

Groton Daily Independent

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Tuesday, April 9

GROTON AREA ELECTION DAY!

Groton Area Opt-Out Election. Polls open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, baked potato with sour cream, California blend vegetables, peach crisp, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Scones.

School Lunch: Chicken patty, fries.

Cancelled: Track at Ipswich, 2:30 p.m.

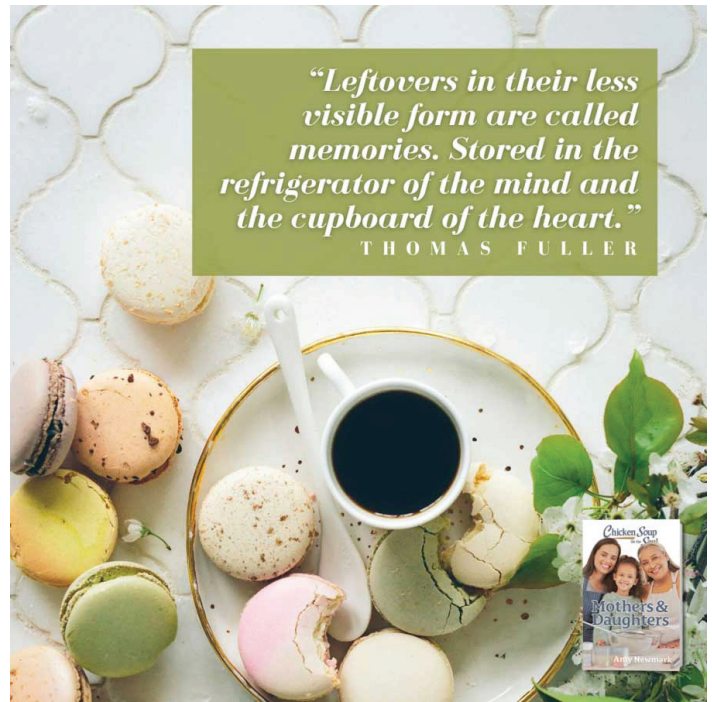
JH Track at Milbank 4 p.m.

Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

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



Wednesday, April 10

Senior Menu: Hamburger on bun, lettuce/tomato/ onion, potato salad, fruit, cookie.

School Breakfast: Cereal

School Lunch: Chicken quesadilla, peas.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

SD District Municipal League meeting at the Legion
No Bingo at the Legion

Thursday, April 11

Senior Menu: Cheese tortellini Alfredo with diced chicken, green beans, Mandarin oranges, whole wheat. bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: BBQ rib sandwich, tater tots.

Girls Golf at Moberidge.

Track at Milbank, 3:30 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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1440

In partnership with **smartasset**[™]

The Biden administration announced a new student debt relief proposal yesterday that has the potential to impact nearly 30 million borrowers. Over 43 million Americans owe a collective \$1.6T in federal student loans.

No. 1 Connecticut captured the men's college basketball championship last night, defeating No. 1 Purdue 75-60. The Huskies became the first team to win back-to-back titles since Florida in 2006-07, with the victory marking Coach Dan Hurley's second title with the program. Connecticut improved to a perfect 6-0 overall in title game

appearances—all won in the past 25 years—and moved into a third-place tie with North Carolina for most championships.

Brain implant startup Synchron announced yesterday it is recruiting dozens of patients for its first large-scale clinical trial. Backed by Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates, the New York-based company is further along than Elon Musk's Neuralink in the process of full Food and Drug Administration approval.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Cowboy Carter" becomes Beyoncé's eighth album to top the Billboard 200 chart; Beyoncé is also first Black woman to top country album chart.

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, an athletic governing body for mostly small colleges, bans transgender women from competing in women's sports.

Actor Jonathan Majors avoids jail time following conviction of misdemeanor assault of his ex-girlfriend. Country artist Morgan Wallen arrested in Nashville for allegedly throwing a chair off a six-story building.

Science & Technology

Commerce Department awards US subsidiary of Taiwanese chipmaking giant TSMC \$6.6B in grants, \$5B in loans to build a third semiconductor production facility in Arizona.

Lab-grown "mini-kidneys" successfully grafted into live mice; method will allow the study of polycystic kidney disease, which affects about 1 in 1,000 people.

Engineers develop spring-like skeleton to act as muscle tissue scaffolding for biohybrid robots; approach can be used for a wide variety of robots regardless of shape or application.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close almost flat (S&P 500 -0.04%, Dow -0.03%, Nasdaq +0.03%) as investors await consumer price index report tomorrow.

People traveling to see total solar eclipse in the US estimated to have spent up to \$1.6B, including on housing, food, and gas, according to consulting group.

99 Cents Only files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, plans to close all 371 US stores this week, citing inflation as a contributing factor.

Politics & World Affairs

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sets date for Israel's ground invasion of Gaza's border city of Rafah but doesn't disclose date, says eliminating Hamas battalions in Rafah is essential. US submits new plan seeking release of 40 hostages in exchange for six-week cease-fire in Gaza.

Former President Donald Trump says abortion laws should be determined by US states, declines to endorse nationwide ban in video posted to Truth Social. The Vatican reaffirms opposition to surrogacy, gender-affirming surgery, and gender theory in new document.

Criminal trial begins for 27 people charged in worldwide money laundering case tied to the 2016 "Panama Papers"—a leaked trove of 11.5 million files that exposed how the world's wealthiest hide their assets.

Competitive game ends in walkoff as Groton Area falls to Dell Rapids

A walk-off left Groton Area Tigers Varsity on the wrong end of a 5-4 defeat to Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers on Monday. The game was tied at four in the bottom of the seventh when Jack Henry singles, scoring one run.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity lost despite out-hitting Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers six to five. Carter Simon led Groton Area Tigers Varsity with two hits.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity got on the board in the first inning after an error scored one run.

Henry hit into a fielder's choice, which helped Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers tie the game at one in the bottom of the first.

A sacrifice bunt by Sutton Williams gave Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers the lead, 2-1, in the bottom of the second.

Bradin Althoff grounded out, which helped Groton Area Tigers Varsity tie the game at two in the top of the third.

Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers took the lead, 4-2, in the bottom of the third thanks to two errors.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity tied the game up in the top of the sixth thanks to two singles. Groton Area Tigers Varsity tied the game at four on a single by Nick Morris.

Lincoln Fersdahl earned the win for Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers. They surrendered two hits and four runs (two earned) over five and one-third innings, striking out six and walking two. Dillon Abeln took the loss for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. The righty went six and one-third innings, allowing five runs (one earned) on four hits, striking out five and walking two.

Simon, Morris and Althoff each drove in one run for Groton Area Tigers Varsity.

Henry drove the middle of the lineup, leading Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers with two runs batted in. The number three hitter went 1-for-4 on the day. Tad Tjaden, Mason Stubbe, Drake Eastman, Henry, and Carson Maeschen each collected one hit for Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers. Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers turned one double play in the game.

Groton Area lost the second game, 10-0.

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Groton Area Tigers Varsity 4 - 5 Dell Rapids Varsity Quarriers

📍 Away 📅 Monday April 08, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	4	6	6
DLLR	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	5	5	3

BATTING

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Flihs (SS)	4	2	1	0	0	0
C Dunker (LF)	3	0	0	0	1	0
B Althoff (1B)	3	1	0	1	0	1
L Ringgenberg (CF)	2	1	0	0	0	1
G Englund (DH)	3	0	1	0	0	1
C Simon (3B)	3	0	2	1	0	0
N Morris (C)	3	0	1	1	0	0
C McInerney (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
N Groeblichhoff...	1	0	0	0	1	0
K Antonsen (2B)	3	0	1	0	0	2
D Abeln (P, 2B)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	26	4	6	3	2	6

TB: N Morris, G Englund, B Flihs, K Antonsen, C Simon 2, **CS:** N Groeblichhoff, **HBP:** L Ringgenberg, B Althoff, **LOB:** 5

PITCHING

Groton Area 1	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
D Abeln	6.1	4	5	1	2	5	0
J Erdmann	0.0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Totals	6.1	5	5	1	3	5	0

L: D Abeln, **P-S:** D Abeln 96-62, J Erdmann 11-5, **WP:** J Erdmann 2, **BF:** D Abeln 28, J Erdmann 2

Dell Rapids Varsity	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
M Stubbe (CF)	3	3	1	0	1	0
C Ruesink (SS, LF)	3	1	0	1	1	1
J Henry (1B, SS)	4	0	1	2	0	0
T Eastman (C)	2	0	0	0	1	1
L Fersdahl (P, 1B)	3	0	0	0	0	0
D Eastman (3B)	3	1	1	0	0	0
T Tjaden (RF)	3	0	1	0	0	0
S Williams (2B)	2	0	0	1	0	1
C Maeschen (LF)	2	0	1	0	0	1
K Richeal (P)	0	0	0	0	0	0
T Millage	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	26	5	5	4	3	5

2B: C Maeschen, **TB:** C Maeschen 2, T Tjaden, D Eastman, M Stubbe, J Henry, **SAC:** S Williams, **CS:** T Tjaden, **SB:** M Stubbe, C Ruesink, **LOB:** 4

Dell Rapids V	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
L Fersdahl	5.1	2	4	2	2	6	0
K Richeal	1.2	4	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	7.0	6	4	2	2	6	0

W: L Fersdahl, **P-S:** L Fersdahl 94-53, K Richeal 15-12, **HBP:** L Fersdahl 2, **BF:** L Fersdahl 22, K Richeal 8

Groton Area School Board approves Langford football co-op, initial changes to student handbook

The Groton Area football team will look a bit different next year if state athletic officials approve applications for Groton Area and Langford Area to form a co-op.

The Groton Area School Board voted Monday to approve an application for cooperative sponsorship of activities. The application will now head to the South Dakota High School Activities Association for their vote.

The two-year cooperative has been under discussion for years, but earlier this school year, Langford Area officials rekindled talks to co-op based on low male enrollment numbers that wouldn't allow Langford to field a varsity football team.

The Langford Area School District was also scheduled to vote on an application of its own to send to the high school activities association for a vote at the SDHSAA annual meeting later this month.

The Groton Area School District only made one change to the cooperative agreement presented to the school board at its last meeting, said Superintendent Joe Schwan. That change would have Groton Area host an end-of-season awards event and cover the costs associated with that event.

Groton Area will still employ a head coach and two assistant coaches, while Langford Area would hire one assistant coach. Practices and home football games will still take place at Groton Area's Doney Field.

Changes proposed for middle school/high school student handbook

Some changes are coming for the middle school/high school.

The school board reviewed revisions to the student handbook.

A lot of the changes include updating language, including removing restrictions of old technology like pagers and Walkmans, said Middle School/High School Principal Shelby Edwards. Restrictions on cell phones have also been changed to be at teachers' discretion.

One larger change, though, is the additional of a food and drink policy.

"Students are allowed to have water with them in class and in the hallways," reads the policy addition. "Other food and drink will not be allowed in the classroom with the exception of special activities.

"Energy drinks will not be allowed in the school at any time. Students will be asked to dispose of the drink immediately."

Vending machines in the school have already been changed to only have water, Edwards said. The change allows the district to better align itself with its health policy.

"It makes a sticky mess, and it's a health issue," Edwards told the board.

There will also be restrictions on food in the classroom.

"Students will not be able to bring food from the cafeteria or off campus lunch into the classroom," reads the updated policy. "All food must be consumed prior to returning to the classroom."

The policy update is set for a second reading before going into place. The second reading will take place at the board's next meeting.

Last day of 2023-2024 school year set

There is an end in sight for the 2023-2024 school year.

The school board confirmed Wednesday, May 15, as the last student-contact day for the current school year.

There has been one snow day and two late starts this academic year, said Superintendent Joe Schwan. May 15 will be the last student-contact day at school, with faculty in-service the day after.

- The school district has purchased a replacement for the van that had been stolen earlier this year in Sioux Falls. Superintendent Joe Schwan said he got a call at the State A Basketball Championship that an individual had been found who had been in possession of the van. However, it can't be proven whether

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that individual stole the vehicle. School board member Tigh Fliehs asked if the district had found a similar van to the one that had been replaced. Schwan said yes, adding that administration had asked dealers about finding a newer van, but the district would have been on a two-year waitlist. That left purchasing a used vehicle.

- A total of 32 students have been signed up for kindergarten for the 2024-2025 school year. Another dozen have signed up for junior kindergarten. Principal Brett Schwan said he anticipates that number going up before school starts in August.

- The board approved an administrative rule waiver application to allow high school credits to be earned before ninth grade. The waiver allows eighth graders that are ready to take Algebra 1 classes for credit, said Middle School/High School Principal Shelby Edwards. The waiver needs to be submitted to the state Department of Education every five years.

- Elementary School Principal Brett Schwan updated the board on upcoming events and field trips. Bramble Park Zoo will visit the school May 7, and Images of the World will have an assembly May 9. May 10 marks the Track and Field day for the elementary school. Field trips are set to start April 23 and last through early May.

- The board approved the resignation of Rita Kampa, cook and maintenance team member, from her maintenance team role, effective at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. Kampa still plans to work food service hours, Superintendent Schwan said.

- Elizabeth Varin

Groton Chamber of Commerce April Meeting

April 3, 2024

12pm City Hall

• Individuals present: Carol Kutter, Douglas Heinrich, Topper Tastad, Ashley Bentz, April Abeln, Paul Kosel, Katelyn Nehlich, and Hannah Gruenwald

• Minutes from the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Heinrich and seconded by Kutter. All members present voted aye.

• Treasurer's report was given. Dacotah Bank checking account balance is \$41,878.50. \$2169.80 is in the Bucks account. The report was approved by Abeln and seconded by Kutter. All members present voted aye.

• A thank you note from Table Talks was received.

• Per last meeting, the Chamber has entered into an agreement with the Groton Transit for a ¼ size advertisement on the passenger door of their #4 white van. The agreement will be a 1-year contract for \$360 with the contract renewing yearly.

• Arrangements will be made to send Chamber rack cards with an Aberdeen individual to the Lit Drop in Watertown.

• 2024 Scholarship winners were Claire Heinrich, Emily Clark, and Ashlyn Sperry. A photo opportunity with the recipients is scheduled for May 9th from 1:30-2:30pm at the GHS library.

• The bike winner at the Easter Egg Hunt was Briggs Sperry. His mom has been contacted to submit a receipt to Treasurer Katelyn.

• Members that RSVP'd to the SDML District 6 meeting have been registered. The event is to be held April 10th at the Groton Legion with social hour starting at 6pm, dinner at 6:30pm, with a program at 7pm. Set up will take place that day at 2pm for anyone that is able to help. Each place setting will have a welcome sheet with 2024 events, a Chamber tumbler, as well as a Groton pen.

• Tastad gave an update on the Main Street benches with a completion date of May 1.

• Kosel will reach out to Main Street businesses about watering the Chamber planters.

• Fundraising options were discussed as well as fundraising ideas.

• Motion by Kutter and seconded by Heinrich to publish a ½ page in the Glacial Lakes Guide. All members present voted aye.

• Donations were discussed.

• A welcome may be scheduled with MGGQ Sunset once her Facebook page is created and the business is more established. Baked with Grace, owned by Karly Metzinger, is also a new business in Groton as well as Tiger Tots Childcare owned by Jamie Krueger. Abeln will reach out to Jamie.

• Beauty Brew Boutique has been asked to be part of the Glacial Lakes and Prairies Coffee Bracket Challenge. Be sure to watch Facebook for details.

• Next Meeting: May 1st, 2024, at City Hall at 12:00pm

Upcoming events

• 04/08/2024 Bingo Bonanza at Avantara 7-8pm

• 04/12/2024 Last day to register online for Baseball, Softball and T-ball

• 04/13/2024 Front Porch 605 Spring Shop Hop 9am-6pm

• 04/14/2024 Front Porch 605 Spring Shop Hop 12-4pm

• 04/17/2024 Beginners Chunky Hand-Knit Blanket Class 5:30-8:30pm

• 04/20/2024 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am

• 04/21/2024 Princess Prom at GHS Arena 4:30-8pm

• 05/04/2024 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (listings due 04/24/24)

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15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

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



Exercise reduces joint pain and helps
fight tiredness. - Mayo Clinic

EMPLOYMENT

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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That's Life by Tony Bender

Sisters are doing it for themselves

Title IX became law in 1972. Half a century later, here we are. The intent of Title IX was to ensure equal opportunities for all students, including athletes, but it took 10 years for women to have their own national basketball tournament.

Like millions of other Americans, I was captivated by the NCAA Women's Basketball Finals, specifically Caitlin Clark and her Iowa Hawkeyes. So what do we find so compelling? Easy. The quality of the game. The passion of the players and coaches. The intensity and big plays under big pressure. The drama.

More than most games, basketball at its best is fluid, smart and artistic, and that's what makes Iowa especially compelling. In the same way that Nikola Jokic conducts the Denver Nuggets, Caitlin Clark directs a symphony. Both make those around them better.

March Madness has produced many epic men's teams with fascinating characters but the last tournament that produced this kind of interest and adrenaline for me was in 1983 when my friends Tim Ost and Jamestown College Men's Basketball Coach Jay Pivic and I watched Jim Valvano's North Carolina State Wolfpack complete a series of miracles with yet another miracle.

Television ratings and ticket prices for the women's NCAA Tournament exceeded that of the men's division for one reason—the storyline is better. What's made Caitlin Clark so compelling is not Superwoman physical ability and her ice-blooded ability to hit big shots in big moments, it's her ability to see and understand the floor and the game itself better than anyone in the arena. The ability to make the right pass, the right shot, a joyful, unflappable assassin. It's incredibly rare. Larry Bird had it. Michael Jordan. Steph Curry. And a rarified few others. Now Caitlin Clark. (Undefeated South Carolina defeated Iowa in the championship.)

We've long had individual women champions. Babe Didrikson. Wilma Rudolph. Billie Jean King. But the evolution of women's team sports was plodding. It wasn't a lack of talent. It was a lack of investment by schools, and without that framework, women athletes had little reason to practice the skills needed for team sports.

Most didn't grow up dribbling and shooting, so when women's teams were accorded the same opportunities to play by the same rules, and not an abbreviated half-court game as in the past, it was often, well... not good.

As a newspaperman and sportswriter, I was badgered by female employees to give them absolute equal coverage. A team doesn't have to win to be interesting, but it helps. Winning teams, male or female, always get more column inches. You can't force interest. Interest is earned.

The early outlier with team sports, as a matter of circumstance, was women's baseball during WWII, but they were in skirts—skilled players in skirts, but sex sells. Today, college fast pitch softball is a fantastic watch with reflexive athletic plays that would get Brooks Robinson's attention.

Lest you think I'm a misogynist, I'll say again, my mother was liberated before Gloria Steinem burned a bra. I did dishes, washed my own uniforms, and wouldn't in any way shape or form have suggested that women were inferior, as evidenced by my survival.

I lived and breathed baseball, but boys my age were scarce when I wanted a game of catch. My sister Sherry is a year and a half younger, but grew up catching fastballs from me. I gave no quarter. She'd sometimes go inside to ice her hand, but always returned.

When she joined a softball team, I expected her to be great. And she was. We both played centerfield but she looked better doing it. Swift and graceful. I had good wheels, so when I was goaded into a race on the church steps by Gus Speidel, I fully expected to win.

I began lacing up my spikes but there was a protest led by Gus. Everyone wanted Sherry to win, so I lost that argument. It was 385 feet from the centerfield fence to home plate. I was 20 feet behind, spinning my wheels, throwing up grass, before I started moving. Somewhere between second base and pitchers mound, I caught her.

But. She. Would. Not. Lose.

She had me by a nose at home plate as Gus crowed like a rooster. It cost me a dollar.

I had mixed emotions. I'd received my comeuppance and didn't much care for that, but I was proud of her. When I watched her play, gliding like a gazelle, making tough catches look easy, I knew I had something to do with it.

Women athletes haven't "arrived." They're continuing to arrive. They've earned their place at center court.

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**BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY**

April 9, 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. Kelsi Vinger, State's Attorney Grant Coordinator
 - a. Planning Group – Facility Use Agreement
5. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of April 2, 2024
 - b. Claims
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Landfill Tonnage Report
 - e. LEMPG 2nd Qtr. Report
 - f. Travel Request
6. Other Business
7. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
8. 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>

EQUALIZATION BOARDS

10:30 AM - BROWN COUNTY BOARD OF EQUALIZATION

- Organize as County Board of Equalization
 - Township Minutes
 - Tax Exempt
 - Tax Freezes
 - Stipulations and/or Corrections

1:00 PM – CONSOLIDATED BOARD OF EQUALIZATION

- Organize as Consolidated Board of Equalization
 - Stipulations and/or Corrections
 - Omitted Properties going from Exempt to Non-Exempt



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Noem doesn't address exceptions but calls Trump's abortion statement 'exactly right'

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - APRIL 8, 2024 5:36 PM

South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem said Monday that presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump's new statement on abortion is "exactly right," but she didn't specifically say whether she agrees with his support of several abortion-ban exceptions.

Trump released a video Monday in which he backed away from supporting a national abortion ban and said the issue should be determined by states. He also said he supports exceptions to abortion bans in cases of rape, incest and to protect the life of the mother.

Noem — a potential Trump running mate — shared Trump's video on social media and wrote, in part, "Different states will make different decisions on Life. What voters want in South Dakota might be different than what voters want in California."

She did not address abortion-ban exceptions, and a spokesman for Noem did not immediately respond to messages Monday from South Dakota Searchlight.

Last week, Real Clear Politics published a column from Noem that foreshadowed Trump's statement.

"I'm a pro-life governor, and I'm proud of what we've done in my state," she wrote. "But what we support in South Dakota may not have support in South Carolina."

In his video, Trump said, "My view is now that we have abortion where everybody wanted it from a legal standpoint, the states will determine by vote, or legislation, or perhaps both, and whatever they decide must be the law of the land. In this case, the law of the state."

South Dakota State University political scientist Lisa Hager said Noem appears to have a clear motivation.

"The biggest goal is to situate herself to become the vice presidential pick," Hager said.

According to a Feb. 16 New York Times article, abortion is an important consideration for Trump as he evaluates potential running mates. The Times reported that Trump often asks whether prospective running mates are "OK on abortion," and is dismissive when he hears that a Republican doesn't support "the three exceptions:" rape, incest and the life of the mother.

Ten days after that story was published, Noem visited Trump one-on-one at his Mar-a-Lago Club in Florida.

The only exception in South Dakota's abortion ban is for the life of the mother. Noem did not ask the Legislature to adopt additional exceptions during the last two legislative sessions after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court case that upheld the constitutional right to an abortion. South Dakota's abortion ban is a trigger law that took effect immediately when *Roe* was struck down.

In 2022, Noem appeared on CBS' "Face the Nation," where host Margaret Brennan asked if Noem was open to exceptions for rape and incest.

"I just have never believed that having a tragedy or tragic situation happen to someone is a reason to have another tragedy occur," Noem responded.

A South Dakota State University survey of 565 registered South Dakota voters in 2022 showed that 74% supported exceptions for rape and incest, and 84% supported an exception for the health of the mother.

Trump's new abortion position does not affect his support from South Dakota Right to Life, said Execu-

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tive Director Dale Bartscher. In response to Searchlight questions, he sent a statement reiterating the organization's endorsement of Trump.

"Thanks to President Trump, the American people and their elected representatives on the state and federal levels now have greater authority to determine abortion policy and pass meaningful protections for unborn children and their mothers," Bartscher wrote.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Fundraising prowess is key factor as Thune seeks to succeed McConnell

BY: LYDIA MCFARLANE - APRIL 8, 2024 7:00 AM

Fundraising prowess has emerged as a key factor in choosing the next Senate GOP party leader to succeed current Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).

McConnell's announcement that he will be stepping down from the Republican Party's Senate leadership in November has started a succession bid that will require contenders to showcase their fundraising skills.

McConnell, the longest-serving Senate party leader, has been a major fundraiser for the Republican Party. Since 2015, McConnell has raised more than \$1 billion for Republicans through outside groups affiliated with him, and his successor will be expected to maintain that pace once he has stepped down.

While more contenders are rumored to be contemplating jumping into the race, the only two senators who have officially announced their bids are Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), who has served as the Senate's Republican whip since 2021, and Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), who served as the party's whip from 2013 to 2019.

Both senators are expected to focus on campaigning to succeed McConnell as GOP Senate leader throughout this election cycle, and are continuing to flex their fundraising acumen.

McConnell has served in the Senate since 1985, making him Kentucky's longest-serving senator. He has held the position of GOP Senate leader since 2007, having been elected to that role after the 2006 elections. After stepping down, McConnell plans to serve the rest of his term until 2027.

Throughout his career in the Senate, McConnell has raised about \$145 million through his campaign committee and leadership PAC, OpenSecrets data shows.

Thune has served in the Senate since 2005 and before was a U.S. Representative for his district in South Dakota from 1997 to 2003. Since the beginning of his career in Congress, Thune has reported raising about \$62.5 million.

Cornyn has served in the Senate since 2002 and has raised almost \$84 million during that time. The Texas senator has raised more money in less time throughout his career in Congress than Thune, who was first elected to Congress five years earlier than Cornyn.

Despite his shorter tenure in Congress, Cornyn beat Thune in career fundraising by more than \$20 million.

While McConnell's replacement will not be elected until after the general election in November, Senate Republicans are keeping their eyes on these potential candidates to step into McConnell's role as GOP leader. Senate party leaders are chosen through closed-door meetings and secret ballots after the election, and the Republican Party has not chosen a new party leader since McConnell's election to leadership in 2007.

McConnell has assisted other Republican candidates and the Republican Party itself with fundraising efforts throughout his time in party leadership. Super PACs linked to McConnell spent millions in battleground states during the 2020 election, as well as dominating spending on political ads during the 2022 midterm election for Republican candidates, outspending even the National Republican Senatorial Committee on ad spending.

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During the 2020 election cycle alone, McConnell's leadership PAC, the Bluegrass Committee, raised \$2.2 million, compared to the average Senate members' leadership PAC fundraising of \$410,580.

Thune and Cornyn both have histories of strong fundraising for the Republican Party, but Cornyn has been praised for his fundraising skills during the past few elections. He was one of the top fundraisers last election cycle, beaten only by McConnell himself and Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.), whose name has also been floated as a potential contender to replace McConnell.

