt to connect tribal leaders and parents with Mexican drug cartels is a sad reflection of her fear-based-politics that do nothing to bring people together and solve problems," said Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Chairwoman Janet Alkire in a March 20 press release.

Alkire added only seven police officers patrol the over 1 million-acre Standing Rock Reservation. Currently, only two officers can patrol the reservation's 12,000-person population at one time.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe and Crow Creek Sioux Tribe have previously voiced similar issues. Both reservations have a limited number of police officers to patrol reservation lands despite their vast land bases.

On Jan. 31, Noem first claimed cartels are operating on tribal land in South Dakota – specifically the Pine Ridge and Lake Traverse Reservations. Following these allegations, Noem was banned for a second time from the Pine Ridge Reservation and held a meeting with the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate in which she apologized for naming the tribe.

Following Noem's March 13 comments, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Chairman Garrett Renville reiterated his request that no tribal governments be singled out when discussing drug cartel and law enforcement concerns.

Amelia Schafer covers Indigenous communities in the South Dakota area as part of a partnership between the Rapid City Journal and ICT, an independent, nonprofit news enterprise that covers Indigenous peoples.

Corrections has collected \$1.25 million for calls, messages since 2021

Data released after tablet communication shutdown, just before tablet-related prison disturbance

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 28, 2024 1:42 PM

The state prison system collected at least \$1.25 million in fees from inmates and their families for phone and messaging services in the three years leading up to this month's sudden shutdown of tablet-based communications.

The South Dakota Department of Corrections (DOC) revenue is a mix of commission payments for phone calls and electronic messaging. The money is paid to the DOC from its communication contractor, ViaPath, which does business as Global Tel Link.

Inmates can call from wall phones and, until recently, from their tablets. Those fee-for-service mobile devices are provided by the contractor to all inmates at no cost to the state. The tablets offer calls, texts and photo messaging, music and games for fees, and have a free law library. Inmates cannot access regular websites or social media.

The DOC provided the commission payout information to South Dakota Searchlight in the run-up to a Wednesday evening disturbance at the state penitentiary in Sioux Falls. During the event, inmates in the East Hall cell block could be heard from the street chanting "we want phones."

An initial call on the disturbance appeared on the Sioux Falls Police Department call log just after 4 p.m. Wednesday. DOC Secretary Kellie Wasko sent a written statement at 8:30 p.m. announcing that order had been restored at the penitentiary.

The statement referenced a "staff assault," but did not mention the extent of any correctional officer

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injuries.

In an interview with The Dakota Scout's Austin Goss on Thursday, Gov. Kristi Noem confirmed that the incident began when correctional officers took tablets from inmates.

"That's what started the original conflict last night, and yes, we did have a correctional officer that was assaulted and went to the hospital," Noem said.

In the same interview, Noem said the state needs to "see if it's possible for prisoners to have these tablets and have them not be used for nefarious reasons."

"We're working with the technology and the vendor to make sure that to see if that's even a possibility," Noem said.

Attorney General Marty Jackley released a statement Thursday saying the state Division of Criminal Investigation will work with the DOC to "to investigate the disturbance at the State Penitentiary."

"It is the Attorney General's intent to prosecute those responsible for any harm done to correctional officers, other inmates, and state property to the fullest extent of the law," Jackley wrote in a press release.

Communication restrictions began 20 days ago

The tablet-based messaging system, which moved to a new mobile platform late last year, was heavily used prior to the March 8 shutdown of tablet-based phone calls, texting and photo messaging.

A press release posted to the agency's website two weeks after that date said that tablet communications had been suspended indefinitely pending the completion of an investigation. The release offered no details about the nature of the investigation, and the DOC has declined to offer further details on its nature.

Inmates were still able to place calls using wall phones, the DOC notice said.

The sudden change, as well as a lack of communication about it, has frustrated inmates and their family members across state prison facilities in Sioux Falls, Yankton, Pierre, Springfield and Rapid City. Inmates have complained of wait times for phones, and about the loss of the tablets' 1-hour phone call limit – 40 more minutes than they're allowed on wall phones.

"The tension is rising due to the lack of phones in here," Inmate Wesley Jarabek told Searchlight last week.

Surge in text, photo messaging follows tablet update

Pre-paid phone calls currently return an 18.7% commission for the state.

Commission rates are far higher for tablet-based text messages and emails, netting the state 50% of the proceeds. Inmates pay 12 cents per photo or text to family and friends outside the walls. Family members and friends pay 25 cents per message.

The lion's share of the \$1.25 million the DOC collected between February 2021 and last month came from prepaid phone calls. But text and photo messaging payments skyrocketed after the tablet and messaging platform updates took effect last year.

November is the first month for which tablet-specific data are listed in the commission report, which was provided on Monday by DOC spokesman Michael Winder. In prior months, revenue from emails and photo messages sent over the previous platform were lumped in with monthly phone revenue reports, Winder said.

By November, all inmates and families were able to communicate using a mobile app called "Getting Out" that works much like regular smartphone-based messaging.

By January, 412,343 messages – more than 13,000 per day – were exchanged between inmates and those on the outside, according to the DOC's commission data. That's an average of about four messages per inmate per day. The DOC collected \$37,758 in commission that month from tablets, according to the commission data.

That same month, the agency collected \$26,662 in prepaid phone revenue.

The report includes monthly payouts from February 2021 through last month, which added up to a total of \$964,755.28.

There was a period of time when monthly payments appeared to drop suddenly and significantly, from

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November 2021 through March 2023. Monthly payouts had totaled \$30,000 or more in the months leading up to November 2021, but fell to around \$11,000 or so each month until March 2023.

Winder, the DOC spokesman, said via email on Wednesday afternoon that the payouts didn't actually drop. Instead, he said, the method of calculating payments changed in that time frame.

"ViaPath paid a lump sum payment of \$288,057.20 for the difference in those months," Winder said. "That payment is not included in the cost recovery reports we sent because those are monthly totals."

Adding the lump sum payment to the monthly payments puts the total for known communication service commissions for the past three years at \$1,252,812.

Winder did not immediately respond to a follow-up question on any other additional commission revenue that may have been collected since February 2021.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

COMMENTARY

Some areas worthy of legislative summer study; some are not

DANA HESS

MARCH 28, 2024 9:56 AM

Don't think for a moment that just because the final gavel has fallen on the 2024 legislative session that the work of lawmakers is over for the year. That work continues on through the summer.

Soon after the final gavel fell, the Legislature's Executive Board met to discuss topics for summer studies. The board decided on two summer studies as well as the formation of a committee. The committee will be in contact with leaders at Ellsworth Air Force Base to make sure the Legislature stays informed on that area's needs as it sees tremendous growth through the implementation of the B-21 bomber program.

One summer study will be a combination of two subjects: state government's role in regulating the internet with regard to artificial intelligence and teenagers' access to online pornography. (For those of you who like to wager, if the contest is between internet blocking technology and teenagers, always bet on teens.)

The other summer study will look at the methodology for property tax assessments to make sure that they are accurate and consistent. Not everyone on the board was enthusiastic about this subject, as they thought citizens would see that the Legislature was studying property taxes and then expect their tax bills to go down.

"I think you're going to regret this big-time," said Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, a Republican from Watertown and chairman of the Executive Board. "I'd rather go to the dentist than sit in on another one of these."

Sen. Jim Bolin, a Republican from Canton, shared Schoenbeck's lack of enthusiasm.

"You're going to raise peoples' expectations and not really accomplish anything significant." The Executive Board voted 10-5 to take on the property tax assessment study.

Summer studies should, as Sen. Bolin suggested, accomplish something significant. There are other areas where the Legislature should put its efforts for the betterment of South Dakota.

One would be a study of education on state Native American reservations. A South Dakota Searchlight story, quoting Department of Education statistics, says that absenteeism among the state's Native American students increased from 31% to 54% from 2018 to 2023. A third of Native American students don't complete high school, 84% are not considered college ready and only 7% take the ACT.

Add that to the prevalence of illegal drugs and the rampant poverty, and there is surely something there that could keep a legislative committee busy through the summer. The Executive Committee was working off a list of potential summer study subjects submitted by lawmakers. Of the 21 potential subjects, none of them dealt with Native American issues. That's a sure sign of the disconnect between the Legislature and the state's nine tribes.

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During the Executive Committee meeting, Schoenbeck explained that summer studies are used to educate lawmakers on a particular subject or provide them with a background for policy issues they will face in the next session. In that case, lawmakers would do well to set aside a summer study for a look at the policies needed for ballot issues to cut the state sales tax on groceries and legalize recreational marijuana.

That study could determine how to massage the language in the grocery tax cut ballot initiative in two areas of concern to the attorney general. There needs to be a plan to change its language so it doesn't endanger a settlement with major cigarette manufacturers, which pays the state an annual \$20 million. The way it is written may also jeopardize the streamlined sales tax agreement that allows South Dakota to collect sales taxes on online purchases. Those would seem to be important policy issues worthy of study.

Recreational marijuana was approved by this state's voters in 2020, only to be overturned by a court ruling. Voters defeated another attempt to legalize marijuana in 2022. It's hard to predict what voters will say this November, but it's apparent that this issue isn't going away. The current ballot initiative doesn't say how stores would be licensed, or the cost for that license. Lawmakers need to consider how recreational marijuana would be taxed, a potential windfall for the state.

One area that could certainly use a windfall is education funding. The recently completed legislative session saw schools saddled with a minimum \$45,000 salary for teachers with no additional funding to help them reach that level. One of the proposed summer studies, offered by Rep. Carl Perry, a Republican from Aberdeen, offered to look at the school funding system. That's certainly an area worthy of study, as teacher salaries in this state are an embarrassment, mired at 49th in national rankings.

Any of these would be better choices for a summer study rather than trying to figure out how state government can regulate something as unwieldy as the internet or taking on a study that will needlessly raise expectations about lowering property taxes.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

States rush to combat AI threat to elections

BY: ZACHARY ROTH - MARCH 28, 2024 11:22 AM

This year's presidential election will be the first since generative AI — a form of artificial intelligence that can create new content, including images, audio, and video — became widely available. That's raising fears that millions of voters could be deceived by a barrage of political deepfakes.

While Congress has done little to address the issue, states are moving aggressively to respond — though questions remain about how effective any new measures to combat AI-created disinformation will be.

Last year, a fake, AI-generated audio recording of a conversation between a liberal Slovakian politician and a journalist, in which they discussed how to rig the country's upcoming election, offered a warning to democracies around the world.

Here in the United States, the urgency of the AI threat was driven home in February, when, in the days before the New Hampshire primary, thousands of voters in the state received a robocall with an AI-generated voice impersonating President Joe Biden, urging them not to vote. A Democratic operative working for a rival candidate has admitted to commissioning the calls.

In response to the call, the Federal Communications Commission issued a ruling restricting robocalls that contain AI-generated voices.

Some conservative groups even appear to be using AI tools to assist with mass voter registration challenges — raising concerns that the technology could be harnessed to help existing voter suppression schemes.

"Instead of voters looking to trusted sources of information about elections, including their state or county board of elections, AI-generated content can grab the voters' attention," said Megan Bellamy, vice

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president for law and policy at the Voting Rights Lab, an advocacy group that tracks election-related state legislation. "And this can lead to chaos and confusion leading up to and even after Election Day."

Disinformation worries

The AI threat has emerged at a time when democracy advocates already are deeply concerned about the potential for "ordinary" online disinformation to confuse voters, and when allies of former president Donald Trump appear to be having success in fighting off efforts to curb disinformation.

But states are responding to the AI threat. Since the start of last year, 101 bills addressing AI and election disinformation have been introduced, according to a March 26 analysis by the Voting Rights Lab.

On March 27, Oregon became the latest state — after Wisconsin, New Mexico, Indiana and Utah — to enact a law on AI-generated election disinformation. Florida and Idaho lawmakers have passed their own measures, which are currently on the desks of those states' governors.

Arizona, Georgia, Iowa and Hawaii, meanwhile, have all passed at least one bill — in the case of Arizona, two — through one chamber.

As that list of states makes clear, red, blue, and purple states all have devoted attention to the issue.

States urged to act

Meanwhile, a new report on how to combat the AI threat to elections, drawing on input from four Democratic secretaries of state, was released March 25 by the NewDEAL Forum, a progressive advocacy group.

"(G)enerative AI has the ability to drastically increase the spread of election mis- and disinformation and cause confusion among voters," the report warned. "For instance, 'deepfakes' (AI-generated images, voices, or videos) could be used to portray a candidate saying or doing things that never happened."

The NewDEAL Forum report urges states to take several steps to respond to the threat, including requiring that certain kinds of AI-generated campaign material be clearly labeled; conducting role-playing exercises to help anticipate the problems that AI could cause; creating rapid-response systems for communicating with voters and the media, in order to knock down AI-generated disinformation; and educating the public ahead of time.

Secretaries of State Steve Simon of Minnesota, Jocelyn Benson of Michigan, Maggie Toulouse Oliver of New Mexico and Adrian Fontes of Arizona provided input for the report. All four are actively working to prepare their states on the issue.

Loopholes seen

Despite the flurry of activity by lawmakers, officials, and outside experts, several of the measures examined in the Voting Rights Lab analysis appear to have weaknesses or loopholes that may raise questions about their ability to effectively protect voters from AI.

Most of the bills require that creators add a disclaimer to any AI-generated content, noting the use of AI, as the NewDEAL Forum report recommends.

But the new Wisconsin law, for instance, requires the disclaimer only for content created by campaigns, meaning deepfakes produced by outside groups but intended to influence an election — hardly an unlikely scenario — would be unaffected.

In addition, the measure is limited to content produced by generative AI, even though experts say other types of synthetic content that don't use AI, like Photoshop and CGI — sometimes referred to as "cheap fakes" — can be just as effective at fooling viewers or listeners, and can be more easily produced.

For that reason, the NewDEAL Forum report recommends that state laws cover all synthetic content, not just that which use AI.

The Wisconsin, Utah, and Indiana laws also contain no criminal penalties — violations are punishable by a \$1000 fine — raising questions about whether they will work as a deterrent.

The Arizona and Florida bills do include criminal penalties. But Arizona's two bills apply only to digital

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impersonation of a candidate, meaning plenty of other forms of AI-generated deception — impersonating a news anchor reporting a story, for instance — would remain legal.

And one of the Arizona bills, as well as New Mexico's law, applied only in the 90 days before an election, even though AI-generated content that appears before that window could potentially still affect the vote.

Experts say the shortcomings exist in large part because, since the threat is so new, states don't yet have a clear sense of exactly what form it will take.

"The legislative bodies are trying to figure out the best approach, and they're working off of examples that they've already seen," said Bellamy, pointing to the examples of the Slovakian audio and the Biden robocalls.

"They're just not sure what direction this is coming from, but feeling the need to do something."

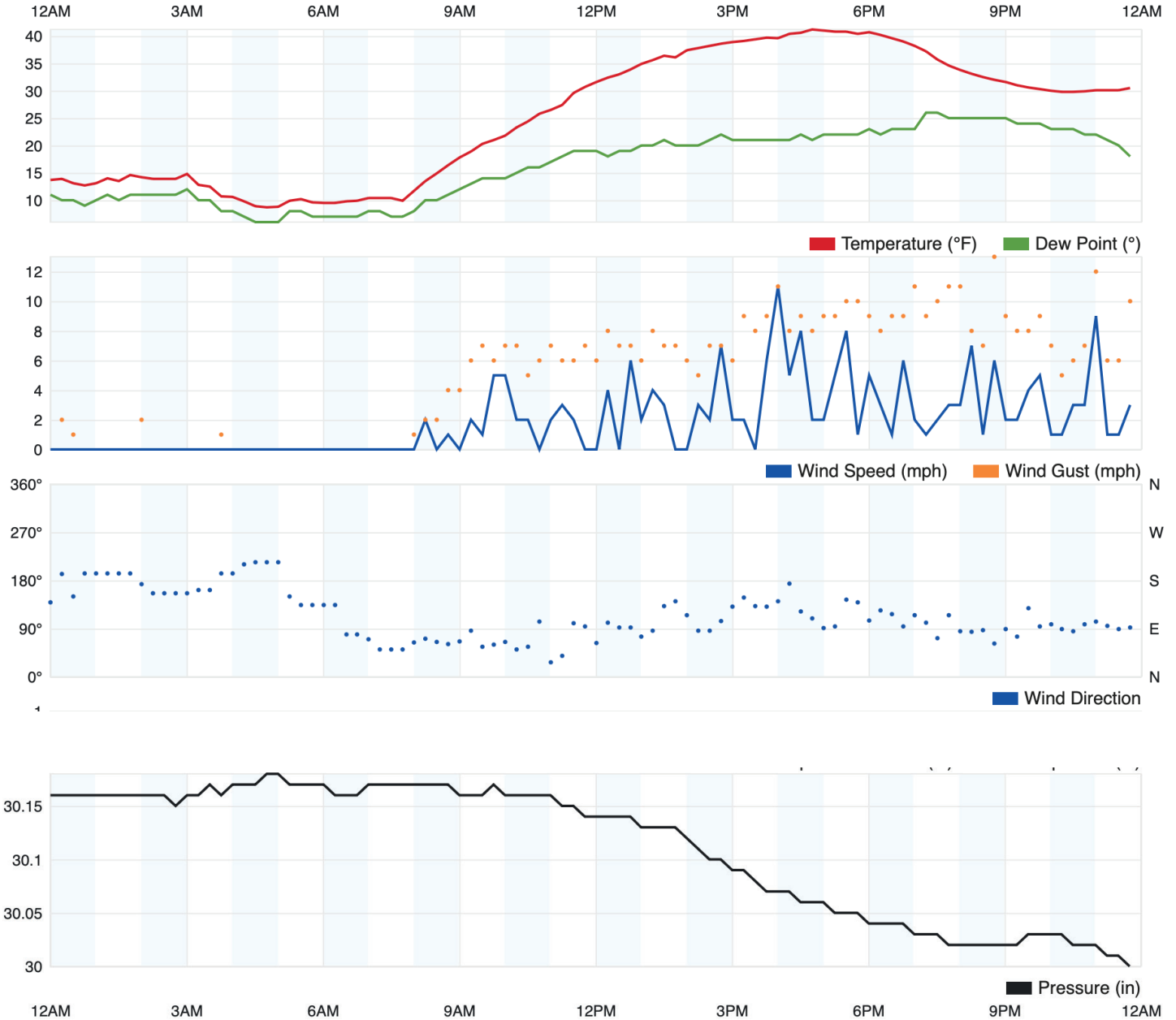
"I think that we will see the solutions evolve," Bellamy added. "The danger of that is that AI-generated content and what it can do is also likely to evolve at the same time. So hopefully we can keep up."

Zachary Roth is the National Democracy Reporter for States Newsroom.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today

Tonight

Saturday

Saturday
Night

Sunday



Mostly Cloudy

High: 40 °F



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 22 °F



Increasing
Clouds

High: 39 °F



Slight Chance
Rain/Snow
then Chance
Snow

Low: 25 °F



Chance
Rain/Snow

High: 37 °F



The Weekend Outlook

March 29, 2024
2:26 AM

mixed precipitation possible this weekend



Today

Freezing sprinkles possible this morning, mostly cloudy
Highs 34-52°



Saturday

Mostly cloudy with chance rain/snow west late
Highs 33-46°



Sunday

Mostly cloudy with **good** chance rain/snow
Highs 32-43°

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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Mixed precipitation is possible both this morning and again late on Saturday and through Sunday. Impacts should be minimal over the weekend.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 4:44 PM

Low Temp: 9 °F at 4:47 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 7:52 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 2021

Record Low: -14 in 2023

Average High: 49

Average Low: 25

Average Precip in March.: 0.81

Precip to date in March: 0.78

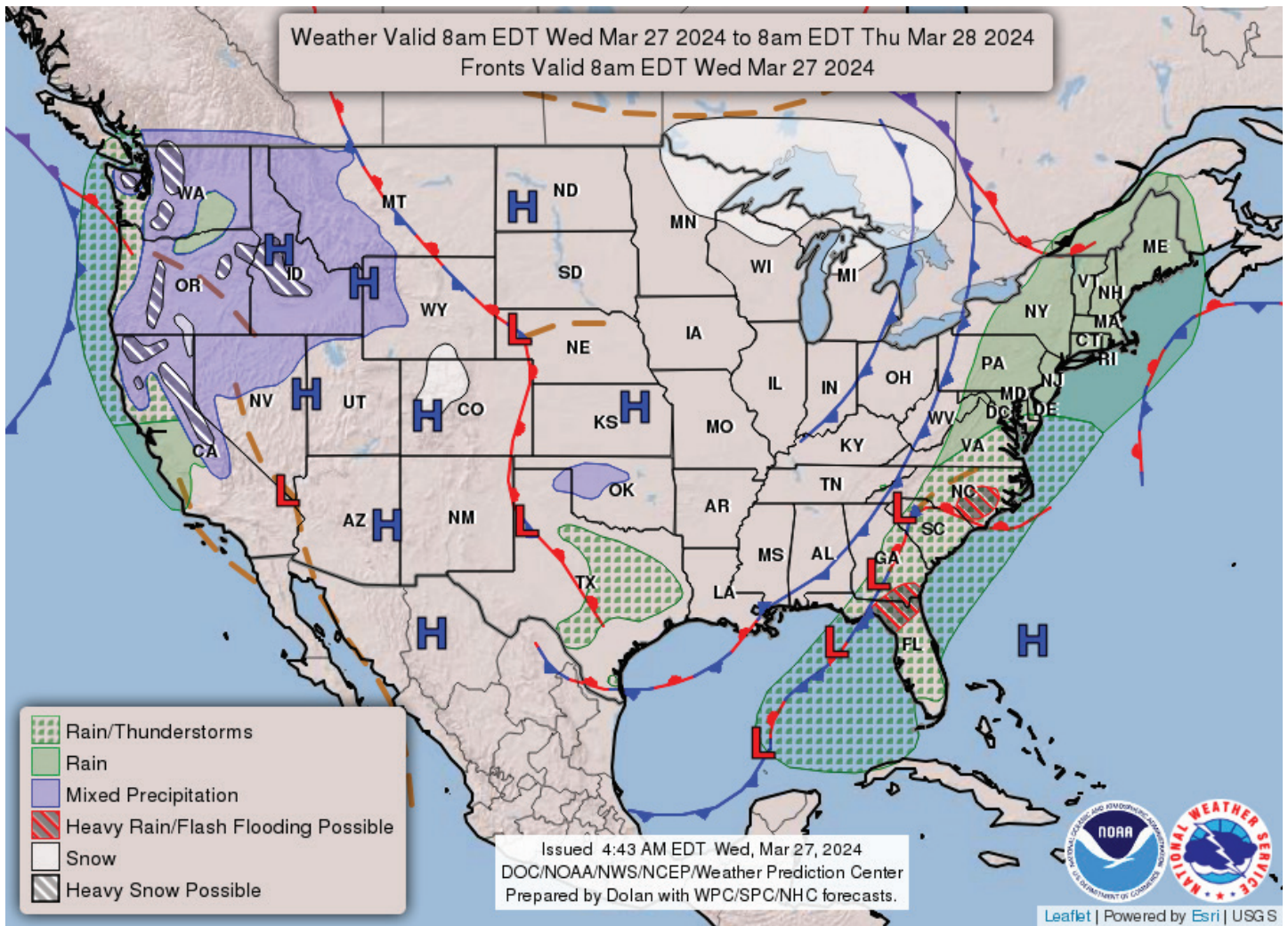
Average Precip to date: 1.98

Precip Year to Date: 0.85

Sunset Tonight: 7:58:39 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:13:17 am

Day length: 12 hours, 43 minutes



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Today in Weather History

March 29, 1982: An early season Tornado briefly touched down at Swett, South Dakota (11 miles west of Martin). The tornado overturned and heavily damaged a mobile home. One person was slightly injured, and another barely escaped injury, as he left the trailer just seconds before the storm struck.

