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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 Mobridge.

Postponed to Friday: Track at Milbank, 3:30 p.m.

Groton Lions Club meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main St.

"The gift which I am sending you is called a dog, and is in fact the most precious and valuable possession of mankind."

THEODORUS GAZA



Friday, April 12

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, mashed potatoes, sauerkraut, 3 bean salad, chocolate pudding with banana.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Grilled cheese, corn.

Track at Milbank, 3:30 p.m.

All-School Play 7 p.m .

Saturday, April 13

ACT Testing at Groton Area

Track at Mobridge 10 a.m.

All School Play 5 p.m.

Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA Spring Gathering, Our Savior's Lutheran in Redfield 9 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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

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1440

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Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh said yesterday that an Israeli airstrike killed three of his adult sons traveling to celebrate the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr in central Gaza, calling the attack motivated by revenge. Israel confirmed the airstrike, characterizing the three as a cell commander and two militant operatives.

A retrial began in Italy yesterday over Amanda Knox, an American woman who was exonerated for a 2007 Italian homicide that gained national attention. The trial is the last open legal inquiry against Knox, who is seeking to reverse a 2009 slander conviction accusing her of

falsely implicating a pub owner in the murder of her roommate.

The US Environmental Protection Agency released rules yesterday requiring public water utilities to remove six common "forever chemicals" from the water supply within five years. The mandate is the first nationwide regulation of the ubiquitous substances found in dental floss, athletic clothing, food wrappers, and more.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 2024 Masters—one of four major championships in men's golf—begins today (3 pm ET, ESPN) from Augusta, Georgia; 2022 winner Scottie Scheffler enters as favorite to win.

"Monopoly" live-action film based on the board game in the works to be produced by Lionsgate and Margot Robbie's production company LuckyChap.

Philadelphia Eagles and Green Bay Packers will kick off 2024 NFL season in the league's first-ever game in Brazil. World track and field governing body will be the first international sports federation to award prize money at the Olympics.

Science & Technology

AI startup Anthropic says its flagship chatbot, Claude 3 Opus, matches humans' ability to present persuasive arguments. US regulators to require most internet service providers to publish information on its fees, speeds, and more, similar to nutrition labels on food.

Mathematician Avi Wigderson wins the 2024 Turing Award for his work in randomness in computation; award is considered to be the Nobel Prize of computer science.

Researchers demonstrate adding a protein found in stem cells to engineered immune cells used in some immunotherapies boosts and extends their ability to fight cancer.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (Dow -1.1%, S&P 500 -1.0%, Nasdaq -0.8%) on news inflation rose 3.5% year-over-year in March, and expectations that a rate cut will not come in June.

Fitch downgrades China's credit rating outlook from stable to negative amid concerns over local and national government's reliance on China's property industry but keeps sovereign debt rating at A+.

Auditor KPMG fined \$25M by accounting oversight board over allegations it failed to prevent cheating on training exams; settlement marks the regulator's largest-ever penalty.

Politics & World Affairs

Arizona Legislature blocks effort to roll back 1864 law banning nearly all abortions, with lawmakers motioning for recess to avoid vote; state Supreme Court ruled the Civil War-era law enforceable Tuesday.

House blocks procedural vote on bill renewing the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act ahead of April 19 deadline. Biden administration reportedly considering executive order to significantly restrict asylum applications at the US-Mexico border.

Six Mississippi police officers sentenced to between 15 and 45 years in prison for the torture of two Black men during the course of a warrantless home search in 2023.

Death Notice: Daniel Johnson

Daniel Johnson, 65, of Groton passed away April 9, 2024 surrounded by family at his home. A private celebration will be held at a later date. Inurnment will take place in Union Cemetery, Groton under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Thank
you

THE GROTON AREA SCHOOL
BOARD WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND
OUR SINCERE GRATITUDE TO
THE GROTON AREA SCHOOL
DISTRICT PATRONS FOR YOUR
CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN
OUR STUDENTS, STAFF, AND
COMMUNITIES!



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The Groton Area varsity track hurdlers attended the NSU Track Hurdling Clinic on Monday. The clinic was conducted by NSU student athletes Renea Taylor, 2 x All American, from Okanogan WA and Joel Matehs, standout junior NSU hurdler, from Rugby ND. Pictured L-R Joel Matehs NSU, Tristan McGannon, Hannah Sandness, Emerlee Jones, Teagan Hanten, Talli Wright, McKenna Tietz, and Renea Taylor NSU. (Courtesy Photo Bruce Babcock)



Open House Bridal Shower

honoring

Jessica Bjerke

Saturday, April 20, 2024

1:00pm - 3:00pm

Olive Grove Golf Course

Registered at Target and Amazon



Groton Area High School

Proudly Presents:

Peter Pan & Wendy



Free will offering at the door

Friday, April 12, 7 p.m.

Saturday, April 13, 5 p.m.

Come on an adventure of pirates,
lost boys, fairies and one leader
who never wants to grow up!

*A comedy adventure adapted by Doug Rand from the
novel of J.M. Barrie - playscripts play.*



Groton Legion installs officers

Groton American Legion Post 39 swore in their new officers at their Post monthly meeting. Seated L-R Steve Dresbach (Chaplin) standing L-R Brent Wienk (Finance Officer), Aaron Grant (Vice Commander), Bruce Babcock (Commander), and Ben Smith (Adjutant). Conducting the ceremony and not pictured Bob Thomason (District 4 Commander, Selby) (Photo submitted by Bruce Babcock, taken by Ron Falk)

Gov. Noem Celebrates South Dakota's Continued AAA Credit Rating

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem celebrated Fitch Ratings' affirmation of South Dakota's AAA credit rating.

"South Dakota's conservative fiscal policies work. They make our people more prosperous and our government more efficient – and this rating reaffirms those facts," said Governor Noem. "In South Dakota, we focus on our priorities. And our top priority is and always will be taking care of our people."

Fitch Ratings noted South Dakota's diverse economy, highlighting the state's agriculture, manufacturing, trade, finance, and tourism industries.

"The state's 'AAA' IDR is supported by consistently well managed fiscal operations, including strong reserve balances and a history of maintaining budgetary structural balance," wrote Fitch Ratings.

South Dakota's rating outlook remains stable. Our dedication to fiscal conservatism, strong money management, and continued low unemployment will ensure South Dakota's long-term economic success.

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15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

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



Living Heart Fitness Center

Neglect your muscles and
you'll pay the price

EMPLOYMENT

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

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Paul Kosel, metering technician, busily works on the siren at the park on Wednesday morning. (Photo by Kellie Locke)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Rapid rise in South Dakota home prices is 'not sustainable,' economist says

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - APRIL 10, 2024 5:48 PM

SIOUX FALLS — Average first-time homebuyers can expect to spend about two-fifths of their pre-tax income on a monthly payment for a house in South Dakota.

"This situation is unheard of," said Dakota Institute CEO Jared McEntaffer.

He addressed the Governor's Conference on Economic Development on Wednesday at the Sioux Falls Convention Center.

McEntaffer called home prices one of the biggest economic issues the state faces. His analysis highlighted the decoupling of housing costs from incomes, posing a challenge for attracting new workers.

He said the median home listing price increased by an inflation-adjusted 26% from the second quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2024 in South Dakota, compared to a national average of 11%. The median listing price in South Dakota increased by \$75,000 over that period, with the median home price in the state peaking in February 2023 at approximately \$375,000.

The impact on potential homebuyers, especially first-timers, is profound.

McEntaffer said a buyer capable of putting down 3% on a median-priced home in 2017 would have faced a monthly mortgage payment of \$1,270. By 2023, due to rising interest rates and home prices, that figure soared to \$2,325; with private mortgage insurance and home insurance included, the total monthly cost climbs to \$3,271. McEntaffer noted that housing can be more affordable in some rural communities.

Homebuyers earning the state's median income can expect to spend about 43% of their monthly pre-tax income purchasing a median-priced house if they put 3% down. Even for those able to afford a 20% down payment, housing costs consume about 32% of their income.

McEntaffer said when additional expenses such as student loans and child care are considered, the total of those expenses and housing costs becomes worrisome.

"This is infeasible. This is not sustainable," McEntaffer said.

He said some of the COVID-19 stimulus funds issued by the federal government were unnecessary for South Dakota, and they flowed into the housing market, which fueled the home-buying surge and exacerbated price increases.

To weather these challenges, McEntaffer advocated for a two-pronged approach: ensuring that wages keep pace with inflation and increasing the construction of multifamily housing units.

However, he cautioned that resolving these problems will take time, partly due to the Federal Reserve's cautious approach toward cutting interest rates, which would further exacerbate inflation.

"This is going to take years, many years — a decade," he said.

McEntaffer also shared some positive news. He said employment since quarter one of 2014 is up nearly 11% in South Dakota, compared to about 7.3% in Minnesota and negative 3% in North Dakota.

McEntaffer added that while South Dakota has had one of the fastest-growing labor markets in the region, the state's small population means Minnesota's 7.3% growth equates to almost five times more jobs than South Dakota added.

South Dakota's population has grown by 26% since 2001 to more than 900,000, compared to Minnesota's 5.8 million people.

"We're going to break a million soon," McEntaffer said.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public af-

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fairs 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.

Third tribal nation bans Gov. Kristi Noem from reservation

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 10, 2024 9:14 AM

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, headquartered in North Dakota but with reservation borders expanding into South Dakota, is the third tribal nation to ban Gov. Kristi Noem from tribal lands this year.

The Wednesday announcement comes after the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council voted to banish Noem for "racially charged" comments she made last month at two town halls alleging some tribal leaders are "personally benefitting" from Mexican drug cartel activity on reservations.

"Governor Kristi Noem's wild and irresponsible attempt to connect tribal leaders and parents with Mexican drug cartels is a sad reflection of her fear-based politics that do nothing to bring people together to solve problems," said Tribal Chairwoman Janet Alkire in a news release. "Rather than make uninformed and unsubstantiated claims, Noem should work with tribal leaders to increase funding and resources for tribal law enforcement and education."

Five tribes have demanded an apology from Noem since then. She has not issued an apology, but has issued press releases calling on tribes to "banish the cartels."

The Oglala Sioux Tribe banished Noem in February and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe banned her last week.

Coupled with her calls to banish the cartels, Noem has encouraged tribal governments to participate in partnerships with the South Dakota Highway Patrol to provide temporary law enforcement on reservations. She has also called on the federal government to audit funding to the tribes to "determine the scope" of underfunding to the nine tribal nations in South Dakota.

Noem crashed the Pe Sla Sacred Sites quarterly meeting in Rapid City at the end of march, where tribal leaders were meeting with representatives of the U.S. Forest Service to discuss co-stewardship efforts in the Black Hills. Oglala Sioux Tribe President Frank Star Comes Out said afterward that Noem's surprise appearance was a distraction.

Noem was previously banned from the Pine Ridge Reservation in 2019 after signing two bills into law regulating protests over the Keystone XL pipeline.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.

COMMENTARY

Republicans vs. uber-Republicans: Primary slugfest approaches

DANA HESS

The 21 subjects turned in by lawmakers as potential summer study subjects made for interesting reading.

The Legislature's Executive Board hit on two subjects to study this summer. One is a study of the accuracy and consistency of property tax assessments. Don't get too excited; your property taxes aren't likely to go down as a result of this study.

The other subject they chose is a bit of a twin bill: Studying state government's ability to wrangle artificial intelligence as well as keeping teenagers away from online pornography.

The other 19 subjects ran a wide gamut from keeping an eye on prison construction costs to reform of the state's eminent domain laws to planning for the boom in growth at Ellsworth Air Force Base (the board approved the formation of a Select Committee on Legislative Relationships with Ellsworth Air Force Base,

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to "allow the Legislature to be proactive and better engage with issues that arise year-round").

Some legislators explained their potential studies in detail. Others, when asked to explain the "scope of study requested," used just one sentence to make their point. Compared with the longer explanations, it looked like homework done by students who were trying to get by with just the bare minimum of work.

Most of the subjects dealt with policy in one form or another. However, one was more politics than policy. That one-sentence wonder came from Rep. Mary Fitzgerald, a Republican from Spearfish. Her proposed study: "The use of legislative caucuses as a tool for coalition-building."

Since Fitzgerald used only one sentence to describe her proposed summer study, it's difficult to read between the lines. So at this point you would be excused if you had some questions: Why does a political party caucus need to study coalition-building? If they're all in the same party, doesn't that mean that they're automatically in the same coalition?

The answer in South Dakota is, well, when it comes to Republicans, not really.

Members of the super majority in the Legislature all call themselves Republicans, but some of them like to think of themselves as more Republican than others. Some are your father's Republicans with a fondness for lower taxes, smaller government and fewer regulations. Others are that and more with a penchant for passing up vaccines, adding more firepower to the Second Amendment and trashing the transgendered.

These two factions of the same party are about to meet head-on in June in 43 Republican primaries, 17 for places on the Senate ballot and 26 primary races in the House.

It doesn't take too long a memory to recall the Republican primary election season from two years ago. That's when mailboxes were clogged with cards and flyers claiming that one or more of the candidates on the Republican primary ballot just wasn't conservative enough to serve the people of South Dakota.

The outfits paying for those mailings were often out-of-state entities. That didn't keep them from developing a keen interest in who was best suited to serve in our Legislature.

It's not just primary election season that brings out these uber-Republicans. The state party is still reeling from its convention two years ago when conservative activists almost managed to stick Gov. Kristi Noem with her primary opponent Steven Haugaard as her lieutenant governor. It took a personal plea from Noem to get the conventioners to give her the candidate she wanted, Larry Rhoden.

At the same convention, ultra conservatives came close to sinking the attorney general candidacy of Marty Jackley with a strong showing by one of the minions from the failed AG tenure of Jason Ravnsborg. In a move that's still dripping with irony, that convention did manage to cast aside the party's incumbent secretary of state candidate in favor of an election denier.

During the last two legislative sessions, Republicans have struggled to find a way to wrest power from the party convention and the activists that flock to it. Some in the GOP would rather that the party's candidates for constitutional offices be on the primary ballot.

Maybe the Republican Party does need a few lessons in coalition building. Or perhaps its members would be better off with a history lesson about the traditional priorities and ideals of the GOP.

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

Thune and Rounds vote to repeal Biden rule tracking tailpipe emissions

Three Democrats and an independent join all Republicans in support of resolution

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 10, 2024 5:12 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate voted Wednesday to roll back a Transportation Department rule that targeted greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles traveling on highways.

The rule, issued by the Transportation Department's Federal Highway Administration in December, established greenhouse gas reductions as one of the 18 performance measures for state transportation departments and local planning organizations to track.

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The 53-47 vote, with four Democrats and independents joining all Republicans (including South Dakota's John Thune and Mike Rounds), was approved via a resolution under the Congressional Review Act, which allows Congress to undo new executive branch rules. Only a majority vote is required.

The White House said Wednesday that President Joe Biden will veto the measure if it passes both chambers of Congress. The margin in the Senate's vote Wednesday would be well below the two-thirds standard needed to override a veto.

The U.S. House, where Republicans enjoy a slim majority, is likely to approve the measure.

Democrats Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, Sherrod Brown of Ohio and Jon Tester of Montana, and independent Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, voted along with every Senate Republican to approve the resolution.

Brown and Tester are among the most vulnerable Democratic senators facing reelection this year. Manchin and Sinema are leaving the Senate rather than seeking reelection.

The rule went into effect Jan. 8. It required state transportation departments and metropolitan planning organizations to make reducing carbon emissions a goal and established a method to measure the amount of carbon emitted from vehicles on their highway systems.

The rule did not mandate what the state and local goals must be.

It was issued as part of a Biden administration goal to reduce carbon emissions at least 50% below 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

The transportation sector is the largest single source of carbon emissions in the country, accounting for 28% of emissions nationwide in 2021, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Rule overstepped law, critics say

North Dakota Republican Kevin Cramer introduced the resolution to repeal the rule. Every Republican and Manchin signed on as cosponsors.

In floor speeches Wednesday, Manchin, a frequent Biden administration critic, and Cramer said the rule was illegal.

The small group of senators that wrote the bipartisan infrastructure law in 2021 considered and declined to grant the FHWA the authority to establish greenhouse gas emissions monitoring, Manchin, who was among that group, said.

"This rule is yet another example of the administration's trying to implement the law they wanted instead of the one they got," he said.

Mandating lower emissions would not be possible without limiting driving, Manchin added, which is unworkable in rural states such as West Virginia.

Removing a tool

In a statement ahead of the Senate vote, the White House said the vote to repeal the rule would only take away a tool for states to measure greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

The resolution repealing the rule "would remove GHG emissions management from the suite of national highway performance measures – in other words, removing a common-sense, good-government tool for transparently managing transportation-related GHG emissions and informing transportation investment decisions," the statement of administration policy read.

Beth Osborne, the director of the left-leaning transportation policy think tank Transportation for America, criticized the move in a post to X.

"If we can't even track our emissions from transportation, we certainly can't do anything about it," Osborne said. "What are 53 members of the Senate so afraid that the public might learn?"

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

U.S. Senate spending panel calls for extending pay boost for Forest Service firefighters

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 10, 2024 3:40 PM

WASHINGTON — Members of a U.S. Senate Appropriations subcommittee said at a hearing Wednesday they were focused on keeping pay for wildland firefighters at the higher level set in a 2021 law and urged Forest Service Chief Randy Moore to focus on ways to maintain a healthy timber industry.

Senate Interior-Environment Subcommittee Chair Jeff Merkley, an Oregon Democrat, and ranking Republican Lisa Murkowski of Alaska said they were committed to funding Forest Service programs to prevent wildfires and to maintain healthy forests.

As the temporary additional funding to the agency appropriated in the 2021 bipartisan infrastructure law and Democrats' 2022 climate, taxes and policy law approaches an end, lawmakers and the agency must work on a way to continue strong funding for an agency that is on the front lines of a changing climate, Merkley said.

"Those are one-time investments," Merkley said of the additional spending passed in recent years. "And those funds are running out."

For the upcoming fiscal year, President Joe Biden requested \$6.5 billion for the agency's base programs and an additional \$2.4 billion from the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve, a separate fund to pay for emergency responses to wildfire.

The administration has three major goals in its fiscal 2025 request, Moore said: modernizing the wildland firefighters workforce, continuing spending that is critical to the agency's mission and granting equitable access to the benefits of national forests.

Firefighter pay

As the threat of wildfire grows due to climate change, federal funding to prevent catastrophic fires must be robust, Merkley and Murkowski said.

That includes the temporary added funding for firefighter pay. Bills in the Senate and House to make the new levels permanent have been introduced but not voted on in either chamber.

The temporary raise is set to expire in fiscal 2025, Murkowski said.

Arizona independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, who sponsored the Senate bill to permanently raise firefighter pay, asked how the temporary status is affecting morale of Forest Service firefighters.

Moore answered that firefighters are happy to have higher pay, but because the higher level is temporary, it does not count toward firefighters' retirement, which makes them hesitant to commit to a long-term career.

"It affects morale, as you can imagine," Moore said. "It's really critical that we have a permanent solution here."

Moore told New Mexico Democrat Martin Heinrich that the agency has "every intention" of reaching the goal of hiring 570 new full-time firefighters.

Viable industry

Merkley, Murkowski and Moore agreed on the need for a sustainable timber industry.

"I can tell you with certainty that if we do not have a vibrant timber industry, we're not going to be able to manage our forests and make them healthy and resilient," Moore said in response to a question from Merkley. "So, it's in all of our best interest to work together as partners."

Murkowski applauded Moore's comment on the importance of the industry but said the Forest Service was in danger of overprotecting forests, leading to economic harms in logging communities and more difficulty in managing forests.

"If we don't have viable timber harvest in our national forest, this whole thing just doesn't work if we're going to manage them properly," she told Moore. "I'm concerned that Forest Service has gone from the

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mission and the focus of multiple use, including timber harvest.”

Biden administration policies to protect old-growth forests, including in the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska, have harmed the industry without sufficiently replacing lost opportunities, she added.

Murkowski singled out the Biden administration’s failure to establish a small-growth harvesting program to replace old-growth harvesting in Tongass, calling it “more than just another broken promise” that has led to an “all-but-dead” timber industry in the region.

“It is frustrating that the administration doesn’t seem to agree that the southeast part of the state can have both a healthy forest and a sustainable timber industry,” she said. “I think the administration can and should do more to provide opportunity there for the people of Southeast Alaska.”

Moore told Murkowski he was “committed to working with” her on the issue.

Mass timber

Merkley called on Moore to lead a push to expand the use of mass timber, a product made from smaller wood elements and used to build beams and columns that are usually constructed with steel or concrete.

Mass timber is seen as a benefit to the timber industry because it uses small-diameter trees and other materials that are otherwise not highly sought after.

The process is good for carbon sequestration, Merkley said. Many states have updated building codes to promote mass timber, but state codes don’t apply to federal buildings. He asked Moore to “help lead the Forest Service into being kind of a driver of the mass timber movement.”

Moore said he agreed with the advantages of the material and would continue to push the issue. He noted the tallest building in the world built with mass timber is a 26-story building in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

‘When are you coming to North Dakota?’

In addition to Murkowski’s questioning on Southeast Alaska, other senators pressed Moore to visit their states or attend to specific local issues.

New Mexico Democrat Martin Heinrich asked about how to prevent cattle with grazing allotments in Santa Fe National Forest from trespassing on the Via Caldera National Preserve. Heinrich’s office receives numerous complaints about it, he said, adding he’d be happy to work to increase any funding needed for a stronger fence.

“Chief, thanks for being here today. Good to see you again. When are you coming to North Dakota?” Republican Sen. John Hoeven said to open his questioning of Moore.

He asked Moore to recommit to providing \$4.5 million for the state to address noxious weeds. The state has received \$1.7 million so far, he said.

Moore replied that the funds were intended to flow over several years, and would continue.

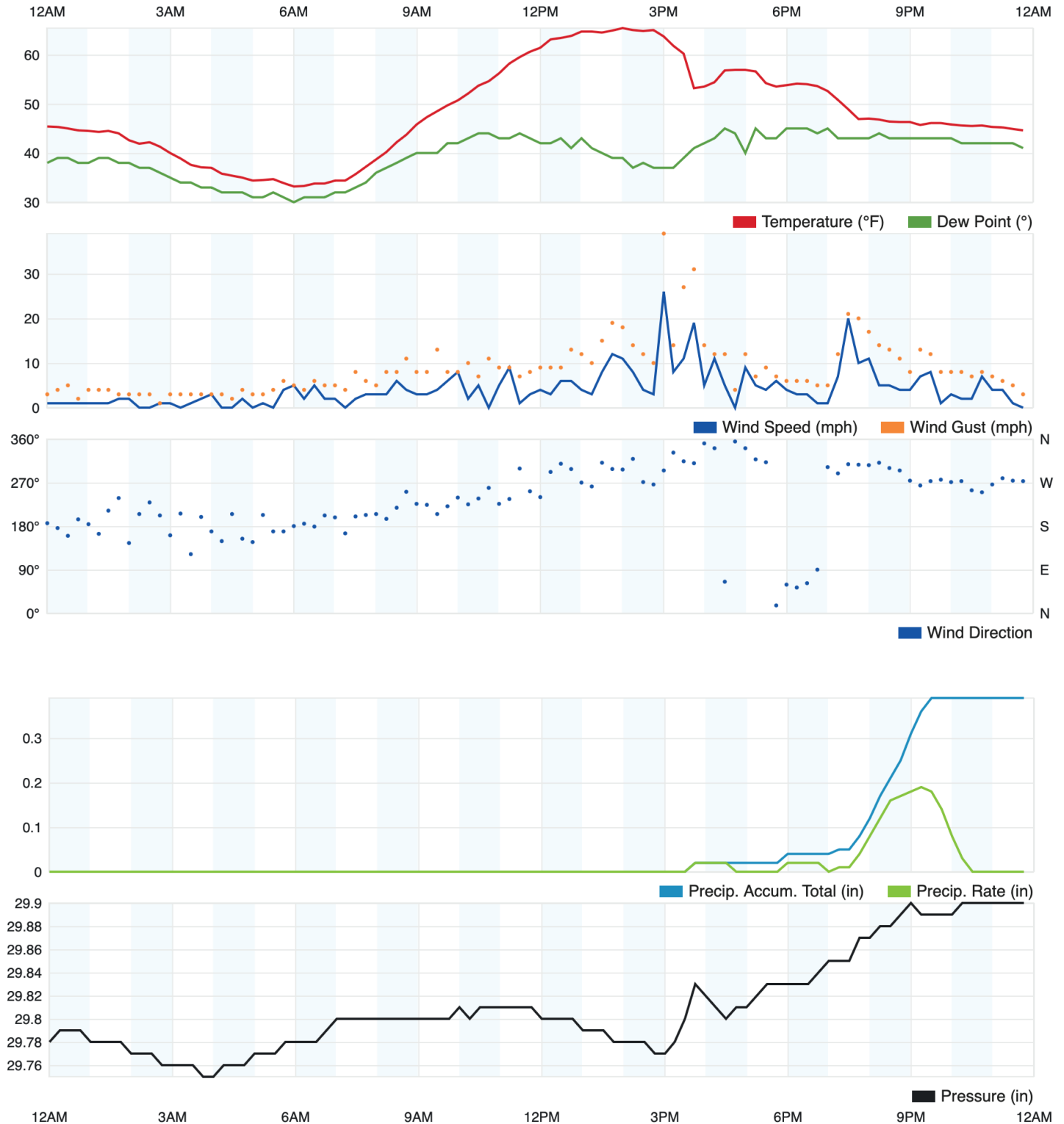
Montana Democrat Jon Tester asked Moore to review a \$5 million fine the Forest Service levied against an electric cooperative in his state. The fine would force the cooperative, which has about \$15 million of annual revenue, to close, Tester said.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thursday



Breezy.
Slight Chance
Showers then
Mostly Sunny

High: 57 °F

Thursday
Night



Partly Cloudy
and Blustery
then Clear

Low: 30 °F

Friday



Sunny

High: 63 °F

Friday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 42 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 79 °F



Above Average
Temperatures



Gusts Between 30 and
35 mph
Thursday

Thursday

- **Elevated fire danger** west
river
- Partly cloudy with
scattered showers over east

Highs 53-58°F

Friday

- Clear skies, dry

Highs 59-69°F

Saturday

- **Unseasonably warm**, dry

Highs 75-82°F



April 11, 2024 3:16 AM

Winds and low relative humidities will increase fire danger today around and west of the Missouri River. East of the James River scattered showers/storms are expected to continue through the day. Friday we start our weekend warm up. Saturday will be the warmest with highs close to 80!

