

# Groton Daily Independent

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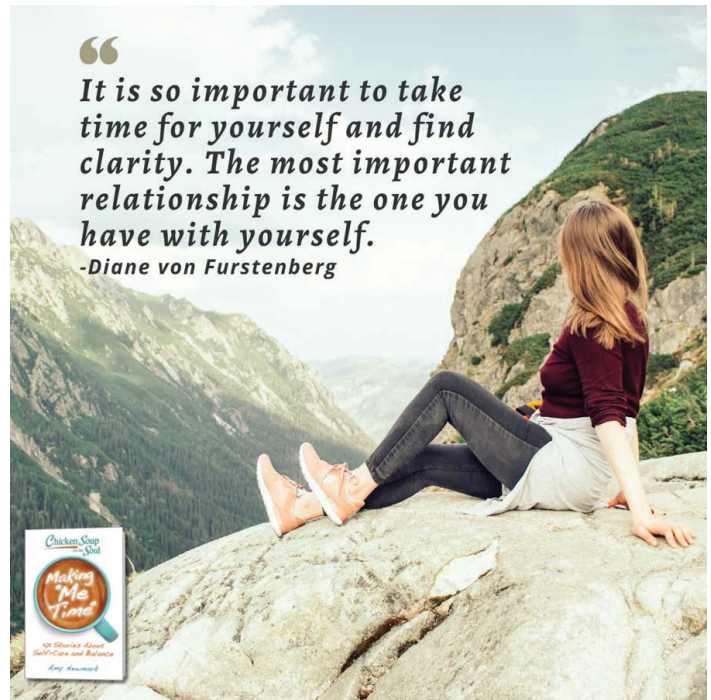
## Saturday, April 13

ACT Testing at Groton Area  
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.

## Sunday, April 14

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with Milestones (4 yr olds and juniors), 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir 6 p.m.

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



“  
*It is so important to take time for yourself and find clarity. The most important relationship is the one you have with yourself.*

-Diane von Furstenberg

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's at 9 a.m. and Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.  
High School Baseball in Groton: Varsity: Elkton/Lake Benton at Noon, W-I-N at 4 p.m

## Monday, April 15

Senior Menu: Beef tips on rice, mixed vegetables, fruit cocktail, cookie, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.  
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, diced potatoes.  
JH Track at Ipswich 2 p.m.  
Track at Britton, 2 p.m.  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Senior Citizen meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study 6:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.  
Groton Area Winter Sports Awards Night, 7 p.m., GHS Arena  
State Smarter Balanced Testing: Grade 3-5, Science (Grade 5): Week of April 15-19 (Day TBD), ELA/Math: April 22-26

**OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
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# 1440

In partnership with **smartasset**<sup>™</sup>

## Russia-Kazakhstan Floodwaters

Mass evacuations are underway in cities in southern Russia and northern Kazakhstan due to floodwaters that have risen to critical levels after river embankments and a dam in the region burst last week. The rivers, including Europe's third-longest river (Ural), swelled as warm temperatures melted snow and ice, mixing with heavy rains. The flooding is the worst to hit the area in 80 years.

Thousands of residents in the Russian city of Orenburg, which lies roughly 900 miles east of Moscow and near Russia's border with Kazakhstan, were asked to evacuate Friday. The floodwaters had risen 37 feet in Orenburg Friday, leaving thousands of homes submerged in water. See photos of the flooding here. See satellite imagery here. More than 120,000 people have been evacuated so far from areas experiencing flooding.

The total damage in the region is expected to cost roughly \$227M. Government officials are also investigating whether construction violations may have caused the dam to collapse.

## US issues travel warning for Israel as Iran attack believed to be imminent.

Iran has vowed to retaliate after Israel's airstrike on an Iranian embassy complex in Syria earlier this month that killed three senior military officials and wounded four others. The US State Department has restricted its employees from traveling to parts of Israel and has reportedly sent more US troops to the Middle East.

## US House passes bill renewing contentious surveillance program.

The House approved the reauthorization of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA, by a vote of 273-147, ahead of an April 19 deadline. The bill extends the act for two years, down from a previous proposal for a five-year extension. FISA's provisions (see overview) include allowing the US government to collect the communications of non-Americans located outside of the country without a warrant. A separate vote on an amendment to require a warrant failed with a tie.

## At least one dead after semitrailer crashes into Texas public safety office.

A stolen 18-wheeler crashed into the Texas Department of Public Safety office Friday, killing at least one person and injuring 13 others. The driver, identified as 42-year-old Clenard Parker, was taken into custody. The office had rejected Parker's renewal for a commercial driver's license a day earlier.

## Biden administration to forgive \$7.4B in student debt.

The Biden administration announced it would be canceling student debt of more than 277,000 borrowers as part of its latest action geared toward income-driven repayment plans. The White House claims the latest effort brings the total amount of student loan forgiveness to \$153B under the current administration.

## Oil and gas companies to pay more to drill on public US lands.

Energy companies will need to pay 16.67% in federal royalty fees, up from 12.5%, for drilling on public lands, per final rules issued Friday by the US government. The new fee will last until August 2032. Other measures include requiring companies to pay \$150K per lease on federal lands, up from \$10K, which was established in 1960.

## Robert MacNeil, creator of 'PBS NewsHour,' dies at 93.

In 1975, MacNeil, along with the late Jim Lehrer, launched a half-hour nightly news program that later became America's first hourlong evening broadcast. The show won a plethora of awards, including an Emmy for its live coverage of the Senate Watergate hearings. MacNeil left the show in 1995 to focus on writing; Lehrer took over until 2009 and died in 2020. MacNeil died Friday due to natural causes.

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## **Roberto Cavalli, Italian fashion designer, dies at 83.**

Cavalli launched his namesake fashion brand in the 1970s and was known for bold animal prints and "stretch jeans," which he pioneered by adding Lycra (a synthetic elastic fiber) to denim. His designs have been worn by celebrities, including Taylor Swift, Madonna, and Zendaya. The cause of his death was not announced.

## **James Webb detects origins of brightest cosmic blast since Big Bang.**

In 2022, researchers discovered the brightest gamma-ray burst ever recorded, dubbed the "BOAT" for the "brightest of all time." The event is now known to have come from the explosion of a giant star. Such explosions, known as supernovas, have been theorized to produce heavy elements like gold and platinum. However, no such metals were found from the BOAT, leaving researchers to question how these metals are produced.

## **Humankind(ness)**

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Lorie N. from Salem, Oregon.

"I was heading into the UPS store with a small package to return. The woman going in front of me had a handful of boxes, so I offered to open the door for her. She was so appreciative, and then let me go ahead of her in line. When I got to the counter, the QR code was not showing in my email and I was getting antsy. The young man who was helping me asked for my phone, so I gave it to him, and he performed his magic, and before long, the QR code showed up. Then, when I was leaving the store, the same woman said, 'Here, let me get the door for you!' The whole thing was just a great experience and reminded me that kindness goes a long way."



## *Open House Bridal Shower*

*honoring*

# *Jessica Bjerke*

*Saturday, April 20, 2024*

*1:00pm - 3:00pm*

*Olive Grove Golf Course*

*Registered at Target and Amazon*



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## Tracy, Roberts are double winners at Milbank

Keegen Tracy and Laila Roberts were both double winners at the Milbank Invitational Track Meet held Friday. Roberts won the 200m dash and was on the winning 400m relay team while Tracy won the 100m and 200m dash events.

Others taking first were Logan Ringgenberg in the shot put, Colby Dunker in the Javelin, McKenna Tietz in the 300m hurdles and the girls 3200m relay team.

### Boy's Results

#### 100 Meters

1. Keegen Tracy, 11.43

#### 200 Meters

1. Keegen Tracy, 23.71

13. Gage Sippel, 26.03

#### 400 Meters

2. Keegen Tracy, 52.44

19. Logan Warrington, 1:03.09

#### 800 Meters

5. Blake Pauli, 2:07.34

9. Jayden Schwan, 2:19.85

#### 4x800 Relay

3. Blake Pauli, Colby Dunker, Gage Sippel, Jayden Schwan, 9:20.16.

#### Shot Put

1. Logan Ringgenberg, 42-01.00

5. Karter Moody, 37-01.50

8. Holden Sippel, 36-09.75

28. Drew Thurston, 27-01.00

#### Discus

4. Logan Ringgenberg, 115-00

5. Holden Sippel, 110-10

11. Karter Moody, 99-08

24. Drew Thurston, 69-10

#### Javelin

1. Colby Dunker, 118-08

11. Logan Ringgenberg, 96-05

12. Holden Sippel, 95-04

15. Drew Thurston, 89-08

17. Karter Moody, 83-07

24. Logan Warrington, 51-10

### Girl's Results

#### 100 Meters

13. Kayla Lehr, 15.05

#### 200 Meters

1. Laila Roberts, 27.92

3. Rylee Dunker, 29.00

11. Kayla Lehr, 30.76

#### 400 Meters

3. Taryn Traphagen, 1:04.80

5. Ashlynn Warrington, 1:09.25

#### 100m Hurdles

3. McKenna Tietz, 18.30

5. Talli Wright, 19.58

7. Teagan Hanten, 20.36

8. Emerlee Jones, 20.47

10. Hannah Sandness, 21.18

#### 300m Hurdles

1. McKenna Tietz, 52.95

2. Emerlee Jones, 53.21

4. Talli Wright, 55.53

5. Teagan Hanten, 58.85

8. Hannah Sandness, 1:01.14

#### 4x100 Relay

1. Laila Roberts, Kella Tracy, Jerica Locke, Rylee Dunker, 54.02 -

#### 4x200 Relay

2. Laila Roberts, Rylee Dunker, Jerica Locke, Kella Tracy, 1:52.45

#### 4x400 Relay

4. Jerica Locke, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, Kella Tracy, 4:23.74

#### 4x800 Relay

1. Kella Tracy, Faith Traphagen, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, 10:19.33

#### SMR 1600m

2. Laila Roberts, Rylee Dunker, Jerica Locke, Taryn Traphagen, 4:38.34

#### Shot Put

5. Emma Kutter, 30-10.25

11. Faith Fliehs, 28-02.00

18. Ashley Johnson, 24-03.50

25. Emma Davies, 21-05.50

#### Discus

12. Faith Fliehs, 69-10

16. Emma Kutter, 64-10

18. Ashley Johnson, 62-04

37. Emma Davies, 34-10

#### Javelin

2. Emma Kutter, 80-03

4. Ashley Johnson, 66-05

9. Faith Fliehs, 42-11

13. Emma Davies, 31-00

#### High Jump

3. Emerlee Jones, 4-05.00

#### Long Jump

22. Teagan Hanten, 11-06.50

#### Triple Jump

11. Emerlee Jones, 27-08.00

12. Teagan Hanten, 25-06.00

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## State Degree Recipients

# GROTON



**Cadence Feist      Logan Ringgenberg**

**Faith Fliehs      Emma Schinkel**

**Layne Hanson      Ashlyn Sperry**

**Jayla Jones      Lexi Osterman**

**Hannah Monson      Ava Wienk**

### **2024 State FFA Degree Recipients**

There will be 319 South Dakota FFA members who will be recognized during Session 2 at State Convention on Friday April 19th.

To obtain their State FFA Degree, members must meet the following requirements:

-Having earned and productively invested at least \$1,000 or worked at least 300 hours in excess of scheduled class time, or a combination thereof, in a Supervised Agricultural Experience program.

-Demonstrated leadership ability by performing ten procedures of Parliamentary Law, giving a six-minute speech on an agriculture or FFA-related topic, and serving as an officer, committee chairperson, or participating member of a chapter committee.

-Have completed at least 25 hours of community service.

As a special project of the SD FFA Foundation, South Dakota FFA members will receive the golden charm of the State Degree and a framed certificate, thanks to the following sponsors: Todd & Barbara Powell; Barry & Jenny Jacobson; The Jacobson Group, LLC; West Central FFA Alumni; Rechelle & Eric Dissing; Dan Streff Family; Sandy Osterday; CharLee Bachman; Kent Buchholz; Noelle & Andrew Swanson; Kevin & Amber Blagg; Steven Zemlicka; Myles & Mercedes Snedeker; Red River Farm Network; Dacotah Diamond Auctions and Equipment; Jeff & Beth Vanderwal; Peterson Livestock; First PREMIER Bank; Lance & Shirley Howe; Wyatt & Zana DeJong; Dani Herring; Stella Nagel; Olson Family; Brad & Trixie Grill; Dawnwind Dairy Goats and Wendy Mortenson Agency.

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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

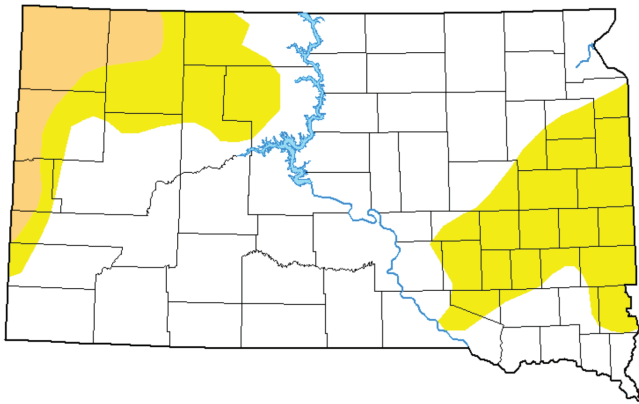
**Dairy Queen in Groton is hiring! If you're looking for a fun job with lots of variety, look no further! We're looking for energetic, smiling people – we provide free meals, uniforms, competitive wages, fun atmosphere and flexible scheduling. Part-time – day, evening, week-end shifts available. We will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

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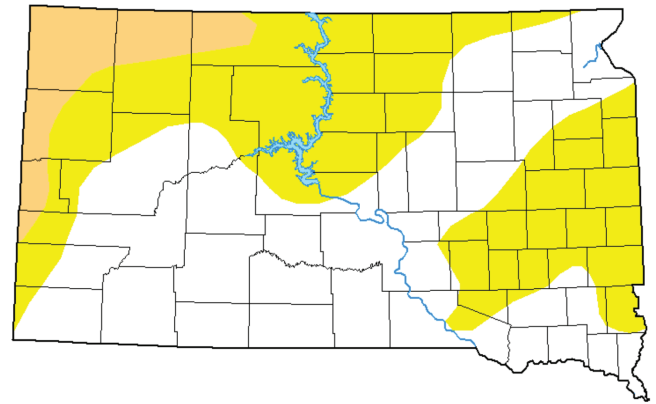
### Drought Classification

- None
- D0 (Abnormally Dry)
- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)
- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)
- No Data

## Drought Monitor



April 9



April 2

Widespread rain and snow (1 to 2 inches of precipitation, liquid equivalent) on April 7 led to a 1-category improvement across parts of northeastern Wyoming and western South Dakota. Despite the recent heavy precipitation, 6-month SPI along with 28-day average streamflow support a continuation of moderate drought (D1) across the High Plains. Following another week of precipitation along with considerations of soil moisture and SPI values of neutral to positive, abnormal dryness (D0) coverage was reduced throughout the Dakotas. A strengthening low pressure system on April 6 and 7 brought high winds to the Great Plains which dried out topsoil especially across Kansas and southeastern Colorado. A reassessment of SPIs at various time scales and given snow water equivalent is slightly above average, D1 coverage was reduced for southern Colorado.

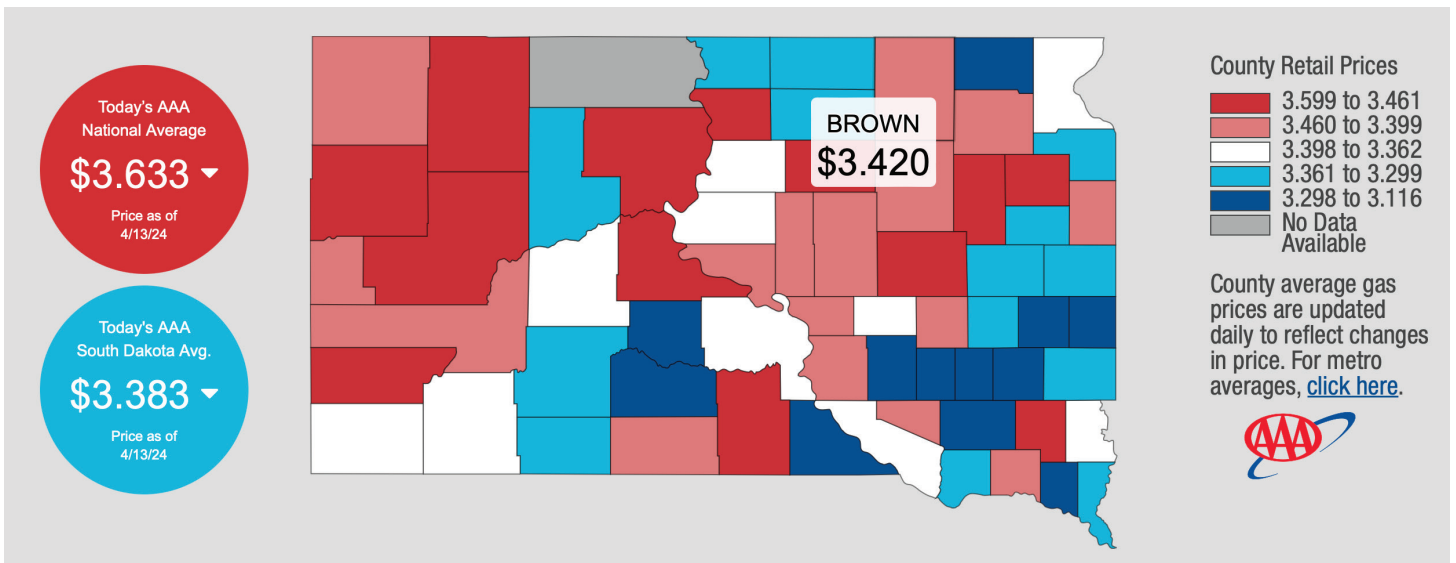
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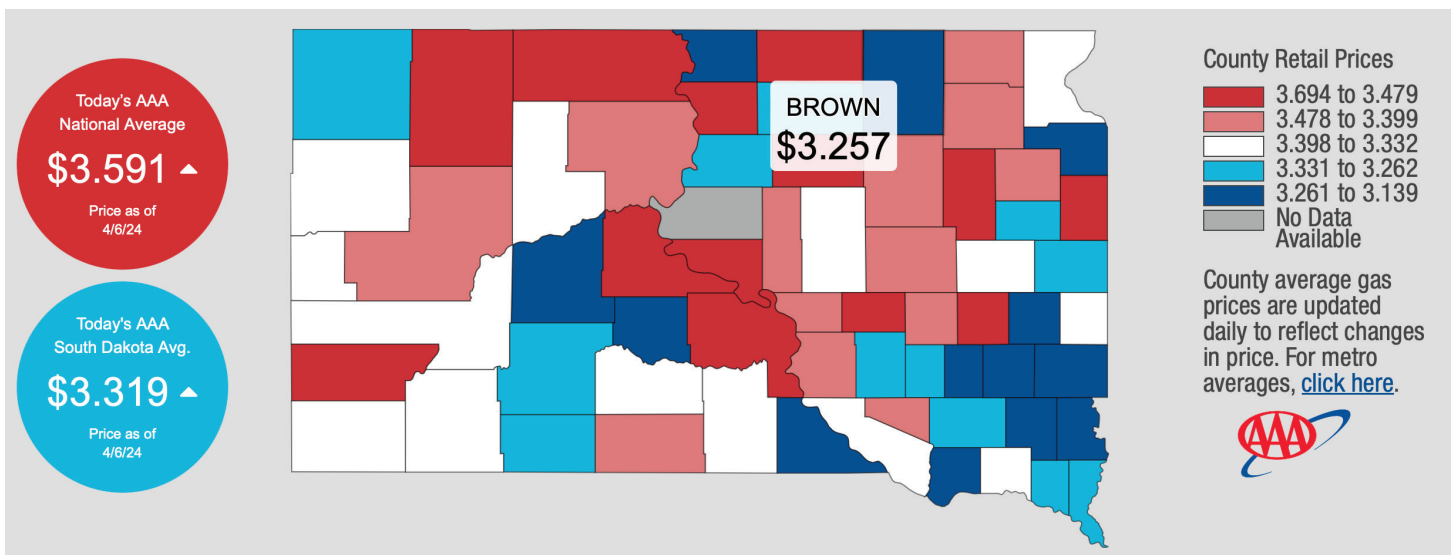
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.383	\$3.539	\$3.954	\$3.716
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.390	\$3.532	\$3.958	\$3.714
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.319	\$3.448	\$3.860	\$3.699
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.192	\$3.356	\$3.773	\$3.707
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.503	\$3.646	\$4.068	\$3.914

### This Week



### Last Week





## Department of Health Secretary, Melissa Magstadt, Issues the Following Statement on H5N1 Avian Influenza

PIERRE, SD - In response to recent concerns surrounding H5N1 Avian Influenza, South Dakota Department of Health Secretary, Melissa Magstadt, underscores collaborative efforts with the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources to safeguard the well-being of both the state's population and livestock.