March 29, 1998: A supercell thunderstorm produced 13 tornadoes across southern Minnesota. The strongest tornado was an F4. Two people died during this tornado event.

1848: Niagara Falls eased to a trickle during the late afternoon and then became "silent" for 30 hours. Most people noticed the silence on the morning of the 30th. This is the only time in recorded history that both Falls stopped flowing. An ice jam at the neck of Lake Erie and the Niagara River entrance between Fort Erie, Ontario Canada, and Buffalo, NY, was caused by the wind, waves, and lake currents. People even ventured into the gorge, discovering relics like weapons from War of 1812.

1886: Rainfall amounts of 6-12 inches occurred over northwest Georgia in a 3-day period from March 29 through April 2. This caused record flooding on the Oostanaula and Etowah Rivers that merge to form the Coosa River. Floodwaters, up to 11 feet deep covered portions of Broad Street in Rome with extensive record flooding. The stage height reached 40.3 feet. Flood stage is 25 feet. This record flood and another major flood in 1892 prompted the citizens of Rome to raise the town by 12 feet. This feat was accomplished by bringing in thousands of wagon loads of dirt. An official rainfall amount of 7.36 inches was recorded on this day in Atlanta. The 7.36 inches is the most Atlanta has seen in one day since record-keeping began in 1878.

1920 - Clear Spring, MD, received 31 inches of snow in 24 hours to establish a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1921 - The temperature in Washington D.C. dropped from 82 degrees to 26 degrees thus ending an early spring. (David Ludlum)

1935 - A severe duststorm blanketed Amarillo, TX, for 84 hours. During one six hour period the visibility was near zero. (28th-31st) (The Weather Channel)

1942: A slow-moving low-pressure system brought 11.5 inches of snow to the nation's capital on March 29, 1942. It still stands as the highest March snowfall on record in Washington, D.C. on a single calendar day. Also, Baltimore, Maryland recorded an imposing total of 21.9 inches of snow on the same day. On the flip side, eight days later, the temperature in D.C. soared to 92 degrees on April 6, 1942, and it remains the highest temperature on record for April 6.

1945 - Providence, RI, hit 90 degrees to establish a March record for the New England area. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms spawned tornadoes in Mississippi, and produced high winds and heavy rain in Louisiana. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 92 mph at Houma LA, and caused a million dollars damage in Terrebonne Parish. Avondale LA was deluged with 4.52 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley spawned a tornado which injured two persons at Bunkie LA, and produced high winds which down a large tree onto a trailer at Bastrop LA claiming the life of one child and injuring another. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced torrential rains in northeastern Texas and southwestern Arkansas. Longview TX reported 14.16 inches of rain. More than eleven inches of rain at Henderson TX caused a dam to give way, and people left stranded in trees had to be rescued by boat. Total damage in northeastern Texas was estimated at 10 to 16 million dollars. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather in southeastern Texas and southern Louisiana. Thunderstorms spawned seven tornadoes, including one which injured seven persons at Gray LA. Thunderstorms also produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 70 mph at Port O'Conner TX, and produced up to six inches of rain in Beauregard Parish LA. (Storm Data)

2007 - Eighteen year old Corey Williams is killed by a lightning bolt in Carbondale, IL, at the Community High School's first home track meet of the season.

2011 - A record 766 inches of snowfall at Boreal Ski Resort and nearly 59 feet at Squaw Valley in California's Sierra Nevadas are just two areas where snowfall records have been broke.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHY NOT YOUR BEST?

A well-dressed gentleman stepped from a taxi cab in New York whistling half-heartedly as he collected his briefcase and umbrella. A newsboy, just a few feet away, listened for a brief moment and said, "You're not much of a whistler, are you? Listen to how good I am!"

When the newsboy finished, he asked the gentleman, "Can you do better?"

"Indeed I can," came the reply. The man was an expert whistler who was in New York for a performance. And then he whistled his very best to the astonishment of the young newsboy.

Puzzled, the young boy looked at him and then asked, "Why were you doing so poorly when you got out of the cab?"

Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes to challenge God's followers to live lives with meaning and purpose. "Whatever you do," he wrote, "do well!" He very clearly and convincingly encourages us to enjoy life as a gift from God and to focus on doing our very best - always. If you are a whistler, whistle the best you can all of the time - not only during a "performance" in front of an audience. After all, we are all "performing" everything we do before God, our Creator. We are always on "stage," demonstrating our gratitude for the gifts He's given us.

We must always be aware of the fact that no matter where we are or what we are doing, we are responsible for doing our best to bring honor and glory to God.

Prayer: Lord of our lives, it is never what we have, but what we do with what You have given us. May we do our best, always, with each of the gifts You have given us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom. Ecclesiastes 9:10



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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paypal.me/paperpaul



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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.26.24

7 11 22 29 38 4

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 29 Mins 3
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.27.24

9 22 30 31 34 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,500,000

NEXT 1 Days 14 Hrs 44
DRAW: Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.28.24

9 15 29 38 39 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 14 Hrs 59 Mins 4
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.27.24

3 4 11 34 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$36,000

NEXT 1 Days 14 Hrs 59
DRAW: Mins 4 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.27.24

31 47 52 53 57 23

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 28
DRAW: Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.27.24

37 46 57 60 66 8

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$935,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 28
DRAW: Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

South Dakota officials to investigate state prison 'disturbance' in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota officials said Thursday they will investigate a "disturbance" at a state prison in Sioux Falls that they say resulted in at least one officer getting assaulted the day before.

"I have directed the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) to work with the state Department of Corrections to investigate the disturbance at the State Penitentiary," South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said in a statement.

Jackley said he intends "to prosecute those responsible for any harm done to correctional officers, other inmates, and state property to the fullest extent of the law."

South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem said a correctional officer was assaulted Wednesday and taken to a hospital "because of some tablets that were removed from prisoners," KELO-TV reported.

According to KELO-TV, Noem said she was "extremely proud" of the corrections officers for getting the situation back under control. She added that inmates were using the electronic tablets for "nefarious reasons."

"They were not being used, in all situations, to just contact home," Noem said. "They were being used for other purposes that were not good and not legal."

A memo from March 20 on the Department of Corrections website said tablet communication features — including phone calls, messages and pictures — have been suspended since March 8 on all department tablets statewide due to an "investigation pending resolution."

Inmates "still have access to wall phones to contact their attorneys and families," according to the memo.

Thought to be gone forever, long-sought emails of late North Dakota attorney general emerge

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Thousands of emails of North Dakota's late attorney general have been released by his successor — long-sought records mired in controversy and previously thought gone forever.

Attorney General Drew Wrigley released about 2,000 emails with redactions on Wednesday. Another 6,000 emails and untold text messages remain to be reviewed and released, he said.

The late Wayne Stenehjem's emails were presumed lost forever, deleted at the direction of his executive assistant, Liz Bocker, days after Stenehjem died in January 2022. The deleted emails and a building cost overrun of over \$1 million incurred under Stenehjem — both disclosed by Wrigley — shocked state lawmakers and government watchdogs.

Now the emails are part of an investigation into an ex-lawmaker.

The emails appear fairly routine, encompassing staff messages and office meetings, and cover much of 2021 to 2022.

Also, Stenehjem apparently conducted state business on a private email account, which is lawful but "does not defeat open records provisions," Wrigley said Thursday.

Wrigley's office recently recovered the emails. They were preserved in a backup of Stenehjem's personal cellphone, extracted soon after his death and found as investigators prepared for the trial of former state Sen. Ray Holmberg, a Republican.

Holmberg, 80, of Grand Forks, is charged with traveling to Europe with the intent of paying for sex with a minor and with receiving images depicting child sexual abuse, according to a federal indictment unsealed last fall. He has pleaded not guilty. A trial is set for September.

Holmberg and Stenehjem were friends and served for decades in the Legislature together. Holmberg resigned in early 2022.

Wrigley has said Stenehjem did not recuse himself from the Holmberg case, and he was viewed as a witness and was questioned at one point. Stenehjem wasn't accused of any crime in connection with Holmberg.

Media sought Stenehjem's emails in mid-2022, soon after Wrigley disclosed the cost overrun. Lawmakers raised concerns about trust and how the building project was handled. The project was for consolidating divisions of the attorney general's office in one location in Bismarck.

Reporters' records requests led to the discovery of Stenehjem's email account being deleted, as well as that of his deputy, Troy Seibel, after he resigned.

Brocker resigned around the time reporters found out about the deletions done at her direction. In February, a special prosecutor declined to press charges in connection with the deleted emails.

The emails are being reviewed in conjunction with records requests, the Holmberg case and the cost overrun, Wrigley said.

For years she thought her son had died of an overdose. The police video changed all that

By MITCH WEISS and KRISTIN M. HALL Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. (AP) — It was in the den that Karen Goodwin most strongly felt her son's presence: On the coffee table were his ashes, inside a clock with its hands forever frozen at 12:35 a.m., the moment that a doctor had pronounced him dead.

As Goodwin swept and dusted the room, she'd often find herself speaking to her son, a soothing one-way conversation that helped her keep his spirit alive. She'd tell him about his nephews and nieces shopping for backpacks for the new school year, or the latest from the Bristol Motor Speedway and her motorcycle ride along Highway 421, one of the most scenic routes in the state.

"I wish you had been there," she'd say wistfully.

Austin Hunter Turner died in 2017, on a night that Goodwin has rewound and replayed again and again, trying to make sense of what happened. Something just didn't add up. There was the race to his apartment, the panic of watching her "baby boy" struggle to breathe, the chaos of paramedics in the kitchen. Her feelings of helplessness as she prayed for him to live.

Her emotions have been painfully conflicting. There was the deep shame that Turner died of a drug overdose. The doubts when her own memory diverged with the official police narrative. More recently, anger and outrage. She now believes she has spent all these years living with a lie that has tested what was once a resolute faith in the police, paramedics and the legal system.

Goodwin's son is among more than 1,000 people across the United States who died over a decade after police restrained them in ways that are not supposed to be fatal, according to an investigation by The Associated Press in collaboration with FRONTLINE (PBS) and the Howard Centers for Investigative Journalism.

Turner's case highlights a central finding of the AP investigation: In the aftermath of fatal police encounters involving the use of Tasers, brute force and other tactics, a lack of accountability permeates the justice system. From the police officers at the scene and their commanders to prosecutors and medical examiners, the system shields officers from scrutiny.

Goodwin and her family are examples of what can happen when police tactics go too far in such a system: The truth can be lost. Like the Goodwins, hundreds of families have been left to wrestle with incorrect or incomplete narratives that have recast the lives of the dead, and re-ordered the lives of those left behind.

The terrible night

Goodwin was in bed when her phone rang. It was her son's girlfriend, Michelle Stowers. She was frantic. Turner had just collapsed on the kitchen floor.

"He's not moving," Stowers cried. "I don't think he's breathing. What should I do?"

The mother's heart hammered.

"Call 911. I'm on my way," Goodwin said, her mind racing through terrible possibilities.

Was her son alive? Dead? He'd had a few seizures, but they were nothing serious.

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As she sped to Turner's apartment on that warm humid night in August 2017, Goodwin called and alerted her husband, Brian, and older son, Dustin. She also dialed her sister but could only utter: "Pray for Hunter."

When she arrived, Goodwin found her son gasping for breath on the linoleum of his kitchen floor. His eyes were vacant. His body shook. Foam spilled from his mouth.

The mother thought her son might die right then. A paramedic arrived, and Goodwin told him that Turner had suffered minor seizures before.

"Hunter, this is momma," she said, kneeling, pressing an oxygen mask to his face.

The front door burst open, and police officers and firefighters swarmed into the tiny apartment. Medics had requested help restraining Turner to treat him. They thought Turner was resisting.

As the room filled with voices and equipment, Goodwin stepped away, relieved. She and her husband and children had always admired paramedics and police. They were heroes. And she knew they'd do everything in their power to save her son's life.

Then an officer shouted: "Get up off the floor!" Goodwin heard another say, "You're going to get tased if you keep it up."

She felt bewildered. Her motherly instincts kicked in. "Please," she implored them, "don't hurt him more than you have to!"

The officers were pinning Turner facedown on a recliner. A few minutes later, he was strapped to a stretcher, again facedown.

Goodwin followed them to the waiting ambulance. She peered inside: Her son seemed like he was unconscious, with a strange sort of mask pulled over his head. His legs were bound.

Goodwin felt powerless. That was her son. She'd give her life for him.

'My baby needs to rest now'

Goodwin followed the ambulance to the Bristol Regional Medical Center.

After a long wait, the emergency room doctor said that "for all intents and purposes" Turner was dead. "Your son is young and strong," he said. "We're going to continue working on him for that reason."

He paused, before continuing: "We'll take you back — if you think you can handle it."

Steps away, she saw a team of doctors and nurses trying to get Turner's heart pumping again. She stared at her son's blank face when they used a defibrillator to try to shock him back to life.

Nothing worked.

"We can keep going," the doctor said.

Goodwin waved her hand. She needed a moment. Her son wasn't moving. He didn't respond to her voice, or the life-saving measures. When she'd touched his chest, it felt like Jell-O, because the paramedics, nurses and doctors had crushed everything in there while trying to save him. Goodwin knew what she had to do.

"That's enough," she said. "My baby needs to rest now."

As she sat in the sterile hospital waiting room, she wondered: Why her son? He's such a gentle, kind soul, Goodwin thought. Everyone loved him.

He was boyishly handsome, with light brown hair and a small goatee and chinstrap of hair along his jawline. A few inches short of 6 feet, Hunter had a strong, outdoorsy kind of look. He was outgoing, ready to chat even with strangers.

Turner had a passion for fast motorbikes and owned a maroon Suzuki SV650 that could fly along at 130 mph.

He'd hit the road with his mom and dad and buddies, racing up steep stretches of the Appalachian Mountains with hairpin turns. Sometimes, he'd turn so sharp and deep he'd scrape the knees of his jeans along the ground.

The 23-year-old Turner worked odd jobs to help make ends meet — lately it was refurbishing furniture.

"I have plenty of time to grow up," he told his parents.

Now, as she sat there, she felt those words reverberating in her head.

An overdose?

At 4 a.m., Goodwin looked up and saw her husband rushing into the waiting room. She needed him

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now, more than ever.

Karen had met Brian in 1996 when he stopped to fill his tank at the gas station where she worked as a cashier. They were immediately attracted to each other. Karen was drawn to his big smile and sarcastic sense of humor, and Brian to the cashier's sassy personality and long blonde hair. Karen and Brian were married within a year.

From the beginning, Karen loved how her husband treated her two boys from a previous marriage as his own, teaching them to hunt and fish, ride dirt bikes and motorcycles. An electrician who spent weeks on the road, he had sped the 200 miles south from West Virginia to Bristol in under three hours. Brian Goodwin, a burly tough guy who never cried, was having a hard time holding it together.

"What happened?" he asked.

Goodwin said she didn't know. She said she'd overheard a Bristol police officer declare that Turner had died of a drug overdose.

The parents knew their son smoked marijuana. They also knew he got high using Suboxone, a drug used to wean people off opioids. But they didn't think either drug could lead to an overdose.

It didn't make sense to Goodwin. Why were police saying this, she wondered. They had learned from Turner's girlfriend that he had seemed fine when she got home from her late shift at Walmart. He hadn't acted stoned. He had collapsed out of the blue. How could this be an overdose?

Ashes

After a memorial service, the Goodwins and two dozen of Turner's friends honored his memory with a procession of motorcycles that climbed the sharp hills of the Appalachians. When they returned to Bristol, the group said their goodbyes. That night, Goodwin felt an emptiness in her soul. It would be a long time before she felt anything else.

Brian went back to work after a month. Keeping busy helped him deal with his grief.

But Goodwin couldn't find an outlet. The mother tattooed her left arm with an image of her son's thumbprint, and a clock set at 12:35. The tattoo artist had mixed traces of Turner's ashes into the ink.

Mother and son had enjoyed a special connection. He was a daredevil, a fun-loving kid. Whenever something went wrong — like the time he hurt himself jumping off a neighbor's porch, or crashing her car into a utility pole as he tried to teach himself to drive a stick shift — he'd run straight to her. And she was always there to say, "It's all right, Hunter. It's all right."

Her son had always been there for her, too. When she had been diagnosed with cancer in 2015 and surgeons had removed one of her lungs and part of the other, her son had been the one to cheer her up.

Every morning he'd sit next to his mother on the front porch, covering her with a blanket to keep her warm. Sometimes, he'd hold his mother's trembling hands and whisper, "I love you. You'll be OK, Mom. You'll be OK."

Now, Goodwin wrestled with existential questions. Why did she fight so hard to beat cancer only to have her son die before her?

As the years wore on, she found solace in the den, next to her son's ashes. Sometimes, she'd think about the weeks and months following Turner's death. When she obtained his autopsy report, it explained that he died of an overdose and repeated the official police version of events — that officers had gone to Turner's apartment to help the young man, but he had been too stoned to cooperate. He fought them, and in the end, it had cost him his life.

During that period, she had heard from police that they had tried to save Turner but couldn't because of the drugs and his heart.

A strong supporter of law enforcement, Goodwin desperately wanted to believe that police and paramedics had acted appropriately. But something was gnawing at her. Sometimes, she'd wake up in the middle of the night and hear the police officer threatening to fire his Taser.

She'd recall that her son seemed to be having a seizure, and police held him down as he struggled to breathe. She had a hard time squaring those actions with what she knew in her heart was a medical emergency.

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But she just didn't trust her recollection. She felt constantly at war — her memory pitted against her deep trust in the police.

And more times than not, she ended up pushing her doubts aside. Why would the police lie? She wanted to believe they had done everything they could to save her son.

The Hard Truth

On Aug. 14, she heard a knock on her door. When she opened it, she found two Associated Press reporters who asked if she wanted to know more about how her son had died. They had videos that the family had never seen.

It was not easy for Goodwin to take them up on the offer. She knew it would be painful to revisit the worst night of her life.

After a week of agonizing, she sat down at her kitchen table and stared at a laptop before hitting play on the videos captured by police body cameras. The house was quiet except for the ping of a wind chime.

The videos on her computer screen took Goodwin straight back. Body cameras worn by officers Eric Keller and Kevin Frederick had captured most of the interactions between police, paramedics and Turner.

At times, the figures were difficult to make out, but one thing was clear: From the first moment police arrived, Turner was treated as a suspect resisting arrest — not as a patient facing an emergency.

Goodwin watched in horror as police officers seemed to ignore the fact they had been dispatched to a medical call.

Paramedics tried to force Turner onto his feet. He managed to get to his knees and momentarily stand. He took a single step and toppled over.

Officers began screaming that Turner was resisting arrest, being combative and disobeying their commands. But the video seemed to show Turner was having a seizure.

During a seizure, the muscles of the arms, legs and face stiffen, then begin to jerk. The videos showed that Turner was not throwing punches. He wasn't kicking.

When Keller bounded into the apartment, the video shows he yelled at the flailing Turner, who was pinned down in a recliner chair, "You're going to get tased if you keep it up."

Despite paramedics warning him to wait, about 10 seconds later Keller pulled the trigger. Goodwin flinched when she heard the weapon's loud pop followed by her son's painful cry, as electricity coursed through his body.

"You're not going to win this battle," another paramedic said.

Goodwin was aghast.

"Win what?" she thought. "This isn't a contest. My son isn't resisting. He's dying!"

The force didn't end there. A paramedic sprayed a sedative up Turner's nose, but most of it ended up on the medic.

Police kept restraining Turner — even after he was handcuffed facedown on top of the recliner. They shackled his legs.

When police transferred Turner to a gurney, they again put him facedown and strapped him in place. As blood spilled from his mouth, they covered his head with a spit hood.

Once inside the ambulance, an officer sat on Turner's body — even though he was still on his stomach. There was no rush to get him to the hospital. Instead, the body camera showed police officers and paramedics spent six minutes recounting the "battle."

It was only then that a paramedic noticed that Turner wasn't breathing. Attendants removed the restraints, flipped him over, and began CPR. After about 10 minutes a paramedic walked into the frame. For a moment, he studied his colleagues who were working feverishly to revive Turner. He looked puzzled.

"What the hell happened here?" he asked. "Did we cut his damn airway off?"

They said no. As medics continued to work on Turner, the quizzical paramedic asked, "Y'all ain't recording are you?"

The officer turned off his body camera. Goodwin's screen suddenly went blank.

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'A damn lie'

The Goodwins were livid. The videos raised disturbing questions. So, they decided to drill down into documents — the police reports and autopsy — to try to find answers.

They soon became convinced the Bristol law enforcement community had lied about what had happened.

Police didn't include any statements in their reports from Karen Goodwin and her other son, Dustin, who had been in the apartment during the encounter. The events police described were a far cry from what Goodwin and her son had seen, or what was captured by the body cameras. They had made Turner out to be a villain.

In a report, Lt. Greg Brown said the paramedics told police the young man was reaching for a knife on the kitchen counter.

"A damn lie," Goodwin thought. She'd seen a paramedic clear the counters before police arrived.

Keller said he fired his Taser to stop Turner from fighting the medical personnel.

Goodwin knew her son was dazed from the seizures. He wasn't fighting back. They had no reason to stun him.

Brown wrote in a report that Turner was fighting with medics when he arrived at the apartment. Goodwin was there. She saw no such thing. The body camera showed the opposite.

Using buzzwords that painted the victim as the aggressor, Brown said Turner was "combative," "agitated," and had "ignored commands." Brown noted that Turner had incredible strength like those under the influence of narcotics.

Sullivan County District Attorney Barry Staubus had asked the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation to examine Turner's death.

The investigator talked to witnesses and collected other details, Staubus said in an interview with AP. But after reviewing the TBI report and the body-camera footage, Staubus concluded that Turner died of a drug overdose. Nothing in the autopsy concluded the force and "restraint techniques" had caused or contributed to Turner's death.

The Goodwins expressed reservations about the state's investigation and the prosecutor's decision to shield police from accountability. They noted that state investigators never reached out to two of the most important witnesses: Karen Goodwin and Dustin. The state investigator had sent messages to Turner's girlfriend and a neighbor at the scene, asking if they'd talk. They said yes.

They never heard from the investigator again.

