

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 1 of 80

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Scepaniak heads up the Groton Area maintenance team](#)
- [3- Bjerke Bridal Shower Ad](#)
- [4- Sky Warn Spotter Training Class](#)
- [4- Secretary of State Provides Information Regarding Absentee Voting](#)
- [5- S.D. high schools to vote on NIL amendment, two board members](#)
- [6- SDHSAA move to sanction baseball worries Legion official](#)
- [6- Witte Exterior's Ad](#)
- [7- SDHSAA board hires former Freeman athletic director](#)
- [7- GDI Living Heart Fitness Center ad](#)
- [8- Groton FCCLA holds end of year awards ceremony](#)
- [15- SD Search Light: State transportation head doubts passenger rail service is a real possibility for South Dakota](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Medicaid expansion enrollment 'slow & steady' as state launches application portal](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Red states, including SD, fight growing efforts to give 'basic income' cash to residents](#)
- [20- SD SearchLight: U.S. Senate rejects two impeachment articles against DHS Secretary Mayorkas](#)
- [23- SD SearchLight: U.S. House GOP rolls out aid for Ukraine, Israel; votes planned on TikTok, border security](#)
- [26- Weather Pages](#)
- [30- Daily Devotional](#)
- [31- Subscription Form](#)
- [32- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [33- News from the Associated Press](#)



Thursday, April 18

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, garlic toast, fudge cake squares, fruit.

School Breakfast: pop tarts.

School Lunch: Corndogs, baked beans.

Postponed to April 23: Girls Golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.

Friday, April 19

Senior Menu: Breaded chicken on bun, oven roasted potatoes, peas and cheese salad, honey fruit salad.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: pizza, green beans.

JH Track at Groton Area, 2 p.m.

Saturday, April 20

PROM, 8 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.

Firemen Spring Social, 7 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 2 of 80

1440

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US House leadership proposed a \$95B foreign aid package yesterday consisting of three funding bills for Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan. The vote, expected to occur Saturday night, will come two months after the House declined to take up similar legislation passed by the Senate. Lawmakers faced renewed pressure to pass the aid after Iran's missile-and-drone attack against Israel last weekend.

The National Basketball Association yesterday banned Toronto Raptors forward Jontay Porter for life for violating the league's betting rules. Porter—who went undrafted in 2019 before one season with the Memphis Grizzlies and three in the NBA's developmental G League—averaged just over four points per game with the Raptors.

Researchers have identified remnants of what may be the largest marine reptile ever discovered. The species, ichthyotitan severnensis, was believed to reach over 80 feet long, twice the length of a city bus.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 2024 Tribeca Film Festival (June 5-16) lineup revealed; includes 103 feature films from filmmakers across 48 countries. Sundance Film Festival looking for new permanent venue; Park City, Utah, has hosted the festival since 1981.

Real Madrid and Bayern Munich advance from UEFA Champions League quarterfinals, will join Borussia Dortmund and Paris Saint-Germain in semifinals set to begin April 30.

US Justice Department to pay \$100M to around 100 victims of former Team USA gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar over FBI's mishandling of the sexual abuse allegations against Nassar.

Science & Technology

New AI-powered algorithm traces metastatic cancer cells—those that have left their original tumor and traveled through the body—to their original site; assistive tool will help provide tailored treatment for patients.

Evolutionary study finds the sympathetic nervous system, responsible for the fight-or-flight response, developed in the earliest known vertebrates roughly 550 million years ago.

Bitcoin halving event, which cuts the reward for validating new bitcoins, expected to happen by end of week.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.6%, Dow -0.1%, Nasdaq -1.2%); S&P 500, Nasdaq close down for fourth day as stocks are dragged down by tech giants, including Nvidia, which fell nearly 4%.

Boeing faces scrutiny in two Senate hearings on aircraft safety and quality; whistleblower alleges Boeing cut corners on 787 and 777 models, panel of experts discuss previous findings on flaws in Boeing's safety culture. Telehealth firm Cerebral fined \$7M over privacy violations.

Tesla asks shareholders to reapprove CEO Elon Musk's \$56B pay package, less than three months after a judge invalidated the same package; shareholders also asked to approve moving Tesla's incorporation from Delaware to Texas.

Politics & World Affairs

Democratic-led Senate votes to dismiss articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. Columbia University president testifies at House hearing on antisemitism.

National Public Radio editor Uri Berliner resigns following five-day suspension; announcement comes after Berliner accused NPR last week of liberal bias in essay for Free Press.

