

Groton Daily Independent

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Tuesday, April 2

Senior Menu: Baked pork chops, au gratin potatoes, vegetable capri blend, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Cereal.
School Lunch: Chicken strips, fries.
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Wage Memorial Library Board meeting, 2 p.m. at the Library
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid / LWML, 1 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study meeting, 11 a.m., Groton Dairy Queen

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



Wednesday, April 3

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas and carrots, apricots, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: French toast.
School Lunch: Chef salad.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
Groton Chamber Meeting, Noon at City Hall
Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m. ; Confirmation 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
United Methodist: Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, April 4

Senior Menu: Cheeseburger quinoa casserole, cheesy breadstick steamed Brussel sprouts, fruit.
School Breakfast: Muffins.
School Lunch: Pasta with meat sauce.
Track at Mobridge 11 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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An airstrike targeting Iran's embassy in Syria killed at least seven military officers yesterday, including a senior commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps. Syrian and Iranian officials accused Israel of the attack, while an Israeli military official accused Iran of a drone strike against a military base in southern Israel. Iran is known to supply weapons and funding to militant groups, including Hamas, which orchestrated last year's raid into Israel.

Former South Carolina lawyer Alex Murdaugh was sentenced to 40 years in federal prison yesterday for defrauding his clients and colleagues of millions of dollars over a decade. The sentence—nearly double the length suggested by prosecutors—will be served concurrently with two state sentences: a double life term for the 2021 murder of his wife and son and 27 years for similar financial crimes. He also must pay \$8M in restitution.

UPS announced it will become the primary air cargo provider for the United States Postal Service following unsuccessful negotiations between FedEx and USPS. The USPS, which doesn't own or operate any aircraft, has had a relationship with FedEx since 2001 for US Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail air transportation.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Caitlin Clark leads No. 1 seed Iowa to Elite Eight victory over No. 3 seed LSU; No. 3 seed Connecticut tops No. 1 seed USC to join No. 3 seed NC State and No. 1 seed South Carolina in the Final Four.

Formula 1 owner Liberty Media purchases MotoGP's parent company Dorna in deal valuing the motor-bike series at \$4.5B.

Vontae Davis, two-time NFL Pro Bowl cornerback, found dead at his Florida home at age 35. Barbara Rush, Golden Globe-winning actress whose career spanned nearly 60 years, dies at age 97.

Science & Technology

Health officials confirm human case of avian influenza A—or H5N1, also known as the bird flu—after coming in contact with infected cattle; case is the second in the US, risk to public remains low.

Archaeologists uncover what is believed to be a 130,000-year-old stingray sculpture; artifact would be the oldest known example of humans sculpting depictions of other animals.

Physical activity lengthens the time of non-REM sleep phases at night, increasing the overall quality of rest; study adds quantitative support to anecdotal link between exercise and sleep.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq -0.1%) as investors consider last week's inflation data. Gold prices retreat from record high.

Trump Media and Technology Group shares close down 22% after the Truth Social owner reports \$58M net loss and \$4M revenue in 2023. Sam Altman removed from ownership structure of OpenAI Startup Fund, the ChatGPT maker's venture capital arm.

Microsoft to unbundle Teams and Office worldwide following scrutiny from European regulators and rival Slack over antitrust concerns. Google to destroy browsing data of 136 million users to settle class-action lawsuit accusing the tech giant of secretly tracking users of Chrome's private mode.

Politics & World Affairs

Florida's Supreme Court upholds 2022 15-week abortion ban, allowing a separate 2023 six-week ban to take effect in 30 days; court also allows proposed amendment codifying the right to an abortion in the state constitution to appear on November ballot. Former President Donald Trump posts \$175M bond in New York civil fraud case, avoiding asset seizure during appeals process.

Severe thunderstorms sweep across central and eastern US, bringing floods, hail, and tornadoes through today. Section of California's Highway 1 near Big Sur remains closed after weekend storm causes part of roadway to crumble.

Germany legalizes possession of small amounts of cannabis for recreational use, effective yesterday; Germany becomes third European Union member to legalize recreational use of cannabis after Malta and Luxembourg.

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POPS Concerts coming up this Sunday

The Groton Area High School music department will present its annual POPS Concert on Sunday, April 7th at 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. in the high school gym. Tickets will not be sold in advance. Admission is \$5.00 at the door.

The concert will feature performances from the Prismatic Sensations Show Choir, High School Drumline, High School Flex Band, Chamber Choir, and new this year the High School Choir. We will have many talented soloists/groups as well. There will be no reserved seating, and seats do fill up quickly, so plan on arriving early to get a great view of the show! The doors will open one hour prior to show time. This concert is one of the highlights of the year for the music department, and you do not want to miss it!

Come on out, have some pop and popcorn, and enjoy performances by many of our music department's students!

If you have card tables that the music department may borrow for the day, please label them with your name and drop them off at the high school or e-mail Mrs. Yeigh at desiree.yeigh@k12.sd.us to arrange pick up.

30th Anniversary!



Congratulations Dale and Joyce Grenz on 30 years of owning and operating the Groton Dairy Queen. You have served the greater community with generous hearts and humble leadership - all while offering Hot Eats and Cool Treats with excellence. Today we celebrate and honor you for 30 years of service!



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15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

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



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

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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BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY

April 2, 2024 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Gene Loeschke, Director of Equalization
 - a. Annual Conference
5. City Of Aberdeen: City Manager-Robin Bobzien, City Attorney-Ron Wager, and City Finance Officer-Jordan McQuillen
 - a. Discretionary Abatement Discussion
6. Patricia Kendall, Museum Director
 - a. Annual Report
7. Jason Hill, Dept. of Legislative Audits
 - a. Audit Entrance Conference
8. Kelsi Vinger, State's Attorney Grant Coordinator
 - a. Planning Group – Facility Use Agreement
9. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent
 - a. R-O-W's for Northern Electric
 - b. Department Update
10. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of March 26, 2024
 - b. Claims
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Annual Reports for 2022 & 2023
 - e. 2023 Corrections to Landfill Charge Accounts
 - f. Travel Request
11. Other Business
12. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
13. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at

<https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>

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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Death Notice: Mary Anne Clark

Mary Anne Clark, 92 of Groton passed away April 1, 2024 at Sanford Aberdeen Medical Center. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

April 2, 2024 – 7:00pm

City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Approval of Special Event Alcoholic Beverage License – Fireman’s Fun Night on April 20, 2024
4. Department Reports
5. Fee Schedule Modification – Increase Returned Check Charge from \$40 to \$60, Effective 7/1/2024
6. Minutes
 - a. City Council Meeting from March 19, 2024
 - b. Board of Equalization Meeting from March 19, 2024
7. Bills
8. REMINDER: SDML District 6 Annual Meeting – April 10, 2024 – 6pm at the Groton American Legion
9. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
10. Hire Summer Employees
11. Adjournment

Minnehaha County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: Interstate 29, mile marker 95, three miles NW of Baltic, SD

When: 10:30 a.m., Monday, April 1, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 27, serious non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 1: 2024 Volvo Plus

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Passenger 1: Male, 21, fatal injuries

Seatbelt Use: Under investigation

Passenger 2: Male, 25, serious non-life-threatening injuries

Seatbelt Use: Under investigation

Passenger 3: Male, 23, serious non-life-threatening injuries

Seatbelt Use: Under investigation

Minnehaha County, S.D.- A passenger in a single vehicle crash suffered fatal injuries this morning near Baltic, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver a 2024 Volvo left the roadway and entered the median after losing control of the vehicle due to poor weather conditions. The vehicle rolled before coming to a final rest. There were four occupants in the vehicle and three were ejected from the vehicle, one of which received fatal injuries. The other three occupants received serious non-life-threatening injuries and were transported to a nearby hospital. Seatbelt use is under investigation.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

That's Life by Tony Bender: Bunnies for Easter dinner and other culinary atrocities

I've always thought that for Easter dinner we ought to eat rabbits. Because I'm subversive. And for Christmas, reindeer sausage. Really, it hardly seems fair that bunnies and reindeer get all the glory, and then we eat ham. At the very least, pigs should have their own holiday.

I've eaten rabbit. It was years ago when I was custom combining in Oklahoma. Or Kansas. Someplace forgettable like that. Our hosts proposed a bunny buffet with one provision. I had to choose and dispatch the rabbit. If it had been up to me, we would have starved in Oklahoma. Or Kansas. Or Nebraska, wherever we were.

I may have been soft, but not too soft to eat fried rabbit. Delicious. It probably comes as no surprise that it tastes like chicken, which is the chameleon of meats.

Sometimes I wonder how certain foods became acceptable in some cultures and not in others. I mean, who decided that goat milk—or worse, fermented goat milk—was a delicacy? I assume alcohol was involved.

I've actually milked a goat but I don't put it on my resume because I lost the big goat-milking contest at the Ashley Rodeo about 20 years ago. Being a second place goat milker isn't all that impressive. I was pitted against Super Valu grocer Kirk Rueb which seemed a little unfair. After all, the man has his own dairy section. To make matters worse, he got a mellow goat. Mine was rambunctious. Also, I think Rambunctious Goats would be a great band name. Dibs.

The next day, however, we learned that Kirk's goat had died. I was conflicted. Was it a moral victory? All I know is milking a goat to death is worse than finishing second.

You know, if you get right down to it, in Germans From Russia Country, we do objectively eat some interesting things. Head cheese. Liver sausage and such. You can get in a bar fight defending the honor of your local liver sausage.

Heck, I was politely threatened by a lovely elderly lady from Reeder years ago for impugning the honor of lutefisk. I described it in a column as coagulated snot and she took umbrage to that. It's not easy getting a Norwegian fired up, but that's one way to do it. I wrote a correction describing it more fairly as "tasty" coagulated snot.

The worst of it is not the fact that lutefisk is soaked in lye. Poison, essentially. A Norwegian lady at Norsk Host Fest recalled that as a child, her fisherman father would dry fish on the docks. She was aghast when she saw dogs peeing on the fish. "Don't worry," he said. "Dat's da stuff ve send to Sveden!"

I lived in Juneau for three years and developed a real appreciation for seafood, including octopus. And you know alcohol was involved in that initial taste test.

I did radio commercials for Jerry's Meats. Slogan: "You can't beat Jerry's Meats!" Imagine the possibilities. Jerry sometimes gave me seafood that had been abandoned by sports fishermen.

One day, they were cutting up a 90-pound halibut, diminutive in comparison to some of the other monsters pulled from the deep. "Do you know what we call those?" Jerry asked. "Ping-pong paddles."

When my Grandpa Ben came to visit, I prepared an aromatic pot of King Crab legs. He stared for a while, not sure if it was some kind of joke or not, before declining. "Ach, they're too ugly!" So, I punted. He got a 15 cent package of ramen which he loved. In fact, that became a mainstay for the duration of his visit.

I remembered Grandma Bender serving up a steaming bowl of chicken feet more than once when I visited, and really, are crab legs any more off-putting than chicken feet? Perspective, I guess.

Generally, I have an adventurous spirit when it comes to exotic food, but I won't eat insects. Unless I'm on my motorcycle. But paying for chocolate-covered crickets? I don't think so, even if they have a high nutritional value. They're much lower in fat than pork, chicken, beef, and liver sausage—100 grams of crickets has 13 grams of protein and only 5 grams of fat.

Still... maybe I'll just have ramen.



South Dakota's high health care costs causing many to skip treatments

By Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

The high cost of obtaining health care in South Dakota – ranked second most expensive in the nation – is prompting some residents to forgo necessary medical care over worries they cannot afford it, according to a recent national data analysis.

South Dakota is followed only by North Carolina in a new national ranking of health care expenses based on the cost of medical care and insurance. At nearly \$12,500 per year, the state has the highest per-capita health care spending rate among all Great Plains states, the data show.

Largely based on data from KFF, formerly the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Forbes Advisor team examined nine metrics to determine which of the 50 states and Washington, D.C., had the highest and lowest annual health care costs for consumers.

In labeling South Dakota second highest, Forbes noted that the state has high rates of families that struggle to pay for child medical bills, high deductibles for individuals and families with insurance and high costs for policyholders within the Affordable Care Act marketplace. Forbes Advisor is a consumer financial analysis group sponsored in part by Forbes magazine.

The ranking comes as South Dakota continues to lag behind the nation and most neighboring states for median household income (\$69,457 in 2022) and also has the highest poverty rate among all Great Plains states (12.5%). KFF also reported in 2023 that South Dakota ranked 35th in the country for quality health care outcomes.

Taken together, the data paint a worrisome picture of access, affordability and quality of health care in South Dakota.

The high cost of health care has caused nearly 1 in 10 state residents to skip necessary medical care and 1 in 4 to forgo mental health treatment due to cost, according to another KFF study.

"If you delay needed care because you can't afford it, it's eventually going to cost you, the providers and the insurers a lot more money," said Les Masterson, an editor and insurance expert at Forbes Advisor. "That is also causing problems where people are getting sicker and dying younger."

Lack of competition, higher overhead costs

Masterson acknowledged that health care costs are high and rising across the country and that the variables that determine what medical care and insurance cost in each state are complicated.

Masterson and two South Dakota health care officials interviewed by News Watch said the state's high cost ranking can be attributed largely to a lack of competition among providers and insurers, worker shortages causing increased employee costs, higher overhead costs due to inflation, a high level of indigent care, and generally poor health condition of the population that increase risks and costs for insurers and providers.

"Health care is expensive, insurance is expensive and every citizen in this state who pays for those things knows that," said Tim Rave, CEO of the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations, which represents hospitals and clinics across the state.

And yet, Rave said, the convoluted and expensive modern system of health care economics is necessary to allow medical providers to remain viable.

"Hospitals in this state are nonprofit. But you still have to make money or you close the doors. And profit margins for them is in the red or at a maximum in the 3 to 4 percent range," he said.

Shelly Ten Napel, CEO of the Community Healthcare Association of the Dakotas, works to support

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health providers who often serve people with the least ability to pay. She said the rising costs of health care, particularly emergency, specialist and life-saving care, are putting some individuals and families into untenable situations.

"We're seeing the faces of that on a day-to-day basis of folks who can't afford coverage," she said. "We see the people with a cancer diagnosis who have to ask themselves if they are willing to bankrupt their family in order to get the care they need."

The high and rising cost of health care is causing angst for people of all income levels, however.

A February 2024 poll by KFF found that about 75% of adults were very or somewhat worried about being able to afford unexpected medical bills or pay for health care for themselves or their families. About half of poll respondents were worried they cannot afford their monthly insurance premiums or to pay for needed prescription drugs.

Medicaid expansion may lower costs in South Dakota

All three experts interviewed by News Watch pointed to recent Medicaid expansion as a possible path to reducing overall health care and insurance costs across the state.

South Dakota was a laggard among states that expanded eligibility for Medicaid, the federal health program for low-income adults, with opposition coming from Gov. Kristi Noem and the Republican leadership in the Legislature.

However, the state was forced to enact looser income guidelines for Medicaid eligibility in July 2023 after voters approved the expansion by a statewide referendum in 2022. Medicaid expansion in states was allowed by the federal government as part of the Affordable Care Act.

The expanded eligibility guidelines have been slow to catch on in South Dakota, as about 18,000 new Medicaid participants had entered the program as of February, far fewer than the roughly 43,000 additional participants projected when the referendum was passed.

The average monthly overall enrollment in Medicaid in South Dakota in 2023 was 145,350, according to state data. Of the \$1.27 billion spent on Medicaid in South Dakota in 2023, about \$875 million was in federal funds and the remaining \$402 million was in state money.

Some studies have shown that Medicaid expansion in other states has led to lower insurance premiums overall. Masterson suggested that greater Medicaid participation would help more lower-income South Dakota residents obtain medical coverage and care as well as reduce overall insurance and medical care costs.

Medicaid allows providers that would otherwise have to write off many medical care costs for low-income patients to receive some form of payment. Meanwhile, providing more preventive care and diagnostics to people who otherwise would not receive them reduces the need for emergency and life-saving care that cost far more, Masterson said.

"Preventive care is free, and providers get some of the cost paid by federal Medicaid," he said. "It will be interesting to see what Medicaid expansion does to lower costs in South Dakota in the future."

Data reveal South Dakota health care cost trends

According to KFF, which collects data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the National Health Statistics Group, South Dakotans saw their overall spending on health care nearly double from \$633 million in 2010 to \$1.12 billion in 2020.

The per-capita cost of health care nearly tripled over the past two decades, according to KFF, rising from \$4,157 per-capita in 2000 to \$7,766 in 2010 to \$12,495 in 2020. Throughout that 20-year period, South Dakota had the highest per-capita health care costs among all states in the Great Plains region, with North Dakota and Minnesota also near the top and Iowa on the low end.

While statistics can only shed a general light on health care costs and quality — which can vary widely by individual experience and situation — the data about the South Dakota health care system are not good in several areas.

South Dakota is the 23rd worst state for overall health care access and outcomes, according to 24 separate metrics analyzed by KFF in 2023. According to a further breakdown of that data, South Dakota ranked

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35th among the states in quality of health care outcomes and 26th in access to health care.

Some KFF survey data show improvement in South Dakota health care access, however.

While 59.7% of South Dakotans had some type of health insurance plan in 2010, that percentage rose to 64.7% in 2022. Meanwhile, 62% of South Dakotans had an employer-sponsored health plan in 2022, the 16th highest rate in the nation and above the U.S. average of 57%.

However, only 18.8% of Native Americans in South Dakota had an employer-sponsored health plan in 2022, the worst rate for Native Americans among all states, including New Mexico, Alaska and Montana.

Business trends don't favor lower prices

And even if two-thirds of South Dakotans with insurance have an employer-supported plan, it doesn't mean they won't face outsized health care costs, Ten Napel said.

The high number of small businesses, the high level of self employment and large agricultural industry prevent many state residents from benefiting from large employer plans that offer lower prices due to a wide subscriber base.

"Our employer environment is angled toward self employment and small employers, so (high health costs) are not surprising," said Ten Napel, whose organization supports community health care programs in South Dakota and North Dakota. "It reflects the lower employer contributions that are leading to higher employee contributions for small businesses, farmers and self employed people."

Rave, a former South Dakota lawmaker who began his career as a paramedic, said the state has done a good job of providing health coverage for children and low-income residents over the past two decades. However, any effort to offset costs for patients puts an additional burden on hospitals, which are seeing increased costs but are unable to turn patients away for any reason, he said.

"I think we do a good job of taking that burden off the families, but that does put the burden more on providers because they're not reimbursed for 100% of those charges," Rave said.

States can play a role in lowering health care costs

States are taking steps to reduce overall health care costs while increasing access, Ten Napel said.

In Minnesota, a large consortium of businesses was formed to expand the pool of policyholders to reduce costs. In North Dakota in 2019, she said, the state implemented a reinsurance program that uses federal and state funds to help insurance companies reduce costs for policyholders statewide.

And, Ten Napel said, South Dakota has had success with its Home Health program within Medicaid that provides additional medical services and support for low-income patients with serious, life-altering illnesses. State data show the program saved more than \$8 million in Medicaid costs in 2022 while improving care at home and through providers for qualifying patients with chronic illnesses.

However, South Dakota has not yet adopted a large-scale "value-based" model of reimbursement for medical services that has lowered overall costs in other states, Ten Napel said. That approach focuses more on education of patients and a greater focus on earlier testing and preventive care.

"That has not come to South Dakota as it has in a majority of other states," she said. "It's a reorientation of the health care system toward prevention, primary care, patient education and prevention, all things that reduce the number of life-impacting situations."

Ten Napel said her organization has made a concerted effort to improve patient education, so people know more about what programs can help them and how they can save money as they gain access to medical care. In addition to programs such as Medicaid and Medicare and subsidies within the Affordable Care Act marketplace, there are other programs available to help people in need access medical diagnosis and treatment, she said.

"The reality is that if you're talking about \$12,000 per-capita cost per year for health care, there's very few of us that have that in our back pocket," Ten Napel said. "So we all need help figuring out how to manage the current health care system and get the care we need."

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Prison staff memo: Tablet-based phone calls could come back, messaging remains suspended

Tablet communication shakeup contributed to unrest last week at penitentiary

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 1, 2024 5:21 PM

In a Sunday staff memo, the South Dakota Department of Corrections announced that tablet-based phone calls could soon be available again for inmates and their families – albeit with time constraints.

Tablet-based text and photo messaging will remain suspended indefinitely, the memo says. State officials did not respond to South Dakota Searchlight requests for verification of the memo, which surfaced on a social media support group for inmates and families.

It's the latest development in a prison communications shakeup that contributed to two nights of unrest and at least one staff injury last week at the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

The DOC shut down tablet-based phone calls and messaging on March 8 due to an investigation. No details about that investigation have been released.

In the days after the shutdown, family members and friends got notices on mobile and web platforms telling them that their accounts had been suspended. The DOC did not comment on the change until March 20, when it posted a notice about the investigation to the DOC website.

Inmates have been allowed to make phone calls using landlines since then, but family, friends and inmates have expressed frustration about that setup. During busier times, inmates wait in line for wall phones, and there are 20-minute call time limits. Until March 8, inmates could call from their cells at any time using the tablets.

Last Wednesday, one week after the notice was posted, a disturbance broke out at a state penitentiary cell block known as East Hall. Members of the media standing outside could hear inmates inside yelling "we want phones."

The next day, Gov. Kristi Noem said in an interview that the unrest began with a dispute over tablets, and said the tablet communications had been suspended because inmates had been using the devices for "nefarious" reasons.

Noem said the state is looking into whether the tablets can be used safely. They are provided for no cost by a contractor in return for commission payments generated by fee-based programs. Inmates and their friends and family members pay the fees when they connect via the messaging or phone apps.

More unrest came Thursday night and continued into Friday morning in East Hall. Late in the day Friday, the DOC told media outlets that an "ongoing search for contraband" was underway in the penitentiary.

Attorney General Marty Jackley's office, meanwhile, said the Division of Criminal Investigation is working to bring those responsible for the incidents to justice.

The executive director of the South Dakota State Employees Organization, Eric Ollila, told South Dakota Searchlight that inconsistent security policies were likely also a factor in the unrest. Staff concerns about lax discipline policies have been brewing for months, he said, suggesting that inmates felt empowered to act out.

The Sunday memo is the latest twist in the communication policy saga. It came from Amber Pirraglia, director of prisons. It says the DOC and its inspector general have worked to resolve the investigation into tablet communications.

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"In response to the investigation, the messaging app will continue to be disabled, indefinitely," it reads. The agency has "worked diligently over the past couple of weeks to establish appropriate guidelines for phone calls on tablets," the memo says. The new guidelines will limit inmates to three phone calls a day, each no longer than 20 minutes, using either tablets or the wall phones.

"Phone calls could be reinstated as early as this week as we finalize the rollout schedule," the memo reads. Inmates and their family members have talked about how tablet phone calls allow for more flexibility, but some have questioned the reasoning behind the three-call daily limit and 20-minute call duration.

Justine Moreau is a French national who met a South Dakota inmate named Richard Madetzke through a mail connection service in 2019. Last fall, after years of daily communications and several in-person visits, the two were married at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield.

She and Madetzke regularly spoke more than three times a day, she said, and they have watched movies together – her from home in France and him from his cell in Springfield – during long calls over the phone.

"We are definitely saving money" since the shutdown of tablet communications, Moreau said.

The resumption of tablet-based calls would be welcome, she said, though she'd rather see communications resume as they were before March 8.

The three-call limit is more concerning than the time limit, she said, though she "doesn't understand how limiting us to 20 minutes will make a difference."

More troubling, she said, have been the abrupt changes in communication policy and the lack of transparency from the state on the reasons for them.

"I feel like we are all being punished, and we don't know why," Moreau said.

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.

Oglala Sioux Tribe calls for ceasefire in Gaza

Tribe is one of several Native nations to pass similar resolutions

BY: AMELIA SCHAFER, RAPID CITY JOURNAL/ICT - APRIL 1, 2024 9:04 AM

RAPID CITY, S.D. – The Oglala Sioux Tribe is now one of a handful of Native nations in the United States to call for a ceasefire in Gaza after a resolution was presented to the council by the Oglala Lakota Chapter of the International Indigenous Youth Council.

The resolution, which passed 14-to-1, calls for state and federal representatives to advocate for fuel, water, food and supplies to be allowed into Gaza, to cease military aid to the Israeli government and for an immediate cease-fire.

"It was kind of nerve-wracking because of the lack of education on what's going on over there. We didn't know where our tribal leaders would be at," said Mato White Plume, Oglala Lakota and a member of the Youth Council. "But they supported us using our voices and speaking out, which let us know that they understand."

Oglala Lakota Youth Council representatives and community members delivered several speeches in support of the resolution, many comparing the treatment of Palestinian people to that of Lakota people by European settlers.

"We are the descendants of America's genocide, and we're still trying to heal from what they put us through. So when this genocide against Palestinians began in October, we felt it was crucial for all Indigenous people to stand with them and speak out against what's happening," White Plume said.

Recently, many have seen a large red, black and green painted banner waving at different Indigenous events, including the Lakota Nation Invitational in December. The banner reads "From Pine Ridge to Palestine," and was made by the Oglala Lakota Chapter of the International Indigenous Youth Council. The banner also caused the group to be expelled from the Denver March Powwow March 15, one of the largest competition powwows in North America.

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"That was really disheartening. The Denver March Powwow was founded out of resistance for the [Bureau of Indian Affairs], so they turned away from their roots," White Plume said. "We asked them to share their policy that justified this, but we didn't receive a response."

The Denver March Powwow's Powwow Committee did not respond to requests for comment.

In 2016, at the height of the No DAPL Movement, several Palestinians came to North Dakota to protest the Keystone XL Pipeline and Dakota Access Pipeline, White Plume said. Oglala Lakota Youth Council members referenced this act while urging the tribal council to support a cease-fire in Palestine.

Part of the resolution requested President Frank Star Comes Out advance a similar resolution to the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association, the Coalition of Large Tribes, the National Congress of American Indians and the U.S. Congress.

"This resolution wouldn't have passed without the Oglala Lakota Chapter of the International Indigenous Youth Council," said Charlee Brewer, an Oglala Lakota citizen and a local activist. "Their months-long activism made this happen, and I'm just really proud of them. I'm grateful that they allowed Carrie [Twiss] and I to come and share letters of support."

Since Israel launched its assault on the Gaza Strip following Hamas' attack of Israeli citizens on Oct. 7, over 30,000 Palestinian people – mostly civilians – have died. Food, water, medicine and other supplies are barred from entering Gaza through the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings.

Several Native Nations and Indigenous activist groups have issued statements condemning the violence in Gaza and calling for a ceasefire.

The Yurok Tribal Council, Winnemem Wintu Tribe in California and the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians have all passed similar resolutions. Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren stated he would be releasing a statement in Dec. 2023, but has not yet followed through.

The Oceti Sakowin Treaty Council, which represents the 49 tribes within the traditional Oceti Sakowin Nation, unanimously passed a similar resolution presented to them by Honor the Earth, an Indigenous activist group.

NDN Collective was among the first activist groups to publicly call for a ceasefire in Oct. 2023, and has published several statements in support of Palestine since 2021.