This election cycle, Cornyn has reported transferring \$60,000 from his campaign and associated leadership PAC, the R Senate PAC, to the National Republican Senatorial Committee. In 2022, \$135,000 was transferred to the NRSC from Cornyn's campaign and leadership PAC.

Thune's campaign and associated leadership PAC, the Commonsense Conservative Values Pac, reported transferring \$250,000 to the NRSC and \$12,000 to 2024 Republican Senate Victory this election cycle.

Both candidates have joint fundraising committees that have given more than \$1 million to the NRSC this cycle. The Cornyn Victory Fund has given about \$2.5 million to the NRSC thus far this election cycle, while the Thune Victory Fund has given \$1.7 million.

However, Cornyn has also given significant amounts from the joint committee, the Cornyn Victory Fund, to other Republican candidates up for reelection.

Twelve incumbent senators are listed as federal beneficiaries of the Cornyn Victory Fund. Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), who was initially believed to be a contender for McConnell's replacement but is now running for Republican Whip, was the top recipient of the Cornyn Victory Fund, having received more than \$600,000 thus far into the 2024 cycle.

Lydia McFarlane reports for OpenSecrets. Nonpartisan, independent and nonprofit, OpenSecrets is the nation's premier research group tracking money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy.

In Wisconsin, Biden underlines plans to help college students with 'unsustainable debts'

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - APRIL 8, 2024 4:29 PM

WASHINGTON — During a speech in Madison, Wisconsin on Monday, President Joe Biden touted his administration's efforts to provide student debt relief through several new proposals, such as canceling accrued interest.

"While (a) college degree still is a ticket to the middle class, that ticket is becoming much too expensive," Biden said. "Things are a lot different from when college tuition was more affordable and borrowing for colleges, repaying those loans was reasonable."

The new proposals announced earlier Monday, if finalized, would include a one-time cancellation of all accrued interest for 23 million borrowers; cancellation of the full amount of student loan debt for 4 million borrowers; and providing more than 10 million borrowers with at least \$5,000 in student debt relief, among other initiatives.

As Biden makes his bid for another term, his stance on providing debt relief for student loan borrowers has evolved since he won the 2020 presidential election.

In 2021, during a town hall, a voter from Racine, Wisconsin asked Biden if he would support student loan debt cancellation and he bluntly replied that he would not, and instead said he would support congressional action on the issue.

The White House believes the new proposals are narrowly targeted enough that they will survive any anticipated legal challenges in order to avoid an outcome similar to last summer, when the Supreme Court struck down the Biden administration's earlier version of student debt cancellation.

"Today, too many Americans, especially young people, are saddled with unsustainable debts in exchange for a college degree," Biden said in Madison.

Student debt forgiveness remains a key issue for voters, especially young ones. The administration has begun to lose support from some young voters who back a ceasefire in Gaza and are frustrated with the administration's support of Israel in its war against Hamas that has led to the death of more than 30,000

Palestinians, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a center-leaning think tank, has not estimated the cost of the new proposal, but in a statement Monday argued against any debt cancellation.

"This new plan will cost tens of billions of dollars at a time when we should be working to reduce the debt, and by worsening inflationary pressures it's likely to lead the Fed to keep interest rates higher for longer," Maya MacGuineas, the president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, said in a statement.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

Trump says abortion policy should be left to the states, backing away from national ban

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 8, 2024 2:05 PM

WASHINGTON — Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump announced a shift in his views on abortion laws Monday, releasing a video advocating for state legislatures to make those decisions, not Congress — and was immediately met with strong criticism from an influential anti-abortion group that said it should remain a national debate.

"My view is now that we have abortion where everybody wanted it from a legal standpoint, the states will determine by vote, or legislation, or perhaps both, and whatever they decide must be the law of the land. In this case, the law of the state," Trump said in a nearly five-minute video he posted to social media.

"Many states will be different, many will have a different number of weeks, or some will have more conservative than others, and that's what they will be," he added. "At the end of the day, this is all about the will of the people. You must follow your heart, or in many cases your religion or your faith."

Trump said he supports exceptions to abortion bans to allow pregnancy terminations in cases of rape, incest and the life of the pregnant patient.

Trump's video is a departure from comments he's made on the campaign trail that he would support a 16-week nationwide ban.

The shift in his policy platform less than seven months before Election Day could be viewed as an effort by Trump to appeal to centrist Republicans and swing voters, especially women, as Democrats have sought to rally supporters behind reproductive rights.

In the last two years, voters in a number of states have approved ballot questions that bolstered support for abortion access, including those in Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio.

Several other states, including South Dakota, Arizona and Florida, are likely to have abortion access questions on this November's ballot, alongside the choice for president and representation in both chambers of Congress.

President Joe Biden wrote in a statement released by his reelection campaign that "Trump once said women must be punished for seeking reproductive health care — and he's gotten his wish."

"Women are being turned away from emergency rooms, forced to go to court to seek permission for the medical attention they need, and left to travel hundreds of miles for health care," Biden wrote.

"Because of Donald Trump, one in three women in America already live under extreme and dangerous bans that put their lives at risk and threaten doctors with prosecution for doing their jobs," Biden added. "And that is only going to get worse."

'Deeply disappointed'

Anti-abortion organizations immediately expressed frustration with Trump's most recent campaign stance, while reproductive rights organizations questioned its truthfulness.

Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America President Marjorie Dannenfelser wrote in a statement the organization is "deeply disappointed in President Trump's position" and reiterated the Supreme Court's "Dobbs decision

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clearly allows both states and Congress to act.”

“Saying the issue is ‘back to the states’ cedes the national debate to the Democrats who are working relentlessly to enact legislation mandating abortion throughout all nine months of pregnancy,” Dannenfelsler wrote. “If successful, they will wipe out states’ rights.”

South Carolina Republican U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham also broke with Trump on the issue, writing in a statement that “the pro-life movement has always been about the wellbeing of the unborn child — not geography.”

Graham, ranking member on the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, said he would continue to press for a 15-week nationwide abortion ban with exceptions for rape, incest and the life of the pregnant patient.

Until he can garner the votes to move that bill through Congress, Graham wrote, he would press for a law “requiring abortion providers to administer anesthesia to an unborn child at fifteen weeks.”

Trump rebuked Dannenfelsler and Graham later Monday afternoon, writing on social media that they “should study the 10th Amendment and States’ Rights. When they do, they should proudly get on with helping Republicans to WIN ELECTIONS, rather than making it impossible for them to do so!”

Trump wrote in another post: “I blame myself for Lindsey Graham, because the only reason he won in the Great State of South Carolina is because I Endorsed him!”

In another post, Trump wrote: “We cannot let our Country suffer any further damage by losing Elections on an issue that should always have been decided by the States, and now will be!”

Abortion rights supporters were highly critical. Reproductive Freedom for All President and CEO Mini Timmaraju wrote in a statement that she didn’t believe Trump’s comments in the video, calling him a “liar.”

“He knows that publicly supporting bans loses voters, so he deployed dangerous disinformation about abortion in order to distract from the truth about what he will do if elected,” Timmaraju wrote.

“He’s responsible for the harm and chaos caused by Republicans’ abortion bans in the states, and all he is saying is that he wants more of it,” Timmaraju added. “The stakes couldn’t be higher, and we need to elect reproductive freedom majorities in Congress and send President Biden and Vice President Harris back to the White House to restore the federal right to abortion and expand access.”

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, cast doubt that Trump would hold the stance for any length of time, writing in a statement, “Let’s wait a few weeks and see what his new position will be.”

Biden-Harris 2024 Campaign Manager Julie Chavez Rodriguez said on a call with reporters Monday afternoon that Trump’s video shows “his support for those extreme bans and made clear he will support these bans in all 50 states.”

“Make no mistake, leaving it to the states is an endorsement of the cruel and dangerous abortion bans across the country made possible only by Donald Trump,” Rodriguez said.

The abortion bans currently in place in Republican states sometimes exclude exceptions for rape and incest, and can take effect before a woman knows she’s pregnant, Rodriguez said.

Abortion decision

Trump was president before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2022 overturned the constitutional right to abortion it established in the 1973 Roe v. Wade case and reaffirmed in the 1992 Planned Parenthood v. Casey ruling.

The conservative justices on the court wrote in their ruling ending nationwide protections that “the authority to regulate abortion is returned to the people and their elected representatives.”

That would include Congress, should lawmakers choose to pursue a nationwide law. Trump didn’t say in the video if he would veto such a bill or work to prevent it from reaching his desk, in the event he is reelected president and has a Republican-controlled Congress.

In the video, Trump personally thanked the conservative justices on the Supreme Court who ended the right to an abortion and commented that he was “proudly the person who was responsible” for that ruling.

Trump didn’t comment specifically in the video about whether he would seek to enforce an 1873 anti-

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obscenity law that many anti-abortion advocates say could ban the mailing of medication abortion.

The Comstock Act, as it's called, came up at the U.S. Supreme Court in late March when the justices heard oral arguments over access to mifepristone, one of two pharmaceuticals used in medication abortions.

That law hasn't been enforced in decades but it bars the mailing of "Every article or thing designed, adapted, or intended for producing abortion, or for any indecent or immoral use."

Trump and IVF

Trump also addressed access to in vitro fertilization in his video, saying the Republican Party "wants to make it easier for mothers and families to have babies, not harder."

"That includes supporting the availability of fertility treatments, like IVF, in every state in America," Trump said, later adding he "strongly supports the availability of IVF for couples who are trying to have a precious baby."

Trump thanked lawmakers in Alabama for enacting civil and criminal protections for IVF clinics so they could resume treatments after the state's Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos constituted children.

While many of the IVF clinics in the state restarted their work after the new law was put in place, a Mobile, Alabama, IVF clinic said it will cease at the end of the year due to a lawsuit over the process.

"Today I'm pleased that the Alabama Legislature has acted very quickly and passed legislation that preserves the availability of IVF in Alabama," Trump said. "They really did a great and fast job."

Trump said that the GOP "should always be on the side of the miracle of life and the side of mothers, fathers and their beautiful babies. And that's what we are."

"IVF is an important part of that and our great Republican Party will always be with you in your quest for the ultimate joy in life," Trump said.

Republicans in the U.S. Senate have blocked two bills from moving forward that would have addressed access to IVF, following the questions about the process in Alabama.

Republican Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi in late February blocked efforts by Illinois Democratic Sen. Tammy Duckworth to pass a bill that would have implemented nationwide protections of IVF patients and health care providers.

That legislation would have barred limitations on "assisted reproductive technology services" that are "more burdensome than limitations or requirements imposed on medically comparable procedures, do not significantly advance reproductive health or the safety of such services and unduly restrict access to such services."

In mid-March, Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford blocked Washington state Democratic Sen. Patty Murray from quickly passing legislation that would have expanded access to fertility treatments for military members and veterans.

The bill, titled the Veteran Families Health Services Act, would have allowed troops to freeze their eggs or sperm before shipping out to a combat zone or a hazardous duty assignment. It would also have broadened access to VA's adoption services.

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 proposes new student debt relief plan for millions of borrowers

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - APRIL 8, 2024 8:56 AM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Monday will announce the rollout of a student debt forgiveness proposal that the White House believes is narrowly targeted enough to survive legal challenges.

The plan, if finalized, would include a one-time cancellation of all accrued interest for 23 million borrowers. It would also cancel the full amount of student loan debt for 4 million borrowers and provide more

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than 10 million borrowers with at least \$5,000 in student debt relief.

The president will unveil the Department of Education proposed regulations during a speech in Madison, Wisconsin, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on a call Sunday.

The announcement comes seven months ahead of the November elections, in which student debt forgiveness remains a key issue for voters, especially younger ones. Some of those younger voters who back a ceasefire have been turned off by the administration's support of Israel in its war against Hamas in Gaza.

The proposed rule will be released in the coming months, and the Biden administration expects some provisions, such as the interest cancellation, could be implemented as early as this fall, Jean-Pierre said.

"President Biden will use every tool available to cancel student loan debt for as many borrowers as possible, no matter how many times Republican elected officials try to stand in his way," she said.

A fresh legal fight likely

The proposal is likely to face legal challenges, similar to the battle that engulfed Biden's original student debt forgiveness plan. The Supreme Court struck it down last year when it was challenged in lawsuits backed by six Republican-led states — Nebraska, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas and South Carolina.

Senior administration officials told reporters that the Biden administration carefully studied the Supreme Court's opinion last year, which turned aside the administration's argument that Education Secretary Miguel Cardona had the legal authority under the HEROES Act to enact a one-time student debt relief plan of up to \$20,000 for some borrowers.

A senior administration official said the new proposals "address specific situations and specific populations in ways that we feel very confident are covered by what the secretary's long-standing authority under (the Higher Education Act) allows him to do, and we're confident that we're acting within the scope of the law, as set forth by the Supreme Court."

After the Supreme Court ruling, Biden directed the Department of Education to take a more targeted route to provide student debt relief through the Higher Education Act in anticipation of legal challenges.

"The negotiated rulemaking process is how we change and improve our higher education policies," Cardona said to reporters Sunday, adding that the Department of Education is moving to quickly finalize the proposals.

While the rulemaking process can take months or years, Cardona has the ability to designate provisions for early implementation, a senior administration official said.

About 43.5 million people have student loan debt, totaling \$1.73 trillion, according to the Federal Reserve.

Building on previous student debt relief plans

The new plan builds on several student debt relief programs the Biden administration already has rolled out, such as the Saving on a Valuable Education Plan, known as the SAVE plan, or any other income-driven repayment plans. For the SAVE plan, borrowers who make monthly payments are not charged accrued interest; payments are based on a borrower's income and family size; and the plan forgives balances after a set number of years.

Under the proposed regulations, there would be a one-time cancellation of up to \$20,000 of unpaid interest regardless of a borrower's income level. Low-and-middle-income borrowers enrolled in any Department of Education income-driven repayment plan would be eligible to have the entire amount of their interest accrued balance canceled. Eligibility would apply to single borrowers who earn \$120,000 or less and married borrowers who earn \$240,000 or less.

The Biden administration estimates that 25 million borrowers would benefit from some type of interest cancellation.

"The interest forgiveness is currently crafted as a one-time benefit for example, but going forward, borrowers will benefit from substantially more favorable treatment through the SAVE program," a senior administration official said.

The plan would also automatically cancel debt for borrowers eligible for that forgiveness under the SAVE,

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Public Service Loan Forgiveness or other programs like the closed school loan discharge who have not yet applied for those programs.

The Department of Education would also be able to use its own data to identify those borrowers who would be eligible for student loan debt forgiveness, but have yet to apply. The Biden administration estimates that this would cancel debt for about 2 million borrowers.

20 years of loan repayments

Under the proposed plan, borrowers who began repayment of their undergraduate student loans 20 years ago, and borrowers who began repayment of their graduate loans 25 years ago, would have their student loan debt canceled. Those borrowers would need to be on an income-driven repayment plan in order to qualify for that relief.

The plan also aims to cancel debt for borrowers who enrolled in low-financial-value-programs, which means the total cost of attending exceeded the financial benefits.

Borrowers who attended institutions or programs that lost eligibility to participate in the federal student aid program or were denied recertification would be eligible to have their student loans canceled. And borrowers who attended those institutions that either closed or failed to provide "sufficient value" would be eligible for relief.

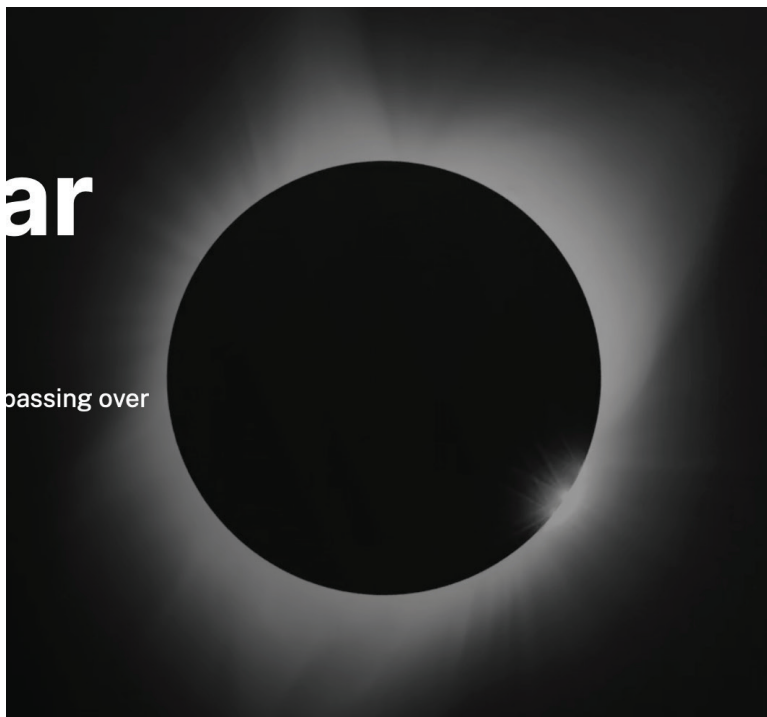
Cardona added that this could include some career training programs that have "taken advantage" of borrowers, or institutions that have an unusually high student loan debt default rate.

The plan would also provide relief for borrowers who are experiencing some sort of hardship in their daily lives that creates a barrier to paying back loans. Some of those financial hardships would include medical debt or child care.

While the administration is aiming for this debt relief to be immediate, a senior administration official said that some additional information would be required for the borrowers who qualify under the hardship relief.

"Our goal is for the overwhelming majority of things like interest, loans that are older, borrowers (who) attended programs that didn't deliver financial value, to do that all automatically," the senior administration official said.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

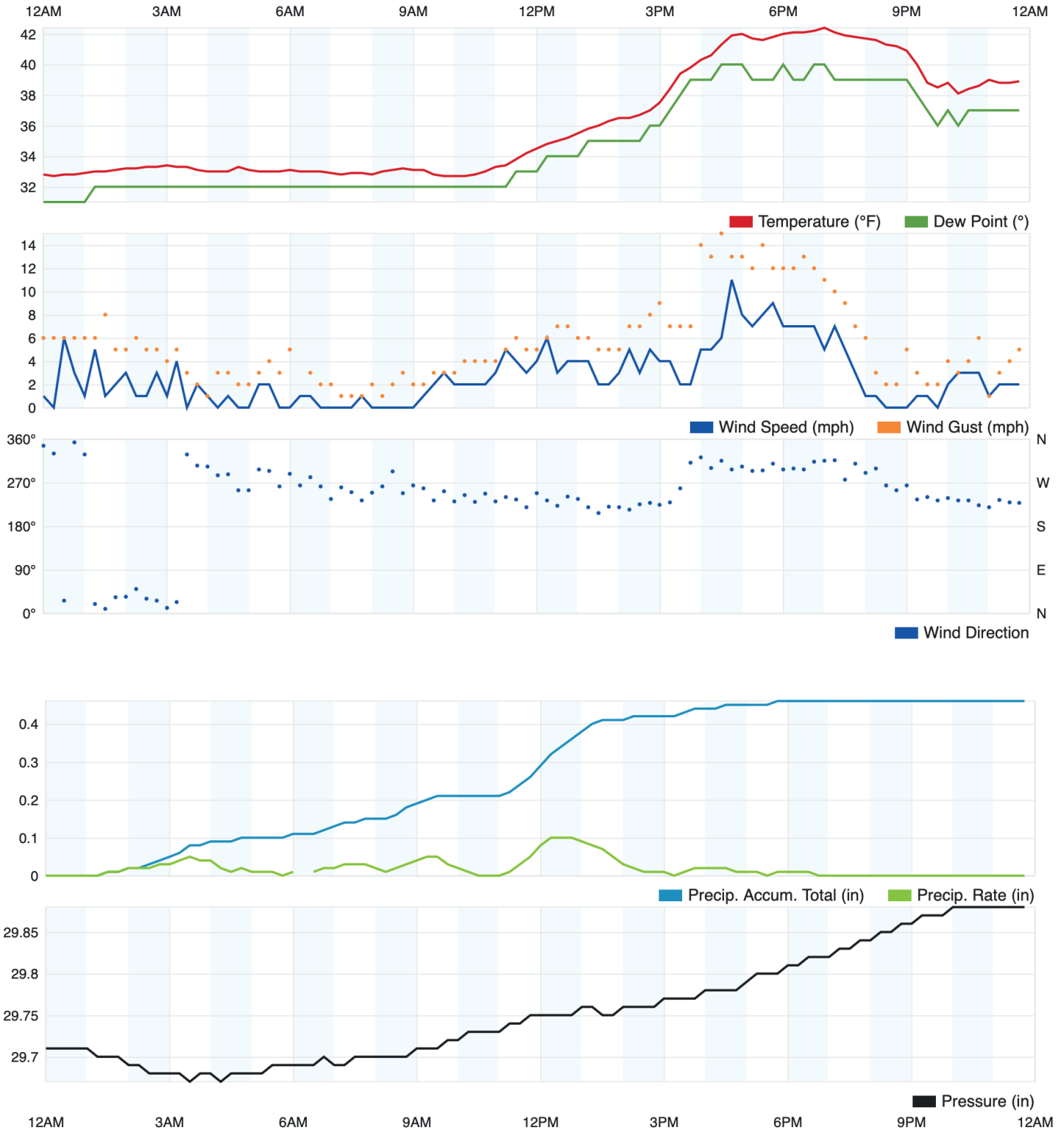


The Total Solar Eclipse as recorded by NASA.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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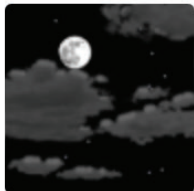
Today



Sunny

High: 62 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 38 °F

Wednesday



Sunny then
Chance Rain
and Breezy

High: 63 °F

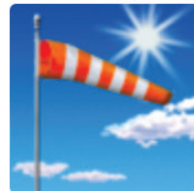
Wednesday
Night



Slight Chance
Rain and
Breezy

Low: 38 °F

Thursday



Sunny and
Windy

High: 57 °F



Aberdeen, SD

Mid Week Forecast

Tuesday



Highs: 58 - 64°F

Lows: 37 - 40°F

Wednesday



Highs: 56 - 65°F

Lows: 32 - 41°F

Expect clear to mostly clear skies today with highs in the upper 50s to low 60s. Wednesday will start out with relatively few clouds but rain moves in for the afternoon.

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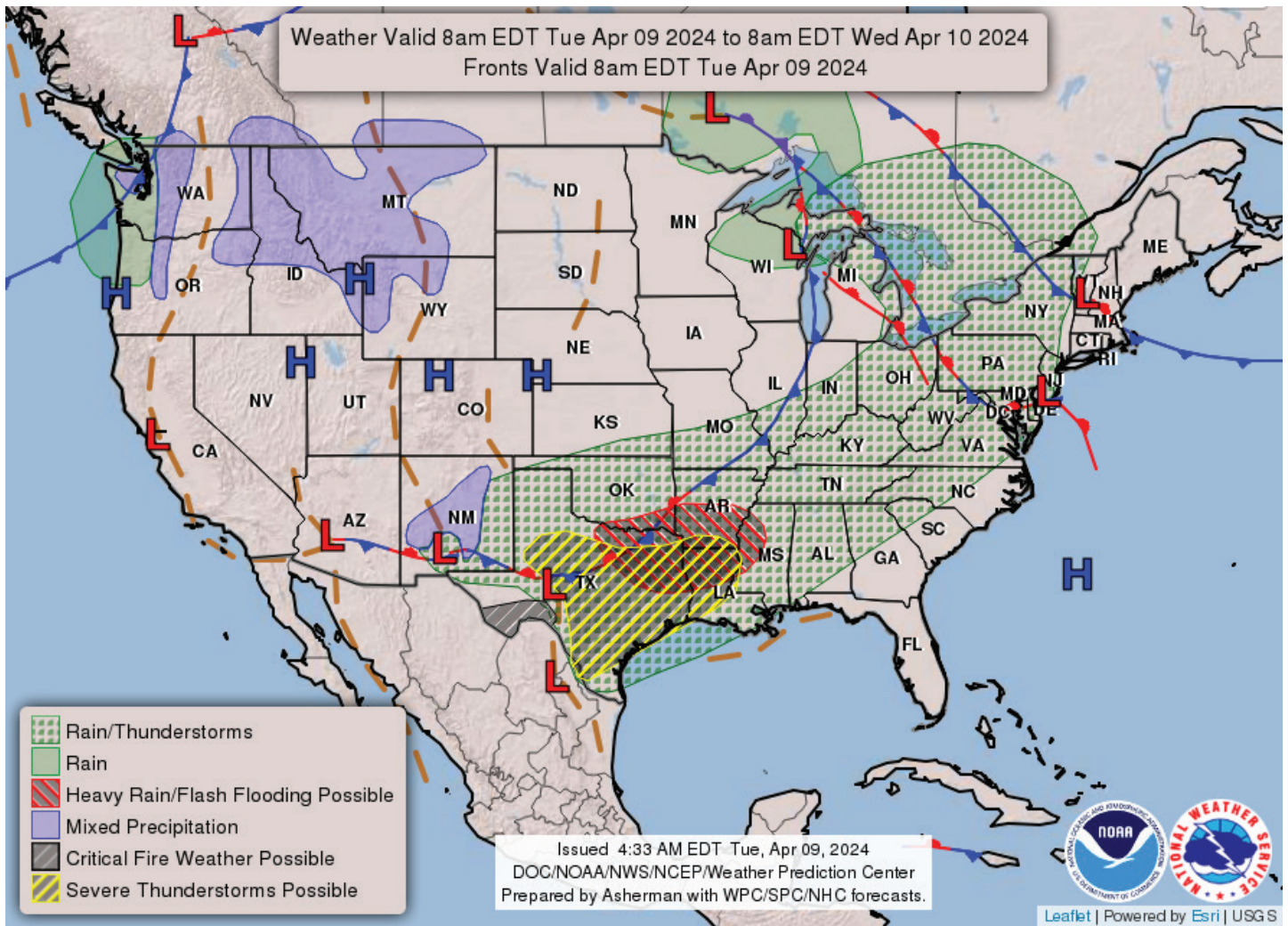
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 42 °F at 6:52 PM
Low Temp: 33 °F at 12:10 AM
Wind: 15 mph at 4:24 PM
Precip: : 0.51

Day length: 13 hours, 18 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1977
Record Low: 8 in 1997
Average High: 55
Average Low: 29
Average Precip in April.: 0.41
Precip to date in April: 0.58
Average Precip to date: 2.47
Precip Year to Date: 1.43
Sunset Tonight: 8:12:52 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:52:50 am



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Today in Weather History

April 9, 1997: A late season storm produced snow from the Black Hills through South Central South Dakota. The greatest amounts occurred in a 40-mile wide swath along and south of Interstate 90. Snowfall amounts included 9 inches at Rapid City, 12 inches at Deerfield, 10 inches at Custer, 11 inches at Mission, and 12 inches at Winner. Outside this swath, snowfall ranged from 3 to 6 inches.