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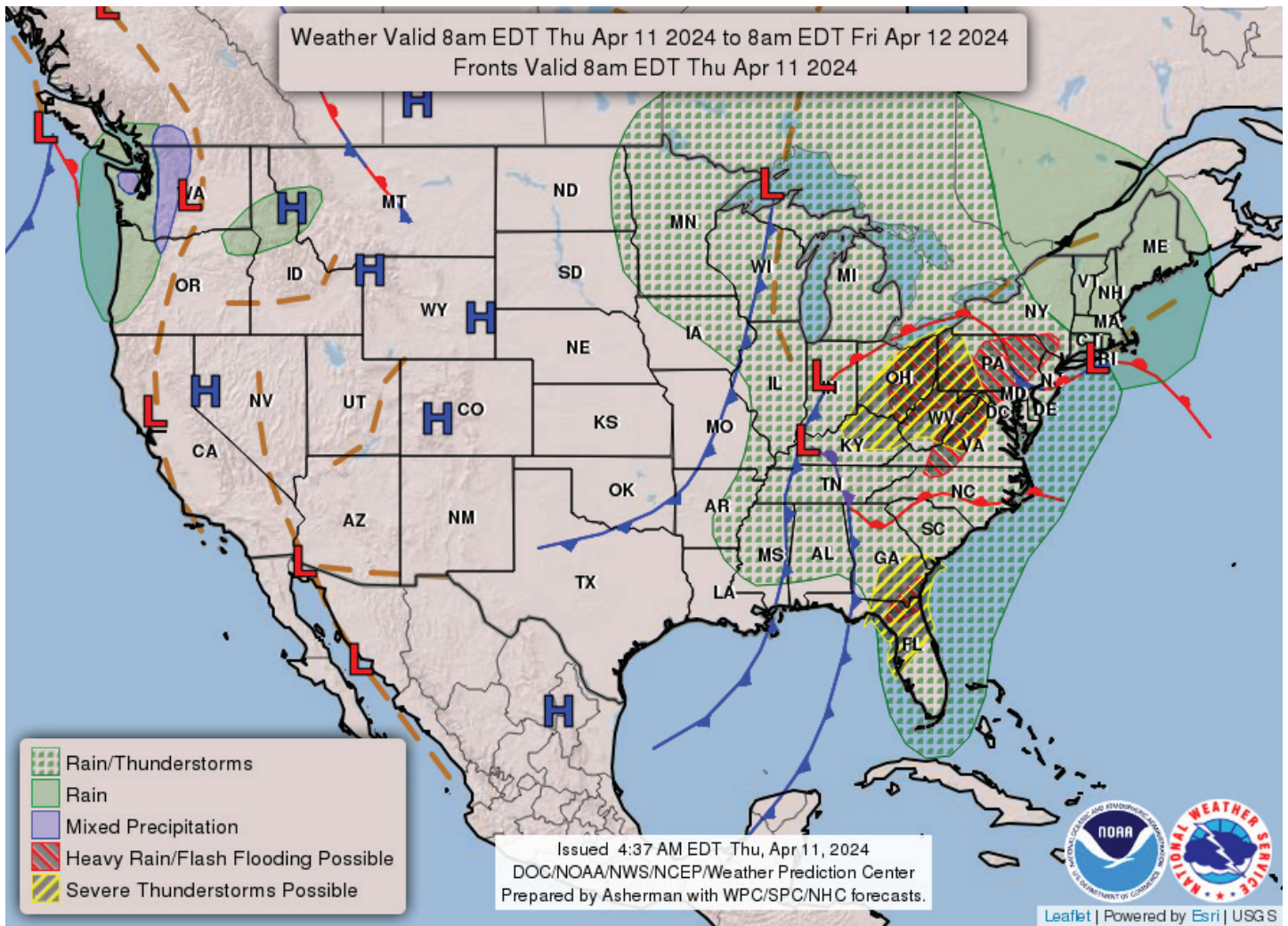
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 66 °F at 1:57 PM
Low Temp: 33 °F at 6:06 AM
Wind: 39 mph at 3:01 PM
Precip: : 0.38

Day length: 13 hours, 24 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1910
Record Low: 8 in 1939
Average High: 56
Average Low: 30
Average Precip in April.: 0.51
Precip to date in April: 0.96
Average Precip to date: 2.52
Precip Year to Date: 1.86
Sunset Tonight: 8:15:27 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:49:13 am



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Today in Weather History

April 11, 1993: Heavy wet snow fell over a portion of northeast South Dakota, mainly east of Aberdeen and north of Watertown. The snowfall began on the 10th and carried into the 11th. 2 to 6 inches were reported across the area. However, 8 inches were reported near Summit and 7 inches near Sisseton.

April 11, 2007: A large upper-level low-pressure area wrapped snow into far northeast South Dakota. Snow covered and slushy roads resulted from the heavy wet snow making travel tough. Some schools and events postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Sisseton and Milbank, 7 inches at Castlewood, 8 inches at Bryant, 9 inches at Toronto and Clear Lake, and 12 inches at Summit.

April 11, 2008: An intense area of low pressure moving northeast across the Central Plains brought widespread heavy snow and strong winds to parts of central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 3 to 16 inches combined with north winds of 30 to 45 mph brought widespread blowing and drifting snow with blizzard conditions and heavy drifting affecting much of the area. A few thunderstorms also occurred, bringing rapid snowfall rates to some areas. Many vehicles went into the ditch with many other accidents occurring. Most roads became nearly impassable with no travel advised for parts of central and much of northeast South Dakota. There were many people stranded to wait out the storm. Also, many schools and businesses were closed on Friday the 11th. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Faulkton, Ree Heights, Kidder, and Hayti, 7 inches at Garden City, Castlewood, Miller, Britton, and near Stephan, 9 inches at Waubay, Bryant, and Roy Lake, 10 inches at Big Stone City and Milbank, 11 inches at Wilmot, Watertown, and Victor, 15 inches at Summit, and 16 inches at Clear Lake.

1965: Severe thunderstorms in the Upper Midwest spawned fifty-one tornadoes killing over 250 people and causing more than 200 million dollars damage. Indiana, Ohio and Michigan were hardest hit in the "Palm Sunday Tornado Outbreak". Although no F5's were officially reported, at least 22 were rated as F3 or F4. This is the third deadliest day for tornadoes on record, behind the Super Outbreak of 4/3/1974, and the outbreak that included the Tri-State Tornado of 3/18/1925. Dr. Ted Fujita discovered suction vortices during the Palm Sunday tornado outbreak. It had been believed the reason why tornadoes could hit one house and leave another across the street completely unscathed was because the whole tornado would "jump" from one house to another. However, the actual reason is because most of the destruction is caused by suction vortices: small, intense mini-tornadoes within the main tornado.

1987 - Ten days of flooding in the northeastern U.S. finally came to an end. Damage from flooding due to rain and snow melt ran into the billions of dollars. The collapse of the New York State Thruway Bridge over Schoharie Creek claimed ten lives. (Storm Data)

1988: Sixteen cities in the western U.S., nine in California, reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 95 degrees at Sacramento and 96 degrees at Bakersfield, California were the warmest of record for so early in the season.

1989: Forty-four cities in the south central and eastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 25 degrees at Conway Arkansas, 29 degrees at Dallas/Fort Worth Texas, and 22 degrees at Ozark Arkansas, were April records. Lows of 26 degrees at Hot Springs Arkansas and 31 degrees at Shreveport Louisiana equaled April records.

1990 - While showers produced heavy rain over much of the northeastern U.S., heavy snow blanketed northern Maine, with 13 inches reported at Telos Lake. Strong southwesterly winds accompanying the rain and snow gusted to 68 mph at the Blue Hill Observatory in Massachusetts. Rainfall totals of 1.04 inch at Pittsburgh PA and 1.52 inch at Buffalo NY on the 10th were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2012: The deluge began around 3:30 a.m. Over the next few hours, fast-moving hailstones pummeled the area north of Amarillo, Tex., which had lately been sitting in dust due to a lack of precipitation, according to the news organization. The hail mixed with melting hail turning the dust to mud and the mix create four-foot high mounds that shut down a major highway for the next 18 hours.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

IT'S IN THE DETAILS

A lady was traveling in Europe with a group of her friends. On one of their shopping trips, she discovered a beautiful diamond and ruby bracelet that captured her heart. She sent a message to her husband that read, "Have found a beautiful bracelet. It costs \$75,000. May I buy it for our anniversary?"

He responded, "No, price too high."

Somehow, in the transmission, his comma after the "No" was deleted. She read it as "No price too high" meaning that she was worth it. So, she purchased the bracelet.

In a letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "Focus on reading the Scriptures to the church." The "Scriptures" that Paul was talking about were the writings of the Old Testament. It was all that the early church had to read at that time. But they read them faithfully to learn of the Messiah who had been sent from God.

We, too, must do the same: focus on reading the Scriptures. We need to read the Old as well as the New Testament for there are rich rewards to be found in both. It is necessary for us read, focus, study, understand and apply the principles of His Word that God has revealed to us for our daily walk.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to hide Your Word in our hearts that we might not sin against You and live our lives as Your disciples. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them. 1 Timothy 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:
04.09.24

34 43 51 52 69 25

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$120,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 4
Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.10.24

2 15 21 33 47 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,800,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 19
Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.10.24

2 4 7 12 39 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 34 Mins 22
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.10.24

4 11 12 27 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$54,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 34
Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.10.24

8 21 24 57 64 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 3
Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.10.24

6 7 12 24 36 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$46,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 3
Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Fox Rothschild: Hideaway Hills Mine Collapse Court Reopens Class

RAPID CITY, S.D.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Apr 10, 2024--

A court in South Dakota responsible for overseeing the class action lawsuit involving the Hideaway Hills subdivision in Black Hawk, S.D., has reopened the class, allowing homeowners that previously decided against joining the litigation to change their minds and take part in the case.

The court's order opens a window until May 1, 2024, during which homeowners can rescind their decision to opt out.

"I don't know that I have ever seen anything like this in a class action case before. It really is extraordinary," says attorney Kathleen Barrow of Fox Rothschild, who along with attorney David Grant Crooks represents families in the 158 homes that are part of the Hideaway Hills subdivision.

The case dates to April 2020, when a sinkhole opened in the neighborhood, revealing an abandoned state-operated gypsum mine. South Dakota for generations operated gypsum mines to support its for-profit cement company. In 1994, when the state sold the land to a private developer, it retained rights to the subsurface minerals.

The court's decision to reopen the class comes as geotechnical testing on soils in the neighborhood shows high concentrations of water-soluble gypsum in the fill dirt the state used to reclaim the area just before homes were built. Testing shows the soils utilized by the state for mine reclamation contain an average of about 25 percent pulverized gypsum, with a high of 80 percent. Some residents are living in areas with 40 feet of fill dirt, a majority of which is pulverized gypsum, which could disintegrate and collapse when it is exposed to moisture.

The case is Andrew Morse and John and Emily Clarke et al. v. State of South Dakota, No. 46CIV-20-000295 in the Meade County 4th Judicial District. It is set for trial later this year.

Which states could have abortion on the ballot in 2024?

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

A push to ask Arizona voters to add a right to abortion to the state constitution took on new stakes this week when the state's Supreme Court ruled that the state can enforce a ban on abortion in all stages of pregnancy.

Arizona is one of several states where abortion might be on the ballot this year.

Across the country, there have been increased efforts to put abortion rights questions to voters since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and removed the nationwide right to abortion.

Since that 2022 decision, most Republican-controlled states have new abortion restrictions in effect, including 14 that ban it at every stage of pregnancy. Most Democrat-dominated states have laws or executive orders to protect access.

Additionally, voters in seven states — California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Ohio and Vermont — have sided with abortion rights supporters on ballot measures.

It's not clear yet how many states will vote on measures to enshrine abortion access in November. In some, the question is whether amendment supporters can get enough valid signatures. In others, it's up to the legislature. And there's legal wrangling in the process in some states.

Some of the efforts have already failed to reach ballots. Wisconsin's legislative session ended without a state Senate vote on a measure that the House approved to ask voters to ban abortion after 14 weeks. A Louisiana measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution died in committee and one in Maine effectively died when it fell short of receiving the approval of two-thirds of the House.

WHAT'S SECURELY ON 2024 BALLOTS?

FLORIDA

The state Supreme Court ruled on April 1 that a ballot measure to legalize abortion until viability could

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go on the ballot despite a legal challenge from state Attorney General Ashley Moody, who argued that there are differing views on the meaning of "viability" and that some key terms in the proposed measure are not properly defined.

Advocates collected nearly a million signatures to put a state constitutional amendment to legalize abortion until viability on the ballot, surpassing the nearly 892,000 required.

Sixty percent of voters would have to agree for it to take effect.

Abortion is legal in Florida through the first 15 weeks of pregnancy. But a separate April 1 state Supreme Court ruling upholding the current law triggers a 2023 law would drop that to six weeks — often before women know they're pregnant — to take effect on May 1.

MARYLAND

Maryland voters this year will also be asked whether to enshrine the right for women to end their pregnancies in the state's constitution in a ballot question put before them by lawmakers last year. The state already protects the right to abortion under state law and Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-1. Abortion is allowed in Maryland until viability.

NEW YORK

New York lawmakers agreed to ask voters to bar discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, pregnancy outcome and reproductive healthcare as part of a broader equal protection amendment. It would also bar discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin and disability. The language of the constitutional amendment does not mention abortion specifically. Abortion is allowed in New York law until viability.

WHERE ELSE COULD ABORTION BE ON THE BALLOT IN 2024?

ARIZONA

A signature drive is underway to add a constitutional right to abortion in Arizona. Under the measure, the state would not be able to ban abortion until the fetus is viable, with later abortions allowed to protect a woman's physical or mental health. Supporters must gather nearly 384,000 valid signatures by July 4. An April 9 Arizona Supreme Court decision allows a ban on abortion throughout pregnancy to be enforced starting April 23.

ARKANSAS

Proponents of an amendment to allow abortion in many cases have until July 5 to gather nearly 91,000 valid signatures to get it on the Nov. 5 ballot. The measure would bar laws banning abortion in the first 20 weeks of gestation and allow abortion later in pregnancy in cases of rape, incest, threats to the woman's health or life, or if the fetus would be unlikely to survive birth. Because it allows limits as soon as 20 weeks, the proposal does not have the support of Planned Parenthood Great Plains, which includes Arkansas. The state has a ban on abortion at all stages of pregnancy with narrow exceptions.

COLORADO

There are dueling efforts on abortion in Colorado. One measure would create a voter-initiated law to ban access throughout pregnancy and the other would amend the state constitution to protect it. The abortion rights amendment would also require Medicaid and private health insurance to cover abortion.

Supporters on each side have to submit more than 124,000 signatures to get a measure on the ballot. The deadlines to submit them are April 15 for the ban measure and April 26 for the one to ensure access. Amending the constitution in Colorado requires the support of 55% of voters. But the ban could be passed with a simple majority. Abortion is legal at all stages of pregnancy in Colorado.

MISSOURI

Pushes are underway to get multiple abortion-related ballot measures before Missouri voters in 2024. Abortion rights advocates in Missouri for Constitutional Freedom are pushing for one that would guarantee abortion is legal until viability.

A group of moderate Republicans are taking a different approach and calling for an amendment that would allow abortion up to 12 weeks, and after that only under limited exceptions.

Supporters of each measure must submit more than 171,000 valid signatures by May 5 to get them on the ballot.

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And some Republican lawmakers have launched a legislative process to put before voters a measure to enshrine a ban on abortion in the state constitution. It would expand provide an exception to allow for immediate abortion to save the life of the woman or in cases "for which a delay will create a serious risk of substantial and irreversible physical impairment of a major bodily function." Further exceptions would have to be approved by voters.

Abortion is currently banned in Missouri at all stages of pregnancy with limited exceptions.

MONTANA

Abortion rights proponents in Montana have proposed a constitutional amendment that would bar the government from denying the right to abortion before viability or when it's necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant person. After a legal battle over the ballot language, the Montana Supreme Court on April 1 wrote its version of the language that would appear on the ballot if supporters gather more than 60,000 signatures by June 21. Abortion is legal until viability in Montana under a 1999 Montana Supreme Court opinion.

NEBRASKA

Advocates are trying to collect about 125,000 signatures needed by July 5 to put a constitutional amendment before voters to protect abortion rights until fetal viability. Under a law adopted last year, abortion is banned after 12 weeks, with some exceptions.

NEVADA

Signatures are being gathered to place an abortion access amendment on Nevada's ballot in November. Under the amendment, abortion access for the first 24 weeks of pregnancy or later to protect the health of the pregnant person, which is already assured under a 1990 law, would be enshrined in the constitution. It requires more than 102,000 valid signatures by June 26 to place the measure on the ballot. Voters would need to approve it in both 2024 and 2026 to change the constitution.

The measure is one of several attempts by Nevada abortion rights groups to get a ballot question before voters in 2024 or 2026.

SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota advocates are attempting to gather more than 35,000 signatures by May 7 to get a measure on the ballot that would loosen restrictions but does not go as far as many abortion rights advocates would like. It would ban any restrictions on abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. It would allow the state in the second trimester to "regulate the pregnant woman's abortion decision and its effectuation only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman." An abortion ban would be allowed in the third trimester, as long as it included exceptions for the life and health of the woman. Planned Parenthood is not supporting the measure.

Abortion in the state is now banned at all stages of pregnancy with narrow exceptions.

WHICH STATES CAN BUT LIKELY WON'T PUT ABORTION ON THE BALLOT?

There are some states where the balance of power or other circumstances make abortion-related measures — most of them seeking bans or limits — unlikely to reach voters in 2024.

IOWA

To put a constitutional amendment on the ballot, Iowa lawmakers have to approve it in two consecutive sessions. In 2021, both chambers advanced a resolution to find there is no constitutional right to abortion in the state. Republicans control the Legislature and governor's office, but the amendment has not emerged as a priority this year and Gov. Kim Reynolds has said she'll let the issue move through the courts rather than pushing for a vote. Abortion is currently banned 20 weeks into pregnancy. A stricter ban, which would kick in when cardiac activity can be detected, around six weeks, has been adopted but put on hold by a court.

PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania has a similar process as Iowa with a similar amendment to find no constitutional right to abortion up for consideration. Lawmakers passed it in 2022. But Democrats have since taken control of the state House, making it unlikely to pass, which is required before it can go to a statewide referendum. Abortion is now legal in Pennsylvania up to 24 weeks of pregnancy.

A bill passed by Kansas lawmakers would make it a crime to coerce someone into an abortion

By JOHN HANNA AP Political Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — People who make physical or financial threats against others in Kansas to force them to get an abortion could spend a year in prison and be fined up to \$10,000 under one of several proposals pushed through the Republican-controlled Legislature.

Abortion opponents in Kansas pursued the measure against abortion “coercion,” increased reporting on abortion and aid to anti-abortion centers providing free counseling, supplies and other services to pregnant women and new mothers because of the state’s unusual legal climate. While the Legislature has strong anti-abortion majorities, the state Supreme Court declared in 2019 that the state constitution protects abortion rights, and Kansas residents decisively affirmed that position in a statewide August 2022 vote.

Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly is a strong supporter of abortion rights, and many lawmakers expect her to veto all the anti-abortion measures reaching her desk. All the proposals appear to have or be close to having the two-thirds majorities necessary in both chambers to override a veto.

“The vast majority of Kansans agree that too many women feel abortion is their only choice,” Danielle Underwood, a spokesperson for Kansans for Life, the state’s most politically influential anti-abortion group, said in an email Tuesday.

Kelly has until Monday to act on the bill that would make coercing someone into an abortion a specific crime. She also faces a Monday deadline on a bill that would require abortion providers to ask their patients why they want to terminate their pregnancies and then report the information to the state health department.

Anti-abortion groups and lawmakers have said they’re pushing for the state to collect the data to better guide state policy. Abortion rights supporters contend the measure is unnecessary and would violate patients’ privacy.

Two other measures will arrive on Kelly’s desk by Monday. One would grant up to \$10 million a year in income tax credits for donors to anti-abortion counseling centers and exempt the centers from paying the state’s 6.5% sales tax on what they buy. In addition, a provision in the next state budget would give those centers \$2 million in direct aid, continuing a policy enacted last year over Kelly’s veto.

Abortion opponents argue that such measures simply help vulnerable women. But Democrats have been frustrated with GOP lawmakers’ push for new legislation and aid to the anti-abortion counseling centers, arguing that it breaks faith with voters’ support for abortion rights.

“Abortion is a legal health service,” Democratic state Rep. Tom Sawyer, of Wichita, said when the House debated the tax breaks for the centers and their donors. “If you want to try to encourage people to not get abortions, it’s your right to do it, but we should not be so generously funding them with state funds.”

Abortion opponents hope that lawmakers will approve one other bill they’re backing, to ensure that prospective mothers can seek child support back to conception to cover expenses from a pregnancy. The House approved it before the Legislature adjourned early Saturday for a spring break, and the Senate could consider it after lawmakers reconvene April 25 to wrap up business for the year.

Abortion opponents portrayed the bill on coercion as something to help the state fight human trafficking and other crimes, such as the rape of a child. The bill’s definition of coercion includes destroying or hiding someone’s passport or immigration papers or threatening to harm or “physically restrain” them to force them into getting an abortion.

“This is something that flows from criminal activities,” state Sen. Mike Thompson, a Kansas City-area Republican, said during the final debate on the bill.

The measure is similar to laws in Idaho, Indiana, Michigan and South Dakota.

Critics said the Kansas bill is written broadly enough that a doctor who is seen as too aggressive in arguing that an abortion is necessary could fall under it. So, too, they said, could a husband who threatens divorce or a live-in boyfriend who threatens to leave if a woman decides to have a child.

“I just see how this could turn into a real, real sticky situation for a lot of young people,” Rep. Ford Carr, another Wichita Democrat, said during his debate.

The Latest | Israeli strike kills 3 sons of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh

By The Associated Press undefined

An Israeli airstrike in Gaza killed three sons of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, according to Israel's army and the militant group's official media, with Haniyeh accusing Israel of acting in "the spirit of revenge and murder."

The Israeli military confirmed it carried out the attack Wednesday, saying the men conducted militant activity in central Gaza, without elaborating. Hamas said four of the leader's grandchildren were also killed.

In an interview with the Al Jazeera satellite channel, Haniyeh said the killings would not pressure Hamas into softening its positions amid ongoing cease-fire negotiations with Israel, brokered by international mediators.

Haniyeh left Gaza in 2019 and lives in exile in Qatar. The top Hamas leader in Gaza is Yehya Sinwar, who masterminded the Oct. 7 attack on Israel that sparked the war. Some 1,200 people were killed in the attack, mostly civilians, and Palestinian militants took around 250 people hostage.

Israel's six-month war against Hamas has devastated the Gaza Strip and pushed the tiny Palestinian territory into a humanitarian crisis, leaving more than 1 million people on the brink of starvation.

Israeli bombardments and ground offensives have killed at least 33,360 Palestinians and wounded 74,993, Gaza's Health Ministry says. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tally, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Currently:

- An Israeli airstrike in Gaza kills 3 sons and 4 grandchildren of top Hamas leader
- Trump renews criticism of Jewish voters who back Biden: 'Should have their head examined'
- Muslims worldwide celebrate Eid al-Fitr in the shadow of Gaza's misery
- Israel threatens to strike Iran directly if Iran launches attack from its territory
- At U.N. court, Germany rejects allegations that it's facilitating acts of genocide in Gaza
- Find more AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

GERMAN AIRLINE LUFTHANSA EXTENDS FLIGHT SUSPENSIONS TO AND FROM TEHRAN

BERLIN – German airline Lufthansa says its flights to and from Tehran will remain suspended through Saturday "due to the current situation in the Middle East."

Lufthansa, which usually has five flights per week from Frankfurt to Tehran, suspended its flights on Saturday, initially until Thursday.

In an emailed response to a query about the flights on Thursday, the company didn't elaborate on its concerns about the situation. Iran has vowed to retaliate against Israel over an attack on its consulate in Damascus earlier this month.

Lufthansa said that flights by its Austrian Airlines subsidiary to Tehran continue because, due to the shorter flight time from Vienna, it can run the flights as "daylight operations," with the plane returning immediately after arrival in Tehran.

It said that flights to and from Frankfurt had to be canceled "as Lufthansa has decided not to let the crew disembark in Tehran."

BIDEN VOWS 'IRONCLAD' SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL AS IRAN THREATENS TO STRIKE

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Joe Biden emphasized his country's "ironclad" support for Israel on Wednesday as Iran vows to retaliate for this month's deadly strike on the Iranian Consulate in Syria.

The U.S. military believes Israel carried out the airstrike on Iran's diplomatic station, which killed two top generals and others. Israel has not commented on the attack, however Tehran says it holds Israel responsible. The White House says it had no prior knowledge of the operation, but has repeatedly promised to back Israel in the face of Iranian threats.

Biden spoke Wednesday alongside Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who is in Washington for an official visit.

"We also want to address the Iranian threat — to launch a significant attack on Israel," Biden said dur-

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ing a joint news conference.

"Our commitment to Israel's security against these threats from Iran and its proxies is ironclad. We say it again, ironclad, and we're going to do all we can to protect Israel's security," Biden said.

Earlier Wednesday, Iran's supreme leader repeated a promise to retaliate against Israel. And Israel's foreign minister threatened Wednesday that his country's forces would strike Iran directly if the Islamic Republic launched an attack from its territory against Israel.

Since the Israel's war in Gaza against Hamas began six months ago, there have been near-daily exchanges of fire along the Israel-Lebanon border between Israeli forces and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran.

Tehran also backs an umbrella group of Iraqi militias that have attacked U.S. military bases and positions in Syria and Iraq.

FOOD AID CHARITY SAYS ISRAELI STRIKE WOUNDED PALESTINIAN STAFFER ON SAME DAY AS DEADLY CONVOY ATTACKS

JERUSALEM — A off-duty Palestinian staff member with the food aid charity World Central Kitchen was badly wounded by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza on April 1, the same day seven other staffers were killed in a separate Israeli attack.

The staffer, identified only as Amro, was pulled from the rubble of a residence after an Israeli strike hit a nearby mosque, in the vicinity of a WCK warehouse and kitchen, the charity said Wednesday. He spent time in a coma, and WCK said is still recovering in a hospital from head and hand injuries.

Amro had joined WCK at the start of the year, the charity said in a statement, and before the war had owned a sweet shop that was destroyed by Israeli bombardments.

The statement said Amro turned down chances to leave Gaza several times: "He always says, 'I am here serving people hot food every day. I will not leave my job and let them suffer.'"

On April 1, Israeli airstrikes on an aid convoy killed seven WCK workers — six foreigners and one Palestinian. Israel says the deaths were a tragic error. WCK laid the blame squarely on Israel's military, saying the army had coordinated over the movement of the cars carrying the workers as they left northern Gaza.

Nearly every day, strikes level buildings with Palestinian families inside, killing men, women and children, with no explanation of the target or independent accountability over the proportionality of the strike. Israel blames the large number of civilian casualties on militants, saying they operate among the population.

ISRAEL PLANS TO OPEN A NEW ENTRY POINT FOR AID INTO NORTHERN GAZA INSTEAD OF THE DAMAGED EREZ CROSSING

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israel will soon open a new crossing to deliver humanitarian aid into the hard-hit northern Gaza Strip, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Wednesday.

Gallant's announcement comes at a time of heavy U.S. pressure to increase the flow of desperately needed aid into Gaza. Earlier Wednesday, U.S. President Joe Biden said Israel's efforts are still "not enough."

Israeli officials say the new crossing will be built instead of using the damaged Erez crossing, which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged last week to open. Erez was destroyed by Hamas militants during their Oct. 7 attack and was designed for pedestrians, not cargo, according to COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs.

An official from COGAT said the new crossing would be close to the beachfront on Gaza's northern tip. It was not clear exactly when the crossing will be opened. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

At a briefing with reporters, Gallant said Israel plans a number of additional steps to improve the humanitarian situation — including using its port in the southern Israeli city of Ashdod to accept aid shipments for the Palestinians. It was not clear when the port would open.

He also says Israel will allow Jordan to deliver more aid to Gaza, and that Israel is working with the U.S. on infrastructure projects such as new water lines.

Israel faces pressure from the U.S. to increase aid into Gaza, where its offensive has wreaked an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Aid groups say supplies are not reaching people quickly enough, blaming Israeli restrictions and noting that thousands of trucks are waiting to enter Gaza.

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Associated Press writer Julia Frankel contributed.

BIDEN SAYS ISRAEL STILL NOT DOING ENOUGH TO GET AID INTO GAZA

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Joe Biden said Wednesday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not doing enough to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza.

“We’ll see what he does in terms of meeting the commitments that he made to me,” Biden said at the White House.

Biden has warned Netanyahu that future U.S. support for the war depends on swift implementation of new steps to protect civilians and aid workers. Although the flow of trucks has increased since Biden spoke with Netanyahu last week, the U.S. president said Israel should open another access point in Gaza’s north.

Israel halted aid deliveries to Gaza in the early days of the war, but under U.S. pressure has slowly increased the number of trucks allowed to enter the territory.

Still, aid groups say supplies are not reaching desperate people quickly enough, blaming Israeli restrictions and noting that thousands of trucks are waiting to enter Gaza. Countries have attempted less efficient ways to deliver aid, including airdrops and by sea.

IRAN’S SUPREME LEADER AGAIN PLEDGES RETALIATION AGAINST ISRAEL OVER KILLINGS OF IRANIAN GENERALS

JERUSALEM — Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei again promised to retaliate against Israel over the killings of Iranian generals in a strike on its consulate in Syria.

Khamenei spoke Wednesday at a prayer ceremony in Tehran celebrating the first day of the Eid al-Fitr holiday and the end of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. He said last week’s attack on Iran’s consulate in Damascus, widely blamed on Israel, was akin to an attack on Iranian territory. “The evil regime must be punished, and it will be punished,” he added.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz appeared to respond, posting on social platform X in both Farsi and Hebrew: “If Iran attacks from its territory, Israel will respond and attack in Iran.”

The strike on April 1 killed 12 people, including seven Iranian Revolutionary Guard members, four Syrians and a Hezbollah militia member. Israel has not acknowledged its involvement, though it has been bracing for an Iranian response to the attack, which marked a significant escalation in their long-running shadow war.

Iran supports anti-Israeli militant groups like Hamas, who are battling Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, as well as the Lebanese Hezbollah.