Tennessee law keeps confidential the state's investigation files, including those that detail fatal police encounters — unless the death involves a shooting. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation declined to discuss Turner's death.

Bristol's chief of police would not answer questions when reached by the AP. Lt. Brown and officers Keller and Frederick did not reply to requests for comment, and neither did paramedics involved. The Bristol Fire Department did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

The Goodwins were also perplexed by the autopsy report. Medical Examiner Eugene Scheuerman had declared Turner's death an accident. He died of "Multiple Drug Toxicity" related to his use of the opioid in Suboxone and the psychoactive chemical in marijuana.

An analysis found a "therapeutic to lethal level" of Suboxone in Turner's system. Scheuerman added that "dilated cardiomyopathy" — a condition that affects the heart's ability to pump enough oxygen-rich blood — was a contributing factor to Turner's death.

The autopsy report also repeated the police version of events.

He didn't note that police officers had placed Turner facedown and applied their body weight, a tactic that has long been criticized by experts for restricting breathing.

The Goodwins wondered if the medical examiner had bothered to watch the police videos. Scheuerman has since died.

Three experts who reviewed the documents for AP related to the incident disagreed with the autopsy findings: they said Turner did not die of a drug overdose. Instead, they said the Bristol police made critical errors that contributed to Turner's death, including placing him facedown in a way that could restrict his

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breathing.

"They didn't understand the dangers of prolonged restraint and the pressure on his back," said Jack Ryan, a police training expert and a former police officer and administrator.

Forever midnight

Karen and Brian Goodwin said they were still figuring out how to come to terms with the truth. They had blamed their son for his own demise and had felt incredibly guilty about that. They are now convinced he didn't die from drugs — he was killed by police force.

What hurts so much is that many people in town believe Turner died of an overdose. The parents still can hear the whispers in grocery stores and restaurants: Their boy would still be alive if he hadn't been a drug user.

"That's the stigma that we've had to live with, 'Your son was a dumbass.' We've had to live with that as his legacy," Brian said. "I want everyone to know the truth."

What's next? A lawsuit? Becoming advocates for holding police accountable in arrest-related deaths so another family doesn't go through their pain? They wonder how they will react if police pull them over along the road. They still support the police. But will they be respectful?

Karen worries she may be running out of time. Her health, fragile from the cancer fight, has been flagging. She is glad she learned the truth, but she fears she won't live long enough to do anything with it.

"My son didn't do this to himself," Karen said, fighting back tears. "He didn't have to die ... His death killed a part of us."

She turned and studied the clock on the coffee table. Even with all the new information, the clock's hands remain fixed, unmoving, stuck forever at 35 minutes past midnight.

A Filipino villager is nailed to a cross for the 35th time on Good Friday to pray for world peace

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A Filipino villager has been nailed to a wooden cross for the 35th time to reenact Jesus Christ's suffering in a brutal Good Friday tradition he said he would devote to pray for peace in Ukraine, Gaza and the disputed South China Sea.

On Friday, over a hundred people watched on as 10 devotees were nailed to wooden crosses, among them Ruben Enaje, a 63-year-old carpenter and sign painter. The real-life crucifixions have become an annual religious spectacle that draws tourists in three rural communities in Pampanga province, north of Manila.

The gory ritual resumed last year after a three-year pause due to the coronavirus pandemic. It has turned Enaje into a village celebrity for his role as the "Christ" in the Lenten reenactment of the Way of the Cross.

Ahead of the crucifixions, Enaje told The Associated Press by telephone Thursday night that he has considered ending his annual religious penitence due to his age, but said he could not turn down requests from villagers for him to pray for sick relatives and all other kinds of maladies.

The need for prayers has also deepened in an alarming period of wars and conflicts worldwide, he said.

"If these wars worsen and spread, more people, especially the young and old, would be affected. These are innocent people who have totally nothing to do with these wars," Enaje said.

Despite the distance, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza have helped send prices of oil, gas and food soaring elsewhere, including in the Philippines, making it harder for poor people to stretch their meagre income, he said.

Closer to home, the escalating territorial dispute between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea has also sparked worries because it's obviously a lopsided conflict, Enaje said. "China has many big ships. Can you imagine what they could do?" he asked.

"This is why I always pray for peace in the world," he said and added he would also seek relief for people in southern Philippine provinces, which have been hit recently by flooding and earthquakes.

In the 1980s, Enaje survived nearly unscathed when he accidentally fell from a three-story building,

prompting him to undergo the crucifixion as thanksgiving for what he considered a miracle. He extended the ritual after loved ones recovered from serious illnesses, one after another, and he landed more carpentry and sign-painting job contracts.

"Because my body is getting weaker, I can't tell ... if there will be a next one or if this is really the final time," Enaje said.

During the annual crucifixions on a dusty hill in Enaje's village of San Pedro Cutud in Pampanga and two other nearby communities, he and other religious devotees, wearing thorny crowns of twigs, carried heavy wooden crosses on their backs for more than a kilometer (more than half a mile) under a hot summer sun. Village actors dressed as Roman centurions hammered 4-inch (10-centimeter) stainless steel nails through their palms and feet, then set them aloft on wooden crosses for about 10 minutes as dark clouds rolled in and a large crowd prayed and snapped pictures.

Among the crowd this year was Maciej Kruszewski, a tourist from Poland and a first-time audience member of the crucifixions.

"Here, we would like to just grasp what does it mean, Easter in completely different part of the world," said Kruszewski.

Other penitents walked barefoot through village streets and beat their bare backs with sharp bamboo sticks and pieces of wood. Some participants in the past opened cuts in the penitents' backs using broken glass to ensure the ritual was sufficiently bloody.

Many of the mostly impoverished penitents undergo the ritual to atone for their sins, pray for the sick or for a better life, and give thanks for miracles.

The gruesome spectacle reflects the Philippines' unique brand of Catholicism, which merges church traditions with folk superstitions.

Church leaders in the Philippines, the largest Catholic nation in Asia, have frowned on the crucifixions and self-flagellations. Filipinos can show their faith and religious devotion, they say, without hurting themselves and by doing charity work instead, such as donating blood, but the tradition has lasted for decades.

Bus plunges off a bridge in South Africa, killing 45 people. An 8-year-old is the only survivor

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — A bus carrying worshippers on a long-distance trip from Botswana to an Easter weekend church gathering in South Africa plunged off a bridge on a mountain pass Thursday and burst into flames as it hit the rocky ground below, killing at least 45 people, authorities said. The only survivor was an 8-year-old child who was receiving medical attention for serious injuries.

The Limpopo provincial government said the bus veered off the Mmamatlakala bridge in northern South Africa and plunged 50 meters (164 feet) into a ravine before busting into flames.

Search operations were ongoing, the provincial government said, but many bodies were burned beyond recognition and trapped inside the vehicle, while others had been thrown from the bus.

The crash happened near the town of Mokopane, which is about 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the South African capital, Pretoria.

Hours after the crash, smoke seeped from the mangled, burned wreck underneath the concrete bridge. Authorities said it appeared that the driver lost control and the bus ploughed into the barriers along the side of the bridge and then over the edge. The driver was one of the dead.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the victims appeared to be all from Botswana and had been on their way to the town of Moria in Limpopo for a popular Easter weekend pilgrimage that attracts hundreds of thousands of worshippers from South Africa and neighboring countries who follow the Zion Christian Church.

Ramaphosa had phoned Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi to offer his condolences and said the South African government would do all it can to help, according to a statement from Ramaphosa's office.

Provincial authorities said the bus had a Botswana license plate.

South African Minister of Transport Sindisiwe Chikunga was in Limpopo province for a road safety campaign and changed plans to visit the crash scene after hearing the "devastating news," the national Department of Transport said. She said there was an investigation underway into the cause of the crash and offered her condolences to the families of the victims.

The South African government often warns motorists to be cautious during the Easter holidays, which is a particularly busy and dangerous time for road travel. More than 200 people died in road crashes during the Easter weekend last year.

Just a day before the bus crash, the South African government called on people to be extra careful on Thursday and Friday because of the expected high volumes traveling by road to Moria.

The Zion Christian Church has its headquarters in Moria and this year is the first time its Easter pilgrimage is set to go ahead since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alabama holds off top-seeded North Carolina 89-87 to reach Elite Eight for 2nd time ever

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Alabama's mantra for this NCAA Tournament is next — as in the next play, next game, next everything. What's next for the Crimson Tide is the second Elite Eight in school history.

Grant Nelson converted a go-ahead three-point play with 38 seconds remaining, and Alabama became the first team in this year's tournament to oust a No. 1 seed, beating North Carolina 89-87 on Thursday night.

"These guys are bringing their competitive side out at the right time," Tide coach Nate Oats said. "You want to be peaking in March and we're peaking in March."

Nelson finished with a season-high 24 points, 19 in the second half, and he blocked RJ Davis' attempt at a tying layup after giving Alabama the lead. He had 12 rebounds and five blocks.

"I thought I had an advantage on Nelson and he was able to swat it," Davis said.

Rylan Griffen added 19 points, tying his career high with five 3-pointers, and Aaron Estrada also scored 19 for the fourth-seeded Crimson Tide (24-11).

The Tide face sixth-seeded Clemson on Saturday for a berth in the Final Four. The Tigers defeated second-seeded Arizona 77-72 in the first semifinal at Crypto.com Arena.

"We've been working for this all season but this isn't our end goal," said Nelson, a 6-foot-11 senior who played at North Dakota State his first three years.

Mark Sears, Alabama's leading scorer this season, finished with 18 points after making just two field goals in the second half when Nelson dominated.

"I was very proud of him," Sears said. "He was struggling the first two games. To see him carry us, it was very amazing."

After Nelson blocked Davis' shot with 25 seconds left, Davis furiously dribbled around before missing a layup and the Tar Heels got called for a shot-clock violation with 8 seconds left. They were forced to foul, sending Nelson to the line. He calmly made both for an 89-85 lead.

Armando Bacot scored inside with 1 second left, leaving North Carolina trailing 89-87. The Tar Heels fouled Nelson again with 0.9 seconds left. He missed both and time expired on the blueblood Tar Heels, who own six national championships.

"I'm definitely hurt. I think we all are a little shocked," Bacot said. "Felt like we had a chance to win the national championship this year."

Bacot finished with 19 points and 12 rebounds in his final game for UNC (29-8). Cormac Ryan had 17 points and made five 3-pointers and Davis had 16 points. Davis was 4 of 20 from the floor and missed all nine of his 3-point attempts.

"I just wasn't good enough, missed a lot of easy shots that I normally make," Davis said, his voice trailing off as he lowered his head and rubbed his eyes.

At times, UNC coach Hubert Davis looked like he was still playing for his alma mater, where he starred

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from 1988-92 under Hall of Famer Dean Smith. Davis dashed up and down the sideline in his white sneakers, gesturing and yelling and taking his glasses on and off as he lived each play through his team.

"We had good looks that we can make that we just missed," Davis said. "Sometimes your shots just don't go in and stinks when it doesn't. Just came at a really wrong time."

Alabama trailed 54-46 at halftime. Nelson and Sam Walters combined to score nine of Alabama's first 13 points to take a 59-57 lead. The Tar Heels struggled early when big man Bacot picked up his third foul five minutes in, but they tied it at 59-all on a basket by Harrison Ingram.

Nelson, Estrada and Griffen teamed to score 21 of Alabama's next 23 points that produced an 82-77 lead. Nelson ran off seven in a row, capped by a 3-pointer.

Carolina scored eight in a row, including six straight by Davis, to take its last lead, 85-82.

The Tar Heels opened the game on a 19-9 run for their largest lead of a half in which there were eight ties and seven lead changes.

Sears went on a tear, scoring nine points — hitting a 3-pointer and turning to blow a kiss to the crowd — to help the Tide lead 39-34.

North Carolina regained control with a 20-7 spurt to end the half ahead 54-46. Ryan and Ingram had two 3-pointers each and Bacot dunked, slithered around Mohamed Wague for a layup and scored off his own steal.

UP NEXT

The Tide made their only other Elite Eight appearance in 2004 under coach Mark Gottfried, losing to UConn. Alabama, best known for its football program, has never made the Final Four.

Cranes arriving to start removing wreckage from deadly Baltimore bridge collapse

By LEA SKENE and BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The largest crane on the Eastern Seaboard was being transported to Baltimore so crews on Friday can begin removing the wreckage of a collapsed highway bridge that has halted a search for four workers still missing days after the disaster and blocked the city's vital port from operating.

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said the crane, which was arriving by barge and can lift up to 1,000 tons, will be one of at least two used to clear the channel of the twisted metal and concrete remains of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and the cargo ship that hit it this week.

"The best minds in the world" are working on the plans for removal, Moore said. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Baltimore District told the governor that it and the Navy were mobilizing major resources from around the country at record speed to clear the channel.

"This is not just about Maryland," Moore said. "This is about the nation's economy. The port handles more cars and more farm equipment than any other port in America."

He warned of a long road to recovery but said he was grateful to the Biden administration for approving \$60 million in immediate aid. President Joe Biden has said the federal government will pay the full cost of rebuilding the bridge.

"This work is not going to take hours. This work is not going to take days. This work is not going to take weeks," Moore said. "We have a very long road ahead of us."

Thirty-two members of the Army Corps of Engineers were surveying the scene of the collapse and 38 Navy contractors were working on the salvage operation, officials said Thursday.

The devastation left behind after the cargo ship lost power and struck a support pillar early Tuesday is extensive. Divers recovered the bodies of two men from a pickup truck in the Patapsco River near the bridge's middle span Wednesday, but officials said they have to start clearing the wreckage before anyone can reach the bodies of four other missing workers.

State police have said that based on sonar scans, the vehicles appear to be encased in a "superstructure" of concrete and other debris.

Federal and state officials have said the collision and collapse appeared to be an accident.

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The victims, who were part of a construction crew fixing potholes on the bridge, were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, Butler said. At least eight people initially went into the water when the ship struck the bridge column, and two of them were rescued Tuesday, officials said.

The crash caused the bridge to break and fall into the water within seconds. Authorities had just enough time to stop vehicle traffic, but didn't get a chance to alert the construction crew.

During the Baltimore Orioles' opening day game Thursday, Sgt. Paul Pastorek, Cpl. Jeremy Herbert and Officer Garry Kirts of the Maryland Transportation Authority were honored for their actions in halting bridge traffic and preventing further loss of life.

The three said in a statement that they were "proud to carry out our duties as officers of this state to save the lives that we could."

The cargo ship Dali, which is managed by Synergy Marine Group, was headed from Baltimore to Sri Lanka. It is owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd. and was chartered by Danish shipping giant Maersk.

Synergy extended sympathies to the victims' families in a statement Thursday.

"We deeply regret this incident and the problems it has caused for the people of Baltimore and the region's economy that relies on this vitally important port," Synergy said, noting that it would continue to cooperate with investigators.

Of the 21 crew members on the ship, 20 are from India, Randhir Jaiswal, the nation's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, told reporters, saying one was slightly injured and needed stitches but "all are in good shape and good health."

Scott Cowan, president of the International Longshoremen's Association Local 333, said the union was scrambling to help its roughly 2,400 members whose jobs are at risk of drying up until shipping can resume in the Port of Baltimore.

"If there's no ships, there's no work," he said. "We're doing everything we can."

The huge vessel, nearly as long as the Eiffel Tower is tall, was carrying nearly 4,700 shipping containers, 56 of them with hazardous materials inside. Fourteen of those were destroyed, officials said. However industrial hygienists who evaluated the contents identified them as perfumes and soaps, the Key Bridge Joint Information Center said, and there was "no immediate threat to the environment."

About 21 gallons (80 liters) of oil from a bow thruster on the ship is believed to have caused a sheen in the waterway, Coast Guard Rear Adm. Shannon Gilreath said.

Booms were placed to prevent any spreading of oil, and state environmental officials were sampling the water and air.

At the moment there are containers hanging dangerously off the side of the ship, Gilreath said, adding, "We're trying to keep our first responders ... as safe as possible."

The sudden loss of a roadway that carried 30,000 vehicles a day and the port disruption will affect not only thousands of dockworkers and commuters but also U.S. consumers, who are likely to feel the impact of shipping delays.

The governors of New York and New Jersey offered to take on cargo shipments that have been disrupted, to try to minimize supply chain problems.

From 1960 to 2015, there were 35 major bridge collapses worldwide due to ship or barge collisions, according to the World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure.

Clemson advances to the Elite Eight

By The Associated Press undefined

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Chase Hunter scored 18 points and converted a three-point play with 25.7 seconds remaining, and Clemson advanced to the Elite Eight for the second time in school history, beating Arizona 77-72 in a West Region semifinal on Thursday night.

PJ Hall added 17 points for the sixth-seeded Tigers (24-11), who advanced to face either top-seeded North Carolina or No. 4 seed Alabama.

Clemson last reached the final eight in 1980, when there were 48 teams in the NCAA Tournament. Coach

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Brad Brownell was making his second appearance in the second weekend of March Madness in his 14 seasons with the Tigers.

Oumar Ballo scored 15 points and Caleb Love 13 for second-seeded Arizona (27-9), which had a horrific shooting night, going 5 of 28 (17.9%) from 3-point range. Love missed all nine of his attempts beyond the arc as the Wildcats failed to reach the Elite Eight for the 12th time overall and first time since 2015.

ALABAMA 89, NORTH CAROLINA 87

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Grant Nelson converted a go-ahead three-point play with 38 seconds remaining, and Alabama beat top-seeded North Carolina to reach the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament for the second time in school history.

Nelson finished with a season-high 24 points, 19 in the second half, and he blocked RJ Davis' attempt at a tying layup after giving Alabama the lead. Rylan Griffen added 19 points, tying his career high with five 3-pointers, and Aaron Estrada also scored 19 for the fourth-seeded Crimson Tide (24-11).

Bacot finished with 19 points and 12 rebounds for UNC (29-8). Cormac Ryan had 17 points and made five 3-pointers and Davis had 16 points.

EAST REGION

UCONN 82, SAN DIEGO STATE 52

BOSTON (AP) — Stephon Castle had 16 points and 11 rebounds for top-seeded UConn and the defending NCAA champion advanced to the Elite Eight with another double-digit victory, beating San Diego State 82-52 in a rematch of last year's title game.

Cam Spencer scored 18 points and Tristen Newton added 17 points and seven rebounds for the Huskies (34-3), who will play the winner of the other East Region semifinal between No. 2 Iowa State and No. 3 Illinois for a spot in the Final Four in Glendale, Arizona.

Seven-footer Donovan Clingan, who played just 23 minutes after getting into foul trouble, had eight points and eight rebounds.

Jaedon LeDee scored 15 of his 18 points in the first half for fifth-seeded San Diego State, which followed up the only Final Four appearance in school history with another Sweet 16 run.

ILLINOIS 72, IOWA STATE 69

BOSTON (AP) — Terrence Shannon Jr. scored 29 points and Illinois reached the Elite Eight for the first time since 2005, beating Iowa State.

Shannon had 20 points in the first half for the third-seeded Illini (29-8), who never trailed. He broke away for a dunk in the closing seconds and later hit two free throws to help Illinois finally put away the second-seeded Cyclones (29-8).

Illinois made a regional final for the fourth time in the past 40 years and will meet defending champion UConn on Saturday for a trip to the Final Four.

Curtis Jones scored 26 points to lead Iowa State, which came into March Madness having blown out Houston for the Big 12 Tournament title.

AP March Madness bracket: <https://apnews.com/hub/ncaa-mens-bracket> and coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/march-madness>

Mob in Mexico brutally beats suspected kidnapper to death hours before Holy Week procession

By FERNANDA PESCE Associated Press

TAXCO, Mexico (AP) — A mob in the Mexican tourist city of Taxco brutally beat a woman to death Thursday because she was suspected of kidnapping and killing a young girl, rampaging just hours before the city's famous Holy Week procession.

The mob formed after an 8-year-old girl disappeared Wednesday. Her body was found on a road on the outskirts of the city early Thursday. Security camera footage appeared to show a woman and a man loading a bundle, which may have been the girl's body, into a taxi.

The mob surrounded the woman's house Thursday, threatening to drag her out. Police took the woman

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into the bed of a police pickup truck, but then stood by — apparently intimidated by the crowd — as members of the mob dragged her out of the truck and down onto the street where they stomped, kicked and pummeled her until she lay, partly stripped and motionless.

Police then picked her up and took her away, leaving the pavement stained with blood. The Guerrero state prosecutors' office later confirmed the woman died of her injuries.

"This is the result of the bad government we have," said a member of the mob, who gave her name as Andrea but refused to give her last name. "This isn't the first time this kind of thing has happened," she said, referring to the murder of the girl, "but this is the first time the people have done something."

"We are fed up," she said. "This time it was an 8-year-old girl."

The mayor of Taxco, Mario Figueroa, said he shared residents' outrage over the killing. Figueroa said a total of three people beaten by the mob — the woman and two men — had been taken away by police. Video from the scene suggested they had also been beaten, though The Associated Press witnessed only the beating of the woman.

The state prosecutors' office said the two men were hospitalized. There was no immediate information on their condition.

In a statement issued soon after the event, Figueroa complained he did not get any help from the state government for his small, outnumbered municipal police force.

"Unfortunately, up to now we have not received any help or answers," Figueroa said.

The Good Friday eve religious procession, which dates back centuries in the old silver-mining town, went off as planned Thursday night.

People crowded Taxco's colonial streets to watch hooded men walking while whipping themselves or carrying heavy bundles of thorns across their bare shoulders in penitence to emulate the suffering of Jesus Christ carrying the cross.

But the earlier flash of violence cast a pall over the already solemn procession, which draws thousands to the small town.

Many participants wore small white ribbons of mourning.

"I never thought that in a touristic place like Taxco we would experience a lynching," said Felipa Lagunas, a local elementary school teacher. "I saw it as something distant, in places far from civilization ... I never imagined that my community would experience this on such a special day."

Mob attacks in rural Mexico are common. In 2018, two men were torched by an angry crowd in the central state of Puebla, and the next day a man and woman were dragged from their vehicle, beaten and set afire in the neighboring state of Hidalgo.

But Taxco and other cities in Guerrero state have been particularly prone to violence.

In late January, Taxco endured a days-long strike by private taxi and van drivers who suffered threats from one of several drug gangs fighting for control of the area. The situation was so bad that police had to give people rides in the back of their patrol vehicles.

Around the same time, the bullet-ridden bodies of two detectives were found on the outskirts of Taxco. Local media said their bodies showed signs of torture.

In February, Figueroa's own bulletproof car was shot up by gunmen on motorcycles.

In Taxco and throughout Guerrero state, drug cartels and gangs routinely prey on the local population, demanding protection payments from store owners, taxi and bus drivers. They kill those who refuse to pay.

Residents said they have had enough, even though the violence may further affect tourism.

"We know the town lives off of Holy Week (tourism) and that this is going to mess it up. There will be a lot of people who won't want to come anymore," said Andrea, the woman who was in the mob. "We make our living off tourism, but we cannot continue to allow them to do these things to us."