"These past few months it's been an honor to organize teach-ins and hold up banners at public Native American events across the country to raise awareness and build support for our Palestinian relatives," White Plume said. "So when we got our tribal council to stand behind us and call for a ceasefire and an immediate end to the illegal occupation, it was a good day."

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.

Biden campaign, Jan. 6 officers decry Trump use of 'political violence' in post of video

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 1, 2024 6:11 PM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's reelection campaign on Monday called on voters to disavow violence as a viable part of this year's campaign cycle, including comments made by his Republican opponent and former President Donald Trump.

Former U.S. Capitol Police Sergeant Aquilino Gonell, District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges and Biden-Harris Communications Director Michael Tyler said during a press conference Americans must reject the way Trump has campaigned so far.

"I will start by saying simply that political violence has no place in the United States of America. It should never be acceptable," Tyler said. "This is a conversation that should not even be necessary. In fact, it's a conversation that even a decade ago would have been unrecognizable in our political discourse. But it's not anymore."

Trump's campaign is recycling many of the themes of his unsuccessful bid for the White House four

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years ago that eventually led to a violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Trump posting on social media over the weekend, showing Biden "hogtied and gagged in the back of a pickup truck," is another example of how Trump chooses "to traffic in violence as he seeks to regain power," Tyler said.

The Associated Press said in its report the video showed "the image of a hog-tied President Joe Biden painted on the tailgate of a passing truck."

Steven Cheung, Trump campaign spokesman, said in a written statement that, "Democrats and crazed lunatics have not only called for despicable violence against President Trump and his family, they are actually weaponizing the justice system against him."

Trump faces 88 criminal charges in four cases, including for his role inciting violence on Jan. 6 based on false claims of election interference and a separate case regarding classified documents.

Trump traveling to Michigan, Wisconsin

The press conference was held inside the Democratic National Committee building in Washington, D.C., just ahead of Trump campaigning in Michigan and Wisconsin on Tuesday.

Gonell criticized Trump for embracing the people convicted of crimes for their role in the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, whom he's called "patriots" and "political prisoners."

"His failure to denounce violence on Jan. 6 2021, is a slap in the face to every officer who put their life on the line that day," Gonell said. "He doesn't give a damn about us."

Gonell said Trump has not called any of the police officers injured in that attack in the three years since his supporters marched from a rally he held near the White House to the Capitol, before attacking police, breaking into the building and ending the country's history of peaceful transitions of power.

"For Trump, the violence is a weapon to get what he wants — power, revenge, retribution," Gonell said.

Republicans cannot be depended on to defend the U.S. Constitution and the rule of law, since they have made excuses for Trump's past behaviors, he said.

"Every single American should listen to what Trump is saying," Gonell said. "He's saying that he's willing to do January 6 again. That's frightening. And he must not be elected in November."

Hodges rebuked Trump for "continuing to encourage political violence" within the United States.

"My fellow officers and I experienced that type of violence at the hands of a mob of MAGA extremists on January 6, all because they bought into Donald Trump's lie that the 2020 election was stolen," Hodges said.

Trump shouldn't say that he supports law enforcement when he also chooses to "inflame and encourage political violence at every turn," Hodges said.

"You can't claim to be on our side and then promise pardons for the violent insurrectionists who assaulted me and my brave colleagues, and killed my fellow officers Brian Sicknick and Jeffrey Smith," he said.

The District of Columbia's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner ruled that Sicknick died of natural causes following the attack on the Capitol. The USCP said in a written statement in April 2021 that it accepted the findings but that they did "not change the fact Officer Sicknick died in the line of duty, courageously defending Congress and the Capitol."

Smith died by suicide in the days after he was attacked by pro-Trump rioters on Jan. 6. The Department of Justice classified his death as having occurred in the line of duty.

The D.C. Police and Firefighters' Retirement and Relief Board came to the same conclusion, writing in a letter that "Officer Smith sustained a personal injury on January 6, 2021, while performing his duties and that his injury was the sole and direct cause of his death," according to NBC News.

Recasting Jan. 6

During Monday's press conference, Gonell rejected attempts by Trump and many of his supporters to rewrite or recast the events of Jan. 6 as nonviolent or simply a tour of the Capitol.

"We were being attacked. We were being crushed. Members of Congress were rushing to some of these areas to hide for refuge or escape the building," Gonell said. "If it wasn't for what we did on that day, I

don't think they would have made it out."

Some of those members, he said, have "the audacity to tell me that nothing happened and if it did happen, it wasn't as bad as it was."

"But they know on January 6th who was culpable," he added. "They know how fearful they were on that day. And if it wasn't because of what we did, they wouldn't have survived."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Biden to visit Port of Baltimore Friday to review federal response on Key Bridge

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 1, 2024 3:00 PM

President Joe Biden will tour the Port of Baltimore and the site of the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse Friday as long-term efforts to reopen the port continue, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday.

"President Biden will travel to Baltimore on Friday to visit the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, meet with state and local officials and get (an) on-the-ground look at federal response efforts," Jean-Pierre said.

The U.S. Coast Guard is leading a coordinated effort to clear debris blocking shipping traffic to the port, Jean-Pierre said.

Cranes and barges contracted by the U.S. Navy had arrived in recent days to assist in that effort, according to a statement from the Navy. Among the ships was the Chesapeake 1000, the largest heavy-lift crane on the East Coast with the capacity to lift 1,000 tons, Jean-Pierre said.

Two other barges with a combined capacity of 350 tons have also arrived in Baltimore Harbor, with a fourth, 400-ton capacity barge scheduled to arrive next week, the Navy said. The barges will be used to remove submerged portions of the collapsed bridge, the Navy said.

The shutdown of the port, which approached its second week Monday after a massive ship struck and toppled the bridge March 26, is a major issue for the local economy, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said last week. The port supports 8,000 direct jobs that pay roughly \$2 million per day in wages, Buttigieg said.

Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su was in Baltimore Monday to meet with local stakeholders, as the department works with state and local officials "to determine how to assist workers out of work due to the closure of the port," Jean-Pierre said.

Biden was leading a "whole-of-government approach to the collapse," and working with Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, the city's congressional delegation and local leaders, Jean-Pierre said.

The Biden administration will continue to talk with state and local leaders to understand the scope of the work needed to build a bridge to replace the Key Bridge and to reopen the busy Port of Baltimore to shipping traffic, she said.

No formal White House meetings with congressional leaders about the federal response had been scheduled Monday, but Jean-Pierre said White House staff was in regular contact with Congress and the Transportation Department.

She said she couldn't estimate a timeline for when the port would reopen, but stressed that the administration would "do everything we can" to reopen the port and construct a bridge.

"It is a complicated scenario, so I don't have a timeline on that," she said. "We're going to have conversations with congressional members. We're going to certainly talk to them on what else is needed ... There is going to be additional funding needed to get this done."

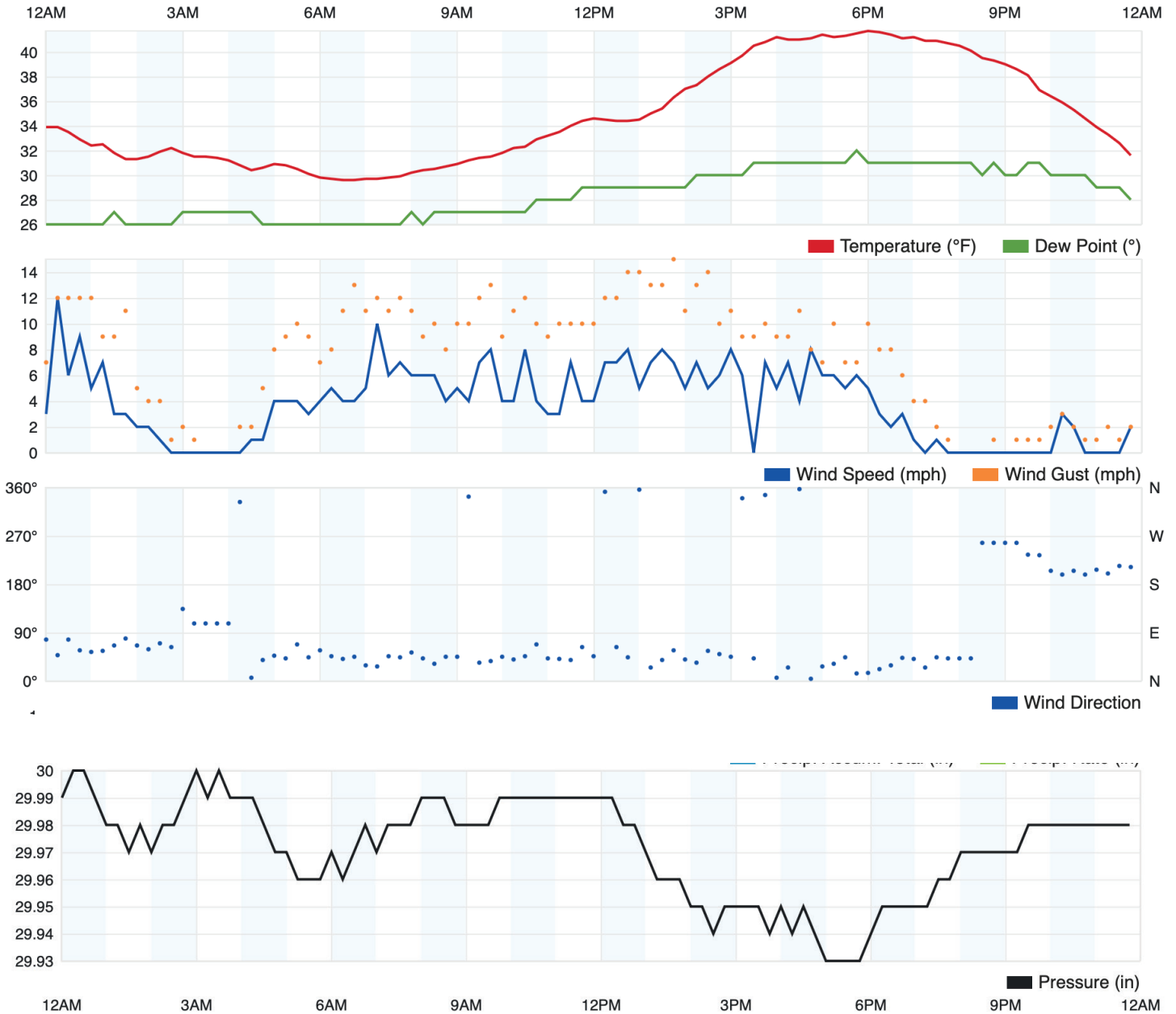
Jean-Pierre said the White House was communicating with the state to "get a sense of how much this is going to cost." Biden has said that the federal government would cover the costs of rebuilding the bridge.

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny
then Sunny
and Breezy

High: 50 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy
and Blustery
then Mostly
Clear

Low: 25 °F

Wednesday



Sunny

High: 51 °F

Wednesday
Night



Clear

Low: 23 °F

Thursday



Sunny

High: 55 °F

Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<i>Highs:</i> 44 to 52°	<i>Lows:</i> 22 to 29°	<i>Highs:</i> 45 to 55°	<i>Highs:</i> 50 to 58°	<i>Highs:</i> 54 to 61°
NW 30-40mph	NW 15-30mph	N 20-30mph	E 10-20mph	SE 25-40mph

Steady Warmup →

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Could see a few light showers in the far northeast of the state this afternoon otherwise most of the area will see dry conditions for the next few days along with a steady warmup. Winds will be a little gusty though.

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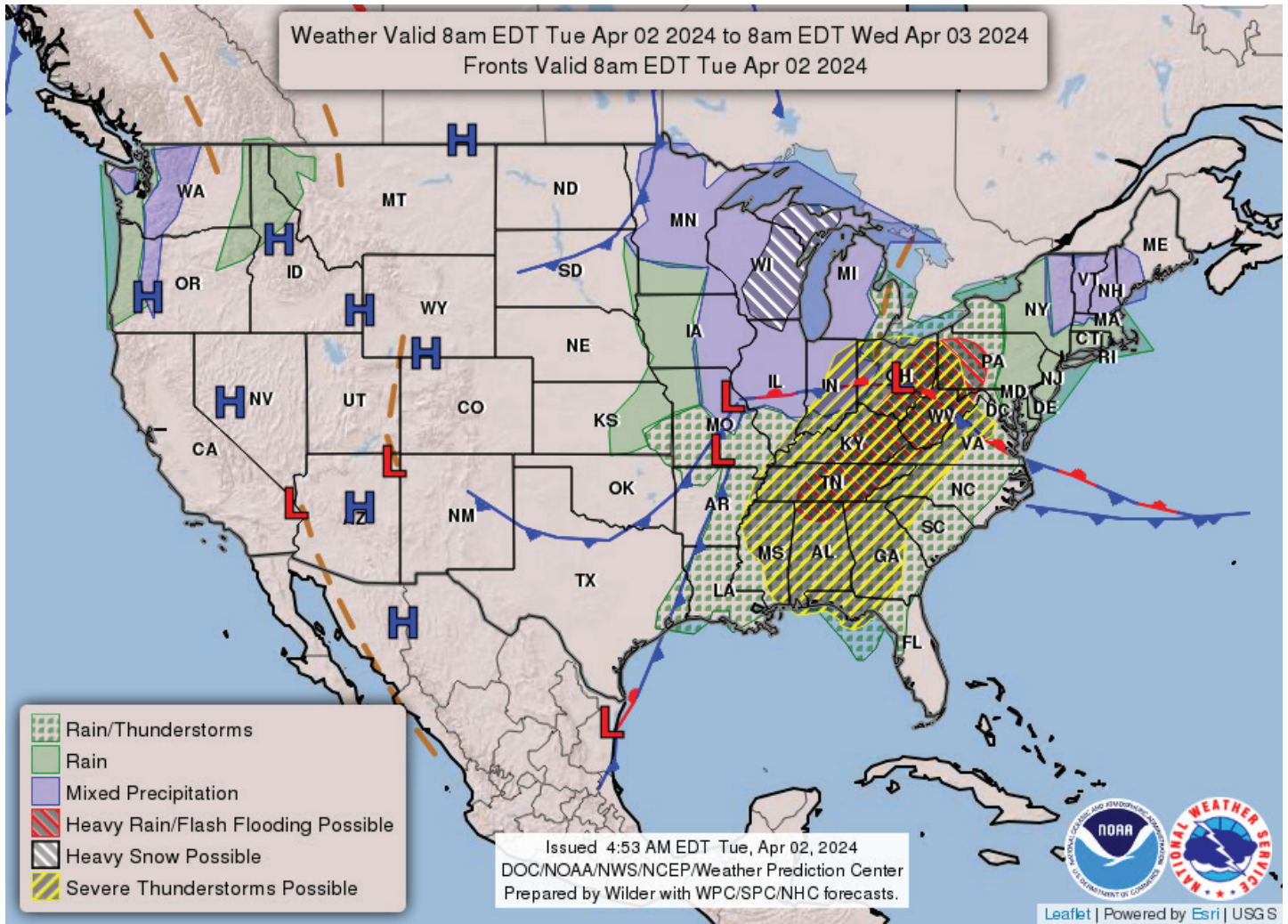
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 42 °F at 6:08 PM
Low Temp: 30 °F at 6:39 AM
Wind: 15 mph at 12:51 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 84 in 1921
Record Low: 3 in 1975
Average High: 51
Average Low: 26
Average Precip in April.: 0.08
Precip to date in April: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 2.14
Precip Year to Date: 0.85
Sunset Tonight: 8:03:49 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:05:45 am

Day length: 12 hours, 56 minutes



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Today in Weather History

April 2, 1998: The James River began to flood in early April from Columbia to Stratford. The James rose to around 1.5 feet above flood stage at Columbia and Stratford through April into May. The James River mainly flooded farmland, pastureland, and a few roads in the vicinity of the channel.

April 2, 2010: In South Dakota, a band of heavy snow set up across Corson and Dewey counties during the early morning hours of April 2nd. Along with heavy wet snow, northwest winds gusting up to 40 mph developed. By the time the storm ended in the late morning hours, 6 to 8 inches of snow had fallen. The heavy snow, combined with the strong winds, downed many power poles across the region along with making travel treacherous. Some snowfall amounts included; 4 inches at Eagle Butte; 6 inches at Timber Lake, McLaughlin, and 14 miles north of Isabel; 7 inches at Isabel and 6 miles southeast of McIntosh; 8 inches southwest of Keldron. More than 400 poles were lost to the heavy snow leaving approximately 800 people without power. Eighty linemen worked through the Easter weekend in the snow and mud. McLaughlin and Keldron were the hardest hit. Several hundred people were still without power on April 5th.

1936: An estimated F4 tornado cut a 15-mile path through Crisp County, GA. The hardest hit area was the town of Cordele, where 276 homes were destroyed in a five-block swath through the town. The storm was on a course that would have missed the center of town, but it made a left turn towards the end of its path. 23 people were killed and 500 injured. Total damage was \$3 million.

1957: An F3 tornado tore through Dallas, TX. 10 people were killed, and 216 were injured. Total damage was \$1.5 million. This tornado was among the most photographed and studied in history.

1975 - The northeastern U.S. was in the grips of a severe storm which produced hurricane force winds along the coast, and two to three feet of snow in Maine and New Hampshire. Winds atop Mount Washington NH gusted to 140 mph. (David Ludlum)

1975 - The biggest snowstorm of record for so late in the season paralyzed Chicago, IL. Up to 20 inches of snow fell in extreme northeastern Illinois, and 10.9 inches of snow closed Chicago's O'Hare Airport. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - Severe thunderstorms spawned fifty-six tornadoes in the central U.S., including seventeen in the Red River Region of Texas and Oklahoma. The tornadoes claimed thirty lives, and injured 383 other persons. A violent tornado near Messer OK left only the carpet tack strips on the slab of a house it destroyed, and carried a motel sign thirty miles. (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1987 - Eleven cities in Florida reported record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee with a reading of 31 degrees. The low of 48 degrees at Key West smashed their previous record for the date by 13 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced up to nine inches of rain around New Orleans LA causing 18 million dollars damage. A tornado caused three million dollars damage at Slidell LA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Strong and gusty winds prevailed from California to Colorado and Wyoming. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Lancaster CA, and reached 85 mph at Berthoud Pass CO. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in the Colorado Rockies. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in North Carolina and Virginia during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail, and spawned a tornado near Chester VA which caused half a million dollars damage. A storm system produced snow and gale force winds across northern Michigan, with 8.3 inches of snow reported at Marquette. Temperatures in the north central U.S. soared from morning lows in the 20s and 30s to afternoon highs in the 60s and 70s. Eight cities reported record highs for the date, including Havre MT with a reading of 77 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Heavy rainfall in the Northeast produced flooding in parts of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Severe flooding along the Delaware River forced the evacuation of 6,000 residents in New Jersey and over 5,700 in Pennsylvania during the weekend of the 2nd-3rd. Around 3,200 homes in New Jersey were damaged, while one fatality was reported in New York (Associated Press).

2006 - Tornadoes and hail as big as softballs ripped through eight Midwestern states, killing at least 27 people, injuring scores and destroying hundreds of homes. In Tennessee, tornadoes killed 23 people, including an infant and a family of four. Severe thunderstorms, many producing tornadoes, also struck parts of Iowa, Kentucky, Arkansas, Missouri, Ohio, Illinois and Indiana. Strong wind was blamed for at least three deaths in Missouri. The weather service's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Okla., said it had preliminary reports of 63 tornadoes. The worst damage occurred throughout the Tennessee Valley.

2015 - Late night severe storms produced 80 to 100 mph straight-line winds that caused extensive damage from Hutchinson to Newton and Wichita. An 89 mph wind gust was reported at the Kansas Aviation Museum located in southeast Wichita. (NWS, Wichita, KS)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ALL I WANT IS...

The James family gathered together for a quiet time and discussion. Albert climbed into his father's lap and hugged him with all his might. Teasingly, he asked, "Well, son, what do you want now?"

"Nothing," he answered. "All I want is you!"

How unfortunate for us that we rarely go to our Heavenly Father unless we want something. It seems that when we approach Him it is for something that contributes to our wellbeing, our health, family problems, issues at work, our financial needs or a friend who has come to us for help. Too often we are more interested in the gifts that the Giver has to give us than the Giver. We ask rather than admire and we pray rather than praise and we want rather than worship.

It is true that our Lord has invited us to ask if we want to receive and to come to Him for anything and everything – no matter when or what. For most of us it is a long-standing habit that might be hard to break.

Perhaps it would change the nature of our relationship with God if, on occasion, we simply said to Him in a prayer of gratitude, "All I want is You!"

Prayer: Lord, we truly love You! Forgive us for hearts and minds that only focus on our wants and needs. Help us to also express our love and praise. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name! 1 Chronicles 29:13



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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.29.24

11 30 33 38 60 16

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$36,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 28 Mins 15
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.01.24

6 16 32 41 44 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,600,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 43
DRAW: Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.01.24

2 11 29 43 45 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 58 Mins 14
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.24

1 15 19 30 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$40,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 58
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.01.24

12 15 28 30 39 12

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 27
DRAW: Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.01.24

19 24 40 42 56 23

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$1,090,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 27
DRAW: Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

A 12-year-old student opens fire at a school in Finland and wounds 3 others

HELSINKI (AP) — A 12-year-old student opened fire at a secondary school in southern Finland and wounded three other students on Tuesday, police said. The suspect was later arrested.

Heavily armed police cordoned off the lower secondary school, with some 800 students, in the city of Vantaa, just outside the capital, Helsinki, after receiving a call about a shooting incident at 09:08 a.m.

Police said both the suspect and the wounded were 12 years old. The suspect was arrested in the Helsinki area later Tuesday with a handgun in his possession, police said.

The condition of the three wounded students wasn't immediately clear.

Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo posted on X that he was "deeply shocked" over the shooting.

In the past decades, Finland has witnessed two major deadly school shootings.

In November 2007, a 18-year-old student armed with a semi-automatic pistol opened fire at the premises of the Jokela high school in Tuusula, southern Finland, killing nine people. He was found dead with self-inflicted wounds.

Less than a year later, in September 2008, a 22-year-old student shot and killed 10 people with a semi-automatic pistol at a vocational college in Kauhajoki, southwestern Finland, before fatally shooting himself.

In the Nordic nation of 5.6 million, there are more than 1.5 million licensed firearms and about 430,000 license holders, according to the Finnish Interior Ministry. Hunting and gun-ownership have long traditions in the sparsely-populated northern European country.

Responsibility for granting permits for ordinary firearms rests with local police departments.

Following the school shootings in 2007 and 2008, Finland tightened its gun laws by raising the minimum age for firearms ownership and giving police greater powers to make background checks on individuals applying for a gun license.

World Central Kitchen charity halts

Gaza operations after apparent Israeli strike kills 7 workers

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — An apparent Israeli airstrike killed six international aid workers with the World Central Kitchen and their Palestinian driver, the charity said Tuesday, in a potentially major setback to efforts to deliver aid by sea to Gaza, where Israel's offensive against Hamas has pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation.

The food charity, founded by celebrity chef José Andrés, said it was immediately suspending operations in the region.

The source of fire late Monday could not be independently confirmed. The Israeli military expressed "sincere sorrow" over the deaths while stopping short of accepting responsibility.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top military spokesman, said that officials are reviewing the incident at the highest levels. He says an independent investigation will be launched that "will help us reduce the risk of such an event from occurring again."

Footage showed the bodies, several wearing protective gear with the charity's logo, at a hospital in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. Those killed include three British nationals, an Australian, a Polish national and an American-Canadian dual citizen, according to hospital records.

The charity said the team was traveling in a three-car convoy that included two armored vehicles.

"Despite coordinating movements with the (Israeli army), the convoy was hit as it was leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route."

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Erin Gore, the CEO of the charity, said "this is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organizations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war. This is unforgivable."

Three aid ships from the Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus arrived earlier Monday carrying some 400 tons of food and supplies organized by the charity and the United Arab Emirates, the group's second shipment after a pilot run last month. The Israeli military was involved in coordinating both deliveries.

The U.S., which has provided key military and diplomatic support for Israel's offensive, has touted the sea route as a new way to deliver desperately needed aid to northern Gaza and plans to build its own floating dock, with construction expected to take several weeks.

The U.N. has said much of the population is on the brink of starvation, largely cut off from the rest of the territory by Israeli forces. Israel has barred UNRWA, the main U.N. agency in Gaza, from making deliveries to the north, and other aid groups say sending truck convoys north has been too dangerous because of the military's failure to ensure safe passage.

The UNRWA said in its latest report that 173 of its workers have been killed in Gaza. The figure does not include workers for other aid organizations.

The bodies of the aid workers have been taken to a hospital in the southern city of Rafah on the Egyptian border, according to an Associated Press reporter at the hospital. The foreigners' bodies will be evacuated out of Gaza and the Palestinian driver's body will be handed to his family in Rafah for burial.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese confirmed that Zomi Frankcom, 44, of Melbourne, was among those killed and said his government has requested an explanation from Israel.

"This is someone who was volunteering overseas to provide aid through this charity for people who are suffering tremendous deprivation in Gaza. And this is just completely unacceptable," Albanese told reporters.

"We want full accountability for this because this is a tragedy that should never have occurred."

Poland's Foreign Ministry posted "sincerest words of sympathy" to the family of a volunteer who had offered assistance to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, without saying how he was killed. The Foreign Ministry said it is requesting an explanation from Israel.

Britain's Foreign Office said it was aware of reports of the death of a British national in Gaza and was "urgently seeking further information."

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people and abducting around 250 hostages. Israel responded with one of the deadliest and most destructive offensives in recent history.

At least 32,845 Palestinians have been killed, around two-thirds of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count. Israel blames the civilian toll on Palestinian militants because they fight in dense residential areas.

Aid groups have repeatedly called for a humanitarian cease-fire, saying it's the only way to reach people in need. The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent months trying to broker another cease-fire and hostage release but the indirect talks between Israel and Hamas remain bogged down.

Hamas is believed to be holding some 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others after freeing most of the rest during a cease-fire in November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Mosques in NYC struggle to house and feed an influx of Muslim migrants this Ramadan

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Above a bodega in New York City's Harlem neighborhood, a mosque congregation hosts iftar, the traditional Islamic end of fast meal, for hundreds of hungry migrants every night during this holy month of Ramadan.

Up north in the Bronx, an imam has turned the two-story brick residence that houses his mosque into a makeshift overnight shelter for migrants, many of them men from his native Senegal.

Islamic institutions in the Big Apple are struggling to keep up with the needs of the city's migrant popula-

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tion as an increasing number of asylum seekers come from Muslim-majority African countries. The challenge has become all the more pronounced during Ramadan, which began March 11 and ends April 9.

Many mosques have opened their doors to migrants during the daylight hours, becoming de facto day centers where new arrivals can find a quiet place to rest and recover, oftentimes following restless nights sleeping on the streets or in the subway.

Muslim leaders say they've stepped up their appeals for donations of money, food, clothing and other supplies in recent days.

"We're doing what we can do, but we can't do everything. That's the bottom line," said Moussa Sanogo, assistant imam at the Masjid Aqsa-Salam in Harlem, just north of Central Park. "These brothers, they don't eat enough. They're starving when they get here. Can you imagine? Starving. In America."