Hawaii's attorney general releases report on lack of preparedness in advance of August 2023 wildfire that killed 101 people; Maui Fire Department had limited equipment, poorly stocked fire engines while fire hydrants lost water supply.

Scepaniak heads up the Groton Area maintenance team

Ryan Scepaniak is the new head of the maintenance team for Groton Area Schools, replacing Mike Nehls who has retired.



"I grew up in Aberdeen and attended school there," he explained, "and have been a plumber for twenty years. I worked for Haar Plumbing, Hase Plumbing, and Brenner Plumbing and Heating. For the last twelve years I was self-employed."

"I was looking for a position like this one because the cost of materials, which I had to pass on down to the customers, became too expensive for most people to afford," Scepaniak admitted. "I needed to make a living too, so that means the price I was forced to charge became too high!"

"In addition to the costs involved with owning my own business, I was often not receiving a regular income as well as having no retirement plan to count on either!" he exclaimed.

"As the head of maintenance, I have other responsibilities besides cleaning and pushing a broom!" Scepaniak smiled. "I also order the chemicals and other supplies needed to keep these two school buildings clean."

"It is also my job to make sure we have substitutes available when a regular janitor is unable to be here," he listed. "I used to do plumbing for the school when Mike Nehls was the head of maintenance, so I had a good idea of what was expected to do this job."

"The best part of this job is working with these various individuals," Scepaniak smiled. "They are good people who provide a friendly, helpful

atmosphere who provide a 'second home' feeling to the building."

"I enjoy this job but do have to admit that there is a very hard and time-consuming job as a janitor in a school," he stated. "That job is the striping and waxing of the floors in all of the hallways and classrooms."

"I currently live south of Bristol with my wife Kristy and our three children," Scepaniak said. "My wife works at Dakota Foundry in Webster, and our children attend school here in Groton. They are in the 9th, 8th, and 1st grades."

- Dorene Nelson



Open House Bridal Shower

honoring

Jessica Bjerke

Saturday, April 20, 2024

1:00pm - 3:00pm

Olive Grove Golf Course

Registered at Target and Amazon



Sky Warn Spotter Training Class

The National Weather Service – Aberdeen Office and Brown County Emergency Management office is hosting Sky Warn Spotter Training:

Monday April 29th, 2024.

K.O. Lee Aberdeen Public Library.

5:30pm – 7:30pm

This training is FREE and open to the public. No registration needed.

This class will cover topics discussing severe thunderstorms that produce damaging winds, large hail, tornadoes, and flash floods. Other types of severe weather and lightning safety will also be discussed.

For more information or questions please call the Brown County Emergency Management office at 605-

Secretary of State Provides Information Regarding Absentee Voting

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson would like to provide important information regarding absentee voting for the June 4, 2024 Primary Election.

The absentee voting period for South Dakota's 2024 Primary Election will begin April 19, 2024. To request an absentee ballot, voters must submit an absentee ballot application form to the county auditor. Absentee ballot application forms may be requested from the county auditor or found on the Secretary of State's website: <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/voting/absentee-voting.aspx>. To account for mail processing and delivery times, voters are encouraged to request an absentee ballot as soon as possible and return the ballot to the county auditor allowing sufficient time for delivery.

Voters may verify whether they have already requested an absentee ballot and check the status of their absentee ballot by contacting their county auditor or searching the Voter Information Portal (VIP) on the Secretary of State's website: <https://vip.sdsos.gov/VIPLogin.aspx>.

Voters submitting an absentee ballot application form must include a photocopy of an acceptable photo identification card or have the form notarized, as per SDCL 12-18-6.1. Acceptable photo identification cards include a South Dakota driver's license or non-driver ID card, tribal ID, passport, student ID issued by a South Dakota high school or college, or any other photo ID issued by the United States government. Please contact your county auditor if you have any questions: <https://vip.sdsos.gov/CountyAuditors.aspx>.

Voters also have the option to absentee vote in-person up to the day before the election or vote in-person on Election Day. For those looking to absentee vote in-person, please contact your county auditor for office hours. On Election Day, polls will be open from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm local time. Information on polling locations and sample ballots may be found on the Voter Information Portal (VIP) on the Secretary of State's website.

S.D. high schools to vote on NIL amendment, two board members

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — There are nine people nominated for two positions on the South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors. The nominations took place Wednesday, April 17, during the association's annual meeting.

Five superintendents were nominated to fill the West River at-large position on the board. They are Chris Long of Lyman, Kelly Daughters of Faith, Erik Person of Lead-Deadwood, Mark Naugle of Custer and Cory Strasser of Rapid City.