"The Department of Health is working with the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources to ensure the safety of the people and livestock in South Dakota. It's important to note that the risk of human infection is low," said Department of Health Secretary, Melissa Magstadt. "If you have had exposure to an H5N1-infected bird or animal and are showing signs and symptoms of infection, such as redness and swelling of the eye (conjunctivitis), cough, fever, or sore throat, visit your medical provider to be tested."

Currently, there is no concern about the safety of the commercial milk supply or risk to consumer health. Dairies are required to ensure only milk from healthy animals enter the food supply chain. Additionally, the pasteurization process of heating milk to a high temperature ensures milk and dairy products can be safely consumed, as confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). In line with long-standing policy, the CDC does not recommend consuming unpasteurized milk or raw milk. Pasteurization has continually proven to successfully inactivate bacteria and viruses, like influenza, in milk.

For more information, please see the [H5N1 Avian Influenza page](#) on the DOH website.

At the heart of the Department of Health's mission is a simple goal: to protect and improve the health of all South Dakotans. The department is entrusted with the vital task of promoting wellness, preventing disease, and ensuring access to quality healthcare for all South Dakotans.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Thune, Rounds, Johnson: Don't close Huron, Sioux Falls mail processing centers**

**BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 12, 2024 5:02 PM**

South Dakota's congressional delegation opposes the potential shuttering of two South Dakota mail processing facilities.

Republican Senators John Thune and Mike Rounds, along with Republican Rep. Dusty Johnson, sent a letter to U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy asking him to reconsider moving mail processing out of Sioux Falls and Huron.

The recommendation was finalized in February "without taking into account local concerns," according to a press release from Rounds.

If the postal service follows through, Rapid City will be the only remaining processing facility in South Dakota. A press release from Johnson's office says moving operations from Sioux Falls to Omaha and from Huron to Fargo would be inefficient and cause delays for South Dakotans.

"This move will require any mail sent from Sioux Falls to Chamberlain, for example, to go all the way to Omaha then back over to Chamberlain, a 500-mile journey," Johnson said in a press release.

In the joint letter to DeJoy, the officials say they understand the importance of modernization and streamlining at the postal service, but that "such changes should not come at the expense of rural and highly rural populations in South Dakota or similar states."

The letter also mentions that postal customer service centers in Pierre, Mobridge and Aberdeen were closed in 2012, which forced the rerouting of local mail and packages. Closing the Sioux Falls and Huron facilities would create delays, particularly during South Dakota's harsh winters, the letter says, and additional transportation costs could cancel out any cost savings from the closures.

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

### **Gov. Kristi Noem banned from fourth South Dakota reservation**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 12, 2024 1:38 PM**

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe in south-central South Dakota is the fourth tribal nation to ban Gov. Kristi Noem from tribal lands this year.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe banished Noem in February after she spoke to the Legislature alleging Mexican drug cartels have infiltrated reservations. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe banned Noem earlier this month for comments she made at a town hall in Winner, alleging some tribal leaders are "personally benefiting" from cartels. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and Rosebud Sioux Tribe banned Noem this week for her comments and in solidarity.

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

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,

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and this week she offered a state law enforcement course for prospective tribal police. 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.

“Tribal leaders should immediately banish the Mexican drug cartels that are responsible for murders, rapes, drug addiction, and many more crimes on tribal lands,” Noem said in an emailed statement to South Dakota Searchlight. “The people in the communities live with unspeakable horrors and tragedy every day, but banishing me for telling the truth about the suffering does nothing to solve the problems. It may play well for the leftist media, but in reality, it’s pointless. The real question you should be asking is: ‘Why won’t tribal leaders banish the Mexican drug cartels who are responsible for this devastation?’”

In a news release announcing the banishment, Rosebud Sioux Tribe officials said the ban is justified not just because of Noem’s recent comments but because of a strained relationship since she took office in 2019.

“Governor Noem claims she wants to establish meaningful relationships with Tribes to improve solutions for systemic problems,” the release said. “However, her actions as Governor blatantly show otherwise. The recent racial disparaging allegations made against Native students, parents, Tribal Councils, and Tribal leaders have led to further division and distrust of Tribal-state relations.”

Examples of Noem’s alleged “disingenuous nature toward Native Americans” during her tenure as governor cited in the news release include:

Signing two bills into law in 2019 regulating protests over the Keystone XL pipeline. The Oglala Sioux Tribe banned Noem for the first time because of the decision, and a federal judge blocked parts of the laws.

Challenging the legality of COVID-19 tribal checkpoints at reservation borders during the pandemic.

Supporting the amendment of social studies standards to remove sections of Native American history in favor of broader coverage of world and American history.

Returning millions in unused Emergency Rental Assistance funds to the federal government in 2022, resulting in Rosebud not receiving any of the funding.

Sending belated assistance to the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in late 2022 due to a winter storm and state of emergency while Noem sent South Dakota National Guard troops to the U.S. border three times “without hesitation.”

Proceeding with the construction of a shooting range in Rapid City despite Native American artifacts of cultural significance being found at the site.

Conducting a “slandering campaign” against South Dakota tribes and not taking down or returning the Rosebud Sioux Tribe flag from the state Capitol, despite a public request to do so.

“Moving forward, we will only acknowledge Governor Noem after she issues a public apology to the Oceti Sakowin,” the release said, “and presents a plan of action for supporting and empowering the Lakota people through policy and legislation.”

The Oceti Sakowin is the collective term for Lakota, Dakota and Nakota speaking Native Americans, most of whom are located in the Great Plains region of the United States and Canada.

Ian Fury, spokesman for Noem, said the governor’s administration will continue efforts to work with tribes.

“Gov. Noem has consistently shown up, welcomed conversations and offered solutions — and she’ll continue to do that for as long as she’s governor,” Fury told South Dakota Searchlight.

Requests for further comment from Rosebud Tribal President Scott Herman were not returned before this article was published.

Noem also pointed out in an interview this week with KELO-TV that her banishment from Standing Rock Reservation was decided by mostly North Dakota tribal council members rather than South Dakota representatives.

*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.*

## Black Hills sawmill lays off workers and alleges Forest Service is to blame

BY: SETH TUPPER - APRIL 12, 2024 12:49 PM

The owner of a Spearfish sawmill is laying off 50 people and alleges the U.S. Forest Service is to blame for not allowing the company to cut enough timber.

The Forest Service, through a spokesman, declined to comment.

Neiman Enterprises announced the layoffs at Spearfish Forest Products in a Thursday evening news release.

"The layoffs are the direct result of reductions to the Black Hills National Forest timber sale program," the release said.

A Neiman spokesperson said about 150 employees remain at the Spearfish sawmill, and another 15 will stay on at the associated Spearfish Pellet Company.

Neiman also blamed the Forest Service in 2021 when it announced the closure of its other South Dakota sawmill in Hill City. That closure eliminated 120 jobs. Neiman operates additional sawmills in Hulett, Wyoming (where the company is headquartered), Gilcrest, Oregon, and Montrose, Colorado.

The company recently participated in a Forest Service pilot program that brought excess timber from other parts of the company to Hulett by train. The company does not have any further timber rail transit projects, Neiman spokeswoman Sonja Merryman said Thursday, and is pursuing projects closer to the company's mills in areas that lack a strong timber industry.

Neiman is one of the companies that bids for the right to purchase and harvest Black Hills National Forest timber in areas designated by the Forest Service. The companies make money, but they also help manage the forest by thinning it, which can reduce the forest's susceptibility to severe wildfires and tree-killing mountain pine beetles. Logging and prescribed burns can help replace the natural thinning historically achieved by wildfires, which are now suppressed by the Forest Service and other modern landowners and managers.

Debates about logging in the forest have intensified since 2020, after Forest Service researchers said-severe wildfires and a pine beetle epidemic had drastically reduced the number of trees big enough for logging. They said the forest had only half of the trees needed to sustain the level of timber sales allowed in the forest plan.

Some members of the timber industry dispute the research. Neiman's Thursday news release included a statement from Ben Wudtke, executive director of a timber industry trade group called the Black Hills Forest Resource Association. Wudtke said "we have more timber now than in the '70s and '80s when the Black Hills National Forest was selling twice the amount of timber."

"History has shown again and again that decisions like that to reduce the Black Hills National Forest timber sale program are dangerous and come with serious consequences," Wudtke said.

Last month, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson hosted a forestry roundtable discussion in Spearfish. His office reacted to the Spearfish layoffs with a statement.

"This is tough news for 50 local families. We have logging activity in national forests primarily because it improves forest health, but it also creates good jobs," Johnson said. "Harvest levels continue to be substantially below what forest inventories can sustain. Working with industry and the Forest Service, we must find a way to do better. Failure to do so will injure the forest and our economy."

A retired former Forest Service employee in the Black Hills, Dave Mertz, said Friday that those who believe the Forest Service research also need a voice.

"I am sorry people are losing their jobs. I'm sorry that it's gotten to this point," Mertz said. "But there needs to be some serious discussion between the various stakeholders on how to move forward for the best future of the Black Hills, and that needs to include everybody."

The Forest Service measures timber volume in a unit called "CCF," with 1 CCF equaling 100 cubic feet. Timber sales in the Black Hills National Forest reached a modern high of about 253,000 CCF in 2008 and have declined since then, dipping to a 20-year low of just under 100,000 CCF in 2023.

Neiman was the second-largest purchaser by volume of Black Hills National Forest timber last year, according to Forest Service data obtained by South Dakota Searchlight. The largest was Baker Timber Products, of Rapid City.

In Neiman's news release, President Jim Neiman said the company will attempt to help laid-off employees obtain assistance and find jobs.

"On behalf of the Neiman family, we want to express our deepest gratitude to the affected employees for their hard work and dedication," he said.

Spearfish is in Lawrence County, where Eric Jennings is a county commissioner. He said Friday that the loss of good-paying jobs at the sawmill will be felt by the affected employees, the community and the local economy.

"The bigger issue is if we lose our sawmills and our ability to manage the forest," Jennings said, "we're eventually going to get hit with the kind of conditions they have in California, where they've had all those devastating fires."

*Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.*

## Trump supports U.S. House Speaker Johnson, elections agenda in joint appearance

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - APRIL 12, 2024 5:14 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson and Donald J. Trump met Friday evening in Palm Beach, Florida, to promote an unreleased bill related to noncitizens voting in federal elections.

The event doubled as a show of support from the presumptive Republican presidential nominee to the embattled GOP speaker.

The two men argued that strict voting requirements are needed because of the Biden administration's immigration policy.

"We have an election problem," Trump said, sharply criticizing the White House approach.

The bill would require proof of citizenship to vote in federal elections, Johnson said. That is already a requirement under federal law.

"Election integrity is tied to (the) border, the lack of border security," Johnson said.

Johnson said the legislation would also require states to verify that someone who is registered to vote is a U.S. citizen, which states already do through federal databases, birth certificates or drivers licenses.

Johnson said he'll bring the bill to the floor for a vote in order to put Democrats on the record.

"The Democrats are going to go on record," Johnson said. "We're about to find out their answer."

An election bill would likely face a difficult path in the Senate where Democrats hold a slim majority and 60 votes are needed to pass legislation.

The visit to Trump's golf resort and primary residence at Mar-a-Lago came as Johnson struggles to govern with a slim 218-213 majority and is fending off an effort from Trump ally and far-right Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia to oust him as speaker.

"He's doing a really good job under tough circumstances," Trump said, throwing his support behind Johnson.

Johnson is also facing pressure from members on his hard-right flank over the reauthorization of a warrantless surveillance program under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and approving additional aid to Ukraine – two issues that Trump has voiced disapproval of.

In a statement from his campaign operation, Trump said that Johnson had agreed to hold "a series of public committee hearings over the next two months" to allow members of Congress to prepare to draft legislation.

The hearings will address mail-in voting, general preparedness for the 2024 election and voter registra-

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tion list maintenance with a focus on preventing immigrants in the country illegally from registering to vote, the statement read.

Following the press conference, Alex Floyd, a spokesperson for the Democratic National Committee said in a statement that Trump and Johnson were "extreme election deniers and serial liars who are hellbent on threatening our democracy and spreading baseless falsehoods about the 2020 election."

"The only thing this sad joint appearance will accomplish is to make it even more obvious to the American people that the future of our democracy is on the line this November," Floyd said.

As in his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump has made fear of immigration a central theme in his bid for the White House this November.

A 1996 law already prohibits noncitizens from voting in federal elections.

However, as a handful of Democrat-led cities have passed laws allowing noncitizens to vote in local elections, Republicans have pushed a narrative that noncitizens are engaging in voter fraud at the federal level and have advocated for more restrictive voting rules.

## Previous attempt

House Republicans led a similar effort last year, where the House Administration Committee passed on a party line vote a package to overhaul voting requirements for states inducing set penalties for states that allow noncitizens to vote in local elections.

The committee's chair, Wisconsin Republican Bryan Steil, said at the time the 224-page bill contained similar provisions to the voting reform bill that Georgia's Republican legislature passed after Joe Biden won the state in 2020 and sent two Democratic senators to Washington. The Georgia bill was widely criticized by Democrats and advocates of voting access for adding barriers to voting.

That bill, which has gone nowhere in Congress, would have repealed an amendment passed by the D.C. Council in 2022 to allow noncitizens to vote in local elections. States including California, Maryland and Vermont have similar laws.

Trump has often, without evidence, claimed that large numbers of noncitizens are voting in federal elections.

Researchers have often disproven that. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, conducted an analysis of election conduct from 2003 to 2023 and found 29 instances of noncitizens voting.

## Area of agreement

This is not the first time Trump and Johnson have aligned on voting issues.

A constitutional lawyer, Johnson played a key role in defending the former president's efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election through legal challenges. The Louisiana Republican led more than 100 House Republicans in an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in a case challenging the election results in four key battleground states that President Joe Biden won – Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

The Supreme Court rejected the suit.

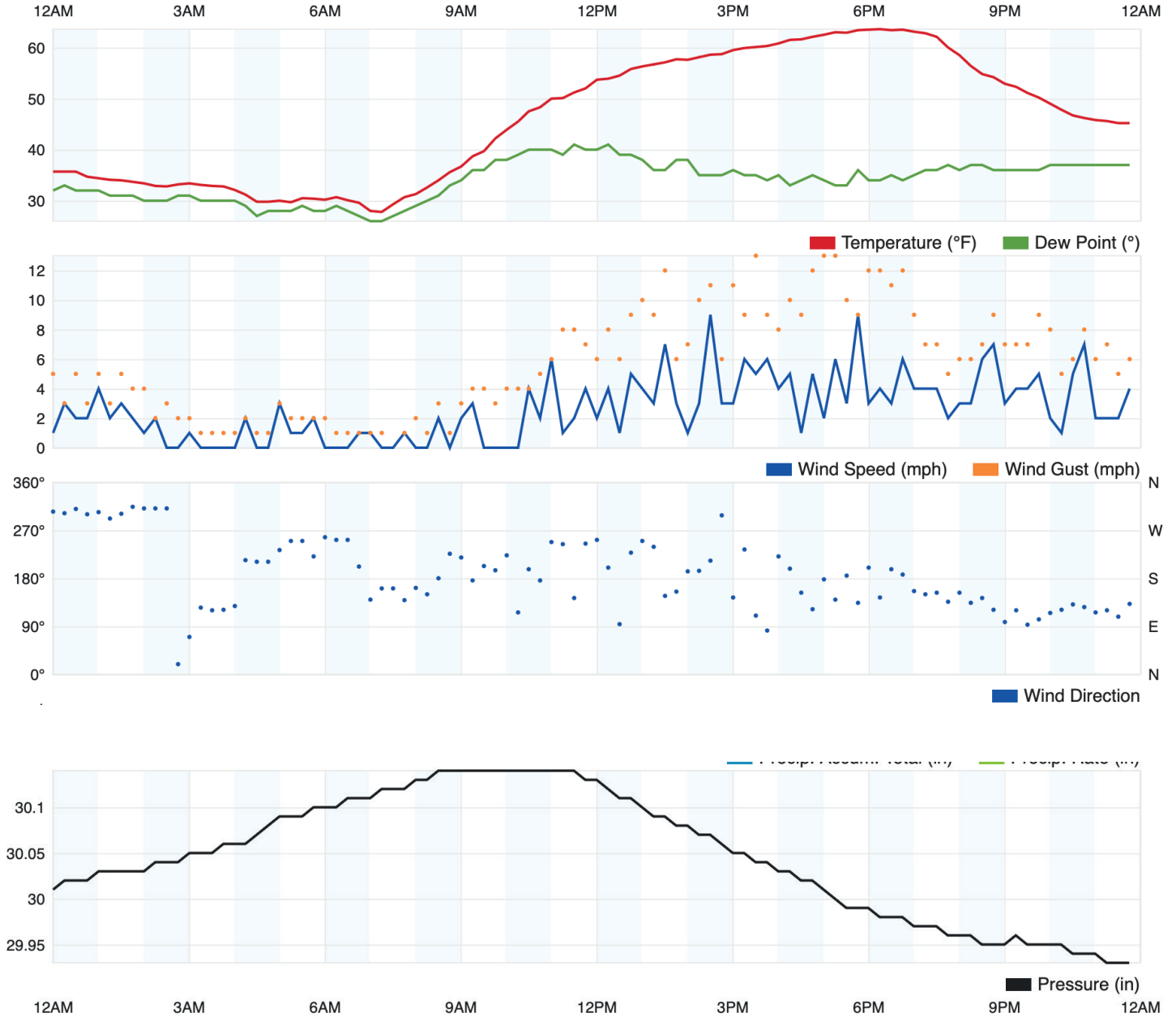
And during the Trump administration, Johnson served as Trump's legal defense during his first impeachment in the House in 2020 when the former president was charged with obstructing Congress and abusing power.

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

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 82 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 44 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 72 °F

Sunday  
Night



Mostly Clear  
then Slight  
Chance  
Showers

Low: 48 °F

Monday



Chance  
Showers and  
Breezy

High: 75 °F



## Warm & Dry through Sunday, then increasing chances of Showers & Thunderstorms

Today



low 80s

Very Warm &  
Very Dry

Shifting winds  
becoming out of  
the west &  
northwest this  
afternoon

Sunday



70s

Warm &  
Dry

Monday



70 to 81°

30-40% chance of  
light Rain. A 20%  
chance of  
afternoon  
Thunderstorms.  
Breezy with gusts  
25-35 mph.

Tuesday



60s

80% chance of  
Rain. A 30%  
chance of  
Thunderstorms.  
Breezy with gusts  
25-40 mph.