Imam Omar Niass, who runs Jamhiyatu Ansaru-Deen, the mosque in the Bronx, said providing a place for newly arrived migrants to bed down is the least he can do, even if it has come at great personal expense.

His utility bills have long since outpaced his ability to pay. He estimates he's behind about \$7,000 on the home's electricity service and another \$11,000 on water service.

"In our culture, you can't deny the people who come to the mosque," he said on a recent Friday as more than 50 men arrived for afternoon prayers. "We keep receiving the people because they have nowhere to go. If they come, they stay. We do what we can to feed them, to help them."

The latest migrant surge has seen more than 185,000 asylum seekers arrive in New York City since the spring of 2022, with Africans from majority Muslim nations such as Senegal, Guinea and Mauritania among the top nationalities represented in new cases in federal immigration courts in the state.

New York City's estimated 275 mosques were among the first places to feel the impact of the African wave, as they're often migrants' first stop upon arriving in the city, said Assefash Makonnen, of African Communities Together, a Harlem-based advocacy group supporting African immigrants.

But relying solely on the generosity of faith-based communities — many of which are already struggling to keep afloat — isn't sustainable in the long run, she said.

Last summer, Democratic Mayor Eric Adams announced to fanfare a program meant to provide funding, security and other support for up to 75 mosques, churches and synagogues that agreed to provide overnight shelter to migrants.

So far, though, just six houses of worship holding around 100 beds have been approved to provide additional space for the more than 64,000 migrants currently housed by the city in hotels and other shelters.

Bishop Matthew Heyd of the Episcopal Diocese of New York said the challenge for many faith-based institutions is that they're located in older buildings that don't meet current fire safety standards.

With more "commonsense" regulations, he said, houses of worship are prepared to provide 5,000 additional beds for migrants at a fraction of the cost the city is currently paying to shelter migrants in hotels across the five boroughs.

"We want to be part of the solution to this. We have been before, and can be now," Heyd said, referring to a network of faith-based shelters that grew in response to the city's homeless crisis in the 1980s.

Adams spokesperson Kayla Mamelak said the city, in response to the concerns, lowered the maximum number of beds permitted at faith-based shelters earlier this year from 19 to 15, meaning they wouldn't be required to have sprinkler systems under city building codes.

"We are making changes where we can," she said. "Obviously the health and safety of the people we are sheltering has to be the priority. You just can't walk into a church and turn it into a shelter."

In the Bronx, Niass said he hasn't given the city program much thought. He also stressed he doesn't collect rent from the migrants, in contrast to the illegal, dangerously overcrowded migrant boarding houses the city has shut down in recent weeks.

Still, the conditions at the mosque are less than ideal.

On a recent visit, men rested on the floor of a basement prayer room in between the day's five prayer times. More lounged out in the backyard, where there was a microwave and hot water kettle set up for preparing basic meals, as well as a shed for storing luggage and a row of file cabinets for incoming mail.

Near the driveway was a portable toilet covered in a blue tarp that did little to mask the odors that drew swarms of flies.

Malick Thiam, a Senegalese migrant who has been staying at Niass' mosque for about a month, said he's thankful for the hospitality but looks forward to finding a place of his own.

The 29-year-old, who arrived in the country in August, said he's recently started work making late-night food deliveries. He said he typically returns to the mosque as others get up for early morning work shifts, allowing him to avoid conflicts as men jockey over sleeping spots.

"Sometimes they got fighting, sometimes they got many problems," Thiam said, speaking in clear but at times broken English as he relaxed in the mosque's backyard. "Living here is not easy. It is difficult. It is very, very difficult."

Back in Harlem, Alphabacar Diallo is similarly thankful for the support Masjid Aqsa-Salam has provided, but is anxious to get on with his life. Like many others coming for iftar, the 39-year-old migrant from Guinea says he's still waiting for work authorization some eight months after arriving in the country.

Until then, the mosque provides him a place to keep warm, fed and close to the faith that's sustained him. "Without the masjid," he said in French through a translator, "I don't know where I'd be."

The Latest | Aid group says Israeli airstrike in Gaza killed at least 7 of its workers

By The Associated Press undefined

An aid group says an Israeli airstrike on its workers in Gaza killed at least seven people, including several foreigners.

The World Central Kitchen, the food charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés, said early Tuesday that the seven killed include citizens of Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom and a U.S.-Canada dual citizen. It did not provide a breakdown and said at least one Palestinian was also killed.

It said the workers were in the process of delivering desperately needed food aid that had arrived by sea on Monday when they were struck late that evening. Israel has said it is investigating the incident.

Also Tuesday, Iran's official IRNA news agency said Tehran sent an "important" message to the United States over an alleged Israeli airstrike at the Iranian consulate in Syria that killed two Iranian generals and five officers.

Iran relayed the message after it summoned a Swiss envoy in Tehran late Monday, the report said. It did not provide more details about the message but said Iran claimed the U.S. had "responsibility" for the strike. Switzerland has looked out for America's interests in Iran since the 1979 U.S. Embassy hostage crisis.

Israel's war in Gaza has killed more than 32,000 Palestinians, the territory's Health Ministry says. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tally, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. The war began on Oct. 7, when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage.

Currently:

- Aid group says Israeli strike kills 7 of its workers in Gaza, including foreigners
- Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Syria killed 2 generals and 5 other officers, Iran says
- Israel clears way to shutter Al Jazeera. Netanyahu says 'terror channel' airs incitement
- US pushes alternatives to Rafah invasion in Hamas war talks with Israel
- As Israel withdraws from Shifa Hospital, accounts from military and witnesses differ wildly
- Find more AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

AID GROUP SAYS ISRAELI AIRSTRIKE KILLS AT LEAST 7 OF ITS WORKERS, INCLUDING FOREIGNERS
DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — An apparent Israeli airstrike killed six international aid workers with the World Central Kitchen charity and their Palestinian driver, the aid group said Tuesday, hours after it brought a new shipload of food into northern Gaza, which has been isolated and pushed to the brink of famine by Israel's offensive.

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Footage showed the bodies of the dead at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. Several of them wore protective gear with the charity's logo.

The food charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés said early Tuesday that the seven killed include citizens of Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom and a U.S.-Canada dual citizen.

"This is a tragedy. Humanitarian aid workers and civilians should NEVER be a target. EVER," WCK spokeswoman Linda Roth said in a statement.

The source of fire late Monday could not be independently confirmed. The Israeli military said it was conducting a review "to understand the circumstances of this tragic incident."

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Tuesday his government requested an explanation from Israel of how four international aid workers including an Australian woman were killed in the apparent airstrike in Gaza.

"This is someone who was volunteering overseas to provide aid through this charity for people who are suffering tremendous deprivation in Gaza. And this is just completely unacceptable," Albanese told reporters.

"We want full accountability for this because this is a tragedy that should never have occurred," Albanese added.

JAPAN WILL LIFT FUNDING FREEZE ON UN AGENCY SUPPORTING PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

TOKYO — Japan says it will lift a funding freeze on a United Nations' agency supporting Palestinian refugees that Tokyo had imposed in response to the alleged involvement of the agency's staff in last year's Hamas attack on Israel.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa told reporters on Tuesday that Japan will resume its \$35 million contribution planned for 2023 for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA.

"The humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territory (of Gaza) continues to worsen, and there is no time to waste," Kamikawa said. "As a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, Japan has a responsibility to respond to the crisis, and UNRWA's involvement is indispensable to carry out the humanitarian support."

The resumption comes days after UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini visited Tokyo seeking Japan's funding resumption. In his meeting with Kamikawa, Lazzarini pledged a monitoring mechanism as part of the agency's effort to step up transparency, neutrality and staff training.

Japan joined the United States and other countries in January in suspending funding for the U.N. agency following the alleged involvement of a dozen UNRWA staffers in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel.

IRAN SENDS 'IMPORTANT' MESSAGE TO US OVER AIRSTRIKE AT IRANIAN CONSULATE IN SYRIA

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's official IRNA news agency says Tehran has sent an "important" message to the United States over an alleged Israeli airstrike at the Iranian consulate in Syria that killed two Iranian generals and five officers.

Iran relayed the message after it summoned a Swiss envoy in Tehran, the report said Tuesday. It did not provide more details about the message but said Iran claimed the U.S. had "responsibility" for the strike. Switzerland has looked out for America's interests in Iran since the 1979 U.S. Embassy hostage crisis.

Iran's envoy to the U.N also asked in a letter for an "immediate" U.N. Security Council meeting to discuss the strike.

President Ebrahim Raisi attended a Supreme National Security Council meeting Monday night to discuss the strike, Iranian state TV reported. It said the meeting decided on a "required" reaction to the strike but gave no details. The council is in charge of important decisions on domestic and foreign issues.

Groups of people rallied Monday night to protest the strike in several cities in Iran, state TV said Tuesday, noting that protesters demanded retaliatory action against Israel. Some burned Israeli and the U.S. flags.

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard on Monday said that seven of its members including two generals were killed in an Israeli airstrike that struck the Iranian consulate in the Syrian capital.

It was the deadliest strike on an Iranian diplomatic post in decades and appeared to signify an escalation of Israel's targeting of Iranian military officials and their allies in Syria. Such strikes have intensified since

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Hamas militants — who are supported by Iran — attacked Israel on Oct. 7.

In 1998, eight Iranian diplomats and staff of the country's consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif city in Afghanistan were killed during a raid on the diplomatic site as the Taliban were battling to take control of the city.

UN SECURITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT SAYS PALESTINIANS EXPECTED TO SEND LETTER REQUESTING FULL MEMBERSHIP

UNITED NATIONS – The president of the U.N. Security Council says the Palestinians are expected to send a letter in the next few days outlining their request for full membership in the United Nations.

Malta's U.N. Ambassador Vanessa Frazier, whose country took over the rotating president on Monday, said once the letter is received it will be shared with council members and will then likely be discussed in a closed meeting.

Frazier said the council's monthly Mideast meeting on April 18 will be at ministerial meeting, which is expected to focus on the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and the council's demand for a cease-fire during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan which ends on April 9 and which both parties have rejected.

The Palestinian request for full U.N. membership is also expected to be raised at the meeting, assuming the letter has been received, she said.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas delivered the Palestinian Authority's application to become the 194th member of the United Nations to then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Sept. 23, 2011, before addressing world leaders at the General Assembly.

That bid failed because the Palestinians failed to get the required support of nine of the Security Council's 15 members. Even if they did, the United States, Israel's closest ally, had promised to veto any council resolution endorsing Palestinian membership.

FRANCE CIRCULATES PROPOSED UN RESOLUTION CALLING FOR CEASE-FIRE

UNITED NATIONS – France circulated a proposed new U.N. resolution that would call for an immediate ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and the immediate release of all hostages seized during Hamas' surprise attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7.

France's U.N. Ambassador Nicolas de Riviere told reporters before presenting the draft resolution to Security Council members at a closed meeting late Monday that the draft resolution has no "time limitation," stressing that "we want to move to a permanent cease-fire."

The Security Council issued its first demand for a cease-fire last Monday for the remainder of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan which ends April 9. The United States, Israel's close ally, abstained, angering Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who canceled a visit to Washington by a high-level delegation in their strongest public clash since the war began. Both Israel and Hamas rejected the council's demands.

De Riviere said the draft resolution condemns Hamas' "terrorist attacks" on Oct. 7 – something the Security Council has refused to do in two previous humanitarian resolutions and the Ramadan cease-fire resolution.

The proposed resolution also demands immediate humanitarian access throughout Gaza, where hunger is rife and starvation has already led to the deaths of children.

Forced from their Gaza home by Israeli troops, a family makes a frightening walk through a war zone

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — It wasn't lack of food that pushed Heba al-Haddad and her family to leave their home in Gaza City. They had a source of clean water and could live off boiled peas. It wasn't the incessant shelling. They felt the stairways would protect them even in a direct hit on their building.

Even watching soldiers force neighbors from their homes — some in their underwear, some apparently pulled away for detention — didn't convince al-Haddad to leave Rimal, once Gaza City's most upscale neighborhood but now a hellscape of destroyed buildings and rubble-filled streets.

It took a unit of 14 Israeli soldiers storming her apartment to force her out. They ordered al-Haddad, her husband and his elderly parents — one half-blind and the other in a wheelchair — their two teenage

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sons and seven other family members to leave in the middle of the night on March 21.

The soldiers handed them glow sticks with strict instructions: Walk south with a woman in front holding a stick so soldiers at checkpoints don't shoot you. Later, she learned the troops set fire to the house after they left.

"I can't describe the terror of leaving the house, and we know that outside is a war zone," al-Haddad told The Associated Press. She spoke from Rafah, at the far southern end of the Gaza Strip after a harrowing 10-hour walk out of the north along the main coastal road, now an obstacle course of craters and debris lined with tanks and snipers.

Witnesses say Israeli troops conducted building-by-building expulsions of residents in nearby neighborhoods during the military's two-week raid on Gaza City's Shifa Hospital, which triggered furious fighting across the area. Israeli troops ended their assault on Shifa early Monday, saying they had rooted out Hamas militants grouped inside to direct attacks, a claim that could not be independently confirmed.

In many cases, the troops destroyed or set fire to buildings after clearing them of residents, according to witnesses and the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, which follows the conflict through researchers on the ground.

Al-Haddad said she saw troops blow up or set fire to nearby buildings after expelling those inside. A Euro-Med researcher said in a voice message shared with the AP that when he was released from detention by Israeli soldiers in the Shifa hospital, he walked out into fire spreading from buildings surrounding the hospital.

Asked about the reports, the Israeli military said there are no specific procedures for evacuations, only that it "depends on the situation" and if there is an "operational threat." The Israeli military didn't respond to questions about burning homes, instead saying its troops carry out "demolitions of Hamas infrastructure and other military targets using approved and appropriate means." It said it could not comment on the specific case of al-Haddad's family.

Throughout its nearly six-month offensive in Gaza, the Israeli military has largely relied on announcing evacuation orders for large areas through leaflets, text messages or loudspeakers, urging people to leave before ground assaults.

The past weeks' campaign of evacuations in Gaza City has been more aggressive and direct, Euro-Med director Ramy Abdu said: Troops went door to door to expel people or sent detained Palestinians to tell residents to leave. The monitor estimates some 7,000 people were forced from neighborhoods around Shifa, where fighting left wide-scale destruction.

Israel vowed to destroy Hamas after its Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel killed some 1,200 people. Israel's assault has killed more than 32,000 Palestinians, more than 13,000 of them children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, and driven some 80% of its 2.3 million people from their homes.

Al-Haddad, a pharmacist, and her husband, Raed al-Tabaa, an accountant and university professor, had been determined to stay in Gaza City even as Israel's ground offensive flattened large swaths of northern Gaza.

They fled their home after it took a direct hit in November and moved into the building where her brother-in-law lived less than a kilometer (0.6 miles) from Shifa Hospital.

After the raid on Shifa began March 19, al-Haddad said the family heard people screaming or calling for help at her building's entrance. Her family huddled in stairways or the middle of the apartment for cover from gunfire outside as tanks rolled down their street.

On the night of March 20, al-Haddad sent a voice message to family members who had already fled south, saying tanks were at their doorstep.

"We are OK because we are alive, but we are very shaken up," she whispered. "I don't know what to say. We are deprived of any humanity anyone can imagine."

Then it was her family's turn. At 2:30 a.m., the family was awakened by an explosion as troops blasted open their building's entrance. Hearing them coming up the stairs, the family opened their apartment door to avoid another explosion. The troops searched the apartment and checked if anyone was on military

wanted lists. Then they ordered the family out.

In a mix of broken English and Arabic, the family pleaded to be allowed to stay or at least to wait until morning, saying the journey was impossible for the elderly in-laws, al-Haddad said.

The soldiers said that "by daylight, the whole building could be blown up," she said. "They said, 'You will leave. We will stay.'"

The soldiers showed them the route to follow on Google Maps and told them how to walk: A woman carrying a glow stick must lead the group, with another woman at the back, and the men, children and elderly in the middle. They said to wave the glow sticks when approaching a checkpoint in the dark so the soldiers would not be suspicious and would know they have been checked.

They were allowed to take a bicycle to carry a few bags and a wheelchair for al-Haddad's mother-in-law. But it proved impossible to push the wheelchair down the roads littered with belongings people could no longer carry.

Her in-laws, in their 80s and 70s, were forced to walk some of the distance, falling numerous times as soldiers shouted at them to keep moving, she said. At 2 p.m., they reached an Israeli checkpoint, where soldiers had them pass one-by-one through a metal gate and look into a security camera, clearly collecting information on everyone going through, al-Haddad said.

Now in Rafah, they are crowded into a house with her brothers, their wives and their children — more than 15 people, sleeping five to a room.

Al-Haddad said they were thinking of where to go if Israeli troops attack Rafah, where more than 1.2 million have crowded. They're gathering money to buy a way out of Gaza — "to save my children's future," she said.

"This is a trip like no other. We have started our displacement journey," al-Haddad said.

Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Syria killed 2 generals and 5 other officers, Iran says

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and ALBERT AJI Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — An Israeli airstrike that demolished Iran's consulate in Syria on Monday killed two Iranian generals and five officers, according to Iranian officials. The strike appeared to signify an escalation of Israel's targeting of military officials from Iran, which supports militant groups fighting Israel in Gaza, and along its border with Lebanon.

Since the war in Gaza began nearly six months ago, clashes have increased between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants based in Lebanon. Hamas, which rules Gaza and attacked Israel on Oct. 7, is also backed by Iran.

Israel, which rarely acknowledges strikes against Iranian targets, said it had no comment on the latest attack in Syria, although a military spokesman blamed Iran for a drone attack early Monday against a naval base in southern Israel.

Israel has grown increasingly impatient with the daily exchanges of fire with Hezbollah, which have escalated in recent days, and warned of the possibility of a full-fledged war. Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have also been launching long-range missiles toward Israel, including on Monday.

The airstrike in Syria killed Gen. Mohammad Reza Zahedi, who led the elite Quds Force in Lebanon and Syria until 2016, according to Iran's Revolutionary Guard. It also killed Zahedi's deputy, Gen Mohammad Hadi Hajriahimi, and five other officers.

A member of Hezbollah, Hussein Youssef, also was killed in the attack, an official with the militant group told The Associated Press. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with group's rules. Hezbollah has not publicly announced the death.

Hezbollah offered condolences to Iran for Zahedi's death and called Israel "foolish when it believes that liquidating the leaders can stop the roaring tide of the people's resistance." It added in its statement that the killing "will not pass without the enemy receiving punishment and revenge."

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is based in Britain, said two Syrians also were killed.

Two police officers who guarded the consulate were among those wounded, and first responders were still searching for bodies under the rubble.

While Iran's consular building was leveled in the attack, according to Syria's state news agency, its main embassy building remained intact. Still, the Iranian ambassador's residence was inside the consular building.

Iran's ambassador, Hossein Akbari, vowed revenge for the strike "at the same magnitude and harshness." Hamas and Islamic Jihad — another Palestinian militant group backed by Iran — accused Israel of seeking to widen the conflict in Gaza.

Experts said there was no doubt that Iran would retaliate. The strike in Syria was a "major escalation," Charles Lister, a Syria expert at the Middle East Institute in Washington, said on the social media platform X.

A spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry, Nasser Kanaani, called on other countries to condemn the strike. Israel has attacked scores of Iranian-linked targets in Syria over the years with the apparent intent of disrupting arms transfers and other cooperation with Hezbollah, which has sent thousands of fighters to support Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

An Israeli airstrike in a Damascus neighborhood in December killed a longtime Iranian Revolutionary Guard adviser to Syria, Seyed Razi Mousavi.

A similar strike on a building in Damascus in January killed at least five Iranian advisers. Last week, an Iranian adviser was killed in airstrikes over the eastern Syrian province of Deir el-Zour, near the Iraqi border.

The chief spokesman for Israel's army, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said a Monday drone attack on a naval base in southern Israel was "directed by Iran" and caused no injuries.

Early on Tuesday, the Israeli military said some kind of weapon fired from Syria toward Israel crashed before reaching its intended target.

Gunbattle between Haitian police and gangs paralyzes area near National Palace

By PIERRE-RICHARD LUXAMA Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Heavy gunfire erupted Monday in the downtown area of Haiti's capital as police battled gang members near the National Palace for several hours.

Local media reported that at least one policeman was shot after he and other officers were forced to flee an armored car that was later set on fire.

Scores of people were trapped by the gunfire in downtown Port-au-Prince while dozens of others managed to flee. One man who declined to provide his name out of fear for his life told The Associated Press that he was stuck for five hours until police rescued him.

"It's the armored car that covered us (so we could) leave the area," he said.

A spokesman for Haiti's National Police did not return messages for comment.

The latest gunbattle comes more than a month after powerful gangs began attacking key government infrastructure. They have torched police stations, opened fire on the main international airport that remains closed and stormed the country's two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates.

The violence has somewhat subsided in certain areas since the attacks began on Feb. 29, but gunfire still echoes daily.

At least 1,554 people have been reported killed up to March 22 and another 826 injured, according to the U.N.

The situation forced Prime Minister Ariel Henry to announce last month that he would resign as soon as a transitional council is created. Henry, who was on an official trip to Kenya to push for the U.N.-backed deployment of a police force from the East African country, remains locked out of Haiti.

The proposed transitional council of nine members, which has yet to be formally established, will be responsible for choosing a new prime minister and council of ministers.

On Monday night, Haiti's government issued a statement raising concerns over its creation, saying that the current council of ministers "stumbled over proven constitutional and legal questions. The Constitution

and Haitian laws nowhere provide for this institution.”

The government noted the ministers met Monday to talk about the transitional council and shared the draft decree with legal experts so they “could finalize it and make it compliant with the laws of the republic.”

The current council of ministers also plans to create a joint commission to oversee the handover of responsibilities.

Haiti’s government noted that Henry received a list of nine people nominated to the transitional council on Friday and a draft decree establishing the council on Sunday.

Abortions are legal in much of Africa.

But few women may be aware, and providers don’t advertise it

By MARIA CHENG and MISPER APAWU Associated Press

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — When Efua, a 25-year-old fashion designer and single mother in Ghana, became pregnant last year, she sought an abortion at a health clinic but worried the procedure might be illegal. Health workers assured her abortions were lawful under certain conditions in the West African country, but Efua said she was still nervous.

“I had lots of questions, just to be sure I would be safe,” Efua told the Associated Press, on condition that only her middle name be used, for fear of reprisals from the growing anti-abortion movement in her country.

Finding reliable information was difficult, she said, and she didn’t tell her family about her procedure. “It comes with too many judgments,” she decided.

More than 20 countries across Africa have loosened restrictions on abortion in recent years, but experts say that like Efua, many women probably don’t realize they are entitled to a legal abortion. And despite the expanded legality of the procedure in places like Ghana, Congo, Ethiopia and Mozambique, some doctors and nurses say they’ve become increasingly wary of openly providing abortions. They’re fearful of triggering the ire of opposition groups that have become emboldened since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 decision overturning the nationwide right to abortion.

“We are providing a legal service for women who want an abortion, but we do not advertise it openly,” said Esi Asare Prah, who works at the clinic where Efua had the procedure — legal under Ghana’s law, passed in 1985. “We’ve found that people are OK with our clinic providing abortions, as long as we don’t make it too obvious what we are doing.”

The Maputo Protocol, a human rights treaty in effect since 2005 for all 55 countries of the African Union, says every nation on the continent should grant women the right to a medical abortion in cases of rape, sexual assault, incest, and endangerment for the mental or physical health of the mother or fetus.

Africa is alone globally in having such a treaty, but more than a dozen of its countries have yet to pass laws granting women access to abortions. Even in those that have legalized the procedure, obstacles to access remain. And misinformation is rampant in many countries, with a recent study faulting practices by Google and Meta.

“The right to abortion exists in law, but in practice, the reality may be a little different,” said Evelyne Opondo, of the International Center for Research on Women. She noted that poorer countries in particular, such as Benin and Ethiopia, may permit abortions in some instances but struggle with a lack of resources to make them available to all women. Many women learn of their options only through word of mouth.

Across Africa, MSI Reproductive Choices — which provides contraception and abortion in 37 countries worldwide — reports that staff have been repeatedly targeted by anti-abortion groups. The group cites harassment and intimidation of staff in Ethiopia. And in Nigeria, MSI’s clinic was raided and temporarily closed after false allegations that staffers had illegally accessed confidential documents.

“The opposition to abortion in Africa has always existed, but now they are better organized,” said Mallah Tabot, of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in Kenya. She noted that a significant amount of money backing anti-abortion efforts appears to have come from conservative American groups — and several reports have found millions in such funding from conservative Christian organizations.

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The spike from opposition groups is alarming, said Angela Akol, of the reproductive rights advocacy group Ipas.

"We've seen them in Kenya and Uganda advocating at the highest levels of government for reductions to abortion access," she said. "There are patriarchal and almost misogynistic norms across much of Africa. ... The West is tapping into that momentum after the Roe v. Wade reversal to challenge abortion rights here."

Congo, one of the world's poorest countries, introduced a law in 2018 permitting abortions in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy in cases of rape, incest, and physical or mental health risks to the woman.

Even so, pamphlets aimed at women who might want an abortion use coded language, said Patrick Djemo, of MSI in Congo.

"We talk about the management of unwanted pregnancies," he said, noting that they don't use the word abortion. "It could cause a backlash."

Accurate language and information can be hard to find online, too. Last week, a study from MSI and the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that Google and Meta — which operates Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp — restricted access to accurate information about abortion in countries including Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya.

The study said the tech giants banned local abortion providers from advertising services while approving paid ads from anti-abortion groups pushing false claims about decriminalization efforts as part of a global conspiracy to "eliminate" local populations.

Google didn't respond to a request for comment on the study. Meta said via email that its platforms "prohibit ads that mislead people about services a business provides" and that it would review the report.

Opondo, of the international women's center, said she's deeply concerned about the future of abortion-rights movements in Africa, with opponents using the same tactics that helped overturn Roe vs. Wade in the U.S.

Yet, she said, for now it's "still probably easier for a woman in Benin to get an abortion than in Texas."

For Efuia, information and cost were obstacles. She cobbled together the necessary 1,000 Ghana cedis (\$77) for her abortion after asking a friend to help.

She said she wishes women could easily get reliable information, especially given the physical and mental stress she experienced. She said she wouldn't have been able to handle another baby on her own and believes many other women face similar dilemmas.

"If you're pregnant and not ready," she said, "it could really affect you mentally and for the rest of your life."

Life has returned to Ukraine's Bucha.

But 2 years after the killings, some families can't move on

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — Days after Russian forces withdrew from the outskirts of Kyiv in the dramatic first weeks of their full-scale invasion two years ago, a photo revealed what had become of Nataliia Verbova's missing husband.

Poring over the image of eight men executed and lying on cold concrete in the suburb of Bucha, taken by AP photographer Vadim Ghirda, she focused on a man face down with his hands tied. She didn't want to believe it was Andrii, who had joined the territorial defense days after the invasion but was detained by the Russians.

A month later, she visited the morgue and recognized the socks she had gifted him. It was Andrii.

"I will never forget the pool of blood under him. When I saw these photos all around the world I felt pain," she said, standing over her husband's grave. "Two years have passed, but for me it's as though it happened yesterday. Nothing has changed."