April 9, 2007: Arctic air moved into central and northeast South Dakota and remained for nearly a week. High temperatures from April 3rd to April 9th were mostly in the 20s to around 30 degrees with lows in the single digits and teens. The high temperatures were from 20 to 30 degrees below average, and the lows were from 10 to 25 degrees below normal across all of the area. Some record lows and many record low maximum temperatures were set throughout the period. The first ten days of April were the coldest on record for Aberdeen. The early spring cold period affected many of the residents, especially farmers and ranchers, of central and northeast South Dakota. Also, many robins died from the cold and lack of food.

1877 - Oregon Inlet, NC, was widened three quarters of a mile by a nor'easter. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1889: The Norfolk Landmark reported that damage was more substantial than the August 1879 hurricane because it lasted for a much longer duration- the water was 18 inches higher. Rain, snow, and sleet fell, totaling 3.2 inches. Drummonds Bridge was swept away (later replaced by the Ghent Bridge). Trees were uprooted, and roofs were torn off.

1947: An estimated F5 tornado struck Woodward, Oklahoma during the late evening killing 95 persons and causing six million dollars damage. The tornado, one to two miles in width, and traveling at a speed of 50 mph, killed a total of 167 persons along its 221-mile path from Texas into Kansas, injured 980 others, and caused nearly ten million dollars damage.

1953: The first radar image of a tornado was detected by radar equipment at the University of Illinois Airport at Champaign, IL. Studies of the radar pictures from that day showed that a tornado of significant size and intensity could be detected.

1977 - A storm brought 15.5 inches of rain to Jolo, WV, in thirty hours. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - International Falls, MN, reported their sixth straight record high for the date, with a reading of 77 degrees. A cold front ushering sharply colder weather into the north central U.S. produced wind gusts to 60 mph at Glasgow MT. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Residents of Sioux City, IA, awoke to find two inches of snow on the ground following a record high temperature of 88 degrees the previous afternoon. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Eighteen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 80 degrees at Eureka CA established a record for the month of April. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from the Central High Plains to Arkansas and northern Texas. Severe thunderstorms spawned five tornadoes, and there were seventy reports of large hail and damaging winds. A tornado injured four persons at Ardmore OK, and thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Kellyville OK, and hail three inches in diameter at Halmstead KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2011 - An EF-3 tornado hits Mapleton, IA. Officials estimate more than half the town is damaged or destroyed but none of the 1200 residents were killed. 31 tornadoes were confirmed across Iowa, Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina on this day.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

GETTING UP WHEN WE'RE DOWN

Bob Richards is the only two-time gold medal winner of the pole vaulting competition in the world Olympics. An ordained minister, the "Vaulting Vicar" once said, "I've never seen a great champion who quit when he was beaten. A champion refuses to go down and stay down. He bounces back to a greater victory every time."

We often recall the events in the life of the Apostle Peter. On three occasions during the trial of Jesus, he denied his Lord three times. He was prejudiced against Gentile Christians and was known to be prejudiced against them on certain occasions. He spoke without thinking and was seen as brash and at times impulsive.

But in spite of these facts, he was one of the "inner three" of the disciples, their recognized leader, and he eventually became the "spokesman" for the early church after Pentecost.

In Peter we see one who failed but would not let his failure keep him down or keep him from being a follower of Jesus. We must always believe that when we fail to do what God has for us to do, He still loves us, will never forsake us or abandon us.

Prayer: We are grateful, Lord, for Your faithfulness and presence in our lives and that You will always love us in spite of our faults and failures. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For I can do everything through Christ,[a] who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13



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:
04.05.24

20 30 54 63 65 14

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$97,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 21 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.24

24 28 29 32 38 8

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,750,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 36 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.24

4 7 33 34 46 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 51 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.06.24

3 4 28 32 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$50,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 51 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.24

7 40 45 58 61 14

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 20 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.24

6 21 23 39 54 23

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$31,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 20 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

European court hands down mixed rulings on 3 cases seeking to force countries to meet climate goals

By MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

STRASBOURG, France (AP) — Europe's highest human rights court ruled Tuesday that its member nations have an obligation to protect their citizens from the ill effects of climate change, but still threw out a high-profile case brought by six Portuguese youngsters aimed at forcing countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The European Court of Human Rights sided with more than 2,000 Swiss members of Senior Women for Climate Protection, who also sought such measures in a mixed session of judgements in which a French mayor similarly seeking stronger government efforts to combat climate change was also defeated.

Lawyers for all three had hoped the Strasbourg court would find that national governments have a legal duty to make sure global warming is held to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, in line with the goals of the Paris climate agreement.

"I really hoped that we would win against all the countries, so obviously I'm disappointed that this didn't happen," said 19-year-old Sofia Oliveira, one of the Portuguese plaintiffs. "But the most important thing is that the Court has said in the Swiss women's case that governments must cut their emissions more to protect human rights. So, their win is a win for us, too, and a win for everyone!"

In a reference to its fundamental Convention of Human Rights, "the court found that Art. 8 of the Convention encompasses a right for individuals to effective protection by the state authorities from the serious adverse effects of climate change on their lives, health, well-being and quality of life."

Judgments from the European Court of Human Rights set a legal precedent against which future lawsuits would be judged in the Council of Europe's 46 member states.

Although activists have had successes with lawsuits in domestic proceedings, this was the first time an international court ruled on climate change.

"This is a turning point," said Corina Heri, an expert in climate change litigation at the University of Zurich. She said Tuesday's decision confirms for the first time that countries have an obligation to protect people from the effects of climate change and will open the door to more legal challenges.

Ahead of the ruling, a large crowd gathered in front of the court building to cheer and wave flags, including climate activist Greta Thunberg, who was coming off of multiple arrests during a demonstration in The Hague over the weekend.

The decisions have "the potential to be a watershed moment in the global fight for a livable future. A victory for any of the three cases would be one of the most significant developments on climate change since the signing of the Paris Agreement" said Gerry Liston, a lawyer with the Global Legal Action Network, which is supporting the Portuguese students.

The European Union, which doesn't include Switzerland, currently has a target to be climate-neutral by 2050. Many governments have said that meeting a 2030 goal would be economically unattainable.

The groups were confident that the 17 judges would rule in their favor, but the mixed decision could undermine a previous ruling in the Netherlands. In 2019, the Dutch Supreme Court ordered the government to cut emissions by at least 25% by the end of 2020 from benchmark 1990 levels.

The Urgenda decision, referring to the climate group that brought the case, relied on the European Convention of Human Rights. It could be overturned if Tuesday's decision concludes there is no legal obligation for countries to combat climate change.

"A court ruling is binding on all countries," said Dennis van Berkel, who represented Urgenda in the Netherlands.

Together with five more young people, 16-year-old André dos Santos Oliveira took Portugal and 32 other nations to court, arguing the failure to stop emissions violated their fundamental rights. Their case was

thrown out.

"The extreme heat waves, the rainfalls, followed by heat waves, it is just choking us with greenhouse effects. And what worries me is the frequency in which they started happening more and more. That's what really scared me. And, I thought to myself, well, what can I do?" she said.

But judges ruled in favor of a group of Swiss retirees also demanding their government do more. Senior Women for Climate Protection, whose average age is 74, say older women's rights are especially infringed on because they are most affected by the extreme heat that will become more frequent due to global warming.

Earth shattered global annual heat records in 2023, flirted with the world's agreed-upon warming threshold, and showed more signs of a feverish planet, Copernicus, a European climate agency, said in January.

In all three cases, lawyers argued that the political and civil protections guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights are meaningless if the planet is uninhabitable.

Switzerland is not alone in being affected by global warming, said Alain Chablais, representative of the country at last year's hearings. "This problem cannot be solved by Switzerland alone."

Acknowledging the urgency of the climate crisis, the court fast-tracked all three cases, including a rare move allowing the Portuguese case to bypass domestic legal proceedings.

The Latest | Netanyahu vows to carry out Rafah invasion, which US says would be a mistake

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has escalated his pledge to invade the southern Gaza city of Rafah, which is filled with around 1.4 million Palestinians, most of whom are displaced from other parts of the Gaza Strip.

"It will happen. There is a date," Netanyahu said in a video statement Monday, without elaborating.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has said a ground operation into Rafah would be a mistake and has demanded to see a credible plan to protect civilians. Netanyahu spoke as Israeli negotiators are in Cairo discussing international efforts to broker a cease-fire deal with the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

Israeli troops withdrew Sunday from Khan Younis, another city in southern Gaza, ending a key phase of the war. Defense officials say they're regrouping ahead of a push into Rafah. Palestinians who visited Khan Younis on Monday said the city is now unlivable, offering them little immediate chance to return. Many have been sheltering in Rafah.

The Palestinian death toll from the war has passed 33,200, with nearly 76,000 wounded, Gaza's Health Ministry said. 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 Oct. 7 when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage.

Currently:

- Palestinians returning to Khan Younis find an unrecognizable city after Israeli withdrawal.
- These Palestinian mothers in Gaza gave birth Oct. 7. Their babies have known only war.
- AP Photos chronicle 6 months of devastation in Gaza war with no sign of an end.
- Israel finds the body of a hostage killed in Gaza, while talks will resume on a cease-fire.
- For families of hostages, it's a race against time as Israel's war reaches six-month mark.
- Find more AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

ISRAEL PLANS TO BAN PRODUCTS FROM TURKEY IN A TIT-FOR-TAT MOVE

JERUSALEM — Foreign Minister Israel Katz says Israel is preparing a ban on products from Turkey after Ankara announced it was restricting exports to Israel.

Turkey said earlier Tuesday it is restricting exports of dozens of products to Israel, including aluminum, steel, construction products and chemical fertilizers. It said it would continue the measures until Israel

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declares a cease-fire and allows the uninterrupted flow of aid to Gaza.

Katz said in a post on the social platform X that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is sacrificing the economic interests of his citizens "for his support of Hamas."

Relations between Turkey and Israel have been frosty for years, although trade ties between the two countries are strong.

NATO-member Turkey is among the strongest critics of Israel's military actions in Gaza.

Erdogan has repeatedly called for an immediate cease-fire and accused Israel of committing genocide in its military campaign in Gaza. The Israeli Foreign Ministry had no additional comment.

MEDIATORS PRESENT NEW CEASE-FIRE PROPOSAL TO HAMAS AND ISRAEL, EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS SAY
CAIRO — Egyptian officials said Tuesday that mediators have presented a new cease-fire proposal to Hamas and Israel that would include a six-week pause in fighting and a swap of 40 Hamas-held hostages for at least 700 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

The proposal was presented to delegations from Hamas and Israel during the latest round of negotiations in Cairo over the weekend, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations.

Among the Palestinian prisoners to be freed would be dozens convicted of killing Israelis during attacks by militant groups.

The officials said Hamas would be required to provide a list of the hostages it will release, as well as a list of Palestinian prisoners whose freedom it seeks.

The proposal also includes the return of a significant number of Palestinians to northern Gaza. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled the northern half of Gaza in the early stages of the war, heeding Israeli evacuation orders. The vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people are now crammed into the southern half.

The proposal stipulates that Israel gradually dismantle checkpoints it had built on a new road that split the strip in half to prevent the return of Palestinians to the north.

Hamas has said it is reviewing the proposal.

NETANYAHU VOWS TO CARRY OUT RAFAH GROUND INVASION

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has escalated his pledge to invade the southern Gaza city of Rafah, declaring: "There is a date."

Netanyahu has repeatedly said Israel must send ground forces into Rafah, saying it is Hamas' last stronghold in Gaza.

But the international community, including the U.S., opposes the operation, saying the roughly 1.4 million civilians seeking shelter there will be in danger.

Israel has insisted it has a plan to protect the civilians.

In a video statement Monday, Netanyahu said the Rafah operation is essential for victory. He said, "It will happen. There is a date," without elaborating. He spoke as Israeli negotiators were in Cairo discussing international efforts to broker a cease-fire deal with Hamas.

ISRAELI OFFENSIVE IN KHAN YOUNIS DAMAGED MORE THAN HALF OF ALL BUILDINGS IN THE CITY, MAP EXPERTS SAY

JERUSALEM — A pair of mapping experts say Israel's offensive in the southern Gaza City of Khan Younis appears to have left over half of the city's buildings with damage or destruction visible from space.

As of last week, over 55% of the city's buildings were likely damaged or destroyed, according to an analysis of Copernicus Sentinel-1 satellite data by Corey Scher of the CUNY Graduate Center and Jamon Van Den Hoek of Oregon State University. They say that accounts for 45,000 buildings.

Still, the damage in Khan Younis and other parts of the Strip's south is considerably less than in the north of Gaza, where the researchers estimate 70% of buildings were likely damaged or destroyed.

Israel's ground and aerial bombardment campaign, begun after the Hamas attack Oct. 7, has wreaked unprecedented damage on the strip, leveling entire apartment buildings and leaving much of the territory in ruins, a moonscape from war.

Israel withdrew its last ground troops from Khan Younis on Sunday, marking the end of a key phase in

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its war against Hamas.

ISRAEL TO BUY 40,000 TENTS TO EVACUATE PALESTINIANS FROM RAFAH, ISRAELI OFFICIAL SAYS
JERUSALEM — An Israeli official confirms that Israel is purchasing 40,000 tents to prepare for the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

Israel says Rafah is Hamas' last stronghold and is vowing to send ground troops into the city. But the international community, including the U.S., opposes the offensive, saying it would endanger Palestinian civilians.

More than 1 million Palestinians, over half of Gaza's population, have fled to Rafah after being displaced by fighting elsewhere in the territory.

Israel has said it has a plan to evacuate civilians ahead of its offensive, and Israel's Defense Ministry on Monday published a tender seeking a supplier of tents.

The Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media, said the tents were part of the Rafah preparations.

Associated Press writer Josef Federman contributed.

ISRAELI ARMY SAYS A PALESTINIAN WOMAN WAS SHOT DEAD ATTEMPTING TO STAB A SOLDIER IN WEST BANK

JERUSALEM — The Israeli army said its forces shot dead a Palestinian woman in the northern West Bank on Monday, after she attempted to stab a soldier at a checkpoint.

The army said the incident took place at the Tayasir checkpoint near the northern West Bank town of Tubas.

In a statement, the Palestinian Health Ministry identified the deceased as a young woman but did not state her name or age.

At least 460 Palestinians in east Jerusalem and the West Bank have been killed by Israeli fire since the Israel-Hamas war erupted six months ago, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

Many have been shot dead in armed clashes, some while attempting to stab Israeli forces, and others for throwing stones at troops.

The Associated Press has reported on several cases where Palestinians have been shot dead for posing no apparent threat to nearby troops.

Knife attacks by Palestinian women are rare.

POPE FRANCIS MEETS WITH FAMILIES OF HOSTAGES

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis met Monday with relatives of hostages taken by Hamas on Oct. 7, marking the six-month anniversary of the attack in southern Israel with an hourlong audience.

The Vatican released photos of the encounter, showing the relatives of the several of the hostages sitting in a semicircle in front of Francis in his private library in the Apostolic Palace. Each one held a poster with a photo and the name of their loved one.

It was the second time Francis has met with relatives of the hostages. On Nov. 22, he met with a delegation of Israelis, and then separately a delegation of Palestinians whose relatives had been harmed during the long Mideast conflict.

Francis has called for the immediate release of the hostages and a cease-fire in Gaza, and for humanitarian aid to urgently reach desperate Palestinians.

GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY REPORTS 32 PEOPLE KILLED IN LAST 24 HOURS

CAIRO — The Health Ministry in Gaza on Monday said the bodies of 32 people killed in Israel's bombardment have been brought to hospitals in the beleaguered territory in the past 24 hours. Hospitals also received 47 wounded people, it said.

The fresh fatalities brought the death toll in the strip to 33,207 since the war began on Oct. 7, it said.

The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants, but said two thirds of the dead are children and women. The Israeli military says it has killed 12,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The ministry said 75,933 people have been wounded.

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The ministry said many casualties remain under the rubble and first responders have been unable to retrieve them amid the relentless bombing.

PAKISTAN AND SAUDI ARABIA CALL ON ISRAEL TO HALT ITS MILITARY OPERATIONS IN GAZA

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have called on Israel to halt its military operations in Gaza and seek a peaceful solution to the conflict in line with UN resolutions.

The two countries made the demands in a joint statement on Monday after a meeting between Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Mecca.

The two sides called for international efforts "to halt Israeli military operations in Gaza, mitigate humanitarian impact and underscored the imperative for the international community to pressure Israel to cease hostilities, adhere to international law, and facilitate unhindered humanitarian aid access to Gaza," according to the statement.

They also discussed the need for a peace process in accordance with UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative "aimed at finding a just and comprehensive solution, for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital."

ISRAELI MILITARY SAYS IT KILLED A HEZBOLLAH COMMANDER IN LEBANON

BEIRUT — Israel's military says it has killed a commander of Hezbollah's secretive Radwan Force in southern Lebanon.

Ali Ahmad Hussein is one of the most senior militants killed since Israel and Hezbollah began exchanging fire at the start of the war in Gaza. His killing comes as regional tensions soar after an apparent Israeli attack last week on Iran's consulate in Syria, threatening to spark a wider conflagration.

The Israeli military said two other Hezbollah militants were also killed in the strike early Monday.

Hezbollah announced the death of Ali Ahmad Hussein but did not give any details on the circumstances or his role within the group, in line with how they announce the deaths of their members.

The Israeli military said he was killed in an Israeli airstrike in the southern Lebanese village of Sultaniyeh. It said in a statement that Hussein was responsible for carrying out attacks on northern Israel.

Hezbollah militants and Israeli troops have clashed along the tense Lebanon-Israel border since Oct. 8. Hezbollah says it would stop firing rockets once a cease-fire is reached in the Gaza Strip that would end the Israel-Hamas war.

Israeli officials have been demanding that the Radwan Force withdraw from the border area in order to allow tens of thousands of displaced Israelis to return home.

AUSTRALIA APPOINTS EX-DEFENSE CHIEF TO LOOK INTO ISRAELI STRIKE THAT KILLED 7 AID WORKERS

MELBOURNE, Australia — Australia has appointed retired national defense chief Mark Binskin to look into how Israel Defense Forces came to kill seven World Central Kitchen aid workers, including Australian Zomi Frankcom, in Gaza last week.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Monday he expected Israel would fully cooperate with Binskin as Australia's special adviser on Israel's response to the missile strikes on three aid vehicles.

"We would expect that someone of Mr. Binskin's stature, frankly, will be given every cooperation from the Israel Defense Forces and the Israeli government," Albanese told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"We don't find the explanations to be satisfactory to this point," Albanese added.

The seven aid workers' deaths had "shaken the world," Albanese said, adding it is "unacceptable" that almost 200 aid workers have died since the conflict began in October last year.

Binskin, who served as Australian Defense Force chief from 2014 to 2018, will advise the government on the "sufficiency and appropriateness of steps taken by the Israeli government" in response to the fatal attack, which the Israeli military has described as a tragic error, a government statement said.

Germany rejects allegations that it's facilitating acts of genocide in Gaza at UN court

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Germany on Tuesday strongly rejected a case brought by Nicaragua at the United Nations' top court accusing Berlin of facilitating breaches of the Geneva Convention and international humanitarian law by providing arms and other support to Israel in its deadly assault on Gaza.

"The minute we look closely, Nicaragua's accusations fall apart," Christian Tams, a member of Germany's legal team, told the 16-judge panel at the International Court of Justice.

On Monday, Nicaragua urged judges to order a halt to German military aid to Israel, arguing that Berlin's support enables acts of genocide and breaches of international humanitarian law in Gaza.

The head of Germany's legal team, Tania von Uslar-Gleichen, said Nicaragua's claims "have no basis in fact or law. They are dependent on an assessment of conduct by Israel, not a party to these proceedings."

Preliminary hearings held Monday and Tuesday are focused solely on Nicaragua's request for so-called provisional measures, including a court order for Berlin to halt military and other aid to Israel and reinstate funding to the U.N. aid agency in Gaza.

Tams said that Germany had licensed only four exports of weapons of war to Israel since October, "three of which concern test or practice equipment."

Showing judges a photo of German aid being airdropped over Gaza, Tams added that Berlin continues to provide humanitarian support to Palestinians "every single day under extremely difficult conditions, constructively engaging with international partners."

Nicaragua's case is the latest legal attempt to rein in Israel's offensive by a country with historic ties to the Palestinian people, after South Africa accused Israel of genocide at the same court late last year. It also comes against a backdrop of growing calls for Israel's allies to stop supplying the country with weapons — and as some supporters, including Germany, have grown more critical of the war.

At Monday's hearings, Nicaragua's Ambassador to the Netherlands, Carlos José Argüello Gómez, accused Germany of "failing to honor its own obligation to prevent genocide or to ensure respect of international humanitarian law."

However, another lawyer for Germany, Samuel Wordsworth, argued that the court could not rule Germany was violating the obligation to prevent genocide because its judges have not ruled that Israel is breaching the Genocide Convention.

In a preliminary phase of the case brought late last year by South Africa, the U.N. court has said that it is "plausible" that Israel's actions in Gaza could amount to breaches of the convention.

"How can it be said that there was a failure to ensure respect of a third state, if the failure on the part of that third state to respect is not established in the first place?" Wordsworth said.

The court will likely take weeks to deliver its preliminary decision, and Nicaragua's case will probably drag on for years.

Israel strongly denies that its assault amounts to genocidal acts, saying it is acting in self defense after Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people.

Since then, more than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry. Its toll doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants, but it has said women and children make up the majority of the dead.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Germany is second only to the U.S. in supplying arms to Israel — but it would be harder, if not impossible, for the U.S. to be brought before the court because Washington does not recognize the ICJ's power to compel countries to appear before it. The U.S. also has not signed a protocol to the Genocide Convention that allows countries to bring disputes to the court.

Biden to meet Japan's PM Kishida amid shared concerns about China and differences on US Steel deal

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida begins a much-anticipated visit to Washington on Tuesday aiming to spotlight shared concerns about provocative Chinese military action in the Pacific and at a rare moment of public difference between the two nations over a Japanese company's plan to buy an iconic U.S. company.

Kishida and his wife will stop by the White House Tuesday evening ahead of Wednesday's official visit and formal state dinner as President Joe Biden looks to celebrate a decades-long ally he sees as the cornerstone of his Indo-Pacific policy. Kishida will be the fifth world leader honored by Biden with a state dinner since he took office in 2021.

Ahead of the White House visit, Kishida is set to visit Arlington National Cemetery and stop by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Tuesday. Biden and Kishida on Wednesday will hold talks and take part in a joint news conference before Biden fetes the Japanese leader with the state dinner in the East Room.

The prime minister has also been invited to address a joint meeting of Congress on Thursday. He will be just the second Japanese leader to address the body; Shinzo Abe gave a speech to Congress in 2015.

The visit comes after Biden announced last month that he opposes the planned sale of Pittsburgh-based U.S. Steel to Nippon Steel of Japan, exposing a marked rift in the partnership at the very moment the two leaders aim to reinforce it. Biden argued in announcing his opposition that the U.S. needs to "maintain strong American steel companies powered by American steelworkers."

Ambassador Rahm Emanuel, Biden's envoy to Tokyo, sought Monday to downplay the impact of Biden's opposition to the U.S. Steel acquisition to the relationship. Emanuel noted that in February the Biden administration approved a plan that would drive billions of dollars in revenue to a U.S.-based subsidiary of the Japanese company Mitsui for crane production in the United States.

"The United States relationship with Japan is a lot deeper and stronger and more significant than a single commercial deal," said Emanuel, the former mayor of Chicago, in a joint appearance at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies with Japan's chief envoy to Washington. "As we would say in Chicago, you got to chill."

Nippon Steel announced in December that it planned to buy U.S. Steel for \$14.1 billion in cash, raising concerns about what the transaction could mean for unionized workers, supply chains and U.S. national security. Shigeo Yamada, Japan's ambassador to Washington, declined to comment on whether Kishida would raise the Nippon-U.S. Steel deal with Biden.

Biden has sought to place greater foreign policy focus on the Pacific even while grappling with the fallout of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the grinding Israel-Hamas war. Last year, Biden brought together Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at the presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland, a historic summit between leaders of two countries that have a difficult shared history.

Biden has honored Yoon with a state visit and picked Kishida's predecessor, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, as the first face-to-face foreign leader visit of his presidency.

The administration has been pleased by Japan's strong support for Ukraine. Tokyo has been one of the largest donors to Kyiv since Russia's February 2022 invasion, and Japan has surged its defense spending amid concern about China's military assertiveness.

Yamada suggested in his joint appearance with Emanuel that Kishida would underscore Japan's support for Ukraine during his appearance before Congress, and lay out why the conflict in Eastern Europe matters to his country. Biden is struggling to get House Republicans to back his call to send an additional \$60 billion to Kyiv as it tries to fend off Russia.

Kishida has warned that the war in Europe could lead to conflict in East Asia, suggesting that a lax attitude to Russia emboldens China.

"The prime minister's conviction is today's Ukraine could be tomorrow's East Asia," Yamada said.

Kishida will stick around Washington on Thursday to take part in a meeting with Biden and Philippine

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President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Philippine-Chinese relations have been repeatedly tested by skirmishes between the two nations' coast guard vessels in the disputed South China Sea.

Chinese coast guard ships also regularly approach disputed Japanese-controlled East China Sea islands near Taiwan. Beijing says Taiwan is part of its territory and will be brought under control by force if necessary.

"Cooperation among our three countries is extremely important in maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and in defending a free and open international order based on the rules of law," Kishida said Monday before leaving for Washington.

The leaders are expected to discuss plans to upgrade the U.S. military command structure in Japan. There are about 54,000 U.S. troops stationed in Japan.