[weather.gov/aberdeen](http://weather.gov/aberdeen)

Very dry and very warm conditions will continue through Sunday. Temperatures will be in the 70s and 80s through Monday. Precipitation chances will slowly increase Monday. Then on Tuesday temperatures will top out in the 60s Tuesday with an 80% chance of showers and thunderstorms. Winds will shift out of the west and then out of the northwest this afternoon. Breezy wind will gust 25-35 mph Monday out of the southeast, and 25-40 mph Tuesday mainly out of the north.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 64 °F at 6:37 PM

Low Temp: 28 °F at 7:08 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 3:04 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 30 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 2003

Record Low: 9 in 2013

Average High: 57

Average Low: 30

Average Precip in April.: 0.62

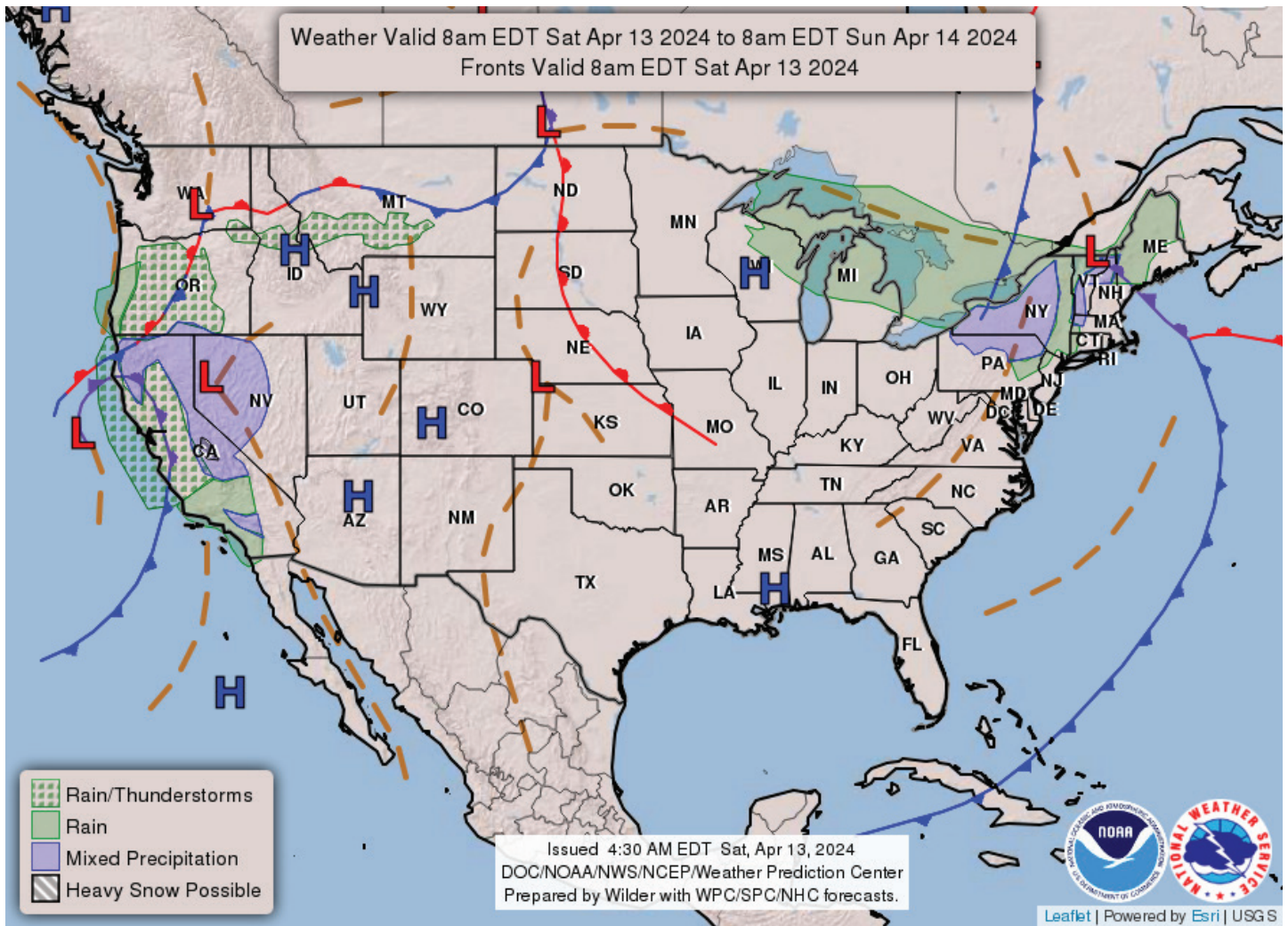
Precip to date in April: 1.19

Average Precip to date: 2.68

Precip Year to Date: 2.09

Sunset Tonight: 8:18:02 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:45:38 am



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## Today in Weather History

April 13, 1986: A significant spring storm quickly intensified bringing blizzard conditions to much of the Northern Plains Region. Up to 18 inches of snow was reported in North Dakota, and in South Dakota, winds gusting to 90 mph whipped the snow into drifts fifteen feet high. Livestock losses were in the millions of dollars, and for some areas, it was the worst blizzard ever.

April 13, 1995: Flooding, resulting from snowmelt from the two major snowstorms in April and saturated soils, caused extensive road damage and inundation. The flooding caused several road closings and numerous flooded basements in many counties. Also, many lakes were overfull in Day and Campbell Counties. Flooded farmland caused severe delays in small grain planting. Spink, Sully, McPherson, and Brown Counties were declared disasters.

April 13, 2010: Unyielding south winds developed over central and northeast South Dakota in the early afternoon and continued into the early evening hours. South winds of 30 to 50 mph with gusts to near 70 mph caused some structural and shingled damage across the area. A pickup on Interstate-90 lost a camper to the high winds. The high winds, combined with lowered humidity and dry fuels, helped fan several grassland fires across the region. The most substantial fire started from a downed power line in Campbell County near the town of Glenham. The fire grew to be five miles long by two miles wide and traveled eight miles before it was under control. Almost 6000 acres were burned with nearly 20 fire departments dispatched.

1877 - The second coastal storm in just three days hit Virginia and the Carolinas. The first storm flattened the sand dunes at Hatteras, and widened the Oregon inlet three quarters of a mile. The second storm produced hurricane force winds along the coast of North Carolina causing more beach erosion and land transformation. (David Ludlum)

1955 - The town of Axis, AL, was deluged with 20.33 inches of rain in 24 hours establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A major spring storm quickly intensified bringing blizzard conditions to much of the Northern Plains Region. Up to 18 inches of snow was reported in North Dakota, and in South Dakota, winds gusting to 90 mph whipped the snow into drifts fifteen feet high. Livestock losses were in the millions of dollars, and for some areas it was the worst blizzard ever. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms in northern Texas produced wind gusts to 98 mph at the Killeen Airport causing a million dollars property damage. Two airplanes were totally destroyed by the high winds, and ten others were damaged. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure off the Atlantic coast produced high winds across North Carolina, with gusts to 78 mph reported at Waves. The high winds combined with high tides to cause coastal flooding and erosion. About 275 feet of land was eroded from the northern tip of Pea Island. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms in central Florida produced golf ball size hail and a tornado near Lakeland FL. Fair and mild weather prevailed across most of the rest of the nation. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in central Oklahoma and north central Texas. Thunderstorms in Oklahoma produced up to six inches of golf ball size hail along I-40 near El Reno, and produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Okarche. Thunderstorms over north central Texas produced softball size hail northwest of Rotan, and high winds which injured two persons southeast of Itasca. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1999: A two-mile-wide area of wind-driven hail pounded residences and farm equipment for about a 5 mile stretch at least as far as State Highway 158 in west Texas near Midland/Odessa. Hail grew up to about golf ball size and winds peaked at approximately 80 mph. The wind-driven hail broke windows in houses and blasted paint off the wooden siding. The strong winds took roofs off several mobile homes and at least one single-family house. Utility crews stated that the winds downed a total of 27 poles. The American Red Cross determined that 324 units were affected with 18 mobile homes and four houses destroyed. About 50-60 families were at least temporarily displaced.

2004 - The latest measurable snowfall on record hits Jackson, TN, causing six traffic fatalities.

2006: An F2 tornado hit Iowa City, Iowa and trekked across other Southeast parts of the University of Iowa campus doing 15+ million dollars damage hurting 30 people and damaging or destroying 1051 buildings. The roof/steeple/bricks fell from the St. Patrick's Church shortly after 75 parishioners had taken to the rectory basement next door.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach of the Green Bay Packers, knew what it took to be victorious. Once when asked the formula, he replied, "Dedication, hard work and sacrifice."

When his team met for practice, he would remind them that "You're here to play football. And I'm here to see you play as well as your God-given talents and abilities will allow you to play. And that means total dedication!"

But dedication was not enough. Lombardi was known as a coach who was relentless in making his teams produce. He knew that dedication by itself would not be enough. It would take long hours of practice and preparation, perseverance and pain, suffering and sacrifice. It took every talent and every ability that every player possessed to become winners and champions.

Paul wrote, "Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life."

God gave us a new life to use for His glory. We must make every sacrifice to succeed for Him.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to commit our minds and hearts to You and then develop every skill and talent You have given us to work for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. Romans 6:13



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: 04.12.24

1 12 14 18 66 16

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$148,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

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: 16 Hrs 15 Mins 58 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.12.24

1 19 20 34 44 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 30 Mins 57 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.10.24

4 11 12 27 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$54,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 30 Mins 57 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.10.24

8 21 24 57 64 2

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 59 Mins 58 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: 16 Hrs 59 Mins 58 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

## News from the Associated Press

### **Pakistani police search for gunmen who abducted bus passengers and killed 11 in the southwest**

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistani police searched for gunmen who killed nine people after abducting them from a bus on a highway in the country's southwest. The same attackers earlier killed two people and wounded six in another car they forced to stop.

The abduction took place on Friday in Baluchistan province, which has long been the scene of an insurgency by separatists fighting for independence.

Deputy Commissioner Habibullah Mosakhail said Saturday that the gunmen set up a blockade, then stopped the bus and went through the passengers' ID cards. They took nine people with them, all from the eastern Punjab province, and fled into the mountains, he said.

Police later recovered nine bodies under a bridge about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the highway. Earlier on Friday, the same gunmen had opened fire at a vehicle that failed to stop for their blockade, killing two and wounding six.

A search for the perpetrators was underway, Mosakhail said. The bus was heading from the provincial capital of Quetta to Taftan, a town bordering Iran.

Passenger Sajjad Ahmed said there were 70 people on the bus. Masked men stopped the bus near the city of Nushki, took away nine people and told the driver to continue the journey, he told reporters.

"We heard the armed men open fire on those people as we drove away," said Ahmed. "We heard the sounds of firing. The driver took the bus to the closest police station. We didn't know if those people were alive or not."

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the attack, expressing his "deep sorrow and regret over this shocking incident." He offered his condolences to the families of the victims and said he stood by them in their hour of grief, according to a statement from his office.

"The perpetrators of this incident of terrorism and their facilitators will be punished," Sharif said.

Abductions are rare in Baluchistan, where militants usually target police forces and soldiers or infrastructure.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the killings. Police said there was no ransom demand and no indication of a motive for the attacks.

Although the government says it has quelled the insurgency, violence in the province has persisted.

### **Video shows raid on ship near Strait of Hormuz that a Mideast official says was carried out by Iran**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A video seen by The Associated Press shows commandos raiding a ship near the Strait of Hormuz by helicopter Saturday, an attack a Mideast defense official attributed to Iran amid wider tensions between Tehran and the West.

The video showed the attack earlier reported by the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations. It described the vessel as being "seized by regional authorities" in the Gulf of Oman off the Emirati port city of Fujairah, without elaborating.

The defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, shared the video with the AP. In it, the commandos rappelled down onto a stack of containers sitting on the deck of the vessel.

A crew member on the ship could be heard saying: "Don't come out." He then tells his colleagues to go to the ship's bridge as more commandos come down on the deck. One commando can be seen kneeling above the others to provide them potential cover fire.

Though the AP could not immediately verify the video, it corresponded to known details of the boarding, and the helicopter involved appeared to be one used by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which has carried out other ship raids in the past.

The vessel involved is likely the Portuguese-flagged MSC Aries, a container ship associated with London-based Zodiac Maritime. Zodiac Maritime is part of Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer's Zodiac Group. Zodiac declined to comment and referred questions to MSC, which did not immediately respond.

The MSC Aries had been last located off Dubai heading toward the Strait of Hormuz on Friday. The ship had turned off its tracking data, which has been common for Israeli-affiliated ships moving through the region.

The incident comes amid heightened tensions between Iran and the West, particularly after a suspected Israeli strike on the Iranian Consulate in Syria. Meanwhile, the wider Middle East remains on edge after six months of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Iran did not immediately acknowledge seizing any vessel, nor was there any report carried by state media about the incident. However, Iran since 2019 has engaged in a series of ship seizures and had attacks on vessels attributed to it amid ongoing tensions with the West over its rapidly advancing nuclear program.

The Gulf of Oman is near the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all globally traded oil passes. Fujairah, on the United Arab Emirates' eastern coast, is a main port in the region for ships to take on new oil cargo, pick up supplies or trade out crew.

Since 2019, the waters off Fujairah have seen a series of explosions and hijackings. The U.S. Navy blamed Iran for limpet mine attacks on vessels that damaged tankers.

## **A man stabbed to death 5 people in a Sydney shopping center and was fatally shot by police**

SYDNEY (AP) — A man stabbed five people to death at a busy Sydney shopping center Saturday before he was fatally shot, police said. Multiple people, including a small child, were also injured in the attack.

The suspect stabbed nine people at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction, which is in the city's eastern suburbs, before a police inspector shot him after he turned and raised a knife, New South Wales Assistant Police Commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters. Five of the victims and the suspect died, he said. He had no specific details on the condition of the injured.

Cooke said he believed that the suspect acted alone, and he was "content that there is no continuing threat." He said officials didn't know who the offender was. "This is quite raw," he said, and a "lengthy and precise" investigation was just beginning.

He said there was "nothing that we are aware of at the scene that would indicate any motive or any ideology." When asked whether officials were ruling out terrorism, he said: "We're not ruling anything out."

Cooke said the police inspector, a senior officer, was alone when she confronted the suspect and engaged him soon after her arrival on the scene, "saving a range of people's lives."

Video showed many ambulances and police cars around the shopping center, and people streaming out. Paramedics were treating patients at the scene.

Witness Roi Huberman, a sound engineer at ABC TV in Australia, told the network that he sheltered in a store during the incident.

"And suddenly we heard a shot or maybe two shots and we didn't know what to do," he said. "Then the very capable person in the store took us to the back where it can be locked. She then locked the store and then she then let us through the back and now we are out."

## Shohei Ohtani's ex-interpreter, Ipeei Mizuhara, must get gambling addiction treatment, judge says

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Los Angeles Dodgers star Shohei Ohtani's former longtime interpreter agreed Friday to undergo court-ordered gambling addiction treatment after federal prosecutors accused him of stealing \$16 million from the Japanese baseball player to pay off debts.

The initial federal court appearance by Ipeei Mizuhara marked the first time the interpreter has been seen in public since the scandal exploded last month.

From the field at Dodger Stadium hours after Friday's proceeding, Ohtani said he was "very grateful" for the investigation and would focus on baseball going forward.

Mizuhara exploited his personal and professional relationship with Ohtani to plunder millions from the two-way player's account for years, at times impersonating Ohtani to bankers, prosecutors said.

He faces up to 30 years in prison if convicted of one count of bank fraud.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Maria A. Audero ordered Mizuhara to seek the treatment as a condition of his bond in the sports betting case. Michael G. Freedman, the interpreter's attorney, said his client had planned to do so anyway.

While he is best known as Ohtani's voice in ballparks across the country, Mizuhara only spoke on Friday to answer the judge's questions, saying "yes" when Audero asked if he understood several parts of the case.

Mizuhara hopes to "reach an agreement with the government to resolve this case as quickly as possible so that he can take responsibility," Freedman said in a statement issued after the hearing ended.

He added that his client "wishes to apologize to Mr. Ohtani, the Dodgers, Major League Baseball, and his family."

A criminal complaint filed Thursday detailed the alleged scheme through evidence that included text messages, financial records and recordings of phone calls. Mizuhara's winning bets totaled over \$142 million, which he deposited in his own bank account and not Ohtani's. But his losing bets were around \$183 million, a net loss of nearly \$41 million. He did not wager on baseball.

Other bond conditions stipulate that Mizuhara cannot gamble, either electronically or in-person, go inside any gambling establishments or associate with any known bookmakers.

Mizuhara was released after the hearing on an unsecured \$25,000 bond, colloquially known as a signature bond, meaning he did not have to put up any cash or collateral to be freed. If he violates the bond conditions, he will be on the hook for \$25,000.

The judge noted his family ties and longtime residency in the Los Angeles area and self-surrender Friday morning when she approved the bond. She also mentioned that he did not have a criminal record.

While Ohtani's name was never mentioned during the hearing, his presence loomed large over the roughly 10-minute proceeding inside a courtroom packed with press, much of it Japanese media. The judge and prosecutor only briefly referenced the baseball star as "the victim."

But hours later, Ohtani spoke to the Los Angeles Times ahead of the team's game against the San Diego Padres about the controversy, saying he very grateful for the Department of Justice's investigation.

"For me personally, this marks a break from this, and I'd like to focus on baseball," he told the newspaper through a new interpreter.

In a group interview with reporters after the Dodgers' 8-7 loss to the San Diego Padres in 11 innings, Ohtani did not take questions about the investigation.

A Dodgers public relations staff member said, "We're talking about baseball."

There was no evidence that Ohtani was involved in or aware of Mizuhara's gambling, and the player is cooperating with investigators, authorities said.

MLB rules prohibit players and team employees from wagering on baseball, even legally. MLB also bans betting on other sports with illegal or offshore bookmakers.

The Los Angeles Times and ESPN broke the news of the prosecution last month, prompting the Dodgers to fire the interpreter and MLB to open its own investigation.



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On Friday before the Padres game, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said he was happy Ohtani has not been implicated in the case and everyone can move forward. He has not seen the investigation affect Ohtani or anyone else on the team, he added.

"He's handled it with flying colors. He's done a great job of just focusing on playing baseball and not letting it be a distraction for him," Roberts said. "Our guys, as well, have handled it really well as far as that noise and not letting it affect play.

"I think for us, we've already moved past it, to be quite honest with you. He addressed us earlier, we felt good about it and supported him. Nothing has changed," Roberts said.

Ohtani proved Roberts correct hours later when he hit his 175th home run in MLB, tying Hideki Matsui for the most by a Japan-born player.

## How O.J. Simpson burned the Ford Bronco into America's collective memory

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

The Ford Bronco initially was conceived and designed for rugged outdoorsy types, a two-door means of escape to nature from the bustling cities of mid-century America.

But it had already been tamed and polished for suburbanites, with cruise control and air conditioning, by 1994 when O.J. Simpson cowered in the back of one, a handgun to his temple, as patrol cars followed it for about two hours in the California twilight.

The model was discontinued two years later. But the Bronco — or at least that white Bronco — became one of America's most iconic automobiles after the slow-speed chase on the Los Angeles freeways that played out on TV screens before an audience of millions, a moment that was seared indelibly into the nation's cultural memory.

"Kids who were born in the 2000s, even they know that's O.J.," Marcus Collins, a University of Michigan marketing professor, said of his students. "It's just as salient as me showing the Twin Towers on fire. It definitely became etched in the zeitgeist because of all the contextual associations that we applied to it."

The Bronco ridden in by Simpson, who died Wednesday, now sits in a crime museum in Tennessee, parked near a Volkswagen Beetle that was driven by serial killer Ted Bundy.

White Ford Bronco is also the name of a band that plays 1990s cover songs, by artists from Metallica to Will Smith to the Spice Girls.

Singer and guitarist Diego Valencia, 41, said he was brainstorming band names in 2008 when a coworker suggested it.

"With something like 'Seinfeld' or 'Beverly Hills 90210,' you might be losing some people," Valencia said. "But that was the most '90s thing ever."

The White Ford Bronco name is not a celebration of Simpson, Valencia said, but a nod to that moment of "where were you in June of 1994?"

Marketed to hunters and fisherman

The Bronco rolled off the assembly line in 1966 as one of the first sport-utility vehicles, said Todd Zuercher, an auto historian and author of the 2019 book "Ford Bronco: A History of Ford's Legendary 4x4."

"The whole thing back then was get out and get away from the hustle and bustle of urban life and get into the backcountry," Zuercher said.

The vehicle was marketed to hunters and fishermen but also to families for exploring, Zuercher said. The Bronco was an improvement over competing models, such as the Jeep CJ-5 and the International Scout, because it had a hard top, a heater and maybe even a radio.

SUVs progressively became larger and more luxurious over the years, Zuercher said, and by time of the Simpson car chase, the Bronco was on its fifth generation.

Simpson also owned a Bronco, but it was seized as evidence after blood was found inside. The one involved in the police pursuit was a 1993 XLT model belonging to his friend, former teammate and the driver that evening, Al "A.C." Cowlings.

'He was checking out'

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Simpson was charged with murder after his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman were found stabbed to death. Simpson failed to surrender to police as promised and was declared a fugitive on June 17, 1994.

He was spotted later in the Bronco with Cowlings, sparking a 60-mile (96-kilometer) police pursuit across Southern California. More than 90 million Americans watched, thunderstruck, as TV helicopters provided live shots of the action. Thousands more lined freeways and city streets, some cheering the former star running back as the bizarre motorcade passed by.

Cowlings said there was only one thing on his mind: keeping Simpson alive.

"He was checking out," Cowlings told The Associated Press in 1996. "There's no way O.J. and I were trying to escape. I was trying to save a friend."