Russian troops quickly occupied Bucha after invading Ukraine and stayed for about a month. When Ukrainian troops retook the town, they found what became known as the epicenter of the war's atrocities.

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Dozens of bodies of men, women and children lay on the streets, in yards and homes, and in mass graves. Some showed signs of torture. Day after day, body collectors found the dead in basements, lying in doorways, deep in the woods. The once comfortable suburb was shocked and silent.

More than 400 bodies were found. Ukrainian authorities say the total number of dead has not been finalized, with many still missing.

Today, two years on, Bucha is evolving. Cranes dot the horizon and the skeletal frames of future residential complexes line the main thoroughfare. Cafes and restaurants are open. They are signs of hope and renewal where there was once only trauma and despair.

Where hurried graves had been marked with wooden crosses, there are now marble tombstones with the portraits of war heroes.

In the neighboring suburb of Irpin, where entire streetscapes were shattered and blackened under Russian occupation, what was destroyed is being reconstructed.

To mark the second anniversary of the liberation of these and other Kyiv suburbs, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked all those involved in their renewal. "This is about more than just rebuilding from the ruins; it is about preserving the idea of a free world and our united Europe," he said.

But for those who suffered the worst of Russian atrocities, such changes are cosmetic. For those Bucha residents, time has not dulled the pain of loss. Many are struggling to come to terms with what happened to them and their loved ones.

Verbova is grateful her husband has received a more permanent resting place.

He and the other men had set up a roadblock in an attempt to prevent Russian troops from advancing as they swept toward Kyiv. They were later discovered by Ghirda, the AP photographer, lying outside a building on Yablunska Street.

They had been there for a month, their sprawled bodies preserved by the winter cold. Only after the Russians pulled out of Bucha could their loved ones collect them.

The men should be considered national heroes, Verbova said.

She holds on to her husband's possessions — his telephone book and wallet — as if they were jewels.

But she can't move on. She said the government hasn't given her husband official status as military personnel, a designation that would enable the family to receive financial compensation.

It's a problem most of the men's families share. Oleksandr Turovskyi, whose 35-year old son Sviatoslav was among them, is fighting to get him the same status. At home, where photos of Sviatoslav as a boy and as a member of the territorial defense are on display, he holds up his son's war medals.

"Parents should not bury their children. It's not fair," he said.

Unlike much of reviving Bucha, the place where the eight men were discovered is mostly untouched. Their portraits hang on the building's wall along with flowers.

Turovskyi still visits the scene to feel closer to his son.

"At 5 o'clock in the evening (after work), I still have a feeling that he will come in and say: 'Hello, how are you?'" he said. "All these two years, even more than two years, I have been waiting for him. Although I know that I have already buried him, I am still waiting."

The world should not forget that there is a war in Ukraine, he said.

"That's why we have to talk about it, in order to stop it and prevent it from spreading," he said. "So that others cannot feel what we feel."

Israel clears way to expel Al Jazeera.

Channel says Netanyahu's incitement claim is a dangerous lie

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday vowed to shut down Al Jazeera's operations in Israel, calling it a "terror channel" that spreads incitement, after parliament passed a law clearing the way for the closure.

Netanyahu's pledge escalated Israel's long-running feud against Al Jazeera. It also threatened to heighten

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tensions with Qatar, which owns the channel, at a time when the Doha government is playing a key role in mediation efforts to halt the war in Gaza.

The broadcaster condemned Netanyahu's incitement claim as a "dangerous ludicrous lie." Al Jazeera said late Monday that it holds Netanyahu responsible for the safety of its staff and offices, that it would continue what it described as its bold and professional coverage, and that it "reserves the right to pursue every legal step."

Israel has long had a rocky relationship with Al Jazeera, accusing it of bias against Israel. Relations took a major downturn nearly two years ago when Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh was killed during an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian-American journalist was well-known across the Arab world for her critical coverage of Israel, and the channel accused Israel of intentionally killing her. Israel denied the charge, saying she was likely killed by Israeli fire in what appeared to be an accidental shooting.

Those relations further deteriorated following the outbreak of Israel's war against Hamas on Oct. 7, when the militant group carried out a cross-border attack in southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage.

In December, an Israeli strike killed an Al Jazeera cameraman as he reported on the war in southern Gaza. The channel's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael Dahdouh, was injured in the same attack.

The network also blamed Israel for killing Dahdouh's son in a strike in January. Hamza Dahdouh was working for Al Jazeera when the strike hit a car in which he was traveling, it reported. The army later said that Hamza Dahdouh was a member of Islamic Jihad, a militant group that joined the Oct. 7 attack with Hamas.

Wael Dahdouh's wife, daughter and another son were killed along with his grandson in another Israeli strike last October. The channel broadcast images of Dahdouh entering the hospital and giving way to grief as he peered over the body of his dead son. Israel has not said who the target of that strike was.

Al Jazeera is one of the few international media outlets to remain in Gaza throughout the war, broadcasting bloody scenes of airstrikes and overcrowded hospitals and accusing Israel of massacres. Israel accuses Al Jazeera of collaborating with Hamas.

"Al Jazeera harmed Israel's security, actively participated in the Oct. 7 massacre, and incited against Israeli soldiers. It is time to remove the bullhorn of Hamas from our country," Netanyahu said on X, formerly Twitter.

He said he planned on acting immediately under the authorities of the newly passed law. "The terror channel Al Jazeera will no longer broadcast from Israel," he said.

Al Jazeera has been closed or blocked by other Mideast governments, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Egypt has banned Al Jazeera since 2013. It launched the crackdown after the 2013 military overthrow of an elected but divisive government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood group. Egypt considers the Brotherhood a terrorist group and accused both Qatar and Al Jazeera of supporting it.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said the U.S. does not always agree with Al Jazeera's coverage, but respects its work.

"We support the independent free press anywhere in the world," he said. "And much of what we know about what has happened in Gaza is because of reporters who are there doing their jobs, including reporters from Al Jazeera."

Israel has in the past threatened to shutter Al Jazeera but never did so. Monday's law did not immediately close the station but it authorizes officials to do so after consultations and approval from legal and security officials. Any order would be valid only through July 31 or the end of the war in Gaza.

Israel's communications minister, Shlomo Karhi, said he intended to move forward with the closure. He said Al Jazeera has been acting as a "propaganda arm of Hamas" by "encouraging armed struggle against Israel."

"It is impossible to tolerate a media outlet, with press credentials from the Government Press Office and

offices in Israel, would act from within against us, certainly during wartime," he said.

His office said the order would seek to block the channel's broadcasts in Israel and prevent it from operating in the country. The order would not apply to the West Bank or Gaza.

Al Jazeera's local bureau chief, Walid Al-Omari, said late Monday that the station had not heard from Israeli authorities. "But it's clear it's a question of time and they will take the decision within days," he told The Associated Press.

But punishing the channel could be risky. Qatar has been acting as a chief mediator between Israel and Hamas. It helped broker and sponsor a weeklong cease-fire in November, and has been hosting weeks of on-and-off talks aimed at brokering another pause in fighting.

By targeting Al Jazeera, Israel could be trying to push Qatar to put additional pressure on Hamas to make concessions. Netanyahu has in the past accused Qatar of not doing enough. But it also risks alienating Qatar, a wealthy energy-rich Gulf state that is one of the few countries with influence over Hamas.

Israel has come under heavy criticism from press-freedom groups during the war. The Committee to Protect Journalists says 90 Palestinian journalists have been killed in the war, in addition to two Israeli journalists. Israel also has barred international journalists from entering Gaza independently to cover the war. The army has allowed small groups of journalists to enter Gaza on brief, highly controlled visits under military escort.

Hagar Shechter, an attorney with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, said the law violates "the right for free speech, freedom of the press, freedom of occupation, and undermines separation of powers." She added that the group plans to file a petition with Israel's Supreme Court against the law.

Oren Persico, a staff writer at the Seventh Eye, an independent media watchdog website in Israel, said the law was a watered-down version of legislation sought by the country's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, due to pushback from legal experts.

The closure needs an expert opinion from a top security official deeming the network "harming Israel's security." The order would then need Cabinet or parliamentary approval, and further approval from the courts.

Persico said most worrying was that other media, including Israeli outlets, could also be in the line of fire. "What's important here isn't Al Jazeera, it's about the authority that the government has to shut down media, it's a slippery slope," he said.

Gaza medical officials say Israeli strike kills 4 foreign aid workers, driver after delivering food

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — An apparent Israeli airstrike killed four international aid workers with the World Central Kitchen charity and their Palestinian driver late Monday, hours after the group brought in a new shipload of food to northern Gaza, which has been isolated and pushed to the brink of famine by Israel's offensive.

Footage showed the bodies of the five dead at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. Several of them wore protective gear with the charity's logo. Staff showed the passports of three of the dead — British, Australian and Polish. The nationality of the fourth aid worker was not immediately known.

The Israeli military said it was conducting a review "to understand the circumstances of this tragic incident."

World Central Kitchen, the charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés, said it was aware of the reports and would "share more information when we have gathered all the facts."

"This is a tragedy. Humanitarian aid workers and civilians should NEVER be a target. EVER," WCK spokeswoman Linda Roth said in a statement.

Mahmoud Thabet, a Palestinian Red Crescent paramedic who was on the team that brought the bodies

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to the hospital, told The Associated Press the workers were in a three-car convoy that was crossing out of northern Gaza when an Israeli missile hit. Thabet said he was told by WCK staff the team had been in the north coordinating distribution of the newly arrived aid and were heading back to Rafah in the south.

The source of fire could not be independently confirmed.

Three aid ships from Cyprus arrived earlier Monday carrying some 400 tons of food and supplies organized by the charity and the United Arab Emirates — the group's second shipment after a pilot run last month. The Israeli military was involved in coordinating both deliveries.

The U.S. has touted the sea route as a new way to deliver desperately needed aid to northern Gaza, where the U.N. has said much of the population is on the brink of starvation, largely cut off from the rest of the territory by Israeli forces. Israel has barred UNRWA, the main U.N. agency in Gaza, from making deliveries to the north, and other aid groups say sending truck convoys north has been too dangerous because of the military's failure to ensure safe passage.

The UNRWA said in its latest report that 173 of its "colleagues" have been killed in Gaza in the violence. The figure does not include workers for other aid organizations.

World Central Kitchen board member Robert Egger and the media reported that the Australian killed in Monday night's strike was 44-year-old Zomi Frankcom from Melbourne.

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said it was urgently seeking to confirm reports of an Australian death. The department said in a statement: "We have been clear on the need for civilian lives to be protected in this conflict."

The strike came hours after Israeli troops ended a two-week raid on Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest, leaving the facility largely gutted and a swath of destruction in the surrounding neighborhoods. Footage showed Shifa's main buildings had been reduced to burned-out husks.

Israel said it launched the raid on Shifa because senior Hamas operatives had regrouped there and were planning attacks. The military said its troops killed 200 militants in the operation, though the claim that they were all militants could not be confirmed, and Palestinians coming to the site after the troops withdrew found bodies of civilians.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS MONDAY:

Syrian officials and state media said an Israeli airstrike destroyed the Iran's consulate in Syria, killing two Iranian generals and five officers. The strike appears to signify an escalation of Israel's targeting of Iranian military officials and their allies in Syria. The targeting has intensified since Hamas militants — who are supported by Iran — attacked Israel on Oct. 7.

Israel, which rarely acknowledges such strikes, said it had no comment. Iran's ambassador, Hossein Akbari, vowed revenge for the attack "at the same magnitude and harshness."

Also, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would shut down satellite broadcaster Al Jazeera immediately after parliament passed a law Monday clearing the way for the country to halt the Qatari-owned channel from broadcasting from Israel.

Netanyahu called the network the "terror channel" and accused it of harming Israeli security, participating in the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks and inciting violence against Israel.

Al Jazeera condemned his remarks, calling them "a dangerous and ridiculous lie" and saying they were Netanyahu's justification "for the ongoing assault" on the media network and press freedom. In a statement, the network vowed to persist in its reporting with "boldness and professionalism."

RAID LEAVES SHIFA IN RUINS

The Shifa raid gutted a facility that had once been the heart of Gaza's health care system but which doctors and staff had struggled to get even partially operating again after a previous Israeli assault in November.

The latest assault triggered days of heavy fighting for blocks around Shifa, with witnesses reporting airstrikes, the shelling of homes and troops going house to house to force residents to leave. Israeli authorities identified six officials from Hamas' military wing they said were killed inside the hospital during the raid. Israel also said it seized weapons and valuable intelligence.

After the troops withdrew, hundreds of Palestinians returned to search for lost loved ones or examine

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the damage.

Among the dead were Ahmed Maqadma and his mother — both doctors at Shifa — and his cousin, said Dr. Ghassan Abu Sitta, a Palestinian-British doctor who volunteered at Shifa and other hospitals during the first months of the war before returning to Britain.

The fate of the three had been unknown since their phone suddenly went dead as they tried to leave Shifa nearly a week ago. On Monday, relatives found their bodies with gunshot wounds about a block from the hospital, said Abu Sitta, who is in touch with the family.

Mohammed Mahdi, who was among those who returned to the area, described a scene of “total destruction.” He said several buildings had been burned down and that he counted six bodies in the area, including two in the hospital courtyard.

At least 21 patients died during the raid, World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus posted late Sunday on X, formerly Twitter.

Israel has accused Hamas of using hospitals for military purposes and has raided many hospitals across the territory. Critics accuse the army of recklessly endangering civilians and of decimating a health sector already overwhelmed with wounded.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top military spokesman, said Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group established their main northern headquarters inside the hospital. He described days of close-quarters fighting and blamed Hamas for the destruction, saying some fighters barricaded themselves inside hospital wards while others launched mortar rounds at the compound.

Hagari said the troops arrested some 900 suspected militants during the raid, including more than 500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters, and seized over \$3 million in different currencies, as well as weapons. He said the army evacuated more than 200 of the estimated 300 to 350 patients. Two Israeli soldiers were killed in the raid, the military said.

The war began on Oct. 7, when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage.

Israel’s offensive since has killed at least 32,845 Palestinians, around two-thirds of them women and children, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count. The Israeli military blames the civilian toll on Palestinian militants because they fight in dense residential areas.

The war has displaced most of the territory’s population and driven a third of its residents to the brink of famine.

Netanyahu has vowed to keep up the offensive until Hamas is destroyed and all hostages are freed. He says Israel will soon expand ground operations to the southern city of Rafah, where some 1.4 million people — more than half of Gaza’s population — have sought refuge.

But he faces mounting pressure from Israelis who blame him for the security failures of Oct. 7 and from some families of the hostages who blame him for the failure to reach a deal despite several weeks of talks mediated by the United States, Qatar and Egypt. Tens of thousands protested Sunday, demanding Netanyahu do more to bring home the hostages in the largest anti-government demonstration since the start of the war.

Hamas and other militants are still believed to be holding some 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others, after freeing most of the rest during a cease-fire last November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Peru’s embattled president replaces 6 ministers as lawmakers ask Parliament to remove her

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Peruvian President Dina Boluarte replaced six ministers after they resigned as her government is rocked by a political crisis fueled by an alleged illicit enrichment scandal involving luxury watches.

The Cabinet shakeup Monday came as lawmakers submitted to Parliament a request to remove her from

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office for "permanent moral incapacity" three days after police broke down the front door of her residence to search for the watches as part of an investigation.

The request was submitted by lawmakers from various parties including Peru Libre to which Boluarte once belonged. To remove Boluarte, the move requires 87 votes from the 130-seat unicameral Parliament, and so far, five parties that together have 54 votes expressed support for the president following the raid.

Boluarte is being preliminarily investigated for allegedly acquiring an undisclosed collection of luxury watches since becoming vice president and social inclusion minister in July 2021 and then president in December 2022.

Lawmakers in their request to remove her from office cite the investigation against Boluarte as well as countrywide problems, such as rising crime.

She has denied the illicit enrichment accusations.

Late Friday, armed police officers broke down the front door of Boluarte's house with a battering ram in search of Rolex watches. The raid marked the first time in Peru's history that police forcibly entered the home of a sitting president.

The probe began in mid-March after a TV show spotlighted Boluarte wearing a Rolex watch that is worth up to \$14,000 in Peru. Other TV shows later mentioned at least two more Rolexes.

Boluarte, a 61-year-old lawyer, was a modest district official before entering then-President Pedro Castillo's government on a monthly salary of \$8,136 in July 2021. Boluarte later assumed the presidency with a lower salary of \$4,200 per month. Shortly thereafter, she began to display the luxury watches.

she did not list the three watches in an obligatory asset declaration form.

On Monday, Boluarte initially lost three Cabinet members when the ministers of interior, education and women abruptly resigned.

Interior Minister Víctor Torres told reporters his resignation was due to a family matter while the heads of the Ministry of Women, Nancy Tolentino, and of Education, Miriam Ponce, did not offer reasons in the announcements they shared on social media.

Their resignations were followed by the ministers of agriculture, production and foreign trade stepping down.

On announcing his resignation, Torres warned that if Boluarte leaves power "the country will sink."

Boluarte then swore in six new ministers, including Walter Ortiz, a retired police officer who had previously been director against organized crime, as interior minister. The Cabinet has 18 ministries, in addition to the position of prime minister held by Gustavo Adrianzén.

She also swore in Elizabeth Caldo, a former executive at telecommunications giant Telefónica, as her new foreign trade minister, and Morgan Quero as her education minister.

Boluarte became president in December 2022, when she replaced Castillo, who was dismissed by Parliament and is now imprisoned while being investigated for alleged corruption and rebellion.

Donald Trump has posted a \$175 million bond to avert asset seizure as he appeals NY fraud penalty

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump posted a \$175 million bond on Monday in his New York civil fraud case, halting collection of the more than \$454 million he owes and preventing the state from seizing his assets to satisfy the debt while he appeals, according to a court filing.

A New York appellate court had given the former president 10 days to put up the money after a panel of judges agreed last month to slash the amount needed to stop the clock on enforcement.

The bond Trump is posting with the court now is essentially a placeholder, meant to guarantee payment if the judgment is upheld. If that happens, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee will have to pay the state the whole sum, which grows with daily interest.

If Trump wins, he won't have to pay the state anything and will get back the money he has put up now.

"As promised, President Trump has posted bond. He looks forward to vindicating his rights on appeal

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and overturning this unjust verdict," said one of Trump's lawyers, Alina Habba.

Until the appeals court intervened to lower the required bond, New York Attorney General Letitia James had been poised to initiate efforts to collect the judgment, possibly by seizing some of Trump's marquee properties. James, a Democrat, brought the lawsuit on the state's behalf. Her office declined to comment Monday.

The court ruled after Trump's lawyers complained it was "a practical impossibility" to get an underwriter to sign off on a bond for the \$454 million, plus interest, that he owes.

The company that underwrote the bond is Knight Specialty Insurance, which is part of the Knight Insurance Group. The chairman of that company, billionaire Don Hankey, told The Associated Press that both cash and bonds were used as collateral for Trump's appellate bond.

"This is what we do at Knight Insurance, and we're happy to do this for anyone who needs a bond," said Hankey, who is best known in the business world for making high-risk, high-interest loans to car buyers with flawed credit histories. Hankey told the AP he has never met or spoken with Trump.

Trump is fighting to overturn a judge's Feb. 16 finding that he lied about his wealth as he fostered the real estate empire that launched him to stardom and the presidency. The trial focused on how Trump's assets were valued on financial statements that went to bankers and insurers to get loans and deals.

Trump denies any wrongdoing, saying the statements actually lowballed his fortune, came with disclaimers and weren't taken at face value by the institutions that lent to or insured him.

The state courts' Appellate Division has said it would hear arguments in September. A specific date has not been set. If the schedule holds, it will fall in the final weeks of the presidential race.

Under New York law, filing an appeal generally doesn't hold off enforcement of a judgment. But there's an automatic pause — in legalese, a stay — if the person or entity obtains a bond guaranteeing payment of what's owed.

Courts sometimes grant exceptions and lower the amount required for a stay, as in Trump's case.

Trump's lawyers had told the appeals court more than 30 bonding companies were unwilling to take a mix of cash and real estate as collateral for a \$454 million-plus bond. Underwriters insisted on only cash, stocks or other liquid assets, the attorneys said.

They said most bonding companies require collateral covering 120% of the amount owed.

Trump recently claimed to have almost a half-billion dollars in cash — along with billions of dollars worth of real estate and other assets — but said he wanted to have some cash available for his presidential run.

Recent legal debts have taken a sizable chunk out of Trump's cash reserves.

In addition to the \$175 million he had to put up in the New York case, Trump has posted a bond and cash worth more than \$97 million to cover money he owes to writer E. Jean Carroll while he appeals verdicts in a pair of federal civil trials. Juries found that he sexually assaulted her in the 1990s and defamed her when she went public with the allegation in 2019. He denies all the allegations.

In February, Trump paid the \$392,638 in legal fees a judge ordered him to cover for The New York Times and three reporters after he unsuccessfully sued them over a Pulitzer Prize-winning 2018 story about his family's wealth and tax practices.

In March, a British court ordered Trump to pay legal fees of 300,000 pounds (\$382,000) to a company he unsuccessfully sued over the so-called Steele dossier that contained salacious allegations about him. Trump said those claims were false.

Trump could eventually generate cash by selling some of the nearly 60% of stock he owns in his newly public social media company, Trump Media & Technology Group — but that would be a longer-term play. Trump's stake could be worth billions of dollars, but a "lock-up" provision prevents insiders like him from selling their shares for six months.

Trump to go after Biden on the border and crime when he visits battleground Michigan and Wisconsin

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Donald Trump is expected on Tuesday to attack President Joe Biden over his handling of the U.S.-Mexico border when he visits Wisconsin and Michigan, both critical battleground states in the 2024 election.

Trump will first appear in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to deliver a speech about what his campaign calls "Biden's Border Bloodbath." He will then hold a rally in Green Bay, Wisconsin, on the day the state holds its presidential primaries.

Polls suggest Trump has an advantage over Biden on immigration issues as many prospective voters say they're concerned about illegal border crossings hitting record highs. In recent weeks, Trump and others in his party have seized on several high-profile cases of immigrants in the U.S. illegally being charged with crimes, including the killing of Laken Riley, a nursing student in Georgia, for which a Venezuelan man is charged.

Trump on Tuesday is expected to discuss the killing of Ruby Garcia, a Michigan woman who was found dead on the side of a Grand Rapids highway on March 22. Police say she was in a romantic relationship with the suspect, Brandon Ortiz Vite. He told police he shot her multiple times during an argument before dropping her body on the side of the road and driving off in her red Mazda.

Authorities say Ortiz Vite is a citizen of Mexico and had previously been deported following a drunk driving arrest. He does not have an attorney listed in court records.

"Under Crooked Joe Biden, EVERY state is now a border state. EVERY town is now a Border Town — because Joe Biden has brought the carnage, chaos, and killing from all over world, and dumped it straight into our own backyards," Trump spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said in a statement previewing the former president's speech.

FBI statistics show overall violent crime dropped again in the U.S. last year, continuing a downward trend after a pandemic-era spike. In Michigan, violent crime hit a three-year low in 2022, the most recent available data. Crime in Michigan's largest city, Detroit, is also down, with the fewest homicides last year since 1966.

While Riley's family attended Trump's rally in Georgia last month and met with him backstage, it was unclear whether Garcia's family would attend. Trump told conservative Michigan radio host Justin Barclay on Monday that he'd "love to have her family there, if they'd like to be there — it'd be in my honor" and asked him to try to coordinate.

Her sister pleaded on Facebook last week for reporters to stop politicizing her sister's story.

Biden's campaign, which has been hammering Trump for his role in killing a bipartisan border deal that would have added more than 1,500 new Customs and Border Protection personnel, in addition to other restrictions, preempted the speech by accusing Trump of doing the same.

"Tomorrow, Donald Trump is coming to Grand Rapids where he is expected to once again try to politicize a tragedy and sow hate and division to hide from his own record of failing Michiganders," said Alyssa Bradley, the Biden campaign's Michigan communications director.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, said Monday that there is "a real problem on our southern border" and that it's "really critical that Congress and the president solve the problem."

"There was a solution on the table. It was actually the former president that encouraged Republicans to walk away from getting it done," Whitmer said. "I don't have a lot of tolerance for political points when it continues to endanger our economy and, to some extent, our people as we saw play out in Grand Rapids recently."

Trump has been leaning into inflammatory rhetoric about the record surge of migrants at the southern border since he became his party's presumptive nominee. He has portrayed migrants as "poisoning the blood of the country," questioned whether some should even be considered people, and claimed, without evidence, that countries have been emptying their prisons and mental asylums into the U.S.

He has also accused Biden of waging a "conspiracy to overthrow the United States of America," claiming Biden is trying to "collapse the American system, nullify the will of the actual American voters and establish a new base of power that gives them control for generations."

Republicans in both states are in catchup mode as they appear to be far behind Democrats organizationally just six months before the first early votes are cast in the general election.

Michigan Republican Party Chairman Pete Hoekstra told The Associated Press last week that the Trump campaign and its partners at the Republican National Committee had yet to make significant general election investments in the state, with no general election field staff in place.

Republican lawmakers in Michigan have also found themselves entrenched in controversy in recent weeks. State Rep. Matthew Maddock falsely claimed that buses carrying college athletes to Detroit for March Madness were shuttling illegal migrant "invaders" into the city.

Meanwhile, in Wisconsin, Democrats have touted their statewide organization, pointing to 44 field offices they already have operating across the state, along with a staff of over 50 so far.

The Trump campaign has yet to name any Wisconsin state party leaders or organizers.

The Wisconsin Republican Party has also been badly outraised in recent years and the state GOP's executive director left in March just months ahead of the national convention coming to Milwaukee.

Democrats have been reveling in a string of victories including the Wisconsin Supreme Court's recent overturning of Republican-drawn legislative maps, which is expected to result in Democratic gains.

The visit will be Trump's first in the state since 2022, when he held a rally to boost gubernatorial candidate Tim Michels, who lost his bid to Democratic Gov. Tony Evers.

Trump's campaign has said it is working to catch up and will be opening dozens of offices and hiring hundreds of staff on a rolling basis over the next 30 to 45 days.

___ Colvin reported from New York. Associated Press writer Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin, contributed to this report.

Caitlin Clark leads Iowa back to Final Four, scoring 41 points in 94-87 win over defending champ LSU

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Caitlin Clark put up another sensational performance to carry Iowa to its second straight Final Four.

The Hawkeyes' superstar guard, whose record-breaking exploits have brought unprecedented attention to women's basketball, made nine 3-pointers and finished with 41 points and 12 assists as Iowa knocked defending national champion LSU out of the NCAA Tournament with a 94-87 victory on Monday night.

"It's amazing to be back in the Final Four. It's so hard to get back there," Clark said. "This region was really hard, but we told ourselves we are the one seed for a reason."

Top-seeded Iowa (33-4) will play Paige Bueckers and UConn in the national semifinals Friday night in Cleveland.

Monday's highly anticipated matchup was a rematch of last year's national championship game won by LSU, which drew a record 9.9 million viewers.

Both teams wished that this meeting had come later in the tournament instead of with a Final Four berth at stake, but that was out of their control.