That board position is currently held by board chairman Kelly Messmer of Harding County.

Four athletic/activities directors have been nominated for the Native American school representative on the board. Candidates must be from a high school that has at least a 50% Native American student population. The candidates are Charles Wilson of Todd County, Rich Crow Eagle of Tiospa Zina, Francis Big Crow of Lakota Tech and Tre'Voun Buffalo of Wakpala.

That board position is currently held by Dani Walking Eagle of St. Francis Indian School.

To earn a place on the board, a candidate must receive a majority of the votes cast by member schools. If no candidate can hit that benchmark, the two candidates with the highest vote totals will compete in a run-off election. All member schools may vote on board members.

New board members will serve five-year terms that start on July 1.

All member schools will also vote on a constitutional amendment that delineates in detail the association's rules governing the use of name, image and likeness for students who have monetized their social media presence. Running afoul of the NIL rules can result in the loss of an athlete's amateur standing for a year.

The association's constitution currently says that students will be ineligible if they receive "remuneration for the use of their name, picture and/or personal appearance as an athlete in the promotion of a commercial or profit making event."

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos, who would have to rule on an athlete's eligibility, said "as an athlete" is "very broad."

"There's not a whole lot to go off of," Swartos said, as it pertains to determining if an athlete broke the rules.

While students earning money on their name, image or likeness on social media are most often found at the college level, Swartos said he has had some inquiries from the parents of high school athletes about the association's NIL rules.

The amendment serves to clarify the rules for high school athletes who seek to get paid for the use of their name, image and likeness. According to the amendment, the social media activity of the athlete must not:

- Interfere with academics.
- Be tied to athletic performance such as pay to play.
- Induce the athlete to attend a particular school.
- Receive payment from the school or agents of the school like booster clubs or foundations.
- Use SDHSAA or a member school's marks or logos.
- Use the school's name, mascot or uniforms.
- Promote or endorse activities associated with alcohol, tobacco, vaping, controlled substances, gambling, banned athletic substances or other illegal substances or activities.

The association also advises international students to consult U.S. visa and immigration rules. Students and their families are advised to seek legal counsel and it is up to them to make sure that their NIL participation does not jeopardize the student's college athletic eligibility.

To be approved, the amendment will need a yes vote from 60% of the schools that vote.

SDHSAA move to sanction baseball worries Legion official

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — An American Legion official raised concerns after two high schools requested that the South Dakota High School Activities Association consider sanctioning baseball.

The association got the request from Superintendent Matt Alley of McCook Central High School and Superintendent Eric Denning of Mount Vernon High School. Denning also serves on the SDHSAA board of directors.

Dan Wyatt, a Legion member from Madison, spoke to the SDHSAA board via Zoom during its meeting Wednesday, April 17.

"I could see Legion baseball done in South Dakota in three or four years if this goes through," Wyatt told the board.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos explained to Wyatt that after the board sanctioned softball, it approved a formal process for the sanctioning of new sports. That process would take at least a year, Swartos said, and if the sport is approved by the board, it would be another year before the first season started.

The first step is a written request from a school or SDHSAA staff. In the next year a proposal must be completed that includes a history of the sport, data on interest from member schools, recommendations on a season timeframe and projected start-up costs for schools.

A steering committee would then conduct a post-season finance and venue study as well as study the impact on the school calendar and its impact on current programs. If approved by the board of directors, an advisory committee would be established and a handbook developed.

Swartos assured Wyatt that his organization as well as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the South Dakota High School Baseball Association would be included in the planning process.

Some high schools offer baseball through the South Dakota High School Baseball Association. Wyatt said the Legion and the baseball association work well together in Madison.

Despite assurances from Swartos, Wyatt remained concerned. "Would I like to see it happen?" Wyatt asked. "No."

The board unanimously voted to start the process of sanctioning baseball. Denning abstained from the vote.

—30—

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 7 of 80

SDHSAA board hires former Freeman athletic director

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewMedia Association

PIERRE — At its meeting Wednesday, April 17, the board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association hired Kristina Sage as an assistant executive director. Sage is currently the athletic director at Freeman High School.

Sage will replace Jo Auch who is retiring this summer, having served SDHSAA since 2008.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said the association is "incredibly thankful to have experienced Jo's expertise, kindness and humility for the past 16 years."