BIDEN CALLS NETANYAHU’S APPROACH TO WAR AGAINST HAMAS A ‘MISTAKE’

TEL AVIV, Israel — U.S. President Joe Biden says Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s approach to the war against Hamas is mistaken.

Biden’s remarks in an interview that aired late Tuesday deepen an already growing rift between the two staunch allies over the war, now in its seventh month. Those disagreements have compounded over the worsening humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, Israel’s expected offensive in the city of Rafah and Israel’s recent strike on a humanitarian convoy, which killed seven aid workers, most of them foreigners.

“What he’s doing is a mistake. I don’t agree with his approach,” Biden told U.S. Spanish-language broadcaster Univision in an interview conducted on April 3, two days after the strike on the World Central Kitchen aid convoy. He was responding to a question about whether Netanyahu was letting political considerations steer his decision-making in the war.

Biden said Israel should agree to a cease-fire, flood beleaguered Gaza with aid for the next six to eight weeks and allow regional countries to help distribute the aid. “It should be done now,” he said.

The Biden administration was outspoken in its support for Israel following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, but in recent weeks has stepped up criticism of Israel’s approach to the war.

Israel and Hamas are holding talks meant to bring about a cease-fire in exchange for the release of hostages, although the sides still disagree on key terms of a deal.

Ukraine's parliament passes a controversial law to boost much-needed conscripts and fill army ranks

By SAMYA KULLAB and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's parliament passed a law Thursday that will govern how the country recruits new conscripts, following months of delay and after thousands of amendments were submitted to water down the initial draft.

Lawmakers dragged their feet for months over the law, which is expected to be unpopular. The law was spurred by a request from Ukraine's military, which wanted to mobilize up to 500,000 more troops, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in December.

Exhausted soldiers, on the front lines since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, had no means to rotate out for rest, while many thousands of Ukrainian men evade the draft.

The law was passed to the backdrop of an escalating Russian campaign that has devastated Ukraine's energy infrastructure in recent weeks. Authorities said Russian overnight missile and drone attacks again struck infrastructure and power facilities across several regions and completely destroyed the Trypilka thermal power plant, the largest power generating facility in Kyiv region.

The law brings into effect a host of changes to the current system by expanding the powers of Ukrainian authorities to issue draft notices using an electronic system.

Incumbent army chief Oleksandr Syrskyi and Zelenskyy have since revised that figure after conducting an audit, saying the number needed was not as high because soldiers can be rotated from the rear.

Former army commander Valerii Zaluzhnyi's dismissal from his post was reportedly over the mobilization issue.

The vote came after parliament's defense committee removed a key provision from the draft Tuesday that would ensure the rotation of servicemen after 36 months of combat, a move that surprised some lawmakers as it had been a promise of the Ukrainian leadership.

Lawmaker Oleksii Honcharenko said in a Telegram post that he was shocked by the move to remove the provision. It was likely taken out because, considering the scale and intensity of the war against Russia, it would prove difficult to implement. Ukraine already suffers from a lack of trained recruits capable of fighting, and demobilizing soldiers on the front lines now would deprive Ukrainian forces of their most capable fighters.

On Wednesday, the parliamentary defense committee instructed the Defense Ministry to draft a comprehensive bill on demobilization of military personnel within the next eight months, news reports cited ministry spokesperson Dmytro Lazutkin as saying.

In nighttime missile and drone attacks, at least 10 of the strikes damaged energy infrastructure in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said more than 200,000 people in the region were without power and Russia "is trying to destroy Kharkiv's infrastructure and leave the city in darkness."

In the Odesa region, four people were killed and 14 injured in Russian missile strikes Wednesday evening, said regional governor Oleh Kiper.

Energy facilities were also hit in the Zaporizhzhia and Lviv regions.

Biden administration moves to force thousands more gun dealers to run background checks

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thousands more firearms dealers across the U.S. will have to run background checks on buyers when selling at gun shows or other places outside brick-and-mortar stores, according to a Biden administration rule that will soon go into effect.

The rule aims to close a loophole that has allowed tens of thousands of guns to be sold every year by unlicensed dealers who don't perform background checks to ensure the potential buyer is not legally pro-

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hibited from having a firearm.

It's the administration's latest effort to combat the scourge of gun violence across the country. But in a contentious election year, it's also an effort to show voters — especially younger ones for whom gun violence deeply resonates — that the White House is trying to stop the deaths.

"This is going to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers and felons," President Joe Biden said in a statement. "And my Administration is going to continue to do everything we possibly can to save lives. Congress needs to finish the job and pass universal background checks legislation now."

The rule, which was finalized this week, makes clear that anyone who sells firearms predominantly to earn a profit must be federally licensed and conduct background checks, regardless of whether they are selling on the internet, at a gun show or at a brick-and-mortar store, Attorney General Merrick Garland told reporters.

Biden has made curtailing gun violence a major part of his administration and reelection campaign, creating the first-ever White House office of gun violence prevention, and urging Congress to ban so-called assault weapons — something Democrats shied from even just a few years ago.

But the rule is certain to prompt criticism from gun rights advocates who believe the Democratic president has been unfairly and unlawfully targeting gun owners.

The Biden administration first proposed the rule in August, after the passage of the most sweeping gun violence bill in decades, a bipartisan compromise in response to the massacre of 19 students and two teachers at a Uvalde, Texas elementary school.

That law expanded the definition of those who are "engaged in the business" of selling firearms, and are required to become licensed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and therefore run background checks. The rule, which implements the change in the law, will take effect 30 days after it is published in the Federal Register.

There are already roughly 80,000 federally licensed firearms dealers. Administration officials believe the new rule will impact more than 20,000 dealers who have gotten away with selling firearms without a license and performing background checks at places like gun shows and over the internet by claiming they aren't "engaged in the business" of firearm sales.

"This final rule does not infringe on anyone's Second Amendment rights, and it will not negatively impact the many law-abiding licensed firearms dealers in our nation," ATF Director Steve Dettelbach said. "They are already playing by the rules."

It comes a week after the ATF released new data that shows more than 68,000 illegally trafficked firearms in the U.S. came through unlicensed dealers who aren't required to perform background checks over a five-year period. The ATF report also showed that guns trafficked through unlicensed dealers were used in nearly 370 shootings between 2017 and 2021.

Gun control advocates have praised the regulation as a big step toward their goal of universal background checks for gun buyers — a Democratic priority that has been blocked by Republicans in Congress.

"Expanding background checks and closing the gun seller loophole is a massive victory for safer communities — and it was made possible thanks to the tireless advocacy of our grassroots movement," Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director of Moms Demand Action, said in an emailed statement.

But the rule is likely to be challenged in court by gun rights activists, who have previously sued over other ATF rule changes that they argue infringe on gun rights. The National Shooting Sports Foundation, an industry trade group, previously warned of a court challenge if the rule was finalized as written.

Biden administration officials said they are confident the rule — which drew more than 380,000 public comments — would withstand legal challenges.

A mission of mercy, then a fatal strike:

How an aid convoy in Gaza became Israel's target

By JACK JEFFERY, JULIA FRANKEL and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

DEIR AL BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — It was hours after sundown when the eight aid trucks drove from the makeshift jetty, cobbled together from tons of wreckage left across Gaza by months of war.

The trucks were escorted by three vehicles carrying aid workers from the World Central Kitchen, the relief organization that had arranged the massive food shipment. All seven aid workers wore body armor. The cars were marked, including on the roof, with the group's emblem, a multi-colored frying pan.

After a grueling crawl along a beaten-up road, it seemed like mission accomplished. The convoy dropped off its precious cargo at a warehouse, and the team prepared to head home.

There wasn't much more than a sliver of moon that night. The roads were dark, except for occasional patches where light spilled from buildings with their own generators.

By a few minutes after 10 p.m., the convoy was moving south on Al Rashid Street, Gaza's coastal road.

The first missile struck a little more than an hour later.

Soon after, all seven aid workers were dead.

A crucial effort to ward off famine

The path to the April 1 attack started months ago, as aid groups desperately looked for ways to feed millions cut off from regular food deliveries. Gaza was sealed off by Israeli forces within hours of the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants that ignited the war. Since then, more than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 80% of the enclave's 2.3 million people displaced.

Hunger has become commonplace. Famine, U.N. officials warn, has become increasingly likely in war-ravaged northern Gaza.

With the situation growing increasingly dire and deliveries through Gaza's land crossings with Israel and Egypt limited, World Central Kitchen pioneered an effort to deliver aid by sea.

The relief group, founded in 2010 by celebrity chef José Andrés, has worked from Haiti to Ukraine, dispatching teams that can quickly provide meals on a mass scale in conflict zones and after natural disasters. The group prides itself on providing food that fits with local tastes.

Its first ship arrived in mid-March, delivering 200 tons of food, water and other aid in coordination with Israel.

On March 30, three ships and a barge left Cyprus carrying enough rice, pasta, flour, canned vegetables, and other supplies to prepare more than 1 million meals, the group said.

Two days later, some of those supplies were ready to be trucked into the heart of Gaza.

April 1, 10 p.m.

The eight-truck World Central Kitchen convoy turned south after leaving the pier, driving along the coast toward a warehouse about 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) away.

The World Central Kitchen team traveled in two armored cars and a third unarmored vehicle. They included a Palestinian driver and translator, Saifeddin Issam Ayad Abutaha, a young businessman whose mother was hoping to find him a wife; and security consultant Jacob Flickinger, a dual American-Canadian citizen saving to build a house in Costa Rica where he and his girlfriend could raise their 18-month-old son.

There were three British military veterans, an Australian beloved for her big hugs and relentless work ethic, and a Polish volunteer heralded by the group as "builder, plumber, welder, electrician, engineer, boss, confidant, friend, and teammate."

The team had established a "deconfliction" plan ahead of time with Israeli forces, so the military would know when they would travel and what route they would take.

Aid organizations use complex systems to try to keep their teams safe. Typically, they send an advance plan to COGAT, the Israeli defense agency responsible for Palestinian civilian matters, which then shares it with the Israeli army, said a military official. As deliveries unfold, the aid groups can communicate with the military in real time, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with army briefing rules.

Workers for World Food Kitchen carry GPS transmitters that track their locations, according to an or-

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ganization employee who spoke on condition of anonymity because he didn't have permission to talk to the media.

Many relief workers have expressed concerns about the deconfliction system.

"It hasn't been working well," said Chris Skopec, a Washington-based official with the aid group Project Hope, citing poor communication and coordination. "And when it doesn't work well, people die."

10:28 p.m.

Things began to go wrong a few miles from the pier.

An Israeli officer, watching from a drone, saw what he thought was a Hamas gunman climb on top of one truck and fire into the air.

Gunmen are a daily part of life in Gaza, which has been run by Hamas since 2007. They could be Hamas fighters, members of Hamas-supervised police or privately employed guards.

Some relief groups hire armed guards, aid officials said, often plain-clothed men who brandish guns or large sticks to beat back hungry Palestinians trying to snatch supplies.

The World Central Kitchen sometimes uses armed guards, the employee said, though it was not clear if they had been employed for the April 1 convoy. The employee and other aid officials insisted their guards were not part of Hamas or its militant ally, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, but did not elaborate on the guards' affiliation. Despite such denials, it is unlikely anyone riding on top of an aid truck wouldn't have at least tacit permission from Hamas.

Israeli military spokesperson Maj. Nir Dinar said soldiers try to distinguish between armed security guards and Hamas militants when determining targets. He said he could not rule out the possibility that the armed men accompanying the World Central Kitchen convoy were security guards.

10:46 p.m.

In grainy aerial footage that the Israeli military showed to journalists, people swarmed around the convoy when it arrived at a World Central Kitchen warehouse in the city of Deir Al-Balah. The military said two to four of the men were armed, though that was not clear in the aerial footage shown to journalists.

10:55 p.m.

The trucks remained at the warehouse but the three World Central Kitchen vehicles began driving south to take the workers to their accommodations. Another vehicle that had joined the convoy – which the Israelis say held gunmen – drove north toward another warehouse.

Planning messages sent by World Central Kitchen had made clear that the aid workers would not remain with the trucks but would travel on by car.

But Israeli officials say the soldiers monitoring the convoy had not read the messages. Then, an Israeli officer believed he saw someone step into a World Central Kitchen vehicle with a gun.

"The state of mind at that time was the humanitarian mission had ended and that they were tracking Hamas vehicles with at least one suspected gunman," said retired Gen. Yoav Har-Evan, who led the military's investigation into the strike.

Because of the darkness, Israeli officials said the World Central Kitchen emblems on the cars' roofs were not visible.

11:09 p.m.

The first missile struck one of the armored cars as it drove along the coastal road. Aid workers fled the damaged vehicle for the other armored car, which Israel struck two minutes later.

The survivors piled into the third vehicle. It, too, was soon hit.

Abdel Razzaq Abutaha, the brother of the slain driver, said other aide workers called him after the blasts, telling him to check on his brother.

He repeatedly called his brother's phone. Eventually a man answered, and said he'd found the phone around 200 meters (656 feet) from one of the bombed-out cars.

"Everyone in the car was killed," the man told Abdel Razzaq.

Abdel Razzaq had believed his brother's work would be safe

"It is an American international institution with top coordination," he said. "What is there to fear?"

The aftermath

When the sun rose the next morning, the burned husks of the three vehicles were spread along a mile or so of Al Rashid Street.

Israel quickly admitted it had mistakenly killed the aid workers, and launched an investigation.

"It's a tragedy," military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari told reporters. "It shouldn't have happened. And we will make sure that it won't happen again."

On Friday, Israel said it had dismissed two officers and reprimanded three more for their roles, saying they had mishandled critical information and violated the army's rules of engagement, which require multiple reasons to identify a target.

In the wake of the deadly strike, Israel and COGAT have set up a special "war room" where COGAT and military officials sit together to streamline the coordination process.

Israel's promises have done little to quiet growing international anger over its offensive.

More than 200 aid workers have been killed in Gaza since the war began, including at least 30 killed in the line of duty, according to the U.N. Many aid workers noted the convoy strike stood out only because six of those killed were not Palestinian.

Aid workers are, in many ways, a hard community to define. Some are experts who earn a good living traveling from disaster to disaster. Some are volunteers looking for a way to do some good. Some are driven by ambition, others by faith.

In Gaza, though, everyone understood the risks.

John Flickinger's son Jacob, a Canadian military veteran, was a member of the convoy's security team.

"He volunteered to go into Gaza, and he was pretty clear-eyed," Flickinger told the AP. "We discussed it, that it was a chaotic situation."

While World Central Kitchen and a few other aid groups suspended operations in Gaza after the attacks, many of the largest organizations, including Doctors Without Borders and Oxfam International, barely slowed down.

The convoy strike "wasn't outside of things that we could have predicted, unfortunately," said Ruth James, a UK-based Oxfam regional humanitarian coordinator. Except for one cancelled trip, Oxfam staff simply kept working.

"What keeps them going?" she asked. "I can only guess."

Shouts of 'Shame! Shame!' erupt in Arizona House as fight over abortion ban engulfs lawmakers

By ANITA SNOW and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The Arizona Legislature devolved into shouts of "Shame! Shame!" on Wednesday as Republican lawmakers quickly shut down discussion on a proposed repeal of the state's newly revived 1864 law that criminalizes abortion throughout pregnancy unless a woman's life is at risk.

The state Supreme Court cleared the way on Tuesday for enforcement of the pre-statehood law. Arizona abortion providers vowed Wednesday to continue service until they're forced to stop, possibly within weeks.

State legislators convened as pressure mounted from Democrats and some Republicans, including former President Donald Trump, for them to intervene.

House Democrats and at least one Republican tried to open discussion on a repeal of the 1864 abortion ban, which holds no exceptions for rape or incest. GOP leaders, who command the majority, cut it off twice and quickly adjourned for the week. Outraged Democrats erupted in finger-waving chants of "Shame! Shame!"

Republican state Rep. Teresa Martinez, of Casa Grande, said there was no reason to rush the debate. She accused Democrats of "screaming at us and engaging in extremist and insurrectionist behavior on the House floor." The GOP-led Senate briefly convened without debate on abortion.

"We are navigating an extremely complex, emotional and important area of law and policy," said Martinez, the GOP House whip. "In my opinion, removing healthy babies from healthy mothers is not health care nor

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reproductive care. Pregnancy is not an illness. It should be celebrated. It is an abortion that terminates life.” Democratic legislators seized on national interest in the state’s abortion ban.

“We’ve got the eyes of the world watching Arizona right now,” said Democratic state Rep. Stephanie Stahl Hamilton, of Tucson. “We know that the Supreme Court decision yesterday is extreme. And we know that should the 1864 ban on abortion remain a law in Arizona, people will die.”

Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs called inaction on the proposed repeal unconscionable.

“Radical legislators protected a Civil War-era total abortion ban that jails doctors, strips women of our bodily autonomy and puts our lives at risk,” she said.

Three Republican legislators openly oppose the ban, including state Rep. Matt Gress, of Phoenix, who made a motion Wednesday to repeal the law. In a statement, he said the near-total ban “is not reflective of the values of the vast majority of our electorate, regardless of political affiliation. ... This issue transcends all.”

According to AP VoteCast, 6 out of 10 Arizona voters in the 2022 midterm elections said they would favor guaranteeing legal abortion nationwide. The state recorded 11,530 abortions in 2022, the last data available, according to Arizona’s Department of Health Services.

At Camelback Family Planning in Phoenix, where about one-fourth of Arizona abortions are performed, registered nurse Ashleigh Feiring said abortion services were still available and that staff hope emergency legislation will avoid interruptions or closure.

“Our plan is to stay open as long as possible,” Feiring said. “Our clinic has been shut down twice in the last four years, but we’ve always resumed service.”

At the same time, anti-abortion groups including SBA Pro-Life America urged Arizona residents to oppose a proposed ballot initiative aimed at placing abortion rights in Arizona’s state constitution.

“They would wipe away all pro-life laws put in place by the Legislature, reflective of the will of the people,” SBA President Marjorie Dannenfelser said in a statement.

Hobbs, however, predicted that outrage will motivate voters to enshrine abortion rights directly in state law.

“The fight is not over, for sure” she said.

Grace Harders drove around metro Phoenix on Wednesday looking for an opportunity to sign an abortion rights petition. She said she wouldn’t know what to do if she had an unplanned pregnancy but knew she’d be scared.

“I’m a pro-choice person, and I want to ensure the right for all women,” Harders said.

Abortion rights advocates said they’ve gathered more than 500,000 signatures for the petition from the Arizona for Abortion Access campaign — far above what they need to add a ballot question asking voters to approve a constitutional amendment protecting the right to abortion until viability, when a fetus could survive outside the womb.

Arriving for a campaign fundraiser in Atlanta, Trump said the Arizona court decision went too far and called on state lawmakers to change it even as he defended the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 ruling overturning of Roe v. Wade.

“It’s all about states’ rights,” the former president told supporters and journalists. “It’ll be straightened out.”

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022, most Republican-controlled states have started enforcing new bans or restrictions, and most Democratic-dominated ones have sought to protect abortion access.

Meanwhile, voters have sided with abortion rights supporters on statewide ballot measures in California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Ohio and Vermont.

The Arizona ruling suggests doctors can be prosecuted for performing the procedure. The 1864 law carries a sentence of two to five years in prison for doctors or anyone else who assists in an abortion.

“Physicians are now on notice that all abortions, except those necessary to save a woman’s life, are illegal,” the Arizona Supreme Court said in its decision, adding that additional criminal and regulatory sanctions may apply to abortions performed after 15 weeks, the state’s previous time limit for the procedure.

Beyond that, the court ruling also ignited concern that enforcement might interfere with handling miscarriages.

Enforcing the 1864 law won't begin for at least two weeks. However, plaintiffs in the case — including Planned Parenthood — said the delay could last up to two months, based on an agreement reached in a related case.

Planned Parenthood has said it will offer abortion services up to 15 weeks of pregnancy for at least two more months, in line with an agreement in the related case.

Doctors and clinic leaders are anticipating a scramble across the Southwest region to accommodate Arizona residents as they travel out of state for abortion care.

Cambodia's relocation of people from UNESCO site raises concerns

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

RUN TA EK, Cambodia (AP) — It's been more than a year since Yem Srey Pin moved with her family from the village where she was born on Cambodia's Angkor UNESCO World Heritage site to Run Ta Ek, a dusty new settlement about 25 kilometers (15 miles) away.

A tattered Cambodian flag flaps gently in the scorching midday sun on her corner lot, its depiction of the Angkor Wat temple barely still visible, while her brother scoops water from a clay cistern onto a neighbor's cow that he tends during the day.

Hers is one of about 5,000 families relocated from the sprawling archaeological site, one of Southeast Asia's top tourist draws, by Cambodian authorities in an ongoing program that Amnesty International has condemned as a "gross violation of international human rights law." Another 5,000 families are still due to be moved.

The allegations have drawn strong expressions of concern from UNESCO and a spirited rebuttal from Cambodian authorities, who say they're doing nothing more than protecting the heritage land from illegal squatters.

Yem Srey Pin's single-room home, its reused corrugated steel siding perforated by rust and old nail holes, is a far cry better than the makeshift tent she lived in with her husband and five children when they first arrived, which did little to protect from the monsoon rains and blew down in the winds.

And their 600-square-meter (6,500-square-foot) property is significantly bigger than the 90-square-meter (1,000-square-foot) plot they occupied illegally in the village of Khvean on the Angkor site.

But the 35-year-old is also in debt from building the new house. Her husband finds less construction work nearby and his wages are lower, and there are no wild fruits or vegetables she can forage, nor rice paddies where she can collect crabs to sell at her mother's stand.

"After more than a year here I haven't been able to save any money and I haven't earned anything," she said, as her 12-year-old son rocked her 8-month-old daughter in a hammock in front of a fan to take the edge off midday heat nearing 40 degrees Celsius (topping 100 degrees Fahrenheit).

"Living here is just hand to mouth because the income we do have goes to pay for the rice, food and my children's school."

The Angkor site is one of the largest archaeological sites in the world, spread across some 400 square kilometers (155 square miles) in northwestern Cambodia. It contains the ruins of Khmer Empire capitals from the 9th to 15th centuries, including the temple of Angkor Wat, featured on several Cambodian banknotes, such as the 2,000 riel note depicting rice farmers working fields around the temple, as well as the country's flag.

UNESCO calls it one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia, and it is critical to Cambodia's tourism industry.

When it was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1992, it was named a "living heritage site" whose local population observed ancestral traditions and cultural practices that have disappeared elsewhere.

Still, UNESCO at the time noted that Angkor was under "dual pressures" from some 100,000 inhabitants in 112 historic settlements who "constantly try to expand their dwelling areas," and from encroachment

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from the nearby town of Siem Reap.

Cambodia's answer was a plan to entice the 10,000 families illegally squatting in the area to resettle at Run Ta Ek and another site, as well as to encourage some from the 112 historic settlements to relocate as their families grow in size.

"People got married, they had children, so the number of people were on the rise, including those coming illegally," said Long Kosal, deputy director general and spokesperson for the Cambodian agency known as APSARA that's responsible for managing the Angkor site.

"What we did was that we provided an option."

Cambodia began moving people to Run Ta Ek in 2022, giving those who volunteered to leave their homes in the Angkor area plots of land, a two-month supply of canned food and rice, a tarp and 30 sheets of corrugated metal to use to build a home. Benefits also included a Poor Card, essentially a state welfare program giving them around 310,000 riel (about \$75) monthly for 10 years.

In a November report, Amnesty questioned how voluntary the relocations actually were, saying many people they interviewed were threatened or coerced into moving and that the relocations were more "forced evictions in disguise."

The rights group cited a speech from former Prime Minister Hun Sen in which he said people "must either leave the Angkor site soon and receive some form of compensation or be evicted at a later time and receive nothing."

Amnesty also noted Hun Sen's track record, saying that under his long-time rule Cambodian authorities had been responsible for several forced evictions elsewhere that it alleged "constituted gross violations of human rights." It said Run Ta Ek — with dirt roads, insufficient drainage, poor sanitation and other issues — did not fulfil international obligations under human rights treaties to provide people adequate housing.

That has now changed: Homes with outhouses have been built, roads paved, and sewers installed. Primitive hand pumps made of blue PVC piping provide water, and electricity has been run in.

There's a school, a health center, a temple; bus routes were added, and a market area was built but is not yet operating, Long Kosal said.

Hun Sen's successor, his son Hun Manet, traveled to Run Ta Ek in December to meet with residents and highlight infrastructure improvements in an attempt to allay the growing international concerns surrounding Cambodia's most important tourist site.

He reiterated his father's contention that if the squatters are not removed, the site risks being delisted by UNESCO — something UNESCO has never threatened.

Amnesty itself concedes life has gotten better for the residents of Run Ta Ek, but maintains there are major concerns.

Families have had to take on heavy debt to build even their basic houses, there is little work to be found, and the village — without any significant tree cover — is swelteringly hot during the day and has little shelter from winds or monsoon rains, said Montse Ferrer, the head of Amnesty's research team investigating the Angkor Wat resettlements.

"People no longer have income," she said in an interview in Geneva. "They had a clear source of income at the time — tourism — but also other sources of income linked to the location at Angkor. They are now at least 30 minutes away from the site and can no longer access these sources."

Following Amnesty's scathing report, UNESCO moved up the timeline for Cambodia's submission of its own report on the state of conservation at the Angkor site, specifically asking for the allegations to be addressed.

In that report, submitted to UNESCO in March, Cambodia said it had not violated any international laws with the relocations, saying it was only moving people involved in the "illegal occupation of heritage land" and that in Run Ta Ek many were now property owners for the first time in their lives.

UNESCO said it would not comment on the situation until it has been able to analyze Cambodia's response, but referred The Associated Press to previous comments from Lazare Eloundou Assomo, director of the UNESCO World Heritage Center.

Speaking after Amnesty released its report, he stressed the agency had "always categorically rejected

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the use of forced evictions as a tool for management of World Heritage listed sites.”

“Since the Cambodian authorities announced their population relocation program in 2022, UNESCO has repeatedly and publicly recalled the importance of full respect for human rights,” he said.

Ferrer said Cambodia’s response avoids addressing many of the issues raised by Amnesty, and that UNESCO — even though it says it has little ability to change national policies — has not yet used the significant leverage it does have.

“They could decide that the site is in danger, which they haven’t. They can advise the World Heritage Committee, which is the ultimate body that can decide to take specific action against the state of Cambodia,” she said. “It can also conduct its own investigation and make public recommendations about what the state can be doing.”

Run Ta Ek resident Chhem Hay decided in June to take the opportunity to move from the village where she’d lived since she was a young teenager to the new settlement, enticed by the prospect of owning her own land, and a larger property than she’d ever had.

Her situation has improved since the austere early days living with her husband and teenage daughter in a tent on a dirt lot surviving on rice and prahok — a fermented fish paste that is an inexpensive staple for many Cambodians — paid for by charity handouts from Buddhist monks.

“I didn’t dare eat anything much,” she said. “I tried to save money to buy bricks and sand.”

She was able to get a bank loan for \$1,000 for the materials for a house, and now lives in a single-room brick structure built by her construction-worker husband and other family.

The income from the government Poor Card is enough for the monthly payments on the high-interest 2-year loan, which will have cost her almost double the principle when it’s paid off. She has four chickens and some newly hatched chicks, though had to kill six others to feed the men building her house.

But the 37-year-old lost her work as a garbage collector in her village, and her husband has to drive in to Siem Reap for construction work, setting out at 5 a.m. to make it on time and spending about a third of his 35,000 riel (\$8.70) daily income on gas for his motorbike.

She’s looking forward to the day when the village market is opened, and hopes the government will establish a factory or similar business that will provide jobs.

“I don’t know what will happen at the moment,” she said, standing in her doorway. “I’m just living day by day.”

For residents like Chhem Hay, Cambodia plans to offer vocational training, but does not envision further financial compensation, Long Kosal said.

“Once you have education, once you have a vocational skill, you can find a job easily,” he said. “Where you just remain there waiting for support, then you’re not going to go anywhere. You’re not going to make it.”

Meanwhile, villagers say many have already given up on Run Ta Ek, putting padlocks on their new homes and moving away — presumably back closer to Siem Reap and the Angkor site where it is easier to make a living.

Yem Srey Pin said even though Run Ta Ek has slowly improved since she arrived in February 2023, and her new home will be paid off fairly soon, she’d rather return to her village if it were possible.

But the village of Khvean is already slowly being reclaimed by the jungle, with grass growing through the foundations of houses, all that remains of the former homes. A hair curler, tattered blue playing cards and a trampled baseball cap lying on the ground are among the last vestiges of the lives left behind.