Building a new Key Bridge could take years and cost at least \$400 million, experts say

By BEN FINLEY and BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Rebuilding Baltimore's collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge could take anywhere from 18 months to several years, experts say, while the cost could be at least \$400 million — or more than twice that.

It all depends on factors that are still mostly unknown. They range from the design of the new bridge to how swiftly government officials can navigate the bureaucracy of approving permits and awarding contracts.

Realistically, the project could take five to seven years, according to Ben Schafer, an engineering professor at Johns Hopkins University.

"The lead time on air conditioning equipment right now for a home renovation is like 16 months, right?" Schafer said. He continued: "So it's like you're telling me they're going to build a whole bridge in two years? I want it to be true, but I think empirically it doesn't feel right to me."

Others are more optimistic about the potential timeline: Sameh Badie, an engineering professor at George Washington University, said the project could take as little as 18 months to two years.

The Key Bridge collapsed Tuesday, killing six members of a crew that was working on the span, after the Dali cargo ship plowed into one its supports. Officials are scrambling to clean up and rebuild after the accident, which has shuttered the city's busy port and a portion of the Baltimore beltway.

The disaster is in some ways similar to the deadly collapse of Florida's Sunshine Skyway Bridge, which was struck by a freighter in Tampa Bay in 1980. The new bridge took five years to build, was 19 months late and ran \$20 million over budget when it opened in 1987.

But experts say it's better to look to more recent bridge disasters for a sense of how quickly reconstruction may happen.

Jim Tymon, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, cited the case of the Interstate 35W bridge in Minnesota, which collapsed into the Mississippi River in 2007. The new span was up in less than 14 months.

"It's the best comparison that we have for a project like this," Tymon said. "They did outstanding work in being able to get the approvals necessary to be able to rebuild that as quickly as possible."

Tymon expects various government agencies to work together to push through permits, environmental and otherwise.

"It doesn't mean that all of the right boxes won't get checked — they will," Tymon said. "It'll just be done more efficiently because everybody will know that this has to get done as quickly as possible."

One looming issue is the source of funding. President Joe Biden has repeatedly said the federal government will pay for the new bridge, but that remains to be seen.

"Hopefully, Congress will be able to come together to provide those resources as soon as possible so that that does not become a source of delay," Tymon said.

Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar helped to obtain funding quickly to rebuild the I-35W bridge in her state. But she said replacing the Baltimore span could be more complicated.

She noted that the I-35W bridge, a federal interstate highway, was a much busier roadway with about 140,000 vehicle crossings a day, compared with about 31,000 for the Maryland bridge.

"But where there's a will there's a way, and you can get the emergency funding," Klobuchar said. "It's happened all over the country when disasters hit. And the fact that this is such a major port also makes it deserving of making sure that this all gets taken care of."

Badie, of George Washington University, said the cost could be between \$500 million and \$1 billion, with the largest variable being the design.

For example a suspension bridge like San Francisco's Golden Gate will cost more, while a cable-stayed span, like Florida's Skyway Sunshine Bridge, which handles weight using cables and towers, would be less expensive.

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Whatever is built, steel is expensive these days and there is a backlog for I-beams, Badie said. Plus, the limited number of construction companies that can tackle such a project are already busy on other jobs.

"A project like this is going to be expedited, so everything is going to cost a lot more," Badie said.

Hota GangaRao, a West Virginia University engineering professor, said the project could cost as little as \$400 million. But that's only if the old bridge's pier foundations are used; designers may want to locate the new supports farther away from the shipping channels to avoid another collision.

"That's going to be more steel, more complicated construction and more checks and balances," GangaRao said. "It all adds up."

Norma Jean Mattei, an emeritus engineering professor at The University of New Orleans, said replacing the Key Bridge likely will take several years. Even if it's a priority, the process of designing the span, getting permits and hiring contractors takes a lot of time. And then you have to build it.

"It's quite a process to actually get a bridge of this type into operation," she said.

Network political contributors have a long history. But are they more trouble than they're worth?

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — One of the nation's most prominent news outlets has found itself in an embarrassing mess over the hiring — and quick firing — of someone who isn't even a journalist in the first place.

Among other things, NBC News' brief employment of former Republican National Committee chief Ronna McDaniel has illustrated the role of political contributors in television news, and the frustration many executives feel in adequately representing the GOP point of view in the Donald Trump era.

NBC News' leadership felt it had secured a prize in the services of McDaniel to provide an insider's perspective on the Republican campaign. Yet they were taken aback and changed course Tuesday after network personalities like Chuck Todd and Rachel Maddow objected to working with someone who had trafficked in election disinformation.

Those bosses, starting with NBC Universal Chairman Cesar Conde, now face questions about their leadership and anger from Republicans, some of whom their journalists count upon as news sources heading into a presidential election.

"The reputation of a news organization will never rise on the hiring of a non-journalistic contributor," said Mark Whitaker, a former NBC News senior vice president and Washington bureau chief. "But it can fall."

TRACING THE HISTORY OF PARTISANS ON THE AIR

Televised political combat existed in earlier times, like Shana Alexander and James Kilpatrick's "point-counterpoint" segment on "60 Minutes" in the 1970s. Politics and journalism had its share of cross-fertilization with figures such as George Stephanopoulos and the late Tim Russert.

Yet the idea of building rosters of paid political contributors took off with cable news. MSNBC, CNN and Fox News Channel are, in large part, political talk channels and seek experts to help fill the time. News streaming has similar needs. Being on call to opine can be lucrative work; several reports had NBC agreeing to pay McDaniel \$300,000 a year.

The networks say they strive for political balance. Even NBC News, whose MSNBC cable outlet appeals to liberals, has more than a dozen Republican contributors. Yet most of them — figures like former RNC chief Michael Steele, former Ohio Gov. John Kasich and Bulwark founder Charlie Sykes — either predate Trump in their active political work or oppose him, or both.

Finding someone with a MAGA pedigree has been more difficult. Former Trump chiefs of staff Reince Priebus and Mick Mulvaney had short tenures at CBS News; some CBS journalists privately objected to hiring Mulvaney. Priebus last year joined ABC News, where former Trump Homeland Security adviser Tom Bossert also is a contributor.

Former Trump communications director Alyssa Farah Griffin is at CNN, along with ex-Trump campaign adviser David Urban and Mark Esper, a former defense secretary in the Trump administration.

Many figures who have stepped outside of Trump's orbit, like Griffin, have turned against him. To some

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insiders and supporters, the simple act of becoming a network contributor makes you anti-MAGA. Even a generally reliable Trump defender such as Kayleigh McEnany, among a handful of former administration officials like Mike Pompeo now on Fox News' payroll, has been criticized by her ex-boss as being insufficiently loyal.

A Trump supporter has to wonder if it's worthwhile to continually feel outnumbered and defensive on television and be forced to account for every wild statement the former president makes, GOP consultant Alex Conant said.

Networks, meanwhile, need contributors to speak authoritatively and get beyond talking points, said Mark Lukasiewicz, a former NBC executive who is now dean of Hofstra University's communications school.

"Journalists in a lot of newsrooms are starting to think more about the stakes, thinking about the costs of delivering a large audience and a platform to someone who doesn't fundamentally believe in a system that allows that platform to exist," Lukasiewicz said. "I think there is a higher bar for somebody who is on the payroll of a journalistic institution, rather than just somebody you interview."

MAKING CHOICES ABOUT WHO TO PUT ON THE AIR

If publicly supporting, or at least not objecting to, Trump lies about a rigged 2020 election is a litmus test for a job as a network contributor — well, that would eliminate a lot of Republicans.

"To remain itself, the MAGA movement has to practice election denial, minimize the events of Jan. 6, and treat the news media as a hate object for pointing this out," said Jay Rosen, a New York University professor and author of the Pressthink blog. "Extending the hand of welcome is just too costly for a self-respecting newsroom with a public service charter, as NBC learned this week."

Networks should retire this category of contributors and switch to a system relying on their own journalists and vetted, unpaid experts, he said. He has no expectations: in reality, they rarely compete by striking out on their own in this manner.

NBC's Conde made clear that while McDaniel didn't work out, the principle behind her hiring stands. The network remains committed to seeking diverse viewpoints, and will "redouble our efforts" to seek such voices, he said in the internal memo announcing her firing. Whether that will placate Republicans is uncertain at best.

Some of the personalities who publicly objected to McDaniel at NBC News, such as "Morning Joe" co-host Mika Brzezinski, said they don't object to airing conservative viewpoints but draw the line at people who actively tried to subvert the 2020 election.

That's not a nuance many Republicans perceived. Through its failure, an effort designed to make NBC News more inviting had the opposite effect.

"For Republicans who already think NBC is biased, this confirms everything," Conant said.

Trump, in messages on his Truth Social platform, has tried to draw in NBC's corporate parent, Comcast.

"These sick degenerates over at MSNBC are really running NBC, and there seems nothing (Comcast) chairman Brian Roberts can do about it," he wrote. There has been no public indication Conde and his management team has lost Comcast's support.

Still, the aftermath has increased public scrutiny on Conde and his management team: Rebecca Blumenstein, NBC News president-editorial; MSNBC President Rashida Jones; and Carrie Budoff Brown, senior vice president for politics.

Among the questions: through two full days of NBC and MSNBC journalists and show hosts publicly condemning the McDaniel hiring, why didn't anyone in management step forward to explain the motivations behind it? The Washington Post on Wednesday raised questions about Jones' role in recruiting the former Republican leader.

Margaret Sullivan, executive director of the Newmark Center for Journalism Ethics and Security at Columbia University, wrote in the Guardian that NBC could "earn itself a lot of good will and recover from this blunder" by publicly apologizing.

There was no comment from NBC News on Thursday.

The Moscow concert massacre was a major security blunder. What's behind that failure?

By The Associated Press undefined

Hours before gunmen last week carried out the bloodiest attack in two decades in Russia, authorities made an addition to a government register of extremist and terrorist groups: They included the international LGBTQ+ "movement."

That addition to the register followed a Russian Supreme Court ruling last year that cracked down on gay and transgender people in the country.

While the register also lists al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, an affiliate of which claimed responsibility for the concert hall attack, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ activists raised questions about how Russia's vast security services evaluate threats to the country.

The March 22 attack that killed over 140 people marked a major security failure under President Vladimir Putin, who came to power 24 years ago by taking a tough line against those he labeled terrorists from the Russian region of Chechnya waging a bloody insurgency.

The lapse in security has led many to wonder how gunmen could easily kill so many people at a public event. One week after the massacre, here's a look at what's behind the failure to prevent the concert hall attack and the government's chaotic response to it:

A FOCUS ON STIFLING DISSENT

Russia's massive security apparatus has focused in recent years on stifling the political opposition, independent media and civil society groups in the harshest crackdown since Soviet times. The repressions have only intensified after the invasion of Ukraine.

Individual protesters are swiftly quashed by riot police. After the Feb. 16 death of opposition leader Alexei Navalny in prison, mourners bringing flowers and candles to makeshift memorials were quickly detained. Surveillance cameras with facial recognition software are widely used.

Many opposition groups have been branded as "extremists" -- a designation that carries long prison terms for anyone associated with them.

Navalny was serving a 19-year sentence on charges of extremism, and his political network is on the register of extremist and terrorist organizations, just like the LGBTQ+ "movement" that on March 22 was added to the register of Russia's state watchdog for financial crimes.

Top Navalny associate Leonid Volkov, who lives abroad, said the security agencies are too busy with the political crackdown to pay attention to terrorism threats.

"They like inventing fictitious terrorists -- those who think or love differently -- so they don't have time for real ones," he said on his messaging app channel.

Many security officers are focused on suspected Ukrainian agents and fending off sabotage and other attacks by Ukraine in the 2-year-old war. They also are scouring social media for signs of anti-war sentiment.

After the attack, law enforcement agencies followed a familiar pattern of repression, detaining people over social media posts about it that authorities deemed offensive.

Andrei Kolesnikov, senior fellow at Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, said security forces focused on Kremlin critics but have proven inadequate in tackling real threats to the country.

"This machine can't be effective when it has to perform its direct function to ensure citizens' security," he wrote in a commentary, noting Putin has had nearly a quarter-century to ensure "stability and security, but instead he ruined both."

A U.S. WARNING DISMISSED AS 'BLACKMAIL'

The U.S. government said it told Russia in early March about an imminent attack under the "duty to warn" rule that obliges U.S. intelligence officials to share such information, even with adversaries. It was unclear how specific it was.

The U.S. Embassy in Moscow also issued a public notice March 7 advising Americans to avoid crowds in the capital over the next 48 hours due to "imminent" plans by extremists to target large gatherings, including concerts.

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With Russia-U.S. relations at their lowest point since the Cold War, Moscow was likely to treat any such tip with suspicion. Three days before the attack, Putin dismissed the U.S. Embassy notice as an attempt to scare or intimidate Russians and blackmail the Kremlin.

Alexander Bortnikov, head of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, said the U.S. warning was general and didn't help track down the attackers. He said the FSB, acting on the tip, targeted some suspects but it proved wrong.

Putin and other officials tried to divert attention from the security failure by seeking to link the attack to Ukraine despite Kyiv's emphatic denials and the Islamic State affiliate's claim of responsibility.

In a persistent attempt to blame Kyiv, investigators alleged the attackers had received cash and cryptocurrency from Ukraine and arrested a man accused of involvement in the transfers. They didn't provide any evidence.

A BUNGLED INITIAL RESPONSE

It took anti-terrorism units at least a half-hour to reach the concert hall after hearing of the attack. By that time, the gunmen had fled after setting fire to the venue.

The security forces' arrival at the concert hall on Moscow's outer ring road was delayed by rush hour traffic, and it took them time to assess the situation as concertgoers fled.

Police said they were able to check security video before the building was destroyed and quickly saw the gunmen. Cameras caught them arriving at the hall and then departing in a white Renault. Russian media said the car was continuously caught by traffic cameras as it sped from Moscow.

It wasn't immediately clear why authorities allowed them to drive more than 370 kilometers (over 230 miles) southwest before finally arresting them about 140 kilometers (86 miles) from the Ukrainian border.

A CONFUSING AND MIXED KREMLIN MESSAGE

After the Islamic State's branch in Afghanistan claimed responsibility, Putin at first did not mention the group on the day after the attack. On Monday, he acknowledged "radical Islamists" were behind the attack but also repeated — without evidence — that Ukraine and the West were likely involved. Those allegations were echoed by his security chiefs.

He and his lieutenants said the arrest of the four gunmen near Ukraine indicated Kyiv's likely involvement, ignoring Ukrainian denials and the IS statement.

Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, a close Moscow ally, declared that he and Putin had discussed bolstering the Russia-Belarus border to prevent the attackers from crossing — muddling the Kremlin claims of a Ukrainian escape route.

A TROUBLED MANHUNT

The four suspects were detained, along with seven others, with a search for more accomplices underway. Putin also ordered investigators to find the masterminds, a task that appears challenging.

A senior Turkish security official said Tuesday that two of the four suspects spent a "short amount of time" in Turkey before traveling together to Russia on March 2.

In video released by Russian news outlets, one of the suspects told interrogators he had been contracted for the attack by an associate of an Islamic preacher who offered him 1 million rubles (about \$10,800).

The veracity of the suspects' statements has come into question after they showed signs of severe beatings. At a court hearing Sunday night, their faces appeared swollen and bruised. One had a heavily bandaged ear — reportedly cut off during an interrogation — another had a plastic bag hanging over his neck and a third was in a wheelchair with his eyes closed, accompanied by medical personnel.

A POSSIBLE AFTERMATH

Putin's allegations of Ukrainian involvement in the attack could set the stage for him to both raise the stakes in the war and to further tighten the crackdown on critics at home.

But he is unlikely to reshuffle the leadership of security agencies, despite the embarrassing blunders that led to the security lapses.

Putin is known to resent making personnel changes under pressure, which could make him look weak. During stage-managed televised meetings with top officials to discuss the attack, he avoided any criticism of their performance, indicating their jobs are safe at least for now.

With leading opposition activists in prison or abroad and independent media muzzled, Putin this month rode a stage-managed election landslide to another six years in power. That will keep him well-insulated from any public criticism.

Compliant lawmakers and state-controlled broadcasters and other media will continue to hammer home his message of Ukraine's alleged role in the attack, distracting attention from the poor performance of law enforcement agencies.

Many Americans say immigrants contribute to economy but there's worry over risks, AP-NORC poll finds

By REBECCA SANTANA and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans are more worried about legal immigrants committing crimes in the U.S. than they were a few years ago, a change driven largely by increased concern among Republicans, while Democrats continue to see a broad range of benefits from immigration, a new poll shows.

The poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that substantial shares of U.S. adults believe that immigrants contribute to the country's economic growth, and offer important contributions to American culture. But when it comes to legal immigrants, U.S. adults see fewer major benefits than they did in the past, and more major risks.

About 4 in 10 Americans say that when immigrants come to the U.S. legally, it's a major benefit for American companies to get the expertise of skilled workers in fields like science and technology. A similar share (38%) also say that legal immigrants contribute a major benefit by enriching American culture and values.

Both those figures were down compared with 2017, when 59% of Americans said skilled immigrant workers who enter the country legally were a major benefit, and half said legal immigrants contribute a major benefit by enriching American culture.

Meanwhile, the share of Americans who say that there's a major risk that legal immigrants will commit crimes in the U.S. has increased, going from 19% in 2017 to 32% in the new poll.

Republicans were more likely than Democrats to say that immigration is an important issue for them personally, and 41% now say it's a major risk that legal immigrants will commit crimes in the U.S., up from 20% in 2017. Overall, Republicans are more likely to see major risks — and fewer benefits — from immigrants who enter the country legally and illegally, although they tend to be most concerned about people who come to the country illegally.

Bob Saunders is a 64-year-old independent from Voorhees, New Jersey. He disapproves of President Joe Biden's performance when it comes to immigration and border security and is particularly worried about the number of immigrants coming to the southern border who are eventually released into the country. He stressed that there's a difference between legal and illegal immigration. Saunders said it's important to know the background of the immigrants coming to the U.S. and said legal immigration contributes to the economy. He also noted the immigrants in his own family.

"It's not anti-immigration," Saunders said. "It's anti-illegal immigration."

Many Republicans, 71%, say there's a risk of people in the country illegally coming to the U.S. and committing crimes, although many studies have found immigrants are less drawn to violent crime than native-born citizens. Even more, 80%, think there's a major risk that people in the country without permission will burden public service programs, while about 6 in 10 Republicans are concerned that there's a major risk of them taking American jobs, that their population growth will weaken American identity or that they will vote illegally — although only a small number of noncitizen voters have been uncovered.

Amber Pierce, a 43-year-old Republican from Milam, Texas, says she understands that a lot of migrants are seeking a better life for their children, but she's also concerned migrants will become a drain on government services.

"I believe that a lot of them come over here and get free health care and take away from the people who have worked here and are citizens," Pierce said. "They get a free ride. I don't think that's fair."

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Democrats, on the other hand, are more likely to see benefits from immigration, although the poll did find that only half of Democrats now think that legal immigrants are making important contributions to American companies, a decrease of more than 20 percentage points from 2017. But they're more likely than Republicans to say that the ability of people to come from other places in the world to escape violence or find economic opportunities is extremely or very important to the U.S.'s identity as a nation.

"People who are coming, are coming for good reason. It's how many of us got here," said Amy Wozniak, a Democrat from Greenwood, Indiana. Wozniak said previous waves of immigrants came from European countries. Now immigrants are coming from different countries but that doesn't mean they're not fleeing for justifiable reasons, she said: "They're not all drugs and thugs."

There's also a divide among partisans about the value of diversity, with 83% of Democrats saying that the country's diverse population makes it at least moderately stronger, compared with 43% of Republicans and Independents. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say that a shared American culture and set of values is extremely or very important to the United States' identity as a nation, although about half of Democrats also see this as important.

U.S. adults — and especially Republicans — are more likely to say that the country has been significantly changed by immigrants in the past five years than they are to say that immigrants have changed their own community or their state. About 3 in 10 U.S. adults say immigrants have had a major impact on their local community while about 6 in 10 say they've had a major impact on the country as a whole. The gap between perceptions of community impact and effects on the country as a whole is particularly wide among Republicans.

There is some bipartisan agreement about how immigration at the border between the U.S. and Mexico should be addressed. The most popular option asked about is hiring more Border Patrol agents, which is supported by about 8 in 10 Republicans and about half of Democrats. Hiring more immigration judges and court personnel is also favored among majorities of both parties.

About half of Americans support reducing the number of immigrants who are allowed to seek asylum in the U.S. when they arrive at the border, but there's a much bigger partisan divide there, with more Republicans than Democrats favoring this strategy. Building a wall — former President Donald Trump's signature policy goal — is the least popular and most polarizing option of the four asked about. About 4 in 10 favor building a wall, including 77% of Republicans but just 12% of Democrats.

Donna Lyon is a Democratic-leaning independent from Cortland, New York. She believes a border wall would do little to stop migrants. But she supports hiring more Border Patrol agents and more immigration court judges to deal with the growing backlog of immigration court cases: "That would stop all the backup that we have."

Congress just recently approved money to hire about 2,000 more Border Patrol agents but so far this year, there's been no significant boost for funding for more immigration judges. Many on both sides of the aisle have said it takes much too long to decide asylum cases, meaning migrants stay in the country for years waiting for a decision, but the parties have failed to find consensus on how to address the issue.

Obama, Clinton and big-name entertainers help Biden raise a record \$26 million for his reelection

By COLLEEN LONG and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and some big names from the entertainment world teamed up Thursday night to deliver a rousing New York embrace of President Joe Biden that hauled in a record-setting \$26 million-plus for his reelection campaign.

The mood at Radio City Music Hall was electric as Obama praised Biden's willingness to look for common ground and said, "That's the kind of president I want." Clinton said simply of the choices facing voters in 2024: "Stay with what works."

Biden himself went straight at Donald Trump, saying his expected GOP rival's ideas were "a little old

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and out of shape.”

Moderator Stephen Colbert, in an armchair conversation with the trio, called them “champion talkers” and joked that the three presidents had come to town “and not one of them is here to appear in court,” a dig at Trump’s many legal troubles.

The eye-popping fundraising haul was a major show of Democratic support for Biden at a time of persistently low poll numbers. The president will test the power of his campaign cash as he faces off with Trump, who proved with his 2016 win over Democrat Hillary Clinton that he didn’t need to raise the most money to seize the presidency.

During the nearly hourlong conversation, Obama and Clinton explained just how hard Biden’s job is. They spoke of loneliness and frustration over policies that work but aren’t immediately felt by the public. They gave an insider’s view of the office as they sought to explain why Biden was best for the job.

“It is a lonely seat,” said Obama, who had hitched a ride to New York on Air Force One with Biden.

The talk was by turns humorous and serious, ending with all three donning sunglasses in the mostly dark music hall, a nod to the trademark Ray-Ban sunglasses that Biden often wears.

The sold-out Radio City Music Hall event was a gilded exclamation mark on a recent burst of campaign travel by Biden, who has visited several political battlegrounds in the three weeks since his State of the Union address served as a rallying cry for his reelection bid. Thursday’s event also brought together more than three decades of Democratic leadership.