Sage's duties will include oversight of boys' and girls' tennis, volleyball, competitive cheer, competitive dance, sideline cheer, boys' and girls' basketball, gymnastics and softball.

"Kristina's experience at Freeman High School and the Cornbelt Conference, as well as her established relationships with athletic directors across the state, will lend itself well to the position," Swartos said.

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Downtown Groton

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Groton FCCLA holds end of year awards ceremony



Hannah Sandness, Anna Fjeldheim and Talli Wright pose with one of the roses given to new officers after the FCCLA banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 9 of 80



Abby Jensen, 2023-2024 Groton FCCLA secretary, discusses projects the FCCLA chapter accomplished during the awards banquet Wednesday evening. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Abby Jensen, 2023-2024 Groton FCCLA secretary, discusses projects the FCCLA chapter accomplished during the awards banquet Wednesday evening. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Anna Fjeldheim, left, looks toward Kyleigh Englund as the two stand next to the quilts they created in their senior FACS IV class. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 10 of 80



Students who made quilts in the senior FACS IV class stand next to their projects during the FCCLA Banquet on Wednesday evening. Students who created quilts include Colby Dunker (Christmas Patchwork), Kyleigh Englund (Aztec), Anna Fjeldheim (Fast Four Patchwork), Jackson Garstecki (Patriotic Patchwork), Carly Guthmiller (Seeing Double), Claire Heinrich (Round About), Karsyn Jangula (Seven Inch Patchwork), Abby Jensen (East Eight), Sydney Leicht (Four Inch Patchwork), Shaela McGannon (Four Square), Nick Morris (Five & Dime), Ashlynn Sperry (Eight Inch Patchwork), Lane Tietz (Simply Serene), Ava Wienk (Five Inch Patchwork) and Bryson Wambach (10 Inch Trio Patchwork). (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Outgoing and incoming FCCLA officers light candles for the installation of new officers at Wednesday's banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 11 of 80



Anna Fjeldheim, 2023-2024 FCCLA president, lights a candle to kick off the installation of the 2024-2025 officers. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Hannah Sandness, 2024-2025 FCCLA historian, lights a candle during the installation of new officers at Wednesday's banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Outgoing and incoming officers lead the crowd in reading the FCCLA Creed during Wednesday's banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 12 of 80



Talli Wright, 2024-2025 FCCLA president, bangs the gavel to end the annual banquet.
(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Emma Bahr blows out one of the candles at the end of the FCCLA banquet on Wednesday evening. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



From left: Taryn Traphagen, Hannah Sandness, Talli Wright, Carly Gilbert, Carly Guthmiller, Emily Overacker, Anna Fjeldheim, Lindsey Tietz, Claire Heinrich, Emma Bahr, Abby Jensen, Ava Weink, Jaedyn Penning and McKenna Tietz pose for photos after Wednesday evening's FCCLA banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 13 of 80



Groton FCCLA 2024-2025 officers Historian Hannah Sandness, Social Media Officer Carly Gilbert, Public Relations Officer Emily Overacker, Vice President Emma Bahr, President Talli Wright, Secretary Jaedyn Penning, Student Advisor Taryn Traphagen and Treasurer McKenna Tietz pose for photos after Wednesday evening's FCCLA banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



From left: Jaedyn Penning, Anna Fjeldheim and McKenna Tietz were awarded certificates during Wednesday's FCCLA banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Students pose for selfies after Wednesday's FCCLA banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 14 of 80



From left: Ashlyn Sperry, Claire Heinrich, Carly Guthmiller, Abby Jensen, Anna Fjeldheim, Emma Schinkel, Sydney Leicht and Karsyn Jangula pose with their service award certificates after Wednesday evening's FCCLA banquet. Not pictured are Camryn Kurtz, Hannah Monson and Cadence Feist. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Top quilters Shaela McGannon and Kyleigh Englund pose for photos with their quilts after Wednesday's FCCLA banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Students pose for selfies after Wednesday's FCCLA banquet. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State transportation head doubts passenger rail service is a real possibility for South Dakota

DOT secretary supports concept but sees high cost and low population as hurdles

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 17, 2024 6:23 PM

The head of the South Dakota Department of Transportation dismissed the possibility of passenger rail in the state during a meeting of the Railroad Authority Board on Wednesday.

Secretary Joel Jundt addressed the topic during the board's first meeting since the Federal Railroad Administration presented a map of possible passenger rail futures that, for the first time, presented a possible route through South Dakota.

South Dakota is the only state in the contiguous United States to have never had service from Amtrak, the government-subsidized rail corporation that consolidated the majority of passenger rail lines in the 1970s.