With almost all of the village’s 400 families moving out, aside from a few who work at a neighboring military facility, Yem Srey Pin says there’s nothing left for her there, even if APSARA would let her return.

“I can’t live in my old village alone,” she said.

South Korea's prime minister and top presidential officials offer to resign after election defeat

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's prime minister and senior presidential officials offered to resign en masse Thursday after their ruling party suffered a crushing defeat in parliamentary elections in a huge blow to conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol.

The results of Wednesday's elections mean the liberal opposition forces will prolong their control of parliament until after Yoon completes his single five-year term in 2027. That will likely set back Yoon's domestic agenda and weaken his grip on the ruling party as he faces the opposition's intensifying political offensive during his remaining three years in office, experts say.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo and all senior presidential advisers to Yoon, except those in charge of security issues, submitted their resignations, according to Yoon's office. It didn't immediately say whether Yoon accepted their resignations.

Executive power in South Korea is heavily concentrated in the president, but the prime minister is the No. 2 official and leads the country if the president becomes incapacitated.

Yoon said he will "humbly uphold" the public sentiments reflected in the election outcome and focus on improving people's economic situations and on reforming state affairs, said Yoon's presidential chief of staff, Lee Kwan-seop, in a televised briefing.

In a separate news conference, ruling People Power Party leader Han Dong-hoon said he would step down as well to take responsibility for the election defeat.

"I apologize to the people on behalf of our party, which wasn't good enough to win the people's choices," he said.

With most of the votes counted, the main opposition Democratic Party and its satellite party appeared to have won a combined 175 seats in the 300-member National Assembly. Another small liberal opposition party was expected to win 12 seats under a proportional representation system, according to South Korean media tallies.

Yoon's ruling People Power Party and its satellite party were projected to have obtained 108 seats.

The final official results were expected later Thursday.

Regardless of the results, Yoon will stay in power and his major foreign policies will likely be unchanged. But Wednesday's elections were widely seen as a midterm confidence vote on Yoon, a former top prosecutor who took office in 2022.

Yoon has pushed hard to boost cooperation with the United States and Japan as a way to address a mix of tough security and economic challenges. But he has been grappling with low approval ratings at home and a liberal opposition-controlled National Assembly that has limited his major policy platforms that require legislative approvals.

Hong Sung Gul, a public administration expert at Seoul's Kookmin University, said Yoon will likely find it more difficult to implement business-friendly policies and tax reforms, as the opposition parties are likely to aggressively flex their legislative muscles.

"When it comes to policies, important ones like tax system reforms require legislation. I think there is a high possibility for the opposition parties to put a break on Yoon's such policy agendas," Hong said.

Yoon's critics have accused him of failing to resolve livelihood issues such as soaring prices, refusing to quickly fire some top officials implicated in scandals, and lacking efforts to communicate with opposition leaders for policy coordination.

Earlier this year, Yoon briefly enjoyed rising approval ratings over his strong push to drastically increase the number of medical students despite vehement protests by incumbent doctors. But the doctors' walk-outs eventually left Yoon facing growing calls to find a compromise, with patients and others experiencing delays of surgeries and other inconveniences.

The rival parties' campaigning ahead of Wednesday's elections deepened South Korea's already serious conservative-liberal divide as they exchanged toxic rhetoric and mudslinging.

Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon in the country's most closely fought presidential contest. During the 2022 race, Yoon and Lee and their supporters spent months demonizing each other.

Lee is eyeing another presidential bid. His main potential conservative rival is Han, who also served as Yoon's justice minister. Lee faces an array of corruption investigations that he argues are politically motivated and pushed by Yoon's government.

"The results of the parliamentary elections are not the victory by the Democratic Party, but the great victory by our people," Lee said Thursday. "Now, the elections are over. Both the ruling and opposition political parties must pull together all their strength to resolve economic and public livelihood problems."

The incoming parliament is to begin meeting on May 30 for a four-year term. Of the 300 seats, 254 were elected through direct votes in local districts, and the other 46 by the parties according to their proportion of the vote. The final voter turnout for South Korea's 44 million eligible voters was tentatively estimated at 67%, the highest for a parliamentary election since 1992, according to the National Election Commission.

10 years after Chibok, Nigerian families cope with the trauma of more school kidnappings

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

KADUNA, Nigeria (AP) — His weak body stood in the doorway, exhausted and covered in dirt. For two years, the boy had been among Nigeria's ghosts, one of at least 1,500 schoolchildren and others seized by armed groups and held for ransom.

But paying a ransom didn't work for 12-year-old Treasure, the only captive held back from the more than 100 schoolchildren kidnapped from their school in July 2021 in the northwestern Kaduna state. Instead, his captors hung on, and he had to escape the forests on his own in November.

Treasure's ordeal is part of a worrying new development in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country where the mass abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls a decade ago marked a new era of fear —with nearly 100 of the girls still in captivity. Since the Chibok abductions, at least 1,500 students have been kidnapped, as armed groups increasingly find in them a lucrative way to fund other crimes and control villages in the nation's mineral-rich but poorly policed northwestern region.

The Associated Press spoke with five families whose children have been taken hostage in recent years and witnessed a pattern of trauma and struggle with education among the children. Parents are becoming more reluctant to send their children to school in parts of northern Nigeria, worsening the education crisis in a country of over 200 million where at least 10 million children are out of school — one of the world's highest rates.

The AP could not speak with Treasure, who is undergoing therapy after escaping captivity in November. His relatives, however, were interviewed at their home in Kaduna state, including Jennifer, his cousin, who was also kidnapped when her boarding school was attacked in March 2021.

"I have not recovered, my family has not recovered (and) Treasure barely talks about it," said Jennifer, 26, as her mother sobbed beside her. "I don't think life will ever be the same after all the experience," she added.

Unlike the Islamic extremists that staged the Chibok kidnappings, the deadly criminal gangs terrorizing villages in northwestern Nigeria are mostly former herdsmen who were in conflict with farming host communities, according to authorities. Aided by arms smuggled through Nigeria's porous borders, they operate with no centralized leadership structure and launch attacks driven mostly by economic motive.

Some analysts see school kidnappings as a symptom of Nigeria's worsening security crisis.

According to Nigerian research firm SBM Intelligence, nearly 2,000 people have been abducted in exchange for ransoms this year. However, armed gangs find the kidnapping of schoolchildren a "more lucrative way of getting attention and collecting bigger ransoms," said Rev. John Hayab, a former chairman of the local Christian association in Kaduna who has often helped to secure the release of abducted schoolchildren like Treasure.

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The security lapses that resulted in the Chibok kidnappings 10 years ago remain in place in many schools, according to a recent survey by the United Nations children's agency's Nigeria office, which found that only 43% of minimum safety standards such as perimeter fencing and guards are met in over 6,000 surveyed schools.

Bola Tinubu, who was elected president in March 2023, had promised to end the kidnappings while on the campaign trail. Nearly a year into his tenure there is still "a lack of will and urgency and a failure to realize the gravity of the situation, or to respond to it," said Nnamdi Obasi, senior adviser for Nigeria at the International Crisis Group.

"There is no focused attention or commitment of resources on this emergency," he added.

Treasure was the youngest of more than 100 children seized from the Bethel Baptist High School in the Chikun area of Kaduna in 2021. After receiving ransoms and freeing the other children in batches, his captors vowed to keep him, said Rev. Hayab.

That didn't stop his family from clinging to hope that he would one day return home alive. His grandmother, Mary Peter, remembers the night he returned home, agitated and hungry.

"He told us he was hungry and wanted to eat," she said of Treasure's first words that night after two years and three months in captivity.

"Treasure went through hell," said Rev. Hayab with the Christian association. "We need to work hard to get him out of ... what he saw, whatever he experienced."

Nigerian lawmakers in 2022 outlawed ransom payments, but desperate families continue to pay, knowing kidnappers can be ruthless, sometimes killing their victims when their relatives delay ransom payments often delivered in cash at designated locations.

And sometimes, even paying a ransom does not guarantee freedom. Some victims have accused security forces of not doing anything to arrest the kidnappers even after providing information about their calls and where their hostages were held.

Such was the experience of Treasure's uncle Emmanuel Audu, who was seized and chained to a tree for more than a week after he had gone to deliver the ransom demanded for his nephew to be freed.

Audu and other hostages were held in Kaduna's notorious Davin Rugu forest. Once a bustling forest reserve that was home to wild animals and tourists, it is now one of the bandit enclaves in the ungoverned and vast woodlands tucked between mountainous terrains and stretching across thousands of kilometers as they connect states in the troubled region.

"The whole forest is occupied by kidnappers and terrorists," Audu said as he talked about his time in captivity. His account was corroborated by several other kidnap victims and analysts.

Some of his captors in the forest were boys as young as Treasure, a hint of what his nephew could have become, and a sign that a new generation of kidnappers is already emerging.

"They beat us mercilessly. When you faint, they will flog you till you wake up," he said, raising his hand to show the scars that reminded him of life in captivity.

No one in the Peter family recovered after their experience with kidnapping.

Jennifer says she rarely sleeps well even though it's been almost three years since she was freed by her captors. Her mother, a food trader, is finding it hard to raise capital again for her business after using most of her savings and assets inherited from her late husband to pay for ransoms.

Therapy is so costly, that the church had to sponsor that of Treasure while other members of the family are left to endure and hope they eventually get over their experiences.

"Sometimes, when I think about what happened, I wish I did not go to school," said Jennifer with a rueful grin. "I just feel sorry for the children that are still in boarding school because it is not safe. They are the main target."

Water pouring out of rural Utah dam through 60-foot crack, putting nearby town at risk

By BRITTANY PETERSON and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Workers hurriedly tried to shore up a rural Utah dam after a 60-foot (18-meter) crack sent water pouring into a creek and endangering the 1,800 residents of a downstream town.

State and local leaders don't think the Panguitch Lake Dam is in imminent danger of breaking open but have told residents to be prepared to evacuate if conditions worsen. Emergency management officials passed out a list of evacuation procedures to worried residents at a Wednesday evening town meeting meant to mitigate panic.

"I can't say that the emergency situation is entirely averted, but I'm very, very encouraged by the progress we've made today," Everett Taylor, an assistant state engineer for dam safety with the Utah Division of Water Rights, told residents of the southern Utah town.

Lowering the reservoir to below the affected area will take several days, he said. About 2 feet (61 centimeters) of water remained above the crack as of Wednesday evening, and workers had covered nearly 45 feet (nearly 14-meters) of the crack with boulders.

An ice sheet on the reservoir had pushed up against the dam, causing the top to crack and tilt downstream, with water gushing through the opening, Taylor explained. His staff was able to relieve some of the pressure against the dam by making large cuts across the ice sheet. The ice has now pulled away, and the top of the dam has tilted back, he said.

Local officials discovered the fissure in the upper portion of the dam during an inspection Monday night, and state officials announced it to the public on Tuesday. The state has labeled it a level 2 breach risk — a designation in the middle of the three-prong scale that means there is potential for dam failure.

If a breach occurs, state and local law enforcement will work with the Red Cross to evacuate Panguitch, which sits about 10 miles (16 kilometers) downstream from the dam. Another tiny town, Circleville, is farther downstream and faces a lower flood risk.

Sgt. Jacob Cox of the Utah Highway Patrol, which has been tasked with helping prepare the town in case of an evacuation, told residents Wednesday that they should have ample time to gather their belongings and evacuate safely.

"This can be orderly," he said. "If the notice is that the dam has broken or breached, we have time. The estimation is roughly two hours before those floodwaters are really inundating the town."

Sirens will sound in the event of an evacuation, and officers will go door to door to make sure everyone has cleared the area, Garfield County Sheriff Eric Houston said. A nearby chapel and high school will serve as emergency shelters.

Water is being released at nearly 260 cubic feet (6.5 cubic meters) per second to draw down the reservoir below the crack. Large rocks are being trucked in and placed on the downstream side of the dam to support the wall. No rain is forecast until Saturday.

The dam was built in the late 1800s, but the top portion that cracked was added to the dam in the 1930s and 1940s. There were no previous concerns regarding its structural integrity, and the crack came as a surprise, Taylor said.

Panguitch Mayor Kim Soper urged residents to steer clear of the creek receiving runoff from the reservoir, warning that the water level is much higher than usual and is a danger to children.

He teared up as he recalled standing in the same gymnasium in 2017 to prepare evacuation plans as a wildfire ravaged southern Utah.

"We got through that, and we're going to get through this," Soper assured his community. "It's just a different emergency."

Outside roles by NBC's Conde, others reveal a journalism ethics issue: being paid to sit on boards

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As NBC News Group chairman, Cesar Conde, is already busy overseeing the network's broadcast and digital news operations, along with CNBC, MSNBC, Telemundo and NBC-owned local affiliates.

Yet the executive also has a second paid job. And a third — as a member of Walmart and PepsiCo's corporate boards. The arrangement has raised some ethical concerns, and reveals a potential blind spot for a news business usually very serious about conflicts — real or perceived.

CNN's new chief executive, Mark Thompson, chairs Ancestry.com's board. And although Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, owner of The Washington Post, is not a journalist, the newspaper reminds readers who he is when writing about Amazon. Former President Donald Trump has eagerly pointed out Bezos' dual roles.

A former NBC News executive, Bill Wheatley, recently questioned the propriety of Conde's outside corporate roles at a time when the news division's leadership is already under fire for the hiring and quick dismissal — following a staff revolt — of former Republican National Committee head Ronna McDaniel as a contributor.

"It seemed to me that this was an additional instance of NBC management not understanding the rules by which news leaders are supposed to play," said Wheatley, who retired in 2005 as NBC News' executive vice president and has done work as a news consultant since.

Conde was on the Walmart and PepsiCo boards before he took over as NBC News Group chairman in 2020. The NBC News chief earned \$275,018 from Walmart in 2022 and \$320,000 from PepsiCo, in a combination of cash and stock, according to Salary.com.

NBC wouldn't comment to The Associated Press on the matter.

NO EVIDENCE OF ANY EFFECT ON THE NEWS

There's no evidence that Conde has been involved with any NBC stories involving the two corporations. NBC pointed to a 2021 Wall Street Journal article where the network said he would recuse himself from any reporting on the companies.

Generally, journalists work hard to avoid any situation where a conflict could be alleged, even if the conflict itself does not come to pass: Did reporters, for example, write positive stories on a corporation that a boss is involved with, or ignore bad news because it might anger a superior? Perception can be as important as an actual conflict; some journalists go so far as to not even vote in an election that their outlet is covering.

This holds true within NBC as well. Among other rules: The business network CNBC that Conde oversees forbids its journalists — and their spouses — from owning stock for these reasons.

Recusal is a good step, Wheatley says, but it doesn't cure the conflict.

"In an ideal world, I think news executives should avoid situations like this," said Jane Kirtley, a professor of media ethics and law at the University of Minnesota. If the situation can't be avoided, it's important to disclose it and make clear the companies will face reporting that takes place "without fear or favor," she said.

Kelly McBride, senior vice president and ethics expert at the Poynter Institute, the pre-eminent journalism think tank, agrees that the situation isn't ideal. At the same time, she says, "we don't want executives or anybody in journalism to be a blank slate."

Leaders in journalism have traditionally worked their way up the ranks but that's not always the route anymore. Conde succeeded in corporate, not news, roles at Univision and Telemundo before getting his current job. CNN's Thompson was a top executive at the BBC and The New York Times. At the latter, his biggest achievement was more in business than journalism, shepherding a successful digital transformation.

CNN would not discuss whether Thompson is paid for his Ancestry.com job. Representatives for the company, a private one not obligated to disclose salaries, did not respond to a message. The Glassdoor jobs website estimated directors at Ancestry are paid in a similar six-figure range as the Walmart and PepsiCo jobs.

Thompson has recused himself from any news involving Ancestry or other genealogical companies,

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network spokeswoman Emily Kuhn said.

ABC this spring appointed Debra O'Connell, a longtime executive at the network and its corporate owner, the Walt Disney Co., to a position that oversees ABC News. O'Connell's background is in sales and marketing. She has unpaid positions on boards involving National Geographic and the A&E Networks, both companies affiliated with Disney.

HOW DO JOURNALISTS APPROACH THIS SITUATION?

It's hard to make assumptions about how journalists will deal with knowing the boss has interest in a particular company.

It's human nature to want to avoid problems, although McBride notes that some contrarian journalists who want to prove their independence would dive right in. For example, The Washington Post in 2021 analyzed government data for a story on the dangers faced by Amazon warehouse workers.

Because NBC wouldn't address questions about Conde, it's not clear whether anyone at NBC Universal signed off on him continuing with his paid board positions.

The New York Times and Wall Street Journal are two news companies with conduct codes that specifically talk about such roles. The Times says staff members "may not join boards of trustees, advisory committees or similar groups except those serving journalistic organizations or otherwise promoting journalism education." The Journal says its employees "may not serve as directors, officers, advisors, investors, consultants or partners of any company or venture devoted to profit-making."

Other situations are murkier. ABC, CBS and Fox News said its news leaders don't serve on paid outside corporate boards, but couldn't or wouldn't point to policies that forbid the practice.

The AP employee handbook says that "we avoid addressing, or accepting fees or expense from, governmental bodies; trade, lobbying or special interest groups; businesses or labor groups; or any group that would pose a conflict of interest." Neither AP President Daisy Veerasingham nor Julie Pace, AP's executive editor and senior vice president, sits on any outside boards, a spokeswoman said.

It would make sense for news organizations to make clear policies about service on outside boards, and outline procedures if it is allowed, Poynter's McBride said. "I don't think it was much of an issue in the past," she said. "The nature of news companies has gotten much more complicated that it's likely to become an issue in the future."

News organizations are also left to decide for themselves how to alert readers or viewers of potential conflicts. The Post generally makes clear its owner's ties to Amazon when writing about the company; a September 2023 story about workplace safety included this disclaimer: "Amazon founder Jeff Bezos owns the Washington Post."

The Post knows it is being watched. Trump has called the newspaper the "Amazon Washington Post" on social media and wrote on Twitter in 2018 that "The Washington Post is nothing more than an expensive ... lobbyist for Amazon."

On NBC's "Nightly News" last July, reporter Jacob Burns reported a story about how Walmart was using artificial intelligence to help stock its shelves and change the jobs of some of its employees. Burns quoted a company spokesman saying that AI wouldn't result in job losses, and a business school professor who expressed some skepticism about that.

While Conde's NBC corporate profile mentions his association with Walmart, it was not included as part of Burns' story or in a handful of digital pieces that have run about the company.

A Congressman wanted to understand AI. So he went back to a college classroom to learn

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Don Beyer's car dealerships were among the first in the U.S. to set up a website. As a representative, the Virginia Democrat leads a bipartisan group focused on promoting fusion energy. He reads books about geometry for fun.

So when questions about regulating artificial intelligence emerged, the 73-year-old Beyer took what for

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him seemed like an obvious step, enrolling at George Mason University to get a master's degree in machine learning. In an era when lawmakers and Supreme Court justices sometimes concede they don't understand emerging technology, Beyer's journey is an outlier, but it highlights a broader effort by members of Congress to educate themselves about artificial intelligence as they consider laws that would shape its development.

Frightening to some, thrilling to others, baffling to many: Artificial intelligence has been called a transformative technology, a threat to democracy or even an existential risk for humanity. It will fall to members of Congress to figure out how to regulate the industry in a way that encourages its potential benefits while mitigating the worst risks.

But first they have to understand what AI is, and what it isn't.

"I tend to be an AI optimist," Beyer told The Associated Press following a recent afternoon class on George Mason's campus in suburban Virginia. "We can't even imagine how different our lives will be in five years, 10 years, 20 years, because of AI. ... There won't be robots with red eyes coming after us any time soon. But there are other deeper existential risks that we need to pay attention to."

Risks like massive job losses in industries made obsolete by AI, programs that retrieve biased or inaccurate results, or deepfake images, video and audio that could be leveraged for political disinformation, scams or sexual exploitation. On the other side of the equation, onerous regulations could stymie innovation, leaving the U.S. at a disadvantage as other nations look to harness the power of AI.

Striking the right balance will require input not only from tech companies but also from the industry's critics, as well as from the industries that AI may transform. While many Americans may have formed their ideas about AI from science fiction movies like *The Terminator* or *The Matrix*, it's important that lawmakers have a clear-eyed understanding of the technology, said Rep. Jay Obernolte, R-Calif., and the chairman of the House's AI Task Force.

When lawmakers have questions about AI, Obernolte is one of the people they seek out. He studied engineering and applied science at the California Institute of Technology and earned an M.S. in artificial intelligence at UCLA. The California Republican also started his own video game company. Obernolte said he's been "very pleasantly impressed" with how seriously his colleagues on both sides of the aisle are taking their responsibility to understand AI.

That shouldn't be surprising, Obernolte said. After all, lawmakers regularly vote on bills that touch on complicated legal, financial, health and scientific subjects. If you think computers are complicated, check out the rules governing Medicaid and Medicare.

Keeping up with the pace of technology has challenged Congress since the steam engine and the cotton gin transformed the nation's industrial and agricultural sectors. Nuclear power and weaponry is another example of a highly technical subject that lawmakers have had to contend with in recent decades, according to Kenneth Lowande, a University of Michigan political scientist who has studied expertise and how it relates to policy-making in Congress.

Federal lawmakers have created several offices — the Library of Congress, the Congressional Budget Office, etc. — to provide resources and specialized input when necessary. They also rely on staff with specific expertise on subject topics, including technology.

Then there's another, more informal form of education that many members of Congress receive.

"They have interest groups and lobbyists banging down their door to give them briefings," Lowande said.

Beyer said he's had a lifelong interest in computers and that when AI emerged as a topic of public interest he wanted to know more. A lot more. Almost all of his fellow students are decades younger; most don't seem that fazed when they discover their classmate is a congressman, Beyer said.

He said the classes, which he fits in around his busy congressional schedule — are already paying off. He's learned about the development of AI and the challenges facing the field. He said it's helped him understand the challenges — biases, unreliable data — and the possibilities, like improved cancer diagnoses and more efficient supply chains.

Beyer is also learning how to write computer code.

"I'm finding that learning to code — which is thinking in this sort of mathematical, algorithmic step-by-

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step, is helping me think differently about a lot of other things — how you put together an office, how you work a piece of legislation,” Beyer said.

While a computer science degree isn’t required, it’s imperative that lawmakers understand AI’s implications for the economy, national defense, health care, education, personal privacy and intellectual property rights, according to Chris Pierson, CEO of the cybersecurity firm BlackCloak.

“AI is not good or bad,” said Pierson, who formerly worked in Washington for the Department of Homeland Security. “It’s how you use it.”

The work of safeguarding AI has already begun, though it’s the executive branch leading the way so far. Last month, the White House unveiled new rules that require federal agencies to show their use of AI isn’t harming the public. Under an executive order issued last year, AI developers must provide information on the safety of their products.

When it comes to more substantive action, America is playing catchup to the European Union, which recently enacted the world’s first significant rules governing the development and use of AI. The rules prohibit some uses — routine AI-enabled facial recognition by law enforcement, for one — while requiring other programs to submit information about safety and public risks. The landmark law is expected to serve as a blueprint for other nations as they contemplate their own AI laws.

As Congress begins that process, the focus must be on “mitigating potential harm,” said Obernolte, who said he’s optimistic that lawmakers from both parties can find common ground on ways to prevent the worst AI risks.

“Nothing substantive is going to get done that isn’t bipartisan,” he said.

To help guide the conversation lawmakers created a new AI task force (Obernolte is co-chairman), as well as an AI Caucus made up of lawmakers with a particular expertise or interest in the topic. They’ve invited experts to brief lawmakers on the technology and its impacts — and not just computer scientists and tech gurus either, but also representatives from different sectors that see their own risks and rewards in AI.

Rep. Anna Eshoo is the Democratic chairwoman of the caucus. She represents part of California’s Silicon Valley and recently introduced legislation that would require tech companies and social media platforms like Meta, Google or TikTok to identify and label AI-generated deepfakes to ensure the public isn’t misled. She said the caucus has already proved its worth as a “safe place” place where lawmakers can ask questions, share resources and begin to craft consensus.

“There isn’t a bad or silly question,” she said. “You have to understand something before you can accept or reject it.”

Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg says Trump prosecution isn’t about politics

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When he was elected two years ago as Manhattan’s first Black district attorney, Alvin Bragg spoke candidly about his unease with the job’s political demands. A former law professor, he’s more comfortable untangling complex legal questions than swaggering up to a podium.

But when the first of Donald Trump’s four criminal prosecutions heads to trial on Monday, about alleged hush money payments to cover up a sex scandal during the 2016 election, Bragg will be at the center of a political maelstrom with few precedents.

Even before announcing the 34-count felony indictment against Trump last year, Bragg was a lightning rod for conservative critics who said he wasn’t tough enough on crime. The upcoming trial will test the Democrat’s efforts to portray himself as apolitical in the face of relentless attacks from Trump and his supporters, who say the prosecution is the epitome of partisanship.

Echoing the racist tropes he has deployed frequently against his legal adversaries, Trump has called Bragg a “thug” and a “degenerate psychopath,” urging his supporters to take action against the “danger to our country.”

Bragg, who declined to be interviewed for this story, has rejected that, comparing the prosecution against Trump to any other case of financial crime.

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"At its core, this case today is one with allegations like so many of our white collar cases," Bragg said in announcing the indictment last year. "Someone lied again and again to protect their interests and evade the laws to which we are all held accountable."

The first-ever trial of a former U.S. president will feature allegations that Trump falsified business records while compensating one of his lawyers, Michael Cohen, for burying stories about extramarital affairs that arose during the 2016 presidential race.

The charges — which carry the possibility of jail time — threaten Trump's campaign schedule as he faces a general election rematch with President Joe Biden.

They have also turned a spotlight on Bragg, who since bringing the indictment has been the target of scores of racist emails and death threats, as well as two packages containing white powder.

"Because he is the first to get Trump to trial, and because he's been successful so far, the level of hate pointed at Bragg is staggering," said Norman Eisen, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who served as special counsel in the first impeachment trial against Trump. "The threat level is just off the charts."

Citing Trump's threatening and inflammatory statements, Judge Juan M. Merchan imposed a gag order last month that bars Trump from publicly commenting on witnesses, jurors or others involved in the case — though not Bragg or the judge personally. Attorneys for Trump have sought to reverse the order, seizing on the issue as one of several arguments for delaying the trial.

The 50-year-old Harlem-raised Bragg got his early political education during visits to the city's homeless shelters, where his father worked. He said he was held at gunpoint six times while growing up — three times by overly suspicious police officers — and once had a knife held to his throat.

After graduating from Harvard Law School, Bragg began his career as a criminal defense and civil rights lawyer, later joining the federal prosecutor's office in Manhattan. As a top lawyer in the New York attorney general's office, he oversaw investigations into police killings and a lawsuit that shut down Trump's charitable foundation.

Though he said he had little interest in elected office, Bragg joined a crowded race for Manhattan district attorney in 2019, running on a platform of "justice and public safety."

Compared to many of his opponents, Bragg took a more measured tone in detailing his plans for the investigations into Trump and his businesses, which began under former District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr.

Once in office, Bragg surprised many by pausing the criminal investigation into Trump, leading to the resignation of two top prosecutors who had pushed for an indictment.

When he resurrected the case last April, the charges of falsifying records were raised to felonies under an unusual legal theory that Trump could be prosecuted in state court for violating federal campaign finance laws. Some legal experts say the strategy could backfire.

"It seems a bit of a legal reach, and the question is why are they doing it?" said Jonathan Turley, a professor at the George Washington University Law School. "It can be hard to escape the conclusion that this effort would not have been taken if the defendant was not Donald Trump."

From his first days in office, Bragg found himself under a barrage of criticism over a memo instructing prosecutors not to seek jail time for some low-level offenses.

He walked back portions of the directive amid fierce protest from New York Police Department leaders, conservative media and some centrist Democrats, though he later said he regretted not pushing back more forcefully. For many on the right, the image of Bragg as a poster child for Democrat permissiveness stuck.

"When you're the district attorney, you are also a politician, and there's been a slight failure to grasp that," said Rebecca Roiphe, a New York Law School professor who taught alongside Bragg and previously worked in the Manhattan district attorney's office. "The fact that he's not attuned to what he needs to do politically to get things done is both a strength and a weakness."

Though most major crime rates in Manhattan remain lower than before Bragg took office, conservatives continue to accuse him of allowing rampant lawlessness. Republicans convened a congressional field hearing in New York to examine what they said were Bragg's "pro-crime, anti-victim" policies.