Clutching a family photo, Simpson was ultimately coaxed out of the Bronco and gave himself up in the driveway of his Brentwood home. Police found a gun, Simpson's passport, a fake beard and thousands of dollars in cash and checks in the vehicle.

The make of the vehicle seemed to heighten the drama.

"If it were a Jeep Wrangler, it almost could have been any of us," said Collins, the marketing professor. "But because it was a white Ford Bronco, it stood out. It was a distinctive vehicle with this very distinctive person, O.J. It was still on brand."

Soccer moms weren't driving Broncos

There has been speculation that the chase hastened the Bronco's demise, or alternatively that it led to an uptick in sales.

Zuercher, the auto historian, said the Bronco was already on its last legs at the time. As a two-door SUV, it couldn't compete with four-door models that were family-friendly and extremely popular. The Ford Explorer, for example, was a runaway hit when it came out in 1990.

"Most of the soccer moms of the 1990s weren't driving Ford Broncos," Zuercher said. "There were two more model years after the O.J. chase, and then the Bronco was gone for 25 years."

The car-chase Bronco was later bought by three men, one of whom was Simpson's former agent, ESPN reported in 2016. It spent years in a Los Angeles parking garage, among other places, before finding a home at the Alcatraz East Crime Museum in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Besides the Simpson Bronco and Bundy's Beetle, the museum also houses a 1933 Essex Terraplane that belonged to gangster John Dillinger and a 1934 Ford prop car used in the bloody death scene at the end of the 1967 film "Bonnie and Clyde."

Taylor Smart, the museum's marketing director, said there is still an air of mystery surrounding the O.J. pursuit that captivates people, notably the question of, Why did it even happen?

The museum replays the chase on TV screens in the room where the iconic Bronco is parked behind a barrier, allowing visitors to relive the drama as they use cellphones to take snapshots of a slice of American history.

"A lot of people can name the exact bar that they were at" on that day 30 years ago, Smart said. "It was this shared experience with many across America. Everyone kind of has a story to tell of where they were, what they were doing, when that white Bronco chase came on."

## **A Palestinian is killed as Israeli settlers rampage in his village and troops fire on stone-throwers**

By JACK JEFFREY and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Dozens of Israeli settlers stormed into a Palestinian village in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Friday, shooting and setting houses and cars on fire. The rampage killed a Palestinian man and wounded 25 others, Palestinian health officials said.

The violence was the latest in an escalation in the West Bank that has accompanied Israel's war in the Gaza Strip. An Israeli rights group said the settlers were searching for a missing 14-year-old boy from their

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settlement. After the rampage, Israeli troops said they were still searching for the teen.

The killing came after an Israeli raid overnight killed two Palestinians, including a Hamas militant, in confrontation with Israeli forces.

Palestinian health officials say over 460 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank by Israeli fire since the war erupted in October.

The Israeli human rights group Yesh Din said that settlers stormed into the village of al-Mughayyir late Friday, searching for the Israeli boy. The group said that settlers were shooting and setting houses on fire in the village.

Videos posted to X by the rights group showed dark clouds of smoke billowing from burning cars as gunshots rang out. A photo posted by the group showed what appeared to be a crowd of masked settlers.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said that one man was brought dead to a hospital and 25 were treated for wounds. The Palestine Red Crescent Society said eight of the injured were hit by live fire.

The slain man was later identified by his family as 26-year-old Jihad Abu Alia. His father, Afif Abu Alia, said he was shot and killed but was unsure whether the fatal bullet was fired by an armed settler or an Israeli soldier.

"My son went with others to defend our land and honor, and this is what happened," Abu Alia said from a hospital in the West Bank city of Ramallah, where his son's body had been transported.

The attack was condemned by Mohammad Mustafa, the new Palestinian prime minister.

The Israeli army said it was searching for the missing Israeli teen, and that forces had opened fire when stones were hurled at soldiers by Palestinians. It said "hits were identified," and soldiers also cleared out Israeli settlers from the village.

"As of this moment, the violent riots have been dispersed and there are no Israeli civilians present within the town," it said.

United States officials, including President Joe Biden, have repeatedly raised concerns about a surge in settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank since Israel's war with the militant Hamas group in the Gaza Strip began more than six months ago. Rights groups have long accused the military of failing to halt settler violence or punish soldiers for wrongdoing.

Earlier on Friday, two Palestinians were killed in confrontations with Israeli forces in the northern West Bank, Palestinian medics and the military said. Hamas said one of those killed was a local commander.

The military said the target of the soldiers' raid was Mohammed Daraghmeh, a local Hamas commander. It said Daraghmeh was killed in a shootout with Israeli soldiers who discovered weapons in his car. The army alleged that Daraghmeh had been planning attacks on Israeli targets but provided no evidence. It also said assailants hurled explosives at soldiers.

The Israel-Hamas war started on Oct. 7, when Hamas killed 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, in a surprise attack and incursion into southern Israel. Around 250 people were seized as hostages by the militants and taken to Gaza.

Israel said Friday it had opened a new crossing for aid trucks into hard-hit northern Gaza as ramps up aid deliveries to the besieged enclave. However, the United Nations says the surge of aid is not being felt in Gaza because of persistent distribution difficulties.

Six months of fighting in Gaza have 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 in Gaza have killed more than 33,600 Palestinians and wounded over 76,200, the Gaza 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.

Israel says it has killed over 12,000 militants during the war, but it has not provided evidence to back up the claim.

## Some fear University of Michigan proposed policy on protests could quell free speech efforts

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

A University of Michigan proposal aimed at deterring disruptions on its Ann Arbor campus after anti-Israel protesters interrupted an honors convocation is sparking backlash from free speech advocates.

Violations of the policy, which has yet to be implemented, could result in suspension or expulsion for students and termination for university staff.

The March 24 protest by groups calling for the school to divest from companies linked to Israel is among a number of demonstrations on college campuses across the United States in which students and organizations have taken sides — in support of Palestinians or of Israel — as Israel continues its 6-month-long war in Gaza against Hamas.

University of Michigan President Santo Ono said in a letter to the campus community that the protesters who disrupted the annual honors undergraduate graduation ceremony “brought profound disappointment to students, parents, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives and friends.”

“We all must understand that, while protest is valued and protected, disruptions are not,” Ono wrote. “One group’s right to protest does not supersede the right of others to participate in a joyous event.”

“It was painful for everyone who had gathered — and especially so for members of our Jewish community,” Ono added.

The Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas left 1,200 people, mostly civilians, dead. Militants took roughly 250 people hostage, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel’s response to the attack has been devastating. Bombardments and ground offensives have killed more than 33,600 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded over 76,200, the Gaza Health Ministry says. The ministry doesn’t differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tally but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

The war 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.

Students Allied for Freedom and Equality, which calls itself a Palestinian solidarity group, posted on social media that students shut down the University of Michigan convocation to demand the school divest from Israel and “war profiteers facilitating genocide.”

The Associated Press left emails this week seeking comment from organizers of the protest.

Some University of Michigan students walked out of classes on April 4, protesting the school’s ties to Israel and the planned policy, which, among other things, would prohibit disrupting speakers or performers. Students violating the policy could face reprimand, disciplinary probation, restitution, removal from a specific course, suspension or expulsion.

Staff members violating the policy could face misconduct allegations, and the school “may institute discipline, up to and including termination.”

The policy, if enacted as is, would apply to all students, employees, contractors, volunteers and visitors who engage in disruptive activity.

“We will not shy away from protecting the values we hold dear,” Ono wrote in a follow-up letter to the campus community. “Those who participate in disruptive activity will be held accountable.”

Michigan sophomore Annabel Bean said the school appears to be trying to limit and repress student protests.

“The guidelines are just really a huge overstep I think in my opinion,” Bean told WXYZ-TV. “The point of a protest is to be disruptive and if you’re saying it can’t be disruptive, then we’re not protesting, and how are you honoring your history of disruptive student protests?”

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan said it is concerned the proposed policy, as drafted, will impair civil liberties on campus.

“We believe the proposed policy is vague and overbroad, and risks chilling a substantial amount of free speech and expression,” the ACLU Michigan said in a letter to Ono. “We recognize that the university has

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an interest in carrying out its operations without major disruptions; however, in attempting to achieve that goal, the proposed policy sacrifices far too much."

The university is reviewing comments from the community to ensure any new policy reflects the school's mission and values, Assistant Vice President of Public Affairs Colleen Mastony said in an email.

"The university will not rush the development of this new policy," Mastony said. "We will ensure all voices have an opportunity to be heard. Our goal is to make policies clearer, ensure key terms are well defined, incorporate pathways for restorative action, and support respectful discussion of divergent viewpoints."

As it reads now, the proposed policy lacks clarity, said Thomas Braun, a biostatistics professor.

"For faculty, who are not on the tenured track or not tenured, the worry is this overreaching policy ... it's unclear what sanctions can be given to faculty," said Braun, adding that there is fear of being denied tenure "because of something you participated in."

Braun, who also is chair of the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs, said there always is a debate on the school's campus regarding freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

"I can support free speech and still be for one side or the other," he said. "This issue has made it very clear to me that I have been oblivious to the experiences of the Palestinians in Gaza. At the same time, I can't think I can condone the entire removal of Israel as a state. How does a campus deal with its own turmoil around this issue, while at the same time being asked to solve the world's issues?"

## **Texas' diversity, equity and inclusion ban has led to more than 100 job cuts at state universities**

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A ban on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in higher education has led to more than 100 job cuts across university campuses in Texas, a hit echoed or anticipated in numerous other states where lawmakers are rolling out similar policies during an important election year.

Universities throughout Texas rushed to make changes after Republican Gov. Greg Abbott signed the law last year. On April 2, the president of the 52,000-student University of Texas at Austin — one of the largest college campuses in the U.S. — sent an email saying the school was shuttering the Division of Campus and Community Engagement and eliminating jobs in order to comply with the ban, which went into effect on Jan. 1.

More than 60 University of Texas at Austin staff members were terminated as a result of the law, according to the Texas Conference of the American Association of University Professors. The group said it compiled the list based on affected employees who had reached out and that the number could be greater. University officials declined to confirm the number of positions eliminated.

Officials at other schools, in response to inquiries from The Associated Press, indicated that a total of 36 positions were eliminated between Texas A&M University in College Station; Texas Tech University in Lubbock; Texas State University in San Marcos; The University of Houston; Sam Houston State University in Huntsville; and Sul Ross State University in Alpine. Officials said no one was let go; people were assigned to new jobs, some resigned and vacant positions were closed.

Earlier this week, University of Texas at Dallas officials announced that approximately 20 associate jobs would be eliminated in compliance with the law. University officials declined to comment on how many of those positions are currently filled.

Texas House of Representatives Speaker Dade Phelan, a Republican, applauded the University of Texas actions in a post on the social media platform X. "It is a victory for common sense and proof that the Legislature's actions are working," Phelan wrote.

Texas is among five states that have recently passed legislation targeting DEI programs. At least 20 others are considering it.

Florida was the first to implement a ban, last year, with the vocal backing of then-Republican presidential candidate Gov. Ron DeSantis, who often derides DEI and similar diversity efforts as "woke" policies of the left. In response to the law, the University of Florida last month announced more than a dozen terminations.

Universities of Wisconsin regents reached a deal with Republican lawmakers in December to limit DEI positions at the system's two dozen campuses in exchange for getting funds for staff raises and construction projects. The deal imposed a hiring freeze on diversity positions through 2026, and shifted more than 40 diversity-related positions to focus on "student success."

Republican legislators who oppose DEI programs say they are discriminatory and promote left-wing ideology. Some are counting on the issue to resonate with voters during this election year. Democratic DEI supporters say the programs are necessary to ensure that institutions meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations. Lawmakers from the party have filed about two dozen bills in 11 states that would require or promote DEI initiatives.

Texas' anti-DEI law, which Abbott enthusiastically signed last year, prohibits training and activities conducted "in reference to race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation." Additionally, the law, also known by its legislative title, SB17, forbids staff members from making hiring decisions that are influenced by race, sex, color or ethnicity, and prohibits promoting "differential" or "preferential" treatment or "special" benefits for people based on these categories.

SB17 states that the ban doesn't apply to academic course instruction and scholarly research. That's why professor Aquasia Shaw was so surprised to hear last week that her supervisor was not going to renew her contract. Shaw said she was not given a reason for the termination, but considering the timing, she suspects it's the new law.

Shaw taught courses on the intersection of sociology, sports and cultural studies in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Her faculty page on the university's website states her focus as "sociology of sport and cultural studies, sport management and diversity, inclusion and social justice." A course she taught this semester was titled Race and Sports in African American Life. But she said she had not been involved in any DEI initiatives outside of her teaching.

"I was under the impression that teaching and research was protected so ... I am trying to grapple with the idea and in denial that this can't be the reason I was targeted," she said.

In March, Republican state Sen. Brandon Creighton, who authored SB17, sent a letter to public university boards of regents across the state, inviting them to testify in May about the changes that have been made to achieve compliance. He included a warning that renaming programs, rather than changing their intent, would not be sufficient.

Creighton's office did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

The law's impact was felt in Texas even before it went into effect. In anticipation, University of Texas at Austin officials last year changed the school's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement to the Division of Campus and Community Engagement. The name change didn't save it — it was closed this month. School officials said some of the division's projects would be relocated, while others would be shut down. They did not provide specifics.

Shaw said she was the only person of color in her department. She said she saw on X that other university employees had been let go and began connecting with them. At least 10 of the other terminated faculty and staff members whom she contacted are also from minority groups, she said.

The loss of her job was a big blow to Shaw, who had already scheduled classes for this summer and fall. She said her superiors had previously told her they hoped to renew her contract.

"I am so disheartened to see that exactly what I was concerned about ended up happening anyway," Shaw said.

## Far fewer young Americans now want to study in China, something both countries are trying to fix

By DIDI TANG and DAKE KANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Stephen Garrett, a 27-year-old graduate student, always thought he would study in China, but first the country's restrictive COVID-19 policies made it nearly impossible and now he has

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other concerns.

The cost is one deterrent, but Garrett is more worried about restrictions on academic freedom and the personal risk of being stranded in China. He is not alone.

These days, only about 700 American students are studying at Chinese universities, down from a peak of close to 25,000 a decade ago, while there are nearly 300,000 Chinese students at U.S. schools.

Some young Americans are discouraged from investing their time in China by what they see as diminishing economic opportunities and strained relations between Washington and Beijing.

Whatever the reason for the imbalance, U.S. officials and scholars bemoan the lost opportunities for young people to experience life in China and gain insight into a formidable American adversary.

And officials from both countries agree that more should be done to encourage the student exchanges, at a time when Beijing and Washington can hardly agree on anything else.

"I do not believe the environment is as hospitable for educational exchange as it was in the past, and I think both sides are going to need to take steps," said Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell.

The U.S. has advised its citizens to "reconsider travel" to China over concerns of arbitrary detentions and widened use of exit bans to bar Americans from leaving the country. Campbell said this has hindered the rebuilding of the exchanges and easing the advisory is now under "active consideration."

For its part, Beijing is rebuilding programs for international students that were shuttered during the pandemic, and Chinese President Xi Jinping has invited tens of thousands of U.S. high school students to visit.

The situation was far different after President Barack Obama started the 100,000 Strong initiative in 2009 to drastically increase the number of U.S. students studying in China.

By 2012, there were as many as 24,583 U.S. students in China, according to data by the Chinese education ministry. The Open Doors reports by the Institute of International Education, which only track students enrolled in U.S. schools and studying in China for credit, show the number peaked at 14,887 in the 2011-12 school year. But 10 years later, the number was down to only 211.

In late 2023, the number of American students stood at 700, according to Nicholas Burns, the U.S. ambassador to China, who said this was far too few in a country of such importance to the United States.

"We need young Americans to learn Mandarin. We need young Americans to have an experience of China," Burns said.

Without these U.S. students, "in the next decade, we won't be able to exercise savvy, knowledgeable diplomacy in China," warned David Moser, an American linguist who went to China in the 1980s and is now tasked with establishing a new master's program for international students at Beijing Capital Normal University.

Moser recalled the years when American students found China fascinating and thought an education there could lead to an interesting career. But he said the days of bustling trade and money deals are gone, while American students and their parents are watching China and the United States move away from each other. "So people think investment in China as a career is a dumb idea," Moser said.

After 2012, the number of American students in China dipped but held steady at more than 11,000 for several years, according to Open Doors, until the pandemic hit, when China closed its borders and kept most foreigners out. Programs for overseas students that took years to build were shuttered, and staff were let go, Moser said.

Amy Gadsden, executive director of China Initiatives at the University of Pennsylvania, also attributed some of the declining interest to foreign businesses closing their offices in China. Beijing's draconian governing style, laid bare by its response to the pandemic, also has given American students a pause, she said.

Garrett, a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, or SAIS, had lived in Hong Kong as a teenager and interned in mainland China. He said he's still interested in traveling to China but not anytime soon, citing the lack of access to information, restrictions on discussions of politically sensitive issues and China's sweeping anti-spying law.

Some American students remain committed to studying in China, said Andrew Mertha, director of the China Global Research Center at SAIS. "There are people who are interested in China for China's sake," he said. "I don't think those numbers are affected at all."

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About 40 U.S. students are now studying at the Hopkins-Nanjing center in the eastern Chinese city, and the number is expected to go up in the fall to approach the pre-pandemic level of 50-60 students, said Adam Webb, the center's American co-director.

Among them is Chris Hankin, 28, who said he believed time in China was irreplaceable because he could interact with ordinary people and travel to places outside the radar of international media. "As the relationship becomes more intense, it's important to have that color, to have that granularity," said Hankin, a master's student of international relations with a focus on energy and the environment.

Jonathan Zhang, a Chinese American studying at the prestigious Schwarzman Scholars program at Tsinghua University in Beijing, said it was more important than ever to be in China at a time of tense relations. "It's really hard to talk about China without being in China," he said. "I think it's truly a shame that so many people have never stepped foot in China."

Zhang was met with concerns when he deferred an offer at a consulting firm to go Beijing. "They're like, 'oh, be safe,' or like, 'what do you mean, you're going back to China?'" Zhang said. "I feel like the (Chinese) government is trying with an earnest effort, but I feel like a lot of this trust has been broken."

Gadsden said U.S. universities need to do more to nudge students to consider China. "We need to be more intentional about creating the opportunities and about encouraging students to do this deeper work on China, because it's going to be interesting for them, and it's going to be valuable for the U.S.-China relationship and for the world," she said.

In China, Jia Qingguo, a professor of international relations and a national political adviser, has suggested Beijing clarify its laws involving foreign nationals, introduce a separate system for political reviews of foreign students' dissertations, and make it easier for foreign graduates to find internships and jobs in Chinese companies.

Meanwhile, China is hosting American high school students under a plan Xi unveiled in November to welcome 50,000 in the next five years.

In January, a group of 24 students from Iowa's Muscatine High School became the first to travel to China. The all-expenses-paid, nine-day trip took them to the Beijing Zoo, Great Wall, Palace Museum, the Yu Garden and Shanghai Museum.

Sienna Stonking, one of the Muscatine students, now wants to return to China to study.

"If I had the opportunity, I would love to go to college in China," she told China's state broadcaster CGTN. "Honestly, I love it there."

## How a hush money scandal tied to a porn star led to Trump's first criminal trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It was the kind of tawdry tale Donald Trump might've relished before politics: a porn actress claiming they'd had sex.

But on the eve of the 2016 presidential election, Trump feared the story — which he says is false — would cost him votes. So, prosecutors say, he arranged to pay Stormy Daniels to keep quiet.

Now, after years of fits and starts before an indictment last year, Trump is set to stand trial Monday in New York on state charges related to the very sex scandal that he and his aides strove to hide.

Barring a last-minute delay, it will be the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial. It will be an unprecedented event in U.S. history — the first criminal trial of a former president.

It wasn't always clear the hush money allegations would even lead to charges — let alone be the first to reach trial. It is arguably the least perilous of Trump's indictments, with others involving government secrets and threats to democracy.

Yet it is almost certain to be the most salacious, with testimony expected about alleged marital infidelity, a supermarket tabloid's complicity in a coverup, and payouts orchestrated by a former Trump loyalist who now counts himself among the ex-president's enemies.



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Many details of the case have been public since 2018, when federal prosecutors charged Trump's ex-lawyer Michael Cohen with campaign finance crimes in connection with a scheme to bury not only Daniels' claims, but other potentially damaging stories from Trump's playboy past.