Clark, who also scored 41 points in the regional final last year, and Angel Reese of LSU put on a memorable show for the sold-out crowd and the millions watching.

"I think it's just great for the sport, just being able to be a part of history. Like I said, no matter which way it went tonight, I know this was going to be a night for the ages," said Reese, who had 17 points and 20 rebounds before fouling out with 1:45 left. "And just being able to be a part of history is great. Playing against another great player, of course, is always amazing."

Clark has already declared for this year's WNBA draft. Reese, too, will have a decision to make about

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whether to turn pro or come back for one more season.

With the game tied at 45 after an entertaining first half, Clark took over in the third quarter. The NCAA Division I all-time scoring leader hit four 3-pointers, each deeper than the previous one. Her fourth of the quarter, from her signature logo range, made it 61-52. It also was the 538th of her career, which made her the all-time leader in that category among NCAA Division I players, passing Oklahoma's Taylor Robertson.

"There's not a lot of strategy. You've got to guard her. Nobody else seems to be able to guard her," LSU coach Kim Mulkey said. "We didn't even guard her last year when we beat them. She's just a generational player, and she just makes everybody around her better."

Flau'jae Johnson scored 23 points for No. 3 seed LSU (31-6), which fell short of becoming the first repeat champion since UConn in 2016.

Kate Martin scored 21 points for Iowa and Sydney Affolter added 16.

Iowa's lead ballooned to 65-52 before LSU scored six straight points. The Tigers trailed 69-58 heading into the fourth quarter before scoring the first five points to get within 69-63.

But they got no closer as Clark wouldn't let the Hawkeyes lose. Her ninth 3-pointer, which tied the March Madness single-game record, made it 80-69 with 5:05 left. She pumped her chest as she ran back down the court and yelled to the adoring crowd.

"I got hyped for a second," Clark said. "When you are playing a team like LSU, they are never out of the game. No matter what the time or score is. Do not start celebrating or get too emotional. They are going to fight until the end."

The game got off to a quick start and the first quarter was an offensive clinic by both teams. Clark got the scoring going early, much to the delight of a pro-Iowa crowd. She hit a 3 to start the game, breaking a tie with Diana Taurasi for most 3-pointers in women's NCAA Tournament history.

Iowa led 17-9 before Mulkey called timeout. That seemed to settle her team down as the Tigers outscored the Hawkeyes 22-9 the rest of the quarter behind Reese, who finished the opening 10 minutes with 10 points, five rebounds and three assists to go along with two steals.

The Tigers got a scare in the second quarter when Reese went down trying to block Clark's shot. She rolled her right ankle on a TV camera on the baseline and hopped off the court. The trainers looked at it and she rode a stationary bike for a few minutes before returning to the game. Reese was a little slower getting up the court but otherwise appeared unaffected.

Johnson made an acrobatic shot just before the halftime buzzer to tie the game. Clark had 19 points in the first half.

MORE CLARK RECORDS

Clark broke the NCAA Tournament assists record of 136 that was held by Temeka Johnson of LSU. Clark has 140. She matched Courtney Moses of Purdue in 2012 and Kia Nurse of UConn in 2017 with her nine 3-pointers.

"My shot felt good in warmups. Helps when you make your first 3 as a shooter," Clark said. "Made my first to start the second half, that helps too. Nice to have a game where I got some good looks from 3."

UP NEXT

The Hawkeyes only played in the national semifinals one time previously before last season, and that was in 1993. They lost to UConn in Clark's freshman year in the Sweet 16.

US pushes alternatives to Rafah invasion in Hamas war talks with Israel

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top American and Israeli officials held virtual talks Monday as the U.S. pushed alternatives to the ground assault against Hamas under consideration by Israelis in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, a move the U.S. opposes on humanitarian grounds and that has frayed relations between the two allies.

President Joe Biden and his administration have publicly and privately urged Israel for months to refrain from a large-scale incursion into Rafah without a credible plan to relocate and safeguard noncombatants.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted that Israeli forces, which are trying to eradicate Hamas after the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, must be able to enter the city to root out the group's remaining battalions.

The more than two-and-a-half-hour meeting by secure video conference was described by both sides as constructive and productive, as Washington encourages the Israelis to avoid an all-out assault on the city, where an estimated four battalions of Hamas fighters are dispersed among more than 1.3 million civilians. The White House has instead pushed Israel to take more targeted actions to kill or capture Hamas leaders while limiting civilian impacts.

The potential operation in the city has exposed one of the deepest rifts between Israel and its closest ally, funder and arms supplier. The U.S. has already openly said Israel must do more to allow food and other goods through its blockade of Gaza to avert famine.

"They agreed that they share the objective to see Hamas defeated in Rafah," the U.S. and Israeli teams known as the Strategic Consultative Group said in a joint statement released by the White House. "The U.S. side expressed its concerns with various courses of action in Rafah. The Israeli side agreed to take these concerns into account and to have follow up discussions between experts overseen by the SCG. The follow-up discussions would include in person SCG meeting as early as next week."

The virtual meeting came a week after planned in-person talks were nixed by Netanyahu when the U.S. didn't veto a U.N. resolution that called for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken chaired the meeting for the U.S. side. The Israeli side was led by Israeli national security adviser Tzachi Hanegbi and Minister for Strategic Affairs and Netanyahu confidant Ron Dermer.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration is weighing selling Israel up to 50 new F-15 fighter jets, according to two congressional aides. The sale was informally notified to the relevant foreign affairs committees in the House and Senate on Jan. 30, according to the aides, who were granted anonymity to discuss details of a potential sale that have not yet been made public.

The initial notification indicates the administration is likely moving forward with the sale, although it is unclear if it has gotten the final nod of approval from Congress' national security leadership.

Separately Monday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to encourage reforms in the group that oversees part of the West Bank and which the U.S. is hopeful can play a role in governing post-war Gaza.

Judge expands Trump's gag order after ex-president's social media posts about judge's daughter

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The judge in Donald Trump's April 15 hush-money criminal trial declared his family off-limits to the former president's rancor on Monday, expanding a gag order days after Trump assailed his daughter and made false claims about her on social media.

Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan amended a week-old ban on Trump making public statements about witnesses, jurors and others connected with the case after the presumptive Republican nominee lashed out at Loren Merchan, a Democratic political consultant in several posts on his Truth Social platform.

Trump is still free to criticize Merchan and another key figure in the case, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, an elected Democrat who's leading the hush-money prosecution. But under the revised gag order, the D.A.'s family is now off-limits from his rhetoric, too.

"This pattern of attacking family members of presiding jurists and attorneys assigned to his cases serves no legitimate purpose," Merchan wrote. "It merely injects fear in those assigned or called to participate in the proceedings that not only they, but their family members as well, are 'fair game,' for Defendant's vitriol."

A violation could result in Trump being held in contempt of court, fined or even jailed.

Trump's lawyer, Susan Necheles, declined comment. A spokesperson for the district attorney's office also declined comment.

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Trump's hush-money case, one of four criminal cases against him, centers on allegations that he falsely logged payments to his former lawyer Michael Cohen as legal fees when they were for Cohen's work covering up negative stories about Trump during the 2016 campaign. That included \$130,000 Cohen paid porn actor Stormy Daniels on Trump's behalf so she wouldn't publicize her claim of a sexual encounter with him years earlier.

Trump pleaded not guilty last April to 34 counts of falsifying business records, a felony punishable by up to four years in prison, though there is no guarantee that a conviction would result in jail time. He denies having sex with Daniels and his lawyers have said that the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses, not part of any coverup.

Trump touched off a firestorm last Wednesday — the day after the original gag order was issued — when he suggested on Truth Social, without evidence, that Merchan's rulings were swayed by his daughter's political consulting interests and wrongly claimed that she had posted a photo on social media showing him behind bars.

Trump complained that the judge was "wrongfully attempting to deprive me of my First Amendment Right to speak out against the Weaponization of Law Enforcement" by Democratic rivals and that Loren Merchan "makes money by working to 'Get Trump.'"

Trump's posts put Merchan in an extraordinary position as a judge and a father. Just two weeks before jury selection in the historic first-ever criminal trial of a former president, Trump's lawyers and prosecutors wrangled in a series of court filings over the bounds of the original gag order and whether Trump had overstepped them.

"It is no longer just a mere possibility or a reasonable likelihood that there exists a threat to the integrity of the judicial proceedings," Merchan concluded Monday. "The threat is very real. Admonitions are not enough, nor is reliance on self-restraint."

Merchan responded after prosecutors asked him Friday to "clarify or confirm" the scope of the gag order and to direct Trump to "immediately desist from attacks on family members."

Assistant District Attorney Joshua Steinglass implored Merchan to "make abundantly clear" to Trump that the gag order protects the judge's family, Bragg's family and the family members of all other individuals it covers. He urged Merchan to warn Trump "that his recent conduct is contumacious and direct him to immediately desist."

Trump's lawyers fought the gag order and its expansion, citing constitutional concerns about restricting Trump's speech further while he's campaigning for president and fighting criminal charges.

On Monday, they said they would soon ask again for Merchan to step aside from the case — promising a court filing in the coming days seeking his recusal based on what they said were "changed circumstances and newly discovered evidence."

Merchan refused the defense's demands to exit the case last year when they first made an issue of his daughter's consulting work and questioned \$35 worth of donations he'd made to Democratic causes during the 2020 campaign, including \$15 to Biden.

Merchan said then that a state court ethics panel found Loren Merchan's work had no bearing on his impartiality. He ruled last September that he was certain of his "ability to be fair and impartial" and that Trump's lawyers had "failed to demonstrate that there exists concrete, or even realistic" reasons for recusal.

Trump's original gag order, issued last Tuesday, had barred him from either making or directing other people to make public statements on his behalf about jurors or potential witnesses in the hush-money trial, such as his lawyer-turned-nemesis Michael Cohen and porn star Stormy Daniels.

The order, echoing one in Trump's Washington, D.C., election interference criminal case, also prohibits any statements meant to interfere with or harass the court's staff, prosecution team or their families. Those prohibitions still apply, along with the newly minted ban on comments about Merchan's and Bragg's families.

Merchan, in expanding the gag order, also warned Trump he'll forfeit his right to see the names of jurors — which are otherwise being kept from the public — if he engages in conduct that threatens their safety or integrity.

"Again, all citizens called upon to participate in these proceedings, whether as a juror, a witness or in

some other capacity, must now concern themselves not only with their own personal safety, but with the safety and the potential for personal attacks upon their loved ones," Merchan wrote. "That reality cannot be overstated."

Judge refuses to toss out tax case against Hunter Biden

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A judge refused Monday to toss out a tax case against Hunter Biden, moving the case closer to the possible spectacle of a trial as his father campaigns for another term as president.

U.S. District Judge Mark Scarsi denied eight motions to dismiss the indictment accusing President Joe Biden's son of scheming to avoid paying \$1.4 million in taxes while living an extravagant lifestyle.

Hunter Biden has pleaded not guilty to the nine felony and misdemeanor tax offenses filed in Los Angeles. His attorney, Abbe Lowell, contended the prosecution is politically motivated, among other arguments, but Scarsi found he had little support for the claims.

"Defendant fails to present a reasonable inference, let alone clear evidence, of discriminatory effect and discriminatory purpose," he wrote.

Hunter Biden's attorneys maintained that the handling of the case was abnormal. "We strongly disagree with the court's decision and will continue to vigorously pursue Mr. Biden's challenges," Lowell said in a statement.

The ruling comes after a three-hour hearing last week where Scarsi, an appointee of former president Donald Trump, seemed skeptical of the defense. Prosecutors, for their part, framed the claims as far-fetched.

Scarsi also dismissed claims related to the timing of the charges, leaks from IRS agents who testified before Congress, and the appointment of the special counsel overseeing the case.

Hunter Biden has also been charged in Delaware with lying on a federal form to buy a gun in 2018. He said he wasn't using or addicted to illegal drugs, even though he has acknowledged being addicted to crack cocaine at the time. He has pleaded not guilty in that case, which also accuses him of possessing the gun illegally.

Both cases are overseen by special counsel David Weiss and now have tentative trials scheduled for June, though defense attorneys are also trying to get the Delaware gun charges tossed out.

The two sets of charges come from a yearslong federal investigation that had been expected to wrap up over the summer with a plea deal in which Hunter Biden would have gotten two years of probation after pleading guilty to misdemeanor tax charges. The president's son, who has since repaid the back taxes with a loan, also would have avoided prosecution on the gun charge if he stayed out of trouble.

But the deal that could have spared Hunter Biden a criminal trial during the 2024 presidential campaign unraveled after a federal judge in Delaware began to question it.

Defense attorneys had argued that immunity provisions in the deal were signed by a prosecutor and are still in effect, but Scarsi sided with prosecutors who said it never got the required approval of a probation officer.

Hunter Biden's original proposed plea deal with prosecutors had been pilloried as a "sweetheart deal" by Republicans, including Trump. The former president is facing his own criminal problems — dozens of charges across four cases, including that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which he lost to Joe Biden.

If convicted of the tax charges, Hunter Biden, 53, could receive a maximum of 17 years in prison.

A channel has opened for vessels clearing wreckage at the Baltimore bridge collapse site

By LEA SKENE and TASSANEE VEJPONGSA Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The U.S. Coast Guard has opened a temporary, alternate channel for vessels involved in clearing debris from the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, part of a phased approach to opening the main shipping channel leading to the vital port, officials said Monday.

Crews are undertaking the complicated work of removing steel and concrete at the site of the bridge's deadly collapse after a container ship lost power and crashed into a supporting column. On Sunday, dive teams surveyed parts of the bridge and checked the ship, and workers in lifts used torches to cut above-water parts of the twisted steel superstructure.

Officials said the temporary channel is open primarily to vessels that are helping with the cleanup effort. Some barges and tugs that have been stuck in the Port of Baltimore since the collapse are also scheduled to pass through the channel.

Authorities believe six workers plunged to their deaths in the collapse, including two whose bodies were recovered last week.

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said at a Monday afternoon news conference that his top priority is recovering the four remaining bodies, followed by reopening shipping channels to the port. He said he understands the urgency but that the risks are significant. He said crews have described the mangled steel girders of the fallen bridge as "chaotic wreckage."

"What we're finding is it is more complicated than we hoped for initially," said U.S. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Shannon Gilreath.

Moore said crews used a large crane to lift a 200-ton (180-metric ton) span of the bridge, a task that took 10 hours. He said the piece was considered a "relatively small lift" in the grand scheme of the recovery effort, which he called enormous.

Moore said crews would lift another 350-ton (317-metric ton) piece from the bridge later Monday as weather allows.

Officials earlier said the temporary channel would have a controlling depth of 11 feet (over 3 meters), a horizontal clearance of 264 feet (80 meters) and a vertical clearance of 96 feet (29 meters).

"This marks an important first step along the road to reopening the port of Baltimore," Capt. David O'Connell, the federal on-scene coordinator of the response, said in a statement Monday. "By opening this alternate route, we will support the flow of marine traffic into Baltimore."

Two additional larger channels are planned as more debris is removed from the waterway. Officials declined to provide a projected timeline for those channels being opened.

Meanwhile, the ship remains stationary, and its 21 crew members remain on board for the foreseeable future, officials said. Twenty of them are from India, and one is from Sri Lanka, said Will Marks, a spokesman for the crew. He said they're currently busy maintaining the ship and cooperating with investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Marks said it's unclear how long the crew will remain on board.

Officials in Baltimore said the crew has plenty of supplies. They said parts of the ship that were damaged in the crash didn't include the crew's living quarters or kitchen.

President Joe Biden will visit the collapse site Friday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre announced Monday. He will meet with state and local officials and get an "on-the-ground look" at federal response efforts, Jean-Pierre said.

Moore said he expects the president will leave with a better understanding of the task at hand.

"He's going to see the fact that we have a ship that is almost the size of the Eiffel Tower, that weighs about as much as the Washington Monument, that's in the middle of the Patapsco River," Moore said. "He's going to see a bridge that has been in existence since I was alive — I don't know what that skyline looks like without the Key bridge — and he is going to come and he's going to see it sitting on top of a ship."

Also Monday, the Small Business Administration opened two centers in the area to help companies get

loans to assist them with losses caused by the disruption of the bridge collapse.

Yvette Jeffery, a spokesperson for the agency's disaster recovery office, said affected businesses can receive loans for as much as \$2 million. She said the effects could range from supply-chain challenges to decreased foot traffic in communities that depended heavily on the bridge.

The bridge fell as the cargo ship Dali lost power March 26 shortly after leaving Baltimore on its way to Sri Lanka. The ship issued a mayday alert, which allowed just enough time for police to stop traffic, but not enough to save a roadwork crew filling potholes on the bridge.

Two workers survived, two bodies were found in a submerged pickup, and four more men are presumed dead.

The Dali is managed by Synergy Marine Group and owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd., both of Singapore. Danish shipping giant Maersk chartered the Dali.

Synergy and Grace Ocean filed a court petition Monday seeking to limit their legal liability, a routine but important procedure for cases litigated under U.S. maritime law. A federal court in Maryland will ultimately decide who is responsible and how much they owe.

The filing seeks to cap the companies' liability at roughly \$43.6 million. It estimates that the vessel itself is valued at up to \$90 million and was carrying freight worth over \$1.1 million in income for the companies. The estimate also deducts two major expenses: at least \$28 million in repairs and at least \$19.5 million in salvage.

Officials are trying to determine how to rebuild the major bridge, which was completed in 1977. It carried Interstate 695 around southeast Baltimore and became a symbol of the city's working-class roots and maritime culture.

Congress is expected to consider aid packages to help people who lose jobs or businesses because of the prolonged closure of the Port of Baltimore. The port handles more cars and farm equipment than any other U.S. facility.

Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott said it won't happen overnight, but the city and its port will recover.

"It will be likely a very hard road," he said. "But we here in Baltimore are built with grit ... and we're going to show the world what that truly means."

As Israel withdraws from raid on Shifa Hospital, accounts from military and witnesses differ wildly

JERUSALEM (AP) — On Monday, the Israeli military withdrew from its second devastating raid on Gaza's largest hospital, Shifa, leaving it in ruins, with the walls blown out and frame blackened.

Despite the destruction, Israel claimed the battle as a victory in its battle against Hamas militants — and said it hadn't harmed civilians sheltering inside the hospital.

But accounts from observers on the ground and the World Health Organization tell a different story.

They describe a terrifying two-week raid during which more than a dozen civilians died and others were brutally detained and trapped inside a facility with dwindling supplies.

Here's what's been said about the raid.

HAVE CIVILIANS AND PATIENTS BEEN KILLED?

Israel said its forces launched the surprise attack March 18. After two weeks of battles inside Shifa, the military had killed 200 militants, spokesperson Daniel Hagari told reporters Monday. He maintained that no civilians sheltering inside the hospital were harmed and said forces had provided some 6,000 Palestinians sheltering there with food, water, and medicine. The army deployed medical teams and Arabic speakers to communicate and help those inside before evacuating everyone effectively, he said.

But World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Sunday that 21 patients inside the hospital had died since the start of the siege. He said 107 patients had been left inside the hospital, including young children and adults in critical condition. He said they lack "health support, medical care and supplies."

"Since yesterday only one bottle of water remains for every 15 people. Contagious diseases are spread-

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ing due to extremely unsanitary conditions, and a lack of water," he wrote on X.

The raid triggered days of fighting for blocks around Shifa. Witnesses and journalists reported airstrikes, the shelling of homes and troops forcing residents to evacuate.

One resident, Mohammed Al-Sheikh, said Israeli fighter jets were "hitting anything moving in the area."

Another, Bassel al-Hilou, said seven relatives were killed in Israeli airstrikes.

"There was a massacre in my uncle's house," he said Monday morning, as hundreds returned to bury the dead, examine the damage or search for loved ones. "The situation was indescribable."

The Israeli military did not comment on any civilian deaths near or outside the hospital.

WHO HAS ISRAEL ARRESTED AND DETAINED?

Israel said it arrested 900 suspected militants. Of those, Israel said, it has confirmed 500 are militants — some of them high-level commanders and members of Hamas' top political echelon.

But accounts from the Gaza Health Ministry and Al Jazeera, a Qatari-based media network, said medical workers and journalists were among those detained and brutalized by Israeli forces.

A group of reporters was handcuffed, blindfolded and stripped of their clothes for 12 hours, a statement from Al Jazeera said. Israel's military did not respond to an AP request for comment on the allegation.

WHAT HAPPENED AS THE RAID ENDED?

After killing and rounding up suspects inside the hospital, military spokesman Hagari said, Israeli forces retreated, exiting the compound on Monday. Two Israeli soldiers were killed and eight injured in the fighting, he said.

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a militant group loosely linked to President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement, said its fighters had targeted Israeli forces with artillery during the operation and as forces withdrew.

Hamas also released videos of militants preparing shells that it said were directed toward Israeli forces in the hospital compound.

Hagari acknowledged that the fighting had destroyed Shifa's emergency ward and a major hospital compound.

"Beside the success, there is a tragedy," he said. "Because of the barricading, because of the bombs and explosives that we used in those buildings. That is the tragedy of ruining the hospital, although we tried everything we can to prevent it."

WHY DID ISRAEL TARGET SHIFA FOR A SECOND TIME?

Since Hamas militants stormed southern Israel on Oct. 7, Israel has made Shifa a central component of its blistering counteroffensive on Gaza.

Israel faces heavy scrutiny over its two major offensives on Shifa. Hospitals receive special protections under international law. Israel says Shifa lost that protection because it is a central command and control center for Hamas. Rights groups and international lawyers say evidence to support this claim has been faulty and insufficient.

In justifying its first raid, Israel said that underneath the hospital lay a complex network of tunnels, a central command center for Hamas. Evidence produced from that raid— caches of weapons, a tunnel leading to small, rusty quarters that appeared out of use, and no scores of militants found — fell far short of the claim.

Hagari said Monday that the intelligence had been wrong and that Israel had tipped off Hamas militants at Shifa by announcing its attack plans.

"They left there because they knew we were coming," he said. "And this time, we did something else."

By doubling back to Shifa in mid-March, he said, forces surprised militants who had regrouped inside.

He said the military now believes militants operated mainly from the hospital wards themselves, not tunnels underneath.

NCAA says 3-point line drawn 9 inches short at apex for Portland women's regional by court supplier

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Sports Writer

The NCAA said Monday one of the 3-point lines on the court used for the women's basketball regionals in Portland, Oregon, was about 9 inches short of regulation at its apex, a mistake by the contractor that makes the courts used throughout March Madness.

The line on the court at Moda Center was corrected, the NCAA said, ahead of Monday night's UConn-USC game to determine the final spot in next weekend's Final Four. But not before five games had been played on it, the first four with the mistake unnoticed.

"What happened with the court in Portland is inexcusable and unfair to every team that played on it," Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer, whose team lost in Portland, said in a statement to The Associated Press. "When you arrive at a gym, especially in the NCAA Tournament, at the very least you expect the baskets to be 10 feet and the floor markings to be correct. For an error of that magnitude to overshadow what has been an incredible two weekends of basketball featuring sensational teams and incredible individual performances is unacceptable and extremely upsetting."

The NCAA uses Connor Sports to supply and install the courts. The NCAA said the marking used to draw the line at the top of the arc in the center of the court was too short. It did not identify the contractor that made the mistake.

"For all NCAA courts, a small hole is punched in the floor at each end of the court that indicates 'center-of-basket' during the finishing process. A calibrated vinyl-tape device is then placed in the hole, which lays the 2-inch game line to be painted," Lynn Holzman, NCAA vice president for women's basketball, said in an email to members.

After reviewing the Portland court, it was found that the center hole was punched about 9 inches short of where it needed to be at the apex of the 3-point arc.

"Connor Sports and the NCAA found the inaccurate line was the result of human error by the finisher contracted by Connor Sports," Holzman said. "The review also found the sides of the 3-point line were accurately painted, as were all other court markings."

The discrepancy in distance was discovered Sunday before Texas and North Carolina State played their Elite Eight game. Four games already had been played over two days with the mismatched 3-point lines.

Coaches for Texas and N.C. State agreed to play as scheduled with one line shorter than the other rather than delay the start. N.C. State beat Texas 76-66 to advance to the Final Four.

The NCAA 3-point line is 22 feet, 1 3/4 inches at the top of the arc for both women and men.

"We apologize for this error and the length of time for which it went unnoticed," Holzman said. "Simply put, this court did not meet our expectations, and the NCAA should have caught the error sooner.

"We will work with all of the NCAA's suppliers and vendors to establish additional quality control measures to ensure this does not happen in future tournaments."

This women's NCAA Tournament has broken records for television viewership, driven by the popularity of Iowa All-American Caitlin Clark, other stars such as LSU's Angel Reese, UConn's Paige Bueckers and USC's JuJu Watkins, and the dominance of undefeated South Carolina.

But the games at times have been overshadowed by controversies and off-the-court issues. The NCAA had to replace one official at halftime when it was discovered she had a degree from one of the schools whose game she was officiating, and Notre Dame star Hanna Hidalgo missed a chunk of the Fighting Irish's Sweet 16 game against Oregon State when officials made her remove a nose ring, which she had played with earlier in the tournament.

Away from the court, Utah players and coaches reported being racially harassed near the Idaho hotel where the team stayed while playing first- and second-round games in Spokane, Washington, about 40 minutes away.

The misdrawn 3-point line capped a rocky eight days for the NCAA, which has been working to address

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inequities between how it administers the men's and women's tournaments since issues were pointed out during the 2021 single-site events in Indianapolis and San Antonio, respectively.

The problem at Moda Center, home to the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers, was another embarrassing mishap. Teams switch baskets that they shoot at at halftime, so for each game, each team played one half shooting from the short 3-point arc.

According to the NCAA's statistics, teams shooting from the 3-point line in Portland that was 9 inches short at the top over five games were 23 for 89 (25.8%). Teams shooting on the accurate line were 29 for 87 (33.3%).

"I think we shot the ball better on the other end both games, because that's the normal line," N.C. State coach Wes Moore said. "But I'm not going to blame it on that. I mean, these kids, like I said, they shoot so far behind it sometimes nowadays, who knows where the line is?"

The Wolfpack were 11 for 19 shooting 3s from the correctly measured line in two games and 5 for 16 with the incorrect line.

"You know, it is an unusual situation," Moore said. "But, like I said, I don't know that it was an advantage or disadvantage, either way. We both played a half on each end."

Baylor, Gonzaga and Duke also played in Portland this past weekend.

In its Sweet 16 game against USC, Baylor went 3 for 12 on 3s from the wrongly marked side (missing seven in a row in one stretch), compared with 6 for 14 on 3s from the correctly marked side. USC won by four.

Connor Sports is a hardwood sports flooring company that provides more than a dozen NBA and WNBA teams floors for their practice venues and game arenas, according to the company's website.

"We apologize for the error that was found and have technicians on site at the Moda Center in Portland who were instructed to make the necessary corrections immediately following (Sunday's) game," the company said in a statement.

At arenas that host multiple types of basketball events, multiple courts are often used. For example, at Madison Square Garden in New York, there is a court used for Knicks games, and when the Big East Tournament is played there, the conference brings a court. That court comes pre-marked with logos, signage and lines drawn to college basketball dimensions.