Bragg was pilloried on the right again earlier this year when he declined to seek pretrial detention for

some men accused of brawling with police officers in Times Square.

The decision sparked criticism not only from conservatives but also Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, and top NYPD officials. Bragg defended himself, telling reporters, "the only thing worse than failing to bring perpetrators to justice would be to ensnare innocent people in the criminal justice system."

He later announced several men initially arrested played only a minor role or were not present at all.

In 2022, Bragg's office pressured the Trump Organization's longtime chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, into pleading guilty to evading taxes on company perks like a luxury car and rent-free apartment. Later that year, it put Trump's company on trial, and won a conviction on similar tax charges.

After that, Bragg convened a new grand jury, securing the indictment accusing Trump of falsely recording payments to Cohen as legal expenses, when they were for orchestrating payoffs to porn actor Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal, to prevent them from going public with claims they had extramarital sexual encounters with Trump.

Trump denies the accusations and says no crime was committed. Now, a jury is on the verge of being picked that will make a historic decision about whether Trump broke the law — or Bragg overreached.

As his trans daughter struggles, a father pushes past his prejudice. 'It was like a wake-up'

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

SMITHVILLE, Mo. (AP) — Before his transgender daughter was suspended after using the girls' bathroom at her Missouri high school. Before the bullying and the suicide attempts. Before she dropped out. Before all that, Dusty Farr was — in his own words — "a full-on bigot." By which he meant that he was eager to steer clear of anyone LGBTQ+.

Now, though, after everything, he says he wouldn't much care if his 16-year-old daughter — and he proudly calls her that — told him she was an alien. Because she is alive.

"When it was my child, it just flipped a switch. And it was like a wake-up," says Farr, who is suing the Platte County School District on Kansas City's outskirts.

Looking back, Farr figures his daughter, the youngest of five, started feeling out of place in her own body when she was just 6 or 7. But he didn't see it, even as they fished and camped together.

Then when she was 12, she started to steer away from him, spending more time with the rest of the family. It lasted for a few months before she came out. He knows now how hard this was. "Growing up," he says, "my kids knew how I felt."

His wife, whom he described as less sheltered, was on board immediately. Him, not so much.

"Given the way I was raised, a conservative fire and brimstone Baptist, LGBTQ is a sin, you're going to hell. And these were things, unfortunately, that I said to my daughter," Farr says. "I'm kind of ashamed to say that."

They bumped heads, their relationship strained. In desperation, he turned to God and then it hit him: "She's a girl."

His daughter, who is named only by her initials of R.F. in the lawsuit, was stunned. He had been, she recalls, "to say it nicely, very annoying." Now everything was different.

"There was this electricity in me that was just, it felt like pure joy," she recalled as she played with her dog at a park in February. Her father was with her.

She, her father and her attorneys asked that she remain anonymous because she is unnamed in the lawsuit and to protect her from discrimination.

She was diagnosed with gender dysphoria, or distress caused when gender identity doesn't match a person's assigned sex. She grew out her hair and began taking drugs to delay puberty — a common treatment.

Farr says things returned to normal — for the most part. But then came high school. "And," Farr says, "anything I did to her, school was 10 times worse."

The 2021-22 school year had just started when the assistant principal pulled his daughter aside. According

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to the suit filed last year, the administrator said students must use the restroom of their sex designated at birth or a single gender-neutral bathroom. The district disputes that happened .

Another employee, the suit said, took it further and told her using the girls' bathroom was against the law. The district disputed that happened, too.

The thing is, there isn't a law — at least, not in Missouri.

While more than 10 states have enacted laws over bathroom use, Missouri is not one of them. What Missouri has done is impose a ban on gender-affirming care. For bathrooms, it leaves policy debate to local districts.

"Asinine" is how Farr described the whole wave of restrictions, while acknowledging in the same breath that he probably would have supported them a decade ago. "Kind of makes me dislike myself a little bit."

He figured it was all just a way to intimidate her. His daughter didn't understand: "It kind of just made me feel hopeless in my education," she recalls thinking.

The gender-neutral bathroom was far from her classes and often had long lines, the suit says. She, as a freshman, was missing class, and teachers were lecturing her. So she used the girls' restroom. Verbal reprimands were followed by a one day in-school suspension and then a two-day, out-of-school suspension, the suit says.

"Your policy is dumb," Farr recalled telling the school, which argued in its response to his lawsuit that his daughter was eating lunch in the girls' restroom.

His daughter started using the boys' restroom. One day, a classmate approached and told another student, "Maybe I should rape her," the suit said.

Beyond angry now, Farr called not just the school but the ACLU. The district acknowledged the incident, saying a student made a "highly inappropriate" comment about rape and was disciplined. By now, Farr's daughter was afraid to go to school.

He described it as "a damned if you do, damned if you don't situation."

The district sees it differently, writing in a court filing that "there were numerous factors and circumstances in R.F.'s life, unrelated to school, which may have caused emotional harm, depression and anxiety."

Ultimately, her parents got the school to agree to let her finish her freshman year online. But she missed three weeks of classes before the switch was approved. Typically an A and B student, she plummeted to D's and F's. Worse to Farr, his daughter was withdrawing.

He describes it as "a dark rabbit hole of depression." Twice she tried to kill herself and was hospitalized. Everything from butter knives to headache medicine was locked up.

She returned in person to start her sophomore year, hoping things would be better. She made it only a few weeks before returning to online school.

At semester's end, Farr and his family moved out of the district. Bathroom access remained a source of friction in her new school, so again she switched to online school. When she turned 16 last spring, Farr and his wife agreed to let her drop out.

She is in counseling now, taking hormone replacement therapy and considering an alternative high school completion program. She'd like to go to college one day, and study psychology, maybe law.

Sometimes Farr's daughter yells at him, and he admits that he missed the teen attitude. That spirit and fight had faded.

"Being a teenager is hell," he says. "Being a trans teen is 10 kinds of hell. She's the brave one. I'm just her voice."

He feels he has changed enough to fill this role — that being her voice can help other parents and kids avoid what his family endured. He thinks that because of where he came from, maybe people will listen when he raises alarms. Maybe.

"It's almost like a transgender person," he says of his transformation. "There's the dead me. And then there's the new me."

Forced evictions or free choice? Cambodia's relocation of people from UNESCO site raises concerns

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

RUN TA EK, Cambodia (AP) — It's been more than a year since Yem Srey Pin moved with her family from the village where she was born on Cambodia's Angkor UNESCO World Heritage site to Run Ta Ek, a dusty new settlement about 25 kilometers (15 miles) away.

Hers is one of about 5,000 families relocated from the sprawling archaeological site, one of Southeast Asia's top tourist draws, by Cambodian authorities in an ongoing program that Amnesty International has condemned as a "gross violation of international human rights law." Another 5,000 families are still due to be moved.

The allegations have drawn strong expressions of concern from UNESCO and a spirited rebuttal from Cambodian authorities, who say they're doing nothing more than protecting the heritage land from illegal squatters.

Yem Srey Pin's single-room home is a far cry better than the makeshift tent she lived in with her husband and five children when they first arrived, which did little to protect from the monsoon rains and blew down in the winds.

And their 600-square-meter (about 6,500 square foot) property is significantly bigger than the 90-square-meter (about 1,000 square foot) plot they occupied illegally in the village of Khvean on the Angkor site.

But the 35-year-old is also in debt from building the new house. Her husband finds less construction work nearby and his wages are lower, and there are no wild fruits or vegetables she can forage, nor rice paddies where she can collect crabs to sell at her mother's stand.

"After more than a year here I haven't been able to save any money and I haven't earned anything," she said.

The Angkor site is one of the largest archaeological sites in the world, spread across some 400 square kilometers (155 square miles) in northwestern Cambodia. It contains the ruins of Khmer Empire capitals from the 9th to 15th centuries, including the temple of Angkor Wat.

When it was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1992, it was named a "living heritage site" whose local population observed ancestral traditions and cultural practices that have disappeared elsewhere.

Still, UNESCO at the time noted that Angkor was under "dual pressures" from some 100,000 inhabitants in 112 historic settlements who "constantly try to expand their dwelling areas," and from encroachment from the nearby town of Siem Reap.

Cambodia's answer was a plan to entice the 10,000 families illegally squatting in the area to resettle at Run Ta Ek and another site, as well as to encourage some from the 112 historic settlements to relocate as their families grow in size.

"The number of people were on the rise, including those coming illegally," said Long Kosal, spokesperson for the Cambodian agency known as APSARA that's responsible for managing the Angkor site. "What we did was that we provided an option."

Cambodia began moving people to Run Ta Ek in 2022, giving those who volunteered to leave their homes in the Angkor area plots of land, a two-month supply of canned food and rice, a tarp and 30 sheets of corrugated metal to use to build a home. Benefits also included a Poor Card, essentially a state welfare program giving them around 310,000 riel (about \$75) monthly for 10 years.

In a November report, Amnesty questioned how voluntary the relocations actually were, saying many people they interviewed were threatened or coerced into moving and that the relocations were more "forced evictions in disguise."

The rights group cited a speech from former Prime Minister Hun Sen in which he said people "must either leave the Angkor site soon and receive some form of compensation or be evicted at a later time and receive nothing."

Amnesty also noted Hun Sen's track record, saying that under his long-time rule Cambodian authorities had been responsible for several forced evictions elsewhere that it alleged "constituted gross violations of

human rights." It said Run Ta Ek — with dirt roads, insufficient drainage, poor sanitation and other issues — did not fulfil international obligations under human rights treaties to provide people adequate housing.

That has now changed: Homes with outhouses have been built, roads paved, and sewers installed. Primitive hand pumps made of blue PVC piping provide water, and electricity has been run in.

There's a school, a health center, a temple; bus routes were added, and a market area was built but is not yet operating, Long Kosal said.

But Amnesty maintains there are major concerns.

Among other things, families have had to take on heavy debt to build even basic houses, and there is little work to be found, said Montse Ferrer, the head of Amnesty's research team investigating the Angkor Wat resettlements.

"They had a clear source of income at the time — tourism — but also other sources of income linked to the location at Angkor," she said. "They are now at least 30 minutes away from the site and can no longer access these sources."

Following Amnesty's scathing report, UNESCO moved up the timeline for Cambodia's submission of its own report on the state of conservation at the Angkor site, specifically asking for the allegations to be addressed.

In that report, submitted to UNESCO in March, Cambodia said it had not violated any international laws with the relocations, saying it was only moving people involved in the "illegal occupation of heritage land" and that in Run Ta Ek many were now property owners for the first time in their lives.

UNESCO said it would not comment on the situation until it has been able to analyze Cambodia's response.

It referred The Associated Press to previous comments from Lazare Eloundou Assomo, director of the UNESCO World Heritage Center, who stressed the agency had "always categorically rejected the use of forced evictions as a tool for management of World Heritage listed sites."

Yem Srey Pin said even though Run Ta Ek has slowly improved since she arrived in February 2023, and her new home will be paid off fairly soon, she'd rather return to her village if it were possible.

But with almost all of the village's 400 families moving out, Yem Srey Pin says there's nothing left for her there.

"I can't live in my old village alone," she said.

As his trans daughter struggles, a father pushes past his prejudice. 'It was like a wake-up'

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

SMITHVILLE, Mo. (AP) — Before his transgender daughter was suspended after using the girls' bathroom at her Missouri high school. Before the bullying and the suicide attempts. Before she dropped out.

Before all that, Dusty Farr was — in his own words — "a full-on bigot." By which he meant that he was eager to steer clear of anyone LGBTQ+.

Now, though, after everything, he says he wouldn't much care if his 16-year-old daughter — and he proudly calls her that — told him she was an alien. Because she is alive.

"When it was my child, it just flipped a switch," says Farr, who is suing the Platte County School District on Kansas City's outskirts. "And it was like a wake-up."

Farr has found himself in an unlikely role: fighting bathroom bans that have proliferated at the state and local level in recent years. But Farr is not so unusual, says his attorney, Gillian Ruddy Wilcox of the American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri.

"It sometimes takes meeting a person before someone can say, 'Oh, that's a person and that's who they are, and they're just being themselves,'" she says. "And I do think that for Dusty, that's what it took."

Looking back, Farr figures his daughter, the youngest of five, started feeling out of place in her own body when she was just 6 or 7. But he didn't see it.

Farr said he didn't have "a lot of exposure to what I would consider the outside world" in the conserva-

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tive Nebraska community where he was raised. "Just old farmers" is how he described it.

Moving to the Kansas City area, which has 20% more people than live in all of Nebraska, was a culture shock. "I had never seen the LGBTQ community up close, and I would still have my closed-minded thoughts." He said things then that he now regrets. "A lot of derogatory words. I don't want to go back to that place."

He settled on the outskirts in one of the more conservative enclaves, a community that is home to some of the troops stationed at nearby Fort Leavenworth. He worked as a service manager at a tractor repair facility.

His youngest — a smart, funny, loves-to-sing, light-up-a-room kind of kid — was his fishing and camping buddy. A competitive archer, she also joined her dad on trips to the shooting range.

"No parent has a favorite," Farr says, "but if I had a favorite, it would be my youngest."

But when she was 12, she started to steer away from him, spending more time with the rest of the family. It lasted for a few months before she came out to her family. He knows now how hard this was. "Growing up," he says, "my kids knew how I felt."

His wife, whom he described as less sheltered, was on board immediately. Him, not so much.

"Given the way I was raised, a conservative fire and brimstone Baptist, LGBTQ is a sin, you're going to hell. And these were things, unfortunately, that I said to my daughter," Farr says. "I'm kind of ashamed to say that."

They bumped heads and argued, their relationship strained. In desperation, he turned to God, poring through the Bible, questioning teachings that he once took at face value that being transgender was an abomination. He prayed on it, too, replaying her childhood in his mind, seeing feminine qualities now that he had missed.

Then it hit him. "She's a girl."

"I got peace from God. Like, 'This is how your daughter was born. I don't make mistakes as God. So she was made this way. There's a reason for it.'"

The switch was almost instantaneous. "An overnight epiphany," he calls it. "It's uplifting when you can actually accept the way things are, and you're not carrying that unfounded hate and unfounded disgust."

His daughter, who is named only by her initials of R.F. in the lawsuit, was stunned. He had been, she recalls, "to say it nicely, very annoying." Now everything was different.

"There was this electricity in me that was just, it felt like pure joy. Just seeing someone I thought would never support me, just being one of my biggest supporters," she recalled as she played with her dog, a miniature Jack Russell terrier named Allie, at a park on an unseasonably warm February day. Her father was with her.

She, her father and her attorneys asked that she remain anonymous because she is unnamed in the lawsuit and to protect her from discrimination.

All those years, he had missed it. It is strange to him now.

"I don't know if it was my inner bigotry not wanting to see it or if I was just blind. I don't know," he says.

But the how, the why — these are not things he likes to dwell on much.

"Where we're at now is what matters," he says. "Me being a loving father. Me being accepting, me knowing that this isn't a choice. This is how she was born."

His daughter was diagnosed with gender dysphoria, or distress caused when gender identity doesn't match a person's assigned sex. A common treatment is to prescribe drugs to delay puberty.

That's what Farr's daughter did, along with growing out her hair. She had friends, and Farr says things returned to normal — for the most part.

But then came high school. "And," Farr says, "anything I did to her, school was 10 times worse."

The school knew about her gender dysphoria diagnosis, Farr says, describing it simply as a medical issue. Telling them about it was something he likened to talking about a case of chicken pox. The whole thing didn't seem like such a big deal now. "We were golden." After all, he says: "If we don't evolve, we die."

But the 2021-22 school year had just started when the assistant principal pulled his daughter aside.

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While remote learning persisted in some schools as the pandemic lingered, the high school was in person. According to the suit filed last year, the administrator said students must use the restroom of their sex designated at birth or a single gender-neutral bathroom. The district disputes that happened.

Another employee, the suit said, took it further and told her using the girls' bathroom was against the law. The district disputed that happened, too.

The thing is, there isn't a law — at least, not in Missouri.

While more than 10 states have enacted laws over bathroom use, Missouri is not one of them. What Missouri has done is impose a ban on gender-affirming care. For bathrooms, it leaves policy debate to local districts.

"Asinine" is how Farr described the whole wave of restrictions, while acknowledging in the same breath that he probably would have supported them a decade ago. "Kind of makes me dislike myself a little bit."

He figured it was all just a way to intimidate her. He thinks some people believe mistakenly that trans kids are trying to catch a glimpse of someone not fully clothed.

Some Republican legislators who have backed state-level bathroom laws have argued that they're responding to people's concerns about transgender women sharing bathrooms, locker rooms and other spaces with cisgender women and girls. But critics argue that restrictions cause harassment of transgender people, not the other way around.

"I don't think they get the severity of what just telling someone what restroom they can use — what kind of impact something that small can have on someone."

His daughter didn't understand: "It kind of just made me feel hopeless in my education," she recalls thinking. "Because how is this place that's supposed to teach me everything to be an adult, how are they going to teach me what I need to learn when they're dictating where I pee?"

The gender-neutral bathroom was far from her classes and often had long lines, the suit says. She, as a freshman, was missing class, and teachers were lecturing her. So she used the girls' restroom. Verbal reprimands were followed by a one day in-school suspension and then a two-day, out-of-school suspension, the suit says.

"Your policy is dumb," Farr recalled telling the school, which argued in its response to his lawsuit that his daughter was eating lunch in the girls' restroom and had unclean hands.

His daughter started using the boys' restroom. The suit said it was because she feared more discipline, but the district argued in its written response that she was "intentionally engaging in disruptive behavior in numerous bathrooms, perhaps to invite discipline." It didn't elaborate on what it meant by disruptive behavior.

One day, she was in the boys' restroom when a classmate approached and told another student, "Maybe I should rape her," the suit said. Farr said the student told his daughter he was threatening her because she looked like a girl.

Beyond angry now, Farr called not just the school but the ACLU. The district acknowledged the incident, saying a student made a "highly inappropriate" comment about rape and was disciplined. By now, Farr's daughter was afraid to go to school.

"If I use the restroom they say I have to, I'm going to get bullied. If I use the gender-neutral restroom, I'm going to be late to my classes," Farr says, illustrating his daughter's point of view. "So it's a damned if you do, damned if you don't situation."

The district sees it differently, writing in a court filing that "there were numerous factors and circumstances in R.F.'s life, unrelated to school, which may have caused emotional harm, depression and anxiety."

Ultimately, her parents got the school to agree to let her finish her freshman year online. But she missed three weeks of classes before the switch was approved. Typically an A and B student, she plummeted to D's and F's. Worse to Farr, his daughter was withdrawing, losing friends and isolating herself in her room.

He describes it as "a dark rabbit hole of depression." Twice she tried to kill herself and was hospitalized. Everything from butter knives to headache medicine was locked up.

She returned in person to start her sophomore year, hoping things would be better. She made it only a few weeks before returning to online school.

At semester's end, Farr and his family moved out of the district. Bathroom access remained a source of friction in her new school, so again she switched to online school. When she turned 16 last spring, Farr and his wife agreed to let her drop out. He says they chose to focus on her mental health and describes it as "probably the best decision we've made." Still, it feels strange.

"I never would have guessed that I would — I don't want to use happy — but would be OK with one of my kids quitting school," he said.

She is in counseling now, taking hormone replacement therapy, leaving her room and watching TV with Farr. She is interviewing for a job and considering an alternative high school completion program. She'd like to go to college one day, and study psychology, maybe law.

With the lawsuit filed, customers have approached Farr, telling him they support his fight. He was expecting they would scoff. Even his own parents are on board, which he says "surprised the hell out of me."

"These aren't the people who raised me, let me tell you," he says.

Sometimes Farr's daughter yells at him, and he admits that he missed the teen attitude. That spirit and fight had faded.

"Being a teenager is hell," he says. "Being a trans teen is 10 kinds of hell. She's the brave one. I'm just her voice."

He feels he has changed enough to fill this role — that being her voice can help other parents and kids avoid what his family endured. "Our kids," he says, "are dying." He thinks that because of where he came from, maybe people will listen when he raises alarms. Maybe.

"It's almost like a transgender person," he says of his transformation. "There's the dead me. And then there's the new me."

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to address Congress amid skepticism about US role abroad

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will head to Capitol Hill on Thursday for an address to U.S. lawmakers meant to underscore the importance of keeping a strong partnership between the two countries at a time of tension in the Asia-Pacific and skepticism in Congress about U.S. involvement abroad.

Kishida was in Washington this week visiting President Joe Biden as the White House completed hosting each leader of the Quad — an informal partnership between the U.S. Japan, Australia and India that is seen as important to countering China's growing military strength in the region. Kishida is expected to talk about the future of the relationship between Japan and the U.S.

He will be addressing many Republicans who have pushed for the U.S. to take a less active role in global affairs as they follow the "America First" ethos of Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. The Republican-controlled House has sat for months on a \$95 billion package that would send wartime funding to Ukraine and Israel, as well as aid to allies in the Indo-Pacific like Taiwan and humanitarian help to civilians in Gaza and Ukraine.

While the package does not include any direct funding for Japan, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said earlier this week that he hoped Kishida's visit would underscore "that we're in a worldwide situation here against the enemies of democracy — led by China, Russia and Iran."

Japan has taken a strong role in supporting Ukraine's defense against Moscow as well as helping humanitarian aid get to Gaza. It is also seen as a key U.S. partner in a fraught region where China is asserting its strength and North Korea is developing a nuclear program.

"Japan is a close ally — critical to both our national and economic security," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer in a statement. "This visit will continue to deepen the diplomatic and security relationship

between our two countries and build on the strength of decades of cooperation.”

Kishida was also attending a U.S.-Japan-Philippines summit on Thursday in another effort to bolster regional cooperation in the face of China’s aggression.

In Congress, House Speaker Mike Johnson has held up the foreign security package since its Senate passage in February but is now working to advance it in the coming weeks. It will be a difficult task to navigate the deep divides on support for Kyiv among Republicans. Making matters worse for the Republican speaker, he is already facing the threat of being ousted from the speaker’s office.

Kishida, who was elected in 2021, arrives in Washington while facing political problems of his own in Japan. Polls show his support has plunged as he deals with a political funds corruption scandal within his ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The nation’s economy has also slipped to the world’s fourth-largest last year, falling behind Germany.

It will be the first time a Japanese prime minister addresses Congress since former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe traveled to Capitol Hill in 2015. Kishida will also be the sixth foreign leader to address Congress during Biden’s presidency.

Kansas City Chiefs’ Rashee Rice facing aggravated assault charge after high-speed crash in Dallas

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Dallas police said Wednesday that Kansas City Chiefs wide receiver Rashee Rice faces charges including aggravated assault after he and another speeding driver of a sports car caused a chain-reaction crash on a Dallas highway.

Police said that arrest warrants have been issued for the 23-year-old for one count of aggravated assault, one count of collision involving serious bodily injury and six counts of collision involving injury. Rice’s attorney, state Sen. Royce West, said last week that Rice had been driving a Lamborghini sport utility vehicle when the crash occurred.

Arrest warrants were also issued for Theodore Knox, 21, who was driving the other speeding sports car, a Corvette, police said. Police said that arrest warrants have been issued for Knox for one count of aggravated assault, one count of collision involving serious bodily injury and six counts of collision involving injury.

Police said that Rice and Knox were not currently in custody. West had no immediate comment on Rice’s behalf, and it was not clear whether Knox had an attorney.

The Chiefs had no immediate comment.

The crash involved the Lamborghini, a Corvette and four other vehicles and left four people with minor injuries, police have said.

Police have said the drivers of the Corvette and Lamborghini were speeding in the far left lane when they lost control and the Lamborghini traveled onto the shoulder and hit the center median wall, causing the chain collision. Police said the drivers of the Corvette and Lamborghini left following the crash without determining whether anyone needed medical attention or providing their information.

Police said the passengers in two speeding sports cars who left the scene will not be charged.

Rice last week posted to his Instagram Story that he was taking “full responsibility” for his part in the wreck.

Aggravated assault, a second-degree felony, is punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Collision involving serious bodily injury, a third-degree felony, is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, and collision involving injury is punishable by up to five years in prison.

Rice was leasing the Lamborghini from The Classic Lifestyle, said Kyle Coker, an attorney for the Dallas-based exotic car rental company. And West has said the Corvette belonged to Rice.

Rice was born in Philadelphia but grew up in the Fort Worth, Texas, suburb of North Richland Hills. He played college football at nearby Southern Methodist University, where a breakout senior season in 2022

put the wide receiver on the radar of NFL teams.

The Chiefs selected him in the second round of last year's draft, and he quickly became one of the only dependable options in their passing game.

Arkansas hires John Calipari to coach the Razorbacks, a day after stepping down from Kentucky

By ERIC W. BOLIN The Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. (AP) — Fireworks went off as new Arkansas men's basketball coach John Calipari was introduced to fans at Bud Walton Arena.

If his past success is an indicator, many more fireworks are forthcoming.

Arkansas hired Calipari on Wednesday, a day after the Hall of Fame coach stepped down from the Kentucky program he led to the 2012 NCAA championship.

Calipari is the winningest active coach in men's college basketball, with a career record of 855-263 in stops at Massachusetts, Memphis and Kentucky. The 65-year-old has led his programs to six Final Fours and three national championship games. He has won numerous awards, including AP Coach of the Year in 2015.

Calipari signed a five-year contract with an annual base salary of \$7 million through April 2029 with a maximum of two automatic rollover years for NCAA Tournament appearances that would extend the contract to 2031. The deal includes a \$1 million signing bonus and features retention bonuses of \$500,000 each year of the contract along with one-time bonuses for making the NCAA Tournament, reaching the second round, Sweet 16, Final Four and winning a national championship.

It's a slight drop — Kentucky had been paying Calipari \$8.5 million annually.

At first glance, Arkansas' seismic move makes the Razorbacks immediate Southeastern Conference contenders. Calipari's Kentucky teams won six conference tournament championships and six regular season titles, though the Wildcats haven't won the tournament title since 2017.

Hunter Yurachek, Arkansas' vice chancellor and athletic director, said Calipari's reputation as an elite recruiter and his longtime success in the SEC were key draws.

"I talked to eight to 10 different coaches about this job," he said. "Here's what I want to be clear about: In spite of the reports, there was only one person that was offered this job."

Calipari replaces Eric Musselman, who left for the job at Southern California. Calipari inherits a program that went 16-17 last season after three consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances, including the Sweet 16 a year ago and the Elite Eight in 2021 and 2022.

Arkansas, like Kentucky, has a rich history. The Razorbacks have been to six Final Fours, won the national title in 1994 and lost in the final in 1995.

Excited Arkansas fans jammed the arena hoping to witness the start of a return to that level of greatness. John Tyson, chairman of Springdale, Arkansas-based Tyson Foods, initially put Calipari and Yurachek in touch. Tyson got a standing ovation from the crowd when his presence was announced at the arena.

Later, the house lights flickered, then faded, and a promo video that included Calipari's remarks at a press conference from a previous game against Arkansas played.

Shortly thereafter, Calipari was introduced. He pumped his fist on stage, hugged Yurachek and pointed to members of the crowd before pulling notes from his jacket and sitting down for an interview.

Calipari announced that he was stepping down as Kentucky coach on Tuesday, saying in a video that the program "needs to hear another voice."

He left the Wildcats after going 410-123 in 15 years, including 23-10 this past season. But the past few campaigns have been disappointing by Kentucky standards with a 1-3 mark in its last three NCAA trips, including first-round losses to No. 14 seed Oakland last month and No. 15 seed Saint Peter's two years ago. The Wildcats were top-three seeds both times.

The most recent NCAA loss set off immediate calls to fire Calipari before athletic director Mitch Barnhart stated soon after that Calipari would return next season. Firing him would have triggered a buyout

of more than \$33 million to dismiss him under the terms of a 10-year, "lifetime" contract signed in 2019.

Calipari had no hard feelings about Kentucky.

"It was my dream job," Calipari said of Kentucky in the video. "Anybody in our profession looks at the University of Kentucky in basketball and said, 'that is the bluest of blue.' The last few weeks we've come to realize that this program probably needs to hear another voice that the university as a whole has to have another voice giving guidance about this program that they hear and the fans need to hear."

Calipari knew he was heading to Arkansas before Tuesday's video.

"My thing to (Yurachek), probably at some point on Sunday was look, I feel really good. Just give me time," he said. "This is going to play. I think Monday night is when it was done. It was probably 11 o'clock at night or later. Tuesday morning, I did the video, and then my wife did a video, and we did this."

Before Calipari made his decision, he checked with Houston coach Kelvin Sampson about Yurachek, a former Houston athletic director.