They later implicated Trump as directing Cohen's efforts, obliquely identifying him in court papers as "Individual-1." Justice Department policy forbids charging a sitting president with a crime, and nothing came of it.

In the ensuing years, the tantalizing saga of sex, politics and coverups largely faded from the headlines — eclipsed by an investigation into Russian election interference, Trump's two impeachments and allegations that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election and hoarded classified documents after leaving office.

Former Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. examined the circumstances of a \$130,000 payout that Cohen made to Daniels, and declined to take the politically explosive step of seeking Trump's indictment.

The D.A.'s office was so unsure about the hush money case that it became known among prosecutors as the "zombie case." They'd revisit it then abandon it again as they pursued Trump on multiple fronts over the last five years — going to the Supreme Court twice to obtain his tax records and prosecuting his company and a top executive for tax fraud.

Vance's successor, Alvin Bragg, a Democrat who took office in January 2022, saw the hush money case differently.

The grand jury convened in January 2023. It heard from Cohen, now an outspoken critic of his ex-boss, and other witnesses, including the former publisher of the National Enquirer tabloid, which helped Trump by buying some negative stories and suppressing them in a practice known as "catch-and-kill."

The grand jury voted to indict on March 30, 2023, on charges that Trump had falsified his company's internal records to obscure the true nature of payments made to Cohen to reimburse him for his work covering up potentially embarrassing stories. The charges are felonies punishable by up to four years in prison, though there is no guarantee that a conviction would result in prison time.

Trump denies the allegations, saying it is prosecutors who are engaging in "election interference" and a "witch hunt." He has pleaded not guilty.

In a court filing, Bragg's office framed the prosecution as another of Trump's election interference cases, accusing the Republican of orchestrating an "expansive and corrupt criminal scheme to conceal damaging information from the voting public" and "undermine the integrity of the 2016 presidential election."

In the indictment paperwork, prosecutors told of a multi-part scheme dating to the early days of Trump's 2016 campaign to suppress stories alleging he had extramarital sexual encounters.

Before the Daniels payment, prosecutors said, Cohen arranged for the National Enquirer to pay \$150,000 to former Playboy model Karen McDougal, who claimed she had a monthslong affair with Trump. The tabloid also paid \$30,000 to a Trump Tower doorman who claimed to have a story about a child he alleged Trump had out of wedlock.

Trump, reeling from the October surprise of the never-before-seen 2005 "Access Hollywood" tape in which he boasted about grabbing women's genitals, then directed Cohen to arrange the payment to Daniels, who was agitating to come forward with her claims that they had a sexual encounter at a 2006 celebrity golf outing in Lake Tahoe, California, according to the indictment.

Trump's arraignment, five days after the indictment, was a spectacle attracting hordes of news media, supporters and protesters. His trial will take place in the same courtroom — and the same cauldron.

After Trump's New York indictment, others followed in rapid succession.

Within 70 days, special counsel Jack Smith charged Trump in Florida with keeping classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate. Fifty-four days after that, Smith charged Trump in Washington, D.C., with attempting to subvert the 2020 election in the lead-up to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection. Two weeks later, Atlanta District Attorney Fani Willis charged Trump with racketeering and other charges in a similar election subversion case.

While the New York case has progressed at a rapid clip, Trump's other criminal cases seem increasingly unlikely to come to trial before the November election.

The Atlanta case has been slowed by allegations of impropriety against the top prosecutor, the Washing-

ton case by a Supreme Court appeal on a legally untested immunity question and the Florida prosecution by a slew of unresolved motions.

"Partly it's just that there are fewer of those practical obstacles to making the case move along, and maybe in some degree, this is a simpler case," said Alex Reinert, a professor at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York City.

Trump has tried repeatedly to get the New York trial delayed as well. His lawyers were rejected three times this week in trying to get a state appeals court to put off the case.

In its allegations of hefty payments to stifle an election-year sex story, the case bears some cautionary parallels to the Justice Department's unsuccessful prosecution of former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards, who was charged with campaign finance crimes in connection with nearly \$1 million secretly provided by two wealthy donors who helped hide his pregnant mistress during the 2008 Democratic presidential primary.

Defense lawyers argued that the money was meant to conceal the affair from his cancer-stricken wife, not to boost his election chances. Edwards was ultimately acquitted on one charge while a jury deadlocked on five other counts.

Jeremy Saland, a former Manhattan assistant district attorney who now works as a criminal defense lawyer, said that because of the magnitude of the case, Bragg must believe he has a more winnable case against Trump.

"He has to be going into the courtroom believing that he has the goods," Saland said. "Otherwise, for the psyche of America, it could be catastrophic — that a former president is prosecuted in a case that ends up falling flat on its face, and even if not true, appearing like a sham."

But he said that if the allegations are proven, it would still amount to "significant misconduct of somebody who was vying to be at the time the leader of the free world." For those who say, "Come on, it's just hush money," he said he believed "that we hold our elected officials to a higher standard and we subject them to more scrutiny, and rightfully so."

## **The Masters turns into a menace. Scheffler, DeChambeau and Homa hold on to share the lead**

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Max Homa played the most beautifully boring round of golf amid raging wind and endless calamity Friday in the Masters, giving him a share of the lead with Scottie Scheffler and Bryson DeChambeau going into a weekend for the survivors.

Homa made 15 pars — they all felt so much better than that — for a 1-under 71.

Scheffler finally made his first bogey of the Masters and then a few more, but he was rock solid down the stretch for a 72, his highest score of the year. DeChambeau played the 13th hole from the 14th fairway — at one point hoisting a wooden directional sign over his shoulder as he plotted his move — and finished with a 73.

For some 12 hours, the wind roared through the pines, scattered magnolia leaves across pristine Augusta National, and blew sand out of the white bunkers and into the faces of the players as they tried to handle a beast of a course.

"Mostly what I was trying to do out there was make a bunch of pars and stay in the golf tournament," Scheffler said, a testament to just how difficult it was.

The 60 players who made the cut at 6-over 150 are expected to get a slight reprieve, though still plenty of wind. And that weekend will include Tiger Woods.

Woods set a Masters record by making the cut for the 24th consecutive time. He had to play 23 holes — five in the morning to finish the weather-delayed first round, and then a second round in which he kept the ball in play and posted an even-par 72.

He was only seven shots behind and still very much in the tournament.

"I'm here. I have a chance to win the golf tournament," Woods said. "I got my two rounds in."

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That's really what it was all about — finishing, surviving.

"That was about as happy as you could be to be off of a golf course," Homa said. "That was so hard. We got the sand shower to end our day. So it was kind of the golf course saying, 'Get the hell out of here.'"

The average score was 75.09. Only eight players broke par, the same number of players who shot 80 or higher. Ludvig Aberg had the low round at 69.

"I've never experienced anything like this before," DeChambeau said. "But what a great test."

Homa heard some of the loudest cheers, even if they weren't for him. He spent two days with Woods, and caught the full experience of largest galleries, all of them rising to their feet when Woods approached tee boxes, or the 15th green that he managed to reach in two.

"The memories will just be a lot of the Tiger stuff," Homa said. "I hope to build my own come this week-end, but I fortunately think I've done a good enough job of playing it one shot at a time that I can't really remember a ton of the round at the moment. I played really well, and I tried to play as boring as possible.

"I think just the view of this beautiful golf course with the sea of fans, it will be seared in my brain for a while."

The leaders were at 6-under 138, two shots clear of Masters newcomer Nicolai Hojgaard of Denmark, who shot a 73. Two-time major champion Collin Morikawa, one of only two fortunate souls to break par each of the first two rounds, had a 70 and was three behind.

Justin Thomas will have far worse memories. He was even par for the tournament on the par-5 15th hole, very much in the tournament. He hit iron to lay up and it raced along the turf and into the pond. That was the start of a double bogey-double bogey-bogey-double bogey finish. He shot 79 and missed the cut by one shot.

Defending champion Jon Rahm and Rory McIlroy looked as though they might join him, but that was before the cut line began to move.

Rahm made a late charge for a 76, leaving him 11 shots out of the lead. McIlroy, missing only the Masters for the career Grand Slam, didn't make a birdie for only the third time in his 56 trips around Augusta National. He shot 77 and was 10 shots back.

Homa has some experience of the grandest of stages, playing with Woods during his final British Open at St. Andrews. He was far more comfortable with Woods at Augusta National, and his game was a big part of it. Homa picked up two early birdies, one of them on the par-3 fourth when he had to hit 7-wood.

His lone bogey was on the 11th, the hardest hole at Augusta National, and he buckled down against the most extreme conditions.

DeChambeau was the only player to reach 8 under at any point with his birdie on the 13th hole that was quite the expedition. He drove right into the pines and didn't see a clear route back to the fairway — not the 13th fairway, anyway.

So he looked to the right toward the 14th hole, even removing the sign post that he briefly carried over his shoulder — "It was probably 30 pounds, not too bad," he said — and left himself 145 yards over the tributary to Rae's Creek to a back right pin.

"The patrons were nice enough to move over to the side to make sure it was wide enough so if I hit an errant one, nobody would get hit by the ball," he said. "I hit a great great shot around the corner and was able to take advantage of a pretty open entrance to the green."

He hit it to about 15 feet for birdie and dropped two shots coming in. In those conditions, that was acceptable.

The wind was so fierce that players thought it might be called, with balls oscillating and gusts arriving without notice. As it was, the rounds took nearly six hours to play.

Scheffler hit driver and 3-iron onto the 15th green on Thursday, and driver and 3-iron just to lay up on the 15th on Friday.

"It can be three clubs different, depending on what time you hit it," Harris English said. "Ten to 20 seconds later or earlier, it can be a totally different shot."

Among those making the cut were three Masters champions — 58-year-old Jose Maria Olazabal, 61-year-old Vijay Singh and 53-year-old Phil Mickelson — who have combined to play the Masters 97 times.

## 1 dead and 13 injured in semitrailer crash at a Texas public safety office, with the driver jailed

By LEKAN OYEKANMI and ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

BRENHAM, Texas (AP) — A Texas semitrailer driver rammed a stolen 18-wheeler through the front of a public safety building where his renewal for a commercial driver's license had been rejected, killing one person and injuring 13 others, authorities said Friday.

The intentional crash into the single-story brick building off a highway in Brenham, a rural town outside of Houston, littered debris in the parking lot and left a gaping hole in the entrance. The crash damaged the front of the red semitrailer, which was hauling materials on a flatbed.

After crashing into the building the first time, the driver backed up the truck with the intention of smashing it again before being detained, Brenham Mayor Atwood Kenjura said.

"It's unfortunate that we are here gathered for a really senseless tragedy," Kenjura said.

The driver — identified as Clenard Parker, 42 — was pulled out of the truck by authorities at the Texas Department of Public Safety office. Authorities say Parker did not resist when he was taken into custody and would face multiple felonies, but did not specify the charges.

On Thursday, Parker was told by employees at the office that he would not be eligible to renew his commercial driver's license, Texas Department of Public Safety Sgt. Justin Ruiz said. He did not elaborate as to why Parker's renewal was rejected.

One employee in the building was trapped "for a period of time" after the crash but no one who worked at the driver's license office suffered serious injuries, Republican state Sen. Lois Kolkhorst said.

It was unclear Friday afternoon where the person who was killed was located at the time of the crash.

Following the crash, two people were flown to a hospital in Bryan and another to Houston. Three people were transported to local hospitals but later released, and eight others were treated on the scene.

Parker, who lived in Chappell Hill about 10 miles (16 kilometers) east of the crash site, was being held without bail Friday in the Washington County jail in Brenham on two initial charges — suspicion of evading arrest causing serious bodily injury and unauthorized use of a vehicle.

It wasn't immediately clear if Parker had a lawyer or would be appointed one at a future court appearance. The jail's website didn't list an attorney or pending court date.

Ruiz said he didn't know if Parker had a criminal record. He said they were still investigating whether he was armed at the time of the crash. He said they also were investigating whether his actions might be considered an act of terrorism.

"We're trying to figure that out," Ruiz said. He said the FBI was assisting in the investigation.

A heavy presence of police surrounded the building and drivers were urged to steer clear of the area on Friday. Brenham, a city of about 19,000 residents, is about 80 miles (128 kilometers) west of Houston.

Kolkhorst and Kenjura said the quick response by law enforcement helped avert a greater tragedy.

"We're blessed more weren't injured in this act of violence," Kolkhorst said.

Kenjura said a fire department official told him if Parker had "veered to the left" and succeeded in striking the building again, "there would have been a collapse of the building resulting in more injuries and possibly death."

The Texas Department of Public Safety is a sprawling agency and one of the largest state law enforcement operations in the country. It includes troopers who are a central part of a massive border security operation on the U.S.-Mexico border as well as the Texas Rangers, the state's top criminal investigators. But the department also has offices across the state that issue driver's licenses.

The Texas Rangers were leading the investigation into the crash, Ruiz said.

## Judge declines to delay Trump's NY hush money trial over complaints of pretrial publicity

By JENNIFER PELTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The judge in Donald Trump's hush money criminal case on Friday turned down the former president's request to postpone his trial because of publicity about the case.

It's the latest in a string of delay denials that Trump has gotten from various courts this week as he fights to stave off the trial's start Monday with jury selection.

Among other things, Trump's lawyers had argued that the jury pool was deluged with what the defense saw as "exceptionally prejudicial" news coverage of the case. The defense maintained that was a reason to hold off the case indefinitely.

Judge Juan M. Merchan wrote that Trump "appears to take the position that his situation and this case are unique and that the pre-trial publicity will never subside. However, this view does not align with reality."

Pointing to Trump's two federal defamation trials and a state civil fraud trial in Manhattan within the past year, Merchan wrote that the ex-president himself "was personally responsible for generating much, if not most, of the surrounding publicity with his public statements" outside those courtrooms and on social media.

"The situation Defendant finds himself in now is not new to him and at least in part, of his own doing," the judge added. He said questioning of prospective jurors would address any concerns about their ability to be fair and impartial.

Messages seeking comment were left with Trump's lawyers. The Manhattan district attorney's office, which is prosecuting the case, declined to comment.

Trump, meanwhile, said Friday that he planned to testify at the trial, calling the case a "scam."

"All I can do is tell the truth," Trump told reporters at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. "And the truth is, they have no case."

Asked about jury selection, Trump said the process is "largely luck."

"It depends who you get," Trump said.

"It's very unfair that I'm having a trial there," he said, reiterating complaints he has made about the judge.

In a court filing last month, Trump lawyer Todd Blanche had argued that "potential jurors in Manhattan have been exposed to huge amounts of biased and unfair media coverage relating to this case."

"Many of the potential jurors already wrongfully believe that President Trump is guilty," Blanche added, citing the defense's review of media articles and other research it conducted.

Blanche said the review found 1,223 articles published online about the case from mid-January to late February and that many of them "unfairly and improperly 'demonized'" Trump. However, a chart included in a defense submission included many mentions of terms relevant to the case, such as 207 references to "Manhattan Trial" and 142 to "Hush Money Payments."

Trump's lawyers also blamed key prosecution witnesses Michael Cohen and Stormy Daniels for driving negative coverage of Trump. They pointed to Cohen's withering criticism of Trump on his podcasts and social media feeds and to publicity surrounding the release of a documentary about Daniels, which premiered last month on the NBC streaming service Peacock.

Prosecutors contended that publicity wasn't likely to wane and that Trump's own comments generated a lot of it. Prosecutors also noted that there are more than 1 million people in Manhattan, arguing that jury questioning could surely locate 12, plus six alternates, who could be impartial.

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.

He is accused of doctoring his company's records to hide the real reason for payments to Cohen, his former lawyer and fixer who helped the candidate bury negative claims about him during his 2016 campaign. Cohen's activities included paying porn actor Daniels \$130,000 to suppress her story of an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump years earlier, which Trump denies.

Trump pleaded not guilty last year to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. His lawyers argue the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses.

Trump's lawyers had lobbed other, sometimes similar, arguments for delays at an appeals court this week. One of those appeals sought to put the trial on hold until the appellate court could give full consideration to the defense's argument that it needs to be moved elsewhere, on the grounds that the jury pool has been polluted by news coverage of Trump's other recent cases.

Trump's lawyers also maintain that the presumptive Republican presidential nominee faces "real potential prejudice" in heavily Democratic Manhattan.

All this week's appeals were turned down by individual appellate judges, though the matters are headed to a panel of appeals judges for further consideration.

Along with their claims about pretrial publicity, Trump's lawyers took issue with the recent prosecution of former Trump Organization finance chief Allen Weisselberg for lying in the civil fraud case. They accused the Manhattan DA'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 Cohen.

Merchan, whom Trump's lawyers accused of pressuring Weisselberg into a previous guilty plea, said the new claim "compels this Court — again, to express its continuing and growing alarm over counsel's practice of making serious allegations and representations that have no apparent basis in fact — or at least are unsupported by a legitimate basis of knowledge."

## Manhattan court must find a dozen jurors to hear first-ever criminal case against a former president

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Of the 1.4 million adults who live in Manhattan, a dozen are soon to become the first Americans to sit in judgment of a former president charged with a crime.

Jury selection is set to start Monday in former President Donald Trump's hush money case — the first trial among four criminal prosecutions of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. The proceedings present a historic challenge for the court, the lawyers and the everyday citizens who find themselves in the jury pool.

"There is no question that picking a jury in a case involving someone as familiar to everyone as former President Trump poses unique problems," one of the trial prosecutors, Joshua Steinglass, said during a hearing.

Those problems include finding people who can be impartial about one of the most polarizing figures in American life and detecting any bias among prospective jurors without invading the privacy of the ballot box.

There's also the risk that people may try to game their way onto the jury to serve a personal agenda. Or they may be reluctant to decide a case against a politician who has used his social media megaphone to tear into court decisions that go against him and has tens of millions of fervent supporters.

Still, if jury selection will be tricky, it's not impossible, says John Jay College of Criminal Justice psychology professor Margaret Bull Kovera.

"There are people who will look at the law, look at the evidence that's shown and make a decision," says Kovera, whose research includes the psychology of juries. "And the job of the judge and the attorneys right now is to figure out who those people are."

Trump has pleaded not guilty to fudging his company's books as part of an effort to conceal payments made to hide claims of extramarital sex during his 2016 campaign. He denies the encounters and contends the case is a legally bogus, politically engineered effort to sabotage his current run.

He will go on trial in a criminal court system where juries have decided cases against a roster of famous names, including mob boss John Gotti, disgraced film mogul Harvey Weinstein and Trump's own company.

Over the last year, writer E. Jean Carroll's sex assault and defamation civil suits against Trump went before juries in a nearby federal courthouse. New York state's fraud lawsuit against the ex-president and his company went to trial without a jury last fall in a state court next door.

But the hush-money case, which carries the possibility of up to four years in prison if he's convicted, raises the stakes.

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Trump lived for decades in Manhattan, where he first made his name as a swaggering real estate developer with a flair for publicity. As Steinglass put it, "There is no chance that we're going to find a single juror that doesn't have a view" of Trump.

But the question isn't whether a prospective juror does or doesn't like Trump or anyone else in the case, Judge Juan M. Merchan wrote in a filing Monday. Rather, he said, it's whether the person can "set aside any personal feelings or biases and render a decision that is based on the evidence and the law."

The process of choosing a jury begins when Merchan fills his New Deal-era courtroom with prospective jurors, giving them a brief description of the case and other basics. Then the judge will excuse any people who indicate by a show of hands that they can't serve or can't be fair and impartial, he wrote.

Those who remain will be called in groups into the jury box — by number, as their names won't be made public — to answer 42 questions, some with multiple parts.

Some are standard inquiries about prospective jurors' backgrounds. But the two sides have vigorously debated what, if anything, prospective jurors should be asked about their political activities and opinions.

Merchan emphasized that he won't let the lawyers ask about jurors' voting choices, political contributions or party registration.

But the approved questionnaire asks, for example, whether someone has "political, moral, intellectual or religious beliefs or opinions" that might "slant your approach to this case." Other queries probe whether prospective jurors support any of a half-dozen far-right or far-left groups, have attended Trump or anti-Trump rallies, or have worked or volunteered for Trump, his administration, his campaign or any political entity affiliated with him, or have worked or volunteered for any "anti-Trump group or organization."

In a filing Friday, Trump's lawyers complained that the "political entity" question amounts to inquiring about whether someone affiliates with the Republican Party, without a similarly direct question about affiliations with "rival political parties that are not necessarily anti-Trump" but still might prejudice a potential juror.

Potential jurors also will be quizzed about any "strong opinions or firmly held beliefs" about Trump or his candidacy that would cloud their ability to be fair, any feelings about how Trump is being treated in the case and any "strong opinions" on whether ex-presidents can be charged in state courts.