The main difference between an NBA court and a college court is the distance between the 3-point line and the basket. The NBA line is a foot farther at its longest point.

Google to purge billions of files containing personal data in settlement of Chrome privacy case

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Google has agreed to purge billions of records containing personal information collected from more than 136 million people in the U.S. surfing the internet through its Chrome web browser.

The massive housecleaning comes as part of a settlement in a lawsuit accusing the search giant of illegal surveillance.

The details of the deal emerged in a court filing Monday, more than three months after Google and the attorneys handling the class-action case disclosed they had resolved a June 2020 lawsuit targeting Chrome's privacy controls.

Among other allegations, the lawsuit accused Google of tracking Chrome users' internet activity even when they had switched the browser to the "Incognito" setting that is supposed to shield them from being shadowed by the Mountain View, California, company.

Google vigorously fought the lawsuit until U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers rejected a request to dismiss the case last August, setting up a potential trial. The settlement was negotiated during the next four months, culminating in Monday's disclosure of the terms, which Rogers still must approve during a hearing scheduled for July 30 in Oakland, California, federal court.

The settlement requires Google to expunge billions of personal records stored in its data centers and

make more prominent privacy disclosures about Chrome's Incognito option when it is activated. It also imposes other controls designed to limit Google's collection of personal information.

Consumers represented in the class-action lawsuit won't receive any damages or any other payments in the settlement, a point that Google emphasized in a Monday statement about the deal.

"We are pleased to settle this lawsuit, which we always believed was meritless," Google said. The company asserted it is only being required to "delete old personal technical data that was never associated with an individual and was never used for any form of personalization."

In court papers, the attorneys representing Chrome users painted a much different picture, depicting the settlement as a major victory for personal privacy in an age of ever-increasing digital surveillance.

The lawyers valued the settlement at \$4.75 billion to \$7.8 billion, relying on calculations based primarily on the potential ad sales that the personal information collected through Chrome could have generated in the past and future without the new restrictions.

The settlement also doesn't shield Google from more lawsuits revolving around the same issues covered in the class-action case. That means individual consumers can still pursue damages against the company by filing their own civil complaints in state courts around the U.S.

Investors apparently aren't too worried about the settlement terms affecting the digital ad sales that account for the bulk of the more than \$300 billion in annual revenue pouring into Google's corporate parent, Alphabet Inc. Shares in Alphabet rose 3% to close Monday at \$155.49, giving the company a market value of \$1.9 trillion.

Austin Chambers, a lawyer specializing in data privacy issues at the firm Dorsey & Whitney, described the settlement terms in the Chrome case as a "welcome development" that could affect the way personal information is collected online in the future.

"This prevents companies from profiting off of that data, and also requires them to undertake complex and costly data deletion efforts," Chambers said. "In some cases, this could have a dramatic impact on products built around those datasets."

Google is still facing legal threats on the regulatory frontier that could have a far bigger impact on its business, depending on the outcomes.

After the U.S. Justice Department outlined its allegations that the company is abusing the dominance of its search engine to thwart competition and innovation during a trial last fall, a federal judge is scheduled to hear closing arguments in the case May 1 before issuing a ruling anticipated in the autumn.

Google is also facing potential changes to its app store for smartphones powered by its Android software that could undercut its revenue from commissions after a federal jury last year concluded the company was running an illegal monopoly. A hearing examining possible revisions that Google may have to make to its Play Store is scheduled for late May.

Cargo ship's owner and manager seek to limit legal liability for deadly bridge disaster in Baltimore

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

The owner and manager of a cargo ship that rammed into Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge before the span collapsed last week filed a court petition Monday seeking to limit their legal liability for the deadly disaster.

The companies' "limitation of liability" petition is a routine but important procedure for cases litigated under U.S. maritime law. A federal court in Maryland ultimately decides who is responsible — and how much they owe — for what could become one of the costliest catastrophes of its kind.

Singapore-based Grace Ocean Private Ltd. owns the Dali, the vessel that lost power before it slammed into the bridge early last Tuesday. Synergy Marine Pte Ltd., also based in Singapore, is the ship's manager.

Their joint filing seeks to cap the companies' liability at roughly \$43.6 million. It estimates that the vessel itself is valued at up to \$90 million and was owed over \$1.1 million in income from freight. The estimate also deducts two major expenses: at least \$28 million in repair costs and at least \$19.5 million in salvage costs.

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The companies filed under a pre-Civil War provision of an 1851 maritime law that allows them to seek to limit their liability to the value of the vessel's remains after a casualty. It's a mechanism that has been employed as a defense in many of the most notable maritime disasters, said James Mercante, a New York City-based attorney with over 30 years of experience in maritime law.

"This is the first step in the process," Mercante said. "Now all claims must be filed in this proceeding."

Cases like this typically take years to completely resolve, said Martin Davies, director of Tulane University Law School's Maritime Law Center.

"Although it's a humongous case with a very unusual set of circumstances, I don't think it's going to be that complicated in legal terms," he said. "All aspects of the law are very clear here, so I think the thing that will take the time here is the facts. What exactly went wrong? What could have been done?"

A report from credit rating agency Morningstar DBRS predicts the bridge collapse could become the most expensive marine insured loss in history, surpassing the record of about \$1.5 billion held by the 2012 shipwreck of the Costa Concordia cruise ship off Italy. Morningstar DBRS estimates total insured losses for the Baltimore disaster could be \$2 billion to \$4 billion.

Eight people were working on the highway bridge — a 1.6-mile (2.6-kilometer) span over the Patapsco River — when it collapsed. Two were rescued. The bodies of two more were recovered. Four remain missing and are presumed dead.

The wreckage closed the Port of Baltimore, a major shipping port, potentially costing the area's economy hundreds of millions of dollars in lost labor income alone over the next month.

Experts say the cost to rebuild the collapsed bridge could be at least \$400 million or as much as twice that, though much will depend on the new design.

The amount of money families can generally be awarded for wrongful death claims in maritime law cases is subject to several factors, including how much money the person would have likely provided in financial support to their family if they had not died.

Generally, wrongful death damages may also include things such as funeral expenses and the "loss of nurture," which is essentially the monetary value assigned to whatever moral, spiritual or practical guidance the victim would have been able to provide to their children.

Florida Supreme Court upholds state's 15-week abortion ban, but voters will soon have a say

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — The Florida Supreme Court on Monday cleared the way for the state to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, before many women know they are pregnant, while also giving voters a chance to remove restrictions in November.

The court, which was reshaped by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, ruled 6-1 to uphold the state's ban on most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, meaning a ban on six weeks could soon take effect. But under a separate 4-3 ruling, the court allowed a ballot measure to go to voters that would enshrine abortion rights in Florida's constitution.

The court's decisions could be pivotal in the presidential race and congressional contests this year by driving abortion-rights supporters to the polls. Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, voters in every state with an abortion-related ballot measure have favored the side backed by abortion rights supporters.

The 15-week ban, signed by DeSantis in 2022, has been enforced while it was challenged in court. The six-week ban, passed by the Legislature last year, was written so that it would not take effect until a month after the 2022 law was upheld.

Planned Parenthood, the American Civil Liberties Union and others who challenged the law argued that the Florida Constitution's unique privacy clause for more than 40 years has explicitly protected a right to abortion in the state and should remain in force.

Lawyers for the state, however, said when the privacy clause was adopted by voter referendum in 1980,

few people understood it would cover abortion. They told the justices the clause was mainly meant to cover "informational privacy" such as personal records and not abortion.

The Florida justices agreed, saying that when voters approved the privacy clause, they didn't know it would affect abortion laws.

"The debate — as framed to the public — overwhelmingly associated the Privacy Clause's terms with concerns related to government surveillance and disclosure of private information to the public" the court wrote. "Prolife and prochoice groups did not join in the fray. These groups are not politically bashful— not now, and not in 1980."

DeSantis, who took office in 2019, appointed five of the court's seven justices.

Republican House Speaker Paul Renner said the six-week ban is a good fit for Florida and noted the law includes exceptions for cases involving rape, incest and fetal abnormalities, as well as to save a mother's life.

"It is a compromise that addresses where I think many Floridians are."

Abortion rights proponents were disheartened by the ruling.

"This decision demonstrates how precarious our personal freedoms are in this state," said Democratic Rep. Anna Eskamani. "It's so extreme you're going to see Floridians having to go out of state, probably to Virginia, to get care."

The Florida Access Network plans to switch its strategy from finding abortion care for women in Florida to paying for their travel expenses to go out of state, said Stephanie Loraine Pineiro, the advocacy group's executive director.

"People who can't afford to travel, can't afford to lose their jobs because they have to travel for abortion care, these are the people who are going to be forced to remain pregnant," she said. "The collateral damage is all of us."

The proposed constitutional amendment that will be on the November ballot says "no law shall prohibit, penalize, delay, or restrict abortion before viability or when necessary to protect the patient's health, as determined by the patient's healthcare provider." It provides for one exception that is already in the state constitution: Parents must be notified before their minor children can get an abortion.

Most Republican-controlled states have adopted bans or restrictions on abortions since the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs decision.

A survey of abortion providers conducted for the Society of Family Planning, which advocates for abortion access, found that Florida had the second-largest increase in the total number of abortions provided since the Dobbs decision. The state's data shows that more than 7,700 women from other states received abortions in Florida in 2023.

Fourteen states, including nearby Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi, now have bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. Georgia and South Carolina bar it once cardiac activity can be detected, which is generally considered to be around six weeks into pregnancy.

Florida voters will decide whether to protect abortion rights and legalize pot in November

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON and TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — The Florida Supreme Court issued rulings Monday allowing the state's voters to decide whether to protect abortion rights and legalize recreational use of marijuana, rejecting the state attorney general's arguments that the measures should be kept off the November ballot.

The court was not ruling on the merits of the measures, but only whether they meet the requirements for clarity and don't violate the state constitution's mandate that they only cover one subject.

The court's ruling came the same day it upheld the state's ban on most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. State lawmakers had tightened the ban to six weeks while the issue was still in court. Monday's ruling, therefore, likely paves the way for the six-week ban to go into effect.

ABORTION RIGHTS

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The justices by a 4-3 vote approved for the ballot a proposed amendment that would protect the right to an abortion. The four male justices constituted the majority while the three women opposed allowing the measure to proceed.

The proposed amendment says "no law shall prohibit, penalize, delay, or restrict abortion before viability or when necessary to protect the patient's health, as determined by the patient's healthcare provider." It provides for one exception that is already in the state constitution: Parents must be notified before their minor children can get an abortion.

The majority rejected Republican Attorney General Ashley Moody's argument that the proposed amendment is deceptive and that voters won't realize just how far it will expand access to the procedure.

They also rejected an argument that the measure violates the single-subject clause because it would both allow abortions before the fetus is viable and for the mother's health. The opponents had argued that some voters might approve of allowing abortions to protect the mother's health, but would reject allowing unrestricted abortions before viability. They claimed those are separate subjects.

The majority said that under both Florida and federal law, "abortion has historically involved two major interconnected matters: the viability of the fetus and the health of the mother."

"The mere fact that electors might not agree with the entirety of the amendment does not render it violative of the single-subject requirement," the justices wrote.

Writing for the dissenters, Justice Jaime Grosshans wrote that the measure's ballot summary is misleading and should have been rejected.

"The summary does not give the voter any clarity on the decision they must actually make or reveal the amendment's chief purpose. Instead, it misleads by omission and fails to convey the breadth of what the amendment actually accomplishes — to enshrine broad, undefined terms in our constitution that will lead to decades of litigation."

The ruling could give Democrats a boost in the polls in a state that used to be a toss-up in presidential elections. While many voters aren't enthusiastic about a rematch between former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden, it could inspire more abortion rights advocates to cast a ballot. Trump won Florida four years ago.

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' office issued a statement criticizing the ruling and supporting "the three women on the Court who got it right." He appointed all three women to the court and two of the four men.

"This amendment is misleading and will confuse voters," the statement said. "The language hides the amendment's true purpose of mandating that abortions be permitted up to the time of birth."

But Anna Hochkammer, executive director of Florida Women's Freedom Coalition, applauded the decision, calling it "a huge step forward in our ongoing fight to safeguard a woman's right to have an abortion and to limit government interference in their personal healthcare decisions."

"The overwhelming response from Floridians from every political affiliation, religion and walk of life signifies that this issue transcends partisan politics; it's about healthcare, plain and simple," she said.

Florida will now be one of several states where voters could have a direct say on abortion questions this year.

There has been a major push across the country to put abortion rights questions to voters since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and removed the nationwide right to abortion. Referendums to guarantee abortion rights are set for Maryland and New York, and activists on both sides of the issue in at least seven other states are working to get measures on 2024 ballots.

RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA

The justices voted 5-2 to allow on the ballot a measure that would allow companies which already grow and sell medical marijuana to sell it to adults over 21 for any reason. The ballot measure also would make possession of marijuana for personal use legal.

Moody argued that the proposal is deceptive, in part, because federal law still doesn't allow recreational or medical use of marijuana. She argued that the court previously erred when it approved the language for the medical marijuana ballot initiative voters passed in 2016.

In the majority opinion, Grosshans rejected Moody's argument, saying the measure will not confuse voters as it "clearly states that the amendment legalizes adult personal possession and use of marijuana as a matter of Florida law."

Grosshans rejected an argument by others that the measure violates the prohibition against multi-subject ballot measures because it both decriminalizes marijuana and allows for its sale. Grosshans wrote that those two are logically linked.

"Legalization of marijuana presumes the product will be available for the consumer. Likewise, the sale of personal-use marijuana cannot be reasonably undertaken while possession is criminalized. Selling and possessing marijuana appear, for better or worse, directly connected," Grosshans wrote.

This measure, too, could be an issue that motivates more Democrats to vote.

Why Trump's alarmist message on immigration may be resonating beyond his base

By WILL WEISSERT and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The video shared by former President Donald Trump features horror movie music and footage of migrants purportedly entering the U.S. from countries including Cameroon, Afghanistan and China. Shots of men with tattoos and videos of violent crime are set against close-ups of people waving and wrapping themselves in American flags.

"They're coming by the thousands," Trump says in the video, posted on his social media site. "We will secure our borders. And we will restore sovereignty."

In his speeches and online posts, Trump has ramped up anti-immigrant rhetoric as he seeks the White House a third time, casting migrants as dangerous criminals "poisoning the blood" of America. Hitting the nation's deepest fault lines of race and national identity, his messaging often relies on falsehoods about migration. But it resonates with many of his core supporters going back a decade, to when "build the wall" chants began to ring out at his rallies.

President Joe Biden and his allies discuss the border very differently. The Democrat portrays the situation as a policy dispute that Congress can fix and hits Republicans in Washington for backing away from a border security deal after facing criticism from Trump.

But in a potentially worrying sign for Biden, Trump's message appears to be resonating with key elements of the Democratic coalition that Biden will need to win over this November.

Roughly two-thirds of Americans now disapprove of how Biden is handling border security, including about 4 in 10 Democrats, 55% of Black adults and 73% of Hispanic adults, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll conducted in March.

A recent Pew Research Center poll found that 45% of Americans described the situation as a crisis, while another 32% said it was a major problem.

Vetress Boyce, a Chicago-based racial justice activist, was among those who expressed frustration with Biden's immigration policies and the city's approach as it tries to shelter newly arriving migrants. She argued Democrats should be focusing on economic investment in Black communities, not newcomers.

"They're sending us people who are starving, the same way Blacks are starving in this country. They're sending us people who want to escape the conditions and come here for a better lifestyle when the ones here are suffering and have been suffering for over 100 years," Boyce said. "That recipe is a mixture for disaster. It's a disaster just waiting to happen."

Gracie Martinez is a 52-year-old Hispanic small business owner from Eagle Pass, Texas, the border town that Trump visited in February when he and Biden made same-day trips to the state. Martinez said she once voted for former President Barack Obama and is still a Democrat, but now backs Trump — mainly because of the border.

"It's horrible," she said. "It's tons and tons of people and they're giving them medical and money, phones," she said, complaining those who went through the legal immigration system are treated worse.

Priscilla Hesles, 55, a teacher who lives in Eagle Pass, Texas, described the current situation as "almost

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an overtaking" that had changed the town.

"We don't know where they're hiding. We don't know where they've infiltrated into and where are they going to come out of," said Hesles, who said she used to take an evening walk to a local church, but stopped after she was shaken by an encounter with a group of men she alleged were migrants.

Immigration will almost certainly be one of the central issues in November's election, with both sides spending the next six months trying to paint the other as wrong on border security.

The president's reelection campaign recently launched a \$30 million ad campaign targeting Latino audiences in key swing states that includes a digital ad in English and Spanish highlighting Trump's past description of Mexican immigrants as "criminals" and "rapists."

The White House has also mulled a series of executive actions that could drastically tighten immigration restrictions, effectively going around Congress after it failed to pass the bipartisan deal Biden endorsed.

"Trump is a fraud who is only out for himself," said Biden campaign spokesman Kevin Munoz. "We will make sure voters know that this November."

Trump will campaign Tuesday in Wisconsin and Michigan this week, where he is expected to again tear into Biden on immigration. His campaign said his event in the western Michigan city of Grand Rapids will focus on what it alleged was "Biden's Border Bloodbath."

The former president calls recent record-high arrests for southwest border crossings an "invasion" orchestrated by Democrats to transform America's very makeup. Trump accuses Biden of purposely allowing criminals and potential terrorists to enter the country unchecked, going so far as to claim the president is engaged in a "conspiracy to overthrow the United States of America."

He also casts migrants — many of them women and children escaping poverty and violence — as "poisoning the blood" of America with drugs and disease and claimed some are "not people." Experts who study extremism warn against using dehumanizing language in describing migrants.

There is no evidence that foreign governments are emptying their jails or mental asylums as Trump says. And while conservative news coverage has been dominated by several high-profile and heinous crimes allegedly committed by people in the country illegally, the latest FBI statistics show overall violent crime in the U.S. dropped again last year, continuing a downward trend after a pandemic-era spike.

Studies have also found that people living in the country illegally are far less likely than native-born Americans to have been arrested for violent, drug and property crimes.

"Certainly the last several months have demonstrated a clear shift in political support," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of the immigrant resettlement group Global Refuge and a former Obama administration and State Department official.

"I think that relates to the rhetoric of the past several years," she said, "and just this dynamic of being outmatched by a loud, extreme of xenophobic rhetoric that hasn't been countered with reality and the facts on the ground."

Part of what has made the border such a salient issue is that its impact is being felt far from the border.

Trump allies, most notably Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, have used state-funded buses to send more than 100,000 migrants to Democratic-led cities like New York, Denver and Chicago, where Democrats will hold this summer's convention. While the program was initially dismissed as a publicity stunt, the influx has strained city budgets and left local leaders scrambling to provide emergency housing and medical care for new groups of migrants.

Local news coverage, meanwhile, has often been negative. Viewers have seen migrants blamed for everything from a string of gang-related New Jersey robberies to burglary rings targeting retail stores in suburban Philadelphia to measles cases in parts of Arizona and Illinois.

Abbott has deployed the Texas National Guard to the border, placed concertina wire along parts of the Rio Grande in defiance of U.S. Supreme Court orders, and has argued his state should be able to enforce its own immigration laws.

Some far-right internet sites have begun pointing to Abbott's actions as the first salvo in a coming civil war. And Russia has also helped spread and amplify misleading and incendiary content about U.S. immi-

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gration and border security as part of its broader efforts to polarize Americans. A recent analysis by the firm Logically, which tracks Russian disinformation, found online influencers and social media accounts linked to the Kremlin have seized on the idea of a new civil war and efforts by states like Texas to secede from the union.

Amy Cooter, who directs research at the Center on Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, worries the current wave of civil war talk will only increase as the election nears. So far, it has generally been limited to far-right message boards. But immigration is enough of a concern generally that its political potency is intensified, Cooter said.

"Non-extremist Americans are worried about this, too," she said. "It's about culture and perceptions about who is an American."

In the meantime, there are people like Rudy Menchaca, an Eagle Pass bar owner who also works for a company that imports Corona beer from Mexico and blamed the problems at the border for hurting business.

Menchaca is the kind of Hispanic voter Biden is counting on to back his reelection bid. The 27-year-old said he was never a fan of Trump's rhetoric and how he portrayed Hispanics and Mexicans. "We're not all like that," he said.

But he also said he was warming to the idea of backing the former president because of the reality on the ground.

"I need those soldiers to be around if I have my business," Menchaca said of Texas forces dispatched to the border. "The bad ones that come in could break in."

Lou Conter, last survivor of USS Arizona from Pearl Harbor attack, dies at 102

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Lou Conter, the last living survivor of the USS Arizona battleship that exploded and sank during the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, has died. He was 102.

Conter passed away on Monday at his home in Grass Valley, California, following congestive heart failure, his daughter, Louann Daley said, adding she was beside him along with two of her brothers, James and Jeff.

The Arizona lost 1,177 sailors and Marines in the 1941 attack that launched the United States into World War II. The battleship's dead account for nearly half of those killed in the attack.

Conter was a quartermaster, standing on the main deck of the Arizona as Japanese planes flew overhead at 7:55 a.m. on Dec. 7 that year. Sailors were just beginning to hoist colors or raise the flag when the assault began.

Conter recalled how one bomb penetrated steel decks 13 minutes into the battle and set off more than 1 million pounds (450,000 kilograms) of gunpowder stored below.

The explosion lifted the battleship 30 to 40 feet (9 to 12 meters) out of the water, he said during a 2008 oral history interview stored at the Library of Congress. Everything was on fire from the mainmast forward, he said.

"Guys were running out of the fire and trying to jump over the sides," Conter said. "Oil all over the sea was burning."

His autobiography "The Lou Conter Story" recounts how he joined other survivors in tending to the injured, many of them blinded and badly burned. The sailors only abandoned ship when their senior surviving officer was sure they had rescued all those still alive.

The rusting wreckage of the Arizona still lies where it sank. More than 900 sailors and Marines remain entombed inside. Only 335 Arizona crew members survived.

Conter went to flight school after Pearl Harbor, earning his wings to fly PB-1 patrol bombers, which the Navy used to look for submarines and bomb enemy targets. He flew 200 combat missions in the Pacific with a "Black Cats" squadron, which conducted dive bombing at night in planes painted black.

In 1943, he and his crew were shot down in waters near New Guinea and had to avoid sharks. A sailor expressed doubt they would survive, to which Conter replied, "baloney."

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"Don't ever panic in any situation. Survive is the first thing you tell them. Don't panic or you're dead," he said. They were quiet and treaded water until another plane came hours later and dropped them a lifeboat.

In the late 1950s, he was made the Navy's first SERE officer — an acronym for survival, evasion, resistance and escape. He spent the next decade training Navy pilots and crew on how to survive if they're shot down in the jungle and captured as a prisoner of war. Some of his pupils used his lessons as POWs in Vietnam.

Conter retired in 1967 after 28 years in the Navy.

Conter was born in Ojibwa, Wisconsin, on Sept. 13, 1921. His family later moved to Colorado where he walked five miles (eight kilometers) one way to school outside Denver.

He enlisted in the Navy after he turned 18, getting \$17 a month and a hammock for his bunk at boot camp.

Conter had been getting weaker and weaker in recent months and was hospitalized for 10 days in February, his daughter said. He had been in hospice since returning home.

He told his family he loved them, thanked them for being with him and taking care of him at home.

"I'm glad he's at peace. I'm glad he didn't suffer. I know when he transitioned over, he had so many people there waiting for him - his wife Val, who he loved dearly," Daley said.

Conter is also survived by another son, Tony, and a stepson Ron Fudge, and many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Funeral arrangements were pending. The family plans to bury him in Grass Valley, next to his late wife Valerie, who died in 2016 after they had been married for 45 years.

With Conter's death, there are now 19 survivors of the Pearl Harbor attack still living, according to Kathleen Farley, the California state chair of the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors. About 87,000 military personnel were on Oahu on Dec. 7, according to a rough estimate compiled by military historian J. Michael Wenger.

In his later years, Conter became a fixture at annual remembrance ceremonies in Pearl Harbor that the Navy and the National Park Service jointly hosted on the anniversaries of the 1941 attack. When he lacked the strength to attend in person, he recorded video messages for those who gathered and watched remotely from his home in California.

In 2019, when he was 98, he said he liked going to remember those who lost their lives.

"It's always good to come back and pay respect to them and give them the top honors that they deserve," he said.

Though many treated the shrinking group of Pearl Harbor survivors as heroes, Conter refused the label.

"The 2,403 men that died are the heroes. And we've got to honor them ahead of everybody else. And I've said that every time, and I think it should be stressed," Conter told The Associated Press in a 2022 interview at his California home.

Russian security agency says suspects detained in the Caucasus are linked to Moscow attack

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's top security agency said Monday it has broken up what it called a "terrorist cell" in southern Russia whose members had provided weapons and cash to suspected attackers of the Moscow concert hall.

The Federal Security Service, or FSB, said that on Sunday it detained four suspected members of the cell in the Russian province of Dagestan in the North Caucasus.

The agency alleged that the suspects detained in Dagestan were involved in channeling funds and providing weapons to the gunmen who attacked the concert hall on Moscow's western edge on March 22, killing 144 people in the deadliest attack on Russian soil in two decades.

"The detained militants directly participated in financing the perpetrators of the March 22 terror attack on the Crocus City Hall in Moscow and providing them with terror means," the FSB said in a statement.

It said one of the suspects detained in Dagestan had confessed to personally bringing weapons to the Moscow attackers.

The FSB released a video showing one of the suspects saying that they also planned an attack in the city of Kaspiysk in Dagestan. It wasn't clear whether the two confessions came from the same person.

The agency said the suspects are foreign nationals, without specifying their nationality. The suspected attackers of the Moscow concert hall arrested hours after the March 22 raid are citizens of the Central Asian nation of Tajikistan.

The detention of four suspects in Dagestan follows the arrest of the four suspected gunmen and seven others who were accused of involvement in the attack.

An affiliate of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack. President Vladimir Putin acknowledged that "radical Islamists" conducted the raid, but alleged — without providing evidence — that Ukraine and the West were involved, despite Kyiv's vehement denials.

Also on Monday, a Moscow court ordered a suspected accomplice of the attackers to two months in pretrial detention. Suspect Yakubjoni Yusufzoda, a Tajikistan citizen, allegedly provided money for accommodation for the gunmen, Russian news reports said.

He was detained four days after the attack and jailed for failure to obey police, but now is charged with committing fatal terrorism, the reports said. He is the 10th person charged in the case.

White House Easter egg roll draws a huge crowd after storm-delayed start

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thunder and lightning delayed the start of the annual Easter egg roll at the White House on Monday, but the event eventually rolled ahead under gray skies with a large crowd including many youngsters wearing ponchos or colorful jackets against intermittent rain.

More than 40,000 people — 10,000 more than last year — were expected to attend, with children attempting to coax colorfully dyed hard-boiled eggs across the lawn to a finish line, among other "egg-tivities." This year's theme was "EGG-ucation," and led by Jill Biden, a teacher for more than 30 years.

"Easter reminds us of the power of hope and renewal, and sacrifice and resurrection," President Joe Biden told attendees, speaking from the White House balcony, where he was flanked by two large Easter bunnies, one wearing sunglasses fashioned like his trademark Ray-Bans. "But mainly love and grace towards one another."