"I said, 'Tell me about Hunter,'" Calipari said. "Well, he almost jumped through the phone. ... He said when you need things done, he goes and does it."

An Israeli airstrike in Gaza kills 3 sons and 4 grandchildren of Hamas' top leader

By TIA GOLDENBERG, KAREEM CHEHAYEB and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli aircraft killed three sons of Hamas' top political leader in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, striking high-stakes targets at a time when Israel is holding delicate cease-fire negotiations with the militant group. Hamas said four of the leader's grandchildren were also killed.

Ismail Haniyeh's sons are among the highest-profile figures to be killed in the war so far. Israel said they were Hamas operatives, and Haniyeh accused Israel of acting in "the spirit of revenge and murder."

The deaths threatened to strain the internationally mediated cease-fire talks, which appeared to gain steam in recent days even as the sides remain far apart on key issues.

The slayings also come as Israel is under intensifying pressure — increasingly from its top ally, the U.S. — to change tack in the war, especially when it comes to humanitarian aid for desperate people in Gaza.

Haniyeh said Hamas would not cave to the pressure leveled by the strike on his family.

"The enemy believes that by targeting the families of the leaders, it will push them to give up the demands of our people," Haniyeh told the Al Jazeera satellite channel. "Anyone who believes that targeting my sons will push Hamas to change its position is delusional."

Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV station aired footage of Haniyeh receiving the news of the deaths through the phone of an aide while visiting wounded Palestinians who have been transported to a hospital in Qatar, where he lives in exile. Haniyeh nodded, looked down at the ground and slowly walked out of the room.

Hamas said Hazem, Amir and Mohammed Haniyeh were killed in the Shati refugee camp in Gaza City, where Ismail Haniyeh is originally from. The militant group said three of Haniyeh's granddaughters and a grandson were also killed, without disclosing their ages.

Al-Aqsa TV said the brothers were traveling with family members in a single vehicle targeted by an Israeli drone.

The Israeli military said Mohammed and Hazem were Hamas military operatives and that Amir was a cell commander. It said they had conducted militant activity in the central Gaza Strip, without elaborating. It did not comment about the grandchildren killed.

The strike on Haniyeh's family is the latest bloodshed in a war with no end in sight.

Earlier, Israeli War Cabinet minister Benny Gantz claimed Hamas has been defeated militarily, although he also said Israel will fight it for years to come.

"From a military point of view, Hamas is defeated. Its fighters are eliminated or in hiding" and its capabilities "crippled," Gantz said in a statement to the media in the southern Israeli city of Sderot.

But he added: "Fighting against Hamas will take time. Boys who are now in middle school will still fight

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in the Gaza Strip.”

Gantz reiterated the Israeli government’s commitment to go into Rafah, the city at the far southern tip of the Gaza Strip where more than half the territory’s 2.3 million people are now sheltering.

For Palestinians, the strike on Haniyeh’s family darkened an already grim Eid al-Fitr holiday, which ends the holy fasting month of Ramadan. Palestinians marked the holiday by visiting the graves of loved ones killed in the war. In the Jabaliya refugee camp near Gaza City, people sat quietly by graves surrounded by buildings destroyed in Israel’s offensive, which was launched in response to the deadly Hamas attack on Oct. 7.

As misery in Gaza lingers, Israel has faced increasing pressure, including from its own top ally, the U.S., to change tack in the war, especially with regards to the delivery of humanitarian aid.

In an interview with Spanish-language broadcaster Univision that was recorded April 3 and aired Tuesday, U.S. President Joe Biden criticized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s handling of the war in Gaza and urged his government to flood the beleaguered territory with aid. He repeated that call again Wednesday, saying the efforts to boost aid were “not enough” and demanding another entry point for trucks in northern Gaza.

Gantz said Israel would soon open a new crossing to serve hard-hit northern Gaza, an early target of Israel’s in the war.

After months of supporting the war against Hamas, the White House has ramped up pressure on Israel to reach a cease-fire and taken a sterner line that has rattled the countries’ decades-old alliance and deepened Israel’s international isolation over the war.

The most serious disagreement has been over Israel’s plans for an offensive in Rafah. The rift was worsened by an Israeli airstrike last week on an aid convoy that killed seven workers with the World Central Kitchen charity, most of them foreigners. Israel said the deaths were unintentional, but Biden was outraged.

Biden’s latest comments highlight the differences between Israel and the U.S. over humanitarian aid to people in Gaza, where the war has led to warnings of imminent famine for more than a million people.

“What he’s doing is a mistake. I don’t agree with his approach,” Biden told Univision when asked if Netanyahu was prioritizing his political survival over Israel’s interest.

Israel halted aid deliveries to Gaza in the early days of the war, but under U.S. pressure has slowly increased the number of trucks allowed to enter the territory.

Still, aid groups say supplies are not reaching desperate people quickly enough, blaming Israeli restrictions and noting that thousands of trucks are waiting to enter Gaza. Countries have attempted less efficient ways to deliver aid, including airdrops and by sea.

Israel says it has opened up more entry points for trucks to enter, especially for northern Gaza. Israel also accuses aid groups of being too slow to deliver aid once it’s inside Gaza.

Aid groups say logistical issues and the precarious security situation — underscored by the strike on the aid workers — complicate deliveries.

Netanyahu has vowed to achieve “total victory,” pledging to destroy Hamas’ military and governing capabilities to prevent a repeat of the Oct. 7 attacks and to return hostages captured by Hamas and others that day. He says that victory must include an offensive in Rafah.

Israel launched the war in response to Hamas’ cross-border assault in which militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took roughly 250 people hostage, according to Israeli authorities.

More than 33,400 Palestinians have been killed in the relentless fighting, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which doesn’t differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says most of the dead are women and children. Israel says it has killed some 12,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has ignited a humanitarian catastrophe. Most of the territory’s population has been displaced and with vast swaths of Gaza’s urban landscape leveled in the fighting, many areas are uninhabitable.

3 shot and 5 in custody after gunfire disrupts Philadelphia Eid event, police say

By CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A joyful celebration of the end of Ramadan devolved into panic Wednesday in Philadelphia after rival groups exchanged gunfire, leaving at least three people injured and hundreds of parents and children to flee in search of safety.

The annual Eid al-Fitr event, held outside a large mosque in the city's Parkside neighborhood, came to a sudden end when some 30 shots rang out at about 2:30 p.m., Philadelphia police said.

Five people were later taken into custody, including a 15-year-old boy who sustained leg and shoulder wounds when he was shot by police and was taken to the hospital by an officer, authorities said. Police said he was carrying a gun.

Additionally, one man was shot in the stomach and a juvenile victim had a wound to the hand, police said.

Philadelphia Police Commissioner Kevin Bethel confirmed at a news conference that a police vehicle responding to the 911 calls for help struck a 15-year-old girl who was fleeing the park. He said the child suffered a leg injury.

Witnesses described running to tents set up near the park, hiding behind trees and dropping to the pavement to avoid the gunfire, trying to shield children. Other attendees ran inside the nearby school and mosque and began frantically searching for their children and loved ones.

Authorities said nearly 1,000 people attended the event. Several witnesses said they came back to the park hours after the shooting to try to find their shoes or cellphones after running several streets away to safety.

"Ninety-nine percent of the people attending this event were good people who wanted to have a good time," Bethel said, noting that city officials were offering their support to the Islamic community.

Police investigated the aftermath late Wednesday afternoon at Clara Muhammad Square, which was strewn with debris including blankets, strollers, coolers and a number of shoes, left behind by celebrants. A doll with a plastic wrapper nearby lay abandoned in the grass near a playground surrounded by police tape and guarded by officers. A few tables with aluminum containers of food to break the fast of Ramadan sat in the middle of the park, surrounded by yellow crime scene tape. Two tubs of melted bright red water ice were spilled onto the sidewalk.

Around 4 p.m., members of the Masjid began pushing large brooms to clean up the debris left in the street and on the sidewalk. A handful of young women dressed in bright colors picked up valuables — a bag, a cellphone, shoes — and set them aside for people to claim. Others waited for police to allow them to gather their purses or lawn chairs from the park.

Zania Weatherford had just gone to her car for a moment when she heard the gunfire and saw people running across the street. She called relatives at the event to make sure they were safe.

"Last year, someone set off firecrackers and scared everyone," Weatherford said. "This is just a celebration of life for God to forgive us for our sins. There's one month that God chains the devil down, so whoever did this can't even blame the devil."

Thomas Allen, who was at the Philadelphia Masjid located next the park, said the scene during the shooting was "pandemonium."

"And we're hearing that they were children, you know, they were children. And it's a sad thing," Allen said, referring to the suspects.

"All my years of living in Philadelphia, I've never seen nothing like this, especially at the masjid," he said. "Just as much crime as it may be in Philadelphia. It was always separated from the masjid."

The motive for the shooting was not immediately clear. The suspects include four males and a female, Bethel said.

Eid al-Fitr is an Islamic holiday marking the end of Ramadan, the month when devout Muslims fast daily from dawn to sunset. Ramadan is a time of increased worship, charity, and good deeds. Eid al-Fitr means the feast, or festival, of breaking the fast.

Storms bring floods and damaging wind across the South; 1 dead in Mississippi

By GERALD HERBERT and KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

SLIDELL, La. (AP) — Severe storms blamed for a death in Mississippi spawned a tornado that demolished buildings in one Louisiana city Wednesday while inundating streets in low-lying New Orleans with hours of steady rain that snarled traffic and strained the city's antiquated drainage system.

Severe weather stretched across much of the Gulf South with reports of damage from Texas to the Florida panhandle.

More than 30,000 homes and businesses were without power Wednesday night in Louisiana's St. Tammany Parish, where a tornado struck the city of Slidell, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) northeast of New Orleans. It ripped roofs off buildings and partially collapsed others in and around the city of about 28,000 people. Authorities said first responders had to rescue people trapped in one heavily damaged apartment building.

At a Wednesday night news conference, Slidell Mayor Greg Cromer estimated about 75 homes and businesses were damaged in the city. Parish President Mike Cooper said assessments were still underway, but he estimated that hundreds more homes were damaged outside the city.

Police video showed tree limbs littering the streets and flooded yards that resembled Louisiana swamps. Outside a McDonald's restaurant, a car was on its side, power poles leaned toward the ground and large pieces of the restaurant's trademark golden arches were strewn about.

"I've never talked to God so much before in my life," Robin Marquez said after huddling with coworkers in a two-story building where the roof was ripped away and walls caved in.

There were no reports of deaths or critical injuries in Slidell. The National Weather Service said in a social media post Wednesday night that initial surveys of the damage indicate the area was hit by a category EF-1 tornado, with winds anywhere from 86 mph (138 kph) to 110 miles per hour (177 kph). More surveys and analyses were planned to confirm the twister's strength and path.

Close to 8 inches (20 centimeters) of rain fell in parts of New Orleans. It came as the system of pipes and pumps that drains the city dealt with problems with its power generating system, forcing workers to divert power from one area to another as needed.

"During intense rain, the mission sometimes shifts from keeping the streets dry to draining them as quickly as possible," the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board, which operates the system, said in a statement Wednesday afternoon.

Hours after the rain ended, floodwaters lingered in some neighborhoods in New Orleans and in neighboring Jefferson Parish.

In Mississippi, the death of Shirley Wilson, 64, was attributed to the storm. Wilson had several medical conditions that required her to have access to an electric oxygen machine at all times, Scott County Sheriff Mike Lee said. When her home in the central Mississippi county lost power, her oxygen machine shut down. Emergency responders couldn't reach her until about 20 minutes after her grandchild called 911 early Wednesday, and she was pronounced dead.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency said 72 homes were damaged.

In Texas, several people were rescued from homes and vehicles early Wednesday morning when flooding inundated parts of Jasper County, near the Louisiana line, authorities said.

All major roads into Kirbyville, a Jasper County town of about 2,000 people, were shut down early Wednesday due to the flooding, the sheriff's office said. Shelters were being set up after about 50 people were displaced from their homes, Billy Ted Smith, the Jasper County emergency management coordinator, said. He estimated the displaced people came from about 20 flooded homes and said there had been around half a dozen people rescued from vehicles. He said no major injuries were reported.

In the Houston suburb of Katy, strong thunderstorms that passed through the area around 2 a.m. Wednesday collapsed part of the roof of a Firestone repair shop. Storms also damaged businesses and cars in a nearby strip mall, sending a large air conditioning unit that had been on the roof crashing to the

parking lot, officials said.

No one was inside the repair shop, but employees were working at a nearby sports bar when the thunderstorms rolled through, Harris County Fire Marshal Laurie Christensen told reporters later Wednesday morning.

"We were blessed that no lives were lost," Christensen said, adding that only minor injuries were reported.

Some of the damage in Katy had preliminarily been determined to have been caused by an EF-1 tornado with estimated maximum winds of around 90 mph (145 kph), National Weather Service meteorologist Bradley Brokamp said.

Photos posted on social media showed heavy damage to a church in Port Arthur, Texas, where city officials said they were also dealing with downed trees and powerlines.

In Mississippi, the sheriff sent out an urgent warning Wednesday to people in parts of Yazoo County, just northwest of Jackson, about a levee failure there. The sheriff's office called for the evacuation of one subdivision. County officials continued to monitor the levee, WAPT-TV reported.

New York appeals court rejects Donald Trump's third request to delay Monday's hush money trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump is now 0 for 3 in last-minute attempts to get a New York appeals court to delay his looming hush money criminal trial. An appeals court judge Wednesday swiftly rejected the latest salvo from the former president's lawyers, who argued he should be on the campaign trail rather than "in a courtroom defending himself" starting next week.

Trump's lawyers had asked the state's mid-level appeals court to halt the case indefinitely while they fight to remove the trial judge and challenge several of his pretrial rulings, which they argue have seriously hindered the presumptive Republican nominee's defense.

Justice Ellen Gesmer's ruling, after a third straight day of emergency hearings on Trump's delay requests, was yet another loss for Trump, who has tried repeatedly to get the trial postponed. Barring further court action, the ruling clears the way for jury selection to begin next Monday.

"We're here for this stay because there are restrictions in place that cannot operate in a constitutional way in a trial environment," Trump lawyer Emil Bove argued at the hearing, which was held in a court basement lobby because the regular courtroom was in use.

"It's an incredibly important trial. It's a historic, unprecedented proceeding," Bove said, adding: "This can only be done once and it must be done right."

Trump's hush-money case 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.

Adding to a litany of complaints registered this week with the appeals court, Bove argued that trial Judge Juan Merchan "exceeded his authority" in refusing to postpone the case until the Supreme Court rules on an immunity claim Trump raised in another of his criminal cases. Trump's lawyers argue some evidence in the hush-money case could be excluded if the Supreme Court rules in his favor.

Merchan last week declared that request untimely, ruling that Trump's lawyers had "myriad opportunities" to raise the immunity issue before they finally did so in March, well after a deadline for pretrial motions had passed.

Steven Wu, the appellate chief for the Manhattan district attorney's office, echoed that sentiment at Wednesday's emergency hearing. He argued that Trump's lawyers had months to raise immunity and other issues and should not be rewarded with a delay at the eleventh hour.

"Staying the trial at this point would be incredibly disruptive," Wu said. "The court, the people, witnesses have made extraordinary efforts to make sure this trial can take place on Monday."

"There's a powerful public interest to ensure this criminal trial goes forward," he added.

Gesmer presided over the emergency hearing from an armchair, facing a hodgepodge of wooden seats, a collapsable table and a restroom.

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Trump is accused of falsifying his company's records to hide the nature of payments to his former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen, who helped Trump 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.

Trump already struck out twice this week with the appeals court. One appeals court judge Monday rejected his bid to delay the trial while he seeks to move it out of Manhattan. A different judge on Tuesday denied a request, framed as part of a lawsuit against Merchan, that the trial be delayed while Trump fights a gag order imposed on him in recent weeks.

Trump's lawyers had asked Merchan last month to adjourn the New York trial indefinitely until Trump's immunity claim in his Washington, D.C., election interference case is resolved.

Trump contends he is immune from prosecution for conduct alleged to involve official acts during his tenure in office. His lawyers have not raised that as a defense in the hush-money case, but they argued that some evidence — including Trump's social media posts about former lawyer Cohen — is from his time as president and should be excluded from the trial because of his immunity protections.

The Supreme Court is to hear arguments in that matter on April 25.

"This is a situation where a judge has exceeded his authority under circumstances with very, very serious federalism implications," Bove argued at Wednesday's emergency hearing.

Trump's lawyers also renewed their argument that Merchan should step aside from the case. They've accused him of bias and a conflict of interest, citing his daughter's work as the head of a firm whose clients have included President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and other Democrats.

Trump's lawyers filed a formal recusal request with Merchan last week. The judge rejected a similar request in August and has not ruled on Trump's pending request. The judge has also yet to rule on another defense delay request, which claims that Trump won't get a fair trial because of "prejudicial media coverage."

"Their recusal arguments are completely meritless," Wu argued.

Trump's lawyers also took issue with a protocol Merchan put in place last month to manage a flood of last-minute court filings. And, they revisited their complaints — aired at an emergency hearing Tuesday — about the gag order Merchan imposed on Trump last month that bars him from making public comments about witnesses, jurors and others regarding their connections to the case.

Trump's ability to campaign "is something that's protected under the First Amendment, for President Trump and the American people," Bove argued.

Starting over: Women emerging from prison face formidable challenges to resuming their lives

By SAMANTHA HENDRICKSON Associated Press/Report for America

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — On a cold and dreary October day, Heather C. Jarvis packed everything she had into a pink duffel and a plastic trash bag and waited for the rest of her life to begin.

Sitting in the lobby of the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, Ohio, she smiled anxiously as her longtime therapist told her she'd be fine, that she was ready for the outside world. She had checked all the boxes during her nearly 10 years behind bars — substance abuse treatment, professional development, even earning an associate's degree — and had people intent on helping her.

"Sometimes, I'm just so scared that it's not enough," Jarvis, her voice breaking, told The Associated Press before her release.

Jarvis, 32, is part of the fastest-growing prison population in the country, one of more than 190,000 women held in some form of confinement in the United States as of this year. Their numbers grew by more than 500% between 1980 and 2021, more than twice the growth rate for men, according to a report by

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The Sentencing Project, a research and advocacy organization for incarcerated people.

The sharp increase is partially due to the increased penalties and mandatory minimum sentences for drug possession and trafficking that many states have implemented over the past few decades. Approximately 25% of incarcerated women are in prison for drug-related crimes, compared to 12% of men, according to the 2023 report. Ohio — an epicenter of the opioid crisis — is among the states that experienced the most dramatic jump in female prisoners.

Programs aimed at helping women stay out of prison once they're released have not grown at nearly the same pace, according to the National Institute of Justice.

"Women's incarceration grew very rapidly in the early 2000s, but it took a good decade or so before the field really acknowledged the widening gap between available programs and services and the number of women who need them," said Wendy Sawyer, research director at the Prison Policy Initiative, a research and advocacy nonprofit.

That makes the journey harder for women, who confront different challenges than their male counterparts. Over half, for example, are mothers to minor children, the group says.

"Women face all of the same barriers that men face in reentry — securing employment, housing, and transportation, and reestablishing family connections — but with an extra level of difficulty," Sawyer said. "For example, housing ... often forces women to choose between homelessness and returning to abusive situations, while in contrast, many men return to female supports: mothers, wives, girlfriends."

There is also the issue of sexism.

"There is more stigma attached to a woman getting involved in a crime or using drugs than there is men," remarked Linda Janes, chief operating officer of Alvis House, a Columbus-based nonprofit that works with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections to provide reentry services, including housing and job assistance.

Jarvis is one of the lucky ones. In October, she was released into "transitional control" at Alvis House, and she's already found an apartment to live in after her time there is up. Columbus is far from her hometown of Parkersburg, West Virginia — a long way from the friends she did drugs with and the family members who overdosed or went to jail themselves while struggling with substance misuse.

In 2015, Jarvis pleaded guilty to aggravated robbery and involuntary manslaughter after a friend was fatally shot by a man whom he tried to force to withdraw cash from an ATM. The man's son owed Jarvis and her friend money — funds they needed to fuel their mutual drug addiction. In Ohio, someone can be charged with murder if their accomplice dies while committing or fleeing from a crime. Jarvis' guilty plea reduced her charges.

Now, after serving her time, she is ready to start anew. She's employed, attending The Ohio State University to get a degree in social work, and was recently granted full custody of the oldest of her two daughters, 17-year-old Adessa.

But her longing to be with her children more than Alvis House allowed led her to violate the terms of her release. She moved into her apartment with Adessa, despite being forbidden from living outside transitional housing without another adult.

Jarvis' mother — who had been approved to live with her but could only stay part time — reported her daughter to her parole officer. She was upset about Jarvis' decision to reconcile with the father of her youngest daughter, 11-year-old Anna.

So now, Jarvis is back at Alvis House. Adessa and Anna are living with Jarvis' mother back in Parkersburg.

Still, she hasn't given up. While she doesn't expect Adessa to return, she is working toward gaining shared custody of Anna with Anna's father in the hopes that they will all live together soon in Columbus. She and Anna — who was 5 months old when Jarvis went to prison — have been slowly checking off a bucket list during their brief moments together. It includes eating Takis, a spicy snack made of rolled corn tortilla chips, and for the first time in Anna's life, having Jarvis brush her hair.

"I think that was like, the moment for me when I was like, I'm going to get to be her mom," Jarvis said.

She is also still coming to grips with her new freedom and the daunting number of decisions she now has to make for herself: choosing what she wears, whom she talks to on the phone, what she buys with

her own money.

"I remember how strange it felt to put clothes on and look at myself in the mirror," she said, recalling the tears that flowed freely her first night in Alvis House. "I sat there in front of it for a while trying to decide if I recognized myself."

Her discomfort is echoed in life outside, where society is not necessarily embracing her with open arms. One day, she was forced to explain to a Verizon employee that she had no credit to buy a cellphone because she had been in prison for almost a decade. And just when she was about to start orientation for a job at an addiction treatment center in Columbus, her application was dropped. Even though she never directly harmed anyone herself, her record listed a violent felony, which disqualified her.

"No matter what I do, it's (the felony's) always gonna be violent," Jarvis said in a video message, sobbing into the camera. "I'm not a violent person."

Jarvis has since gotten a job as a restaurant server. On April 20, she will finally be able to move full time into the two-bedroom apartment, a space lovingly furnished with hand-painted mason jars and donated furniture. Anna's bedroom has been tenderly decorated in a pink and purple color scheme.

As the date of her full independence approaches like a fast-moving train filled with the cargo of her past and future life, she has trouble separating her anticipation from her anxiety.

For now, she knows the two emotions will have to coexist.

Sitting in the apartment during a recent interview, she takes a deep breath.

"I'm proud I'm doing what I said I was going to do," she finally says. "I am the person I thought I was, even on my bad days."

Biden praises Prime Minister Kishida's leadership and Japan's growing international clout

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden praised Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's "bold" leadership on a series of global crises as he welcomed the Japanese leader to the White House on Wednesday for wide-ranging talks that touched on the delicate security situation in the Pacific, the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas conflict and more.

Kishida's official visit, which included a glitzy state dinner at the White House on Wednesday evening, completes the Democratic administration's feting of the leaders of the Quad, the informal partnership among the U.S., Japan, Australia and India that the White House has focused on elevating since Biden took office. As administration officials put it, they saved the most pivotal relationship for last.

"The unbreakable alliance between Japan and the United States is the cornerstone of peace, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and around the world," Biden said as he welcomed Kishida to a pomp-filled arrival ceremony on the White House South Lawn.

The visit also marks the realization of Japan's transformation from a regional player to a global influencer — with senior Biden administration officials noting appreciatively there is little the U.S. does across the globe that Tokyo doesn't support. They pointed to Japan's eagerness to take a leading role in trying to bolster Ukraine against Russia's invasion and with the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

"The cooperation between our countries bound together by common values and commitment has become a global one with the scope and depth covering outer space and the deep sea," Kishida said. "Today the world faces more challenges and difficulties than ever before. Japan will join hands with our American friends and together we will lead the way in tackling the challenges of the Indo-Pacific region and the world, while tirelessly developing the relationship."

Kishida also announced that Japan is giving 250 cherry trees to the U.S. to mark America's coming 250th birthday in 2026.

Biden and Kishida are both confronting difficult political headwinds on the home front while trying to navigate increasingly complicated problems on the global stage. Like Biden, Kishida has been dogged by low approval ratings for much of his tenure.

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Biden's reelection effort has been shadowed by an American electorate anxious about inflation, unease among some Democrats over his handling of the Israel-Hamas war, and concerns about whether at 81 he's too old to serve another four years. The U.S. economy got another blip of dour data on Wednesday with the government reporting that consumer inflation ticked up last month.

Kishida, meanwhile, is dealing with a Japanese economy that slipped to the world's fourth-largest after it contracted in the last quarter of 2023 and fell behind Germany. Polls in Japan show that support for Kishida, who was elected in 2021, has plunged as he deals with a political funds corruption scandal within his ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

To be certain, there are differences in the U.S.-Japan relationship. 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. Biden argued in announcing his opposition that the U.S. needs to "maintain strong American steel companies powered by American steelworkers."

At their Rose Garden press conference following their private Oval Office talks, Biden and Kishida side-stepped addressing in detail their discussion about the prospective U.S. Steel acquisition. Biden said he stood by his commitment to American workers and fostering the Japanese alliance. Kishida noted the extensive investment both nations have made into each other's economy and his hope for creating more "win-win" situations.

The leaders announced plans to upgrade U.S.-Japan military relations, with both sides looking to tighten cooperation amid concerns about North Korea's nuclear program and China's increasing military assertiveness in the Pacific. The structural updates will focus on improving interoperability and planning between U.S. and Japanese forces as well as exploring bolstering air defense capabilities, including with Australia. The U.S., United Kingdom, and Australia are also considering including Japan in the AUKUS defense partnership, a grouping launched in 2021 that aims to equip Australia with nuclear-powered and conventionally armed submarines.

Kishida and Biden also confirmed 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 two Japanese astronauts on future moon-landing missions. One of them would become the first non-American astronaut to set foot on the moon.

Biden heaped praise on Japan for its significant increase in defense spending and has tightened cooperation on economic and security matters throughout Kishida's tenure.

Japan was quick to step up in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, join the U.S. and other Western allies in mounting aggressive sanctions on Moscow, and Japanese automakers Mazda, Toyota and Nissan announced their withdrawal from Russia.

Tokyo has been one of the largest donors to Kyiv since Russia's invasion, and Japan has surged its defense spending amid concern about China's military assertiveness.

As part of its increased defense, Japan agreed to acquire U.S.-made Tomahawks and other long-range cruise missiles that can hit targets in China or North Korea under a more offensive security strategy. Japan, Britain and Italy also began a collaboration on a next-generation jet fighter project.

"The prime minister is a visionary and courageous leader," Biden said. "When Russia began its brutal invasion of Ukraine two years ago, he did not hesitate to condemn sanctions and isolate Russia and provide billions assistance to Ukraine."

Biden also credited Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol for working to repair frosty relations between Tokyo and Seoul. Relations have rapidly thawed over the last two years amid shared concerns about China's assertiveness in the Pacific and North Korea's persistent nuclear threats. Biden last year hosted the two leaders at the presidential retreat at Camp David in Maryland's Catoctin Mountains.

The Japan-South Korea relationship is a delicate one because of differing views of World War II history and Japan's colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula.

Biden and Kishida also told reporters they were open to direct talks between Japan and North Korea over the abduction of Japanese citizens during the 1970s and 1980s and other issues. Kishida's previous calls for talks have been rejected by Pyongyang.

In 2002, Kim Jong Il, the father of Kim Jong Un, told then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi that its agents had kidnapped 13 Japanese citizens and allowed five of them to return to Japan. But Japan believes hundreds may have been taken and some remain alive. Biden called Japan's attempts to set up a leader-to-leader summit with North Korea a "good thing," and he reiterated his administration's willingness for its own talks without preconditions.

Kishida will remain in Washington on Thursday to take part in a U.S.-Japan-Philippines summit, at which China's increasing aggressive action in the region will loom large over the talks.

Relations between China and the Philippines have been repeatedly tested by skirmishes involving 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.

"The main intent of this trilateral agreement is for us to be able to continue to flourish, to be able to help one another, and ... to keep the peace in the South China Sea and the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea," Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. told reporters before departing for Washington on Wednesday.

In triple-murder trial, prosecutor says Chad Daybell built 'alternate reality' to gain sex and money

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — An Idaho man charged with three murders in an unusual doomsday-focused case crafted an alternate reality so that he could fulfill "his desire for sex, money and power," a prosecutor told jurors Wednesday morning.