Kishida and Biden are also expected to confirm Japan's participation in NASA's Artemis moon program as well as its contribution of a moon rover developed by Toyota Motor Corp. and the inclusion of a Japanese astronaut in the mission. The rover, which comes at a roughly \$2 billion cost, would be the most expensive contribution to the mission by a non-U.S. partner to date.

On Friday, Kishida will tour Toyota's electric vehicle battery factory under construction as well as Honda's business jet subsidiary in North Carolina. He will also meet students at North Carolina State University.

Can't get enough of the total solar eclipse or got clouded out? Here are the next ones to watch for

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Whether you saw the moon completely block the sun, were foiled by cloudy weather or weren't along the path of Monday's total solar eclipse, there are still more chances to catch a glimpse.

Here's what to know about upcoming solar spectacles:

When is the next total solar eclipse?

Total solar eclipses happen about every year or two or three, due to a precise alignment of the sun, moon and Earth. They can occur anywhere across the globe, usually in remote areas like the South Pacific.

Save the date: The next full solar eclipse, in 2026, will pass over the northern fringes of Greenland, Iceland and Spain.

When will the next totality be visible from the U.S.?

The next U.S. taste of totality comes in 2033 when an eclipse brushes Alaska and Russia. And in 2044, one will cross Greenland and western Canada, touching swaths of North Dakota and Montana.

An eclipse on the scale of Monday's event won't happen again until Aug. 12, 2045.

"But it will be pretty spectacular," said Mary Urquhart, a planetary scientist at the University of Texas at Dallas. "It's going to go coast to coast."

That eclipse will first greet viewers in Northern California, slicing through Utah, Colorado and Mississippi on its way to Cape Canaveral, Florida.

What are other celestial events besides solar eclipses?

You can reuse eclipse glasses to look for sunspots — dark, planet-sized spots that appear on the sun due to tangled magnetic fields.

A partial lunar eclipse in September will be visible over Europe and much of Asia, Africa, North America and South America.

Several meteor showers and supermoons will also grace the skies through 2024, as they do every year.

Space enthusiasts can also visit a local planetarium or science center. The planetarium at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, will stay open the weekend after the eclipse to offer themed shows and a guided sunset meditation.

"People will want to come back, and want to learn more," said director Dayna Thompson.

Broken record: March is 10th straight month to be hottest on record, scientists say

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the 10th consecutive month, Earth in March set a new monthly record for global heat — with both air temperatures and the world's oceans hitting an all-time high for the month, the European Union climate agency Copernicus said.

March 2024 averaged 14.14 degrees Celsius (57.9 degrees Fahrenheit), exceeding the previous record from 2016 by a tenth of a degree, according to Copernicus data. And it was 1.68 degrees C (3 degrees F) warmer than in the late 1800s, the base used for temperatures before the burning of fossil fuels began growing rapidly.

Since last June, the globe has broken heat records each month, with marine heat waves across large areas of the globe's oceans contributing.

Scientists say the record-breaking heat during this time wasn't entirely surprising due to a strong El Nino, a climatic condition that warms the central Pacific and changes global weather patterns.

"But its combination with the non-natural marine heat waves made these records so breathtaking," said Woodwell Climate Research Center scientist Jennifer Francis.

With El Nino waning, the margins by which global average temperatures are surpassed each month should go down, Francis said.

Climate scientists attribute most of the record heat to human-caused climate change from carbon dioxide and methane emissions produced by the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

"The trajectory will not change until concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere stop rising," Francis said, "which means we must stop burning fossil fuels, stop deforestation, and grow our food more sustainably as quickly as possible."

Until then, expect more broken records, she said.

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, the world set a goal to keep warming at or below 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. Copernicus' temperature data is monthly and uses a slightly different measurement system than the Paris threshold, which is averaged over two or three decades.

Samantha Burgess, deputy director of Copernicus, said March's record-breaking temperature wasn't as exceptional as some other months in the past year that broke records by wider margins.

"We've had record-breaking months that have been even more unusual," Burgess said, pointing to February 2024 and September 2023. But the "trajectory is not in the right direction," she added.

The globe has now experienced 12 months with average monthly temperatures 1.58 degrees Celsius (2.8 degrees Fahrenheit) above the Paris threshold, according to Copernicus data.

In March, global sea surface temperature averaged 21.07 degrees Celsius (69.93 degrees Fahrenheit), the highest monthly value on record and slightly higher than what was recorded in February.

"We need more ambitious global action to ensure that we can get to net zero as soon as possible," Burgess said.

UConn concludes a dominant run to its 2nd straight NCAA title, beating Zach Edey and Purdue 75-60

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — A basketball beatdown. A coaching clinic. A double-digit domination.

Take one guess who finished off a romp through college basketball again. You bet, it's UConn — a team built to win now, and often, and by a lot every time it takes the court.

Coach Dan Hurley's Huskies delivered the latest of their suffocating hoops performances Monday night, smothering Purdue for a 75-60 victory to become the first team since 2007 to capture back-to-back na-

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tional championships.

Tristen Newton scored 20 points for the Huskies, who won their 12th straight March Madness game — not a single one of them decided by fewer than 13 points.

UConn was efficient on offense but won this with defense. The Huskies (37-3) limited the country's second-best 3-point shooting team to a mere seven shots behind the arc and only a single make, while happily allowing 7-foot-4 AP Player of the Year Zach Edey to go for 37 points on 25 shot attempts.

UConn won its sixth overall title and joined the 2006-07 Florida Gators and the 1991-92 Duke Blue Devils as just the third team to repeat since John Wooden's UCLA dynasty of the 1960s and '70s.

"I just think it's the best two-year run in a very, very long time, just because of everything we lost from last year's team," said Hurley, whose top two scorers from last year now play in the NBA. "To lose that much and do it again, it's got to be as impressive a two-year run since at least prior to Duke."

The 2024 Huskies are the sixth team to win all six tournament games by double-digit margins. They won those games by a grand total of 140 points, blowing past the 1996 Kentucky team, which won its six by 129.

In a matchup of two top seeds, they wore down the Boilermakers (34-5), who made it this far a year after becoming just the second No. 1 in the history of March Madness to fall in the first round. But Purdue left the same way it came — still looking for the program's first NCAA title.

So much for the free-for-all this new age of the transfer portal and name, image and likeness deals was supposed to become. UConn has figured out how to dominate and replenish its roster with players who understand their roles.

Cam Spencer, a transfer from Rutgers, Stephon Castle, a blue-chip freshman, and Alex Karaban, a sophomore from last year's team, spent the night guarding the 3-point line and making life miserable for Purdue's guards.

"They just made a decision — we can defend the perimeter, and we can take this away from you, you're going to get the ball to your best player, he'll be 1-on-1, and that's that," Purdue coach Matt Painter said.

This was only the second time this season Purdue didn't put up 10 3-point attempts, and how 'bout this final score: Edey 37, the rest of the Boilermakers 23.

How serious was Hurley about defending the perimeter? When Braden Smith wiggled loose for a semi-open look to make Purdue's first 3 of the game with 2:17 left in the first half, the coach bolted onto the floor and called timeout.

And that was that from behind the arc.

"Coaches made a point that we'd be really locked in if we controlled their 3-point attempts," Spencer said. "Holding them to seven shows we were locked in on making sure their guards didn't get involved in the game."

With his Xs-and-Os masterpiece, Hurley joins former Florida coach Billy Donovan in the back-to-back club, and is in company with Bill Self and Rick Pitino as only the third active coach with two championships. News broke over the weekend that it appears there's a job opening at Kentucky, and the UConn coach's name has come up there.

"I don't think that's a concern," Hurley said. "My wife, you should have her answer that."

No way the Huskies would want to lose him.

Hurley earned every penny in this one. In the first half, he begged with, swore at and generally berated the refs about over-the-backs, elbows and hip checks that weren't called.

Once, when that didn't work after Edey set a hard (and probably legal) pick against Castle, Hurley started in on Edey himself as the center walked toward the Purdue bench for a timeout.

But the coach's best work came in whatever hotel room he used to draw up the game plan.

"The whole game plan was no Smith, no Loyer, no Jones, no Gillis," Hurley said, as he ticked off the last names of the Purdue guards. "We knew if we keep them below 18, 20 points as a group, and they had no chance to win, no matter how well Zach played."

It's no slight on Edey, who battled gamely, finishing with 10 rebounds to record his 30th double-double of the season. But this game proved the number crunchers and analytics experts right. UConn let Edey back in and back down all night on 7-2 Donovan Clingan, giving up difficult 2s in the post in exchange for any 3s.

"They only doubled late in the second half, but by that point we had dug ourselves too deep of a hole," Fletcher Loyer said.

The defensive dominance put the finishing touch on a tournament in which UConn's average margin of victory was 23.3 points. Sure, Hurley might have to replace two or three of these players, but the coach said he'll worry about that in a week or two.

"Obviously, what can you say?" he said. "We won — by a lot — again."

Cruelty for clicks: Cambodia is investigating YouTubers' abuse of monkeys at the Angkor UNESCO site

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

SIEM REAP, Cambodia (AP) — A baby monkey struggles and squirms as it tries to escape the man holding it by the neck over a concrete cistern, repeatedly dousing it with water.

In another video clip, a person plays with the genitals of a juvenile male macaque sitting on a limestone block from an ancient temple to get it excited for the camera.

The abuse of monkeys at the Angkor UNESCO World Heritage Site in northwestern Cambodia is not always so graphic, but authorities say it is a growing problem as people look for new ways to draw online viewers to generate cash.

"The monkey should be living in the wild, where they are supposed to be living, but the monkey nowadays is being treated like a domestic pet," said Long Kosal, spokesperson for APSARA, the Cambodian office that oversees the Angkor archaeological site.

"They're making the content to earn money by having the viewers on YouTube, so this is a very big issue for us."

APSARA has few tools itself to stop the YouTubers from filming in general, but has opened an investigation with the Ministry of Agriculture to collect evidence for legal action against the most serious abusers — who are rarely on camera themselves, Long Kosal said.

"If we can build a case, they will be arrested for sure," he said. "Any animal abuser will be seriously punished by law in Cambodia."

YouTube, Facebook and other sites remove the videos with graphic content, but scores of other clips of cute monkeys jumping and playing remain, generating thousands of views and subscribers.

Just making those videos involves very close interaction with the monkeys, however, which authorities and animal-rights activists say creates a host of other problems, both for the macaques and people visiting one of Southeast Asia's most popular tourist sites.

On a recent day outside Angkor's famous 12th-century Bayon Temple, at least a dozen YouTubers, all young men, crowded around a small group of long-tailed macaques, pushing in close to get shots of a mother with a baby on her back and tracking her everywhere she moved.

The wild monkeys feasted on bananas tossed to them by YouTubers and drank from plastic bottles of water. One young macaque briefly amused itself with half-eaten neon-green popsicle discarded at the side of the path, before dropping it to move on to a banana.

A blue-shirted APSARA warden looked on but those filming were unfazed, illustrating the main problem: Simply taking video of monkeys is OK, even though feeding them is frowned upon. At the same time, it's making them dependent upon handouts, and the close interaction with humans means they're increasingly becoming aggressive toward tourists.

"The tourists carry their food, and they would snatch the food," Long Kosal said, flipping through multiple photos on his phone of recent injuries caused by the macaques. "If the tourists resist, they bite and this is very dangerous."

The search for food from tourists also draws the monkeys from the surrounding jungle in to the ancient sites, where they pull away pieces of the temples and cause other damage, he added.

Tourist Cadi Hutchings made sure to keep her distance from the monkeys, after being warned by her

tour guide of the increasing risk of being bitten.

"What they want is your food, but you also need to appreciate that there needs to be a boundary between human intervention in nature," the 23-year-old from Wales said. "It's obviously a great thing that so many tourists come because it's such a lovely place, but at the same time, you have to be careful that with more and more people ... the monkeys don't get too acclimatized."

Many other tourists, however, stopped to take their own photos and videos — some holding out bananas to draw them closer — before heading to the nearby temple site.

YouTuber Ium Daro, who started filming Angkor monkeys about three months ago, followed a mother and a baby along a dirt path with his iPhone held on a selfie stick to get in close.

The 41-year-old said he hadn't seen any monkeys physically abused, and that he didn't see a problem with what he and the others were doing to make a living.

"The monkeys here are friendly," he said. "After we take their pictures we give them food, so it is like we pay them for them giving us the chance to take their picture."

As he spoke, a young macaque scrambled up the leg of an onlooker, trying — unsuccessfully — to grab a plastic bottle of water out of his pocket.

One YouTuber said he had started filming monkeys during the COVID-19 pandemic after the numbers of tourists plummeted, making it impossible to earn a living as a tuk-tuk driver.

Daro said he was looking for a way to supplement his income as a rice vendor, and that he's too new at it to have realized many returns.

Many, like Phut Phu, work as salaried employees of YouTube page operators.

The 24-year-old said he started filming monkeys 2 1/2 years ago when he was looking for a job in the open air to help him deal with a lung problem.

He's generally at it daily from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., earning \$200 a month — equivalent to a Cambodian minimum-wage job — and said he hoped authorities wouldn't try and put an end to it.

"I need these monkeys," he said, holding a Nikon Coolpix camera with an extreme zoom that his employer provided, the same model most of the YouTubers were using.

With the difficulties involved in identifying and catching those responsible for the physical abuse of the monkeys, coupled with the draw of easy money through YouTube videos, Long Kosal said APSARA's task is a tough one.

"This is the problem for us," he said. "We need to find solid reasons which we can use against them not to make content by abusing the monkeys."

For Nick Marx, director of wildlife rescue and care for the Wildlife Alliance — which implements conservation programs across Southeast Asia and is involved in releasing wildlife back into Angkor — the answer is simple, though perhaps equally as elusive.

"The biggest problem is these (videos) are generated to make money," he said in an interview from Phnom Penh. "If people that don't like this kind of thing would stop watching them, that would really help solve the problem of abuse."

Facing likely prison sentences, Michigan school shooter's parents seek mercy from judge

By ED WHITE Associated Press

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — The parents of a Michigan school shooter are asking a judge to keep them out of prison as they face sentencing for their role in an attack that killed four students in 2021.

Jennifer and James Crumbley are scheduled to appear in court Tuesday for the close of a pioneering case: They are the first parents convicted in a U.S. mass school shooting.

The Crumbleys did not know their son, Ethan Crumbley, was planning the shooting at Oxford High School. But prosecutors said the parents failed to safely store a gun and could have prevented the shooting by removing the 15-year-old from school when confronted with his dark drawing that day.

Prosecutors are seeking at least 10 years in prison for involuntary manslaughter.

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Defense attorney Shannon Smith said Jennifer Crumbley is "not a threat to the community." Smith said she is even willing to put Jennifer Crumbley up in a guest house at her property, outfitted with an electronic tether.

"Putting Mrs. Crumbley in prison does nothing to further deter others from committing like offenses," Smith said in a court filing. "There is no person who would want the events of Nov. 30, 2021, to repeat themselves."

Smith said "any gross negligence" were mistakes "that any parent could make."

Mariell Lehman, a lawyer representing James Crumbley, said the nearly 2 1/2 years spent in jail since the couple's arrest is enough time in custody. His wife, too, has been in jail, both unable to post a \$500,000 bond before trial.

James Crumbley "did not believe that there was reason to be concerned that his son was a threat to anyone," Lehman said.

Ethan Crumbley, now 17, pleaded guilty and is serving a life prison sentence.

Prosecutors said "tragically simple actions" by both parents could have stopped the catastrophe.

The couple had separate trials in Oakland County court, 40 miles (64 kilometers) north of Detroit. Jurors heard how the teen had drawn a gun, a bullet and a gunshot victim on a math assignment, accompanied by grim phrases: "The thoughts won't stop. Help me. My life is useless. Blood everywhere."

Ethan told a counselor he was sad — a grandmother had died and his only friend suddenly had moved away — but said the drawing only reflected his interest in creating video games.

The Crumbleys attended a meeting at the school that lasted less than 15 minutes. They did not mention that the gun resembled one James Crumbley, 47, had purchased just four days earlier — a Sig Sauer 9 mm that Ethan had described on social media as his "beauty."

His parents declined to take him home, choosing instead to return to work and accepting a list of mental health providers. School staff said Ethan could stay on campus. A counselor, Shawn Hopkins, said he believed it would be safer for the boy than possibly being alone at home.

No one, however, checked Ethan's backpack. He pulled the gun out later that day and killed four students — Tate Myre, Hana St. Juliana, Justin Shilling and Madisyn Baldwin — and wounded seven other people.

There was no trial testimony from specialists about Ethan's state of mind. But the judge, over defense objections, allowed the jury to see excerpts from his journal.

"I have zero help for my mental problems and it's causing me to shoot up the ... school," he wrote. "I want help but my parents don't listen to me so I can't get any help."

Asked about Ethan reporting hallucinations months before the shooting, Jennifer Crumbley, 46, told jurors he was simply "messing around."

At the close of James Crumbley's trial, prosecutor Karen McDonald demonstrated how a cable lock, found in a package at home, could have secured the gun.

"Ten seconds," she said, "of the easiest, simplest thing."

A lawsuit alleging abuse at a NH youth center is going to trial. There are 1,000 more to come

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — It started with three words: "They raped me."

David Meehan's disclosure to his wife seven years ago set into motion an unprecedented criminal investigation into New Hampshire's state-run youth detention center, which was built in the 1850s as a "house of reformation." It is now called the Sununu Youth Services Center, after former Gov. John H. Sununu, the father of the current governor.

Eleven former state workers face criminal charges, and dozens more are accused in the nearly 1,200 lawsuits former residents have filed against the state alleging abuse spanning six decades. The first lawsuit, filed by Meehan four years ago, goes to trial this week.

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"It's heartwarming in a way to know that I helped these other people find the strength to be able to speak the truth about their experience," Meehan told The Associated Press in 2021. "But at the same time, it hurts in a way that I can't explain, knowing that so many other people were exposed to the same types of things that I was."

Meehan originally was the lead plaintiff in a class action lawsuit that a judge later threw out. Now, his individual suit is the first to go to trial, with a batch of others expected later this year. Jury selection in Rockingham County Superior Court is expected to be completed Tuesday morning, followed by opening arguments.

The trial is expected to last weeks and will be the most public display yet of an unusual dynamic in which the state attorney general's office has been simultaneously prosecuting perpetrators and defending the state against allegations raised in the civil cases. While one team of state lawyers tries to undermine Meehan's credibility, a separate team will rely on his account to prosecute former workers during the upcoming criminal trials.

"This case and the criminal cases are closely interrelated," Judge Andrew Schulman wrote last month. "The evidence in this case comes in part from the criminal investigation. In determining what course to choose in either venue, the Attorney General cannot possibly separate the facts into two piles, one civil and one criminal."

Meehan was 14 when he was sent to what was then called the Youth Development Center in Manchester in 1995. Over the next three years, he alleges he was routinely beaten, raped hundreds of times and held for months in solitary confinement. According to his lawsuit, one worker who subjected him to nearly daily abuse initially gained his trust by giving him snacks and arranging for him to play basketball with local high schoolers. He accuses other workers of standing guard or holding him down during assaults, and says when he told a supervisor how he got a black eye and split lip, the man cut him off and said, "Look little fella, that just doesn't happen."

The lawsuit seeks at least \$1.9 million for past and future lost income, plus compensation for pain and suffering, permanent impairment and loss of quality of life. It accuses the state of breaching its duty to act in Meehan's best interest and of enabling the abuse by being negligent in hiring, training and supervising employees.

The state denies those allegations and maintains it is not liable for the intentional criminal conduct of "rogue" employees. The state also disputes the nature, extent and severity of Meehan's injuries, argues that he contributed to them and that some of the alleged physical abuse in question was "excused as necessary to maintain order and discipline."

The state also argues that Meehan waited too long to come forward. New Hampshire's statute of limitations for such lawsuits is three years from the date of injury, but there are exceptions in cases when victims did not know of the harm or its link to the wrongful party.

On the criminal side, the statute of limitations for sexual assault involving children runs until the victim turns 40. Ten men have been charged with either sexually assaulting or acting as accomplices to the assault of more than a dozen teenagers at the Manchester detention center from 1994 to 2007, while an 11th man faces charges related to a pretrial facility in Concord. The first criminal trial had been scheduled to start this month, but a judge last week delayed it until August.

Schulman, the judge overseeing Meehan's trial, has said those charges do not make anything in Meehan's case more or less probable. He's also warned Meehan's attorneys to stick to the facts.

"This is a lawsuit, not a Manichean battle between light and darkness," he wrote last month. "Improper appeals to passion, which ring like a bell that cannot be unringed, are the stuff that mistrials are made of."

Maryland governor and members of Congress to meet to discuss support for rebuilding collapsed bridge

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said Monday he plans to meet with members of Congress to discuss support for rebuilding the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, which has blocked the main shipping channel at Baltimore's port for nearly two weeks.

"I'm going to be spending part of this week with our delegation going down and meeting with leaders and ranking members in the Congress and letting them know that this issue is not partisan. This is a patriotic responsibility to be able to support one of this country's great economic engines," Moore said in an interview with The Associated Press. "This is an opportunity to support a port that is directly responsible for the hiring of tens of thousands of people."

As Maryland lawmakers reached the end of their legislative session Monday, a measure authorizing use of the state's rainy day fund to help port employees was approved and sent to Moore's desk. The governor planned to sign the emergency legislation Tuesday, putting it into effect right away.

The bridge collapsed March 26 after being struck by the cargo ship Dali, which lost power shortly after leaving Baltimore, bound for Sri Lanka. The ship issued a mayday alert with just enough time for police to stop traffic, but not enough to save a roadwork crew filling potholes on the bridge.

Authorities believe six workers — immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador — plunged to their deaths in the Patapsco River. Two others survived. The bodies of three workers have been recovered, but the search for the other victims continues.

Moore said the state remains focused on supporting the families of the six workers and bringing them closure.

"We are still very much focused on bringing closure and comfort to these families, and the operations to be able to bring that closure to these families," Moore said. "It has not stopped. It continues to be a 24/7 operation."

Temporary, alternate channels have been cleared, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said last week that it expects to open a limited-access channel for barge container ships and some vessels moving cars and farm equipment by the end of April. Officials are aiming to restore normal capacity to Baltimore's port by the end of May.

Moore was upbeat about progress in reopening channels.

He said that if he had been told the morning of the collapse that there would be two channels open in two weeks, "I would have said that sounds really ambitious, considering what we saw, but that's where we are."

The governor also spoke of progress in removing debris, saying that crews were able to pull 350 tons (318 metric tons) of steel from the Patapsco River on Sunday.

More than 50 salvage divers and 12 cranes are on site to help cut out sections of the bridge and remove them from the key waterway. Crews began removing containers from the deck over the weekend, and they're making progress toward removing sections of the bridge that lie across the ship's bow so it can eventually move, according to the Key Bridge Response Unified Command.

From overcapacity to TikTok, the issues covered during Janet Yellen's trip to China

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and her team are leaving China and returning to Washington after trying to tackle the major questions of the day between the countries. Here's a look at what she tried to accomplish, what was achieved, and where things stand for the world's two largest economies:

UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES

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Yellen said she wanted to go into the U.S.-China talks to address a major Biden administration complaint that Beijing's economic model and trade practices put American companies and workers at an unfair competitive disadvantage by producing highly subsidized solar products, electric vehicles and lithium-ion batteries at a loss, dominating the global market.

Chinese government subsidies and other policy support have encouraged solar panel and EV makers in China to invest in factories, building far more production capacity than the domestic market can absorb. She calls this overcapacity.

Throughout the week of meetings, she talked about the risks that come from one nation maintaining nearly all production capacity in these industries, the threat it poses to other nations' industries and how a massive rapid increase in exports from one country can have big impacts on the global economy.

Ultimately, the two sides agreed to hold "intensive exchanges" on more balanced economic growth, according to a U.S. statement issued after Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng held extended meetings over two days in the southern city of Guangzhou. It was not immediately clear when and where the talks would take place.

"It's not going to be solved in an afternoon or a month, but I think they have heard that this is an important issue to us," she said.

MONEY LAUNDERING AND RELATED CRIMES

After several rounds of meetings, the U.S. Treasury and the Chinese central bank agreed to work together to stop money laundering in their respective financial systems.

Nearly all the precursor chemicals that are needed to make the deadly substance fentanyl are coming from China into the U.S. The U.S. says exchanging information on money laundering related to fentanyl trafficking may help disrupt the flow of the precursor chemicals into Mexico and the U.S.

"Treasury is committed to using all of our tools, including international cooperation, to counter this threat," Yellen said in a speech announcing the formation of the group.

The new cooperative between the U.S. and China will be part of the two nations' economic working groups that were launched last September, and the first exchange will be held in the coming weeks.

TIKTOK

Efforts in the U.S. to ban social media app TikTok, owned by Chinese parent company ByteDance, were raised initially by the Chinese during U.S-China talks, a senior Treasury official told The Associated Press. The firm has in the past promoted a data security restructuring plan called "Project Texas" that it says sufficiently guards against national security concerns.

However, U.S. lawmakers have moved forward with efforts to either ban the app or force the Chinese firm to divest its interest in the company, which the White House has supported. In China this week, it was evident that there was little movement on the issue.

Yellen said at a news conference Monday that she supported the administration's efforts to address national security issues that relate to sensitive personal data. "This is a legitimate concern," she said.

"Many US social apps are not allowed to operate in China," Yellen said. "We would like to find a way forward."

FINANCIAL STABILITY

On the second day of Yellen's trip to China, the U.S. and China announced an agreement to work closely on issues related to financial stability, in that U.S. and Chinese financial regulators agreed to hold a series of exercises simulating a failure of a large bank in either of the two countries.

The aim is to determine how to coordinate if a bank failure occurred, with the intent of preventing catastrophic stress on the global financial system.

Yellen said several exercises have already happened.

"I'm pleased that we will hold upcoming exchanges on operational resilience in the financial sector and on financial stability implications from the insurance sector's exposure to climate risks.

"Just like military leaders need a hotline in a crisis," Yellen said "American and Chinese financial regulators must be able to communicate to prevent financial stresses from turning into crises with tremendous ramifications for our citizens and the international community."

WHAT SHE ATE

Yellen is something of a foodie celebrity in China ever since she ate mushrooms that can have psychedelic effects in Beijing last July. This trip was no different.