Biden said it's a time to "cherish the blessings, the possibilities that we have as Americans."

"That's what I see in our country. We're a great nation because we're a good people," he said. "Our values are solid."

The president, accompanied by the first lady, then went down to the lawn, bending down to help a few youngsters with their eggs. He blew a whistle to officially start the roll — one of the oldest White House traditions first held in 1878.

Participants included thousands of military and veteran families, their caregivers and survivors. Members of the general public claimed tickets through an online lottery. All were being admitted in nine waves until the evening.

A large schoolhouse erected on the South Lawn offered kids activities in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM — including making circuit-breakers, simulating a fossil dig and learning about next week's solar eclipse. Youngsters also wrote notes to U.S. troops and first responders with Operation Gratitude, a nonprofit organization.

The American Egg Board donated 64,000 eggs to the White House for the event — 40,000 for egg rolling and 24,00 for decorating and other uses.

"I'm a teacher so I love any time when we can turn the White House into a classroom," the first lady said, noting that the South Lawn had been turned into a "learning playground and school community."

After blowing a whistle to help with a few egg roll games, Jill Biden went to the garden outside the East Wing and read "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" to a group.

The first couple also gave a brief interview Monday to NBC's "Today" and said Easter Sunday for them

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featured putting dollar bills in plastic easter eggs and holding a hunt with their grandchildren. "We're still missing one," joked the first lady.

The Democratic president drew criticism from top conservatives and the campaign of former President Donald Trump, a Republican who is running to reclaim the White House, by proclaiming March 31 — the same day as Easter — as "Transgender Day of Visibility."

Asked about the criticism as he was leaving the lawn, Biden said his critics were "thoroughly uninformed" and that he did not arrange for Easter and transgender recognition to fall on the same day.

Karine Jean-Pierre, the president's chief spokesperson, was more direct and slammed as "cruel, hateful and dishonest" what she said was being pushed "to divide us."

At her daily press briefing, Jean-Pierre said that "folks who understand the calendar and how it works" know that the date for Easter changes every year and that this year it coincided with Transgender Day of Visibility.

Separately, Biden was asked in the NBC News interview about his final campaign as he seeks a second term. He said he was optimistic and thinks "people are so tired of the negativity" they hear from the other side that he will be reelected.

"I think people are going to surprise people again," Biden said.

The White House Easter Egg Roll, one of its oldest traditions, dates to the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes, who opened the White House lawn to children after they were kicked off the grounds of the U.S. Capitol.

States move to shore up voting rights protections after courts erode federal safeguards

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — An appeals court ruling that weakened a key part of the Voting Rights Act is spurring lawmakers in several states to enact state-level protections to plug gaps that the ruling opened in the landmark federal law aimed at prohibiting racial discrimination in voting.

Democratic-led states have been taking matters into their own hands because national legislation to expand voting rights remains stalled in a divided Congress. Meanwhile, Republican lawmakers in many states have tried to erode safeguards in the name of protecting election integrity amid former President Donald Trump's false claims that vote fraud cost him the 2020 election.

Legislators in Minnesota, Michigan, Maryland, New Jersey and Florida are pursuing state voting rights acts, building on ones enacted by New York in 2022 and Connecticut in 2023, as well as ones enacted earlier in Virginia, Oregon, Washington and California.

"And we know of interest from other states that are considering taking up state VRAs in the next year or so," said Michael Pernick, an attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in New York.

In Minnesota, Democratic Rep. Emma Greenman, of Minneapolis, said she felt an urgent need to act after the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last year in an Arkansas case that voters and groups could no longer sue under Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act — only the U.S. attorney general.

Section 2 prohibits voting practices or procedures that discriminate on the basis of race, including maps that disadvantage voters of color. Lawsuits have long been brought under the section to try to ensure Black voters have adequate political representation in places with a long history of racism, including many Southern states.

The appeals court decision currently applies only to the seven states in the 8th Circuit, which stretches from Minnesota to Arkansas. Legal observers expect the case to end up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

"As with other areas of policy, what you're seeing is, states really have to say, 'We need to make sure that ... we have a system that is free from discrimination, we need to protect the rights of voters,'" Greenman said.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act is seen as a crowning achievement of the civil rights movement. But federal courts have "chipped away" at it over the decades, said Lata Nott, an attorney with the Campaign Legal

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Center in Washington, D.C., who testified for the Minnesota bill.

The biggest blow to the federal law in the view of voting rights advocates was a 2013 Supreme Court ruling in an Alabama case that stripped the government of a potent tool to stop voting bias by eliminating the requirement that jurisdictions with a history of racial discrimination in voting get "preclearance" from the federal government for major changes in the way they hold elections.

Conservatives have argued the requirement did not account for racial progress and other changes in society and that existing voting rights protections are adequate.

"It looks like this an effort by the Left in the state to do at the state level what they can't do at the federal level under the VRA," said Zack Smith, a legal fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation's Edwin Meese III Center for Legal and Judicial Studies.

The 8th Circuit decision sounded new alarms because most lawsuits to enforce the act have come from private individuals and groups, not the Justice Department, Nott said. Administrations change, so allowing people to protect their own voting rights is a "valuable enforcement mechanism," she said.

There are broad similarities among the various state voting rights acts under consideration and the New York and Connecticut laws. They all give voters and groups a "private right of action" to challenge laws that dilute or suppress the votes of people of color, Pernick said. That's the right the 8th Circuit struck down on the federal level.

Some of the state proposals also include preclearance requirements for changes in voting to make sure they don't harm voters of color.

The Minnesota proposal is expected to get floor votes soon as part of a broader election policy bill, and the sponsors said they are cautiously optimistic about passage. The Maryland proposal has had hearings, while an effort in Michigan is expected to get hearings in April, Nott said.

Several state proposals include "safe harbor" provisions to try to head off the kind of lengthy, expensive litigation that often has been needed to enforce the federal law. The Minnesota bill, for example, would require potential plaintiffs to notify political subdivisions before they sue to create opportunities to negotiate remedies first.

Minnesota has an image as progressive on voting rights, and the current Legislature is the most diverse in state history. But witnesses who testified before the Legislature recently said there are still problems.

They point to data showing county boards across the state, which make important decisions affecting communities of color, are disproportionately white. Electing local bodies by districts that minority candidates could win, instead of at-large seats, is one potential remedy for preventing vote dilution.

Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon, a Democrat who is president-elect of the National Association of Secretaries of State, said he is trying to enlist as many of his fellow election officers across the country to file a friend-of-the-court brief urging the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the 8th Circuit decision if the plaintiffs in the Arkansas case appeal. But for now, he said, that ruling is the law in seven states.

"If we can no longer count on the federal Voting Rights Act to allow private citizens to protect their own voting rights, then we need a Minnesota Voting Rights Act to fill the gap," Simon testified. "And that's what this bill does. It fills the gap by guaranteeing a day in court for Minnesota voters to defend their voting rights against laws or policies that they believe discriminate against them."

Officials with groups representing Minnesota's local governments testified they support the concept but were concerned about the potential extra costs it could impose on them, an issue that raised concerns among Republicans on the committees that have heard the bill. Republicans also argued it's a heavier-handed tool than Minnesota needs.

Democratic Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said he had not studied the proposal in detail, but he shares the ideals of making voting easy and accessible.

"If this is moving down those paths, that's a good thing," Walz said.

Minnesota Senate President Bobby Joe Champion, a Minneapolis Democrat, is the lead author of the Minnesota Voting Rights Act in the Senate.

"Our democracy is important. We want more people voting, not less. We want more people's voice to be heard, not silenced. We want people's rights to be protected, not squandered," Champion said.

A Rio councilwoman's killing was a mystery.

An arrest gave a peek at corruption keeping it unsolved

By DIANE JEANTET, DAVID BILLER and GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Two days after Rio de Janeiro city councilwoman Marielle Franco's 2018 assassination, her widow sat down with the chief of the state's civil police, Rivaldo Barbosa, who pledged to do everything in his power to hold the guilty parties to account.

In fact, the man Brazilian media once exalted as "Rio's Sherlock" had the exact opposite intent, according to newly revealed allegations. Federal Police arrested Barbosa on March 24 — over six years later — for allegedly helping orchestrate Franco's killing and taking money to obstruct the very investigation he would oversee.

"Hours after my wife's murder, I was in front of a man who knew exactly what had happened and, more than that, who was part of ordering it," Mônica Benício told TV Brasil through tears after his arrest.

The explosive revelations in the nearly 500-page Federal Police report offer an unprecedented glimpse into how organized crime has undermined Rio's institutions and reveal the extent of corruption in a city where militias allegedly pay police to look away. The death of Franco, a rising political star who resisted militias' expansion and fought for the poor, has driven home the consequences of allowing organized crime to run roughshod over Rio's sprawling landscape.

"The Marielle case is quite emblematic," said Jacqueline Muniz, a professor of public security at the Federal Fluminense University and ex-director of Rio's public security secretariat that oversees police. "In Rio, we govern with crime — not against it."

Barbosa's arrest came only after federal authorities started investigating once leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office in 2023. Federal Police made a plea deal with former police officer Ronnie Lessa, who told them that two politician brothers hired him to kill Franco and informed him Barbosa had signed off beforehand. Police say they ordered her dead because she was an obstacle to militias' interests.

Barbosa's attorneys told The Associated Press that he denies any wrongdoing or having ever met the accused politicians, and said the allegations are conjecture based on a criminal's words.

Upon his promotion to police chief, Barbosa delivered a defiant speech to a packed auditorium, demanding the "fight against one of the greatest evils that destroy the state: corruption!"

The very next day, Franco was killed.

The masterminds anticipated the assassination would be a blip — a bit of noise feeding a news cycle and just another death in a city where death is commonplace. But they underestimated how many people had placed their hopes in Franco, who hailed from one of the working-class communities known as favelas. The 38-year-old stood out as a Black, bisexual women in politics and her abrupt end shook Brazil with mass protests that echoed around the world.

Weeks later, with no signs of outrage abating, Lessa was getting nervous. He met the politicians to vent. They assured him Barbosa had been paid to "turn the cannon in the other direction."

Federal Police say Barbosa tapped an officer to lead the capital's homicide division whom he trusted to slow-walk and obstruct the investigation, while another accomplice induced a witness to give false testimony implicating a suspect they knew to be innocent.

As time passed, "Who killed Marielle?" became the mantra of those clamoring for justice.

In 2019, the Federal Police told Rio prosecutors they should investigate Barbosa, sharing a cellphone recording of a militia member one of their operations targeted, local media reported at the time. In that conversation, reproduced in the new report, the militia member said Barbosa had received 400,000 reais to not clear Franco's case.

"It stretched credulity that he would be one of the chief architects and directly involved in preventing the investigation into this extraordinarily well-publicized murder," recalled Robert Muggah, co-founder of Igarapé Institute, a security-focused think tank. "Over the course of the investigation, we became more skeptical, not necessarily of him, but of the civil police's level of commitment."

The police report alleges Barbosa laundered bribe money through front companies ostensibly owned by his wife, whose personal earnings skyrocketed the year he assumed control of the homicide division.

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Financial records show abundant profits for the enterprises and massive cash withdrawals.

Luisa Ferreira, a criminal law professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, said plea bargain testimony should be viewed with a grain of salt but noted the financial data corroborates Lessa's account.

"We don't need full proof at this point (for Barbosa's arrest); we need some corroboration of what was said by the cooperating defendant, and the report does this. Starting now, the bar for evidence will be higher," Ferreira said.

Barbosa's lawyers, who also represent his wife, said she denies participating in any illicit activities and questions about her income will be clarified.

The arrested politicians allegedly started planning Franco's assassination after she voted against a bill to bypass authorities and bestow legal title to land and buildings in militia territory.

The militias, which formed in the late 1980s to stop drug traffickers' expansion, moved into land-grabbing and real estate more recently and control over half the territory in Rio's metro region, according to a 2022 study from the Federal Fluminense University and the Fogo Cruzado Institute.

"This is happening because of the public security choices Rio has made over the last 30 to 40 years," said Rafael Soares, author of "Milicianos," a book about Rio's militias. No Rio administration has addressed corruption, instead appeasing public opinion through bloody confrontations, particularly in poor neighborhoods, that infamously produce collateral damage, Soares said.

Robson Rodrigues, who once led Rio's military police in the Mare favela where Marielle grew up, said police overhaul must look beyond street-level officers to the corps' entire hierarchy. He noted that some politicians fear civil police, who are rumored to keep blackmail dossiers to discourage pushing for deep reform.

"Everybody is scared. There is reluctance, because of the power that the police force has, especially civil police. It's not just about political will; it's about having the courage to do it," said Rodrigues, who researches public security at the State University of Rio de Janeiro.

The police report leading to the arrests provided detailed accounts of corruption. One militia member testified in a separate investigation that the homicide division gets a monthly allowance of about 70,000 reais (\$14,000). Specific cover-ups require more; in one case, the unit received 300,000 reais, he said, claiming Barbosa was among those benefiting.

Homicide detective Brenno Carnevale testified in a 2019 case that seized material went missing and lead investigators were suddenly swapped, especially in cases related to militias. A victim's daughter testified that Carnevale couldn't conceal his exasperation when she came seeking information: All the records had vanished.

These machinations are "the reason why major homicides were never solved," the police's report said. "This whole dynamic would not be possible if the main body responsible for repressing the actions of these groups was not complicit in the scheme."

Rio authorities solved 23% of homicides in 2021, half the rate of neighboring Sao Paulo state and among the country's lowest, according to a 2023 report from nonprofit Instituto Sou da Paz.

The brother of Franco's political mentor was murdered in 2006, and 14 years elapsed before Rio's police indicted three former officers associated with militias. Prosecutors didn't press charges. In November, a decorated officer investigating corruption within her ranks was gunned down by camouflaged men. An officer who previously worked with her in the internal affairs division was arrested; local media reported he was on a militia's payroll.

And newspaper O Globo reported that lawyers are already pushing to reopen at least six cases from when Barbosa was a homicide detective, head of the unit or police chief.

Franco's case has revealed how, at present, only societal outrage and federal involvement yield advances, security experts told the AP. The alleged masterminds behind Franco's killing were arrested, but that doesn't mean justice will be done. For now, it remains one more killing in a city where life is cheap and impunity reigns. _____

Pessoa reported from Sao Paulo.

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Invaders from underground are coming in cicada-geddon.

It's the biggest bug emergence in centuries

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Trillions of evolution's bizarro wonders, red-eyed periodical cicadas that have pumps in their heads and jet-like muscles in their rears, are about to emerge in numbers not seen in decades and possibly centuries.

Crawling out from underground every 13 or 17 years, with a collective song as loud as jet engines, the periodical cicadas are nature's kings of the calendar.

These black bugs with bulging eyes differ from their greener-tinged cousins that come out annually. They stay buried year after year, until they surface and take over a landscape, covering houses with shed exoskeletons and making the ground crunchy.

This spring, an unusual cicada double dose is about to invade a couple parts of the United States in what University of Connecticut cicada expert John Cooley called "cicada-geddon." The last time these two broods came out together in 1803 Thomas Jefferson, who wrote about cicadas in his Garden Book but mistakenly called them locusts, was president.

"Periodic cicadas don't do subtle," Cooley said.

If you're fascinated by the upcoming solar eclipse, the cicadas are weirder and bigger, said Georgia Tech biophysicist Saad Bhamla.

"We've got trillions of these amazing living organisms come out of the Earth, climb up on trees and it's just a unique experience, a sight to behold," Bhamla said. "It's like an entire alien species living underneath our feet and then some prime number years they come out to say hello."

At times mistaken for voracious and unrelated locusts, periodical cicadas are more annoying rather than causing biblical economic damage. They can hurt young trees and some fruit crops, but it's not widespread and can be prevented.

The largest geographic brood in the nation -- called Brood XIX and coming out every 13 years -- is about to march through the Southeast, having already created countless boreholes in the red Georgia clay. It's a sure sign of the coming cicada occupation. They emerge when the ground warms to 64 degrees (17.8 degrees Celsius), which is happening earlier than it used to because of climate change, entomologists said. The bugs are brown at first but darken as they mature.

Soon after the insects appear in large numbers in Georgia and the rest of the Southeast, cicada cousins that come out every 17 years will inundate Illinois. They are Brood XIII.

"You've got one very widely distributed brood in Brood XIX, but you have a very dense historically abundant brood in the Midwest, your Brood XIII," said University of Maryland entomologist Mike Raupp.

"And when you put those two together... you would have more than anywhere else any other time," University of Maryland entomologist Paula Shrewsbury said.

These hideaway cicadas are found only in the eastern United States and a few tiny other places. There are 15 different broods that come out every few years, on 17- and 13-year cycles. These two broods may actually overlap — but probably not interbreed — in a small area near central Illinois, entomologists said.

The numbers that will come out this year — averaging around 1 million per acre over hundreds of millions of acres across 16 states — are mind-boggling. Easily hundreds of trillions, maybe quadrillions, Cooley said.

An even bigger adjacent joint emergence will be when the two largest broods, XIX and XIV, come out together in 2076, Cooley said: "That is the cicada-palooza."

The origin of some of the astronomical cicada numbers can likely be traced to evolution, Cooley and several other entomologists said. Fat, slow and tasty, periodical cicadas make ideal meals for birds, said Raupp, who eats them himself. (His school put out a cicada cookbook called "Cicada-Licious.") But there are too many for them to be eaten to extinction, he said.

"Birds everywhere will feast. Their bellies will be full and once again the cicadas will emerge triumphant," Raupp said.

The other way cicadas use numbers, or math, is in their cycles. They stay underground either 13 or 17 years, both prime numbers. Those big and odd numbers are likely an evolutionary trick to keep predators

from relying on a predictable emergence.

The cicadas can cause problems for young trees and nurseries when their mating and nesting weighs down and breaks branches, Shrewsbury said.

Periodical cicadas look for vegetation surrounding mature trees, where they can mate and lay eggs and then go underground to feast on the roots, said Mount St. Joseph University biologist Gene Kritsky, a cicada expert who wrote a book on this year's dual emergence. That makes American suburbia "periodical cicada heaven," he said.

It can be hard on the eardrums when all those cicadas get together in those trees and start chorusing. It's like a singles bar with the males singing to attract mates, with each species having its own mating call.

"The whole tree is screaming," said Kritsky, who created a Cicada Safari app to track where the cicadas are.

Cooley takes hearing protection because it can get so intense.

"It's up in the 110 decibel range," Cooley said. "It'd be like putting your head next to a jet. It is painful."

The courtship is something to watch, Kritsky imitated the male singing "ffairro (his pitch rising), ffairro."

"She flicks her wings," Kritsky narrated in a play-by-play. "He moves closer. He sings. She flicks her wings. When he gets really close, he doesn't have a gap, he'll go ffairro, ffairro, ffairro, fffairro."

Then the mating is consummated, with the female laying eggs in a groove in a tree branch. The cicada nymph will fall to the ground, then dig underground to get to the roots of a tree.

Cicadas are strange in that they feed on the tree's xylem, which carry water and some nutrients. The pressure inside the xylem is lower than outside, but a pump in the cicada's head allows the bug to get fluid that it otherwise wouldn't be able to get out of the tree, said Carrie Deans, a University of Alabama Huntsville entomologist.

The cicada gets so much fluid that it has a lot of liquid waste to get rid of. It does so thanks to a special muscle that creates a jet of urine that flows faster than in most any other animal, said Georgia Tech's Bhamla.

In Macon, Georgia, T.J. Rauls was planting roses and holly this week when he came across a cicada while digging. A neighbor had already posted an image of an early-emerging critter.

Rauls named his own bug "Bobby" and said he's looking forward to more to come.

"I think it will be an exciting thing," Rauls said. "It will be bewildering with all their noises."

Tall Final Four task: Beating reigning champion UConn will not be an easy task in the desert

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

The 2024 version of March Madness has apexed with a trio of streak busters in the desert.

N.C. State is in the Final Four for the first time since Jim Valvano ran around trying to find someone to hug after the 1983 national championship. Purdue and big man Zach Edey will make their first Final Four appearance since Joe Barry Carroll dominated the paint in 1980.

Alabama? Never been.

An angry pack of Huskies awaits them in the Valley of the Sun.

Dominating on its way to a fifth national championship a year ago, UConn has looked even more unbeatable so far in its run to become the first repeat champion since Florida in 2006-07.

"Our defense is elite. Our offense is elite. We rebound the ball," UConn coach Dan Hurley said. "These guys play every possession like it's the end of the world."

The Huskies have done nothing but end opponents' hopes through consecutive dominating March runs.

UConn steamrolled its way through the 2023 bracket, winning each game by at least 13 points. That was the best since Indiana in 1981.

These Huskies may be better.

With 7-foot-2 Donovan Clingan in the middle and talent across the roster, UConn won its first four NCAA Tournament games by an average of 27.7 points. The Huskies made Illinois look like a JV team in the Elite

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Eight, reeling off 30 — yes, 30 — straight points in a 77-52 victory to become the first reigning champion to reach the Final Four since Florida's consecutive titles.

Knocking off UConn will be a monumental task in Glendale, Arizona, starting with Alabama in the semi-finals Saturday.

"His (Hurley's) formula is working out pretty well," Alabama coach Nate Oats said. "I'm going to have to figure out that formula myself here soon."

Oats already has sorted a few things figured out.

The Crimson Tide lost in the Sweet 16 last season, then most of its roster. Oats had three returning players and replaced three assistants who left for head coaching jobs.

Playing fast and letting 3s fly from all over, Alabama led the nation in scoring during the regular season and has kept up the pace in March. Led by heady, gritty point guard Mark Sears, the Crimson Tide scored at least 89 points in three of four NCAA Tournament games, including 109 in the opener against Charleston.

Alabama reached its first Final Four by making 16 3-pointers in an 89-82 win over Clemson in the Elite Eight.

"Guys bought in — we can make this run, other teams have done it," Oats said. "We have the capability to do it."

The first national semifinal on Saturday will be big — as in more than 14 feet and 575 pounds of men in the paint.

Purdue has college basketball's most unstoppable force in Edey.

At 7-4, he didn't need a ladder to cut down the nets in Detroit and has the skill to go with his size. Edey was the AP national player of the year last year and the front-runner to become the first player to repeat since Virginia's Ralph Sampson earned it three straight years from 1980-83.

Edey has been nearly unguardable in the NCAA Tournament, becoming the first player since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (then known as Lew Alcindor) in 1968 to have at least 50 points and 35 rebounds while shooting 65% from the field the first two games of an NCAA Tournament.

Edey topped that with a career-high 40 points and 16 rebounds in a 72-66 win over Tennessee that sent the Boilermakers to the Final Four a year after making history by losing to a No. 16 seed.

"Zach's got a competitive fight to him. He doesn't back down," Purdue coach Matt Painter said. "When you have that elite physical size and you have that competitive spirit with it, with some skill, it's pretty dangerous. He's pretty hard to handle."

So is N.C. State's DJ Burns Jr.

The 6-9, 275-pounder has a big-sized game and a personality to go with it. He's the focal point of the Wolfpack offense and opponents have yet to find a way to stop him.

Burns has great footwork, a soft touch and vision to find the open man nearly every time. Combined with the team's other DJ, Arizona State transfer DJ Horne, N.C. State won five games in five days just to get into the NCAA Tournament and kept rolling into the Final Four as a No. 11 seed.

"DJ Burns has been around for a long time, but his personality, his play has really opened eyes of a lot of folks around the country," N.C. State coach Kevin Keatts said.

Now the Wolfpack get to play in the game's biggest spotlight with two other teams who ended long droughts — and a fourth vying for a place in history.

A biased test kept thousands of Black people from getting a kidney transplant. It's finally changing

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Jazmin Evans had been waiting for a new kidney for four years when her hospital revealed shocking news: She should have been put on the transplant list in 2015 instead of 2019 — and a racially biased organ test was to blame.

As upsetting as that notification was, it also was part of an unprecedented move to mitigate the racial

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inequity. Evans is among more than 14,000 Black kidney transplant candidates so far given credit for lost waiting time, moving them up the priority list for their transplant.

"I remember just reading that letter over and over again," said Evans, 29, of Philadelphia, who shared the notice in a TikTok video to educate other patients. "How could this happen?"

At issue is a once widely used test that overestimated how well Black people's kidneys were functioning, making them look healthier than they really were — all because of an automated formula that calculated results for Black and non-Black patients differently. That race-based equation could delay diagnosis of organ failure and evaluation for a transplant, exacerbating other disparities that already make Black patients more at risk of needing a new kidney but less likely to get one.

A few years ago, the National Kidney Foundation and American Society of Nephrology prodded laboratories to switch to race-free equations in calculating kidney function. Then the U.S. organ transplant network ordered hospitals to use only race-neutral test results in adding new patients to the kidney waiting list.

"The immediate question came up: What about the people on the list right now? You can't just leave them behind," said Dr. Martha Pavlakis of Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and former chair of the network's kidney committee.

Pavlakis calls what happened next an attempt at restorative justice: The transplant network gave hospitals a year to uncover which Black kidney candidates could have qualified for a new kidney sooner if not for the race-based test — and adjust their waiting time to make up for it. That lookback continues for each newly listed Black patient to see if they, too, should have been referred sooner.

Between January 2023 and mid-March, more than 14,300 Black kidney transplant candidates have had their wait times modified, by an average of two years, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing, which runs the transplant system. So far more than 2,800 of them, including Evans, have received a transplant.

But it's just one example of a larger problem permeating health care. Numerous formulas or "algorithms" used in medical decisions — treatment guidelines, diagnostic tests, risk calculators — adjust the answers according to race or ethnicity in a way that puts people of color at disadvantage.

Given how embedded these equations are in medical software and electronic records, even doctors may not realize how widely they impact care decisions.

"Health equity scholars have been raising alarm bells about the way race has been misused in clinical algorithms for decades," said Dr. Michelle Morse, New York City's chief medical officer.

Change is beginning, slowly. No longer are obstetricians supposed to include race in determining the risk of a pregnant woman attempting vaginal birth after a prior C-section. The American Heart Association just removed race from a commonly used calculator of people's heart disease risk. The American Thoracic Society has urged replacing race-based lung function evaluation.

The kidney saga is unique because of the effort to remedy a past wrong.

"Lots of time when we see health inequities, we just assume there's nothing we can do about it," Morse said. "We can make changes to restore faith in the health system and to actually address the unfair and avoidable outcomes that Black people and other people of color face."

Black Americans are over three times more likely than white people to experience kidney failure. Of the roughly 89,000 people currently on the waiting list for a new kidney, about 30% are Black.

Race isn't a biological factor like age, sex or weight — it's a social construct. So how did it make its way into calculations of kidney function?

The eGFR, or estimated glomerular filtration rate, evaluates kidney health based on how quickly a waste compound called creatinine gets filtered from blood. In 1999, an equation used to calculate eGFR was modified to adjust Black people's results compared to everyone else's, based on some studies with small numbers of Black patients and a long-ago false theory about differences in creatinine levels. Until recently that meant many lab reports would list two results — one calculated for non-Black patients and another for Black patients that could overestimate kidney function by as much as 16%.