"When he had a chance at what he considered his rightful destiny, he made sure no person and no law would stand in his way," prosecutor Rob Wood said.

Chad Daybell, 55, is facing charges of first degree murder, insurance fraud, and conspiracy to commit murder and grand theft in connection with the deaths of Tammy Daybell, 7-year-old Joshua "JJ" Vallow and 16-year-old Tylee Ryan. Last year, their mother, Vallow Daybell, received a life sentence without parole for the killings.

Prosecutors say the couple justified the three killings by creating a detailed and apocalyptic belief system, part of an elaborate scheme to eliminate any obstacles to their relationship and to obtain money from survivor benefits and life insurance. Vallow Daybell referred to her two youngest kids as zombies, one friend testified during her trial.

"The evidence will show that this was a convenient narrative," Wood told jurors. "This narrative gave them the pretext to remove people from this world for their own good."

Daybell's defense attorney John Prior presented a different picture to jurors — noting that Chad Daybell was a religious person but suggesting that his belief in things like premonitions were fairly mainstream. Prior also explained to jurors that Lori Vallow Daybell's brother, Alex Cox, had a violent history. He had previously been convicted of attacking Vallow Daybell's third husband, and he shot and killed her fourth husband.

"Whenever there was a problem with Lori Vallow, Alex Cox ran to the rescue," Prior said in opening statements.

Daybell's attorney also argued that his client lived a normal, faith-focused life before he met Lori Vallow Daybell, who he said showered Daybell with attention. His legal team described her as a "beautiful, vivacious person" who drew Daybell into an extramarital relationship.

Daybell's attorney also said he would present several experts in DNA, forensics and pathology who would testify that it's impossible to determine what caused Tammy Daybell's death and that none of Chad Daybell's DNA was found with the children's bodies. Some of Chad and Tammy Daybell's adult children will also testify, Prior said, about how Tammy Daybell was suffering from a number of maladies but that she refused to see a doctor, instead treating her illnesses with herbs and oils at home.

"What's important are facts and evidence," Prior told the jury. "Don't be distracted by speculation, don't

be distracted by guesses or suspicions or hunches. It all comes down to facts and evidence.”

The prosecutor, Wood, also described the basics of the case against Daybell, structuring his presentation for jurors like chapters in a book — an apparent reference to the defendant’s previous work as an author. Chad Daybell was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and self-published fiction loosely based on its teachings.

In fall 2019, prosecutors say he tried to fraudulently collect on his late wife’s life insurance policy, and Vallow Daybell continued to collect both children’s social security benefits after they died.

Chad Daybell has pleaded not guilty to the charges, and the trial is expected to take more than two months. Prosecutors said they will seek the death penalty if Daybell is convicted. Daybell’s defense attorney John Prior did not return a phone message requesting comment. A judge has issued a gag order in the case, barring attorneys from talking to the media until the trial is over.

The grim story began in the fall of 2019, when extended family members reported the two children missing and law enforcement officials launched a search that spanned several states. The subsequent investigation took several unexpected turns.

Vallow Daybell and Chad Daybell were having an affair when both of their spouses died unexpectedly, investigators said. Vallow Daybell’s husband was shot to death by her brother Alex Cox in Arizona in July 2019; the brother told police it was in self-defense.

Wood told jurors that the evidence in the case will show that Chad Daybell and Lori Vallow Daybell manipulated Cox into doing their bidding by promising him spiritual rewards.

Several months later, in October 2019, Tammy Daybell died. Chad Daybell initially told police she was battling an illness and died in her sleep, but an autopsy later determined she died of asphyxiation. Vallow Daybell and Chad Daybell married just two weeks after Tammy Daybell died, surprising family members and drawing suspicion from authorities.

Friends later told detectives that Vallow Daybell and Chad Daybell believed they had been reincarnated and were tasked with gathering people before a biblical apocalypse.

Wood said Chad Daybell described both children as being possessed before they disappeared, and that he repeatedly predicted to friends that Tammy Daybell would soon die.

The bodies of the children were eventually found buried on Chad Daybell’s property. Tylee Ryan’s remains had been dismembered and burned, and JJ’s remains were bound.

Biden administration sets first-ever limits on ‘forever chemicals’ in drinking water

By MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

The Biden administration on Wednesday finalized strict limits on certain so-called “forever chemicals” in drinking water that will require utilities to reduce them to the lowest level they can be reliably measured. Officials say this will reduce exposure for 100 million people and help prevent thousands of illnesses, including cancers.

The rule is the first national drinking water limit on toxic PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, which are widespread and long lasting in the environment.

Health advocates praised the Environmental Protection Agency for not backing away from tough limits the agency proposed last year. But water utilities took issue with the rule, saying treatment systems are expensive to install and that customers will end up paying more for water.

Water providers are entering a new era with significant additional health standards that the EPA says will make tap water safer for millions of consumers — a Biden administration priority. The agency has also proposed forcing utilities to remove dangerous lead pipes.

Utility groups warn the rules will cost tens of billions of dollars each and fall hardest on small communities with fewer resources. Legal challenges are sure to follow.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan says the rule is the most important action the EPA has ever taken on

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PFAS.

"The result is a comprehensive and life-changing rule, one that will improve the health and vitality of so many communities across our country," said Regan.

PFAS chemicals are hazardous because they don't degrade in the environment and are linked to health issues such as low birth weight and liver disease, along with certain cancers. The EPA estimates the rule will cost about \$1.5 billion to implement each year, but doing so will prevent nearly 10,000 deaths over decades and significantly reduce serious illnesses.

They've been used in everyday products including nonstick pans, firefighting foam and waterproof clothing. Although some of the most common types are phased out in the U.S., others remain. Water providers will now be forced to remove contamination put in the environment by other industries.

"It's that accumulation that's the problem," said Scott Belcher, a North Carolina State University professor who researches PFAS toxicity. "Even tiny, tiny, tiny amounts each time you take a drink of water over your lifetime is going to keep adding up, leading to the health effects."

PFAS is a broad family of chemical substances, and the new rule sets strict limits on two common types — called PFOA and PFOS — at 4 parts per trillion. Three other types that include GenEx Chemicals that are a major problem in North Carolina are limited to 10 parts per trillion. Water providers will have to test for these PFAS chemicals and tell the public when levels are too high. Combinations of some PFAS types will be limited, too.

Regan will announce the rule in Fayetteville, North Carolina, on Wednesday.

Environmental and health advocates praised the rule, but said PFAS manufacturers knew decades ago the substances were dangerous yet hid or downplayed the evidence. Limits should have come sooner, they argue.

"Reducing PFAS in our drinking water is the most cost effective way to reduce our exposure," said Scott Faber, a food and water expert at Environmental Working Group. "It's much more challenging to reduce other exposures such as PFAS in food or clothing or carpets."

Over the last year, EPA has periodically released batches of utility test results for PFAS in drinking water. Roughly 16% of utilities found at least one of the two strictly limited PFAS chemicals at or above the new limits. These utilities serve tens of millions of people. The Biden administration, however, expects about 6-10% of water systems to exceed the new limits.

Water providers will generally have three years to do testing. If those test exceed the limits, they'll have two more years to install treatment systems, according to EPA officials.

Some funds are available to help utilities. Manufacturer 3M recently agreed to pay more than \$10 billion to drinking water providers to settle PFAS litigation. And the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes billions to combat the substance. But utilities say more will be needed.

For some communities, tests results were a surprise. Last June, a utility outside Philadelphia that serves nearly 9,000 people learned that one of its wells had a PFOA level of 235 parts per trillion, among the highest results in the country at the time.

"I mean, obviously, it was a shock," said Joseph Hastings, director of the joint public works department for the Colledgeville and Trappe boroughs, whose job includes solving problems presented by new regulations.

The well was quickly yanked offline, but Hastings still doesn't know the contamination source. Several other wells were above the EPA's new limits, but lower than those the state of Pennsylvania set earlier. Now, Hastings says installing treatment systems could be a multi-million dollar endeavor, a major expense for a small customer base.

The new regulation is "going to throw public confidence in drinking water into chaos," said Mike McGill, president of WaterPIO, a water industry communications firm.

The American Water Works Association, an industry group, says it supports the development of PFAS limits in drinking water, but argues the EPA's rule has big problems.

The agency underestimated its high cost, which can't be justified for communities with low levels of PFAS, and it'll raise customer water bills, the association said. Plus, there aren't enough experts and work-

ers — and supplies of filtration material are limited.

Work in some places has started. The company Veolia operates utilities serving about 2.3 million people across six eastern states and manages water systems for millions more. Veolia built PFAS treatment for small water systems that serve about 150,000 people. The company expects, however, that roughly 50 more sites will need treatment — and it's working to scale up efforts to reduce PFAS in larger communities it serves.

Such efforts followed dramatic shifts in EPA's health guidance for PFAS in recent years as more research into its health harms emerged. Less than a decade ago, EPA issued a health advisory that PFOA and PFOS levels combined shouldn't exceed 70 parts per trillion. Now, the agency says no amount is safe.

Public alarm has increased, too. In Minnesota, for example, Amara's Law aims to stop avoidable PFAS use. It's been nearly a year since the law's namesake, Amara Strande, died from a rare cancer her family blames on PFAS contamination by 3M near her high school in Oakdale, although a connection between PFAS and her cancer can't be proven. Biden administration officials say communities shouldn't suffer like Oakdale. 3M says it extends its deepest condolences to Amara's friends and family.

Losing Amara pushed the family towards activism. They've testified multiple times in favor of PFAS restrictions.

"Four parts per trillion, we couldn't ask for a better standard," Amara's sister Nora said. "It's a very ambitious goal, but anything higher than that is endangering lives."

Ukraine will be outgunned by Russia 10 to 1 in weeks without US help, top Europe general says

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top general for U.S. forces in Europe told Congress Wednesday that Ukraine will be outgunned 10 to one by Russia within a matter of weeks if Congress does not find a way to approve sending more ammunition and weapons to Kyiv soon.

The testimony from Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, head of U.S. European Command, and Celeste Waulander, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, comes as Congress enters pivotal weeks for voting for aid for Ukraine, but there's no guarantee funding will be improved in time.

Ukraine has been rationing its munitions as Congress has delayed passing its \$60 billion supplemental bill. "They are now being outshot by the Russian side five to one. So the Russians fire five times as many artillery shells at the Ukrainians than the Ukrainians are able to fire back. That will immediately go to 10 to one in a matter of weeks," Cavoli said. "We're not talking about months. We're not talking hypothetically."

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson has been trying to find a way forward for the bill that would fund new rounds of munitions production at U.S. firms to enable the Pentagon to then rush more munitions to Ukraine. Johnson is trying to bring it to the floor for a House vote, but he is facing concerns from members who cite domestic needs, including border security.

The speaker is also facing a threat to his leadership role from his far-right flank by Georgia Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene who has called for his ouster over the issue.

While the political battles on Capitol Hill continue, the dire battlefield situation in Ukraine worsens.

Cavoli told the lawmakers that in this conflict, the U.S. flow of 155mm artillery shells has been a lifeline. "The biggest killer on the battlefield is artillery. In most conflicts, but in this one definitely. And should Ukraine run out, they would run out because we stopped supplying — because we supply the lion's share of that," Cavoli said.

Russia's own production of missiles has ramped up and can launch large-scale attacks every few days. If Ukraine's air defense stocks run out, "those attacks would absolutely cripple the economy, and the civil society as well as the military of Ukraine if they were not defended against without a U.S. provision of interceptors," Cavoli said.

"Their ability to defend their terrain that they currently hold and their airspace would fade rapidly, will

fade rapidly without the supplemental," Cavoli said.

U.S. Army leaders offered similar dire warnings to the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee later in the day, saying that the lack of the supplemental is a critical problem for both Ukraine and the U.S. Army.

"The side that can't shoot back, loses, and at this point Ukraine is really starting to be pressed to be able to shoot back. So I am very concerned," said Army Secretary Christine Wormuth. "We saw Ukraine lose some territory a couple of months ago. And I think there is a real danger ...that the Russians could have a breakthrough somewhere in the line."

Gen. Randy George, chief of staff of the Army added that the funding is needed to help send Ukraine long-range weapons and air defense systems so they can defend their critical infrastructure and their troops on the front lines.

At the same time, Wormuth and Gen. Randy George, chief of staff of the Army, said that unless Congress approves the supplemental soon, the Army won't have enough money to bring home the troops currently serving in Europe, or funding to train units in the U.S.

"We don't have the transportation money to have them redeploy," said Wormuth, referring to Army units that are deployed across Europe. "We don't have the transportation money to send units to backfill them."

She and George said they also need the money to continue sending units to the national training centers. to avoid outright cancellation of the training rotations, Wormuth said they can try to reduce participation or shrink their size.

"But those are the kinds of hard choices we're looking at. If we don't see the supplementals come across," she said.

If Kyiv falls, it could imperil Ukraine's Baltic NATO member neighbors and potentially drag U.S. troops into a prolonged European war.

At a Capitol Hill press conference on Wednesday, Johnson said: "House members are continuing to actively discuss our options on a path forward."

"It's a very complicated matter at a very complicated time. The clock is ticking on it, and everyone here feels the urgency of that, but what's required is that you reach consensus on it, and that's what we're working on," Johnson said.

Michigan Democrat Rep. Elissa Slotkin urged a vote.

"Speaker Johnson has a choice to make. I accept that it's a complicated choice. I accept that he's at risk of losing his job over that choice," Slotkin said.

Internet providers must now be more transparent about fees, pricing, FCC says

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Much like nutritional labels on food products, "broadband labels" for internet packages will soon tell you just what is going into the pricing of your service, thanks to new rules adopted by the Federal Communications Commission this week.

"If you've ever shopped for home or mobile internet, you can understand how hard it can be to understand what you're actually paying for," said Jon Donenberg, Deputy Director of the White House National Economic Council, on a call with reporters. "The broadband nutrition label is a tool that can help consumers make sure they have a clear, straightforward explanation of home and mobile services before signing up for anything."

Following the design of FDA food labels, these broadband labels will provide easy-to-understand, accurate information about the cost and performance of high-speed internet service to help consumers avoid junk fees, price hikes, and other unexpected costs.

Internet service providers selling home access or mobile broadband plans will be required to have a label for each plan beginning April 10.

The labels will be mandated to appear at any point of sale, including online and in stores, and they will

be required to disclose all pricing information — including introductory rates, data allowances, and speeds. The labels will also include links to information about network management practices and privacy policies.

Here's what you need to know.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE NEW LABELING?

Hidden fees and unexpected rate hikes have dogged consumers shopping for internet service for years, and the Biden administration has been cracking down on "junk fees" (opaque and misleading fee structures) across industries — including banking, hotel and airline pricing, and utility and phone services — for the past several years.

On a call Tuesday, a spokesperson for the FCC clarified that the labels "cannot be buried in multiple clicks" or hidden in a way that a consumer might miss.

"Fees can make it hard to understand the true cost of an internet plan," said Donenberg, adding that the agency is "committed to rooting out surprise junk fees that some companies pile on to your bills."

WHAT INFORMATION WILL EACH LABEL CONTAIN?

1. Monthly price and contract length
2. Whether that price will change after a certain period and what it will change to
3. Complete list of monthly and one-time fees, and early termination fee
4. Whether the company participates in the Affordable Connectivity Program and link to check if one qualifies
5. "Typical" download and upload speeds, and latency
6. Data cap and price beyond that cap
7. Links to network management (e.g., zero rating and content blocking) and privacy policies

WHAT IF I DON'T UNDERSTAND SOMETHING ON THE LABELS?

A glossary is available to help consumers better understand the information displayed on the label.

WHAT IF A PROVIDER DOESN'T DISPLAY THE LABEL?

If a provider does not display their labels or posts inaccurate information about its fees or service plans, consumers can file a complaint with the FCC Consumer Complaint Center.

WHEN DO THESE RULES TAKE EFFECT?

While many providers will begin displaying their labels in April, some firms with less than 100,000 subscribers will have until Oct. 10, 2024, to comply with the FCC rules.

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Masters a reunion of the world's best players. But the numbers are shrinking

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — More than golf's first major championship of the year, the Masters represents unification. This is the first time since July at the British Open the best players regardless of their tours compete against each other — same course, same tournament, same television network.

"I believe everyone agrees there's excitement in the air this week," Masters Chairman Fred Ridley said Wednesday. "The best players in the world are together once again."

Still unclear at Augusta National is for how much longer.

Saudi-funded LIV Golf has 13 players at the Masters, seven of them former champions who can play as long as they want. That's down from 18 a year ago. Only nine LIV players are assured of being back to Augusta National next year, depending on how they fare in the majors this year.

Ridley offered little hope the pathway for LIV to Augusta National was about to get wider.

He said the Official World Golf Ranking was a "legitimate determiner" of the best in golf, bad news for a rival league that does not get world ranking points. And while the Masters annually reviews its criteria

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for invitations, Ridley announced no new changes.

Instead, he leaned on the Masters being an invitational, and the club alone decides who it deems worthy of getting that elegant, cream-colored invitation in the mail.

"If we felt that there were a player or players, whether they played on the LIV Tour or any other tour, who were deserving of an invitation to the Masters, we would exercise that discretion with regard to special invitations," Ridley said.

The battle is for a green jacket, but that might not be the only competition.

It will be difficult to look at a leaderboard without considering who is with LIV Golf. That much hasn't changed from last year — the first Masters since LIV was launched — and LIV certainly showed the 54-hole, no-cut league didn't affect them. Three players were among the top four on the final leaderboard.

And just like last year, there is no animosity inside the ropes.

Phil Mickelson and Joaquin Niemann from LIV Golf played a practice round with Akshay Bhatia, the final player into the field because of his Texas Open victory last week. Xander Schauffele told of running into Dustin Johnson and the two decided to play a practice round, no different from what would have happened long before LIV began luring away players with guaranteed riches.

But the future remains murky.

Augusta National and the other three organizations that run majors have seats on the OWGR board that reviewed LIV's application to join and get world ranking points. The vote was unanimous not to award points until certain enhancements were met.

LIV eventually decided to withdraw its application, and several players decried the world ranking as no longer relevant.

It is to Ridley and the Masters. The top 50 at the end of the year and a week before the Masters still get invitations. Bryson DeChambeau said the majors, including the Masters, should invite the top 12 from the LIV points list.

Ridley wasn't buying that.

"I think it will be difficult to establish any type of point system that had any connection to the rest of the world of golf because they're basically — not totally, but for the most part — a closed shop," Ridley said. "There is some relegation, but not very much.

"But I don't think that prevents us from giving subjective consideration based on talent, based on performance to those players."

That's what led Augusta National to offer an invitation to Niemann. The club did not cite anything he did on LIV — the Chilean has two LIV wins this year — but his willingness to travel outside LIV and win the Australian Open, along with a top finish in the Australian PGA.

Talor Gooch did not get an invitation. He won three LIV events last year and later suggested Rory McIlroy would have an asterisk next to his name if he won the Masters because all the best aren't there.

Gooch is unlikely to be missed, not with Scottie Scheffler going for a second green jacket, with McIlroy chasing the career Grand Slam, Tiger Woods playing for only the second time this year and a host of others from all tours chasing one of golf's most prized possessions.

And then the PGA Tour will head to Hilton Head and LIV Golf will make its way to Australia, and they all have to wait until the next major May 16-19 at the PGA Championship.

"There's a lot of people a lot smarter than me that could figure this out in a much more efficient way," Jon Rahm said. "But the obvious answer is that there's got to be a way for certain players in whatever tour to be able to earn their way in. That's the only thing I can say. I don't know what that looks like. But there's got to be a fair way for everybody to compete."

6 former Mississippi law officers sentenced in state court for torture of 2 Black men

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press/Report for America

BRANDON, Miss. (AP) — Already sentenced to many years in federal prison, six white former Mississippi law enforcement officers who pleaded guilty to a long list of state and federal charges for torturing two Black men were sentenced Wednesday in state court.

The state sentences did not add time to the federal prison terms the defendants had already received, but the victims' supporters hailed the yearslong sentences, saying they took on unique importance in Mississippi, where local residents saw echoes of the state's history of racist atrocities by people in authority.

The six former officers who attacked Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker in January 2023 were sentenced last month to federal prison terms ranging from about 10 to 40 years. U.S. District Judge Tom Lee called their actions "egregious and despicable" as he gave sentences near the top of the federal guidelines to five of the six men.

Rankin County Circuit Judge Steve Ratcliff on Wednesday gave the men yearslong state sentences that were shorter than the amount of time in federal prison they had already received, but longer than what state prosecutors had recommended. Time served for the state convictions will run concurrently, or at the same time, as the federal sentences, and the men will serve their time in federal penitentiaries.

After the hearing, Malik Shabazz, an attorney representing Jenkins and Parker, celebrated that the former law officers were held accountable in the same courthouse where they had testified against people.

"They all had to come and appear in a courtroom where they have created much mischief," Shabazz said. "In this courtroom and in this courthouse, they have been given credibility to their statements. But today was dramatically different. Today, the judge in this circuit county court has given out justice."

Shabazz had said the state criminal sentencing is important because "historically, the state of Mississippi has lagged behind or ignored racial crimes and police brutality against Blacks." He applauded Ratcliff's decision to reject state prosecutors' recommendations for shorter sentences on the state charges.

Michelle Williams, a spokesperson for the Mississippi Attorney General's Office, said the sentences handed down Wednesday were consistent with the plea agreement reached with federal prosecutors.

In a written statement, Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch said the former officers' crimes did grave harm to the victims and violated the trust of citizens they were supposed to protect.

"These criminal acts make a difficult job even harder and far more dangerous," Fitch said. "And it is left to us all to commit ourselves to repairing that damage."

The defendants include five former Rankin County sheriff's deputies — Brett McAlpin, 53; Hunter Elward, 31; Christian Dedmon, 29; Jeffrey Middleton, 46; and Daniel Opdyke, 28 — and a former police officer from the city of Richland, Joshua Hartfield, 32, who was off duty during the assault.

All six of the former officers pleaded guilty to state charges of conspiracy to hinder prosecution. They were sentenced on multiple counts ranging from five to 20 years. Elward admitted to aggravated assault, and was sentenced to 20 years alongside punishments for burglary and conspiracy.

The charges followed an Associated Press investigation in March 2023 that linked some of the officers to at least four violent encounters since 2019 that left two Black men dead.

The terror began on Jan. 24, 2023, with a racist call for extrajudicial violence, according to federal prosecutors.

A white person phoned McAlpin and complained that two Black men were staying with a white woman at a house in Braxton, Mississippi. McAlpin told Dedmon, who texted a group of white deputies so willing to use excessive force they called themselves "The Goon Squad."

Once inside, they handcuffed Jenkins and his friend Parker and poured milk, alcohol and chocolate syrup over their faces while mocking them with racial slurs. They forced them to strip naked and shower together to conceal the mess. They mocked the victims with racial slurs and assaulted them with sex objects.

In a mock execution gone awry, Elward shot Jenkins in the mouth, lacerating his tongue and breaking his jaw. The officers devised a coverup and agreed to plant drugs on Jenkins and Parker. False charges

stood against the men for months.

McAlpin and Middleton, the oldest in the group, threatened to kill other officers if they spoke up, prosecutors said.

The only defendant who didn't receive a federal prison term at the top of the sentencing guidelines was Hartfield, who did not work in a sheriff's department with the others and was not a member of the "Goon Squad."

In federal court, the deputies expressed remorse for their behavior and apologized to Jenkins and Parker. Several of their attorneys said their clients became ensnared in a culture of corruption that was encouraged by leaders in the sheriff's office.

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

In statements read by their attorneys in court Wednesday, Jenkins and Parker said their ordeal had been ingrained in their bodies and minds.

"Your honor, they killed me. I just didn't die," Jenkins said.

Trump says Arizona's abortion ban goes too far while defending the overturning of Roe v. Wade

By BILL BARROW and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Donald Trump said Wednesday that an Arizona law that criminalizes nearly all abortions goes too far and called on Arizona lawmakers to change it, while also defending the overturning of Roe v. Wade that cleared states to ban the procedure.

"It'll be straightened out and as you know, it's all about states' rights," the former president told supporters and journalists after landing in Atlanta for a fundraiser. "It'll be straightened out, and I'm sure that the governor and everybody else are going to bring it back into reason and that'll be taken care of, I think, very quickly."

Though Trump has waffled on whether he supports abortion rights, he appointed three of the Supreme Court justices who overturned Roe v. Wade and ended a federally guaranteed right to abortion. Now facing growing political backlash as Democrats notch victories around the nation by campaigning on abortion rights, Trump increasingly has been put on the defensive and urged Republicans to avoid supporting bans that are unpopular with many Americans.

Trump was asked Wednesday whether he would sign a national abortion ban if elected president again. According to video taken of his news conference, he shook his head in response and said "No."

Trump issued a video statement earlier this week declining to endorse a national abortion ban and saying he believes limits should be left to the states. His statement angered some religious conservatives and energized allies of President Joe Biden who see abortion rights as one of Trump's weaknesses.

Biden was asked at a Rose Garden news conference for his message to Arizona voters after the state Supreme Court ruling on Tuesday cleared the way for the enforcement of an 1864 law that bans abortion at all stages of pregnancy with no exceptions for rape or incest and allows abortions only if the mother's life is in jeopardy.

"Elect me," the president said. "I'm in the 20th century ... the 21st century. Not back then."

The court's decision drastically altered Arizona's legal landscape for terminating pregnancies. The court suggested doctors can be prosecuted under the Civil War-era law, though the opinion written by the court's majority did not say that.

Trump maintains he is proud that the three Supreme Court justices he nominated voted to overturn Roe v. Wade, saying states will have different restrictions. He supports three exceptions in cases of rape, incest and when the life of the mother is at risk.

In a stop at a Chick-fil-A restaurant in Atlanta, Trump was asked whether doctors should be punished

for performing abortions, and he said he would let that be up to the states.

Biden's campaign spokesman, Michael Tyler, said Trump "owns the suffering and chaos happening right now, including in Arizona, because he proudly overturned Roe" and has a track record of "banning abortion every chance he gets."

Trump also spoke about a Florida law that bans abortions after six weeks, saying that "is probably maybe going to change also." Last week, the state Supreme Court upheld the state's ban on most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy and the ruling also clears the way for the state to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy.

"For 52 years, people have wanted to end Roe v. Wade, to get it back to the states. We did that. It was an incredible thing, an incredible achievement," he said. "Now the states have it, and the states are putting out what they want. It's the will of the people. So Florida is probably going to change."

Trump ignored questions about how he plans to vote himself on Florida's pending state constitutional amendment that would enshrine abortion access as a right of his home state's residents. He did not elaborate on what he thinks the level of restrictions and access should be in Arizona or any other state.

Desperate young Guatemalans try to reach the US even after horrific deaths of migrating relatives

GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

COMITANCILLO, Guatemala (AP) — Every night for nearly two years, Glendy Aracely Ramírez has prayed by the altar in her parents' mud-brick bedroom where, under a large crucifix, is a picture of her sister Blanca. The 23-year-old died alongside 50 other migrants in a smuggler's tractor-trailer in Texas.

"I ask God for my family's health and that I might get to the United States one day. My mom asks God that she won't have to see another accident," said Glendy, 17, who has already packed a small backpack for her own journey from the family's home 8,900 feet (2,700 meters) up in Guatemala's highlands.

Her "coyote" postponed it for a few days because of a flare-up in violence among Mexican drug cartels that control migrants' routes to the United States, but she is undeterred.

Tens of thousands of youths from this region would rather take deadly risks — even repeatedly — than stay behind where they see no future. Blanca's fatal journey was her third attempt to reach the U.S.

"I want to go there, because here there are no opportunities, even though Mom says that I'll suffer what Blanca did," Glendy said as she sat with her mother, Filomena Crisóstomo, in their tidy dirt-floor courtyard. "I'd like to have a house, help my family and get ahead."

The record-high numbers of migrants illegally crossing the U.S.-Mexico border have made migration a top concern in this U.S. presidential election year. Among those migrants, the largest group of unaccompanied minors has been from Guatemala — nearly 50,000 of the 137,000 encounters recorded by border authorities in the last fiscal year.

Most come from tiny hamlets in the predominantly Indigenous Western Highlands. Daily wages top out around the equivalent of \$9, far below the supposed legal minimum. In tiny plots of brittle clay soil — often the only collateral for loans to pay smugglers' fees that can reach \$20,000 — many families grow corn and beans to eat.