High-ranking Chinese officials brought up her celebrity ahead of important meetings — Premier Li Qiang noted in his opening remarks that Yellen's visit has "indeed drawn a lot of attention in society" with media covering her trip and her dining habits. And social media was abuzz, following her latest movements around Guangzhou and Beijing.

This time in Beijing, Yellen ate at Lao Chuan Ban, a popular Sichuan restaurant. She also had lunch with Beijing Mayor Yin Yong at the Beijing International Hotel. On Monday evening, her last night in China, Yellen visited Jing-A Brewing Co. in Beijing — co-founded by an American — where she ordered a Flying Fist IPA, a beer made with American hops.

Palestinians returning to Khan Younis after Israeli withdrawal find an unrecognizable city

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Stunned Palestinians found their home city unrecognizable Monday as they filtered in to salvage what they could from the vast destruction left by Israeli troops who withdrew from southern Gaza's Khan Younis a day earlier after months of fighting and bombardment.

With thousands of buildings destroyed or damaged, families tried to find their homes along streets bulldozed down to the dirt, surrounded by landscapes of rubble and debris that were once blocks of apartments and businesses. On other blocks, buildings still stood but were gutted shells, scorched and full of holes, with partially shattered upper floors dangling off precipitously.

The scenes in Khan Younis underscored what has been one of the world's most destructive and lethal military assaults in recent decades, leaving most of the tiny coastal territory unlivable for its 2.3 million people. It also portended what is likely to happen in Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah, where half of Gaza's uprooted population is now crowded, if Israel goes ahead with plans to invade it.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu escalated his pledge to take the offensive to Rafah, declaring in a video statement Monday, "It will happen. There is a date," without elaborating. He spoke as Israeli negotiators were in Cairo discussing international efforts to broker a cease-fire deal with Hamas.

Magdy Abu Sahrour was shocked to see his house in Khan Younis flattened.

"I couldn't find my home because of all the destruction," he said, standing in front of the rubble. "Where is my place, where is my home?"

Israel sent troops into Khan Younis in December, part of its blistering ground offensive that came in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack and hostage-taking into southern Israel. Its withdrawal brought Israeli troops in the tiny coastal enclave to one of the lowest since the war began.

The war, now in its seventh month, has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to local health authorities. Israeli authorities say 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and roughly 250 people taken hostage in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

Many of the thousands who came to Khan Younis by foot and on donkey carts on Monday have been sheltering in Rafah. The withdrawal gave them a chance to see the wreckage of their homes and retrieve some possessions. But with the city now unlivable, they said they had little immediate chance to return.

An estimated 55% of the buildings in the Khan Younis area — around 45,000 buildings — have been destroyed or damaged, according to Corey Scher of City University of New York and Jamon Van Den Hoek of Oregon State University, two mapping experts who have been using satellite imagery to track destruction.

"Where do I sleep? Where do I go?" Heba Sahloul's aged mother sobbed in despair, sitting amid the rubble of the family's living room. Her daughters searched for anything they could take with them. The room's walls were blown away and the floor was piled with chunks of concrete, slabs of the ceiling and broken countertops. Only the columns painted pink gave any sign it had once been their home.

Sahloul said Israeli troops ordered them to leave during the fighting. "We left all our things here, and we

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went out with only our clothes," she said. Her father was killed earlier in the assault, leaving Sahloul, her sisters and her mother. "We are only six women at home and we do not know where to go," Sahloul said.

One woman clambered over collapsed concrete slabs atop a mountain of her home's wreckage. Her son crawled on all fours into a hollow under the rubble and twisted rebar, clearing away concrete blocks.

"There are no words to describe the pain inside me," the woman said, her voice breaking. "Our memories, our dreams, our childhood here, our family ... It's all gone." The woman, who identified herself only by her first name, Hanan, put a few items they found into a backpack, including a plastic red flower.

Khan Younis' main Nasser Hospital was trashed inside, with debris strewn around the wards and ceiling panels collapsed. The exterior appeared largely intact, but the extent of the damage was not immediately clear. Israeli troops stormed the facility during the offensive, saying they believed the remains of hostages were inside, though they did not report finding any.

Israel said Khan Younis was a major Hamas stronghold and that its operations there killed thousands of militants and inflicted heavy damage to a vast network of tunnels used by Hamas to move weapons and fighters. It also claimed to have found evidence that hostages were held in the city.

With the troops' withdrawal, Hamas could seek to regroup there as it has in northern Gaza, where the military scaled back forces earlier.

Israel plans to invade Rafah, which it says is Hamas' last major stronghold, have raised global alarm over the fate of the around 1.4 million Palestinians sheltering there. Israel's top ally, the U.S., has said invading Rafah would be a mistake and has demanded a credible plan to protect civilians.

Israel is purchasing 40,000 tents to prepare for the evacuation of Rafah, an Israel official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media. It was not clear where they would be set up and how many people they could house. Allowing people to return to Khan Younis could relieve some pressure on Rafah, but many have no homes to return to.

In northern Gaza, the Israeli military has continued to carry out airstrikes and raids in areas where it says Hamas regrouped. Last month, troops stormed Gaza's largest hospital, Shifa, in a raid that triggered two weeks of fighting in and around the facility. Israel says it killed some 200 Hamas fighters in the raid, but hospital officials say many civilians were among the dead.

On Monday, forensic experts from Gaza's Health Ministry were still removing bodies from the yard of Shifa Hospital, where the main buildings were left as burned-out shattered husks. Workers lifted body parts out of the dirt and put them into plastic sacks. It was not clear how many were recent dead and how many came from a mass grave that was dug in the hospital in November to bury war casualties.

Hussein Muhaisen, director of ambulances in the Gaza Strip, said the number of dead was still not known. He said he found the bodies of a woman and children whose hands were bound. His account could not be independently confirmed. Israel says no civilians were killed during its raid.

Israel says its war aims to destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities and return the roughly 130 remaining hostages, a quarter of whom Israel says are dead.

Negotiations mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. over a cease-fire and exchange of captives continue. But Israel and Hamas appear to remain far apart. In a statement Monday, Hamas said the latest response it has received from Israel does not include a permanent cease-fire or the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. It has repeatedly said both terms are unnegotiable, while Israel has firmly rejected them.

Prosecutors urge Supreme Court to reject Trump's immunity claims in election subversion case

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Special counsel Jack Smith's team urged the Supreme Court on Monday night to reject former President Donald Trump's claim that he is immune from prosecution in a case charging him with scheming to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

The brief from prosecutors was submitted just over two weeks before the justices take up the legally untested question of whether an ex-president is shielded from criminal charges for official actions taken

in the White House.

"A President's alleged criminal scheme to use his official powers to overturn the presidential election and thwart the peaceful transfer of power frustrates core constitutional provisions that protect democracy," they wrote.

The outcome of the April 25 arguments is expected to help determine whether Trump faces trial this year in a four-count indictment that accuses him of conspiring to block the peaceful transfer of power after losing the 2020 election to Democrat Joe Biden.

Trump has argued that former presidents enjoy immunity for official acts in office. Both the judge presiding over the case, Tanya Chutkan, and a three-judge federal appellate panel in Washington have forcefully rejected that claim.

The Supreme Court then said it would take up the question, injecting uncertainty into whether the case — one of four criminal prosecutions confronting Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for president — can reach trial before November's election.

In their latest brief, Smith's team rehashed many of the arguments that have prevailed in lower courts, pointedly noting that "federal criminal law applies to the president."

"The Framers never endorsed criminal immunity for a former President, and all Presidents from the Founding to the modern era have known that after leaving office they faced potential criminal liability for official acts," Smith's team wrote.

Prosecutors also said that even if the Supreme Court were to recognize some immunity for a president's official acts, the justices should nonetheless permit the case to move forward because much of the indictment is centered on Trump's private conduct.

Smith's team suggested the court could reach a narrow determination that Trump, in this particular case, was not entitled to immunity without arriving at a broader conclusion that would apply to other cases.

"A holding that petitioner has no immunity from the alleged crimes would suffice to resolve this case, leaving potentially more difficult questions that might arise on different facts for decision if they are ever presented," they said.

Conservative Christians praise Trump's anti-abortion record but say he's stopped short of the goal

By HOLLY MEYER and TIFFANY STANLEY Associated Press

For conservative, anti-abortion Christians, former President Donald Trump delivered in four years what no other Republican before him had been able to do: A conservative majority U.S. Supreme Court that would go on to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a Holy Grail of the movement.

With abortion rights now controlled by each state, rather than legalized nationwide by the 1973 court ruling, Trump made clear Monday that he would not be leading the push for a federal abortion ban as he vies for his second term in the Oval Office. Some anti-abortion religious leaders criticized his approach, while others gave thanks for Trump's past anti-abortion wins and vowed to keep pressing for federal restrictions.

"*Roe* is done. The opportunity to protect life is at hand," Brent Leatherwood, who leads the Southern Baptist Convention's political arm, said in a statement.

Candidates who profess the anti-abortion views of the voters they're wooing "should be articulating a robust vision for establishing a true culture of life where babies are saved, mothers are served, and families are supported," he said. "Anything short of that is not a serious attempt to court pro-life voters."

The Trump campaign did not respond to The Associated Press' request for comment. But in the video posted Monday on his Truth Social site, Trump backed the patchwork of state abortion laws that followed the 2022 Supreme Court decision upending federal abortion protections. Trump took credit for the outcome, a historic ruling celebrated by his evangelical base.

"Many states will be different. Many will have a different number of weeks or some will have more conservative than others and that's what they will be," Trump said. "At the end of the day it's all about will of the people."

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Ed Stetzer, dean of Talbot School of Theology at Biola University, categorized Trump's approach as functionally a pro-states' rights, pro-abortion access position, and fellow anti-abortion Christians should recognize it for the political move that it is.

"Convictions about life are better than following the political winds, and it appears that President Trump's convictions have given way to the political winds," said Stetzer, who thinks it is too early to tell if this would cause some conservative Christians not to vote for him.

As Republican-led states have outlawed or further restricted abortion, Democrats believe the fight over abortion rights helps them at the polls. The issue will be on some state ballots again this year.

For many anti-abortion advocates, voting for President Joe Biden, who is vowing to restore *Roe v. Wade's* protections if re-elected, is not an option. Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, one of the nation's biggest anti-abortion advocacy groups, rebuked Trump's position, but remains committed to defeating Biden and congressional Democrats.

"We are deeply disappointed in President Trump's position. Unborn children and their mothers deserve national protections and national advocacy from the brutality of the abortion industry," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, a Catholic and president of the organization, in a statement.

"Saying the issue is 'back to the states' cedes the national debate to the Democrats," she said.

The Faith & Freedom Coalition, an evangelical advocacy group founded by conservative activist Ralph Reed, said in a statement that it still plans to contact millions of voters of faith between now and the election to make sure they know where the current president stands on abortion: "Biden and the far Left are the real extremists, and their radical position on abortion is not only morally repugnant but is way outside mainstream."

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, said in a statement that he is pushing for federal restrictions on abortion and for former President Trump, if reelected, to reverse Biden administration policies that expand abortion access.

"I applaud President Trump for the work he has done, but that work is not over," he said.

Pope marks 6-month anniversary of Hamas attacks by meeting with relatives of hostages

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis met Monday with relatives of hostages taken by Hamas on Oct. 7, marking the six-month anniversary of the attack in southern Israel with an hourlong audience.

The Vatican released photos of the encounter, showing relatives of several of the hostages sitting in a semicircle in front of Francis in his private library in the Apostolic Palace. Each one held a poster with a photo and the name of a loved one.

It was the second time Francis has met with relatives of the hostages. On Nov. 22, he met with a delegation of Israelis, and then separately a delegation of Palestinians whose relatives had been harmed during the long Mideast conflict.

Francis has called for the immediate release of the hostages and a cease-fire in Gaza, and for humanitarian aid to urgently reach desperate Palestinians.

Ashley Waxman Bakshi, relative of hostages Agah and Li-Yah Berger, said the audience was "very powerful" for the families.

"He was very clear about his solidarity for the release of the hostages," Waxman Bakshi told reporters afterward.

Ecuadorians wanted an action man. President Noboa has fulfilled that role — embassy raid included

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and GABRIELA MOLINA Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — While world leaders have expressed shock and bewilderment over Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa's decision to raid Mexico's embassy last Friday, the extraordinarily unusual move — and Noboa's relative silence about it — is unlikely to hurt him with his constituents. In fact, it's exactly the sort of no-holds-barred crimefighting they expect and voted for.

Ecuadorians were looking for their action man last election, fed up with widespread corruption and the robberies, kidnappings, extortions and murders fueled by the growing presence of international drug cartels. Noboa, often sporting bulletproof vests, sunglasses and leather jackets as well as the occasional smart-casual white T-shirt, so far seems to be fulfilling that role. If stopping lawbreakers in their tracks means breaching an embassy, then so be it, Ecuadorians interviewed over the weekend told The Associated Press.

"President Noboa has given a strong message to the nation," said Carlos Galecio, a political communications consultant and coordinator of the communications program at Ecuador's Casa Grande University. "(It's) a very powerful image boost."

Noboa, the 36-year-old heir to one of Ecuador's largest fortunes, was sworn in as president in November after unexpectedly winning a special election in August. He defeated the protege of leftist ex-President Rafael Correa, who avoided serving a prison sentence related to a corruption conviction by moving to Belgium and securing asylum there.

Noboa inherited a country where people no longer leave home unless absolutely necessary, almost everyone knows a crime victim and many consider migrating. Statistics back those decisions and experiences: Last year was Ecuador's bloodiest on record, with more than 7,600 homicides — up from 4,600 the prior year.

The causes for the spike are complex but largely revolve around cocaine. Cartel-aided gangs are battling for control of the streets, prisons and drug routes to the Pacific. Dwindling state coffers, soaring debts, political infighting and corruption created funding gaps in social and law-enforcement programs. And the COVID-19 pandemic turned hungry children and unemployed adults into easy recruits for criminal groups.

Noboa has responded by promising more equipment for police and the armed forces and the construction of prisons similar to those President Nayib Bukele built in El Salvador, with high-security, maximum-security and supermax units. He also issued a decree labeling more than 20 criminal groups as terrorist organizations and scheduled an April referendum to ask voters to extend the powers of the military to patrol the streets and control prisons.

Recent survey results from Ecuador-based public opinion firm Cedatos showed that more than two-thirds of respondents approve of Noboa's presidency and more than half support his decision to summon voters to the polls.

Police entered the Mexican embassy in Quito, the capital, to arrest former Vice President Jorge Glas, a convicted criminal and fugitive who had been living there since December. In his first comments on the operation, Noboa said Monday he has made "exceptional decisions to protect national security, the rule of law and the dignity of a population that rejects any type of impunity for criminals, corrupt people or narco-terrorists."

"My obligation is to comply with the rulings of the justice system, and we could not allow sentenced criminals involved in very serious crimes to be given asylum," which, Noboa argued, would violate the Vienna Convention and other international accords. In a statement posted on the social platform X, Noboa did not mention Glas by name but suggested he was in "imminent flight risk."

Diplomatic premises are considered foreign soil and "inviolable" under the Vienna treaties and host country law enforcement agencies are not allowed to enter without permission from the ambassador. Mexico plans to challenge the raid at the World Court in The Hague.

Still, Noboa's display of force quickly earned him praise at home.

"I am in favor of President Noboa's actions. I think it is a courageous act ... and I think it is going to

strengthen him," college professor Gabriela Sandoval said. "The priority is to clean, sanitize, continue with a process as important as President Noboa's to put the house in order."

Ecuadorians will vote for president in February. Noboa is eligible to run for reelection.

Confidence in Noboa is such that business groups think the global condemnation of the raid will not impact commerce or the already thorny trade agreement negotiations between Ecuador and Mexico, which represent a key barrier to Ecuador's interest in joining Latin America's Pacific Alliance trade bloc.

"These political and current issues will somehow pass, and then, relations will go back to normal," said Roberto Aspiazu, vice president of the Binational Ecuador-Mexico Chamber. "Sooner or later, that trade agreement is also going to be a reality because the negotiation is there and must be resumed at some point."

Still, the timing of the diplomatic breakdown with Mexico could be particularly unfortunate for Ecuador and counterproductive for Noboa's crimefighting ambitions, said Will Freeman, a fellow of Latin American studies at the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations think tank.

Ecuador was one of the calmest countries in Latin America until about four years ago, when Mexican and Colombian cartels expanded their established Ecuadorian operations, settling into coastal cities and exploiting world-class ports to ship hundreds of millions of dollars of cocaine produced in neighboring Colombia and Peru.

"Ecuadorian gangs are criminal powers in their own right, but they have brokered alliances with Mexico's Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation Cartel cartels," Freeman said. "In an ideal world, Noboa would seek out the Mexican government's cooperation to combat the gangs and their international partners, but clearly, with the break in diplomatic relations, that's not happening."

And though it remains unclear whether Noboa expected the global pushback his decision received, some of that criticism might weigh more heavily than others.

The U.S., which during Noboa's administration has supplied Ecuador with crucial equipment and training to combat the drug cartels, reiterated the importance of complying with international law following last week's raid.

"The United States takes very seriously the obligation of host countries under international law to respect diplomatic missions," said Brian Nichols, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs. "We encourage Ecuador and Mexico to resolve their difference amicably."

Vatican blasts gender-affirming surgery, surrogacy and gender theory as violations of human dignity

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican on Monday declared gender-affirming surgery and surrogacy as grave violations of human dignity, putting them on par with abortion and euthanasia as practices that it said reject God's plan for human life.

The Vatican's doctrine office issued "Infinite Dignity," a 20-page declaration that has been in the works for five years. After substantial revision in recent months, it was approved March 25 by Pope Francis, who ordered its publication.

From a pope who has made outreach to the LGBTQ+ community a hallmark of his papacy, the document was received as a setback, albeit predictable, by trans Catholics. But its message was also consistent with the Argentine Jesuit's long-standing belief that while trans people should be welcomed in the church, so-called "gender ideologies" should not.

In its most eagerly anticipated section, the Vatican repeated its rejection of "gender theory," or the idea that one's biological sex can change. It said God created man and woman as biologically different, separate beings, and said people must not tinker with that or try to "make oneself God."

"It follows that any sex-change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception," the document said.

It distinguished between gender-affirming surgeries, which it rejected, and "genital abnormalities" that

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are present at birth or that develop later. Those abnormalities can be “resolved” with the help of health care professionals, it said.

Advocates for LGBTQ+ Catholics immediately criticized the document as outdated, harmful and contrary to the stated goal of recognizing the “infinite dignity” of all of God’s children. They warned it could have real-world effects on trans people, fueling anti-trans violence and discrimination.

“While it lays out a wonderful rationale for why each human being, regardless of condition in life, must be respected, honored, and loved, it does not apply this principle to gender-diverse people,” said Francis DeBernardo of New Ways Ministry, which advocates for LGBTQ+ Catholics.

Nicolette Burbach, lead expert in social and environmental justice at the London Jesuit Centre, said the document showed the Vatican continues to fail to engage with queer and feminist approaches to the body “which it simply dismisses as supposedly subjecting both the body and human dignity itself to human whims.”

“I think the main difficulty faced by the document is that it attempts to affirm the church’s authentic commitment to human dignity in the face of a troubling history on the part of the church itself around attacks on that dignity,” said Burbach, a trans Catholic theologian who researches transness and the Catholic Church.

The document’s existence, rumored since 2019, was confirmed in recent weeks by the new prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Argentine Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, a close Francis confidant.

Fernández had cast the document as something of a nod to conservatives after he authored a more explosive document approving blessings for same-sex couples that sparked criticism from conservative bishops around the world, especially in Africa.

And yet, in an apparent attempt at balance, the document takes pointed aim at countries — including many in Africa — that criminalize homosexuality. It echoed Francis’ assertion in a 2023 interview with The Associated Press that “being homosexual is not a crime.”

The new document denounces “as contrary to human dignity the fact that, in some places, not a few people are imprisoned, tortured, and even deprived of the good of life solely because of their sexual orientation.”

The White House said President Joe Biden, a devout Catholic, was “pleased” to see that the declaration “furthers the Vatican’s call to ensure that LGBTQ+ (individuals) are protected from violence and imprisonment around the world,” press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

On the specifics involving gender theory, Jean-Pierre stressed that it was not Biden’s role to “litigate internal church policy.”

Asked how its negative take on trans people squared with Francis’ message of welcome, Fernández said the welcome remained but that the pope fervently believed that the idea that gender was fluid “rather than helping to recognize dignity, impoverishes the vision” of a man and woman coming together to create new life.

The document is something of a repackaging of previously articulated Vatican positions, read now through the prism of human dignity. It restates well-known Catholic doctrine opposing abortion and euthanasia, and adds to the list some of Francis’ main concerns as pope: the threats to human dignity posed by poverty, war, human trafficking, the death penalty and forced migration.

In a newly articulated position, it says surrogacy violates both the dignity of the surrogate mother and the child.

While much attention about surrogacy has focused on possible exploitation of poor women as surrogates, the Vatican asserts that the child “has the right to have a fully human (and not artificially induced) origin and to receive the gift of a life that manifests both the dignity of the giver and that of the receiver.”

“Considering this, the legitimate desire to have a child cannot be transformed into a ‘right to a child’ that fails to respect the dignity of that child as the recipient of the gift of life,” it said.

The Vatican had previously published its most articulated position on gender in 2019, when the Congregation for Catholic Education rejected the idea that people can choose or change their genders and

insisted on the complementarity of biologically male and female sex organs to create new life.

The new document from the more authoritative Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith quotes from that 2019 education document, but tempers the tone. Significantly, it doesn't repeat Vatican doctrine that homosexual people deserve to be treated with dignity and respect but that homosexual actions are "intrinsically disordered."

In a news conference to introduce the document, Fernández acknowledged that the "intrinsically disordered" language was very strong. He suggested there might be a better way, "with other words," to express the church's vision of sex between husband and wife to create new life.

Francis has ministered to trans Catholics, including trans sex workers, and insisted that the Catholic Church must welcome all children of God.

But he has also denounced "gender theory" as the "worst danger" facing humanity today, an "ugly ideology" that threatens to cancel out God-given differences between man and woman. He has blasted in particular what he calls the "ideological colonization" of the West in the developing world, where development aid is sometimes conditioned on adopting Western ideas about gender.

Transgender activists immediately called the document "hurtful" and devoid of the voices and experiences of real trans people, especially in the distinction it makes between gender-affirming surgeries and surgeries on intersex people.

"The suggestion that gender-affirming health care — which has saved the lives of so many wonderful trans people and enabled them to live in harmony with their bodies, their communities and (God) — might risk or diminish trans people's dignity is not only hurtful but dangerously ignorant," said Mara Klein, a nonbinary, transgender activist who has participated in Germany's church reform project.

Klein said the Vatican "hypocrisy" was furthered by the document's approval of surgery on intersex people, "which if performed without consent especially on minors often cause immense physical and psychological harm."

The document comes at a time of some backlash against transgender people, including in the United States where Republican-led state legislatures are considering a new round of bills restricting medical care for transgender youths — and in some cases, adults.

"On top of the rising hostility towards our communities, we are faced with a church that does not listen and refuses to see the beauty of creation that can be found in our biographies," Klein said in an email.

Iran's foreign minister accuses US of giving Israel 'green light' to attack consulate in Syria

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and ALBERT AJI Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Iran's foreign minister Monday accused the United States of giving Israel the "green light" for a strike on its consulate building in Syria that killed seven Iranian military officials including two generals.

Hossein Amirabdollahian reiterated Tehran's vows that it will respond to the attack, widely blamed on Israel, that 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.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in an address Monday reiterated the Iran-backed group's support for a Tehran military response to the attack that killed Gen. Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a senior military official in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, and worsened fears of the war spiraling into the rest of the Middle East.

Since the war in Gaza began six months ago, clashes have increased between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Hamas, which rules Gaza and attacked Israel on Oct. 7, is also backed by Iran, as well as an umbrella group of Iraqi militias targeting U.S. military bases and positions in Syria and Iraq.

Though Israel has regularly conducted strikes targeting Iranian military officials and allies, Zahedi's death was the most significant blow for Tehran since a U.S. drone targeted and killed Quds Force chief Gen. Qassim Soleimani in 2020 in Baghdad.

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"I'd like to say with a very loud voice from here in Damascus that America has a responsibility in what happened and must be held responsible," Amirabdollahian told reporters in Damascus during a visit where he met his Syrian counterpart, Faisal Mekdad, who condemned both the strike and Israel's offensive in Gaza. Amirabdollahian also met President Bashar Assad, with whom he discussed Gaza and the wider situation in the region, a statement from Assad's office said.

The Iranian foreign minister, who earlier that day inaugurated the opening of a new consular section in a nearby building, justified his claims by saying that Washington and "two European countries" did not condemn the attack on the diplomatic building.

He said that failure to condemn the attack "indicates that Washington had given the green light to Israel to commit this crime."

The Biden administration has insisted that it had no advance knowledge of the airstrike. Washington is Israel's vital military ally.

Israel, which rarely acknowledges strikes against Iranian targets, said it had no comment on the strike in the Syrian capital. However, Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said last week that the U.S. has assessed Israel was responsible.

Initially after the strikes, Iranian state media said Zahedi led the Quds Force in Lebanon and Syria until 2016.

Then, in a public address Monday, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said Zahedi was a key figure for the Lebanese group, and had three four-year stints in the tiny Mediterranean country.

Nasrallah, like Syria, and other key allies of Tehran, have said they remain committed to backing Iran.

"It's a natural right for Iran. It's natural for the Islamic Republic to conduct this response (to the consulate attack)," Nasrallah said.

Nasrallah said Zahedi's first involvement was until 2002, overseeing Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and helping Hezbollah scale up. Zahedi's second term covered some of the fiercest fighting in Syria's uprising turned civil war, where Tehran and Russia played a key role in backing Assad against opposition forces. Zahedi's final stint began in 2020 and ended when he was killed.

Hezbollah militants and Israeli troops have clashed along the tense Lebanon-Israel border since Oct. 8, the day after the Hamas attack on southern Israel.

The Hezbollah leader said that the moment the clashes began, Zahedi reportedly wanted to join Hezbollah militants on the front line but wasn't permitted to do so.