The music hall’s marquee advertised the big-dollar night as “An Evening with Joe Biden Barack Obama Bill Clinton.” NYPD officers lined surrounding streets as part of a heavy security presence.

Protesters angry at Biden’s handling of the war in Gaza and strong support of Israel briefly disrupted the show, drawing a pledge from Biden to keep working to stop civilian deaths, particularly of children. But he added, “Israel’s existence is at stake.” Hundreds more protested outside in the drizzling rain, many demanding a cease-fire and waving Palestinian flags.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., was up first to warm up the crowd of about 5,000 supporters. Entertainers, too, lined up to make the case for Biden. Lizzo belted out her hit “About Damn Time” and emcee Mindy Kaling joked that it was nice to be in a room with “so many rich people,” adding that she loved that they were supporting a president who openly promises to “raise your taxes.”

Obama laid out the choice for the audience, saying that “at the end of the day, you do have to make a choice about who sees you and cares about you. I’m pretty confident the other guy doesn’t.”

At one point, Colbert said he suspected some Americans had forgotten some of the more concerning aspects of Trump’s presidency, including Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump supporters violently stormed the U.S. Capitol in a failed effort to overturn the 2020 presidential election results.

Biden said concerns over the riot reverberated outside the U.S., with foreign leaders questioning the stability of the U.S. democracy. That democracy is still fragile, he said.

The fundraiser had different tiers of access depending on a donor’s generosity. Other participating celebrities included Queen Latifah, Ben Platt, Cynthia Erivo and Lea Michele. Tickets sold for as low as \$225.

More money got donors more intimate time with the presidents. A photo with all three was \$100,000. A donation of \$250,000 earned donors access to one reception, and \$500,000 got them into an even more exclusive gathering. First lady Jill Biden and DJ D-Nice hosted an afterparty at the music hall with 500 guests, the campaign said.

Obama and Clinton were helping Biden expand his already significant cash advantage over Trump. Biden had \$155 million in cash on hand through the end of February, compared with \$37 million for Trump and his Save America political action committee.

The more than \$26 million tally for the New York City event includes money from supporters who handed over cash in the weeks before the fundraiser for a chance to attend. It raised \$6 million more than Trump raised during February.

“This historic raise is a show of strong enthusiasm for President Biden and Vice President Harris and a testament to the unprecedented fundraising machine we’ve built,” said campaign co-chair Jeffrey Kat-

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zenberg. "Unlike our opponent, every dollar we're raising is going to reach the voters who will decide this election — communicating the president's historic record, his vision for the future and laying plain the stakes of this election."

Trump's campaign is expecting to bring in \$33 million at a big fundraiser next week in Palm Beach, Florida, according to a person familiar with the details who spoke on condition of anonymity to confirm a number first reported by the Financial Times.

Trump has kept a low profile in recent weeks, partially because of courtroom appearances for various legal cases, the bills for which he's paying with funds from donors. His next political rallies are scheduled for Tuesday in Michigan and Wisconsin. Some Republican leaders have become concerned that his campaign doesn't have the infrastructure ready for a general election battle with Biden.

Trump was in the New York area on Thursday, attending the Long Island wake of a New York City police officer who was shot and killed during a traffic stop in Queens.

Republican Party Chairman Michael Whatley tried to framed the two candidates' whereabouts on Thursday as a demonstration of a "contrast in leadership."

"On the same day President Trump attended the wake of slain New York Police Department officer Jonathan Diller, Joe Biden wines and dines with celebrities at a fundraiser with Barack Obama and Bill Clinton," he said in a statement.

The facts, said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, show that violent crime rose during Trump's tenure while Biden's administration has "done the polar opposite, taking decisive action from the very beginning to fund the police and achieving a historic reduction in crime."

The setting was an unusual opportunity for the two past presidents to talk frankly about how they did the job, helping explain Biden and his presidency.

As the three men closed out the night by donning Biden's trademark sunglasses, the president quipped, "Dark Brandon is real," a nod to a meme featuring Biden with lasers for eyes.

Biden OKs \$60M in aid after Baltimore bridge collapse as governor warns of 'very long road ahead'

By LEA SKENE and BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Maryland Gov. Wes Moore warned Thursday of a "very long road ahead" to recover from the loss of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge as the Biden administration approved \$60 million in immediate federal aid after the deadly collapse.

Meanwhile the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was moving the largest crane on the Eastern Seaboard to help remove the wreckage of the bridge, Moore said, so work to clear the channel and reopen the key shipping route can begin. The machine, which can lift up to 1,000 tons, was expected to arrive Thursday evening, and U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen said a second crane with a 400-ton capacity could arrive Saturday.

The state is "deeply grateful" for the federal funds and support, Moore said at an evening news conference.

Moore promised Thursday that "the best minds in the world" were working on plans to clear the debris, move the cargo ship that rammed into the bridge from the channel, recover the bodies of the four remaining workers presumed dead and investigate what went wrong.

"Government is working hand in hand with industry to investigate the area, including the wreck, and remove the ship," said Moore, a Democrat, who said the quick aid is needed to "lay the foundation for a rapid recovery." President Joe Biden has pledged the federal government would pay the full cost of rebuilding the bridge.

"This work is not going to take hours. This work is not going to take days. This work is not going to take weeks," Moore said. "We have a very long road ahead of us."

Van Hollen said 32 members of the Army Corps of Engineers are surveying the scene of the collapse and 38 Navy contractors are working on the salvage operation.

The devastation left behind after the powerless cargo ship struck a support pillar early Tuesday is extensive. Divers recovered the bodies of two men from a pickup truck in the Patapsco River near the bridge's

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middle span Wednesday, but officials said they have to start clearing the wreckage before anyone could reach the bodies of four other missing workers.

State police have said that based on sonar scans, the vehicles appear to be encased in a "superstructure" of concrete and other debris.

National Transportation Safety Board officials boarded the ship, the Dali, to recover information from its electronics and paperwork and to interview the captain and crew members. Investigators shared a preliminary timeline of events before the crash, which federal and state officials have said appeared to be an accident.

"The best minds in the world are coming together to collect the information that we need to move forward with speed and safety in our response to this collapse," Moore said Thursday.

Of the 21 crew members on the ship, 20 are from India, Randhir Jaiswal, the nation's foreign ministry spokesperson, told reporters. One was slightly injured and needed stitches, but "all are in good shape and good health," Jaiswal said.

The victims, who were part of a construction crew fixing potholes on the bridge, were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, Butler said. At least eight people initially went into the water when the ship struck the bridge column, and two of them were rescued Tuesday, officials said.

The crash caused the bridge to break and fall into the water within seconds. Authorities had just enough time to stop vehicle traffic, but didn't get a chance to alert the construction crew.

During the Baltimore Orioles' opening day game Thursday, Sgt. Paul Pastorek, Cpl. Jeremy Herbert and Officer Garry Kirts of the Maryland Transportation Authority were honored for their actions in halting bridge traffic and preventing further loss of life.

The three said in a statement that they were "proud to carry out our duties as officers of this state to save the lives that we could."

The Dali, which is managed by Synergy Marine Group, was headed from Baltimore to Sri Lanka. It is owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd. and was chartered by Danish shipping giant Maersk.

Synergy extended sympathies to the victims' families in a statement early Thursday.

"We deeply regret this incident and the problems it has caused for the people of Baltimore and the region's economy that relies on this vitally important port," Synergy said, noting that it would continue to cooperate with investigators.

Scott Cowan, president of the International Longshoremen's Association Local 333, said the union is scrambling to help its roughly 2,400 members whose jobs are at risk of drying up until shipping can resume in the Port of Baltimore.

"If there's no ships, there's no work," he said. "We're doing everything we can."

The huge vessel, nearly as long as the Eiffel Tower is tall, was carrying nearly 4,700 shipping containers, 56 of them with hazardous materials inside. Fourteen of those were destroyed, officials said. However, industrial hygienists who evaluated the contents identified them as perfumes and soaps, according to the Key Bridge Joint Information Center.

"There was no immediate threat to the environment," the center said.

About 21 gallons (80 liters) of oil from a bow thruster on the ship is believed to have caused a sheen in the waterway, Coast Guard Rear Adm. Shannon Gilreath said Thursday.

Booms were placed to prevent any spreading, and state environmental officials were sampling the water.

At the moment there are also cargo containers hanging dangerously off the side of the ship, Gilreath said, adding, "We're trying to keep our first responders ... as safe as possible."

Divers sent to work beneath the bridge debris and container ship will encounter challenging conditions, including limited visibility and moving currents, according to officials and expert observers.

"Debris can be dangerous, especially when you can't see what's right in front of you," said Donald Gibbons, an instructor with the Eastern Atlantic States Carpenters Technical Centers.

The sudden loss of a highway that carries 30,000 vehicles a day and the port disruption will affect not only thousands of dockworkers and commuters but also U.S. consumers, who are likely to feel the impact of shipping delays.

The governors of New York and New Jersey offered to take on cargo shipments that have been disrupted, to try to minimize supply chain problems.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who met Thursday with supply chain officials, has said the Biden administration was focused on reopening the port and rebuilding the bridge, but he did not put a timeline on those efforts.

From 1960 to 2015, there were 35 major bridge collapses worldwide due to ship or barge collisions, according to the World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure.

Suspect charged with murder, attempted murder in deadly Rockford rampage

By KATHLEEN FOODY, RICK CALLAHAN and COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A 22-year-old man has been charged with four counts of first-degree murder in a frenzied stabbing and beating rampage that left four people dead in a matter of minutes in a northern Illinois city, authorities said Thursday.

Christian Soto is also charged with seven counts of attempted murder and home invasion with a dangerous weapon following the attacks in Rockford on Wednesday. Seven people were injured.

Court and jail records show Soto appeared in court briefly Thursday afternoon and remains held without bond. He is next due in court Tuesday when a judge will determine if he stays in jail pending trial.

Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara, who was clearly shaken and struggled to hold back tears during a news conference Thursday, listed the victims as 63-year-old Romona Schupbach; 23-year-old Jacob Schupbach; 49-year-old Jay Larson; and 15-year-old Jenna Newcomb.

Three people remained hospitalized Thursday, officials said. The other four were treated and released, Rockford Police Chief Carla Redd said.

Authorities have released little information about Soto, who was arrested Wednesday. A woman who identified herself as Soto's sister declined to comment to The Associated Press.

Redd said Soto acted alone and that police do not know his motive for the attacks.

She said Soto and Jacob Schupbach had grown up together. Soto told police that the two were smoking marijuana at Schupbach's home before the attack, Winnebago County State's Attorney J. Hanley said.

"Soto said that he believes that drugs provided to him by Jacob were laced with an unknown narcotic," Hanley said. "Soto said he became paranoid after the drug usage. He said he retrieved a knife from the kitchen ... and proceeded to stab" his friend and his friend's mother to death.

Hanley provided details of the deadly attacks that quickly unfolded in a neighborhood of ranch-style homes soon after 1 p.m. on Wednesday. Redd said less than 20 minutes passed between the initial 911 call and Soto's arrest.

Rockford police responded first to a home on Holmes Street, where they found the bodies of Jacob Schupbach and his mother, Romona.

Hanley said witnesses saw Jacob Schupbach being chased across the street, and that the attacker hit or stabbed him as he lay on the ground. They said the attacker then drove a pickup truck over Schupbach, who was able to make it inside the home. Witnesses said the attacker followed him but left soon after and drove away, Hanley said.

Hanley said officers next found Larson alive in a front yard on nearby Winnetka Drive, but he had been stabbed multiple times and died soon after in a hospital.

Ruth Mendonça, inspector-in-charge of the Chicago office of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, told reporters that Larson had been a mail carrier in the area for 25 years.

A witness said he heard a commotion and saw a man beating Larson on the grass near his home, Hanley said. The witness dialed 911 as the attacker walked toward his locked front door. The attacker retrieved a knife from a black pickup and stabbed Larson before driving over him twice and running away.

Soto told police that he recalled "taking out the mailman," Hanley said.

Around that time, police began receiving 911 calls about an attack on nearby Cleveland Avenue.

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A woman and her adult son and daughter told officers that a man armed with a knife forced his way into their home. The man stabbed the mother near her left eye as she opened the door to let their dog out, Hanley said. Her children fought with Soto and also were wounded. The son told police that the attacker ran away after he struck him with a syrup bottle.

Residents then flagged down first responders about another attack on the same street, Hanley said.

Jenna Newcomb and a friend were watching a movie in her basement and Jenna's sister was upstairs when Soto entered their house through an unlocked door. Hanley said one of the girls later told police Soto "was covered in blood. He beat all three teens with a baseball bat and Jenna died in the attack. The girls who survived are 14 and 15.

Jenna's mother said she died trying to protect her sister and friend from further harm, according to McNamara.

Soto then broke a window to get into a home close by on Florence Street. A woman fled the home and Soto chased her into the yard and stabbed her. Keith Fahreny, who was driving by, saw the attack and stopped to intervene, Hanley said.

Soto attacked Fahreny and tried to steal his vehicle, but Fahreny dragged him from the car. Soto once again fled on foot, but he was soon arrested by a sheriff's deputy.

The woman and Fahreny both survived the attack.

Resident Vanessa Hy told WREX-TV in Rockford that she witnessed the arrest.

"We heard police run up on both sides of the house screaming, 'Stop! Get down!'" Hy told the TV station. "Then they ran into the backyard and after a few minutes we saw them bringing the suspect down the driveway in handcuffs and he was very bloody."

Clearly distraught, McNamara spoke of how the slayings have disrupted his community.

"Right now, the focus is on these individuals who have lost their lives this week," he added. "Their families, making sure they're getting healing that they need."

"You might hear grief and sadness from me," the mayor said. "I'm also really pissed off."

Rockford, home to about 150,000 people, is about 90 miles (145 kilometers) northwest of Chicago. Its economy was decimated by industrial change in the 1980s and now largely depends on manufacturing and healthcare.

Some residents bristle at the mention of a 2013 Forbes article classifying it as one of the country's "most miserable cities," that pointedly noted Rockford's double-digit unemployment rate. Forbes and other media outlets have been more complimentary in recent years, noting the city's affordable cost of living and efforts to support local restaurants and entertainment venues.

But Rockford's police force, like many across the U.S., has reported increases in violent crime since the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year's violent crimes totals dropped by about 19%, according to the department's annual report, but there were 20 murders compared to 15 in 2022.

The stabbings Wednesday came just days after a teenage employee was stabbed and killed inside a Walmart in the city. A suspect in that killing has been arrested.

Clergy from different faiths gave prayers Thursday afternoon at a vigil for those slain and wounded.

"I came today because I didn't want to grieve alone," said the Rev. Caleb Hong, senior pastor at Christ United Methodist Church in Rockford. "And I was hurting, and my guess is many of you are hurting or you're scared, or you're wondering why does this happen?"

"We're all feeling the same way. We're all hurting," he said.

Baltimore bridge collapse puts the highly specialized role of ship's pilot under the spotlight

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

The expert pilots who navigate massive ships in and out of Baltimore's port must often maneuver with just 2 feet (0.6 meter) of clearance from the channel floor and memorize charts, currents and every other possible maritime variable.

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The highly specialized role — in which a pilot temporarily takes control of a ship from its regular captain — is coming under the spotlight this week.

Two pilots were at the helm of the cargo ship Dali about 1:25 a.m. Tuesday when it lost power and, minutes later, crashed into a pillar of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, causing the bridge to collapse and kill six construction workers.

While the incident will undoubtedly raise larger questions about ship and port safety protocols, so far there is no indication the pilots on the Dali did anything wrong given the immediate situation they faced. The ship sent out a mayday call, which gave just enough time for authorities to close the bridge to traffic and likely prevented further deaths. The lead pilot also dropped an anchor, issued steering commands and called for help from nearby tugboats, according to a preliminary timeline outlined by the National Transportation Safety Board.

But in the end, maritime experts say, there was likely nothing the pilots could have done to stop the 95,000-ton ship from ploughing into the bridge.

"It's completely their worst nightmare," said Capt. Allan Post, the deputy superintendent of the Texas A&M Maritime Academy in Galveston. "It is terrifying to even imagine not being able to control the vessel, and knowing what's going to happen, and not being able to do anything about it."

Pilots are local knowledge experts, and they give commands to the bridge team for rudder and engine settings, and for what course to steer, Post said.

U.S. pilots are typically graduates of maritime academies and have spent many years at sea before they join a lengthy apprentice program to learn every aspect of a local area, including memorizing charts, he said.

"A ship's captain is a general practitioner, if I was to use a medical term," Post said. "And a pilot would be a surgeon."

Ship pilots have been working in the Chesapeake Bay since 1640, and the Association of Maryland Pilots currently has 65 active pilots on its books.

The association describes on its website how the bay throws up unique challenges, including that pilots must maneuver container ships that can sit nearly 48 feet (14.6 meters) deep in the water through the main Baltimore shipping channels, which are only 50 feet (15.2 meters) deep.

"Pilots are on the front lines protecting the environmental and ecological balance of the Chesapeake Bay by ensuring the safe passage of these large ships that carry huge quantities of oil and other hazardous materials," the association says on its site.

The association, which didn't immediately respond to a request for comment, has issued a statement thanking first responders to the bridge accident and saying its members' thoughts and prayers are with the families of victims.

There is lucrative pay for pilots because the job comes with plenty of responsibility and risk, Post said.

On a typical day, he said, a pilot might make multiple trips. He or she would be assigned to one ship leaving a port, Post said, and then disembark to board a second, inbound ship.

He said that of the two pilots assigned to the Dali, one would have been in command, with the second able to assist if necessary. He said that, typically, the ship's regular captain would also have been on the bridge, along with one of the watch officers and a couple of other crew.

The NTSB timeline indicated the pilots had less than five minutes from when they first lost power to when the ship struck the pillar.

"They had very little time from the start of the incident until the time they were upon the bridge," Post said. "I believe the pilots did what they could with the abilities that they had onboard the ship at the time to avoid the collision."

UN top court orders Israel to open more land crossings for aid into Gaza

By MIKE CORDER and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The top United Nations court on Thursday ordered Israel to take measures to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including opening more land crossings to allow food, water, fuel and other supplies into the war-ravaged enclave.

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The International Court of Justice issued two new so-called provisional measures in a case brought by South Africa accusing Israel of acts of genocide in its military campaign launched after the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas. Israel denies it is committing genocide and accused South Africa of trying to "undermine Israel's inherent right and obligation to defend its citizens."

Thursday's order came after South Africa sought more provisional measures, including a cease-fire, citing starvation in Gaza. Israel, which had urged the court not to issue new orders, said it places no limits on aid entering Gaza and vowed to "promote new initiatives" to bring in even more assistance.

In its legally binding order, the court told Israel to take measures "without delay" to ensure "the unhindered provision" of basic services and humanitarian assistance, including food, water, fuel and medical supplies.

It also ordered Israel to immediately ensure that its military does not take action that could harm Palestinians' rights under the Genocide Convention, including by preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The court told Israel to report back in a month on its implementation of the orders.

Israel declared war in response to a bloody cross-border attack by Hamas on Oct. 7 in which 1,200 people were killed and 250 others were taken hostage. Israel responded with a campaign of airstrikes and a ground offensive that have left over 32,000 Palestinians dead, according to local health authorities.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza does not differentiate between civilians and combatants, but say roughly two-thirds of the dead are women, children and teens. Israel says over one-third of the dead are militants, though it has not provided evidence to support the claim, and it blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the group operates in residential areas.

The fighting has displaced over 80% of Gaza's population, caused widespread damage and has sparked a humanitarian crisis. The U.N. and international aid agencies say virtually the entire Gaza population is struggling to get enough food, with hundreds of thousands of people on the brink of famine, especially in hard-hit northern Gaza.

South Africa welcomed Thursday's decision, calling it "significant."

"The fact that Palestinian deaths are not solely caused by bombardment and ground attacks, but also by disease and starvation, indicates a need to protect the group's right to exist," the South African president said in a statement.

Hamas, an Islamic militant group sworn to Israel's destruction, said the ruling must be enforced by the international community.

"It must be implemented immediately, so that this decision does not remain a dead letter," it said.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry thanked South Africa, calling the case "a vital step in the global effort to hold Israel accountable for perpetrating genocide."

After initially sealing Gaza's borders in the early days of the war, Israel began to permit entry of humanitarian supplies. It says it places no restrictions on the amount of humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza and accuses the United Nations of failing to properly organize the deliveries. On Tuesday, the army said it inspected 258 aid trucks, but only 116 were distributed within Gaza by the U.N.

The U.N. and international aid groups say deliveries have been impeded by Israeli military restrictions, ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry accused South Africa of making "cynical attempts" to exploit the world court to undermine Israel's right to self-defense and to win the release of remaining hostages. Israel says Hamas continues to hold some 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others either killed on Oct. 7 or who died in captivity.

"Israel will continue to promote new initiatives, and to expand existing ones, in order to enable and facilitate the flow of aid to the Gaza Strip ... despite the operational challenges on the ground and Hamas' active and abhorrent efforts to commandeer, hoard and steal aid," it added.

Israel has been working with international partners on a plan to soon begin deliveries of aid by sea.

Israel has repeatedly feuded with the United Nations, particularly UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees and main provider of aid in Gaza. Israel accuses the agency of tolerating and even cooperating

with Hamas — a charge UNRWA denies.

The court said in its order that "Palestinians in Gaza are no longer facing only a risk of famine ... but that famine is setting in." It cited a report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that said at least 31 people, including 27 children, have already died of malnutrition and dehydration.

The world court said earlier orders imposed on Israel after landmark hearings in South Africa's case "do not fully address the consequences arising from the changes in the situation" in Gaza.

COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs, has also run pilot programs to inspect the humanitarian aid at Israel's main checkpoints in the south and then use land crossings in central Gaza to try to bring aid to the devastated northern part of the Strip. The agency had no immediate comment on the ICJ ruling.

Tennessee governor signs bill to undo Memphis traffic stop reforms after Tyre Nichols death

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee on Thursday signed off on the repeal of police traffic stop reforms made in Memphis after the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols by officers in January 2023, despite pleas from Nichols' parents to GOP lawmakers and the governor to give them a chance to find compromise.

The Republican governor's signature means the law immediately renders some of Memphis' ordinances null and void, including one that outlawed so-called pretextual traffic stops, such as for a broken taillight and other minor violations. Lee echoed arguments from Republican lawmakers who argued Nichols' death needed to result in accountability for officers who abuse power, not new limits on how authorities conduct traffic stops.

"I think what's most important for us to remember is that we can give law enforcement tools, but we've got to hold law enforcement to a standard of using those tools appropriately, where there's an appropriate interaction with the public," Lee told reporters Friday, earlier this month of his decision to sign the bill. "That's not what we understand has happened all the time, and certainly their family would attest to that."

To date, Lee has never vetoed a piece of legislation since taking office nearly seven years ago, only occasionally letting bills become law without signing them to send a message of his concern or disapproval. He rarely bucks his political party's wishes, and he is notably attempting to push through a contentious universal school voucher bill where he needs Republican support in order for it to pass.