The process of choosing 12 jurors and six alternates can be chesslike, as the opposing sides try to game out whom they want and whom their adversaries want. They must also weigh which prospective jurors they can challenge as unable to serve or be impartial and when it's worth using one of their limited chances to rule someone out without giving a reason.

"A lot of times you make assumptions, and arguably stereotypes, about people that aren't true, so it's important to listen to what they say" in court and, if possible, online, says Thaddeus Hoffmeister, a University of Dayton law professor who studies juries.

In prominent cases, courts and attorneys watch out for "stealth jurors," people trying to be chosen because they want to steer the verdict, profit off the experience or have other private motives.

Conversely, some people might want to avoid the attention that comes with a case against a famous person. To try to address that, Merchan decided to shield the jurors' names from everyone except prosecutors, Trump and their respective legal teams.

The six jurors and three alternates in each of Carroll's federal civil cases against Trump were driven to and from court through an underground garage, and their names were withheld from the public, Carroll, Trump, their attorneys and even the judge.

Carroll's lawyer, Roberta Kaplan, says that if she were involved in the hush-money case, she would ask the court to do everything possible to ensure that jurors stay anonymous and don't fear being singled out online or in the media.

"The main concern, given the world we live in, has to be the potential for juror intimidation," Kaplan said.

Jurors were chosen within hours for both trials of Carroll's claims, which Trump denies. Carroll's lawyers later tried midtrial to boot a juror who had mentioned listening to a conservative podcaster who criticized Carroll's case. The judge privately queried the juror, who insisted he could be fair and impartial.

He remained on the panel, which unanimously found Trump liable for sexual abuse and defamation and awarded Carroll \$5 million. Eight months later, the second jury awarded Carroll an additional \$83.5 million for defamation.

## 'I'm dying, you're not': Those terminally ill ask more states to legalize physician-assisted death

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — On a brisk day at a restaurant outside Chicago, Deb Robertson sat with her teenage grandson to talk about her death.

She'll probably miss his high school graduation. She declined the extended warranty on her car. Sometimes she wonders who will be at her funeral.

Those things don't frighten her much. The 65-year-old didn't cry when she learned two months ago that the cancerous tumors in her liver were spreading, portending a tormented death.

But later, she received a call. A bill moving through the Illinois Legislature to allow certain terminally ill patients to end their own lives with a doctor's help had made progress.

Then she cried.

"Medical-aid in dying is not me choosing to die," she says she told her 17-year-old grandson. "I am going to die. But it is my way of having a little bit more control over what it looks like in the end."

That same conversation is happening beside hospital beds and around dinner tables across the country, as Americans who are nearing life's end negotiate the terms with themselves, their families and, now, state lawmakers.

At least 12 states currently have bills that would legalize physician-assisted death. Eight states and Washington, D.C., already allow it, but only for their own residents. Vermont and Oregon permit any qualifying American to travel to their state for the practice. Patients must be at least 18 years old, within six months of death and be assessed to ensure they are capable of making an informed decision.

Two states have gone in the opposite direction. Kansas has a bill to further criminalize those who help someone with their physician-assisted death. West Virginia is asking voters to enshrine its current ban into the state constitution.

That patchwork of laws has left Americans in most states without recourse. Some patients choose to apply for residency in a state where it's legal. Others take arduous trips in the late-stage throes of disease to die in unfamiliar places and beds, far from family, friends and pets.

It was late at night when Rod Azama awoke to his wife crawling on the floor, screaming. Pain from her cancer had punched through the heavy morphine dose.

"Let me die," screamed his wife, Susan.

As Rod rushed to hold her, the cries faded to repeated mumbles. "Heaven," she said, again and again.

Susan, 68, pieced through her life's belongings — family heirlooms, photos, an antique spinning wheel — touching the memories a final time. Then she decided where their next lives would be.

She said goodbye to her constant sidekick, a small, fluffy Maltipoo named Sunny. Rod packed the dog's favorite toy, a stuffed bunny, as a reminder for Susan, who had to leave Sunny behind.

Then the two flew to Oregon.

The issue is contentious. Opponents, including many religious groups and lawmakers, have moral objections with the very concept of someone ending their life. Even with safeguards in place, they argue, the decision could be made for the wrong reasons, including depression or pressure from family burdened by their caretaking.

"It's normalizing suicide, and it's incentivizing individuals to end their lives," said Danielle Pimentel of Americans United for Life. Pimentel raised concerns that pain isn't the top reason people choose an early departure, adding that policy should focus on bettering end-of-life care.

Two national organizations lobbying for the bills argue it's about autonomy and compassion, some power over one's preordained exit.

"It comes down to the right of an individual to control their own end of life decisions free from government intervention or religious interference," said Geoff Sugerman, national campaign strategist Death with Dignity.

Even though it's illegal in most states, a 2018 Gallup poll showed more than two-thirds of Americans



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support physician-assisted death.

Only a small fraction of Americans nationwide, about 8,700, have used physician-assisted death since Oregon became the first state to legalize it in 1997, according to the advocacy group Compassion & Choices. Most are cancer cases; others include heart and respiratory diseases. A third of people prescribed the medications don't end up using them.

Gary Drake planned to. He began a Facebook post on Feb. 13 with "RIP." The 78-year-old was referring to himself. He was off to Oregon, and wouldn't be responding to any more messages and calls.

"I'm too busy and weak to do much more in this lifetime," he wrote.

The jovial businessman from Florida had watched a close friend decline from late-stage lung cancer, driving him to and from chemotherapy, until his friend shot himself. When Drake received a diagnosis around Christmas that his own lung, bone and kidney cancer would end his life within six months, he didn't deliberate long.

He signed off on Facebook: "I love you all, say a prayer for me, and I'll see you on the other side. Bon Voyage."

The finality of the post prompted a flood of comments, as if he were attending his own funeral.

"I know my dad and George are waiting to have a drink with you," someone wrote.

Less than three years ago Drake wouldn't have had the option. Oregon's residency requirement was rolled back in 2022 and Vermont's ended last year, after successful federal lawsuits argued it was unconstitutional for states to deny the service to non-residents.

While debates to legalize the bills are playing out in Kentucky, Delaware, Maryland and Iowa, among others, the advocacy organization Compassion & Choices is using the courts to try to remove residency requirements.

"People are dying right now who don't have the luxury for endless deliberation," said Kim Callinan, CEO and president of the group.

While California has a bill before lawmakers that would allow out-of-staters to access the procedure, that provision in a Colorado bill was stripped out. Three states, including Colorado, have proposals to expand in-state access, such as allowing advanced practice registered nurses, not just doctors, to prescribe the medication.

As Robertson discussed the topic with her grandson over noodles, he got teary eyed. If it became legal in Illinois tonight, would his grandmother be gone tomorrow? How does it differ from suicides that left empty seats at his school?

Robertson reassured him it would be the very last option as she embarks on a new chemo treatment. Then she explained the safeguards.

Typically, two doctors must confirm that a patient has six months to live. The patient must verbally request it twice with a waiting period that varies by state, and submit a written request with witnesses. At three meetings, a physician assesses the patient to ensure they are able to make an informed decision. The patient can be referred to a psychologist for an assessment if there are concerns.

Patients must take the medication themselves. They lose consciousness within a few minutes and usually die within a few hours.

Eventually the teenager met her eyes. "Granny, I support whatever you choose to do," he said.

Robertson was glad she had the conversation. "When you just think of the words 'medical-aid dying,' a 17-year-old gets stuck on the 'dying' part," she said.

Dr. Jess Kaan is no stranger to the controversy and fixation on the "dying" part. Living on the border between Oregon and Washington, she has worked on over 200 cases between the two states. A quarter of those traveled to Oregon.

Kaan has faced condemnation even from some fellow doctors, who accuse her of violating the Hippocratic oath of "do no harm." Kaan's own mother is aghast on religious grounds, and though it's become a major part of Kaan's life, the two have only spoken about it once.

For Kaan, it's a simple argument. She recalled watching a hospitalized patient with Lou Gehrig's disease,

or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, slowly decline, tormented by an inexorable feeling of suffocation, until she died.

"She didn't die the death she wanted to die," Kaan said.

"I'm just so convinced that death itself is not the enemy per se," she said. "For me, the ethical principles upon me are beneficence, in that I feel that the relief of suffering is really what I'm supposed to do as a physician."

As Drake prepared to fly to Oregon after posting on Facebook, he told his 12-year-old granddaughter that their special word would be "LuLu," a tease over her obsession with the clothing brand Lululemon. Every time she saw it, he said, that would be him looking down from above.

"The last conversation she had with him was like any normal conversation that she's ever had with him. And that's the way she'll be able to remember him," said his son, Mitch Drake, 38.

Mitch flew to meet up with his father in Oregon in February. He thanked him for the life he had given him. They said their goodbyes.

Gary Drake drank the medicine as they played his song request: "Toes," by Zac Brown Band.

He put the cup down and sang.

"I got my toes in the water, ass in the sand

Not a worry in the world, a cold beer in my hand

Life is good today

Life is good today."

Then he fell asleep.

## Trump pushes Arizona lawmakers to 'remedy' state abortion ruling that he says 'went too far'

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump urged Arizona lawmakers on Friday to swiftly "remedy" the state Supreme Court ruling allowing prosecutors to enforce a near-total abortion ban that he declared anew "went too far."

Trump has repeatedly expressed pride in his role in overturning the national constitutional right to an abortion by appointing three conservative justices to the U.S. Supreme Court during his one term as president. However, his messaging in the aftermath of the Arizona ruling that a ban on the books since 1864 is constitutional illustrates his struggle to neutralize what has become a potent political weapon for Democrats.

His comments Friday came hours before Vice President Kamala Harris spoke out against the ban in Tucson, where she called prohibitions enacted at the state level "Trump abortion bans." She and President Joe Biden blame Trump for sharply curtailing abortion access, and the issue has become a major liability for the former president in one of the handful of swing states that could decide the November election.

Trump's demand for the state to ease its abortion law came just days after he said abortion rights should be left to the states to decide. At the time he added: "and whatever they decide must be the law of the land — in this case, the law of the state."

On Friday, he struck a firm note on what the state must decide.

"The Governor and the Arizona Legislature must use HEART, COMMON SENSE, and ACT IMMEDIATELY, to remedy what has happened," Trump wrote on Truth Social, his social media platform. "Remember, it is now up to the States and the Good Will of those that represent THE PEOPLE."

He did not call for a specific course of action, such as repealing or watering down the law. He did say that "ideally" abortion restrictions should include exceptions for rape, incest and the life of the mother.

"Arizona Legislature, please act as fast as possible!" Trump wrote.

Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs has called for the repeal of the abortion ban, and a handful of Republican legislators from battleground districts have supported that move. But the Republican majority in the state House shut down an attempted repeal on Monday amid shouts from Democrats of "Shame! Shame!"

The Legislature's most vocal critics of repealing the law are among the body's most devoted Trump supporters.

Under pressure over his role in eliminating the constitutional right to abortion, Trump tried to chart a middle course on Monday, releasing a video in which he said he proudly paved the way for the court's decision and that the matter should be left to states. He declined to endorse a national ban.

But the Arizona Supreme Court ruling the next day showed what can happen when the issue is left to states. The Arizona ruling paves the way for enforcement of a law first passed in 1864, which allows for the imprisonment of abortion providers at any stage of pregnancy unless the mother's life is at risk. It does not include exceptions for pregnancies that result from rape or incest.

"Nothing he says can undo the chaos and cruelty his actions have inflicted on women across America," Sarafina Chitika, a Biden campaign spokesperson, said Friday in response to Trump's latest comments.

Arizona voters backed Biden in 2020 by fewer than 11,000 votes, just the second time in seven decades that the state voted for a Democrat, and both Trump and Biden see the state as a crucial battleground again this year.

According to AP VoteCast, a broad survey of the electorate, 61% of Arizona voters in the 2022 midterm elections said abortion should be legal in most or all cases. Just 6% said it should be illegal in all cases.

Two-thirds of midterm voters in Arizona said the Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade was an important factor for their vote in that election.

About 6 in 10 Arizona voters in that election said they would favor a law guaranteeing access to legal abortion nationwide.

## **US intelligence finding shows China surging equipment sales to Russia to help war effort in Ukraine**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — China has surged sales to Russia of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology that Moscow in turn is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry for use in its war against Ukraine, according to a U.S. assessment.

Two senior Biden administration officials, who discussed the sensitive findings Friday on the condition of anonymity, said that in 2023 about 90% of Russia's microelectronics came from China, which Russia has used to make missiles, tanks and aircraft. Nearly 70% of Russia's approximately \$900 million in machine tool imports in the last quarter of 2023 came from China.

Chinese and Russian entities have also been working to jointly produce unmanned aerial vehicles inside Russia, and Chinese companies are likely providing Russia with nitrocellulose used in the manufacture of ammunition, the officials said. China-based companies Wuhan Global Sensor Technology Co., Wuhan Tongsheng Technology Co. Ltd. and Hikvision are providing optical components for use in Russian tanks and armored vehicles.

The officials said Russia has received military optics for use in tanks and armored vehicles manufactured by Chinese firms iRay Technology and North China Research Institute of Electro-Optics, and China has been providing Russia with UAV engines and turbojet engines for cruise missiles.

Russia's semiconductor imports from China jumped from \$200 million in 2021 to over \$500 million in 2022, according to Russian customs data analyzed by the Free Russia Foundation, a group that advocates for civil society development.

Beijing is also working with Russia to improve its satellite and other space-based capabilities for use in Ukraine, a development the officials say could in the longer term increase the threat Russia poses across Europe. The officials, citing downgraded intelligence findings, said the U.S. has also determined that China is providing imagery to Russia for its war on Ukraine.

The officials discussed the findings as Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to travel to China this month for talks. Blinken is scheduled to travel next week to the Group of 7 foreign ministers meeting in Capri, Italy, where he's expected to raise concerns about China's growing indirect support for Russia as

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Moscow revamps its military and looks to consolidate recent gains in Ukraine.

President Joe Biden has previously raised his concerns directly with Chinese President Xi Jinping about Beijing indirectly supporting Russia's war effort.

While China has not provided direct lethal military support for Russia, it has backed it diplomatically by blaming the West for provoking Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to launch the war and refrained from calling it an invasion in deference to the Kremlin.

China has repeatedly said it isn't providing Russia with arms or military assistance, although it has maintained robust economic connections with Moscow, alongside India and other countries, amid sanctions from Washington and its allies.

"The normal trade between China and Russia should not be interfered or restricted," said Liu Pengyu, spokesman of the Chinese Embassy in Washington. "We urge the U.S. side to refrain from disparaging and scapegoating the normal relationship between China and Russia."

Xi met in Beijing on Tuesday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who heaped praise on Xi's leadership.

Russia's growing economic and diplomatic isolation has made it increasingly reliant on China, its former rival for leadership of the Communist bloc during the Cold War.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who returned to Washington this week from a visit to Beijing, said she warned Chinese officials that the Biden administration was prepared to sanction Chinese banks, companies and Beijing's leadership, if they assist Russia's armed forces with its ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

The Democratic president issued an executive order in December giving Yellen the authority to sanction financial institutions that aided Russia's military-industrial complex.

"We continue to be concerned about the role that any firms, including those in the PRC, are playing in Russia's military procurement," Yellen told reporters, using the initials for the People's Republic of China. "I stressed that companies, including those in the PRC, must not provide material support for Russia's war and that they will face significant consequences if they do. And I reinforced that any banks that facilitate significant transactions that channel military or dual-use goods to Russia's defense industrial base expose themselves to the risk of U.S. sanctions."

The U.S. has frequently downgraded and unveiled intelligence findings about Russia's plans and operations over the course of the more than 2-year-old war with Ukraine.

Such efforts have been focused on highlighting plans for Russian misinformation operations or to throw attention on Moscow's difficulties in prosecuting its war against Ukraine as well as its coordination with Iran and North Korea to supply it with badly needed weaponry. Blinken last year spotlighted intelligence that showed China was considering providing arms and ammunition to Russia.

The White House believes that the public airing of the intelligence findings has led China, at least for now, to hold off on directly arming Russia. China's economy has also been slow to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Chinese officials could be sensitive to reaction from European capitals, which have maintained closer ties to Beijing even as the U.S.-China relationship has become more complicated.

Meanwhile, China on Thursday announced rare sanctions against two U.S. defense companies over what it called their support for arms sales to Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy Beijing claims as its own territory to be recovered by force if necessary.

The announcement freezes the assets of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems and General Dynamics Land Systems held within China. It also bars the companies' management from entering the country.

Filings show General Dynamics operates a half-dozen Gulfstream and jet aviation services operations in China, which remains heavily reliant on foreign aerospace technology even as it attempts to build its own presence in the field.

The company also helps make the Abrams tank being purchased by Taiwan to replace outdated armor intended to deter or resist an invasion from China.

General Atomics produces the Predator and Reaper drones used by the U.S. military.

## Arizona just revived an 1864 law criminalizing abortion. Here's what's happening in other states

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Developments this week in Arizona underscored something that was already apparent about the 2024 elections in the United States: Abortion is going to loom large as an issue in state and federal elections — including the presidential race — and directly in the form of referendums in some states.

An Arizona Supreme Court ruling that allows enforcement of a ban on abortion at all stages of pregnancy was part of a flurry of recent activity on the issue that has been in flux since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and undid a national right to abortion in 2022.

At the moment, 14 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, and two have them currently in place after about six weeks of pregnancy, before many women realize they are pregnant. Both numbers will rise within weeks because of recent court rulings, barring any surprise legislative or court action.

Most Democratic states have adopted executive orders, laws — or both — intended to protect abortion access. Lawmakers in Maine on Friday became the latest to give final passage to a “shield” legislation that would protect providers of both abortion and gender-affirming care from investigations by authorities in states with bans on them. If Gov. Janet Mills, a Democrat, signs it into law, it would join at least 14 other states that have similar protections for abortion.

Here are things to know about the latest developments.

### ENFORCEMENT TO BEGIN SOON ON ARIZONA'S STRICT BAN

The Arizona Supreme Court settled a confounding abortion policy question in the state this week, ruling that enforcement can begin soon on a ban adopted in 1864 on abortion at all stages of pregnancy with exceptions only to save the life of the mother.

The decision overturns an appeals court ruling that found the prevailing abortion law was one from 2022 that allowed abortion during the first 15 weeks of pregnancy.

Now, there's a question about whether the stricter ban kicks in this month or in June. Whenever it does, it's expected to send women scrambling to neighboring states for abortion care.

The fallout from the ruling was swift.

The governor in the battleground state, a Democrat, called on the Republican-controlled legislature to repeal the nearly total ban. But GOP lawmakers blocked discussion of it.

### ARIZONA VOTERS COULD GET A DIRECT SAY IN THE MATTER; MAINE VOTERS WILL NOT

Arizona's Supreme Court has spoken and GOP legislative leaders so far are reluctant to revisit the state's abortion policy.

But voters could have a direct say in November.

Arizona is one of several states this year with a movement to ask voters to approve a constitutional amendment to protect abortion rights. Organizers say they've already exceeded the required 383,923 signatures, even though they're not due until July 3. Even having enough valid signatures might not ensure it appears on the ballot; there are often legal challenges to ballot questions.

Ballot questions are approved already for three states: Maryland and New York, where there is broad access already; and Florida, a state in a situation similar to Arizona's. In a ruling earlier this month, the Florida Supreme Court cleared the way for a ban on abortions to be banned there after the first six weeks of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. A court ruling allowing the ballot question was handed down the same day as the one allowing enforcement of the abortion ban to start on May 1.

Ballot measures to protect or expand abortion access could appear this year in Arkansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada and South Dakota. In Colorado and Missouri, there are competing proposed measures to both protect and restrict access.

This week, Maine lawmakers all but ensured an amendment to enshrine abortion right into the state constitution will not go before voters there this year.

Since 2022, seven states have had abortion directly on the ballot. In each case, voters have sided with

abortion rights advocates, even in largely conservative Kansas and Kentucky.

## PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WEIGH IN

President Joe Biden and other Democrats have established abortion access as a key part of their campaigns this year.

It's only becoming more intense with a ban set to take effect in Arizona, where Biden defeated former President Donald Trump by just 10,000 votes out of nearly 3.4 million cast when they faced off in 2020.