Earlier Monday, Israeli airstrikes over southern Lebanon killed Ali Ahmad Hussein, an elite commander of Hezbollah's secretive Radwan Force. Hezbollah announced Hussein's death, but did not give any details on the circumstances or his role with the group in line with how it makes public the deaths of its members.

The killing of Hussein, one of the most senior militants slain thus far, came ahead of the Iranian foreign minister's visit to Syria.

Israel considers Hezbollah its most serious immediate threat, estimating it has some 150,000 rockets and missiles, including precision-guided missiles that can hit anywhere in Israel. The group, which has thousands of battle-hardened fighters who participated in Syria's 12-year conflict, also has different types of military drones.

In January, Israeli jets struck and killed another elite Hezbollah commander from the Radwan Force, Wissam al-Tawil, who fought with the group for decades and took part in some of its biggest battles.

Hezbollah says it will stop firing rockets once a ceasefire is reached in the Gaza Strip that would end the Israel-Hamas war. Israeli officials have been demanding that the Radwan Force withdraw from the border area in order for tens of thousands of displaced Israelis to return home.

Washington and Paris have been scrambling to find a diplomatic resolution to halt the fighting along the Lebanon-Israel border, hoping to prevent a new all-out war between Hezbollah and Israel since a month-long war in the summer of 2006.

The risk of war spreading to Lebanon has worsened existing political tensions within the country between Hezbollah and their most vocal opponent, the nationalist Christian Lebanese Forces party.

Matters worsened Monday when the Lebanese military announced the death of a Lebanese Forces local official who had been kidnapped a day earlier in northern Lebanon. The Lebanese Army said they detained three Syrians accused in the kidnapping and killing of Pascale Suleiman as they tried to steal his car.

The Lebanese Forces party cast doubt on the army's findings, saying they believed it was a political assassination.

Nasrallah in his speech slammed members of the Christian party and allies who had accused Hezbollah of being involved in the kidnapping. calling it "baseless" and dangerous rhetoric.

Trump declines to endorse a national abortion ban. He says limits should be left to the states

By JILL COLVIN and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump said Monday he believes abortion limits should be left to the states, outlining his position in a video in which he declined to endorse a national ban after months of mixed messages and speculation.

"Many people have asked me what my position is on abortion and abortion rights," Trump said in the video posted on his Truth Social site. "My view is now that we have abortion where everybody wanted it from a legal standpoint, the states will determine by vote or legislation or perhaps both. And whatever they decide must be the law of the land — in this case, the law of the state."

Trump, in the video, did not say when in pregnancy he believes abortion should be banned — declining to endorse a national cutoff that would have been used as a cudgel by Democrats ahead of the November election. But his endorsement of the patchwork approach leaves him open to being attached to the strictest proposed state legislation, which President Joe Biden and his reelection campaign have already been working to do.

Anti-abortion activists expressed keen disappointment that Trump didn't go further.

In the video, he again took credit for the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to end *Roe v. Wade*, saying that he was "proudly the person responsible for the ending" of the constitutional right to an abortion and thanking the conservative justices who overturned it by name.

While he again articulated his support for three exceptions — in cases of rape, incest and when the life of the mother is at risk — he went on to describe the current legal landscape, in which different states have different restrictions following the court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling on June 24, 2022, which upended the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.

"Many states will be different. Many will have a different number of weeks or some will have more conservative than others and that's what they will be," he said. "At the end of the day it's all about will of the people."

Trump had long argued that the Supreme Court's decision gave those who oppose abortion rights "tremendous power to negotiate," leverage he said he wanted to use to strike a deal that he hoped would "make both sides happy" and bring the country together — even though the issue is one of the most contentious in American politics, with some opponents viewing abortion as murder and proponents seeing it as a fundamental women's right.

The announcement drew immediate condemnation from SBA Pro-Life America, one of the country's most prominent groups opposed to abortion rights.

"We are deeply disappointed in President Trump's position," said the group's president, Marjorie Dannenfelser, in a statement. "Unborn children and their mothers deserve national protections and national advocacy from the brutality of the abortion industry. The *Dobbs* decision clearly allows both states and Congress to act."

Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, one of Trump's congressional backers and supporter of a 15-week national ban, said he "respectfully" disagreed with Trump over abortion being an issue for the states. Mike Pence — a staunch abortion opponent who served as Trump's vice president, challenged him for this year's GOP nomination and has said he won't endorse him — on X called the stance "a slap in the face to

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the millions of pro-life Americans" who have previously backed Trump.

Trump took to Truth Social later Monday to lash out at his critics, saying both Dannenfelser and Graham were "of absolutely no help as the Democrats staged rallies and won Elections they should never have won" after Dobbs, adding that Graham should focus instead on "the millions of people dying in senseless, never-ending Wars that he constantly favors and promotes."

Biden's campaign was quick to seize on the moment, with spokesperson Ammar Moussa posting on X that Trump was "endorsing every single abortion ban in the states, including abortion bans with no exceptions ... and he's bragging about his role in creating this hellscape."

In a statement, Biden said Trump has played a part in being "responsible for creating the cruelty and the chaos that has enveloped America since the Dobbs decision," a situation he said is reflected in women "being turned away from emergency rooms, forced to go to court to seek permission for the medical attention they need, and left to travel hundreds of miles for health care."

"Trump's in trouble and he knows it," Biden said at a fundraiser in Chicago on Monday.

In a statement, Jenny Lawson, executive director of Planned Parenthood Votes expressed confidence that the voters who "clearly rejected anti-abortion politics" in other post-Dobbs elections will "do the same with Donald Trump and his cronies in 2024."

In a Biden campaign call with reporters, Texas mother Kaitlyn Kash described her need to obtain out-of-state care after losing one pregnancy, then her difficulty in receiving a "dilation and curettage" procedure after another successful delivery, following the Dobbs decision — situations she laid at Trump's feet.

"What I went through didn't need to happen, but it did because of Donald Trump," Kash said.

Biden's campaign also went up with an ad featuring Amanda Zurawski, a Texas woman they said "nearly died twice after she was denied care for a miscarriage because of the state's abortion ban — a ban that was only possible because Donald Trump overturned Roe v. Wade."

Trump had suggested last month in a radio interview that he was leaning toward supporting a national abortion ban at around 15 weeks of pregnancy but, at the same time, seemed reluctant to embrace a federal prohibition.

Republican-led states have ushered in a wave of new restrictions following the 2022 overturning of Roe v. Wade. More than a dozen GOP-controlled states have banned abortion outright, while others have outlawed the procedure on increasingly diminishing timelines.

Other reproductive-related procedures have faced restrictions, including in vitro fertilization, which quickly became a campaign flashpoint after the Alabama Supreme Court ruled this year that frozen embryos can be considered children under state law. Trump said he strongly supports IVF availability. Alabama lawmakers and Republican Gov. Kay Ivey agreed to protect IVF providers from legal liability.

Democrats believe the fight over abortion rights helps them at the polls and have outperformed expectations in elections since. Voters in seven states have sided with abortion rights supporters on ballot measures, and abortion is expected to be on the ballot in more states this year, including Florida, Maryland and New York.

Trump has tried to thread the needle on abortion throughout the campaign, calling himself the "most pro-life president in American history" but also blaming GOP candidates who did not allow for exceptions for the party's 2022 losses.

In the video, Trump told Republicans that they must "follow your heart on this issue. But remember, you must also win elections to restore our culture and, in fact, to save our country, which is currently and very sadly a nation in decline."

Instead, he has tried to paint Democrats as "the radical ones on this position."

Democrats and Biden's campaign, meanwhile, have been spotlighting the issue as they work to draw a contrast with Trump.

Polling has consistently shown that most Americans believe abortion should be legal through the initial stages of pregnancy. About half of U.S. adults said abortions should be permitted at the 15-week mark, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll conducted last June.

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Data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that the vast majority of abortions from 2012 to 2021 were performed within the first 13 weeks of pregnancy.

NAIA all but bans transgender athletes from women's sports. NCAA vows to ensure 'fair competition'

By ERIC OLSON AP Sports Writer

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics announced a policy Monday that all but bans transgender athletes from competing in women's sports at its 241 mostly small colleges across the country.

The NAIA Council of Presidents approved the policy in a 20-0 vote at its annual convention in Kansas City, Missouri. The NAIA, which oversees some 83,000 athletes competing in more than 25 sports, is believed to be the first college sports organization to take such a step.

According to the transgender participation policy, which goes into effect in August, all athletes may participate in NAIA-sponsored male sports but only athletes whose biological sex assigned at birth is female and have not begun hormone therapy will be allowed to participate in women's sports.

A student who has begun hormone therapy may participate in activities such as workouts, practices and team activities, but not in intercollegiate competition.

NAIA programs in competitive cheer and competitive dance are open to all students. The NAIA policy notes every other sport "includes some combination of strength, speed and stamina, providing competitive advantages for male student-athletes."

NAIA President and CEO Jim Carr said in an interview with The Associated Press he understands the policy will generate controversy but that it was deemed best for member schools for competitive reasons.

"We know there are a lot of opinions, and a lot of people have a very emotional reaction to this, and we want to be respectful of all that," Carr said. "But we feel like our primary responsibility is fairness in competition, so we are following that path. And we've tried as best we could to allow for some participation by all."

The NAIA's 2023-24 policy did not bar transgender and nonbinary athletes from competing in the division of their choice in the regular season. In the postseason, and with some exceptions for those who have had hormone therapy, athletes had to compete in the division of their birth sex.

There is no known number of transgender athletes at the high school and college levels, though it is believed to be small. The topic has become a hot-button issue among conservative groups and others who believe transgender athletes should not be allowed to compete on girls' and women's sports teams.

Shiwali Patel, senior counsel at the National Women's Law Center, said her organization was outraged by the NAIA policy.

"This is unacceptable and blatant discrimination that not only harms trans, nonbinary and intersex individuals, but limits the potential of all athletes," Patel said in a statement. "It's important to recognize that these discriminatory policies don't enhance fairness in competition. Instead, they send a message of exclusion and reinforce dangerous stereotypes that harm all women."

Last month, more than a dozen current and former college athletes filed a federal lawsuit against the NCAA, accusing the sports governing body for more than 500,000 athletes of violating their rights by allowing transgender women to compete in women's sports.

Hours after the NAIA announcement, the NCAA released a statement: "College sports are the premier stage for women's sports in America and the NCAA will continue to promote Title IX, make unprecedented investments in women's sports and ensure fair competition for all student-athletes in all NCAA championships."

At least 24 states have laws barring transgender women and girls from competing in certain women's or girls sports competitions.

The Biden administration originally planned to release a new federal Title IX rule — the law forbids discrimination based on sex in education — addressing both campus sexual assault and transgender athletes. Earlier this year, the department decided to split them into separate rules, and the athletics rule

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now remains in limbo.

"It's similar to the NIL stuff with all these different state laws," said Kasey Havekost, a former Division I athlete who is now a higher education attorney at Bricker Graydon. "The NCAA kind of does something but nothing really happens, and they look to the federal government, and the federal government is slow to put something in place and then we're left with all these different state laws."

Havekost expects lawsuits will follow and challenge the NAIA policy on the basis of Title IX laws.

"I feel like at some point, it will have to be addressed," she said. "It's a really complex issue. It might take a Supreme Court ruling."

About 190 of the 241 NAIA schools are private, and about 125 of those have religious affiliations of varying degrees, Carr said. Of the 20 presidents who voted, 17 are from schools affiliated with Christian denominations.

"People have certain views of the world, and even though I believe all our Council of Presidents members are trying to think what's best for the NAIA, they certainly come to these kinds of issues with their own beliefs and the missions of their institutions in mind," Carr said. "I would think that had some impact."

Patel said the NAIA ban, along with the state laws, "emphasizes the urgency in having clear Title IX rules that expressly prohibit this type of sex-based discrimination, and ensure the rights of all students, including transgender, nonbinary, and intersex athletes, are safeguarded. Trans athletes deserve a chance to play."

The NCAA has had a policy for transgender athlete participation in place since 2010, which called for one year of testosterone suppression treatment and documented testosterone levels submitted before championship competitions. In 2022, the NCAA revised its policies on transgender athlete participation in an attempt to align with national sport governing bodies, following the lead of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee.

The three-phase implementation of the policy included a continuation of the 2010 policy, requiring transgender women to be on hormone replacement therapy for at least one year, plus the submission of a hormone-level test before the start of both the regular season and championship events.

The third phase adds national and international sport governing body standards to the NCAA's policy and — after a delay — is scheduled to be implemented for the 2024-25 school year on Aug. 1.

There are some 15.3 million public high school students in the United States and a 2019 study by the CDC estimated 1.8% of them — about 275,000 — are transgender. The number of athletes within that group is much smaller; a 2017 survey by Human Rights Campaign suggested fewer than 15% of all transgender boys and transgender girls play sports.

The number of NAIA transgender athletes would be far smaller.

'Panama Papers' trial starts. 27 people charged in the worldwide money laundering case

PANAMA CITY (AP) — The trial of 27 people charged in connection with the worldwide "Panama Papers" money laundering started Monday in a Panamanian criminal court.

Those on trial include the owners of the Mossack-Fonseca law firm that was at the heart of the 2016 massive document leak.

The Panama Papers include a collection of 11 million secret financial documents that illustrate how some of the world's richest people hide their money.

The repercussions of the leaks have been far-ranging, prompting the resignation of the prime minister of Iceland and bringing scrutiny to the leaders of Argentina and Ukraine, Chinese politicians and Russian President Vladimir Putin, among others.

The often-delayed trial opened Monday, with lawyers Juergen Mossack, Ramón Fonseca and other former representatives, lawyers or ex-employees of the firm facing money laundering charges.

Mossack was present in the courtroom, and said "I am not guilty of such acts."

Lawyers for Fonseca said he was in a hospital in Panama.

The case centers on allegations the firm set up shell companies to acquire properties in Panama with

money from a sprawling corruption scheme in Brazil known as the Car Wash, or Lava Jato in Portuguese. Fonseca has said the firm, which closed in 2018, had no control over how its clients might use offshore vehicles created for them. Both Mossack and Fonseca have Panamanian citizenship, and Panama does not extradite its own citizens.

The two were acquitted on other charges in 2022.

The records were first leaked to the German daily *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, and were shared with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which began publishing collaborative reports with news organizations in 2016.

U.S. federal prosecutors have alleged that Mossack Fonseca conspired to circumvent American laws to maintain the wealth of its clients and conceal tax dollars owed to the IRS. They alleged the scheme dates to 2000 and involved sham foundations and shell companies in Panama, Hong Kong and the British Virgin Islands.

New York appeals judge rejects Donald Trump's request to delay his April 15 hush money trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York appeals court judge on Monday rejected Donald Trump's bid to delay his April 15 hush money criminal trial while he mounts a last-minute fight to move the case out of Manhattan, foiling the former president's latest attempt to put off the historic trial.

Justice Lizbeth González of the state's mid-level appeals court ruled after an emergency hearing Monday where Trump's lawyers asked that she postpone the trial indefinitely while they seek a change of venue.

They contended the presumptive Republican nominee faces "real potential prejudice" in heavily Democratic Manhattan and said the jury pool has been polluted by news coverage of Trump's other recent cases, including his \$454 million civil fraud judgment and the \$83.3 million he's been ordered to pay for defaming writer E. Jean Carroll. He is appealing both verdicts.

"Jury selection cannot proceed in a fair manner," Trump lawyer Emil Bove argued, citing the defense's polling and a review of media coverage.

Trump's hush money trial is the first of his four criminal indictments slated to go to trial and would be the first criminal trial ever of a former president.

In a separate appellate matter, Trump's lawyers are challenging a gag order barring him from making comments about jurors, witnesses and others connected to the case. The trial judge, Juan M. Merchan, recently expanded the gag order after Trump lashed out at his daughter, a Democratic political consultant, on social media. The appeals court will hear that matter Tuesday.

Trump, who lived in Manhattan for decades and rose to fame as a real estate developer shaping its iconic skyline, has suggested the trial should be moved to Staten Island, the only New York City borough he won in 2016 and 2020.

Steven Wu, the appellate chief for the Manhattan district attorney's office, noted that Merchan, had already rejected Trump's requests to move or delay the trial as untimely.

"The question in this case is not whether a random poll of New Yorkers from whatever neighborhood are able to be impartial, it's about whether a trial court is able to select a jury of 12 impartial jurors," Wu said.

He blamed Trump for stoking pretrial publicity with "countless media appearances talking about the facts of this case, the witnesses, and so on."

As the appeals court fight was playing out, Merchan released his plan Monday for conducting jury selection, including what jurors will and won't be asked about their views on Trump.

In a letter to both sides, Merchan declared that choosing jurors isn't about whether they like or don't like anyone in the case but whether prospective jurors can assure they will "set aside any personal feelings or biases and render a decision that is based on the evidence and the law."

Paperwork relating to Trump's appeals was placed under seal and not publicly available.

Trump had pledged to appeal after Merchan ruled last month that the trial would begin April 15. His

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lawyers had pleaded to delay the trial at least until summer to give them more time to review late-arriving evidence from a prior federal investigation into the matter. Merchan, who had already moved the trial from its original March 25 start date, said no further delays were warranted.

Trump's lawyers filed their appeals Monday on two separate court dockets. One was styled as a lawsuit against Merchan, a legal mechanism allowing them to challenge his rulings.

In New York, judges can be sued over some judicial decisions under a state law known as Article 78. Trump has used the tactic before, including against the judge in his civil fraud case in an unsuccessful last-minute bid to delay that case last fall.

In the hush-money criminal case, he is accused of falsifying his company's records to hide the nature of payments to his former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen, who helped him bury negative stories during his 2016 campaign. Cohen's activities included paying porn actor Stormy Daniels \$130,000 to suppress her claims of an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump years earlier.

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

As Trump's lawyers stressed Monday that he was facing an unprecedented level of damaging publicity in Manhattan, they also referenced a decision issued by the state's appellate court more than 25 years ago.

In that case, the court agreed to move the trial of four New York City police officers charged with killing Amadou Diallo, an unarmed Guinean student, in the Bronx. Citing the "public clamor" in the city, the court agreed to move the trial to Albany, where the officers were ultimately acquitted.

Trump's move to the appeals court Monday is the latest escalation in his battles with Merchan.

Last week, Trump renewed his request for the judge to step aside from the case, citing Merchan's daughter's work as the head of a firm whose clients have included his rival President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and other Democrats.

The former president alleges the judge is biased against him and has a conflict of interest because of his daughter's work. The judge rejected a similar request last August.

If the hush-money trial were to be moved out of Manhattan, it's unlikely Merchan would go with it. In past cases, like the Diallo matter, a new judge was picked from the county where the trial ended up being held.

Trump has also made numerous other attempts to get the trial postponed, echoing a strategy he's deployed in his other criminal cases. "We want delays," Trump proclaimed to TV cameras outside a February pretrial hearing in his hush money case.

Merchan last week rejected his request to delay the trial until the U.S. Supreme Court rules on presidential immunity claims he raised in another of his criminal cases.

Trump also filed an eve-of-trial lawsuit against the judge in his New York civil fraud case, accusing the jurist of repeatedly abusing his authority. Among other issues, Trump's lawyers in that case complained that Judge Arthur Engoron had refused their request to delay the trial. Their suit was filed about three weeks before the trial was slated to begin.

A state appeals court rejected Trump's claims, and the trial started as scheduled Oct. 2.

Engoron, who decided that case without a jury, ruled that Trump, his company and key executives defrauded bankers and insurers by overstating his wealth in documents used to get loans and coverage. Trump denied any wrongdoing and is appealing the finding and staggering penalty.

Biden promotes 'life-changing' student loan relief in Wisconsin as he rallies younger voters

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — President Joe Biden said Monday that more than 30 million borrowers would see "life-changing" relief from his new plan to ease their student loan debt burdens, a fresh attempt by the Democratic president to follow through on a campaign pledge that could buoy his standing with younger voters.

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He detailed the initiative, which has been in the works for months, during a trip to Wisconsin, one of a handful of battleground states that could decide the outcome of Biden's likely November rematch with Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee.

Biden said he wanted to "give everybody a fair shot" and the "freedom to chase their dreams" as he lamented the rising cost of higher education.

"Even when they work hard and pay their student loans, their debt increases and not diminishes," he said. "Too many people feel the strain and stress, wondering if they can get married, have their first child, start a family, because even if they get by, they still have this crushing, crushing debt."

Biden's trip, which included a stop at a Chicago fundraiser on the way back to Washington, comes a week after primary voting in Wisconsin highlighted political weaknesses for him as he prepares for the general election.

More than 48,000 Democratic voters chose "uninstructed" instead of Biden, more than double his narrow margin of victory in the state in 2020.

Trump also saw a significant number of defections during the state's primary, with nearly 119,000 Republicans voting for someone other than him.

But Biden's results, which echoed similar protest votes in states like Michigan and Minnesota, have rattled Democrats who are eager to solidify the coalition that catapulted him into the White House in the first place.

A critical fracture has been the Israel-Hamas war. Younger voters are more likely to disapprove of Biden's enduring support for Israel's military operation in Gaza, which has caused heavy casualties among Palestinian civilians.

Concerns about the war have spread throughout the Madison area, said Democratic Rep Mark Pocan, who represents the city. Pocan said he was "surprised to see the intensity on the issue" from all ages of voters, and he wanted Biden to be aware.

"I just want to make sure he knows that if we're going to have a problem, that could be the problem in Wisconsin," Pocan said.

Some young voters have been impatient with Biden's attempts to wipe away student loan debt. The Supreme Court last year foiled his first attempt to forgive hundreds of billions of dollars in loans, a decision that Biden called a "mistake."

Since then, the White House has pursued debt relief through other targeted initiatives, including those for public service workers and low-income borrowers. Administration officials said they have canceled \$144 billion in student loans for almost 4 million Americans.

At the same time, the Department of Education has been working on a more expansive plan to replace Biden's original effort. Monday's announcement was an opportunity to energize young voters whose support Biden will need to defeat Trump in November.

Vice President Kamala Harris went to Pennsylvania, another battleground state, on Monday to promote debt relief in a meeting with city and school employees in Philadelphia.

"You shouldn't have to make a decision whether you serve or be able to pay your bills," she said.

Republicans said Biden's plan shifts the financial burden of college tuition onto taxpayers who didn't take out loans to attend school, and Kris Kobach, the Republican attorney general in Kansas, accused him of trying to twist the law "beyond recognition."

The Job Creators Network, a conservative advocacy group that challenged Biden's original plan, is considering legal action as well. The organization is backed by Bernie Marcus, a Republican donor who is also hosting a fundraiser for Trump in Atlanta on Wednesday. Trump described Biden's debt relief initiative as an "election-enhancing money grab" two years ago.

Biden's new plan would expand federal student loan relief to five new categories of borrowers through the Higher Education Act, which administration officials believe puts it on a stronger legal footing than the sweeping proposal that was killed by a 6-3 court majority last year.

The plan is smaller and more targeted than Biden's original plan, which would have canceled up to \$20,000 in loans for more than 40 million borrowers. The new plan would cancel some or all federal stu-

dent loans for more than 30 million Americans, the White House said. The Education Department plans to issue a formal proposal in the coming months, with plans to start implementing parts of the plan as early as this fall.

The plan's widest-reaching benefit would cancel up to \$20,000 in interest for borrowers who have seen their balance grow beyond its original amount due to what Biden described as "runaway" interest. That part of the plan would forgive at least some unpaid interest for an estimated 25 million borrowers, with 23 million getting all their interest erased, according to the White House.

An additional 2 million borrowers would automatically have their loans canceled because they're eligible but have not applied for other forgiveness programs, such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

Borrowers who have been repaying their undergraduate student loans for at least 20 years would be eligible to have any remaining debt canceled, along with those repaying graduate school loans for 25 years or more.

The plan would forgive debt for those who were in college programs deemed to have "low financial value." It's meant to help those who were in programs that ended up becoming ineligible to receive federal student aid or programs found to have cheated students.

A final category would cancel debt for borrowers facing financial hardship.

The Security Council revives the Palestinian Authority's UN hopes. The US says not yet

By MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council on Monday revived the Palestinian Authority's hopes of joining the United Nations as a full member.

But the United States said relations between Israel and the Palestinians are far from ripe. That all but quashes the Palestinian Authority's U.N. membership hopes for now.

The U.S. is one of five permanent members who can veto any council action. Members of its U.N. delegation reiterated Monday that the Palestinian Authority needs to exert control over all of the Palestinian territories and negotiate statehood with Israel before it wins statehood.

The Palestinian Authority administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Its forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas seized power in 2007, and it has no power there.

"The issue of full Palestinian membership is a decision that should be negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians," U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood told reporters Monday.

After years of failed on-and-off peace talks, the Palestinians have turned to the United Nations to fulfill their dream of an independent state. Israel says such steps are an attempt to sidestep the negotiating process. Israel's current right-wing government is dominated by hard-liners who oppose Palestinian statehood.

Supporters of the Palestinians' request for full membership in the United Nations asked the Security Council last week to revive the application for admission submitted in 2011. The Palestinians' fresh bid for U.N. membership comes as the war between Israel and Hamas that began on Oct. 7 nears its sixth month and the unresolved decades-old Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains in the spotlight after years on the back burner.

Israel's U.N. ambassador dismissed any possibility of Palestinian statehood, reducing the issue to a question of his country's very ability to survive.

"From well before the establishment of the U.N., the Palestinians' goal has been clear: the annihilation of the Jews," Ambassador Gilad Erdan told reporters. The U.N. was founded in the wake of World War II and "the same genocidal ideology that this body was founded to combat is still prevalent among the Palestinians," he said.

The Security Council decided to make a formal decision on Palestinian U.N. membership this month and a committee that weighs membership applications will meet again Thursday, said Malta's U.N. Ambassador Vanessa Frazier, the current Security Council president.

"This is a historic moment again," said Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador.

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.

"It was a historic moment then, and now that historic moment has been revived again," Mansour told reporters.

Latino voters are coveted by both major parties. They also are a target for election misinformation

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO and ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — As ranchera music filled the Phoenix recording studio at Radio Campesina, a station personality spoke in Spanish into the microphone.

"Friends of Campesina, in these elections, truth and unity are more important than ever," said morning show host Tony Arias. "Don't let yourself be trapped by disinformation."