Nichols' death last January sparked outrage and calls for reforms nationally and locally. Videos showed an almost 3-minute barrage of fists, feet and baton strikes to Nichols' face, head, front and back, as the 29-year-old Black man yelled for his mother about a block from home.

Nichols' parents, mother RowVaughn Wells and stepfather Rodney Wells, were among the advocates who drummed up support for the Memphis city council last year to pass ordinance changes.

Many Republican elected officials in Tennessee also joined in the public outcry over Nichols' death at the time. The month afterward, Lee even mentioned the Nichols family in his annual State of the State speech, saying "their courage, along with the compassion shown by the people of Memphis, is a picture of hope."

Yet the majority-white Legislature has repeatedly rebuffed many Black leaders' call for police reforms and oversight, and instead have sided with advocates who don't want new limits on police authority.

In recent years, lawmakers have reacted similarly when they disagree with how Democrat-voting Memphis and Nashville run their cities. They have preempted local power to undo progressive policies, took more authority over local boards, and kept a hardline approach to crime in Memphis.

Nichols' parents, in this case, said their attempts to get the bill sponsors to commit to finding some middle ground failed, leaving them and supporters in the Memphis community feeling marginalized and discouraged. Nichols' parents said they felt misled by Rep. John Gillespie, leading them to skip one trip to Nashville when they thought he would delay the bill. Instead, House Republicans passed it without the Nichols' parents there. Gillespie argued it was a miscommunication.

When they returned another day for the Senate vote, Sen. Brent Taylor denied their pleas to pause the

bill and try to find middle ground. RowVaughn Wells was in tears after the exchange, and the couple left before the Senate passed the bill.

They also penned a letter to Lee before he ultimately signed the bill.

"After the death of our son, you generously offered your support in our pursuit of justice," they wrote, imploring Lee to veto the bill. "This is that moment, Governor. We need your support now, more than ever."

Five officers, who were also Black, were charged with federal civil rights violations in Nichols' death, and second-degree murder and other criminal counts in state court. One has pleaded guilty in federal court. The U.S. Department of Justice is investigating how Memphis Police Department officers use force and conduct arrests and whether the department in the majority-Black city engages in racially discriminatory policing.

Democratic lawmakers said the bill is a slap in the face to Nichols' grieving parents and the government in majority-Black Memphis. Some also were flummoxed that state Republicans were trying to undo changes made in reaction to Nichols' death even while federal authorities are still broadly investigating policing and race in Memphis.

House Republicans invite President Biden to testify at public hearing as impeachment inquiry stalls

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans on Thursday invited President Joe Biden to testify before Congress in what appears to be a last-ditch effort to deliver on their stalled monthslong impeachment inquiry into the Biden family businesses.

Rep. James Comer, chair of the House Oversight Committee, sent a letter to the Democratic president, inviting him to sit for a public hearing to "explain, under oath," what involvement he had in the Biden family businesses. So far, the GOP-led inquiry has not produced hard evidence of wrongdoing while Biden was in public office.

"In light of the yawning gap between your public statements and the evidence assembled by the Committee, as well as the White House's obstruction, it is in the best interest of the American people for you to answer questions from Members of Congress directly, and I hereby invite you to do so," the Kentucky Republican wrote.

While it is highly unlikely that Biden would agree to appear before lawmakers in such a setting, Comer pointed to previous examples of presidents' testifying before Congress.

"As you are aware, presidents before you have provided testimony to congressional committees, including President Ford's testimony before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice of the House Judiciary Committee in 1974," Comer continued.

The invitation comes as the monthslong inquiry into Biden is all but winding down as Republicans face the stark reality that it lacks the political appetite from within the conference to go forward with an actual impeachment. Nonetheless, leaders of the effort, including Comer are facing growing political pressure to deliver something after months of work investigating the Biden family and its web of international business transactions.

The White House has repeatedly called the inquiry baseless, telling Republicans to "move on" and focus on "real issues" Americans want addressed.

"This is a sad stunt at the end of a dead impeachment," spokesman Ian Sams said in a social media post last week. "Call it a day, pal."

The committee has asserted for the past year that the Bidens traded on the family name, an alleged influence-peddling scheme in which Republicans are trying to link a handful of phone calls or dinner meetings between Joe Biden, when he was vice president or out of office, and Hunter Biden and his business associates.

But despite dedicating countless resources, and interviewing dozens of witnesses, including the president's son Hunter Biden and his brother James Biden, Republicans have yet to produce any evidence that

shows Joe Biden was directly involved or benefited from his family's businesses while in public office.

Democrats have remained unified against the inquiry, with Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on Oversight, calling for his GOP counterpart to end the investigation absent any credible evidence.

"The GOP impeachment inquiry has been a circus," Oversight Democrats wrote on X, the website formerly known as Twitter. "Time to fold up the tent."

Seeking testimony from the president could ultimately be the inquiry's final act. Late last year, Republicans leading the investigation had privately discussed holding a vote on articles of impeachment in the new year, but growing criticism from within their party forced a shift in strategy. Now, Comer is eyeing potential criminal referrals of the family to the Justice Department, a move that will be largely symbolic and unlikely to be taken up by the department.

Israeli court halts subsidies for ultra-Orthodox, deepening turmoil over mandatory military service

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel's Supreme Court on Thursday ordered an end to government subsidies for many ultra-Orthodox men who do not serve in the army — a blockbuster ruling that could have far-reaching consequences for the government and the tens of thousands of religious men who refuse to take part in mandatory military service.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces the most serious threat yet to his government as he struggles to bridge a major split over military service in the shaky national unity government cobbled together in the days after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

Inside his coalition, the powerful bloc of ultra-Orthodox parties — longtime partners of Netanyahu — want draft exemptions to continue. The centrist members of his War Cabinet, both former military generals, have insisted that all sectors of Israeli society contribute equally during its war against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

If the ultra-Orthodox parties leave the government, the country would be forced into new elections, with Netanyahu trailing significantly in the polls amid the war.

Most Jewish men are required to serve nearly three years in the military, followed by years of reserve duty. Jewish women serve two mandatory years.

But the politically powerful ultra-Orthodox, who make up roughly 13% of Israeli society, have traditionally received exemptions while studying full time in religious seminaries.

The exemptions — coupled with government stipends many seminary students receive through age 26 — have infuriated much of the general public. These longstanding tensions have grown during nearly six months of war — in which over 500 Israeli soldiers have been killed.

The Supreme Court has ruled the current system discriminatory and given the government until Monday to present a new plan and until June 30 to pass it. Netanyahu on Thursday asked the court for a 30-day extension to find a compromise.

The court did not immediately respond to his request. But it issued an interim order barring the government from funding the monthly subsidies for religious students who are between the ages of 18 and 26 and have not received a deferral from the military in the past year. Funds will be frozen starting April 1.

The ruling will affect about a third of the 180,000 seminary students who receive subsidies from the government for full-time learning, according to Israel's Channel 12 TV. It said the subsidies could be temporarily covered by the governing coalition's discretionary funds.

Benny Gantz, Netanyahu's top political rival and a member of the three-man War Cabinet, praised the court's decision and said it recognized "the need for soldiers during a difficult war, and the need for everyone in our society to take part in the right to serve the country."

Among Israel's Jewish majority, mandatory military service is largely seen as a melting pot and rite of passage, and the army has said it is suffering from manpower shortages because of the war in Gaza.

The ultra-Orthodox say that integrating into the army will threaten their generations-old way of life and

that their devout lifestyle and dedication to upholding the Jewish commandments protect Israel as much as a strong army. Religious leaders have vowed to fight attempts to force ultra-Orthodox men into the army and have staged mass protests against similar attempts in the past.

Aryeh Deri, head of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, called the court's decision "unprecedented bullying of Torah students in the Jewish state."

In his letter to the Supreme Court requesting the extension, Netanyahu said additional time is needed to come to an agreement, "because it has been proven in the past that enlistment without an agreed-upon arrangement actually has the opposite effect."

Trump attends wake of slain New York officer, calls for 'law and order,' to show contrast with Biden

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

MASSAPEQUA PARK, N.Y. (AP) — Donald Trump attended Thursday's wake of a New York City police officer gunned down in the line of duty and called for "law and order," as part of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee's attempt to show a contrast with President Joe Biden and focus on crime as part of his third White House campaign.

The visitation for Officer Jonathan Diller, who was fatally shot during a traffic stop on Monday, was held in suburban Massapequa on Long Island. Police said the 31-year-old Diller was shot below his bulletproof vest while approaching an illegally parked car in Queens.

Diller, who was married and had a 1-year-old son, was rushed to a hospital, where he died.

Trump's visit came as Biden was also in New York for a previously scheduled fundraiser with Democratic ex-presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. Trump has accused Biden of lacking toughness and his campaign sought to contrast his visit with Biden's fundraiser.

Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung, in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, noted Trump's visit and said, "Meanwhile, the Three Stooges — Biden, Obama, and Clinton — will be at a glitzy fundraiser in the city with their elitist, out-of-touch celebrity benefactors."

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday that the president has spoken with New York City's mayor, but she said she didn't have any "private communications to share" when asked if Biden had spoken to the family of the officer who was killed. Jean-Pierre said the administration's hearts go out to the officer's family.

Speaking aboard Air Force One, she said Biden has supported law enforcement throughout his entire career and took a dig at Trump's record. "Violent crime surged under the previous administration," Jean-Pierre said. "The Biden-Harris administration have done the polar opposite, taking decisive action from the very beginning to fund the police and achieving a historic reduction in crime."

After visiting in the funeral home with Diller's family, Trump spoke outside to news reporters with about a dozen local police officers, half in patrol uniforms, half in tactical gear, forming as a backdrop behind him. One officer standing in front held his rifle across his chest.

Trump called Diller's killing "such a sad, sad event, such a horrible thing."

"The police are the greatest people we have. There's nothing and there's nobody like them. And this should never happen," Trump said.

He spoke about Diller's wife and young son, saying he "doesn't know how his life has been changed."

"We have to get back to law and order. We have to do a lot of things differently. This is not working. This is happening too often," Trump said.

After his brief remarks, he repeated himself as he walked away toward his motorcade and added: "We've got to toughen it up."

He did not elaborate.

Trump has deplored crime in heavily Democratic cities, called for shoplifters to be shot immediately and wants to immunize police officers from lawsuits for potential misconduct. But he's also demonized local prosecutors, the FBI and the Department of Justice over the criminal prosecutions he faces and the

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investigation while he was president into his first campaign's interactions with Russia.

He has also embraced those imprisoned for their roles on the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, when a mob of his angry supporters overran police lines and Capitol and local police officers were attacked and beaten.

Massapequa and the surrounding South Shore towns have long been a popular destination for city police officers and firefighters looking to set down roots on Long Island. The road leading to the funeral home was painted with a thin blue line, a symbol used as a sign of police solidarity, and the road was flanked by American flags and American flags with a thin blue line.

Parked nearby were two pickup trucks with pro-Trump decals and flags bearing his "Make America Great Again" slogan. Dozens of supporters wearing Trump paraphernalia stood nearby in pouring rain.

Though Democrats outnumber Republicans in New York, this area is a heavily Republican part of Long Island that Trump won in the 2020 presidential election.

Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman, a Republican, accompanied Trump and told reporters it was "a tremendous comfort to the family" to have Trump visit.

Inside the funeral home, Trump spent more than 10 minutes meeting privately with Diller's wife, Stephanie, before joining her in the main viewing room and saying a prayer over the officer's casket, Blakeman said later.

Trump then met with the rest of the family, giving his condolences to Diller's mother, siblings, aunts and uncles, he said. Diller's grandmother asked the former president for a hug and the family also asked him to write a note on a mass card.

"It was a really good, warm conversation," Blakeman said. "It was all talking about Jon and what kind of person he was as a father, son, husband. It was not about public policy or anything like that."

The former president and his supporters sought a similar split screen with Biden earlier this month as they went after the president over crime and illegal immigration while both were campaigning in Georgia. Trump during his visit to the state met with the family of slain nursing student Laken Riley. An immigrant from Venezuela who entered the U.S. illegally is charged with her death.

Trump posted about Diller's death on his social media network Tuesday, offering prayers to Diller's family and appreciation for law enforcement. He also called the shooter a "thug" and noted that police said the shooter had numerous prior arrests, declaring that he "NEVER should have been let back out on the streets."

On Thursday, prosecutors in Queens charged the alleged shooter, Guy Rivera, with first degree murder and other charges. Rivera, who was shot in the back when Diller's partner returned fire, was arraigned from his hospital bed. Rivera's lawyers at Legal Aid declined to comment, according to spokesman Redmond Haskins.

Diller was the first New York City police officer killed in the line of duty in two years.

The previous line-of-duty deaths were the fatal shootings of two New York City police officers, and the day after the second funeral, Biden visited the police department's headquarters and spoke to officers and top brass.

Biden has pledged that the federal government will work more closely with police to combat gun violence and crack down on illegal guns.

New FBI statistics related earlier this month showed that overall violent crime in the U.S. dropped again last year, continuing a downward trend after a pandemic-era spike. The FBI data found murders dropped 13% in the last three months of 2023 compared with the same period the year before, and violent crime overall was down 6%.

The FBI's report was in line with the findings of the nonpartisan Council on Criminal Justice, which found that homicides were down an average of 10% from the year before in a survey of 32 cities, though it found violent crime still remained higher than before the coronavirus pandemic in many cities.

US changes how it categorizes people by race and ethnicity. It's the first revision in 27 years

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — For the first time in 27 years, the U.S. government is changing how it categorizes people by race and ethnicity, an effort that federal officials believe will more accurately count residents who identify as Hispanic and of Middle Eastern and North African heritage.

The revisions to the minimum categories on race and ethnicity, announced Thursday by the Office of Management and Budget, are the latest effort to label and define the people of the United States. This evolving process often reflects changes in social attitudes and immigration, as well as a wish for people in an increasingly diverse society to see themselves in the numbers produced by the federal government.

"You can't underestimate the emotional impact this has on people," said Meeta Anand, senior director for Census & Data Equity at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. "It's how we conceive ourselves as a society. ... You are seeing a desire for people to want to self-identify and be reflected in data so they can tell their own stories."

Under the revisions, questions about race and ethnicity that previously were asked separately on forms will be combined into a single question. That will give respondents the option to pick multiple categories at the same time, such as "Black," "American Indian" and "Hispanic." Research has shown that large numbers of Hispanic people aren't sure how to answer the race question when that question is asked separately because they understand race and ethnicity to be similar and they often pick "some other race" or do not answer the question.

A Middle Eastern and North African category will be added to the choices available for questions about race and ethnicity. People descended from places such as Lebanon, Iran, Egypt and Syria had been encouraged to identify as white, but now will have the option of identifying themselves in the new group. Results from the 2020 census, which asked respondents to elaborate on their backgrounds, suggest that 3.5 million residents identify as Middle Eastern and North African.

"It feels good to be seen," said Florida state Rep. Anna Eskamani, a Democrat from Orlando whose parents are from Iran. "Growing up, my family would check the 'white' box because we didn't know what other box reflected our family. Having representation like that, it feels meaningful."

The changes also strike from federal forms the words "Negro" and "Far East," now widely regarded as pejorative, as well as the terms "majority" and "minority," because they fail to reflect the nation's complex racial and ethnic diversity, some officials say. The revisions also encourage the collection of detailed race and ethnicity data beyond the minimum standards, such as "Haitian" or "Jamaican" for someone who checks "Black."

Grouping together people of different backgrounds into a single race and ethnicity category, such as Japanese and Filipino in the Asian classification, often masks disparities in income or health, and advocates argued having the detailed data will allow the information about the subgroups to be separated out in a process called disaggregation.

"To be able to disaggregate can really be helpful to distinguish different kinds of discrimination, the ability to enforce laws around discrimination and do research on public health and economic outcomes," said Allison Plyer, chief demographer of The Data Center in New Orleans.

The changes to the standards were hammered out over two years by a group of federal statisticians and bureaucrats who prefer to stay above the political fray. But the revisions have long-term implications for legislative redistricting, civil rights laws, health statistics, and possibly even politics as the number of people categorized as white is reduced.

Donald Trump, the presumptive GOP nominee for president, recently alluded to arguments made by people who allege Democrats are promoting illegal immigration to weaken the power of white people. As president, Trump unsuccessfully tried to disqualify people who were in the United States illegally from being included in the 2020 census.

Momentum for changing the race and ethnicity categories grew during the Obama administration in the

mid-2010s, but was halted after Trump became president in 2017. It was revived after Democratic President Joe Biden took office in 2021.

The changes will be reflected in data collection, forms, surveys and the once-a-decade census questionnaires put out by the federal government, as well as in state governments and the private sector because businesses, universities and other groups usually follow Washington's lead. Federal agencies have 18 months to submit a plan on how they will put the changes in place.

The first federal standards on race and ethnicity were produced in 1977 to provide consistent data across agencies and come up with figures that could help enforce civil rights laws. They were last updated in 1997 when five minimum race categories were delineated — American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander and white; respondents could pick more than one race. The minimum ethnic categories were grouped separately as not Hispanic or Hispanic or Latino.

Racial and ethnic categories used by the U.S. government reflect their times.

In 1820, the category "Free Colored People" was added to the decennial census to reflect the increase in free Black people. In 1850, the term "Mulatto" was added to the census to capture people of mixed heritage. American Indians were not explicitly counted in the census until 1860. Following years of immigration from China, "Chinese" was included in the 1870 census. There was not a formal question about Hispanic origin until the 1980 census.

Not everyone is on board with the latest revisions.

Some Afro Latinos feel that combining the race and ethnicity question will reduce their numbers and representation in the data, though previous research by the U.S. Census Bureau did not find significant differences among Afro Latino responses when the questions were asked separately or together.

Mozelle Ortiz, for instance, is of mixed Afro Puerto Rican descent. She feels the changes could eliminate that identity, even though people can choose more than one answer once the race and ethnicity questions are combined.

"My entire lineage, that of my Black Puerto Rican grandmother's and all other non-white Spanish speaking peoples, will be erased," Ortiz wrote the interagency group.

Others are unhappy about how some groups of people such as Armenians or Arabs from Sudan and Somalia were not included in the examples used to define people of Middle Eastern or North African background.

Maya Berry, executive director of the Arab American Institute, said that while she was "incredibly happy" with the new category, that enthusiasm was tempered by the omissions.

"It is not reflective of the racial diversity of our community," Berry said. "And it's wrong."

Trump's team cites First Amendment in contesting charges in Georgia election interference case

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The charges against Donald Trump in the Georgia election interference case seek to criminalize political speech and advocacy conduct that the First Amendment protects, a lawyer for the former president said Thursday as he argued that the indictment should be dismissed.

The hearing before Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee was on a filing from Trump and on two pretrial motions by co-defendant David Shafer and centered on technical legal arguments. It marked something of a return to normalcy after the case was rocked by allegations that District Attorney Fani Willis improperly benefited from her romantic relationship with Nathan Wade, a special prosecutor hired for the case.

"There is nothing alleged factually against President Trump that is not political speech," Trump's lead lawyer, Steve Sadow, told the judge. Sadow said a sitting president expressing concerns about an election is "the height of political speech" and that is protected even if what was said ended up being false.

Prosecutor Donald Wakeford countered that Trump's statements are not protected by the First Amendment because they were integral to criminal activity.

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"It's not just that they were false. It's not that the defendant has been hauled into a courtroom because the prosecution doesn't like what he said," Wakeford said, adding that Trump is free to express his opinion and make legitimate protests. "What he is not allowed to do is to employ his speech and his expression and his statements as part of a criminal conspiracy to violate Georgia's RICO statute, to impersonate public officers, to file false documents, to make false statements to the government."

Wakeford pointed out that similar arguments were raised and rejected in the federal election interference case against Trump brought by Department of Justice special counsel Jack Smith. U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan wrote in a December ruling that "it is well established that the First Amendment does not protect speech that is used as an instrument of a crime."

"Defendant is not being prosecuted simply for making false statements ... but rather for knowingly making false statements in furtherance of a criminal conspiracy and obstructing the electoral process," Chutkan wrote.

Willis used Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations law, an expansive anti-racketeering statute, to charge Trump and 18 others with allegedly participating in a wide-ranging conspiracy to overturn the state's 2020 election results.

Most of the charges against Shafer, a former state Republican Party chairman, have to do with his involvement in the casting of Electoral College votes for Trump by a group of Georgia Republicans even though the state's election had been certified in favor of Democrat Joe Biden. The charges against Shafer include impersonating a public officer, forgery, false statements and writings, and attempting to file false documents.

His lawyer, Craig Gillen, argued that the activity Shafer engaged in was lawful at the time and that Shafer was acting in accordance with requirements of the Electoral Count Act. Because a legal challenge to the presidential election results was pending on Dec. 14, 2020, when it came time for electors to meet to cast Georgia's electoral votes, Gillen said it was up to Congress to determine whether a Democratic or Republican slate of electors should be counted for the state. He said that means Shafer and the other Republicans who met to cast electoral votes were acting properly.

Gillen said the accusation that Shafer and others were impersonating a public officer, namely a presidential elector, does not hold water because electors are not considered public officers. Prosecutor Will Wooten argued that a presidential elector is clearly an office created by law and that Shafer and others were charged because they falsely presented themselves as the state's official presidential electors.

Gillen also asked that three phrases be struck from the indictment: "duly elected and qualified presidential electors," "false Electoral College votes" and "lawful electoral votes." He said those phrases are used to assert that the Democratic slate of electors was valid and the Republican slate was not. He said those are "prejudicial legal conclusions" about issues that should be decided by the judge or by the jury at trial.

Wooten opposed the move, saying "every allegation in an indictment is a legal conclusion."

Trump and the others were indicted last year, accused of participating in a scheme to try to illegally overturn the 2020 presidential election in Georgia, which the Republican incumbent narrowly lost to Biden.

All the defendants were charged with violating the anti-racketeering law, along with other alleged crimes. Four people charged in the case have pleaded guilty after reaching deals with prosecutors. Trump and the others have pleaded not guilty. No trial date has been set. Willis has asked that the trial begin in August.

The allegations that Willis engaged in an improper relationship were explored over several days in an evidentiary hearing last month that delved into intimate details of Willis' and Wade's personal lives. The judge rejected defense efforts to remove Willis and her office as long as Wade stepped aside. But McAfee did give the defendants permission to seek a review of his decision from the state Court of Appeals.

Also this month, the judge dismissed six of the 41 counts in the indictment, including three against Trump, finding that prosecutors failed to provide enough detail about the alleged crimes.

Pope, looking strong, washes feet of 12 women at Rome prison from his wheelchair

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of 12 women inmates at a Rome prison during a Holy Thursday ritual meant to emphasize his vocation of service and humility.

The 87-year-old Francis performed the ritual from his wheelchair, after recent ailments have compounded his mobility problems. The Rebibbia prison venue was outfitted to accommodate his needs: The women sat on stools on a raised-up platform, enabling the pope to move down the line with ease from his wheelchair without having to strain himself.