The day of the Arizona ruling, Biden launched an ad campaign in Arizona blaming Trump, the presumptive GOP presidential nominee, for clearing the way to the decision by appointing U.S. Supreme Court justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, ending a nationwide right to abortion and setting off state-by-state fights. Vice President Kamala Harris was headed to Arizona on Friday to address the topic, too.

For his part, Trump has taken credit for the Supreme Court appointments.

Monday, Trump declined to endorse a federal ban, instead saying abortion should be up to the states.

After Tuesday's ruling, Trump said the Arizona ruling will make the ban there go too far. "It'll be straightened out," he said Wednesday "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."

## COURTS ELSEWHERE ARE CONSIDERING ABORTION POLICIES, TOO

Lawyers representing the state government in Iowa went before the state supreme court there Thursday asking that a ban on abortion once cardiac activity can be detected — around six weeks — be allowed to take effect.

The law took effect last year, but a lower-court judge put it on hold after just a few days, leaving abortion legal, for now, for the first 20 weeks of pregnancy.

It's one of several states where lingering court cases could change the status quo of the law.

The issue is primarily in state courts because it revolves around state constitutional questions.

But the U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments April 24 on the limits of the state's ban on abortion throughout pregnancy. Biden's administration says hospitals that receive Medicare funds are required to provide emergency care, potentially including abortion.

It will be the second argument this year before the top court on an abortion-related issue. The court is also expected to rule by late June on whether the government's approvals of mifepristone, one of two drugs usually used in combination in medical abortions, were proper. Most U.S. abortions are now obtained by pills rather than surgery.

## House passes reauthorization of key US surveillance program after days of upheaval over changes

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted Friday to reauthorize and reform a key U.S. government surveillance tool following a dramatic showdown on the floor over whether the FBI should be restricted from using the program to search for Americans' data.

The bill was approved on a bipartisan basis, 273-147, though it will still have to clear the Senate to become law. The surveillance program is set to expire on April 19 unless Congress acts.

Passage of the bill represented a much-needed victory for Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., who has been wrangling with conservative critics of the legislation for months. A group of 19 Republicans revolted to block the bill from coming to the floor earlier in the week, forcing Johnson to make late changes to secure their support.

The legislation approved Friday would extend the surveillance program for two years, rather than the full five-year authorization first proposed. Johnson hoped that the shorter timeline would sway GOP critics by pushing any future debate on the issue to the presidency of Donald Trump if he were to win back the White House in November.

Still, the legislation teetered precariously Friday morning as lawmakers voted on an amendment — vociferously opposed by Johnson, the White House and sponsors of the legislation — that would have prohibited

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the warrantless surveillance of Americans.

One of his top critics, Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene said that Johnson's vote against the warrant requirement was another strike against him.

"Basically, what's the difference in Speaker (Nancy) Pelosi and Speaker Johnson and there's not one," the Georgia lawmaker said.

The amendment ultimately failed by the narrowest of margins, in a 212-212 tie. Supporters breathed a sigh of relief as the vote was gavelled to a close.

The vote on the amendment cut across party lines, uniting progressives and conservatives who agree on little else, but have long been skeptical of the government's surveillance powers.

And opponents of the legislation weren't giving up. In a surprise move after the vote was closed on the overall bill, a Republican made a procedural motion preventing the legislation from being sent to the Senate. An additional vote will be needed next week.

The legislation approved Friday would permit the U.S. government to collect, without a warrant, the communications of non-Americans located outside the country to gather foreign intelligence. The reauthorization is currently tied to a series of reforms aimed at satisfying critics who complained of civil liberties violations against Americans.

But far-right opponents have complained that those changes did not go far enough. The vocal detractors are some of Johnson's harshest critics, members of the ultra-conservative House Freedom Caucus, who have railed against the speaker the last several months for reaching across the aisle to carry out the basic functions of the government.

To further appease some of those critics, Johnson also plans to bring forward next week a separate proposal that would close a loophole that allows U.S. officials to collect data on Americans from big tech companies without a warrant.

Though the program is technically set to expire next Friday, the Biden administration has said it expects its authority to collect intelligence to remain operational for at least another year, thanks to an opinion earlier this month from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which receives surveillance applications. But officials say that court approval shouldn't be a substitute for congressional authorization, especially since communications companies could cease cooperation with the government.

First authorized in 2008, the spy tool has been renewed several times since then as U.S. officials see it as crucial in disrupting terror attacks, cyber intrusions and foreign espionage. It has also produced intelligence that the U.S. has relied on for specific operations.

But the administration's efforts to secure reauthorization of the program have repeatedly encountered fierce, and bipartisan, pushback, with Democrats like Sen. Ron Wyden who have long championed civil liberties aligning with Republican supporters of former President Donald Trump, who in a post on Truth Social on Wednesday stated incorrectly that Section 702 had been used to spy on his presidential campaign.

"Kill FISA," Trump wrote in all capital letters. "It was illegally used against me, and many others. They spied on my campaign." A former adviser to his 2016 presidential campaign was targeted for surveillance over potential ties to Russia under a different section of the law.

A specific area of concern for lawmakers is the FBI's use of the vast intelligence repository to search for information about Americans and others in the U.S. Though the surveillance program only targets non-Americans in other countries, it also collects communications of Americans when they are in contact with those targeted foreigners.

In the past year, U.S. officials have revealed a series of abuses and mistakes by FBI analysts in improperly querying the intelligence repository for information about Americans or others in the U.S., including about a member of Congress and participants in the racial justice protests of 2020 and the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Those violations have led to demands for the FBI to have a warrant before conducting database queries on Americans, which FBI director Chris Wray has warned would effectively gut the program's effectiveness and would also be legally unnecessary given that the information in the database has already been lawfully collected.

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"While it is imperative that we ensure this critical authority of 702 does not lapse, we also must not undercut the effectiveness of this essential tool with a warrant requirement or some similar restriction, paralyzing our ability to tackle fast-moving threats," Wray said in a speech Tuesday.

## **No link between Ozempic, Wegovy and suicide, EU drug regulators say**

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

Drug regulators in Europe have found no evidence that popular diabetes and weight-loss drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy are linked to a higher risk of suicidal thoughts or actions.

The European Medicines Agency regulatory committee announced the results of its review on Friday. It's the latest group to conclude there's no known tie between a new class of obesity drugs and suicide.

In January, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said a preliminary review showed no evidence of such a link, though the agency said it could not rule out that "a small risk may exist" and that it would continue to study the issue. A federally funded U.S. study also found that people taking semaglutide, the medication in Ozempic and Wegovy, had a lower risk of suicidal thoughts than those taking older medications to treat diabetes and obesity.

The review by the European Union's regulators was triggered last July by anecdotal reports that people taking the drugs had thoughts of self-harm. The regulators examined studies, post-marketing data and other research related to medications used in nearly a dozen drugs used to treat the diseases. The group did not review information regarding tirzepatide, the medication used in drugs sold as Mounjaro and Zepbound.

Both agencies said they would continue to closely monitor reports of suicidal thoughts or actions in people taking the drugs known as GLP-1 receptor agonists. Patients taking the drugs should report any mental health or other problems to their health care providers, officials said.

## **In death, 3 decades after his trial verdict, O.J. Simpson still reflects America's racial divides**

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER and AARON MORRISON Associated Press

For many people old enough to remember O.J. Simpson's murder trial, his 1995 exoneration was a defining moment in their understanding of race, policing and justice. Nearly three decades later, it still reflects the different realities of white and Black Americans.

Some people recall watching their Black co-workers and classmates erupting in jubilation at perceived retribution over institutional racism. Others remember their white counterparts shocked over what many felt was overwhelming evidence of guilt. Both reactions reflected different experiences with a criminal justice system that continues to disproportionately punish Black Americans.

Simpson, who died Wednesday, remains a symbol of racial divisions in American society because he is a reminder of how deeply the inequities are felt, even as newer figures have come to symbolize the struggles around racism, policing and justice.

"It wasn't really about O.J. Simpson the man. It was about the rest of the society and how we responded to him," said Justin Hansford, a Howard University law professor.

Simpson died of prostate cancer in Las Vegas, his family announced Thursday. He was 76.

His death comes just a few months before the 30th anniversary of the 1994 killings of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend Ron Goldman. Much like the trial, the public's reaction to the verdict was largely shaped by race.

Today, criminal justice reforms that address racial inequities are less divisive. But that has been replaced by backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion programs, bans of books that address systemic racism, and restrictions around Black history lessons in public schools.

"The hard part is we're going to keep cycling through this until we learn from our past," said University of Pennsylvania sociologist and Africana Studies professor Camille Charles. "But there are people who don't want us to learn from our past."



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During the trial, African Americans were four times as likely to presume Simpson was innocent or being set up by the police, said UCLA Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Darnell Hunt, who at the time was a young sociologist writing a book about the different ways Black and white Americans saw the trial.

"The case was about two different views of reality or two different takes on the reality of race in America at that point in history," he said.

Simpson's trial came on the heels of the 1992 acquittal of police officers in the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, which was caught on video and exposed America's deep trauma over police brutality. For many African Americans in 1995, Simpson's acquittal represented a rebuke of institutional racism in the justice system. But many white Americans believed Simpson and his defense team played the race card to get away with the killings.

The difference could also be seen in the ways Black media outlets covered the trial compared to mainstream publications, Hunt said. Those outlets tended to raise questions about whether the justice system was really fair in terms of "what might be called the Black experience," he said.

Polling in the last decade shows most people still believe Simpson committed the killings, including most African Americans, but the racial and historical dynamics at play in the trial made it about more than the deaths.

Hansford, the Howard University law professor who is Black and was 12 years old at the time of the Simpson verdict, said he remembers the differences in white and Black reactions even in liberal environments like Silver Spring, Maryland, the Washington suburb where he grew up.

"When he was acquitted, all the Black students celebrated and ran into the hallways, jumping up and down," he said. "And the white teachers were crying."

One of Hansford's white teachers said something about Simpson that he didn't agree with, and when he responded, the teacher rebuked him.

"It was one of the worst ways a teacher has ever talked to me," Hansford said. "The O.J. Simpson trial created a situation where people were dug into their sides."

The racial turmoil embedded in the court case was at the center of the 2016 Oscar-winning documentary "OJ: Made in America." Instead of focusing on the killings and the evidence presented at trial, director Ezra Edelman placed the crimes within the context of the Civil Rights struggle, from which Simpson was largely insulated by the warm embrace of the white mainstream.

"All O.J. had to do to get recognized is to run a football," Edelman told the AP in 2016. "And almost concurrent to that you have a community of people whose only way to get recognized is to burn their community down during the (1965 Watts) riots. Those were the two tracks I was trying to home in on, knowing that they will intersect 30 years later."

Simpson had married a white woman in a nation that had historically punished Black men who dared to explore mixed-race relationships. But Simpson also was a former football star, a wealthy Hollywood actor and brand spokesman whose money and privilege distinguished him from impoverished Black men that the criminal justice system punished.

"I'm not Black, I'm O.J.," he liked to tell friends.

He had been admired as a one-of-a-kind celebrity whose transgressions, including a pattern of spousal abuse, were overlooked as incompatible with his All-American persona.

"He actually seemed to go to quite a bit of trouble to distance himself from Black folks," but the Black support for him wasn't about that, said Charles, the University of Pennsylvania sociologist. "I think it was about seeing the system work the way we were told it was supposed to."

Even as systemic racism in criminal justice systems remains an issue, Charles thinks Black Americans have grown less likely to believe in a famous defendant's innocence as a show of race solidarity.

"The one thing that has changed is that you didn't see the same kind of getting behind (R&B singer) R. Kelly or Bill Cosby," Charles said.

"There was much more open conflict about them, and many more Black people were willing to say publicly, 'Nah, he did that.' I think it also could represent a better understanding of celebrity and wealth," she said.

## Democratic donors paid more than \$1M for Biden's legal bills for special counsel probe

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic donors covered more than \$1 million in legal fees racked up by attorneys representing President Joe Biden in a yearlong special counsel probe into his handling of classified documents.

The use of party funds to cover Biden's legal bills is not without precedent and falls within the bounds of campaign finance law, but it could cloud Biden's ability to continue to hammer former President Donald Trump over his far more extensive use of donor funds to cover his legal bills.

The former president has tapped more than \$100 million in donor money for a web of legal challenges, ranging from his upcoming criminal trial in New York over hush money payments to ongoing prosecutions over his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection and his refusal to turn over classified documents to the federal government after leaving office.

For months, Biden aides and advisers have criticized Trump and Republicans for their spending on the former president's legal issues, which has left the GOP campaign cash-strapped and diverted resources from battleground states.

"We are not spending money on legal bills or hawking gold sneakers," Biden campaign finance chair Rufus Gifford told MSNBC last week.

The payments to Biden attorney Bob Bauer and the law firm Hemenway & Barnes were disclosed in regular campaign finance reports to the Federal Election Commission. Two people familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the payments, confirmed the money went for work on the Biden probe. Axios first reported on the payments.

The money for Biden's legal team came from the Democratic National Committee's legal account, according to the people. That account is primarily funded by high-dollar donors who have already met federal contribution limits for the party's political activities.

"If these corrupt Democrats didn't have HYPOCRISY, they'd have NOTHING!" the Republican National Committee said in a post Friday on X.

## Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese headline one of the most anticipated WNBA drafts in years

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Caitlin Clark, Angel Reese, Cameron Brink and others make this one of the most anticipated WNBA drafts in recent years. There are several impact players up for grabs, but their talent is nearly eclipsed by their popularity among basketball fans.

"Caitlin is kind of in a world of her own, but I don't know that we have seen this kind of excitement across the board," ESPN analyst Rebecca Lobo said. "You know, Angel Reese has a massive following. Cameron Brink has a large following of people, whether it's following them on social media or following them throughout the course of their college career.

"We have women coming into the draft this year, who people are very much aware of and eager to see how their game is going to translate at this level."

Clark has helped bring millions of new fans to the game with her signature logo shots and dazzling passing ability. The Iowa star was a big reason why a record 18.9 million viewers tuned in to the NCAA championship game where South Carolina beat the Hawkeyes.

The NCAA Division I all-time scoring leader will go first to the Indiana Fever on Monday night when the draft takes place at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in front of 1,000 fans.

"This is the first time we're going to have fans at the draft, so I think that's going to be special," ESPN analyst Andraya Carter said. "For people watching at home to see and hear a crowd and fans and people there, I think it'll be really exciting."

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While Clark is a lock to go first, Brink, Tennessee's Rickea Jackson and South Carolina's Kamilla Cardoso have all been in the discussion to be taken at No. 2 by Los Angeles. The Sparks also own the No. 4 pick with Chicago choosing third.

"They are foundational. They're an incredible opportunity for our organization," Sparks GM Raegan Pebley said. "We definitely want to see two players that not only have the skill set to make an impact early, but also a long runway ahead of them, opportunities to develop, opportunities to, not only be excellent in what they do, but how they impact the other pieces around them as we continue to build this team."

Dallas is fifth and Washington sixth. Minnesota, Chicago, Dallas, Connecticut, New York and Atlanta close out the first round. In all, there are three rounds and 36 picks in total.

Here are a few other tidbits for the draft:

## INJURY SETBACKS

All-Americans Mackenzie Holmes of Indiana and Elizabeth Kitley of Virginia Tech won't be able to play in the WNBA this season because of knee injuries. Holmes said on social media that she is having surgery next month.

"At this time to ensure my body is healthy and my playing career is as long and successful as possible, I have decided to get the necessary surgery in May to prevent further issues and alleviate the pain it has caused," she said. "I have declared for the 2024 WNBA draft and pray that a team honors me with a selection knowing I will be ready for the start of 2025 training camp."

Kitley tore the ACL in her left knee in Virginia Tech's final regular season game and missed the entire postseason.

"Whenever you see any player go through an injury at any point in their career, but especially at that point, this special season that Virginia Tech was having. But I think she's a player that has, I'll use this word 'track' again," Pebley said. "Just a lot of runway ahead of her. She's going to, I think, have a great career with her versatility, her footwork abilities. And I think her impact around the rim."

## INVITEES

The WNBA invited 15 players to the draft Monday, including Clark, Reese, Brink, Jackson, Cardoso and Kitley. The others are Aliyah Edwards and Nika Muhl of UConn; Charisma Osborne of UCLA; Celeste Taylor and Jacy Sheldon of Ohio State; Alissa Pili of Utah; Marquesha Davis of Mississippi; Dyaisha Fair of Syracuse; and Nyadiew Puoch of Australia.

## How immigrant workers in US have helped boost job growth and stave off a recession

By PAUL WISEMAN, GISELA SALOMON and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Having fled economic and political chaos in Venezuela, Luisana Silva now loads carpets for a South Carolina rug company. She earns enough to pay rent, buy groceries, gas up her car — and send money home to her parents.

Reaching the United States was a harrowing ordeal. Silva, 25, her husband and their then-7-year-old daughter braved the treacherous jungles of Panama's Darien Gap, traveled the length of Mexico, crossed the Rio Grande and then turned themselves in to the U.S. Border Patrol in Brownsville, Texas. Seeking asylum, they received a work permit last year and found jobs in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

"My plan is to help my family that much need the money and to grow economically here," Silva said.

Her story amounts to far more than one family's arduous quest for a better life. The millions of jobs that Silva and other new immigrant arrivals have been filling in the United States appear to solve a riddle that has confounded economists for at least a year:

How has the economy managed to prosper, adding hundreds of thousands of jobs, month after month, at a time when the Federal Reserve has aggressively raised interest rates to fight inflation — normally a recipe for a recession?

Increasingly, the answer appears to be immigrants — whether living in the United States legally or not. The influx of foreign-born adults vastly raised the supply of available workers after a U.S. labor shortage

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had left many companies unable to fill jobs.

More workers filling more jobs and spending more money has helped drive economic growth and create still-more job openings. The availability of immigrant workers eased the pressure on companies to sharply raise wages and to then pass on their higher labor costs to their customers via higher prices that feed inflation. Though U.S. inflation remains elevated, it has plummeted from its levels of two years ago.

"There's been something of a mystery — how are we continuing to get such extraordinary strong job growth with inflation still continuing to come down?" said Heidi Shierholz, president of the Economic Policy Institute and a former chief economist at the Labor Department. "The immigration numbers being higher than what we had thought — that really does pretty much solve that puzzle."

While helping fuel economic growth, immigrants also lie at the heart of an incendiary election-year debate over the control of the nation's Southern border. In his bid to return to the White House, Donald Trump has attacked migrants in often-degrading terms, characterizing them as dangerous criminals who are "poisoning the blood" of America and frequently invoking falsehoods about migration. Trump has vowed to finish building a border wall and to launch the "largest domestic deportation operation in American history." Whether he or President Joe Biden wins the election could determine whether the influx of immigrants, and their key role in propelling the economy, will endure.

The boom in immigration caught almost everyone by surprise. In 2019, the Congressional Budget Office had estimated that net immigration — arrivals minus departures — would equal about 1 million in 2023. The actual number, the CBO said in a January update, was more than triple that estimate: 3.3 million.

Thousands of employers desperately needed the new arrivals. The economy — and consumer spending — had roared back from the pandemic recession. Companies were struggling to hire enough workers to keep up with customer orders.

The problem was compounded by demographic changes: The number of native-born Americans in their prime working years — ages 25 to 54 — was dropping because so many of them had aged out of that category and were nearing or entering retirement. This group's numbers have shrunk by 770,000 since February 2020, just before COVID-19 slammed the economy.

Filling the gap has been a wave of immigrants. Over the past four years, the number of prime-age workers who either have a job or are looking for one has surged by 2.8 million. And nearly all those new labor force entrants — 2.7 million, or 96% of them — were born outside the United States. Immigrants last year accounted for a record 18.6% of the labor force, according to the Economic Policy Institute's analysis of government data.

And employers welcomed the help.

Consider Jan Gautam, CEO of the lodging company Interessant Hotels & Resort Management in Orlando, Florida, who said he can't find American-born workers to take jobs cleaning rooms and doing laundry in his 44 hotels. Of Interessant's 3,500 workers, he said, 85% are immigrants.

"Without employees, you are broken," said Gautam, himself an immigrant from India who started working in restaurants as a dishwasher and now owns his own company.

"If you want boost the economy," he said, "it definitely needs to have more immigrants coming out to this country."

Or consider the workforce of the Flood Brothers farm in Maine's "dairy capital" of Clinton. Foreign-born workers make up fully half the farm's staff of nearly 50, feeding the cows, tending crops and helping collect the milk — 18,000 gallons each day.

"We cannot do it without them," said Jenni Tilton-Flood, a partner in the operation.