The audio was recorded as a promo for Radio Campesina's new campaign aiming to empower Latino voters ahead of the 2024 elections. That effort includes discussing election-related misinformation narratives and fact-checking conspiracy theories on air.

"We are at the front lines of fighting misinformation in our communities," said María Barquín, program director of Chavez Radio Group, the nonprofit that runs Radio Campesina, a network of Spanish-language stations in Arizona, California and Nevada. "There's a lot at stake in 2024 for our communities. And so we need to amp up these efforts now more than ever."

Latinos have grown at the second-fastest rate, behind Asian Americans, of any major racial and ethnic group in the U.S. since the last presidential election, according to a Pew Research Center analysis, and are projected to account for 14.7%, or 36.2 million, of all eligible voters in November, a new high. They are a growing share of the electorate in several presidential and congressional battleground states, including Arizona, California and Nevada, and are being heavily courted by Republicans and Democrats.

Democratic President Joe Biden has credited Latino voters as a key reason he defeated Republican Donald Trump in 2020 and is urging them to help him do it again in November. Given the high stakes of a presidential election year, experts expect a surge of misinformation, especially through audio and video, targeting Spanish-speaking voters.

"Latinos have immense voting power and can make a decisive difference in elections, yet they are an under-messaged, under-prioritized audience," said Arturo Vargas, CEO of NALEO Educational Fund, a national nonprofit encouraging Latino civic participation. "Our vote has an impact. These bad actors know this, and one way to influence the Latino vote is to misinform."

In addition to radio, much of the news and information Latinos consume is audio-based through podcasts or on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube. Content moderation efforts in Spanish are limited on these platforms, which are seeing a rising number of right-wing influencers peddling election falsehoods and QAnon conspiracy theories.

The types of misinformation overlap with falsehoods readily found in other conservative media and many corners of the internet — conspiracy theories about mail voting, dead people casting ballots, rigged voting machines and threats at polling sites.

Other narratives are more closely tailored to Latino communities, including false information about immigration, inflation and abortion rights, often exploiting the traumas and fears of specific communities. For example, Spanish speakers who have immigrated from countries with recent histories of authoritarianism, socialism, high inflation and election fraud may be more vulnerable to misinformation about those topics.

Misinformation on the airwaves also is particularly difficult to track and combat compared with more traditional, text-based misinformation, said Daiquiri Ryan Mercado, strategic legal adviser and policy counsel for the National Hispanic Media Coalition, which runs the Spanish Language Disinformation Coalition. While misinformation researchers can more easily code programs to categorize and track text-based misinfor-

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mation, audio often requires manual listening. Radio stations that air only in certain areas at certain times also can be difficult to track.

"When we have such limited representation, Spanish speakers feel like they can connect to these people, and they become trusted messengers," Mercado said. "But some people may take advantage of that trust."

Mercado and others said that's why trusted messengers, such as Radio Campesina, are so important. The station was founded by Mexican American labor and civil rights leader César Chavez and has built a loyal listening base over decades. At any given moment, as many as 750,000 people are listening to the Chavez Radio Network on the air and online, Barquín said.

"They will come and listen to us because of the music, but our main focus is to empower and educate through information," she said. "The music is just a tactic to bring them in."

Radio Campesina's on-air talent and musical guests often discuss misinformation on air, answering listeners' questions about voting, teaching them about spotting misinformation and doing tutorials on election processes such as how to submit mail-in ballots. The station also has hosted rodeos and music events to register new voters and talk about misinformation.

They allow listeners to call or text questions on WhatsApp, a social media platform especially popular with immigrant communities but where much of the misinformation they see festers. In March, the station partnered with Mi Familia Vota, a Latino advocacy group, for an on-air show and voter phone bank event to answer voter questions.

"We know that there are many people who are unmotivated because sometimes we come from countries where, when it comes to elections, we don't trust the vote," said Carolina Rodriguez-Greer, Arizona director of Mi Familia Vota, before she shared information on the show about how voters can track their ballots.

The organization began working with Spanish media outlets to dispel misinformation after seeing candidates such as former Arizona gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake spread election lies in 2022, Rodriguez-Greer said. Lake is now running for the U.S. Senate with Trump's endorsement.

"One way to combat this misinformation is to fill the airways with good information," said Angelica Razo, national deputy director of campaigns and programs for Mi Familia Vota.

In Tempe, Brian Garcia tunes into Radio Campesina on drives to work. When he was growing up, the station played as his dad cooked dinner and his family gathered around the table. It was a staple for his family, he said, and he's excited about its efforts to tackle election misinformation.

"There aren't many organizations or folks that go onto Spanish language media to combat misinformation and disinformation," he said. "And I think serving as a resource and a trusted source within the Latino community that has already built those relationships, that trust will go a long way."

A variety of other community and media groups also are prioritizing the seemingly never-ending fight against misinformation.

Maritza Félix often fact-checked misinformation for her mother, whom she calls the "Queen of WhatsApp." This led to Félix doing the same for family and friends in a WhatsApp group that grew into the Spanish news nonprofit Conecta Arizona.

It now runs a radio show and newsletter that debunks false claims about election processes, health, immigration and border politics. Conecta Arizona also combats misinformation about the upcoming Mexican presidential election that Félix said has been seeping over the border.

Jeronimo Cortina, associate professor of political science at the University of Houston, tracks broad misinformation narratives aimed at Spanish-speaking communities across the country but also localized content targeting the state's rapidly growing Latino electorate. That includes misinformation about candidates' clean energy policies taking away jobs in Texas' oil and gas industries and about migrants flooding over the border.

"You won't see the same content targeting Latinos in Texas compared to Latinos in Iowa," he said.

This has led to a wider universe of groups tackling misinformation aimed at Latinos. NALEO Educational Fund's Defiende La Verdad campaign monitors misinformation and trains community leaders to spot it. In Florida, the We Are Más podcast combats Spanish-language misinformation nationally and locally,

said its founder Evelyn Pérez-Verdía. Jolt Action, a Texas Latino advocacy group, registers new voters and helps them make sense of misinformation.

The Spanish-language fact-checking group Factchequeado is building partnerships with dozens of media outlets across the country to provide training and free Spanish fact-checking content.

"Disinformation is at the same time a global phenomenon and a hyperlocal phenomenon," said Factchequeado co-founder Laura Zommer. "So we have to address it with local and national groups uniting together."

Some states are seeking to restrict TikTok. That doesn't mean their governors aren't using it

By BROOKE SCHULTZ Associated Press/Report for America

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — POV: You're on TikTok, and so is your governor — even as your Legislature considers banning the app from state-owned devices and networks.

Efforts to ban TikTok over security concerns about China's influence through the platform have picked up steam in the past year in state legislatures, with an expansive ban even proposed by Congress. In Pennsylvania, forward movement on a bill that first unanimously passed the state Senate last year could send legislation to the Democratic governor's desk imminently.

But even as the app faces scrutiny and bans, governors and state agencies — and even President Joe Biden — are still using the app to promote their initiatives and expand their voting pool. Their target is the youth vote, or the people who largely make up the app's U.S. user base of 170 million.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, a Democrat, is a prolific poster, with his efforts beginning on the campaign trail through a personal account. The first-termer is a rising star in the Democratic Party and is among governors building national profiles and possibly positioning themselves for a 2028 run for the White House.

His careful messaging extends to his official governor account on TikTok. All colored with his priorities and stances, videos have him participating in viral trends, breaking down aspects of his budget proposal, and even taking a dig at Texas via a Beyoncé song.

Other governors use TikTok accounts — among verified accounts, only Democrats — even in states that have banned the app from state devices and networks.

It isn't surprising that politicians do use TikTok so much, said Anupam Chander, visiting scholar at the Institute for Rebooting Social Media at Harvard University. It's more surprising that they don't.

Such outreach draws its lineage to President Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats, when Depression-era Americans would gather around the radio to hear his voice. More recently, social media has been galvanized in elections, like former President Barack Obama on Facebook in 2008, or former President Donald Trump on Twitter, now X, in 2016.

"This is an app that can be very personal. You can share your walk to the Senate chambers or your exhilaration as a vote is passed. Or your disappointment when a vote fails," he said. "This is a way to reach people in a very personal way."

Former GOP presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy made early and, well, liberal use of TikTok during his campaign, with one young Republican saying his social media presence "made him popular."

"A lot of younger voters seem receptive to candidates such as Ramaswamy, due to his young age and new-generation agenda," Victoria Carlson, a spokesperson for the George Washington University College Republicans, told CBS News in September.

In Michigan, the app was banned in March 2023 from government devices — with certain exceptions, like Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's promotional account, which has brought cute dog videos, her March Madness bracket and news about her initiatives to her roughly 245,000 followers.

In New Jersey, a government-affiliated app posts jokes and memes. An exemption in New Jersey's law banning TikTok from government devices allows for posts from non-state networks, with permission. Other government accounts across the country have touted their state parks to drive tourism, events and small businesses.

In Pennsylvania, you have Shapiro and his steaming 'Get S—t Done' mug of tea — a nod to his edgy tagline — or slightly shaky footage as he records himself thanking teachers as his kids head back to school. As a play on the popular "point of view" videos where creators set up a scenario, Shapiro makes a concerned face with the overlaid text "POV: When extremists try to stop legal votes from counting."

"The governor believes, and this administration believes, that there should be no wrong door to accessing government," said Manuel Bonder, Shapiro's spokesperson.

TikTok is part of that landscape, he said. The administration has a phone dedicated only to making TikToks, off of state Wi-Fi, with no other apps on it, Bonder said.

"Bans on state government devices and networks prevent state agencies from reaching a wider audience. Bills like these are being pushed through without regard for the facts," said Jamal Brown, a TikTok spokesman.

In 2022, researchers found more than 100 accounts for those running for Congress. A majority were Democrats, said Maggie Macdonald, assistant professor of political science at the University of Kentucky.

"It seems to be, Democrats are exclusively having this debate, in terms of having an account and talking of banning it," she said.

Transgender Catholics say new Vatican document shows no understanding of their lives

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

Transgender Catholics — as well as a priest who welcomes them to his parish — expressed disappointment Monday with a new Vatican document rejecting the fundamental concept of changing one's biological sex.

In essence, it was a restatement of longstanding Catholic teaching, but the dismay was heightened because recent moves by Pope Francis had encouraged some trans Catholics to hope the church might become more accepting.

The pope has welcomed a community of transgender women to his weekly general audiences. And last year, the Vatican said it's permissible, under certain circumstances, for trans people to be baptized as Catholics and serve as godparents.

"A document like this is very hurtful to the larger LGBTQ+ community but especially to the trans community," said Maxwell Kuzma, 32, a lifelong Catholic transgender man working as a film editor and writer in rural Ohio.

"We have seen the care and love Pope Francis has personally extended to the trans community in his personal interactions, yet this document fails to extend that same respect, love, and support," Kuzma said via email.

The new document never uses the word "transgender," which troubled Michael Sennett, a transgender man who is involved with an LGBTQ+ ministry at St. Ignatius of Loyola Church in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

"Avoiding the word 'transgender' speaks to limiting the dignity of transgender people," Sennett said via email. "If the church is unable to name us or acknowledge our true selves, they can't possibly engage us pastorally, even if that is the goal."

He also was dismayed by the document's admonition that God created man and woman as biologically different, separate beings, and that people must not tinker with that or try to "make oneself God."

"Transgender people are beloved, intentional creations of God the same as cisgender men and women are," Sennett said. "Trans people who take hormones or have surgeries are not playing God; we are respecting and accepting our authentic selves."

"Time and time again studies have validated the negative impact on trans people, youth and adults, who are denied affirming care," Sennett added. "Transitioning is not a medical agenda out to recruit people — it is a lifeline."

Christine Zuba, a transgender woman from New Jersey, noted with dismay that the Vatican doctrine office's 20-page document declared gender-affirming surgery to be a "grave violation of human dignity,"

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on par with such global ills as war and human trafficking.

"Transgender persons are being condemned for who we are, and more importantly we become subject to potential harm," Zuba said in an email. "It again (sadly) gives fuel to those who continue to deny our existence."

"We exist, but we do not. We have dignity, but we do not. I don't even want to think about what the religious and political right will make of this."

As for Pope Francis, Zuba praised him as "a good and holy man."

"Our church however still has a LOT to learn," she added. "We are Not an Ideology. Talk to us. Learn."

The Catholic Church in the U.S. is not monolithic on transgender policies. Some dioceses have issued stern guidelines in effect forbidding acknowledgement of gender transitions. But some parishes have welcomed trans people, including the Church of Our Lady of Grace in Hoboken, New Jersey. Its priest, the Rev. Alexander Santora, invited Zuba a few years ago to deliver part of the homily at its annual Pride Mass.

Santora told The Associated Press that he was encouraged by some aspects of the new Vatican document, including its assertion that homosexuality should not be criminalized.

"I fear, though, that the tone of this document may bring more harm to trans individuals and fuel the hate that is proliferating in the U.S., with more oppressive laws that will lead to suicides and violence," he said via email. "I hope the Vatican convenes some devout trans Catholics from around the world to dissect this document and make it more pastoral."

Kuzma, the Ohio-based film editor and writer, said his dismay over the Vatican document was coupled with continued optimism.

"Currently we have a spotlight on us, yet we have existed throughout human history and have often been given special roles in cultures that recognized our unique gifts," he said.

"The Catholic Church moves slowly, but my hope is that one day, the Vatican will truly recognize the beautiful and important gifts transgender people have to share with the church and the world."

McConnell, back in Kentucky, talks about life in the Senate after leaving longtime leadership post

By BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

SHELBYVILLE, Ky. (AP) — For nearly two decades, Mitch McConnell's only job uncertainty hinged on whether he'd serve as Senate majority or minority leader after the next election. With his days as Republican leader now numbered, the Kentuckian is talking more freely about his priorities once he's no longer calling the shots for his party.

During events last week back in the Bluegrass State, McConnell offered fresh details about his decision to step down in November from his role as the longest-serving Senate leader in history, which set off a wave of speculation about the future of his seat. The 82-year-old McConnell still hasn't said for sure whether he might seek another term, leaving others to fill in the gaps, but in a radio interview and a speech, he did grow more expansive about what he hopes to accomplish in the more than two and a half years remaining of his current term.

After months when his public visits back home seemed to taper off amid concerns about his health — though McConnell has meetings and events in Kentucky that aren't publicized to the media — the senator kept the focus on policies he hopes to help move forward in Congress.

"I felt it's time to shift to a new mission," he said during a speech in Shelbyville. "And I'm certainly not leaving the Senate and still have a lot of interest in the issues that are before us."

Topping his to-do list: fighting back against what he sees as his party's increasing shift toward an isolationist foreign policy, McConnell said. He's been on the same mission as GOP Senate leader but it's a politically difficult stance as conservatives become increasingly opposed to spending on overseas wars amid the fiery, often isolationist populism of former President Donald Trump.

"I have a great passion for trying to help do everything I can to push back against the notion that somehow this is not in America's interest to be the leader of the democratic world," the senator said during his

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speech. "Things don't work well if we are not in the leadership position."

McConnell has steadfastly supported a muscular U.S. foreign policy during his Senate career. Nowhere would a hands-off approach pushed by some in his party be more risky than in Ukraine, he said. Backing off support for Ukraine in its war with Russia would embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin's expansionist ambitions and ultimately could trigger a wider conflict, McConnell said.

"If the Russians take Ukraine, some NATO country will be next and then we will be right in the middle of it," McConnell said last week during an interview on WHAS-AM radio in Louisville.

McConnell parried questions about his health and political future. He said he will serve out his seventh Senate term, adding: "I don't know how many times I can say that. But that's exactly what I'm going to do." He offered no hints whether he will run for reelection in 2026, but McConnell had continued raising campaign funds for himself.

Asked in Shelbyville how he's doing, McConnell replied curtly: "I'm great. How are you?"

He had a concussion from a fall last year and two public episodes where his face briefly froze while he was speaking. Aides said McConnell's decision to give up his leadership post was unrelated to his health.

When the topic turned to Kentucky losing clout once he's no longer in leadership, the ever-restrained McConnell replied: "Well I think I'm still going to have a pretty big voice." McConnell's reputation as a prodigious campaign fundraiser for his party also will keep him influential in Republican politics.

Throughout his career, McConnell has been a prolific appropriator for the Bluegrass State, a role he's well positioned to continue as a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

"I think in a state like ours, what we can get out of the federal government we need to get," McConnell told reporters in Shelbyville.

McConnell also sits on the Senate Agriculture Committee and again will have a big hand in crafting the next federal farm bill — crucial to Kentucky's diversified farm sector.

The speech included zingers aimed at Democratic President Joe Biden, whose policies he blamed for fueling inflation and overreaching through regulations.

As usual, the senator made no direct mention of Trump. The two have been estranged since December 2020, when McConnell refused to abide by Trump's lie that Biden's election as president was the product of fraud. McConnell broke the ice long enough last month to endorse Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee in the November election.

McConnell talked expansively in his speech about the dangers of isolationism, suggesting that more is at stake for U.S. interests than at anytime since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

"You can say 'well, I'll just keep my head down and maybe everything will be OK,'" the senator said. "Or you can stand up to it. It may not be fashionable now, but I'm a Ronald Reagan Republican — peace through strength."

He punched back against resistance to sending more aid to Ukraine. It helps employ American workers to replenish U.S. military stocks, McConnell said, and halting the aid would send a dangerous signal to other U.S. adversaries.

"This war is not taking a single American life," he said. "We're not involved directly in the war. We're trying to help these brave people stand up for their own independence."

In another public appearance last week, McConnell introduced U.S. Sen. Katie Britt when the Alabama Republican spoke at the University of Louisville — McConnell's alma mater.

McConnell has become more reflective on his long Senate career when speaking to Kentucky audiences. And he's poked fun at his own elder statesman status.

"I often tell people my real break in politics was my internship with Henry Clay," he said, referring to the 19th century Kentuckian.

Actor Jonathan Majors avoids jail time for assaulting his ex-girlfriend

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Actor Jonathan Majors has been ordered to complete a yearlong counseling program but avoided jail time Monday for assaulting his ex-girlfriend in a high-profile case that derailed the once-promising star's career.

The 34-year-old star of "Creed III" and other films had faced up to a year behind bars after he was convicted of misdemeanor assault by a Manhattan jury in December.

In court Monday, Judge Michael Gaffey sentenced Majors to conditional discharge after noting that both sides in the case agreed the charges did not warrant jail time, given the actor was a first time offender with no prior criminal record.

He said Majors must complete a 52-week, in-person batterer's intervention program in Los Angeles, where the actor lives. He also has to continue with the mental health therapy his lawyers say he's been participating in. Majors faces a year in jail if found in violation of the terms, which also included a no contact order with his former girlfriend, Grace Jabbari.

Majors, dressed in all black and accompanied by his girlfriend, actor Meagan Good, declined to address the court and left the courthouse without speaking to reporters.

His lawyer, Priya Chaudhry, said the actor did not want to make any public statement that Jabbari could use against him in the civil suit she's filed against the actor.

Majors, she added, is "committed to growing as a person" and will complete any court-mandated programs "with an open heart" even as he maintains his innocence and plans to appeal.

"He's lost his whole career," Chaudhry said in court. "This has been the most challenging year of his life."

But Jabbari, fighting back tears as she addressed the court, said Majors refuses to acknowledge his guilt and remains a danger to those around him.

"He's not sorry. He has not accepted responsibility," she said. "He will do this again and he will hurt other women. He believes he is above the law."

Jabbari said Majors had made her believe the two were in a loving relationship, but, in reality, he isolated her from the rest of the world and cut her off from family and friends.

"I was so emotionally dependent on him," she said. "I became a different person around him — small, scared and vulnerable."

Rather than acknowledge his actions, Majors has been openly critical of the court proceedings, launching a "high-powered PR campaign" that included a nationally televised interview, added Assistant District Attorney Kelli Galloway as she argued for a sentence of violence counseling for Majors.

Following the December guilty verdict, Majors was immediately dropped by Marvel Studios, which had cast him as Kang the Conqueror, a role envisioned as the main villain in the entertainment empire's movies and television shows for years to come.

The conviction stemmed from an altercation last March in which Jabbari accused him of attacking her in the backseat of a chauffeured car, saying he hit her head with his open hand, twisted her arm behind her back and squeezed her middle finger until it fractured.

Majors claimed the 31-year-old British dancer was the aggressor, flying into a jealous rage after reading a text message from another woman on his phone. He maintained he was only trying to regain his phone and get away from Jabbari safely.

Majors had hoped his two-week criminal trial would vindicate him. In a television interview shortly after his conviction, he said he deserves a second chance.

But the California native and Yale University graduate still faces Jabbari's civil suit, which she filed last month in Manhattan federal court. In the suit, Jabbari accuses Majors of assault, battery, defamation and inflicting emotional distress, claiming he subjected her to escalating incidents of physical and verbal abuse during their relationship. The two met in 2021 on the set of Marvel's "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania," in which Majors played Kang.

Majors' lawyers have declined to respond to the claims, saying only that they are preparing to file counterclaims against Jabbari.

The actor had his breakthrough role in 2019's "The Last Black Man in San Francisco." He also starred in the HBO horror series "Lovecraft Country," which earned him an Emmy nomination, and as the nemesis to fictional boxing champ Adonis Creed in the blockbuster "Creed III."

As for Marvel, a looming question remains whether the studio will recast the role of Kang or pivot in a new direction.

Majors' departure was among a recent series of high-profile setbacks for the vaunted superhero factory, which has earned an unprecedented \$30 billion worldwide from 33 films.

Russia Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visits Beijing to highlight ties with key diplomatic partner

Associated Press undefined

BEIJING (AP) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in Beijing Monday to display the strength of ties with close diplomatic partner China amid Moscow's grinding war against Ukraine and an ongoing effort to align their foreign policies against the U.S. and its allies.

The two continent-sized authoritarian states, increasingly in dispute with democracies and NATO, seek to gain influence in Africa, the Middle East and South America. China has backed Russia's claim that President Vladimir Putin launched his assault in 2022 because of Western provocations, without producing any solid evidence.

Russian state news agency Tass said the ministers would "discuss the situation in Ukraine and the Asia-Pacific region, issues of bilateral cooperation and interaction in the international arena," quoting Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova.

Zakharova posted a photo on social media site Telegram showing Lavrov meeting with counterpart Wang Yi but gave no information of the content of their discussions. China's Foreign Ministry and state media had no immediate reports about the talks.

Lavrov arrived in China on Monday on an official visit that will last until Tuesday. Wang has visited Russia during the conflict in Ukraine and maintained China's line of not dubbing the Russian war in Ukraine an invasion.

China has at times taken an equally combative tone against the U.S. and its allies. China and Russia have held joint military drills, and are seen as seeking to supplant democracies with dictatorships in areas where they wield influence.

Despite its clear backing of Russia in the Ukraine war, China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told reporters Monday that "China has an objective and fair position on the Ukraine issue."

"We have been actively promoting peace talks and political solutions. China is not a creator or party to the Ukraine crisis, and we have not and will not do anything to profit from it," Mao told reporters at a daily briefing.

China has also said it wasn't providing Russia with arms or military assistance, although it has maintained robust economic connections with Moscow, alongside India and other countries.

Just weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine, Putin visited Beijing for the opening of the 2022 Winter Olympics and the sides signed a pact pledging a "no limits" relationship that has China supporting Russia's line, even while formally urging peace talks.

"We have always controlled the export of dual-use items in accordance with the law," Mao said, referring to industrial items that can be used for both industrial or military purposes, such as drones.

"The relevant country should not smear or attack the normal relations between China and Russia," Mao said. "The relevant country" was a reference to the U.S., Russia and China's chief geopolitical rival.

In a phone call last week with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, U.S. President Joseph Biden pressed China over its defense relationship with Russia, which is seeking to rebuild its industrial base as it continues its invasion of Ukraine. And he called on Beijing to wield its influence over North Korea to rein in the isolated and erratic nuclear power.

Adding to the tension between the two countries, U.S. lawmakers generated new legislation that would

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ban TikTok, the popular social media application, if its China-based owner ByteDance doesn't sell its stakes in the platform within six months of the bill's enactment.

Lawmakers are concerned Chinese authorities could force ByteDance to hand over data on the 170 million Americans who use TikTok.

All Chinese firms, especially those in the social media sphere, are obligated to hand over user data to the government.

Lavrov's visit also coincides with the U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who on Monday wrapped up four days of talks with Chinese officials and said in Beijing they had "difficult conversations" about national security, including American concerns that Chinese companies are supporting Russia in its war in Ukraine.

Yellen also said the Biden administration will push China to change an industrial policy that poses a threat to U.S. jobs.

South Carolina, Iowa, UConn top final AP Top 25 women's basketball poll to cap extraordinary season

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

South Carolina can add another first to its perfect season: The national champion Gamecocks finished atop the first Associated Press Top 25 women's basketball poll to be released after the NCAA Tournament.

The Gamecocks, who won their second title in three years Sunday with an 87-75 victory over Iowa, received all 35 first-place votes from a national media panel Monday. South Carolina was No. 1 for every week this season except for the preseason poll, when the team was sixth, and at 38-0 became just the 10th team to finish a season undefeated.

It is the first time in the 47-year history of the women's Top 25 that the AP has released its final poll after the NCAA Tournament. Until this year, the final poll had been released after Selection Sunday, on the eve of the tournament.

Iowa was a unanimous choice at No. 2, the Hawkeyes' best finish since they were also second in the final poll of 1988. Final Four participants UConn and N.C. State were third and fourth, respectively. The Huskies have been in the top 10 in the final poll every year since 1994. They've been within the top six every season since 2007.

North Carolina State went from unranked in the preseason to a high of three this year. The Huskies and Wolfpack made the biggest jumps in the final poll, each moving up seven places.

USC was fifth, earning its first ranking in the final poll since 2014 and its highest slot at the end of the season since the Trojans were third in 1986.

LSU, Texas and Oregon State — all reached the Elite Eight — and Stanford and UCLA rounded out the top 10.

IN AND OUT

Duke, West Virginia and Iowa State all made the Top 25 after strong showings in the NCAA tourney.

The Blue Devils knocked off No. 2 seed Ohio State in the second round and almost beat UConn in the Sweet 16. The Mountaineers lost to Iowa in the second round, pushing Caitlin Clark and the Hawkeyes to the limit at home. The Cyclones were beaten in overtime by Stanford in the second round.