Little else sprouts from the steep mountainsides except for the exuberantly decorated, multi-story concrete homes built with remittances from loved ones in the United States — constant reminders of what's possible if only one makes it "to the north."

In the small town of Comitancillo, two murals serve as a different reminder — they're memorials to the nearly two dozen local migrants who died in recent mass tragedies. They either asphyxiated in the trailer in San Antonio, Texas, in June 2022, or were shot and set afire by rogue police officers in Camargo, Mexico, in January 2021.

It took less than a week after the remains from the Camargo massacre were returned to Comitancillo for burial before the first surviving family member left for the U.S.

And with a 17-year-old boy who made it to Florida this winter, now at least one relative has migrated

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from nearly all of the families since the massacre, said the Rev. José Luis González, a priest with the Jesuit Migration Network. The lone exception was an older man whose family was already north of the border; he died trying to make it back after being deported, González said.

"It's an evident sign that the fear to stay is bigger than the fear to go," said González, who started ministering to the affected families when they traveled some six hours to Guatemala's capital for DNA tests to identify the remains.

Many families credit the Jesuit group for being the only institution that has stayed by their side, regularly traveling to Comitancillo to provide legal updates — nearly a dozen police officers were sentenced last fall in the Camargo case — as well psychological, humanitarian and pastoral assistance.

On a recent morning, about 50 relatives of those lost either in Camargo or San Antonio gathered for a meeting with the Jesuit group that included workshops to process depression and grief. Most were women and children speaking Mam, one of Guatemala's two dozen Mayan languages.

One of the handful of fathers at the meeting was Virgilio Ambrocio. The eldest of his eight children, Celestina Carolina, was making less than \$90 a month as a housekeeper in Guatemala City and sending half of that back home to help feed her siblings. So she decided to try her luck in the United States, and died at 23 in the trailer.

"The hardest part is, who's going to help us now," Ambrocio said as dust swirled around his home. His wife, Olivia Orozco, wept silently, while holding a framed photo of a smiling Celestina.

The primary driver of migration over the past 10 years is the inability to get jobs to pay for the most basic necessities, said Ursula Roldán, a researcher at Rafael Landívar University in Guatemala City. That's exacerbated by the debts families incur to pay the smugglers, which would take 10 years' worth of in-country wages to repay — making it crucial to get to the U.S. and send back remittances from far higher wages.

Rising violence in the Mexican regions bordering Guatemala is also pushing more migrants to head to the U.S. instead of working seasonal agricultural jobs there. Climate change is affecting even subsistence farming.

In their one-room home near Comitancillo, Reina Coronado tried to convince the eight children she had since she married at 16 that they didn't have to risk their lives.

Some went north anyway, including Aracely Florentina Marroquín, 21, who had completed high school like Blanca and, like her, felt she had wasted her family's money in studying since she still couldn't get a professional job.

The last thing she told Coronado was that she'd go only for four years and send money to build a kitchen, so she wouldn't have to cook tortillas over an open fire. Next came the call from Texas that made Coronado cry for months. Today, she finds some comfort caring for two young daughters still living with her and the animals she raises.

"Even though it's a struggle, one has to fight, to try to keep going," Coronado said. "I go to work and that way the day, and the hard moments, pass. Sometimes I do it crying, but I trust in our Father, the Lord."

Marcelina Tomás has also been praying for strength since her oldest son, Anderson Pablo, was murdered in Camargo — and especially in recent months since his younger brother Emerson, 17, also went to the U.S.

Anderson was in 9th grade when the pandemic hit and he started working in the fields alongside his father. Their wages of around \$6 a day were enough to afford tortillas each day for the family of 11, but not something to go with them, Tomás said. So she and her husband agreed to help Anderson get loans for the \$16,000 smuggling fee.

Twelve days after Anderson, 16, left their home near Comitancillo, news of the Camargo massacre arrived via social media. Pregnant with her tenth child, Tomás, 37, had to leave her children with family members and spend a night away from home for the first time to undergo DNA tests in the capital that allowed Anderson's partial remains to be identified and buried.

"Only God knows what happened. And all for wanting to get ahead," Tomás said. "I relied on him, and he treated his little siblings so well."

Anderson had dissuaded Emerson from going along, saying he should stay in school a bit longer. Ac-

According to Tomás, Emerson was heartbroken after his brother's death; he enrolled in high school, but soon quit to work in a potato field.

Around the third anniversary of Anderson's death, Emerson said he wanted to migrate, because many other youths had gone too. Tomás reminded him of Anderson's fate, the tragedy in San Antonio, the neighbors' children who died in the border deserts or in work accidents in the U.S.

"No," he told me, "I'm going." And he went," Tomás said by the altar where three pictures of Anderson stand by a crucifix, with a lit candle and a vase of calla lilies.

Anderson's dream was to earn enough to move the family from their one-room, mud-brick house to a concrete one with separate spaces for his parents, his brothers and his sisters. They live in such a house now, built with donations received after his death.

But nobody sleeps in the room with the altar. They're keeping it as Anderson's room.

Former Trump executive Allen Weisselberg sentenced to 5 months in jail for lying

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Allen Weisselberg, a retired executive in Donald Trump's real estate empire, was sentenced Wednesday to five months in jail for lying under oath during his testimony in the civil fraud lawsuit brought against the former president by New York's attorney general.

Weisselberg, 76, was escorted out of the courtroom in handcuffs following the sentencing, which lasted less than five minutes.

Asked if he wanted to address the court, Weisselberg, wearing a black windbreaker and a face mask, responded, "No, your honor."

It is Weisselberg's second time behind bars. The former Trump Organization chief financial officer served 100 days last year for dodging taxes on \$1.7 million in company perks, including a rent-free Manhattan apartment and luxury cars.

Now, he's again trading life as a Florida retiree for a stay at New York City's notorious Rikers Island jail complex, though he's also getting something in return.

When Weisselberg pleaded guilty last month to two counts of perjury, the office of Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg made a legally binding promise not to prosecute him for any other crimes he might have committed in connection with his longtime employment by the Trump Organization.

Weisselberg's plea agreement also does not require him to testify at Trump's hush money criminal trial, which is scheduled to start with jury selection Monday.

"Allen Weisselberg accepted responsibility for his conduct and now looks forward to the end of this life-altering experience and to returning to his family and his retirement," his attorney, Seth Rosenberg, said in a statement after the court hearing.

Prosecutors with Bragg's office declined to address the court during the brief sentencing hearing. As part of his guilty plea, Weisselberg admitted lying when he testified he had little knowledge of how Trump's Manhattan penthouse came to be valued on his financial statements at nearly three times its actual size.

The two cases highlighted Weisselberg's unflinching loyalty to Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

Trump's family employed Weisselberg for nearly 50 years, then gave him a \$2 million severance deal when the tax charges prompted him to retire. The company continues to pay his legal bills.

Weisselberg testified twice in trials that went badly for Trump, but each time he took pains to suggest that his boss hadn't committed any serious wrongdoing.

In agreeing to a five-month sentence, prosecutors cited Weisselberg's age and willingness to admit wrongdoing. In New York, perjury is a felony punishable by up to seven years in prison.

Weisselberg's sentence mirrors his previous case, in which he was ordered to serve five months in jail but was eligible for release after little more than three months with good behavior. Prior to that, he had

no criminal record.

Trump's lawyers took issue with Weisselberg's perjury prosecution, accusing the Manhattan district attorney's office of deploying "unethical, strong-armed tactics against an innocent man in his late 70s" while turning "a blind eye" to perjury allegations against Michael Cohen, the former Trump lawyer who is now a key prosecution witness in the hush money case.

Weisselberg pleaded guilty March 4. He admitted lying under oath on three occasions while testifying in New York Attorney General Letitia James' lawsuit against Trump: in depositions in July 2020 and May 2023 and on the witness stand at the trial last October. To avoid violating his tax case probation, however, he agreed to plead guilty only to charges related to his 2020 deposition testimony.

The size of Trump's penthouse was a key issue in the civil fraud case.

Trump valued the apartment on his financial statements from at least 2012 to 2016 as though it measured 30,000 square feet (2,800 square meters). A former Trump real estate executive testified that Weisselberg provided the figure. The former executive said that when he asked for the apartment's size in 2012, Weisselberg replied: "It's quite large. I think it's around 30,000 square feet."

However, state lawyers noted, Weisselberg got an email early in that year with a 1994 document attached that pegged Trump's apartment at 10,996 square feet (1,022 square meters). Weisselberg testified that he remembered the email but not the attachment and that he didn't "walk around knowing the size" of the apartment.

After Forbes magazine published an article in 2017 disputing the size of Trump's penthouse, its estimated value on his financial statement was cut from \$327 million to about \$117 million.

As Weisselberg was testifying last October, Forbes published an article with the headline "Trump's Long-time CFO Lied, Under Oath, About Trump Tower Penthouse."

The civil fraud trial ended with Judge Arthur Engoron ruling that Trump and some of his executives had schemed to deceive banks, insurers and others by lying about his wealth on financial statements used to make deals and secure loans. The judge penalized Trump \$455 million and ordered Weisselberg to pay \$1 million. They are both appealing.

In his decision, Engoron said he found Weisselberg's testimony "intentionally evasive" and "highly unreliable."

Weisselberg is likely to factor into Trump's hush money trial — even if he's in jail and not on the witness stand while it's happening.

Trump is accused of falsifying his company's records to cover up payments during his 2016 campaign to bury stories of marital infidelity. It is the first of Trump's four criminal cases scheduled to go to trial. Trump has pleaded not guilty and denies wrongdoing.

Cohen has said Weisselberg had a role in orchestrating the payments. Weisselberg, who lives in Boynton Beach, Florida, has not been charged in that case, and neither prosecutors nor Trump's lawyers have indicated they will call him as a witness.

Italy opens new slander trial against Amanda Knox. She was exonerated 9 years ago in friend's murder

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

FLORENCE, Italy (AP) — Amanda Knox was back on trial for slander Wednesday for wrongly accusing a Congolese man of murdering her roommate while the young women were exchange students in Italy. Knox herself was convicted of the slaying before being exonerated in a case that grabbed the global spotlight.

Knox was a 20-year-old student with rudimentary Italian who had recently arrived in Perugia, when she endured a long night of questioning in the murder of Meredith Kercher. She ended up accusing the owner of a bar where she worked part-time of killing the 21-year-old British student.

In 2016, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the interrogation violated her rights because she was questioned without a lawyer or official translator.

In November, Italy's highest Cassation Court threw out the slander conviction — the only remaining guilty verdict against Knox after the same court definitively threw out convictions for Kercher's murder against Knox and her Italian ex-boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, nine years ago.

That conviction, which endured multiple trials and appeals, has remained a legal stain against her, especially in Italy, as she pursues a new life in the United States campaigning for judicial reform.

Another man was convicted in Kercher's 2007 murder.

Knox, now 36, did not appear in Wednesday's hearing in Florence, and is being tried in absentia. She remains in the United States, where she campaigns for social justice and has a variety of media projects including a podcast and a limited series on her case in development with Hulu.

Knox's accusation against bar owner Patrick Lumumba appeared in statements typed by police that she signed, but which have been ruled inadmissible in the new trial by Italy's highest court.

She recanted the accusation in a four-page handwritten note in English penned the following afternoon — the only evidence the court can rule on.

However, a lawyer for Lumumba, Carlo Pacelli, argued to readmit the disallowed documents as reference since Knox referred to them multiple times in her written statement. Lumumba, who is participating in the prosecution as permitted by Italian law, also did not attend the trial.

Court recessed after nearly four hours of arguments and will reconvene June 5 for rebuttals and a decision. The case is being heard by two professional judges and eight civilian jurors.

Despite Knox's attempts at walking back the accusation, Lumumba was picked up for questioning and held for nearly two weeks.

The slander conviction carried a three-year sentence, which Knox served during nearly four years of detention until a Perugia appeals court found her and Sollecito not guilty. After six years of flip-flop verdicts, Knox was definitively exonerated by Italy's highest court of the murder in 2015.

Kercher's body was found with the throat slit on Nov. 2, 2007, in her locked bedroom in an apartment she shared with Knox and two other roommates.

Rudy Guede, whose DNA and footprints were found at the scene, was convicted of the murder and sentenced to 16 years in prison. He was released after serving 13 years, and is currently being investigated for allegedly physically and sexually assaulting a former girlfriend since being freed.

Israel threatens to strike Iran directly if Iran launches attack from its territory

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's foreign minister threatened Wednesday that his country's forces would strike Iran directly if the Islamic Republic launched an attack from its territory against Israel.

His comments came amid heightened tensions between the rival powers following the killings of Iranian generals in a blast at the Iranian consulate in Syria earlier this month.

"If Iran attacks from its territory, Israel will respond and attack in Iran," Israel Katz said in a post on X in both Farsi and Hebrew.

Earlier Wednesday, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reiterated a promise to retaliate against Israel over the attack on its consulate in Damascus.

Tehran holds Israel responsible for the strike that leveled the building, killing 12 people. Israel has not acknowledged its involvement, though it has been bracing for an Iranian response to the attack, a significant escalation in their long-running shadow war.

The strike killed Gen. Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a senior figure in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard who led the group's elite Quds Force in Lebanon and Syria until 2016. The 11 others who died included six Revolutionary Guard members, four Syrians and a Hezbollah militia member.

Israel has attacked scores of Iranian-linked targets in Syria over the years with the apparent intent of disrupting arms transfers and other cooperation with Lebanon's Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran. The

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Israeli army rarely comments on these attacks. Since the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza began six months ago, there have been near-daily exchanges of fire between Israeli forces and Hezbollah along the Israel-Lebanon border.

Gaza's Hamas rulers, who triggered the war by attacking southern Israel on Oct. 7, are also backed by Iran. Tehran also backs an umbrella group of Iraqi militias targeting U.S. military bases and positions in Syria and Iraq, known as The Islamic Resistance of Iraq.

Khamenei made the remarks at a prayer ceremony celebrating the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, saying the strike on its consulate was akin to an attack on Iranian territory.

"When they attacked our consulate area, it was like they attacked our territory," Khamenei said, in remarks broadcast by Iranian state TV. "The evil regime must be punished, and it will be punished."

Neither Katz nor the Ayatollah elaborated on the way they would retaliate.

Khamenei also criticized the West, particularly the U.S. and Britain, for supporting Israel in its war against Hamas in Gaza.

"It was expected they (would) prevent (Israel) in this disaster. They did not. They did not fulfil their duties, the Western governments," he said.

Iran does not recognize Israel.

Muslims worldwide celebrate Eid al-Fitr in the shadow of Gaza's misery

By ANDREW WILKS and NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Muslims around the world celebrated the Eid al-Fitr holiday Wednesday, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan. But events were overshadowed by the worsening crisis in Gaza and Israel's expected military offensive in Rafah city after six months of war.

"We should not forget our brothers and sisters in Palestine," one imam, Abdulrahman Musa, said in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. "They have been subjected to unjustified aggression and a lot of violence (as) the world is watching in silence."

In a holiday message, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sent support to Gaza, which he called a "bleeding wound on the conscience of humanity."

In Istanbul, some of the thousands of worshipers at the Aya Sofya Mosque carried Palestinian flags and chanted slogans in support of residents of Gaza, where the United Nations warns that more than a million people are at threat of imminent famine and little aid is allowed in.

Inside Gaza, there was little joy. Palestinians in the refugee camp of Jabaliya near Gaza City mourned loved ones among the over 33,000 killed in Israel's offensive in response to Hamas's deadly Oct. 7 attack in Israel.

Om Nidal Abu Omeira sat alone among bombed-out buildings and wept on the grave of her mother, son-in-law, and grandson. All were killed in Israel's offensive.

"They (the children) keep saying, 'I miss my father, where is he?' I tell them that he's in heaven," she told The Associated Press. "They start crying, and then I start crying with them."

Elsewhere, people were grateful for the plenty they had after a month of fasting and reflection. Before the holiday, markets around the world teemed with shoppers. Residents poured out of cities to return to villages to celebrate with loved ones.

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, nearly three-quarters of the population were traveling for the annual homecoming known locally as "mudik."

"This is a right moment to reconnect, like recharging energy that has been drained almost a year away from home," said civil servant Ridho Alfian.

Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia, was flooded with devotees. Preachers in their sermons called on people to pray for Muslims in Gaza.

"This is the time for Muslims and non-Muslims to show humanitarian solidarity, because the conflict in Gaza is not a religious war, but a humanitarian problem," said Jimly Asshiddiqie, who chairs the advisory board of the Indonesian Mosque Council.

In Berlin, worshipers reflected the world, coming from Benin, Ghana, Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey. "It's a day where we feel grateful for everything we have here, and think and give to those who are poor, facing war and have to go hungry," said Azhra Ahmad, a 45-year-old mother of five.

In Pakistan, authorities deployed more than 100,000 police and paramilitary forces to maintain security at mosques and marketplaces.

In Malaysia, ethnic Malay Muslims performed morning prayers at mosques nationwide just weeks after socks printed with the word "Allah" at a convenience store chain sparked a furor. Many found it offensive.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim called for unity and reconciliation, saying no groups should be sidelined based on religion or any other reason.

In Russia, worshipers gathered as their leaders vowed loyalty to fellow citizens amid tensions following last month's attack by an extremist group on a music hall outside Moscow in which 130 people were killed. The Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate claimed responsibility.

"As our country's president, Vladimir Putin, said, terrorism has neither a nationality nor a religion, the chairman of the Council of Muftis in Russia said. "We call to unite against the threat, against those dark forces."

College students are flocking to the Marriage Pact, mostly for fun, but some find lasting love

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Lifestyles Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It's the stuff of movies: Two friends vow to marry each other if they're not hitched by a specified future date or age.

Well, the Marriage Pact, an annual matching ritual that has become popular on nearly 90 college campuses around the U.S., has turned that dusty cliché into fun.

And a few couples have found lasting love.

Nearly half a million students have participated since the pact first rolled out at Stanford University in 2017. Born of an economics project by two students there, the pact involves an algorithm that rates matches based on such statements as "I prefer politically incorrect humor" and "I pride myself on telling hard truths."

Unlike dating apps and services, each student gets just one name, a percentage on the quality of the match and an email address to reach out.

"The idea is, if you think about everybody who goes to your college, surely there's someone who is a good backup plan for you," said Liam McGregor, one of the students who came up with the pact. "Not a Prince Charming, you know, not your perfect person necessarily, but maybe somebody whose number you should have."

The questions, he said, "are selected based on, hey, what do we need to know to have a 50-year relationship with someone? Can we make it a great one?"

WHO SIGNS UP FOR THE MARRIAGE PACT?

Many students do it with friends just for fun and don't follow up. Others are ghosted after trying to make contact. A tiny fraction land in long-term relationships, even marriage.

Count Max Walker and Melia Summers in that last group. The two were New York University students when they did the pact in fall 2020. It was just a lark for both. He was in New York and she was at NYU's Abu Dhabi campus. They chatted online for months, then Summers took a semester to study in New York.

Their first physical date, for pizza, was nearly a year after their match. Wedding bells will ring June 29. The quality of the match, according to the algorithm, was 99.65%

Take that, Tinder.

"We liked the same music. We did the same sports. We're both from rural places," Summers said. "It was kind of funny, right? It's someone saying that they can find your, like, ultimate match. I didn't really know if I was ready for my ultimate match at the time but I thought that was kind of a funny promise. And also, my friends were doing it, and we thought it'd be kind of interesting to do it together."

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The two plan to move to Knoxville, Tennessee, after the wedding so Walker can attend law school there.

HOW THE MARRIAGE PACT BEGAN

McGregor, who runs the pact, said it spread quickly after word got out. Students from 15 other schools tried in the beginning to get in on the Stanford pact because it wasn't available on their campuses. That's not allowed. A campus-specific email address is required.

Rather than dwell on physical beauty and personal stats like height and hair color, he said, the Marriage Pact focuses its 50-question survey on core values. Communication styles and conflict resolution. Smoking and drug habits. And things like: "If you do nothing for an entire day, how do you feel?" On a 1 to 7 scale, "like a lard" is 1 and "like royalty" is 7.

The University of Michigan marriage pact poses this puzzler: "There is a place for revenge when someone has wronged me." On the 1-7 scale, 1 is "turn the other cheek" and 7 is "plotting rn." The Boston College pact wants to know: "I would end a friendship over differing political views," and the Notre Dame questionnaire queries: "I would send older relatives to a nursing home."

Questions are tailored for each campus since values may vary among students. At Georgetown, questions about politics and ambition are included, for example, whereas the Stanford pact may ask about things like careerism and spontaneity.

Pandemic restrictions kicked in as the pact spread wide to new campuses. "It was just harder to date," said Katie Richards, who did the pact at Boston College in February 2021.

Richards, now 25, was matched with Miguel Corzo, also 25. Both were seniors. After some time dating long distance after graduation, they now live together in Philadelphia and just marked their third anniversary. He got down on one knee and proposed during the recent eclipse's totality in Erie, Pennsylvania, offering a diamond ring just as the moon left a glowing ring around the sun.

"We just did the Marriage Pact because our friends did it. We were just like, oh, you know, why not? It's something to do while everyone's locked away," Corzo said.

NOT EVERY MATCH LEADS TO LOVE

About 30% of matches meet up in person, and 1 in 9 of those end up dating for a year or longer, McGregor said. He knows of several other engaged couples. Some couples who were already dating have participated for fun and wound up matched with each other, he said.

McGregor was stunned at the interest in his little project after receiving the go-ahead from an economics professor.

"We sort of said, hey, could we get 100 people to sign up, because the matches won't be any good if fewer than 100 people sign up. In the first day, more than 1,000 people signed up, and the next day another 1,000 people signed up. By the end of the week, 60% of everyone at Stanford had signed up to get their optimal marital backup plan," he said.

Some students do the pact over and over again. It took Paul Armstrong and Shelby Merrill just one try in 2022 at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Neither took it that seriously at the beginning.

"All my buddies filled it out," Armstrong said. "I got a lot luckier than they did."

Their match hit 99.9%. Armstrong mailed off a personal resume to Merrill with some of his stats, likes and skills, listing among the latter: "Making playlists on Spotify (please don't have Apple Music)."

"When they sent me his email I was like, I'm not going to email him. This is dumb. But then he sent me that and I was like, OK, he put some effort into it. This is cute," Merrill said.

The two, who live in separate Massachusetts towns, are planning their first overseas trip together, to Scandinavia. At 24 (Paul) and 23 (Shelby), they're planning to move in together at some point.

"We're not in any rush," Armstrong said.

Judge in Trump's classified files case agrees to redact witness names, granting prosecution request

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal judge presiding over the classified documents case against former President Donald Trump granted a request by prosecutors on Tuesday aimed at protecting the identities of potential government witnesses.

But U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon refused to categorically block witness statements from being disclosed, saying there was no basis for such a "sweeping" and "blanket" restriction on their inclusion in pretrial motions.

The 24-page order centers on a dispute between special counsel Jack Smith's team and lawyers for Trump over how much information about witnesses and their statements could be made public ahead of trial. The disagreement, which had been pending for weeks, was one of many that had piled up before Cannon and had slowed the pace of the case against Trump — one of four prosecutions he is confronting.

The case remains without a firm trial date, though both sides have said they could be ready this summer. Cannon, who earlier faced blistering criticism over her decision to grant Trump's request for an independent arbiter to review documents obtained during an FBI search of Mar-a-Lago, made clear her continued skepticism of the government's theory of prosecution, saying Tuesday that the case raised "still-developing and somewhat muddled questions."

In reconsidering an earlier order and siding with prosecutors on the protection of witness identities, Cannon likely averted a dramatic exacerbation of tensions with Smith's team, which last week called a separate order from the judge "fundamentally flawed."

The issue surfaced in January when defense lawyers filed in partially redacted form a motion that sought to require prosecutors to turn over a trove of documents that they said would bolster their claim that the Biden administration had sought to "weaponize" the government in charging Trump.

Defense lawyers asked permission to file the motion, which included as attachments information that they had obtained from prosecutors, in mostly unredacted form. But prosecutors objected to unsealing the motion to the extent that it would reveal the identity of any potential government witness.

Cannon then granted the defense request for the motion and its exhibits to be filed in unredacted form as long as the personal identifying information of witnesses remained sealed. Smith's team asked her to reconsider, saying that witnesses could be exposed to threats and harassments if publicly identified.

In agreeing Tuesday for the witness names to remain redacted, she wrote, "Although the record is clear that the Special Counsel could have, and should have, raised its current arguments previously, the Court elects, upon a full review of those newly raised arguments, to reconsider its prior Order."

Still, the order was not a complete win for prosecutors.

Cannon rejected a request by Smith's team to seal from pretrial motions the substance of all witness statements, with the exception of information that could be used to identify witnesses.

"As for legal authority, the cases cited in the Special Counsel's papers do not lend support to this sweeping request; nor do they appear to have been offered as such," Cannon wrote. "And based on the Court's independent research, granting this request would be unprecedented: the Court cannot locate any case — high-profile or otherwise — in which a court has authorized anything remotely similar to the sweeping relief sought here."

Today in History: April 11

Civil Rights Act becomes law a week after Martin Luther King is killed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 11, the 102nd day of 2024. There are 264 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

Groton Daily Independent

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On April 11, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which included the Fair Housing Act, a week after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

On this date:

In 1814, Napoleon Bonaparte abdicated as Emperor of the French and was banished to the island of Elba. (Napoleon later escaped from Elba and returned to power in March 1815, until his downfall in the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815.)

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln spoke to a crowd outside the White House, saying, "We meet this evening, not in sorrow, but in gladness of heart." (It was the last public address Lincoln would deliver.)

In 1899, the treaty ending the Spanish-American War was declared in effect.

In 1913, Postmaster General Albert S. Burluson, during a meeting of President Woodrow Wilson's Cabinet, proposed gradually segregating whites and Blacks who worked for the Railway Mail Service, a policy that went into effect and spread to other agencies.

In 1945, during World War II, American soldiers liberated the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald in Germany.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers played in an exhibition against the New York Yankees at Ebbets Field, four days before his regular-season debut that broke baseball's color line.

In 1961, former SS officer Adolf Eichmann went on trial in Israel, charged with crimes against humanity for his role in the Nazi Holocaust. (Eichmann was convicted and executed.)

In 1970, Apollo 13, with astronauts James A. Lovell, Fred W. Haise and Jack Swigert, blasted off on its ill-fated mission to the moon. (The mission was aborted when an oxygen tank exploded April 13. The crew splashed down safely four days after the explosion.)

In 1980, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued regulations specifically prohibiting sexual harassment of workers by supervisors.

In 1996, 7-year-old Jessica Dubroff, who hoped to become the youngest person to fly cross-country, was killed along with her father and flight instructor when their plane crashed after takeoff from Cheyenne, Wyoming.

In 2012, George Zimmerman, the Florida neighborhood watch volunteer who fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, was arrested and charged with second-degree murder. (He was acquitted at trial.)

In 2013, comedian Jonathan Winters, 87, died in Montecito, California.

In 2017, David Letterman's mother, Dorothy Mengerling, a Midwestern homemaker who became an unlikely celebrity on her son's late-night talk show, died at age 95.

In 2018, Pope Francis admitted he made "grave errors" in judgment in Chile's sex abuse scandal; during a January visit to Chile, Francis had strongly defended Bishop Juan Barros despite accusations by victims that Barros had witnessed and ignored their abuse.

In 2020, the number of U.S. deaths from the coronavirus eclipsed Italy's for the highest in the world, topping 20,000.

In 2022, Mimi Reinhard, a secretary in Oskar Schindler's office who typed up the list of Jews he saved from extermination by Nazi Germany, died at age 107.

Today's Birthdays: Ethel Kennedy is 96. Actor Joel Grey is 92. Actor Louise Lasser is 85. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Ellen Goodman is 83. Movie writer-director John Milius is 80. Actor Peter Riegert is 77. Movie director Carl Franklin is 75. Actor Bill Irwin is 74. Country singer-songwriter Jim Lauderdale is 67. Songwriter-producer Daryl Simmons is 67. Rock musician Nigel Pulsford (Bush) is 63. Actor Lucky Vanous is 63. Country singer Steve Azar is 60. Singer Lisa Stansfield is 58. Actor Johnny Messner is 55. Rock musician Dylan Keefe (Marcy Playground) is 54. Actor Vicellous (vy-SAY'-luhs) Shannon is 53. Rapper David Banner is 50. Actor Tricia Helfer is 50. Rock musician Chris Gaylor (The All-American Rejects) is 45. Actor Kelli Garner is 40. Singer Joss Stone is 37. Actor-dancer Kaitlyn Jenkins is 32.