For every unemployed person in Maine, after all, there are two job openings, on average.

"We would not have an economy, in Maine or in the U.S. if we did not have highly skilled labor that comes from outside of this country," Tilton-Flood said in a phone interview with The Associated Press from her farm.

"Without immigrants — both new asylum-seekers as well as our long-term immigrant contributors — we would not be able to do the work that we do," she said. "Every single thing that affects the American economy is driven by and will only be saved by accepting immigrant labor."

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A study by Wendy Edelberg and Tara Watson, economists at the Brookings Institution's Hamilton Project, has concluded that over the past two years, new immigrants raised the economy's supply of workers and allowed the United States to generate jobs without overheating and accelerating inflation.

In the past, economists typically estimated that America's employers could add no more than 60,000 to 100,000 jobs a month without overheating the economy and igniting inflation. But when Edelberg and Watson included the immigration surge in their calculations, they found that monthly job growth could be roughly twice as high this year — 160,000 to 200,000 — without exerting upward pressure on inflation.

"There are significantly more people working in the country," Fed Chair Jerome Powell said last week in a speech at Stanford University. Largely because of the immigrant influx, Powell said, "it's a bigger economy but not a tighter one. Really an unexpected and an unusual thing."

Trump has repeatedly attacked Biden's immigration policy over the surge in migrants at the Southern border. Only about 27% of the 3.3 million foreigners who entered the United States last year did so through as "lawful permanent residents" or on temporary visas, according to Edelberg and Watson's analysis. The rest — 2.4 million — either came illegally, overstayed their visas, are awaiting immigration court proceedings or are on a parole program that lets them stay temporarily and sometimes work in the country.

"So there you have it," Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a former CBO director who is president of the conservative American Action Forum, wrote in February. "The way to solve an inflation crisis is to endure an immigration crisis."

Many economists suggest that immigrants benefit the U.S. economy in several ways. They take generally undesirable, low-paying but essential jobs that most U.S.-born Americans won't, like caring for children, the sick and the elderly. And they can boost the country's innovation and productivity because they are more likely to start their own businesses and obtain patents.

Ernie Tedeschi, a visiting fellow at Georgetown University's Psaros Center and a former Biden economic adviser, calculates that the burst of immigration has accounted for about a fifth of the economy's growth over the past four years.

Critics counter that a surge in immigration can force down pay, particularly for low-income workers, a category that often includes immigrants who have lived in the United States longer. Last month, in the most recent economic report of the president, Biden's advisers acknowledged that "immigration may place downward pressure on the wages of some low-paid workers" but added that most studies show that the impact on the wages of the U.S.-born is "small."

Even Edelberg notes that an unexpected wave of immigrants, like the recent one, can overwhelm state and local governments and saddle them with burdensome costs. A more orderly immigration system, she said, would help.

The recent surge "is a somewhat disruptive way of increasing immigration in the United States," Edelberg said. "I don't think anybody would have sat down and said: 'Let's create optimal immigration policy,' and this is what they would come up with."

Holtz-Eakin argued that an immigration cutoff of the kind Trump has vowed to impose, if elected, would result in "much, much slower labor force growth and a return to the sharp tradeoff" between containing inflation and maintaining economic growth that the United States has so far managed to avoid.

For now, millions of job vacancies are being filled by immigrants like Mariel Marrero. A political opponent of Venezuela's authoritarian President Nicolás Maduro, Marrero, 32, fled her homeland in 2016 after receiving death threats. She lived in Panama and El Salvador before crossing the U.S. border and applying for asylum.

Her case pending, she received authorization to work in the United States last July. Marrero, who used to work in the archives of the Venezuelan Congress in Caracas, found work selling telephones and then as a sales clerk at a convenience store owned by Venezuelan immigrants.

At first, she lived for free at the house of an uncle. But now she earns enough to pay rent on a two-bedroom house she shares with three other Venezuelans in Doral, Florida, a Miami suburb with a large Venezuelan community. After rent, food, electricity and gasoline, she has enough left over to send \$200

a month to her family in Venezuela.

"One hundred percent — this country gives you opportunities," she said.

Marrero has her own American dream:

"I imagine having my own company, my house, helping my family in a more comfortable way."

## How immigrant workers in US have helped boost job growth and stave off a recession

By PAUL WISEMAN, GISELA SALOMON and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Having fled economic and political chaos in Venezuela, Luisana Silva now loads carpets for a South Carolina rug company. She earns enough to pay rent, buy groceries, gas up her car — and send money home to her parents.

Reaching the United States was a harrowing ordeal. Silva, 25, her husband and their then-7-year-old daughter braved the jungles of Panama's Darien Gap, traveled the length of Mexico, crossed the Rio Grande and then turned themselves in to the U.S. Border Patrol in Brownsville, Texas. Seeking asylum, they received a work permit last year and found jobs in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

"My plan is to help my family that much need the money and to grow economically here," Silva said.

Her story amounts to far more than one family's arduous quest for a better life. The millions of jobs that Silva and other new immigrant arrivals have been filling in the United States appear to solve a riddle that has confounded economists for at least a year:

How has the economy managed to prosper, adding hundreds of thousands of jobs, month after month, at a time when the Federal Reserve has aggressively raised interest rates to fight inflation — normally a recipe for a recession?

Increasingly, the answer appears to be immigrants. The influx of foreign-born adults vastly raised the supply of available workers after a U.S. labor shortage had left many companies unable to fill jobs.

More workers filling more jobs and spending more money has helped drive economic growth and create still-more job openings. The availability of immigrant workers eased the pressure on companies to sharply raise wages and to then pass on their higher labor costs via higher prices that feed inflation. Though U.S. inflation remains elevated, it has plummeted from its levels of two years ago.

"There's been something of a mystery — how are we continuing to get such extraordinary strong job growth with inflation still continuing to come down?" said Heidi Shierholz, president of the Economic Policy Institute. "The immigration numbers being higher than what we had thought — that really does pretty much solve that puzzle."

While helping fuel economic growth, immigrants also lie at the heart of an incendiary election-year debate over the control of the nation's Southern border. In his bid to return to the White House, Donald Trump has vowed to finish building a border wall and to launch the "largest domestic deportation operation in American history." Whether he or President Joe Biden wins the election could determine whether the influx of immigrants, and their key role in propelling the economy, will endure.

The immigration boom was a surprise. In 2019, the Congressional Budget Office had estimated that net immigration — arrivals minus departures — would equal about 1 million in 2023. The actual number, the CBO said in a January update, was 3.3 million.

Thousands of employers desperately needed the new arrivals. The number of native-born Americans in their prime working years — ages 25 to 54 — was dropping because so many of them had aged out of that category and were nearing or entering retirement. Their numbers have shrunk by 770,000 since February 2020, just before COVID-19 slammed the economy.

Filling the gap has been a wave of immigrants. Over the past four years, the number of prime-age workers who either have a job or are looking for one has surged by 2.8 million. And nearly all those newcomers — 2.7 million, or 96% of them — were born outside the United States.

At the Flood Brothers farm in Maine's "dairy capital" of Clinton, foreign-born workers make up half the

staff of nearly 50, feeding the cows, tending crops and helping collect the milk.

"We cannot do it without them," said Jenni Tilton-Flood, a partner in the operation.

For every unemployed person in Maine, after all, there are two job openings, on average.

A study by Wendy Edelberg and Tara Watson of the Brookings Institution found that new immigrants raised the economy's supply of workers and allowed the United States to generate jobs without overheating and accelerating inflation.

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## **German parliament votes to make it easier for people to legally change their name and gender**

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German lawmakers on Friday approved legislation that will make it easier for transgender, intersex and nonbinary people to change their name and gender in official records.

The "self-determination law," one of several social reforms that Chancellor Olaf Scholz's liberal-leaning coalition government pledged when it took office in late 2021, is set to take effect on Nov. 1.

Germany, the European Union's most populous nation, follows several other countries in making the change. Parliament's lower house, the Bundestag, approved it by 374 votes to 251 with 11 abstentions.

The German legislation will allow adults to change their first name and legal gender at registry offices without further formalities. They will have to notify the office three months before making the change.

The existing "transsexual law," which dates back four decades, requires individuals who want to change gender on official documents to first obtain assessments from two experts "sufficiently familiar with the particular problems of transsexualism" and then a court decision.

Since that law was drawn up, Germany's top court has struck down other provisions that required transgender people to get divorced and sterilized, and to undergo gender-transition surgery.

"For over 40 years, the 'transsexual law' has caused a lot of suffering ... and only because people want to be recognized as they are," Sven Lehmann, the government's commissioner for queer issues, told lawmakers. "And today we are finally putting an end to this."

The new legislation focuses on individuals' legal identities. It does not involve any revisions to Germany's rules for gender-transition surgery.

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The new rules will allow minors 14 years and older to change their name and legal gender with approval from their parents or guardians; if they don't agree, teenagers could ask a family court to overrule them. In the case of children younger than 14, parents or guardians would have to make registry office applications on their behalf.

After a formal change of name and gender takes effect, no further changes would be allowed for a year. The new legislation provides for operators of, for example, gyms and changing rooms for women to continue to decide who has access.

Nyke Slawik, a transgender woman elected to parliament in 2021 for the Greens, one of the governing parties, recounted her experience of going through the current system a decade ago. She said she had had enough of being asked "is that your brother's ID?" when she had to identify herself.

"Two years, many conversations with experts and one district court process later, it was done — the name change went through, and I was nearly 2,000 euros (\$2,150) poorer," she told lawmakers. "As trans people, we repeatedly experience our dignity being made a matter for negotiation."

The mainstream conservative opposition faulted the legislation for what it described as a lack of safeguards against abuse and a lack of protection for young people. Conservative lawmaker Susanne Hierl complained that the government is "ignoring the justified concerns of many women and girls."

"You want to satisfy a loud but very small group and, in doing so, are dividing society," Hierl said.

Martin Reichardt of the far-right Alternative for Germany blasted what he called "ideological nonsense."

Justice Minister Marco Buschmann said in a statement that "there are numerous precautions against possibilities of abuse, however improbable they may be." He insisted that the new law takes into account the interests of the whole of society and said "much less will change with this law than some say."

Among others, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Spain already have similar legislation.

In the U.K., the Scottish parliament in 2022 passed a bill that would allow people aged 16 or older to change the gender designation on identity documents by self-declaration. That was vetoed by the British government, a decision that Scotland's highest civil court upheld in December.

In other socially liberal reforms, Scholz's government has legalized the possession of limited amounts of cannabis; eased the rules on gaining German citizenship and ended restrictions on holding dual citizenship; and ended a ban on doctors "advertising" abortion services. Same-sex marriage was already legalized in 2017.

## Several writers decline recognition from PEN America in protest over its Israel-Hamas war stance

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Several authors have turned down awards and awards nominations from PEN America, citing unhappiness with the literary and free expression organization's stance on the war in Gaza.

This week, PEN announced its long lists in categories ranging from the \$75,000 Jean Stein Award for best book to the \$10,000 PEN/Hemingway award for first novel. Authors who have asked for their names to be withdrawn include Jean Stein nominee Camonghne Felix, poetry finalist Eugenia Leigh and short story nominee Ghassan Zeineddine.

"I decided to decline this recognition and asked to be removed from the long list in solidarity with the ongoing protest of PEN's continued normalization and denial of genocide," Felix, author of the memoir "Dyscalculia," wrote on X.

The awards are scheduled to be handed out during an April 29 ceremony in Manhattan, hosted by writer-comedian Jena Friedman. A PEN spokesperson said that nine out of 60 nominated authors had asked for their names to be withdrawn. PEN also confirmed that Esther Allen had declined the PEN/Ralph Manheim Award for translation and added that it would soon announce a new winner.

"We respect their decision and we will celebrate these writers in other ways," said Clarisse Rosaz Shariyf, who oversees PEN's literary programming.



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PEN's response to Israel's invasion of Gaza, following the deadly Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, has been widely criticized by writers who believe the organization has failed to fully condemn the war that has left tens of thousands of Palestinians dead, including hundreds of writers, academics and journalists.

An open letter published in March and signed by Naomi Klein, Lorrie Moore and dozens of others contends that PEN had not "launched any substantial coordinated support" for Palestinians and was not upholding its mission to "dispel all hatreds and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality in one world." The letter's endorsers contrasted PEN's forceful protests against the Russian invasion of Ukraine and alleged that PEN had done little to "mobilize" members against the Gaza war.

"Palestine's poets, scholars, novelists and journalists and essayists have risked everything, including their lives and the lives of their families, to share their words with the world," the letter reads in part. "Yet PEN America appears unwilling to stand with them firmly against the powers that have oppressed and dispossessed them for the last 75 years."

A PEN spokesperson noted that the organization has issued numerous statements calling for a cease-fire and mourning the destruction of museums, libraries and mosques in Gaza, and has helped set up a \$100,000 emergency fund for Palestinian writers. PEN America CEO Suzanne Nossel said in a statement that PEN shared with many the "sorrow and anguish at the horrific costs of the Israel-Hamas war, including for writers, poets, artists and journalists.

"We approach every conflict — Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza — on its own terms, mindful of complexities, what we can contribute, our constituencies, our partners and our principles," she added. "When we take positions, we do not align with states, armies or political groups but with freedom of expression and the preconditions to enable it."

The criticisms come before PEN's high-profile spring events, including the PEN literary awards and a key May 16 fund-raising gala at the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan. Klein and the letter's other signers have said they will be boycotting PEN's "World Voices" festival next month in Los Angeles and New York, an international gathering featuring panel discussions and lectures.

PEN does continue to attract high-profile guests, including opponents of the war,

On Friday, PEN announced that playwright-screenwriter Tony Kushner was this year's winner of the PEN/Mike Nichols Writing for Performance Award, previously given to Tina Fey, Kenneth Lonergan and Elaine May among others. Marcia Gay Harden, who starred in the 1993-94 Broadway production of Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning "Angels in America," and Rachel Zegler, a Golden Globe winner for her performance as Maria in the 2021 Kushner-Steven Spielberg adaptation of "West Side Story," will present the Nichols award during the April 29 event.

Nichols, who died in 2014, directed the acclaimed HBO "Angels in America" miniseries that was released in 2003.

"It's intimidating enough that this honor is named after Mike Nichols, no one ever understood better than him the ways words can be made to perform. But then there's the list of past recipients, each and every one a writer I adore," Kushner said in a statement. "To say I feel unworthy is not to say I'm not gleefully accepting! I loved working with Mike; he was a magnificent artist and a dear friend.

"I'm always pleased to be associated with PEN, whose work promoting and protecting writers is even more vitally important in turbulent, troubled times like ours."

Kushner, who is Jewish, has long criticized Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and recently told the Israeli newspaper Haaretz that the country's invasion of Gaza "looks like ethnic cleansing to me." He added that the history of Jewish suffering should not be used "as an excuse for a project of dehumanizing or slaughtering other people."

Tensions over the Gaza war have extended throughout the arts community. Kushner was among the defenders of last month's Oscar acceptance speech by "Zone of Interest" director Jonathan Glazer, who warned against "dehumanization" — as depicted in his Holocaust drama, winner for best international film — and stated, "Whether the victims of October the 7th in Israel, or the ongoing attack on Gaza, all the victims, this dehumanization, how do we resist?"

Hundreds of Jews working in Hollywood condemned Glazer, writing in an open letter that "We refute our

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Jewishness being hijacked for the purpose of drawing a moral equivalence between a Nazi regime that sought to exterminate a race of people, and an Israeli nation that seeks to avert its own extermination.”

Kushner will not be the only war critic at the awards ceremony. PEN/Jean Stein finalist Aaliyah Bilal, who last fall as a National Book Awards nominee read a letter from the stage calling for an end to the war, said she will be attending the PEN event. The author of the debut story collection “Temple Folk” told The Associated Press that while she respected the decisions of those who dropped out, she was at odds with the central PEN America leadership and not those managing the awards.

“They’re two separate things,” she said.

## Today in History: April 13, Apollo 13 damaged by explosion

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, April 13, the 104th day of 2024. There are 262 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On April 13, 1964, Sidney Poitier became the first Black performer to win an Academy Award for best actor or best actress with his performance in “Lilies of the Field.”

On this date:

In 1743, the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, was born in Shadwell in the Virginia Colony.

In 1861, at the start of the Civil War, Fort Sumter in South Carolina fell to Confederate forces.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., on the 200th anniversary of the third American president’s birth.

In 1953, “Casino Royale,” Ian Fleming’s first book as well as the first James Bond novel, was published in London by Jonathan Cape Ltd.

In 1970, Apollo 13, four-fifths of the way to the moon, was crippled when a tank containing liquid oxygen burst. (The astronauts managed to return safely.)

In 1997, Tiger Woods became the youngest person to win the Masters Tournament.

In 1999, right-to-die advocate Dr. Jack Kevorkian was sentenced in Pontiac, Michigan, to 10 to 25 years in prison for second-degree murder in the lethal injection of a Lou Gehrig’s disease patient. (Kevorkian ended up serving eight years.)

In 2005, a defiant Eric Rudolph pleaded guilty to carrying out the deadly bombing at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and three other attacks in back-to-back court appearances in Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta.

In 2009, at his second trial, music producer Phil Spector was found guilty by a Los Angeles jury of second-degree murder in the shooting of actor Lana Clarkson (he was later sentenced to 19 years to life in prison; he died in prison in January 2021).

In 2011, A federal jury in San Francisco convicted baseball slugger Barry Bonds of a single charge of obstruction of justice, but failed to reach a verdict on the three counts at the heart of allegations that he’d knowingly used steroids and human growth hormone and lied to a grand jury about it. (Bonds’ conviction for obstruction was ultimately overturned.)

In 2012, Jennifer Capriati was elected to the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

In 2016, the Golden State Warriors became the NBA’s first 73-win team by beating the Memphis Grizzlies 125-104, breaking the 1996 72-win record of the Chicago Bulls. Kobe Bryant of the Lakers scored 60 points in his final game, wrapping up 20 years in the NBA.

In 2017, Pentagon officials said U.S. forces in Afghanistan had struck an Islamic State tunnel complex in eastern Afghanistan with “the mother of all bombs,” the largest non-nuclear weapon ever used in combat by the U.S. military.

In 2020, Charles Thacker Jr., a crew member on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, died at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Guam, becoming the first active-duty military member to die from the coronavirus.

In 2013, all 108 passengers and crew survived after a new Lion Air Boeing 737 crashed into the ocean

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and snapped in two while attempting to land on the Indonesian resort island of Bali.

In 2018, President Donald Trump announced that the United States, France and Britain had carried out joint airstrikes in Syria meant to punish President Bashar Assad for his alleged use of chemical weapons.

In 2021, U.S. health officials recommended a "pause" in use of the single-dose Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine to investigate reports of rare but potentially dangerous blood clots, setting off a chain reaction worldwide and dealing a setback to the global vaccination campaign. (Officials lifted the pause on vaccinations 11 days later.)

In 2023, Jack Teixeira, a 21-year-old Massachusetts Air National Guard member, was arrested in connection with the disclosure of highly classified military documents about the Ukraine war and other top national security issues. (In March of 2024, Teixeira pleaded guilty to six counts of willful retention and transmission of national defense information in a deal with prosecutors and accepted an 11-year prison sentence.)

Today's Birthdays: Former Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., is 91. Actor Edward Fox is 87. R&B singer Lester Chambers is 84. Movie-TV composer Bill Conti is 82. Rock musician Jack Casady is 80. Singer Al Green is 78. Actor Ron Perlman is 74. Actor William Sadler is 74. Singer Peabo Bryson is 73. Bandleader/rock musician Max Weinberg is 73. Bluegrass singer-musician Sam Bush is 72. Rock musician Jimmy Destri (Blondie) is 70. Comedian Gary Kroeger is 67. Actor Saundra Santiago is 67. Sen. Bob Casey Jr., D-Pa., is 64. Chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov is 61. Actor Page Hannah is 60. Actor-comedian Caroline Rhea (RAY) is 60. Rock musician Marc Ford (The Black Crowes) is 58. Reggae singer Capleton is 57. Actor Ricky Schroder is 54. Rock singer Aaron Lewis (Staind) is 52. Actor Bokeem Woodbine is 51. Singer Lou Bega is 49. Actor-producer Glenn Howerton is 48. Actor Kyle Howard is 46. Actor Kelli Giddish is 44. Actor Courtney Peldon is 43. Pop singer Nellie McKay (mih-KY') is 42. Rapper/singer Ty Dolla \$ign is 42. Actor Allison Williams is 36. Actor Hannah Marks is 31.