UNLV, Fairfield and Louisville all fell out of the rankings after losses in the first round.

CONFERENCE SUPREMECY

The Pac-12 in its final season in its current form sent seven teams to the tournament and five of them reached the Sweet 16. Six teams are in the season-ending Top 25, with 15th-ranked Colorado and 22nd-ranked Utah joining USC, Oregon State, Stanford and UCLA.

The Big 12 also had six teams in the rankings. The ACC was next with five teams while the Big Ten had three. The SEC and Big East each had two while the West Coast Conference had Gonzaga.

UConn takes precautions to prevent a repeat of the vandalism that followed the 2023 title game

By PAT EATON-ROBB AP Sports Writer

STORRS, Conn. (AP) — Precautions were in place Monday at the University of Connecticut designed to prevent a repeat of the violence and vandalism that marred the celebrations of the school's 2023 NCAA men's basketball championship.

In advance of the Final Four, the school removed the aluminum light posts along Hillside Road, the main thoroughfare through the center of campus, and replaced them with temporary, recessed lighting.

The school also has limited the size of the campus watch party planned for Monday's title game against Purdue. Only 6,700 students, all of whom won tickets to the event through a lottery, will be allowed inside Gampel Pavilion for the event, and they all will be seated in the upper bowl of the 10,000-seat arena.

Unlike last year, the general public will not be allowed into the arena and no alcohol will be sold during the event, school spokesman Mike Enright said.

A total of 39 people were arrested after celebrants broke windows, overturned vehicles and even used a light post to ram a door at the student union following the Huskies' win over San Diego State last April.

Many of those involved in the rioting also faced discipline from the school, which ended up expelling six students, including more than one in their final semester before they would have graduated, Enright said.

Sixteen people were injured, none of them seriously, Enright said.

"We felt that the large number of people at Gampel last year might have contributed to the actions that followed on campus," he said. "We're trying to spread the celebrations out a little bit."

University, state and local police have also been coordinating to make sure there is "an increased safety presence," Enright said. He also noted that there are numerous video cameras on campus to help police identify any problems and those responsible for them.

Enright said similar precautions were taken for watch parties during both the men's and women's Final Four games on Friday and Saturday night and no major problems were reported on campus either night.

"Overall, the students are very well behaved," Enright said. "And Saturday night they were exceptional during the semifinal against Alabama and on Friday for the women's game as well."

Every player on South Carolina's bench feels like a starter. They played a pivotal role in title run

By WILL GRAVES AP National Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — South Carolina doesn't feel like it has five starters. The Gamecocks think they have 10. Maybe more.

Coach Dawn Staley used that depth to wear down South Carolina's opponents with relentless pressure and pace.

Even Caitlin Clark and Iowa — not exactly slowpokes themselves — couldn't keep up. The proof was on the floor for all to see during the Gamecocks' 87-75 win over Clark and the Hawkeyes on Sunday in the NCAA championship.

South Carolina's reserves, led by guard Tessa Johnson, outscored Iowa's 37-0, offering a reminder that while there is more parity in the women's game than ever, the Gamecocks currently have no parallel.

"When we play teams, they've got to scout everyone," Gamecocks guard Te-Hina Paopao said. "They've got to scout all 10, 11 of us. And I know that's hard to do because they're hoopers and there's no let off when they come in."

No, there isn't.

There were three games in this year's women's tournament when one team's reserves outscored their counterparts by 30 or more. South Carolina was responsible for all three, according to STATS, also accomplishing the feat against North Carolina and Presbyterian.

Iowa led by as many as 11 in the first quarter on Sunday. Rather than panic while Clark got hot, Staley

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simply turned to the group that includes Johnson, Ashlyn Watkins, MiLaysia Fulwiley and Sania Feagin and asked them to provide a boost.

They did far more than that. Johnson scored 19 points. Fulwiley added nine points to go with four boards and four assists. All of them played at least 14 minutes. All of them made an impact.

"That's just what they do, they produce," starting guard Raven Johnson said.

And they produce at a level that dares opponents to keep up. Watkins had 20 rebounds in a Final Four win over North Carolina State, allowing the Gamecocks to pull away even with starting center Kamilla Cardoso nursing a right leg injury.

Even Iowa, the nation's highest-scoring team led by its all-everything star, eventually got worn out. The Hawkeyes got within five in the fourth quarter before South Carolina held Iowa scoreless over the final 4:12.

"One thing that we've always been able to do is really push the ball and really run," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said. "We did score pretty well. We scored 20 more points than other people do against South Carolina, so we did score pretty well. But, yeah, to be able to have all those fresh legs on Caitlin was really tough."

It's what happens to just about everybody who plays the Gamecocks and their pipeline that consists of stars and players likely just waiting to be stars.

The time for Tessa Johnson and company to move into the starting lineup is coming. It would have come sooner had they chosen to play elsewhere. They didn't. And that made all the difference.

"They could start on any team in this country," Paopao said. "But they decided to sacrifice that and play for this team and win a national championship, which we did today."

Ethnic guerrillas in Myanmar look set to seize an important town on the Thai border from military

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Guerrilla fighters from Myanmar's Karen ethnic minority claimed Monday to be close to seizing control of a major trading town bordering Thailand, as soldiers and civil servants loyal to the military government appeared to be preparing to abandon their positions.

The occupation of Myawaddy town by the Karen National Liberation Army, the armed wing of the Karen National Union, or KNU, appeared imminent as the guerrillas seized or besieged strategic army outposts on the town's outskirts, a spokesperson and members of the KNU said Monday.

Myawaddy, in Kayin state, is Myanmar's most active trading post with Thailand, and its fall would be the latest in a series of shock defeats suffered by the army since last October, when an alliance of three other ethnic rebel groups launched an offensive in the country's northeast. Over the past five months, the army has been routed in northern Shan state, where it conceded control of several border crossings, in Rakhine state in the west, and is under growing attack elsewhere.

The military government under Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing has acknowledged it is under pressure, and recently introduced conscription to boost its ranks.

The nationwide conflict in Myanmar began after the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021 and suppressed widespread nonviolent protests that sought a return to democratic rule.

Three residents of Myawaddy town, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they fear being arrested by either warring side, told The Associated Press by phone that they had heard no sounds of the fighting outside since Sunday afternoon. They said most residents were working as usual, while others were preparing to flee to Mae Sot, just across the border in Thailand. Two of them said they had not seen any members of the government's security forces since Sunday.

The situation was highlighted Sunday night when a Myanmar plane made an unscheduled flight to Mae Sot from Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city. Thai media reported that the plane had received permission from Thai authorities to evacuate people fleeing Myawaddy. It was not clear if those fleeing, described as military and civil servants loyal to Myanmar's military government, had already crossed into Thailand over the river that marks the border.

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Thailand's Foreign Ministry on Monday confirmed that approval was given for three flights on a Yangon-Mae Sot route to transport passengers and cargo, one each day on Sunday through Tuesday. Myanmar's government later canceled its requests for the remaining two flights.

The Thai government was closely monitoring the situation along the border, and is ready to take all necessary measures to maintain peace and order, and to keep the people along the border safe, the Thai ministry said.

In times of fighting along the frontier, Thailand has generally granted temporary shelter to Myanmar villagers. There are also about 87,000 living in nine long-term refugee camps.

The KNU, which is the leading political body for the Karen minority, said in a statement posted on Facebook that its armed wing and allied pro-democracy forces on Friday had seized the army base on the road to Myawaddy at Thin Gan Nyi Naung. It had served for nearly six decades as the military's regional headquarters.

It said that 617 members of the security forces and their family members had surrendered. The KNU posted photos of the weapons that it claimed to have seized and captured military personnel and their family members given shelter in a school.

Two Karen guerrillas involved in their group's offensive told AP on Monday that they have surrounded an army garrison about 4 kilometers (3 miles) to the west of Myawaddy that is in charge of the town's security, and an artillery battalion to the south. Negotiations were underway for their surrenders, they said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to release information.

They also said the Karen have control of about 60% to 70% of Myawaddy township, and are almost certain to capture the town itself after the two bases surrender or are overrun.

The Karen, like other minority groups living in border regions, have struggled for decades for greater autonomy from Myanmar's central government.

Fighting between the army and Karen armed groups intensified after the military seized power in 2021. Several ethnic rebel groups including the Karen have loose alliances with pro-democracy militias after the military takeover, and also offer refuge to the civilian opponents of the military government.

Ukraine and Russia trade fresh accusations of targeting a major nuclear power plant

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and Ukraine are trading fresh accusations over renewed threats to Europe's largest nuclear plant that has been caught up in the war, with Moscow alleging Ukraine was behind drone attacks on the facility that were witnessed by U.N. inspectors and Kyiv accusing Russia of disinformation tactics.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Monday called the drone attacks on the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in Russian-occupied southern Ukraine "a very dangerous provocation."

"This is a very dangerous practice that has very bad, negative consequences in the future," Peskov said during his daily conference call with reporters.

The U.N.'s atomic watchdog agency on Sunday confirmed drone strikes on one of the plant's six reactors, which caused one casualty, but did not attribute responsibility to either side.

The Associated Press was unable to verify either side's claims in the area of heavy fighting where independent journalists are not allowed to enter.

An official at Energoatom, Ukraine's atomic energy company, blamed Russia for the attacks, saying they were "a provocation" orchestrated to malign Ukraine.

The official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on the record.

The plant has repeatedly been caught in the crossfire since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and seized the facility shortly after. The International Atomic Energy Agency, a

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U.N. body, has frequently expressed alarm about the plant amid fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

The strikes did not compromise the nuclear facility, which the Kremlin's forces have been occupying and running in southern Ukraine since shortly after the war began more than two years ago, the IAEA said. The plant's six reactors have been shut down for months, and IAEA inspectors are stationed at the site.

Propaganda and disinformation have been used as weapons by both sides during the conflict, and both sides have accused each other on other occasions of planning attacks on the plant.

Last July, Ukraine and Russia accused each other of planning to attack the Zaporizhzhia plant, though neither side provided evidence to support their claims.

Even with its reactors shut down, the plant still needs power and qualified staff to operate crucial cooling systems and other safety features.

The IAEA team did not observe structural damage to the "systems, structures and components" important to the nuclear safety of the plant, it said. They reported superficial scorching to the top of a reactor dome.

The damage "has not compromised nuclear safety, but this is a serious incident (with the) potential to undermine (the) integrity of the reactor's containment system," the IAEA said on X, formerly Twitter.

IAEA chief Rafael Mariano Grossi said the main reactor containment structures took at least three direct hits. "This cannot happen," he said on X.

Zaporizhzhia is one of four regions that Russia illegally annexed in September 2022.

The Institute for the Study of War, a think tank based in Washington, said Russian authorities are seeking "to use Russia's physical control over the (plant) to force international organizations, including the IAEA, to meet with Russian occupation officials to legitimize Russia's occupation of the (plant) and by extension Russia's occupation of sovereign Ukrainian land."

Nicaragua urges top UN court to halt German military aid to Israel because of its assault in Gaza

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Nicaragua called on the United Nations' top court on Monday to halt German military aid to Israel, arguing that Berlin's support enables acts of genocide and breaches of international humanitarian law in Gaza.

The case at the International Court of Justice is against Germany, which is the second-largest supplier of arms to Israel after the U.S., but it also indirectly takes aim at Israel's 6-month-old military campaign, which has left tens of thousands of Palestinians dead and devastated Gaza.

Nicaragua's allegations represent the latest legal attempt by a country with historic ties to the Palestinian people to stop Israel's offensive, after South Africa accused Israel of genocide at the court late last year. They also come amid growing calls for Israel's allies to stop supplying the country with weapons — and as some supporters, including Germany, have grown more critical of the war.

Nicaragua's Ambassador to the Netherlands, Carlos José Argüello Gómez, told the 16-judge panel that "Germany is failing to honor its own obligation to prevent genocide or to ensure respect of international humanitarian law."

Germany will present its arguments Tuesday. The head of its legal team, Tania von Uslar-Gleichen, called Nicaragua's case "grossly biased" and denied that Berlin is breaching international law.

Israel strongly denies that its assault amounts to genocidal acts, saying it is acting in self defense after Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people. Israeli legal adviser Tal Becker told judges at the court earlier this year in the case brought by South Africa that Israel is fighting a "war it did not start and did not want."

Since then, more than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry. Its toll doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants, but it has said women and children make up the majority of the dead.

The court will likely take weeks to deliver its preliminary decision, and Nicaragua's case will probably

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drag on for years.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Germany is second only to the U.S. in supplying arms to Israel — but it would be harder, if not impossible, for the U.S. to be brought before the court because Washington does not recognize the ICJ's power to compel countries to appear before it. The U.S. also has not signed a protocol to the Genocide Convention that allows countries to bring disputes to the court.

Nicaragua, nevertheless, sought to include U.S. arms supplies in its case, saying that Berlin and Washington collaborate on some military programs. Argüello Gómez urged the court to include U.S. supplies in its preliminary orders, known as provisional measures.

Nicaragua has asked the court to order Germany to "immediately suspend its aid to Israel, in particular its military assistance including military equipment in so far as this aid may be used in the violation of the Genocide Convention" and international law.

It also wants the court to order Germany to resume funding to the United Nations aid agency in Gaza in addition to the aid Berlin is already providing.

"It is indeed a pathetic excuse to the Palestinian children, women and men in Gaza to provide humanitarian aid, including through airdrops, on the one hand, and to furnish the weapons and military equipment that are used to kill and annihilate them" and humanitarian workers, Nicaragua lawyer Daniel Müller told judges.

Dozens of flag-waving pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrated outside the court.

Sliman Abu Amara, a Dutch citizen of Palestinian descent, said he was grateful to Nicaragua for taking Germany to court, noting "the irony is that Germany is actually behind the whole international convention on preventing the genocide."

On Friday, the U.N.'s top human rights body called on countries to stop selling or shipping weapons to Israel. The United States and Germany opposed the resolution.

Meanwhile, hundreds of British jurists, including three retired Supreme Court judges, have called on their government to suspend arms sales to Israel after seven aid workers from the charity World Central Kitchen, including three U.K. citizens, were killed in Israeli strikes. Israel said the attack was a mistake and dismissed two officers, while reprimanding others.

Germany has for decades been a staunch supporter of Israel. Days after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, Chancellor Olaf Scholz explained: "Our own history, our responsibility arising from the Holocaust, makes it a perpetual task for us to stand up for the security of the state of Israel," he told lawmakers.

Berlin, however, has gradually shifted its tone as civilian casualties in Gaza have soared, becoming increasingly critical of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and speaking out against a ground offensive in Rafah.

Nicaragua's government, which has historical links with Palestinian organizations dating back to their support for the 1979 Sandinista revolution, was itself accused earlier this year by U.N.-backed human rights experts of systematic human rights abuses "tantamount to crimes against humanity." The government of President Daniel Ortega fiercely rejected the allegations.

In response to the case brought by South Africa, the ICJ ordered Israel in January to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and acts of genocide in Gaza.

In March, the court ordered Israel to take measures to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, where experts say a famine is imminent.

As a Mississippi town reels from a devastating tornado, a displaced family finds its way home

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press/Report for America

ROLLING FORK, Miss. (AP) — As a deadly tornado barreled toward their home in the Mississippi Delta, Ida Cartlidge only had time to scoop up her 1-year-old son, Nolan, and hold him close.

Cartlidge huddled with her husband and three sons on the living room floor of their Rolling Fork mobile

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home, its thin walls all that separated the family from 200 mph (320 kph) winds.

"I was holding my baby so tight. I said 'Baby, I'm probably hurting you right now, but I just can't let you go,'" she recalled.

Then the tornado hit, and the home was gone. The twister launched Cartlidge into the air and pulled Nolan from her arms. She remembers seeing him floating above her, as though both were suspended in the air.

She landed with a thud. Miraculously, Nolan fell on her chest. He was the only family member to escape the storm unscathed.

The tornado that destroyed Cartlidge's home last March killed 14 of Rolling Fork's roughly 1,700 residents and reduced the town to rubble as it charted a merciless path across one of the country's poorest regions. For the people there, a complicated story of struggle and resilience has emerged in the year since the storm changed everything and exposed vulnerabilities many survivors had been dealing with long before March 2023.

The Cartlidge family spent the next year in a cramped motel room in search of a more permanent home, like many of their displaced neighbors.

"There's still a lot of suffering," Sen. Joseph Thomas, who represents Rolling Fork in the state Legislature, said in a recent interview. "And you're looking at an area that was already depressed."

Rolling Fork is in Sharkey County, where the poverty rate hovers around 35% — nearly double Mississippi's roughly 19% rate and triple the nation's nearly 12% rate, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Before the storm, Cartlidge, 33, and her husband, Charles Jones, 59, had forged a quiet life in a long, narrow three-bedroom, two-bath mobile home with their sons: Jakavien, 13, Amarii, 12, and Nolan. She worked in customer service for an appliance company and Jones was a mechanic for a local auto parts shop.

Cartlidge suffered a crushed pelvis and broken shoulder in the tornado. Jakavien punctured a lung and shattered bones in his spine and shoulder blade. Amarii had deep lacerations on his back and ankles. Jones injured his ribs and spine.

The mobile home park where they lived was also home to most of the 14 people who died in the tornado. Large families crowded into one- or two-bedroom units, which helped offset the financial strain endemic to a region where stable jobs are scarce.

Sharkey County lost nearly 400 jobs after the tornado, according to Rolling Fork Mayor Eldridge Walker. The tornado laid waste to about 300 structures, including numerous homes and businesses, which meant lost tax revenue for the city, he said. In February 2024, Walker wrote to Thomas pleading for additional state funds.

The city's infrastructure suffered millions of dollars in damage. Public buildings, streets and the city's sewer and drainage systems either sustained severe damage or were destroyed. One year after the tornado, buildings throughout town remain boarded up, and the remnants of destroyed properties dot the landscape.

The local high school remains closed because of lingering damage, leaving students to ride buses to nearby towns. Destroyed vehicles still hinder residents' ability to navigate their daily lives.

"People were displaced from their transportation networks," said William Keith, who worked on disaster response for the American Red Cross. "A lot of people went to the grocery store with their neighbor next door, or they had a buddy a couple blocks away, and then went to work with them."

After everyone was discharged from the hospital, the Cartlidge family moved into a two-bed motel room only minutes down the highway from where their mobile home used to be. The Rolling Fork Motel is a one-story brick building with green doors and a bright yellow sign that looms over Route 61, known as the "Blues Highway."

Music is integral to Rolling Fork's history. Blues legend Muddy Waters is a native son. The highway running through town symbolizes the genre's popular theme of packing up and leaving one's troubles behind, according to the Mississippi Blues Commission.

Convincing locals to stay is a harder proposition these days.

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More than 70% of Rolling Fork residents displaced by the tornado were renters. Housing assistance programs run by nonprofits stepped in after the tornado, but most are geared toward homeowners rather than renters or people who lived with family members, Thomas said.

Queen'terica Jones, 23, lived with her mother, Erica "Nikki" Moore, and three children in a mobile home just down the street from the Cartlidge place. On the evening of the tornado, she found her mother's lifeless body facedown amid the rubble.

Jones had no legal rights to her mother's property and didn't have the documents required by many programs that financed new mobile homes for displaced residents. Objects that had previously seemed ordinary — housing documents, family heirlooms, tax returns — suddenly took on life-altering significance for her.

"It's a hard period. From losing your mom to having to start all over again," Jones said. "Jesus, that's a whole lot."

Without stable work and housing, Jones has moved between the homes of friends and family members since the storm. It's a common story in Rolling Fork, where public services and steady work that had always been elusive grew even more scarce in the storm's aftermath.

"Towns such as Rolling Fork generally have a smaller tax base with fewer economic resources to respond and recover from such disasters," said Ryan Thomson, a professor of rural sociology at Auburn University. "Federal and state aid oftentimes lag behind local needs."

Nonprofits, the state and the federal government rallied to help. But if the assistance doesn't address some of the town's lingering needs, officials fear an exodus is likely.

"We are striving for a better Rolling Fork," Walker wrote in his letter to Thomas. "And the chance to keep our people in this town."

The Red Cross paid for extended stays at the Rolling Fork Motel for displaced residents, and for months, volunteers clad in red vests doled out groceries and supplies to weary residents. They stacked whatever the storm hadn't carried off in corners and made room for donated packages of Cup Noodles and Capri Sun.

For nearly a full year in that cramped motel room, the Cartlidge family lived with only basic necessities. But they had owned their destroyed mobile home, making them eligible for a new one through a nonprofit called Samaritan's Purse.

In February, they moved into a renovated trailer near downtown, with a "Home Sweet Home" mat greeting them at the door. They cried in each other's arms upon seeing the property.

That night, Ida served the children popcorn and soda on a platter and they all watched horror films — none as scary as the nightmare they'd lived through together a year earlier.

Then they went to bed, each in their own room.

Salvage crews have begun removing containers from the ship that collapsed Baltimore's Key bridge

BALTIMORE (AP) — Salvage crews on Sunday began removing containers from the deck of the cargo ship that crashed into and collapsed the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, an important step toward the full reopening of one of the nation's main shipping lanes.

The removal of the containers from the deck of the Dali would continue this week as weather permits, according to a statement from the Key Bridge Response Unified Command. Crews were progressing toward removing sections of the bridge that lie across the ship's bow to eventually allow it to move, the statement said.

In total, 32 vessels have passed through temporary channels on either side of the wreckage, officials said.

"The Unified Command is concurrently progressing on its main lines of effort to remove enough debris to open the channel to larger commercial traffic," U.S. Coast Guard Capt. David O'Connell said in the statement.

The Dali has been trapped under mangled steel in the Patapsco River since it slammed into the bridge on March 26, killing six workers.

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President Joe Biden took a helicopter tour Friday of the warped metal remains and the mass of construction and salvage equipment trying to clear the wreckage. The president also met for more than an hour with the families of those who died.

Eight workers — immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador — were filling potholes on the bridge when it was hit and collapsed in the middle of the night. Two men were rescued and the bodies of three others were recovered in subsequent days. The search for the other victims continued.

Officials have established a temporary, alternate channel for vessels involved in clearing debris. The Army Corps of Engineers hopes to open a limited-access channel for barge container ships and some vessels moving cars and farm equipment by the end of April, and to restore normal capacity to Baltimore's port by May 31, the White House said.

More than 50 salvage divers and 12 cranes are on site to help cut out sections of the bridge and remove them from the key waterway.

Today in History: April 9,

Robert E. Lee surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant, ending the Civil War

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, April 9, the 100th day of 2024. There are 266 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 9, 1865, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his army to Union Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia, effectively ending the U.S. Civil War after nearly four years.

On this date:

In 1413, the coronation of England's King Henry V took place in Westminster Abbey.

In 1939, Marian Anderson performed a concert at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., after the Black singer was denied the use of Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

In 1940, during World War II, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway.

In 1942, during World War II, some 75,000 Philippine and American defenders on Bataan surrendered to Japanese troops, who forced the prisoners into what became known as the Bataan Death March; thousands died or were killed en route.

In 1959, NASA presented its first seven astronauts: Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, Wally Schirra, Alan Shepard and Donald Slayton. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright, 91, died in Phoenix, Arizona.

In 1968, funerals, private and public, were held for Martin Luther King Jr. at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and Morehouse College in Atlanta, five days after the civil rights leader was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

In 1979, officials declared an end to the crisis involving the Three Mile Island Unit 2 nuclear reactor in Pennsylvania, 12 days after a partial core meltdown.

In 1996, in a dramatic shift of purse-string power, President Bill Clinton signed a line-item veto bill into law. (The U.S. Supreme Court struck down the veto in 1998.)

In 2003, jubilant Iraqis celebrated the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, beheading a toppled statue of their longtime ruler in downtown Baghdad.

In 2005, Britain's Prince Charles married longtime love Camilla Parker Bowles, who took the title Duchess of Cornwall.

In 2010, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens announced his retirement.

In 2012, a Florida special prosecutor said a grand jury would not look into the Trayvon Martin case, leaving the decision of whether to charge the teen's shooter in her hands alone. (Prosecutor Angela Corey ended up filing second-degree murder charges against George Zimmerman, who pleaded not guilty, claiming self-defense; He was acquitted at trial.)

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In 2013, 13 people were shot to death during a pre-dawn, house-to-house rampage in the Serbian village of Velika Ivanca; authorities identified the gunman as a 60-year-old veteran of the Balkan wars who took his own life.

In 2017, Sergio Garcia beat Justin Rose in a sudden-death playoff at the Masters for his first victory at a major championship.

In 2018, federal agents raided the office of President Donald Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen, seizing records on matters including a \$130,000 payment made to porn actress Stormy Daniels.

In 2021, Britain's Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth II, died at the age of 99; he was Britain's longest-serving consort.

In 2023, "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" would prove to be a surprisingly huge hit at the box office, bringing in \$204.6 million in its first five days. (By year's end, the animated film had earned more \$1.3 billion globally, second only to "Barbie" for the year.)

Today's Birthdays: Satirical songwriter and mathematician Tom Lehrer is 96. Actor Michael Learned is 85. Actor Dennis Quaid is 70. Comedian Jimmy Tingle is 69. Country musician Dave Innis (Restless Heart) is 65. Talk show host Joe Scarborough is 61. Actor-sports reporter Lisa Guerrero is 60. Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey is 60. Actor Mark Pellegrino is 59. Actor-model Paulina Porizkova is 59. Actor Cynthia Nixon is 58. TV personality Sunny Anderson is 49. Rock singer Gerard Way (My Chemical Romance) is 47. Actor Keshia Knight Pulliam is 45. Rock musician Albert Hammond Jr. (The Strokes) is 44. Actor Charlie Hunnam is 44. Actor Ryan Northcott is 44. Actor Arlen Escarpeta is 43. Actor Jay Baruchel is 42. Actor Annie Funke is 39. Actor Jordan Masterson is 38. Actor Leighton Meester is 38. Actor-singer Jesse McCartney is 37. R&B singer Jazmine Sullivan is 37. Actor Kristen Stewart is 34. Actor Elle Fanning is 26. Rapper Lil Nas X is 25. Actor Isaac Hempstead Wright is 25. Classical crossover singer Jackie Evancho (ee-VAYN'-koh) is 24.