Many of the women wept as Francis washed their feet, gently pouring water over one bared foot and patting it dry with a small towel. He finished the gesture by kissing each foot, often looking up to the woman with a smile.

The Holy Thursday foot-washing ceremony is a hallmark of every Holy Week and recalls the foot-washing Jesus performed on his 12 apostles at their last supper together before he was crucified.

Francis revolutionized the ritual for the Vatican by insisting, from his very first Holy Thursday as pope in 2013, to include women and people of other faiths among the 12. Previously, popes performed the ritual on Catholic men only at a Rome basilica.

Francis has traveled each year to a prison, refugee center or youth detention facility to emphasize his belief that a priest's vocation is to serve especially those most on the margins. In his brief homily, delivered off-the-cuff, Francis explained the meaning of the gesture.

"Jesus humiliates himself," Francis said. "With this gesture, he makes us understand what he had said: 'I am not here to be served, but to serve.'"

"He teaches us the path of service," Francis said.

Francis appeared in good shape at the prison, even after presiding over a long Mass earlier in the day in St. Peter's Basilica. During the morning liturgy, he delivered a lengthy homily with a set of marching orders to Rome-based priests at the start of a busy few days leading to Easter.

Francis has been hobbled by a long bout of respiratory problems this winter and in recent weeks has asked an aide to read aloud his remarks to spare him the strain. On Palm Sunday, he skipped his homily altogether.

But Francis seemed energized by his visit to the Rebibbia prison, where he was given a basket of vegetables grown in the prison garden as well as two liturgical stoles embroidered by the inmates.

Francis, for his part, regifted a framed image of the Madonna that he had been given, saying as soon as he received it he thought of the women at Rebibbia. He also gave a big chocolate Easter egg to the young son of one of the inmates.

Even with Holy Thursday events wrapped up, Francis has a busy few days coming up that will test his stamina.

On Friday, he is due to travel at night to the Colosseum for the Way of the Cross procession re-enacting Christ's crucifixion. On Saturday, he presides over an evening Easter Vigil in St. Peter's Basilica followed a few hours later by Easter Sunday Mass in the piazza and his big noontime Urbi et Orbi (to the city and the world) speech highlighting global conflicts and disasters afflicting humanity.

Some cancer patients can find it hard to tell family and friends

By KENYA HUNTER AP Health Writer

Ever since Anthony Bridges found out he had prostate cancer six years ago, he hasn't stopped talking about it. He told his Facebook friends immediately.

Now, the 68-year-old man from Georgia spends time working with others to encourage other men to talk to their doctor about getting screened.

Not everyone is as eager to share, for cultural or privacy reasons — or because they just don't want to

talk about it. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin kept his prostate cancer quiet, including from President Joe Biden. And more recently, Kate, Princess of Wales, waited weeks before publicly disclosing her cancer.

Austin described his diagnosis as a "gut punch" and his instinct was to keep it private. In a video statement, Kate said it was a "huge shock" and that she and her husband, Prince William, had been trying to "manage this privately for the sake of our young family."

Their reactions hardly surprised experts. Dr. Otis Brawley says he's encountered men who don't even want to talk about their prostate cancer with their own doctors.

Brawley, a professor of oncology and epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University, recalled a time decades ago when cancer simply wasn't spoken of, called the "Big C" instead.

Public conversations around prostate cancer changed, he said, when former Sen. Bob Dole announced his diagnosis and publicly spoke of erectile dysfunction, a side effect of treatment.

For breast cancer, it was first lady Betty Ford, who spoke openly about her surgery and treatment.

"That opened the floodgates. It was then OK to talk about cancer," Brawley said.

In the U.S., death rates from cancer have been declining for decades, which is attributed to progress against lung cancer, screening and better treatments. Still, it remains the nation's No. 2 killer, behind heart disease, and cases are increasing as the population ages and grows.

Elaine Smith, who counsels patients at City of Hope Cancer Center Atlanta, said a patient's openness often depends on personality. Some don't want to be identified solely as a cancer patient.

"So many of my patients say people talk to them with a different tone of voice," Smith said. "They lean into me differently, they look at me with their eyes differently."

Sometimes people worry about how their coworkers will react when they have to miss work for appointments and treatments.

"In many cases, we may not acknowledge it, but that can sometimes have a role in how they are judged in their work performance," said Dr. Bradley Carthon, of Emory University's Winship Cancer Institute.

Patients usually share with their family, experts said, but even that can be difficult.

Kate noted it had taken time to explain "everything to George, Charlotte and Louis in a way that is appropriate for them and to reassure them that I'm going to be OK."

"She has the added challenges of having young children," said Dr. Christina Annunziata, a cancer doctor at the Inova Schar Cancer Institute in Fairfax, Virginia. "As hard as it is to explain to friends and family, or even coworkers. It's even harder to explain to young children."

The downside of keeping it private is that "you're dealing with this all alone," Carthon said.

Dr. Paul Monk, who treats cancer patients at Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, said it's important for patients to bring along a family member or other support to appointments.

"I don't think they hear everything I say," he said. "And so when you bring someone else to your doctor's visit, that's another set of ears and I think that's critically important."

Bridges' wife, Phyllis, served in that role for him when he started treatment for advanced prostate cancer in 2018. He said he had no symptoms and had only gone for a checkup at her insistence.

Bridges felt called to share his story with others, especially with Black men, and is now part of a program called Project Elevation. Working through local churches, the program's goal is to remove some of the stigma surrounding prostate cancer and provide information about screening.

"We have to change the mindset," said the Albany, Georgia, resident. "We have to dispel the fear."

Why did more than 1,000 people die after police subdued them with force that isn't meant to kill?

By REESE DUNKLIN, RYAN J. FOLEY, JEFF MARTIN, JENNIFER McDERMOTT, HOLBROOK MOHR and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Carl Grant, a Vietnam veteran with dementia, wandered out of a hospital room to charge a cellphone he imagined he had. When he wouldn't sit still, the police officer escorting Grant body-slammed him, ricocheting the patient's head off the floor.

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Taylor Ware, a former Marine and aspiring college student, walked the grassy grounds of an interstate rest stop trying to shake the voices in his head. After Ware ran from an officer, he was attacked by a police dog, jolted by a stun gun, pinned on the ground and injected with a sedative.

And Donald Ivy Jr., a former three-sport athlete, left an ATM alone one night when officers sized him up as suspicious and tried to detain him. Ivy took off, and police tackled and shocked him with a stun gun, belted him with batons and held him facedown.

Each man was unarmed. Each was not a threat to public safety. And despite that, each died after police used a kind of force that is not supposed to be deadly — and can be much easier to hide than the blast of an officer's gun.

Every day, police rely on common tactics that, unlike guns, are meant to stop people without killing them, such as physical holds, Tasers and body blows. But when misused, these tactics can still end in death — as happened with George Floyd in 2020, sparking a national reckoning over policing. And while that encounter was caught on video, capturing Floyd's last words of "I can't breathe," many others throughout the United States have escaped notice.

Over a decade, more than 1,000 people died after police subdued them through means not intended to be lethal, an investigation led by The Associated Press found. In hundreds of cases, officers weren't taught or didn't follow best safety practices for physical force and weapons, creating a recipe for death.

These sorts of deadly encounters happened just about everywhere, according to an analysis of a database AP created. Big cities, suburbs and rural America. Red states and blue states. Restaurants, assisted-living centers and, most commonly, in or near the homes of those who died. The deceased came from all walks of life — a poet, a nurse, a saxophone player in a mariachi band, a truck driver, a sales director, a rodeo clown and even a few off-duty law enforcement officers.

The toll, however, disproportionately fell on Black Americans like Grant and Ivy. Black people made up a third of those who died despite representing only 12% of the U.S. population. Others feeling the brunt were impaired by a medical, mental health or drug emergency, a group particularly susceptible to force even when lightly applied.

"We were robbed," said Carl Grant's sister, Kathy Jenkins, whose anger has not subsided four years later. "It's like somebody went in your house and just took something, and you were violated."

AP's three-year investigation was done in collaboration with the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism programs at the University of Maryland and Arizona State University, and FRONTLINE (PBS). The AP and its partners focused on local police, sheriff's deputies and other officers patrolling the streets or responding to dispatch calls. Reporters filed nearly 7,000 requests for government documents and body-camera footage, receiving more than 700 autopsy reports or death certificates, and uncovering video in at least four dozen cases that has never been published or widely distributed.

Medical officials cited law enforcement as causing or contributing to about half of the deaths. In many others, significant police force went unmentioned and drugs or preexisting health conditions were blamed instead.

Video in a few dozen cases showed some officers mocked people as they died, laughing or making comments such as "sweaty little hog," "screaming like a little girl" and "lazy f---." In other cases, officers expressed clear concern for the people they were subduing.

The federal government has struggled for years to count deaths following what police call "less-lethal force," and the little information it collects is often kept from the public and highly incomplete at best. No more than a third of the cases the AP identified are listed in federal mortality data as involving law enforcement at all.

When force came, it could be sudden and extreme, the AP investigation found. Other times, the force was minimal, and yet the people nevertheless died, sometimes from a drug overdose or a combination of factors.

In about 30% of the cases, police were intervening to stop people who were injuring others or who posed a threat of danger. But roughly 25% of those who died were not harming anyone or, at most, were committing low-level infractions or causing minor disturbances, AP's review of cases shows. The rest involved

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other nonviolent situations with people who, police said, were trying to resist arrest or flee.

A Texas man loitering outside a convenience store who resisted going to jail was shocked up to 11 times with a Taser and restrained facedown for nearly 22 minutes — more than twice as long as George Floyd, previously unreported video shows. After a California man turned silent during questioning, he was grabbed, dogpiled by seven officers, shocked five times with a Taser, wrapped in a restraint contraption and injected with a sedative by a medic despite complaining “I can’t breathe.” And a Michigan teen was speeding an all-terrain vehicle down a city street when a state trooper sent volts of excruciating electricity from a Taser through him, and he crashed.

In hundreds of cases, officers repeated errors that experts and trainers have spent years trying to eliminate — perhaps none more prevalent than how they held someone facedown in what is known as prone restraint.

Many policing experts agree that someone can stop breathing if pinned on their chest for too long or with too much weight, and the Department of Justice has issued warnings to that effect since 1995. But with no standard national rules, what police are taught is often left to the states and individual departments. In dozens of cases, officers disregarded people who told them they were struggling for air or even about to die, often uttering the words, “I can’t breathe.”

What followed deadly encounters revealed how the broader justice system frequently works to shield police from scrutiny, often leaving families to grieve without knowing what really happened.

Officers were usually cleared by their departments in internal investigations. Some had a history of violence and a few were involved in multiple restraint deaths. Local and state authorities that investigate deaths also withheld information and in some cases omitted potentially damaging details from reports.

One of the last hopes for accountability from inside the system — what are known as death opinions — also often exonerated officers. The medical examiners and coroners who decide on these did not link hundreds of the deaths to force, but instead to accidents, drug use or preexisting health problems, sometimes relying on debunked science or incomplete studies from sources tied to law enforcement.

Even when these deaths receive the homicide label that fatal police shootings often get, prosecutors rarely pursue officers. Charging police is politically sensitive and can be legally fraught, and the AP investigation identified just 28 deaths that led to such charges. Finding accountability through civil courts was also tough for families, but at least 168 cases ended in settlements or jury verdicts totaling about \$374 million.

The known fatalities still averaged just two a week — a tiny fraction of the total contacts police have with the population. Police leaders, officers and experts say law enforcement shouldn’t bear all the blame. As the social safety net frays, people under mental distress or who use stimulant drugs like cocaine or methamphetamine are increasingly on the streets. Officers sent to handle these emergencies are often poorly trained by their departments.

If incidents turn chaotic and officers make split-second decisions to use force, “people do die,” said Peter Moskos, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and former Baltimore police officer.

“The only way to get down to zero is to get rid of policing,” Moskos said, “and that’s not going to save lives either.”

But because the United States has no clear idea how many people die like this and why, holding police accountable and making meaningful reforms will remain difficult, said Dr. Roger Mitchell Jr., a leader in the push to improve tracking and one of the nation’s few Black chief medical examiners when he held the office in Washington, D.C., from 2014 to 2021.

“Any time anyone dies before their day in court, or dies in an environment where the federal government or the local government’s job is to take care of you,” he said, “it needs transparency. It cannot be in the dark of night.”

“This,” he added, “is an American problem we need to solve.”

Those who died

Carl Grant didn’t care much for football. So on Super Bowl Sunday in 2020, family members said, he eased into his black Kia Optima, intending to shop for groceries near his suburban Atlanta home. The 68-year-old wound up 2½ hours away, where he came face to face with police in an encounter that underscores

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several findings central to AP's investigation: He was Black, he was not threatening physical harm, and a seemingly routine matter rapidly escalated.

The former Marine and trucking business owner had dementia and qualified as a disabled veteran. As he drove that evening, he became disoriented and took an interstate west to Birmingham, Alabama. There, Grant twice tried to go inside houses he thought were his.

Both times, residents phoned 911. And both times, responding officers opted to use force.

At the first house, Grant was taken to the ground and cuffed after an officer said he'd stepped toward a partner. Even though one officer sensed he was impaired, police released Grant without asking medics to examine him — a decision a superior later faulted.

At a second house about a half-mile away, police found him sitting in a porch chair. When he didn't follow an order to get off the porch, a different officer pushed him down the stairs, according to previously unreleased body-camera video. Grant gashed his forehead in the fall.

Officer Vincent Larry, who pushed Grant, went with him to the hospital. When Grant wouldn't return to his exam room, Larry used an unapproved "hip toss" to lift and slam him, hospital surveillance video showed. The back of Grant's head bounced four inches off the floor, a nurse estimated, wrecking his spinal cord in his neck.

After Grant awoke from emergency surgery, he thought his paralysis was a combat injury from the Vietnam War. "I'm so sorry this happened," he told family, his sister recalled. He died almost six months later from the injury.

An internal investigation concluded Larry's force at the hospital was excessive, and in a departure from many other cases AP found, his department acted: he received a 15-day suspension. He is no longer a city employee, a Birmingham spokesperson told AP. Neither Larry nor the department would comment. A judge recently cited a procedural error in dismissing a lawsuit filed by Grant's estate, which is appealing the ruling.

"He's almost 70 and confused," Grant's partner, Ronda Hernandez, said. "That's what I don't get. You just don't do that to old people."

Grant was one of 1,036 deaths from 2012 through 2021 that AP logged. That is certainly an undercount, because many departments blocked access to information. Files that others released were blacked out and video blurred, while officers routinely used vague language in their reports that glossed over force.

All but 3% of the dead were men. They tended to be in their 30s and 40s, when police might consider them more of a physical threat. The youngest was just 15, the oldest 95.

In sheer numbers, white people of non-Hispanic descent were the largest group, making up more than 40% of cases. Hispanics were just under 20% of those killed. But Black Americans were hit especially hard.

The disproportionate representation of Black people tracks research findings that they face higher rates and severity of force, and even deaths. The Department of Justice has found after multiple investigations that Black people accounted for more unjustified stops for minor offenses, illegal searches that produced no contraband, unnecessary force, or arrests without probable cause.

Researchers caution that proving — or disproving — discrimination can be hard because of a lack of information. But in some cases AP identified, officers were accused of profiling and stopping Black people based on suspicions, as happened to Donald "Dontay" Ivy Jr.

Ivy was a 39-year-old resident of Albany, New York, who excelled in basketball during high school, served in the U.S. Navy and graduated college with a business degree. On a freezing night in 2015, he went to an ATM to check whether a delayed disability deposit had posted. Officers thought he seemed suspicious because he was walking with a lean and only one hand in the pocket of his "puffer" coat — indications, they thought, he might have a gun or drugs.

Ivy was cooperative when they stopped him, but, they said, he wouldn't answer how much money he had withdrawn and denied a prior arrest. Police interpreted Ivy's behavior as deceptive without grasping that Ivy suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. A witness recounted that Ivy seemed "slow" when he spoke.

When an officer touched Ivy to detain him — a known trigger for some with severe mental illness — police say Ivy began to resist. An officer fired a Taser, then Ivy fled. Officers caught up and beat him with

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batons, shocked him several more times with a Taser, put him facedown and got on top of him. By the time they rolled Ivy over, he'd stopped breathing.

The department quickly ruled that the officers acted appropriately and blamed a "medical crisis" for his death, even though it was classified a homicide. A grand jury declined to indict. However, the local prosecutor urged police to review policies for Tasers, batons and dealing with people with mental illness.

The local chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union continued to question the stop, saying there was "strong reason to suspect" Ivy was racially profiled. After years in court, the city paid \$625,000 to settle with Ivy's estate. His cousin and close friend Chamberlain Guthrie said the way Ivy's life ended was one of the most painful things his family had endured.

"It'd be one thing if Dontay was out here being a ruffian and he was a thug," Guthrie said. "But he was none of that."

When force goes wrong

When people died after police subdued them, it was often because officers went too fast, too hard or for too long — many times, all of the above.

The United States has no national rules for how exactly to apply force. Instead, Supreme Court decisions set broad guard rails that weigh force as either "objectively reasonable" or "excessive," based in part on the severity of the situation, any immediate safety threat and active resistance.

That frequently leaves states and local law enforcement to sort out the particulars in training and policies. Best practices from the government and private law enforcement organizations have tried to fill gaps, but aren't mandatory and sometimes go ignored, as happened in hundreds of cases reviewed by AP and its partners.

In 2019, the mother of Taylor Ware, the former Marine with college plans, called 911 when he wouldn't get back in their SUV during a manic episode caused by bipolar disorder. She told the dispatcher Ware would need space and urged police to wait for backup because he was a former wrestler and might be a handful — advice that tracked best practices, yet wasn't followed.

The first officer to encounter Ware at a highway rest stop in Indiana saw the 24-year-old extending him a hand in greeting. Ware then calmly walked through a grassy field and sat down with folded legs.

The officer, an unpaid reserve marshal, assured Ware's mother he'd had calls like this before. As she and a family friend watched, he stopped about 10 feet in front of Ware, according to video filmed by the friend and obtained by AP. His police dog barked and lunged several times — a provocation officers are told to avoid with the emotionally distressed. Ware remained seated.

After a few minutes, Ware walked toward the parking lot. There, the officer said, Ware pushed him away, a split-second act disputed by the friend. Her video shows Ware running and the officer commanding the dog to attack, setting off a cascade of force that ended with Ware in a coma. He died three days later.

A police news release said Ware had a "medical event," an explanation that echoes how police first described George Floyd's death. The prosecutor in Indiana declined to bring charges and praised officers for "incredible patience and restraint." His office's letter brushed past or left out key details: multiple dog bites, multiple stun-gun shocks, prone restraint and an injection of the powerful sedative ketamine.

In dozens of other cases identified by AP, people who died were given sedatives without consent, sometimes after officers urged paramedics to use them — a recommendation law enforcement is unqualified to make.

A coroner ruled Ware's death was due to natural causes, specifically "excited delirium" — a term for a condition that police say causes potentially life-threatening agitation, rapid heart rate and other symptoms. Major medical groups oppose it as a diagnosis, however, and say it is frequently an attempt to justify excessive force.

"It was like that was his body's own fault, that it wasn't the police's fault," Ware's sister, Briana Garton, said of the autopsy ruling.

Two experts who reviewed the case for the AP said police actions — such as the order for the dog to attack, the use of a Taser in the sternum and restraint facedown with handcuffs and back pressure — contributed to Ware's death.

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"This was not proper service," said police practices expert Stan Kephart, himself a former chief. "This person should be alive today."

As with Ware, officers resorted to force in roughly 25% of the cases even though the circumstances weren't imminently dangerous. Many began as routine calls that other officers have, time and again, resolved safely. Those included medical emergencies phoned in by families, friends or the person who died.

By launching prematurely into force, police introduced violence and volatility, and in turn needed to use more weapons, holds or restraints to regain control — a phenomenon known as "officer-created jeopardy." Sometimes it starts when police misread as defiance someone's confusion, intoxication or inability to communicate due to a medical issue.

What led up to the force was sometimes unclear. In more than 100 cases, police either withheld key details or witnesses disputed the officer's account — and body-camera footage didn't exist to add clarity. But in about 45% of cases, officers became physical after they said someone tried to evade them or resist arrest for nonviolent circumstances. Some sprinted away with drugs, for example, or simply flailed their arms to resist handcuffs or wiggled around while held down.

Many times the way officers subdued people broke policing best practices, especially when using the go-to tools of restraining people facedown and shocking them with Tasers.

When done properly, placing someone on their stomach or shocking them is not inherently life-threatening. But there are risks: Prone restraint can compress the lungs and put stress on the heart, and Taser's maker has issued warnings against repeated shocks or targeting the body near the heart. These risks intensify when safety protocols aren't followed or when people with mental illness, the elderly or those on stimulant drugs are involved.

Some officers involved in fatalities testified they had been assured that prone position was never deadly, AP found, while many others were trained to roll people onto their sides to aid breathing and simply failed to do so.

"If you're talking, you're breathing, bro," an officer, repeating a common myth about prone restraint, told a Florida man following 12 shocks from stun guns.

"Stomach is (an) ideal place for them to be. It's harder for them to punch me," testified an officer in the death of a Minnesota man found sleeping at a grocery store and restrained for more than 30 minutes.

In dozens of police or witness videos, those who died began to fade on screen, their breathing becoming shallow, as happened in suburban San Diego to 56-year-old Oral Nunis.

Nunis was having a mental break at his daughter's apartment in 2020. He had calmed down, but then the first arriving officer grabbed his arm, a mere four seconds after making eye contact. Nunis begged to go without being handcuffed. The officer persisted. Nunis became agitated and ran outside.

At 5 feet, 5 inches tall and 146 pounds, Nunis quickly found himself pinned by several officers — each at least 80 pounds heavier than him. Although his body turned still, they kept pressing, wrapped him in a full-body restraint device and put a spit mask on him. From just 10 feet away, his daughter tried to console him in his final minutes: "Daddy, just breathe."

The district attorney's office later cleared the police, calling their force reasonable because Nunis had posed "unnaturally strong resistance" for his size.

As part of the family's lawsuit, two pathologists concluded that the restraint officers used led to his death. One officer was asked under oath if pressure on someone's back could impair breathing. "I have had several bodies on top of me during different training scenarios," the 6-foot, 265-pound officer said, "and I never had difficulty breathing."

The use of Tasers can be similarly misinformed. An officer shocked Stanley Downen, 77, a former ironworker with Alzheimer's disease who served during the Korean War, as he wandered the grounds of his veterans' home in Columbia Falls, Montana. The electricity locked up his body and made him fall without control of his limbs. He hit his head on the pavement and later died.

The officer said under oath that he hadn't read any warnings, including those from Taser manufacturer Axon Enterprise Inc., about the risks of shocking the elderly or people who could be injured if they fell. He testified that Downen was "armed with rocks," but a witness told police Downen never raised his hands

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to throw them. The police chief cleared the officer, though a police expert hired by the family found he failed to follow accepted practices.