Not every Black kidney candidate was affected. Some may have had kidney failure diagnosed without

that test. For others to have a chance at benefitting from UNOS' mandated lookback, transplant center staff-turned-detectives often worked after hours and weekends, hunting years-old records for a test that, recalculated without the race adjustment, might make the difference.

"You're reaching out to the nephrologist, their primary care doctors, the dialysis units to get those records," said Dr. Pooja Singh of Jefferson Health's transplant institute in Philadelphia, where Evans received her new kidney. "That first patient getting transplanted for us was such a great moment for our program that the work didn't feel like work after that."

A high school sports physical first spotted Evans' kidney disease at age 17. While finishing her master's degree and beginning to earn her Ph.D. at Temple University, she started dialysis — for nine hours a night while she slept — and was placed on the transplant list.

How long it takes to get a kidney transplant depends on patients' blood type, medical urgency and a mix of other factors — including how long they've spent on the waiting list. Evans was first listed in April 2019. When the Jefferson transplant center unearthed her old lab tests, they found she should have qualified in September 2015.

"Just for context, when I was still an undergrad I should have been on the list," she said, recalling the anger she felt as she read the letter. What she called "a mind-blowing" credit of 3½ more years waiting also provided "a glimmer of hope" that she'd be offered a matching kidney soon.

Evans got a new kidney on July 4 and is healthy again, and grateful the policy change came in time for her.

"You don't know if people would be alive today" if it had been enacted earlier, she said. Still, that extra step of "making amends to fix the situation for those that we can — I feel like it's very important and it's very necessary if you're truly wanting to bring more equity and equality into the medical field."

Women's NCAA Tournament games in Portland played on court with mismatched 3-point lines

By TIM BOOTH AP Sports Writer

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The 3-point line for the women's NCAA Tournament at Moda Center had a discrepancy in distance at each end of the court that went unnoticed through four games over two days before Texas and North Carolina State were informed of the problem ahead of their Elite Eight matchup on Sunday.

While the NCAA did not provide details, one 3-point line near the top of the key appeared to be about 6 inches closer to the basket than at the opposite end of the floor. The NCAA 3-point line is at 22 feet, 1¾ inches for both women and men.

The teams' coaches agreed to play Sunday's game as scheduled with the mismatched 3-point lines rather than delay it, the NCAA said in a statement. N.C. State beat Texas 76-66 to advance to the Final Four.

"The NCAA was notified (Sunday) that the 3-point lines on the court at Moda Center in Portland are not the same distance. The NCAA staff and women's basketball committee members on site consulted with the two head coaches who were made aware of the discrepancy. All parties elected to play a complete game on the court as is, rather than correcting the court and delaying the game," Lynn Holzman, the NCAA's vice president of women's basketball, said in a statement.

Holzman said all lines would be measured after practices concluded on Sunday evening and the correct markings would be on the floor ahead of Monday's game between Southern California and UConn.

"While the NCAA's vendor has apologized for the error, we will investigate how this happened in the first place. The NCAA is working now to ensure the accuracy of all court markings for future games," Holzman said. "We are not aware of any other issues at any of the prior sites for men's or women's tournament games."

Connor Sports makes the March Madness floors for both men and women.

"We apologize for the error that was found and have technicians on site at the Moda Center in Portland

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who were instructed to make the necessary corrections immediately following (Sunday's) game," the company said in a statement.

The court issue was another distraction for the NCAA during a women's tournament in which the play has been exceptional but other issues have taken the spotlight.

There was a referee pulled out of a game at halftime in the first round. Utah faced racist harassment before its first-round game. Notre Dame's Hannah Hidalgo was forced to remove a nose ring and missed time in a Sweet 16 loss to Oregon State. LSU coach Kim Mulkey threatened to sue The Washington Post over a then-unpublished profile of her and later called out a Los Angeles Times columnist for what she said was sexist criticism of her team. The Times edited the column in response.

And now, the court issue in Portland.

"I hate to say this, but I have a lot of colleagues that would say, 'Only in women's basketball,'" Texas coach Vic Schaefer said. "I mean, it's a shame, really, that it even happened. But it is what it is."

Four Sweet 16 games on Friday and Saturday were played without any of the participating teams saying anything publicly about a problem with the court.

During pregame warmups, Schaefer and N.C. State coach Wes Moore were informed that the 3-point line distance at the top of the key was different on both ends of the floor. The distance between the top of the key and the 3-point line was too short at the end in front of the N.C. State bench, while the line at the Texas end was correct, Moore said.

NCAA officials were asked to measure the distance and brought out a tape measure about 15 minutes before tip-off. After discussions between NCAA representatives, the coaches and officials, the game went on as scheduled.

A delay would have taken at least an hour, both coaches said, because someone from the outside would have to be brought in to remark the floor and could have forced the game to be bumped from being broadcast on ABC.

"That's a big deal to be on ABC," Moore said. "We've been fortunate to be on it a couple of times the last couple of years. But it's a big deal."

Both coaches said their players were not aware of the discrepancy, and N.C. State's Aziaha James in particular had no trouble, making a career-high seven 3s on nine attempts. The NCAA said the court would be corrected before Monday's Elite Eight matchup between Southern California and UConn.

"At the end of the day we had already played a game on it and we both won, so we just decided to play," Schaefer said.

The numbers showed that players struggled with the line that was too close to the basket.

Through five games, teams shooting on the end with the closer 3-point arc were 25.8% (23 of 89) on 3s. At the end of the floor that was correct, teams shot 33.3% (29 of 87).

"These kids, they shoot so far behind it sometimes nowadays, who knows where the line is?" Moore said. "It is an unusual situation. But, like I said, I don't know that it was an advantage or disadvantage, either way."

Baylor coach Nicki Collen, whose team lost to USC in the Sweet 16, posted on social media that with eight teams at one site, the focus was on game plan, not what the court looked like.

Baylor was 6 of 14 on 3-pointers in the second half while shooting at the end of the floor with the correct arc.

"Guess that's why we shot it better in the 2nd half," Collen posted.

Gillian Anderson and Rufus Sewell recreate a royal media disaster in Prince Andrew drama 'Scoop'

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — As the past few weeks have shown, British royalty and the media can be an explosive mix.

The absence of the Princess of Wales after abdominal surgery in January sparked uncontrolled online speculation that was first heightened by the release of a manipulated photo, then eased by a video statement from Kate disclosing that she is being treated for cancer.

It's a reminder that when palace privacy meets public curiosity and the public interest, things can get messy.

For more evidence, watch "Scoop," a behind-the-scenes Netflix drama about a disastrous interview Prince Andrew gave in 2019 in response to allegations of sexual misconduct. Released on Friday (April 5), it stars Rufus Sewell as Andrew and Gillian Anderson as journalist Emily Maitlis, who grilled the prince for the BBC's "Newsnight" program.

The feature-length drama is a return to royal themes for "The X-Files" and "Sex Education" star Anderson, who played a leading role in series four of "The Crown," albeit as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, not as a member of the House of Windsor. Anderson says the "complex" relationship between royalty and media needs reassessment.

"Whether that's (Prince) Harry and his cases against the tabloids and all of the truths around that that have come to the fore, or other aspects that are becoming more public knowledge, it probably needs a proper rethink," Anderson told The Associated Press.

Prince Andrew agreed to be interviewed to address reports about his friendship with financier Jeffrey Epstein — found dead in a New York prison in August 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges — and allegations by a woman that she'd had sex with Andrew when she was 17 and being trafficked by Epstein.

"Scoop" is based on a book by Sam McAlister, the tenacious producer who secured the interview. As played by Billie Piper, she promises the palace: "An hour of television can change everything."

That proved grimly true for Andrew.

Under Maitlis' gentle but determined probing, the prince denied all allegations, failed to show empathy for the exploited young women and said Epstein had "conducted himself in a manner unbecoming," which struck many viewers as an understatement.

He claimed he couldn't have been at a nightclub with his accuser on an alleged date because he was at a suburban Pizza Express restaurant with his daughter Princess Beatrice. He couldn't have been sweating on the dancefloor because an "overdose of adrenaline" during his time as a helicopter pilot in the 1982 Falklands War had left him unable to perspire.

McAlister recalled the "extraordinary" experience of being in the room as the interview was recorded inside Buckingham Palace.

"As a journalist, and an ex-lawyer, I knew profoundly that he was doing something that would change the course of his life and the course of life of everyone in the royal family," she said at the show's London premiere.

Andrew initially thought the interview had been a great success, even giving Maitlis a tour of Buckingham Palace after it was recorded.

But he "stepped back" from public duties days after it was broadcast, and has not returned. In 2022 he reached an out-of-court settlement with his accuser, Virginia Giuffre, paying her an unspecified sum without admitting guilt.

Sewell, who spent up to four hours a day being transformed into the prince with makeup and prosthetics, said he tried to find "all of the contradictions" in Andrew. He saw a man whose self-image was forged through a lifetime of deference from those around him, and who played up to his tabloid image as a "naughty scamp" — "Randy Andy" in his bachelor youth, "Air Miles Andy" in his role as a British trade emissary.

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Sewell said he felt Andrew's self-image was "dependent on the other party acquiescing to the idea that he is the prince."

"In order to maintain the idea of himself, he needs someone to play along," said the British actor, recently seen as a mischief-making ambassadorial spouse in "The Diplomat" on Netflix.

"And the interview is the process by which this fish finds himself out of his bowl, gulping for air — because Emily Maitlis does not even need to be rude or aggressive, she just needs to not agree to her side of that contract. And suddenly he is a creature that cannot get the oxygen."

The show's recreation of the infamous interview is remarkably tense, even for viewers who have seen the real thing.

"We prepared completely separately and, and there was no rehearsal," Anderson said. "So when we came together to shoot the interview, it was on our first day of work together and we started the day sitting across from each other in those chairs and the cameras rolled. And so there was tension in and of itself."

"Scoop" is the first of two TV dramas based on the interview. Amazon's rival miniseries "A Very Royal Scandal" is due later this year, with Michael Sheen as Andrew and Ruth Wilson as Maitlis.

Anderson is proud that "Scoop" is a story with "four strong female leads in the ensemble." The cast also includes Keeley Hawes as Andrew's private secretary Amanda Thirsk and Romola Garai as "Newsnight" boss Esme Wren.

As for what the palace can learn from it, she said: "If this tells us anything, it would be that the royal family should never do an interview at all."

"But actually," she added, "I think what is amazing and what stands out is the importance of independent journalism, to hold authority to account and to at least attempt to get some semblance of the truth."

Millions of recalled Hyundai and Kia vehicles with a dangerous defect remain on the road

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — In September, Hyundai and Kia issued a recall of 3.4 million of its vehicles in the United States with an ominous warning: The vehicles should be parked outdoors and away from buildings because they risked catching fire, whether the engines were on or off.

Six months later, most of those autos remain on the road — unrepaired — putting their owners, their families and potentially other people in danger of fires that could spread to garages, houses or other vehicles.

Hyundai and Kia have acknowledged that there's little hope of repairing most of the affected vehicles until June or later, roughly nine months after they announced the recalls. (Hyundai owns part of Kia, though the two companies operate independently.)

The two companies attributed the delays, in part, to the huge number of vehicles involved, among the largest recalls they've ever done. The fires, they say, have occurred when brake fluid leaked onto the circuit boards of antilock braking systems, triggering an electrical short and igniting the fluid.

The companies say they've been unable to obtain enough of the needed parts — fuses that reduce the boards' electrical currents — to fix most of the affected vehicles. Among them are some of their top-selling models for the 2010 through 2017 years, including Hyundai's Santa Fe and Elantra and Kia's Sportage and Forte.

Hyundai and Kia have urged the vehicles' owners to contact the companies or dealers if they see dashboard warning lights or smell something burning. In the meantime, both companies contend that despite the ongoing risks, the cars remain safe to drive.

When they announced the recalls in September, the two automakers reported that the defect had caused 56 vehicle fires and "thermal incidents," which include burning, melting and smoking. No injuries or deaths have been reported, either before or since the recalls were announced.

Safety advocates complain, though, that the repairs are taking far longer than fixes from auto recalls normally do. Typically, such repairs begin in 10 weeks or less, though some can take longer if automakers

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cannot quickly determine the cause, which isn't the case with the Hyundai-Kia problem.

While awaiting repairs, owners of the affected vehicles need to park outside and away from other vehicles to minimize the risks. In the meantime, safety advocates note that if too much brake fluid leaks, it could impair braking or lengthen the distance required to stop a car.

The long-delayed repairs mark the latest in a long series of recalls involving engine fires on Hyundai and Kia vehicles that have bedeviled the two Korean automakers since 2015. All told, 13 million of their vehicles have been recalled for engine problems since 2010.

With the current recall, auto safety advocates say they're mystified about why it's taking so long for Hyundai and Kia to obtain the necessary fuses, a relatively simple part. Some also question whether a fuse will reliably solve the brake fluid leak. Some critics say the companies may be trying to save money by identifying the solution as a new fuse, which is far less expensive than fixing the fluid leaks.

"They're putting a Band-Aid on this thing," said Michael Brooks, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety. "It looks like it's a cheap fix instead of repairing the entire antilock brake system."

Advocates say they wonder, too, why regulators at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration haven't forced the companies to repair the leaks.

A NHTSA spokeswoman said the agency is monitoring the effectiveness of the recalls and "is working with the automakers to ensure the highest level of safety."

Hyundai has said that repairing the affected vehicles requires an intricate fuse assembly, with new covers and labels. Although just one fuse will be added to each vehicle, both automakers said they must obtain multiple types of new fuses to cover all models.

"To expedite the remedy," Hyundai said in a statement, "we are working closely with multiple suppliers, emphasizing the high priority of the recall, and ensuring quality for the replacement fuses."

A schedule that Hyundai filed with the government shows that owners won't start receiving letters advising them to take their cars in for repairs until April 22 at the earliest. Most of them won't get the letters until May or June — eight or nine months after the recalls were announced. Some owners of the affected Kia vehicles might not be notified until the end of June, documents say.

In a statement, Kia said the new fuses it's seeking were developed to prevent fires, "regardless of what the cause of the electrical short circuit condition may be." It said it's working with parts suppliers to accelerate production of the fuses.

Both companies said that besides adding a new fuse, dealers will fix any brake fluid leaks that might be found during inspections. Brake fluid can leak if O-rings, which seal the fluid, lose strength if exposed to moisture, dirt or other contaminants in the fluid, according to Hyundai documents filed with NHTSA. If the fluid level drops significantly, Hyundai said, the driver would see a warning light.

Since September, more than 500 owners have filed complaints accusing the automakers of taking an unreasonable amount of time to make repairs, a review of NHTSA records shows. The Hyundai and Kia fires have continued to occur while owners await repairs; at least five complainants have reported engine compartment fires.

Several complainants said they fear driving the vehicles and want NHTSA to force the companies to provide loaner cars or at least speed up the pace of repairs. Hyundai told dealers last year that they should provide loaners — at Hyundai's expense — for owners who don't feel safe driving their vehicles. After an inquiry from a reporter, Kia said it, too, would provide loaners.

Some complainants say they were confused by Hyundai statements saying the recalled vehicles can be driven even though they can catch fire while the engines are running.

"This safety recall sounds urgent and incredibly dangerous," an owner of a 2012 Hyundai Accent from Burbank, California, wrote in a complaint to NHTSA in December. (People who file complaints aren't identified in the NHTSA database.) The owner couldn't understand why Hyundai would say the Accent is safe to drive yet admit that it can still catch fire while being driven.

Both companies said that while fires remain rare, if they do happen, owners would smell smoke or see warning lights on the dashboard. The warnings would "allow for a safe exit from the vehicle," Kia's state-

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ment said.

But Brooks of the Center for Auto Safety argues that it's irresponsible for the companies to assure owners that the vehicles are safe to drive when they know fires are possible. If smoke or warning lights should appear, he said, the companies can't predict how long the occupants would have to escape or free children or other passengers who might be unable to get out on their own.

"There are a lot of (fire) situations where consumers simply weren't aware," Brooks said. "That is going to compromise the time they have to escape the vehicle if there's a fire." He urged every owner of a recalled vehicle to seek a loaner car from the companies.

Another complainant, from Austin, Texas, called on NHTSA to force Hyundai to fix the fluid leaks.

"They do not appear to be fixing the root cause of the issue," wrote the complainant, the owner of a 2013 Hyundai Tucson. "Leaking brake systems are a safety concern of the highest magnitude, right up there with tires and steering. This is just insane."

Ellen Maisano of Gouldsboro, Pennsylvania, said she parked her 2011 Kia Soul in her yard for four months until trading it in last January out of frustration with the slow repairs.

"I don't want to be on the highway and catch on fire," said Maisano, who also complained to NHTSA, which, in turn, referred her to Kia.

Nor did she want to leave the Soul near other vehicles in her workplace parking lot. And she worried about parking it in her garage.

"All I need is the garage to go up in flames," she said.

Maisano and her partner had to share his car to commute to work, which became difficult after four months. Neither Kia nor her dealership nor her insurance company, she said, would pay for a rental car. So she decided to pony up \$23,000 for a used Honda HR-V, with a monthly payment of \$410 that she hadn't wanted to spend.

Like some other owners, Maisano said she also worried, in light of an epidemic of Hyundai and Kia thefts, about her Kia being stolen when left outdoors. Many of the vehicles being recalled for potential fires also are at risk of being stolen if parked outside because they lack computer chips in the keys and ignitions that must match up before the engines can be started.

Thieves were able to easily steal the cars with a screwdriver and a USB cable, a method that was shared on videos on TikTok and other social media sites. To try to stop the thefts, Hyundai and Kia issued software updates in February 2023 and offered free steering wheel locks.

Documents that Hyundai and Kia filed with regulators show that the companies have traced the fire problem to brake control units made by Mando, a South Korean supplier. In October, after the Hyundai and Kia recalls, Mando issued its own recall, for 3.4 million anti-lock brake modules that can leak fluid.

Some of those modules also went to General Motors, which said it positions them differently from Hyundai and Kia. GM said it doesn't know of any incidents involving the modules, and an internal investigation determined that there was no risk to customers.

Mando did not return messages seeking comment.

In November, NHTSA began investigating whether Hyundai and Kia should have acted faster to recall vehicles with Mando control units that could catch fire. Since 2016, each automaker has announced eight recalls, covering about 6.4 million vehicles with the brake units.

NHTSA documents show 92 fires attributed to vehicles in the 16 recalls, including the ones announced in September. In 2020, NHTSA forced both automakers to pay \$137 million in fines and for safety improvements for being too slow to recall vehicles with engine problems.

Sean Kane, president of Safety Research & Strategies, which conducts research for lawyers that sue automakers, said that while he welcomes NHTSA's investigation, the agency should have required more recalls and repairs sooner.

"It's remarkable that it's gone on as long as it has without much scrutiny," Kane said. "I don't think this problem is over yet in terms of the recall situation."

Millions of recalled Hyundai and Kia vehicles with a dangerous defect remain on the road

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — In September, Hyundai and Kia issued a recall of 3.4 million vehicles in the United States with an ominous warning: The vehicles should be parked outdoors and away from buildings because they risked catching fire, with the engines on or off.

Six months later, most of those autos remain on the road — unrepaired — putting owners, their families and potentially others in danger of fires that could spread to garages, houses or other vehicles.

Hyundai and Kia have acknowledged in documents that there's little hope of repairing most of the vehicles until June or later, roughly nine months after they announced the recalls. (Hyundai owns part of Kia, though the two companies operate independently.)

The companies attributed the delays, in part, to the huge number of vehicles involved. The fires, they say, have occurred when brake fluid leaked onto circuit boards of antilock braking systems, triggering an electrical short and igniting the fluid. They say they've been unable to obtain enough parts — fuses that reduce the boards' electrical currents — to fix most of the affected vehicles. Among them are some of their top-selling models for the 2010 through 2017 years, including Hyundai's Santa Fe and Kia's Sportage.

The companies say owners should contact dealers if they see dashboard warning lights or smell something burning. In the meantime, both say that despite ongoing risks, the cars remain safe to drive.

When they announced the recalls in September, the automakers reported that the defect had caused 56 vehicle fires and "thermal incidents," which include burning, melting and smoking. No injuries were reported.

Safety advocates complain that repairs are taking longer than recall fixes normally do. Typically, repairs begin in 10 weeks or less, though some can take longer if automakers cannot quickly determine a cause. Advocates note that if too much brake fluid leaks, it could impair stopping ability.

The delayed repairs mark the latest in a series of recalls involving engine fires on Hyundai and Kia vehicles that have bedeviled the automakers. All told, 13 million vehicles have been recalled for engine problems since 2010.

With the current recall, safety advocates say they're mystified about why it's taking so long to obtain simple fuses. Some question whether the companies are trying to save money by not fixing the fluid leaks.

"It looks like it's a cheap fix instead of repairing the entire antilock brake system," said Michael Brooks, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety.

Advocates also ask why the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration hasn't forced the companies to repair the leaks. The agency said it's monitoring the effectiveness of the recalls and "is working with the automakers to ensure the highest level of safety."

Hyundai said the repairs require an intricate fuse assembly, with new covers and labels. Just one fuse will be added per vehicle, but both automakers said many types of new fuses are needed to cover all models.

"We are working closely with multiple suppliers, emphasizing the high priority of the recall, and ensuring quality for the replacement fuses," Hyundai's statement said. Kia also said it's working to speed up fuse production.

A schedule that Hyundai filed with the government shows that owners won't start receiving letters advising them to take their cars in for repairs until April 22. Most won't get the letters until May or June — eight or nine months after the recalls were announced. Some Kia owners won't get those letters until late June, documents say.

Both companies also said dealers will fix brake fluid leaks found during inspections. Fluid can leak if O-ring seals lose strength when exposed to moisture or dirt in the fluid, according to Hyundai documents filed with NHTSA. If the brake fluid level drops significantly, Hyundai said, the driver would see a warning light.

Since September, more than 500 owners filed complaints with NHTSA accusing the automakers of taking too long to make repairs. The fires have continued while owners await repairs; at least five complainants reported engine compartment fires.

Several complainants said they want NHTSA to make the companies provide loaner cars or speed up

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repairs. Hyundai told dealers last year that they should provide loaners. Kia said it, too, would provide loaners.

Some were confused by Hyundai statements that the recalled vehicles can be driven even though they can catch fire while the engines are running. "This safety recall sounds urgent and incredibly dangerous," one owner of a 2012 Hyundai Accent from Burbank, California, wrote in a complaint to NHTSA in December.

Both companies said that while fires are rare, if they do happen, owners would smell smoke or see warning lights. The warnings would "allow for a safe exit from the vehicle," Kia's statement said.

But Brooks of the Center for Auto Safety argues it's irresponsible to assure owners the vehicles are safe when the companies know that fires are possible. If smoke or warning lights appear, he said, the auto-makers have no way of predicting how long it would take for occupants to escape.

"There are a lot of (fire) situations where consumers simply weren't aware," Brooks said. "That is going to compromise the time they have to escape the vehicle if there's a fire."

He urged every owner of the recalled vehicles to seek a loaner car.

Ellen Maisano of Gouldsboro, Pennsylvania, said she parked her 2011 Kia Soul in her yard for four months until trading it in last January out of frustration with the slow repairs.

"I don't want to be on the highway and catch on fire," said Maisano. She also didn't want to leave the Soul near other vehicles at work, and she feared parking it in her garage. So she decided to pony up \$23,000 for a used Honda HR-V, with a \$410 monthly payment.

Maisano also said she was worried, in light of a national epidemic of Hyundai and Kia thefts, about her Kia being stolen when left outdoors. Many vehicles being recalled for potential fires also are at risk of being stolen if parked outside because they lack theft-deterrent devices.

Today in History: April 2, Pope John Paul II dies at 84

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, April 2, the 93rd day of 2024. There are 273 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 2, 2005, John Paul II, the Polish pope born Karol Józef Wojtyła, who became one of the most influential leaders of the 20th and early 21st centuries while working to build a moral foundation in the modern world and playing a crucial role in overthrowing communism, died in his Vatican apartment at age 84.

On this date:

In 1792, Congress passed the Coinage Act, which authorized establishment of the U.S. Mint.

In 1865, Confederate President Jefferson Davis and most of his Cabinet fled the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, because of advancing Union forces.

In 1912, the just-completed RMS Titanic left Belfast to begin its sea trials eight days before the start of its ill-fated maiden voyage.

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war against Germany, saying, "The world must be made safe for democracy." (Congress declared war four days later.)

In 1982, several thousand troops from Argentina seized the disputed Falkland Islands, located in the south Atlantic, from Britain. (Britain seized the islands back the following June.)

In 1986, four American passengers, including an 8-month-old girl, her mother and her grandmother, were killed when a terrorist bomb exploded aboard a TWA jetliner en route from Rome to Athens, Greece; the remaining 110 passengers survived.

In 1992, mob boss John Gotti was convicted in New York of murder and racketeering; he was later sentenced to life, and died in prison.

In 1995, after a work stoppage lasting nearly eight months, baseball owners accepted the players' union offer to play without a contract.

In 2002, Israel seized control of Bethlehem; Palestinian gunmen forced their way into the Church of the

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Nativity, the traditional birthplace of Jesus, where they began a 39-day standoff.

In 2003, during the Iraq War, American forces fought their way to within sight of the Baghdad skyline.

In 2007, in its first case on climate change, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency*, ruled 5-4 that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases were air pollutants under the Clean Air Act.

In 2012, a gunman killed seven people at Oikos University, a Christian school in Oakland, California. (The shooter, One Goh, died in 2019 while serving a life prison sentence.)

In 2013, North Korea said it would restart its long-shuttered plutonium reactor and increase production of nuclear weapons material in what outsiders saw as its latest attempt to extract U.S. concessions by raising fears of war.

In 2017, Coach Dawn Staley and South Carolina won their first women's NCAA championship with a 67-55 victory over Mississippi State.

In 2018, anti-apartheid activist Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who'd been married for nearly 38 years to Nelson Mandela, died in a Johannesburg hospital at age 81.

In 2020, the number of confirmed coronavirus cases worldwide passed the 1 million mark, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

In 2021, rapper DMX was rushed from his home to a suburban New York hospital after going into cardiac arrest; he died a week later.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Dame Penelope Keith is 84. Actor Linda Hunt is 79. Singer Emmylou Harris is 77. Actor Sam Anderson is 77. Social critic and author Camille Paglia is 77. Actor Pamela Reed is 75. Rock musician Dave Robinson (The Cars) is 75. Country singer Buddy Jewell is 63. Actor Christopher Meloni is 63. Singer Keren Woodward (Bananarama) is 63. Country singer Billy Dean is 62. Actor Clark Gregg is 62. Actor Jana Marie Hupp is 60. Rock musician Greg Camp is 57. Actor Roselyn Sanchez is 51. Country singer Jill King is 49. Actor Pedro Pascal is 49. Actor Adam Rodriguez is 49. Actor Michael Fassbender is 47. Actor Jaime Ray Newman is 46. Rock musician Jesse Carmichael (Maroon 5) is 45. Actor Bethany Joy Lenz is 43. Singer Lee Dewyze (TV: "American Idol") is 38. Country singer Chris Janson is 38. Actor Drew Van Acker is 38. Actor Briga Heelan (TV: "Great News") is 37. Actor Jesse Plemons is 36. Singer Aaron Kelly (TV: "American Idol") is 31.