In about 30% of deaths that AP logged, civilians and officers faced potential or clear danger, extenuating circumstances that meant police didn't always follow best practices. In about 170 of those cases, officers said a person charged, swung or lunged at them, or police arrived to find people holding someone down after a fight. In the other roughly 110 cases, police were trying to stop violent attacks against others, including officers.

There was a Kansas man who used his elderly mother as a shield when deputies arrived. And there was a 41-year-old concrete mason in Minnesota who choked and punched his adult daughter before grabbing an officer by the throat and pushing her into a window.

In one of the most violent encounters, three officers in Cohasset, Massachusetts, confronted Erich Stelzer, a 6-foot-6-inch bodybuilder who was stabbing his date so viciously that the walls were red with her blood.

Rather than fire their pistols that night in 2018, two of the officers used their Tasers and managed to handcuff Stelzer, 25, as he thrashed on the floor. Stelzer stopped breathing, and the officers could not revive him. The local prosecutor determined they had handled the situation appropriately and would have been justified in shooting Stelzer because he presented a lethal threat.

While the officers were relieved to have saved the woman's life, they also wrestled with killing a man despite doing their best to avoid it.

"As the time went by after the incident, you know, it wasn't lost on me that he was someone's son, someone's brother," Detective Lt. Gregory Lennon said. "And I'm sorry that he died. You know, it wasn't our intention."

Lack of accountability

Understanding how and why people die after force can be difficult. Information is often scarce or government at all levels won't share what it has.

In 2000, Congress started trying to get the Justice Department to track deaths involving law enforcement. The department has acknowledged its data is incomplete, blames spotty reporting from police departments, and does not make whatever information exists publicly available.

Mortality data maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also has gaps. The AP found that when a death certificate does not list words like "police" and "law enforcement," the CDC's language-reading software doesn't label the death as involving "legal intervention." This means the death data flagged police involvement in, at most, 34% of the more than 1,000 deaths the investigation identified.

Among the mislabeled deaths is that of Daniel Prude, a 41-year-old Black man. He died in 2020 while restrained and covered with a spit hood in Rochester, New York. The high-profile incident was caught on video, but while his death certificate noted "physical restraint," it made no direct mention of police.

The CDC recognizes the data undercounts police-involved deaths, but says it wasn't primarily intended to flag them. Staff lack the time or resources to corroborate death certificate details, officials said.

In 2017, leading pathologists recommended adding a checkbox to the U.S. standard death certificate to identify deaths involving law enforcement — as is already done with tobacco use and pregnancy. They argued better data could help inform better practices and prevent deaths. However, the proposal hasn't gained traction.

"This is a long-standing, not-very-secret secret about the problem here: We know very little," said Georgetown University law professor Christy Lopez, who until 2017 led the Justice Department office that investigates law enforcement agencies over excessive force.

Meanwhile, laws in states like Pennsylvania, Alabama and Delaware block the release of most, if not all, information. And in other places, such as Iowa, departments can choose what they wish to release, even to family members like Sandra Jones.

Jones' husband, Brian Hays, 56, had battled an addiction to painkillers since injuring his shoulder at a factory job. She last saw him alive one September night in 2015 after he called 911 because his mental health and methamphetamine use was making him delusional. Officers who arrived at their home in Muscatine, Iowa, ordered her to leave.

The next morning, a hospital contacted Jones to say Hays was there. As Hays was on life support, doctors told her that he had several Taser marks on his body and scrapes on his face and knees, she recalled. Neighbors also said they had seen Hays run out of the house, clad only in boxer shorts, and make it around the corner before officers caught him.

When Jones set out to unravel what happened, she said, police wouldn't hand over their reports. A detective later told her officers had shocked Hays and tied his feet before he went into cardiac arrest. She couldn't glean why that much force was necessary.

In time, Jones managed to get the autopsy report from the medical examiner's office, confirming the force and a struggle. But an attorney told her winning a lawsuit to pry out more information was unlikely. Hays' death didn't even make the local news.

"All I know is, something terrible happened that night," she said. "I have pictured him laying on that cement road more times than I can tell you. I picture him there, struggling to breathe."

This story is part of an ongoing investigation led by The Associated Press in collaboration with the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism programs and FRONTLINE (PBS). The investigation includes the Lethal Restraint interactive story, database and the documentary, "Documenting Police Use Of Force," premiering April 30 on PBS.

Federal EV charging stations are key to Biden's climate agenda, yet only 4 states have them

By ALEXA ST. JOHN, MATTHEW DALY and JOSHUA A. BICKEL Associated Press
LONDON, Ohio (AP) — Within 24 hours of buying his red Ford Mustang Mach-E, Liam Sawyer set off on a camping trip.

Sawyer, who bought the electric SUV "because I think the technology is cool and the range is just long enough," searched ahead of time for convenient charging stations between his home in Indianapolis and Allegheny National Forest in western Pennsylvania.

About 175 miles (282 kilometers) into his journey, he stopped at a new public charging station at the Pilot Travel Center along Interstate 70 outside Columbus, Ohio. The station, which opened in London, Ohio, in December with four chargers, can power an EV in about half an hour while drivers buy food and drinks and use amenities.

That first charge cost Sawyer, a 32-year-old civil engineer, about \$20.

The Ohio charging station was created from the \$5 billion National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program, part of the bipartisan infrastructure bill President Joe Biden signed into law in November 2021. More than two years later, only four states — Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania and Hawaii — have opened stations funded by the program.

Biden, a Democrat, has set a goal of creating a national network of 500,000 publicly available chargers by 2030. Easily accessible charging ports are a key part of his effort to encourage drivers to move away from gasoline-powered cars and trucks that contribute to global warming.

That effort took on greater urgency this month as the Biden administration announced new automobile emissions standards that officials called the most ambitious plan ever to cut planet-warming pollution from passenger vehicles. Meeting those standards would require a huge increase in sales of EVs and plug-in hybrids.

EVs hit a record 1.19 million in sales in the U.S. last year and accounted for 7.6% of the total U.S. vehicle market, up from 5.8% in 2022.

Transportation emissions are the nation's largest source of greenhouse gases.

The Biden administration says the federal charging program is on track. Several states, including Maine, Vermont and Colorado, are expected to open public charging stations later this year, while more than a dozen others have awarded contracts for projects or broken ground.

"We are building this national framework from scratch, partnering with states to set plans, and we want

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to make sure we are taking appropriate care to set this program up correctly," Federal Highway Administrator Shailen Bhatt said in an interview.

"The first two years were about getting the rules right, getting the plans in place," Bhatt said. "And now what you're going to see is this year being about the chargers coming online."

As part of the national charging station rollout, the Biden administration awarded \$623 million in grants to states, local governments and tribes in January. The grants will fund 47 EV charging stations and related projects in 22 states and Puerto Rico, including 7,500 charging ports.

Separately, Walmart and other private companies have pledged to build a network of affordable fast-charging stations for EVs. The federal program is also expected to serve as a catalyst for other projects.

"We're committed to making sure that all Americans can charge (their EVs) where they live, work, shop, play, pray," said Gabe Klein, director of the Joint Office of Energy and Transportation, which runs the federal charging program.

But even some of the government's own experts say 500,000 public chargers won't be enough to meet Biden's ambitious climate goals. The Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory estimated last year that the U.S. will need 1.2 million public chargers by 2030, a huge jump from the 175,000 public charging ports now available, as measured by the Alternative Fuels Data Center, a division of the Energy Department.

The availability of charging stations is key to persuading Americans to buy EVs.

Driving range anxiety is still an impediment, along with cost. About 80% of respondents cited concerns about a lack of charging stations as a reason not to buy an electric vehicle, according to a 2023 survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago.

Seven in 10 said they would not buy an EV because it takes too long to charge and the battery technology isn't ready.

In some parts of the country — especially rural areas far from major cities — "there are definitely corridors where you have worries about range anxiety," Bhatt said. "It is going to take longer to get to them, just like it took longer to get cellphone coverage in those places."

But he said the administration's goal is to have chargers every 50 miles (80 kilometers) along U.S. interstates. Other major charging networks offered by Tesla, EVgo and Electrify America prioritize shopping centers, gas stations and grocery stores, but long-distance travel is where many Americans perceive the biggest gap.

As Biden doubles down on clean energy as part of his reelection campaign, it's notable that Ohio, a swing state led by Republican Gov. Mike DeWine, was one of the first movers in the federal charging endeavor.

"Electric vehicles are the future of transportation, and we want drivers in Ohio to have access to this technology today," said DeWine, who appeared at the Ohio station's grand opening in December.

A state Department of Transportation program, DriveOhio, served as the charging station's organizational structure. A public-private partnership authority helped supply money needed for the project after the federal program contributed 80% of the estimated \$500,000 to \$750,000 cost, including buildout, operation and maintenance for five years.

"I actually don't think these are moving very slow. I think they're going really quickly given that they're tiny construction projects that we're deploying at a pretty significant scale," said Preeti Choudhary, DriveOhio's executive director. "Getting them in the ground quickly is important because we do have this growing contingency of EV drivers out there and they need to be supported when they're driving across our state or across the country."

Meeting federal requirements and operating standards is a challenge for states with little experience rolling out this type of infrastructure, according to Loren McDonald, an independent analyst tracking the buildout.

"The states are moving at very different speeds," he said. "It might take a good 18 months on average for a lot of these stations to come online."

Projects can be held up for months to years by delays with permitting, approvals, electrical upgrades and

equipment. The latter can be costly. In California, the state with the most electric cars, its Public Utilities Commission could spend \$50 billion through 2035 just to meet demand there.

Sawyer, who was charging his Mustang as semi-trucks lined up at rows of gas pumps nearby, said he intends to mostly charge his car at home overnight, but he appreciates the public stations for his occasional road trips. He doesn't mind the half-hour charging time.

"Having the 20 minutes to 30 minutes to kind of rest your feet, get lunch isn't that bad if you're not in a rush," he said. "If you have the luxury of time, it's worth it."

"I definitely think the infrastructure needs to get up there more, right?" he said. "And faster charging will come."

Schools in the path of April's total solar eclipse prepare for a natural teaching moment

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) — Seventh-grade student Henry Cohen bounced side to side in time to the Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun" playing in teacher Nancy Morris' classroom, swinging his arms open and closed across the planets pictured on his T-shirt.

Henry and other classmates at Cleveland's Riverside School were on their feet, dancing during a session of activities tied to April's total solar eclipse. Second-graders invited in for the lessons sat cross-legged on the floor, laughing as they modeled newly decorated eclipse viewing glasses. Dioramas with softball-sized model earths and moons and flashlight "suns" occupied desks and shelves around the room.

Henry said his shirt reflected his love of space, which he called "a cool mystery." The eclipse, he said, "is a one in a million chance and I'm glad I get to be here for it."

For schools in or near the path of totality of the April 8 eclipse, the event has inspired lessons in science, literacy and culture. Some schools also are organizing group viewings for students to experience the awe of daytime darkness and learn about the astronomy behind it together.

A hair out of the path of totality, the school system in Portville, New York, near the Pennsylvania line, plans to load its 500 seventh- through 12th-grade students onto buses and drive about 15 minutes into the path, to an old horse barn overlooking a valley. There, they will be able to trace the shadow of the eclipse as it arrives around 3:20 p.m. EDT.

It required rearranging the hours of the school day to remain in session, but Superintendent Thomas Simon said staff did not want to miss out on the learning opportunity, especially at a time when students experience so much of life through screens.

"We want them to leave here that day feeling they're a very small part of a pretty magnificent planet that we live on, and world that we live in, and that there's some real amazing things that we can experience in the natural world," Simon said.

Schools in Cleveland and some other cities in the eclipse's path will be closed that day so that students aren't stuck on buses or in crowds of people expected to converge. At Riverside, Morris came up with a mix of crafts, games and models to educate and engage her students ahead of time.

"They really were not realizing what a big deal this was until we really started talking about it," Morris said.

Learning about phases of the moon and eclipses is built into every state's science standards, said Dennis Schatz, past president of the National Science Teaching Association. Some school systems have their own planetariums — relics of the 1960s space race — where students can take in educational shows about astronomy.

But there is no better lesson than the real thing, said Schatz, who encourages educators to use the eclipse as "a teachable moment."

Dallas science teachers Anita Orozco and Katherine Roberts plan to do just that at the Lamplighter School, arranging for the entire pre-K- through fourth-grade student body to watch it together outdoors. The teachers spent a Saturday in March at a teaching workshop at the University of Texas at Dallas where

they were told it would be “almost criminal” to keep students inside.

“We want our students to love science as much as we do,” Roberts said, “and we just want them understanding and also having the awe of how crazy this event is.”

Wrangling young children may be a challenge, Orozco said, but “we want it to be an event.”

In training future science teachers, University at Buffalo professor Noemi Waight has encouraged her student teachers to incorporate how culture shapes the way people experience an eclipse. Native Americans, for example, may view the total eclipse as something sacred, she said.

“This is important for our teachers to understand,” she said, “so when they’re teaching, they can address all of these elements.”

The STEM Friends Club from the State University of New York Brockport planned eclipse-related activities with fourth-grade students at teacher Christopher Albrecht’s class, hoping to pass along their passion for science, technology, engineering and math to younger students.

“I want to show students what is possible,” said Allison Blum, 20, a physics major focused on astrophysics. “You know those big mainstream jobs, like astronaut, but you don’t really know what’s possible with the different fields.”

Albrecht sees his fourth-grade students’ interest in the eclipse as a chance to incorporate literacy into lessons, too — maybe even spark a love of reading.

“This is a great opportunity to read a lot with them,” Albrecht said. He has picked “What Is a Solar Eclipse?” by Dana Meachen Rau and “A Few Beautiful Minutes” by Kate Allen Fox for his class at Hill Elementary School in Brockport, New York.

“It’s capturing their interest,” he said, “and at the same time, their imagination, too.”

Black pastors see popular Easter services as an opportunity to rebuild in-person worship attendance

By DARREN SANDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many churches moved their services online, the Rev. William H. Lamar IV initially shuddered at the thought that he needed to morph into a “video personality” to stay engaged with his parishioners.

“I resisted kicking and screaming because I’m a child of the ‘70s,” said Lamar, the senior pastor of historic Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. “I’m not a digital native.”

Four years later, Lamar, a talented preacher, has adjusted to offering both virtual and in-person services. After a noticeable attendance drop, more Metropolitan congregants are choosing in-person worship over virtual, even as they mourn members who died from COVID-19.

This Easter, Lamar is grateful to be back in person with his flock, believing it’s a fitting way to celebrate the holiday’s message of hope and resurrection.

This Easter is also an opportunity for Black churches to welcome more visitors to their pews and try to begin reversing attendance trends. More than a dozen Black clergy said their churches are still feeling the pandemic’s impact on already-waning attendance, even as they have rolled out robust online options to reach new people.

Black Protestants’ monthly church attendance declined 15% from 2019 to 2023, a larger drop than any other major religious group, according to a 2023 Pew Research study. They are also more likely than other groups to take in religious services online or on TV, with more than half (54%) saying they attend services virtually.

This dynamic is being felt at Calvary Baptist Church in the New York City borough of Queens. Its senior pastor, the Rev. Victor T. Hall Sr., hopes this Easter, if for only one Sunday, he’ll get a glimpse of the way things used to be, when his church was “packed and rocking.”

Before the pandemic, Calvary’s numbers were already dwindling as many members moved to more affordable locales in states such as Maryland, North Carolina and Georgia, forcing Hall to offer one service

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on Sunday morning instead of two.

"The churches were already declining, but COVID was the coup de grace," Hall said. "And don't let nobody fool you. It's hard looking at empty pews."

Easter is typically a homecoming of sorts for Black Protestants, who traditionally wear new outfits accented with pastels and elaborate hats – a sartorial expression of the Christian celebration, and an ode to springtime renewal.

But some of the vibrancy and pageantry of Black church culture was extinguished with the inability to gather, said KB Dennis Meade, an assistant professor of religious studies at Northwestern University who is curating a digital archive of how Black religious traditions adapted during the pandemic. She said Easter and other major holidays are an opportunity to further assess that, including comparing this year's attendance numbers to pre-pandemic Easter Sunday numbers.

"If you're a cultural Christian, but maybe not a practicing one, you're going to want to go to church on Easter," she said.

The Rev. Kia Conerway founded The Church at the Well in Memphis, Tennessee, in 2018. The congregation had just moved into their new building space when COVID-19 hit.

Through innovative marketing and online worship, the church kept growing, from 160 members in 2019 to well over 400 today, according to Conerway. Now, every other Sunday is a completely virtual service, and more than a third of the congregation tunes in from outside the local area.

"Easter is the Super Bowl of Christianity," she said. "When we realized that 37% of our people did not live in Memphis, we were challenged to figure out how we serve them now that we're back in the building."

To better serve virtual worshippers, the church redoubled efforts to draw them into small groups and initiated a monthly check-in call.

Ahead of Easter, church members assembled and sent care packages to those who attend virtually. They included gift cards to pass out to strangers, safety glasses for the upcoming solar eclipse and handwritten notes, thanking them for being part of their church family and looking forward to seeing them again soon.

For those celebrating Easter in person, the church will serve snow cones and the children will participate in an Easter egg hunt. "We want kids to feel at home and to feel connected," Conerway said.

During the pandemic at Saints Memorial Community Church in Willingboro, New Jersey, the Rev. Cassius L. Rudolph scrambled to ensure his elderly members would be able to meet. The first Sunday that the church doors were closed, Rudolph, who began as the interim pastor in 2019, led the service via telephone.

The cacophony of voices on the conference call "was just unbearable, but they wanted to be able to interact with each other," he said.

This Easter, members of Saints Memorial are looking forward to being together in their renovated church sanctuary, complete with a new roof.

"They want to be back home on Easter," Rudolph said.

At Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ, the Rev. Otis Moss III said there is collective gratitude that the church can gather safely in person this Easter Sunday. But there is also grief over the lives Trinity lost to COVID-19 and the human suffering in places like Haiti, Darfur, Congo and Gaza.

This confluence of events inspired his Easter message, entitled "It's Still Dark," which examines the space between Friday's crucifixion of Christ and Sunday's resurrection.

"We are as a nation and as a community sitting between these two moments," Moss said.

"We can never remove our spiritual strivings from our existential dilemma, nor can we remove what is happening in the world from our spiritual and theological frame," Moss said. "Those two things go together. Right now, people who are marginalized are hurting. There should be a voice from the faith community that speaks to those who are weeping."

On Palm Sunday at Metropolitan AME, the week before Easter, Lamar asked his flock to consider the mindset of Jesus as he marched into Jerusalem where he would be crucified.

"Was Jesus joyful? Was he pensive? Was he afraid?" he asked.

Behind a lectern flanked by kente cloth, Lamar looked out to a promising sign – people filled more than

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two-thirds of the cavernous sanctuary.

His parishioners hummed, shouted, stood and applauded as his preaching reached a crescendo.

During this sacred season, it was a welcome reminder of the power of Black preaching, especially when experienced live and in person.

He left the pulpit near the end of the service to deliver the benediction, an unusual move for the pastor. But it gave him the opportunity to give a more personal goodbye to the influx of Palm Sunday worshippers — both old and new

Today in History: March 29, US combat troops leave Vietnam

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, March 29, the 89th day of 2024. There are 277 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 29, 1973, the last United States combat troops left South Vietnam, ending America's direct military involvement in the Vietnam War.

On this date:

In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln ordered plans for a relief expedition to sail to South Carolina's Fort Sumter, which was still in the hands of Union forces despite repeated demands by the Confederacy that it be turned over.

In 1867, Britain's Parliament passed, and Queen Victoria signed, the British North America Act creating the Dominion of Canada, which came into being the following July.

In 1943, World War II rationing of meat, fats and cheese began, limiting consumers to store purchases of an average of about two pounds a week for beef, pork, lamb and mutton using a coupon system.

In 1951, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were convicted in New York of conspiracy to commit espionage for the Soviet Union. (They were executed in June 1953.)

In 1971, Army Lt. William L. Calley Jr. was convicted of murdering 22 Vietnamese civilians in the 1968 My Lai (mee ly) massacre. (Calley ended up serving three years under house arrest.) And a jury in Los Angeles recommended the death penalty for Charles Manson and three female followers for the 1969 Tate-La Bianca murders. (The sentences were commuted when the California state Supreme Court struck down the death penalty in 1972.)

In 1974, eight Ohio National Guardsmen were indicted on federal charges stemming from the shooting deaths of four students at Kent State University. (The charges were later dismissed.)

In 1984, under cover of early morning darkness, the Baltimore Colts football team left its home city of three decades and moved to Indianapolis.

In 2002, Israeli troops stormed Yasser Arafat's headquarters complex in the West Bank in a raid that was launched in response to anti-Israeli attacks that had killed 30 people in three days.

In 2004, President George W. Bush welcomed seven former Soviet-bloc nations (Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Latvia and Estonia) into NATO during a White House ceremony.

In 2010, two female suicide bombers blew themselves up in twin attacks on Moscow subway stations jam-packed with rush-hour passengers, killing at least 40 people and wounding more than 100.

In 2020, country singer Joe Diffie, who had a string of hits in the 1990s, died at 61 from what a spokesman said were complications from COVID-19.

In 2018, Russia announced the expulsion of more than 150 diplomats, including 60 Americans, and said it was closing a U.S. consulate in retaliation for Western expulsions of Russian diplomats over the poisoning of an ex-spy and his daughter in Britain.

In 2021, the former Minneapolis police officer charged with killing George Floyd went on trial with prosecutors showing the jury video of Derek Chauvin pressing his knee on the Black man's neck for several minutes as onlookers yelled at him repeatedly to get off and Floyd gasped that he couldn't breathe. (Chauvin would be convicted of murder and manslaughter and sentenced to 22 1/2 years in prison.)

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In 2021, G. Gordon Liddy, a mastermind of the Watergate burglary and a radio talk show host after emerging from prison, died at age 90 at his daughter's home in Virginia.

In 2022, the Foo Fighters canceled all upcoming concert dates four days after the death of the band's drummer, Taylor Hawkins.

Today's Birthdays: Author Judith Guest is 88. Former British Prime Minister Sir John Major is 81. Comedian Eric Idle is 81. Basketball Hall of Famer Walt Frazier is 79. Singer Bobby Kimball (Toto) is 77. Actor Bud Cort is 76. Actor Brendan Gleeson is 69. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Earl Campbell is 69. Actor Marina Sirtis is 69. Actor Christopher Lambert is 67. Rock singer Perry Farrell (Jane's Addiction) is 65. Comedian-actor Amy Sedaris is 63. Model Elle Macpherson is 61. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., is 60. Actor Annabella Sciorra is 60. Movie director Michel Hazanavicius (mee-SHEHL' ah-zah-nah-VEE'-see-oos) is 57. Rock singer-musician John Popper (Blues Traveler) is 57. Actor Lucy Lawless is 56. Country singer Brady Seals is 55. Actor Sam Hazeldine is 52. International Tennis Hall of Famer Jennifer Capriati is 48. R&B singer PJ Morton is 43. Actor Megan Hilty is 43. Pop singer Kelly Sweet is 36.