The Federal Railroad Administration is in the midst of a multi-year Long Distance Rail Service Study. Maps showing possible routes through Sioux Falls, Pierre and Rapid City appeared in February.

Kellie Beck, the director of finance and management for the state DOT, told the railroad board that she'd participated in two of the meetings for that federal study on behalf of the state.

She told the board of the recently released maps, but also noted that Jundt had been part of a previous passenger rail study in 2021 that concluded passenger rail wouldn't be viable in South Dakota for many years.

She also reminded the board that the state's status as one of three without passenger rail means that it gets "Special Transportation Circumstance" grants every year from the federal government, which the state has used for cargo rail and other projects.

"As you guys are aware, we've funded a lot of projects and have done a lot of short-line projects to promote and enhance economic development," Beck said. "In '22, and '23, we were allocated close to \$27 million each year."

Jundt chimed in at that point to offer his take on the study's South Dakota maps from the DOT's perspective. A passenger rail project would be expensive — "over a billion dollars and more than that," Jundt said — and he doesn't see South Dakota's low population "rising to the top from a high priority standpoint" in the months and years ahead. Costs for some other long passenger rail projects have run into the tens of billions.

"From a concept standpoint, I think it would be a great thing to have passenger rail in South Dakota for tourism and everything else," Jundt said. "But I think once they truly get into understanding the dynamics and the cost to do this, it might not look as favorable as just the concept."

Rail advocate Dan Bilka disputed that during the Wednesday meeting.

The current study focuses on long-distance routes. The 2021 study focused on state-supported routes — shorter routes with a higher level of ongoing state-level funding.

"It's comparing apples to oranges," said Bilka, head of a nonprofit organization called All Aboard Northwest.

The long-distance study, by contrast, "isn't about ridership, or those farebox recovery metrics that have been used to basically leave us out of consideration for decades." A farebox is used to collect passenger fares.

The current study is meant to identify routes that would best serve both rural and urban transportation

needs, enhance existing long-distance routes and "reflect public engagement" on passenger rail.

"That's why we might be actually a higher priority than some of these other ones that might overlap with state supported services," Bilka said of the South Dakota proposals.

Jundt said his reference to ridership and priorities was tied to his review of the other routes on the long-distance study, not a repetition of the 2021 conclusions.

The board took no action on passenger rail, and no board members expressed an opinion on the topic.

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.

Medicaid expansion enrollment 'slow & steady' as state launches application portal

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 17, 2024 5:05 PM

Over 21,500 South Dakotans have enrolled in Medicaid expansion since it became available in July 2023, representing about 16% of total Medicaid enrollment in the state.

Medicaid is a joint federal-state health insurance program for low-income adults, children, pregnant women, elderly adults and people with disabilities.

South Dakota voters approved a citizen-proposed constitutional amendment in 2022 that expanded Medicaid to people whose incomes are 138% of the federal poverty level or less, which is up to \$43,056 for a family of four or \$20,783 a year for a single person in 2024.

Expansion enrollment is lower than what the state Department of Social Services originally projected. The department planned for 57,000 expansion enrollees. But the department now expects to see 40,000 South Dakotans enrolled by 2025 — 17,000 less than anticipated.

Members of the state Board of Social Services on Tuesday in Pierre discussed efforts to reach eligible Medicaid expansion patients. That includes a new online enrollment system meant to improve the application process and "engaging with people where they're at," said Medicaid Director Heather Petermann.

"We've seen a slow and steady increase in the numbers," Petermann said. "It's a little bit of a crystal ball, we can't completely know for sure. We expect this will continue."

Some legislators and health care organizations have criticized the department for a lack of outreach and advertisement contributing to lower enrollment numbers. Secretary Matt Althoff said the department doesn't have a backlog of applicants, calling it a "steady stream."

Many expansion enrollments are a result of a patient visiting a medical provider and being referred to Medicaid expansion, said Deputy Secretary and Director of Operations Brenda Tidball-Zeltinger. The department also hopes to more proactively connect eligible patients when they seek other help from the department outside of Medicaid enrollment. For example, over two-thirds of South Dakotans eligible for expanded Medicaid are also eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP.

"I think it's when they come to us for other safety net programs. That's what I think is the most effective: I'm coming to you about a food need, well, let's talk about your health care. I'm coming to you because I have a behavioral health need, well, let's talk about your primary care provider and talk about your health care needs as well," Tidball-Zeltinger said during the meeting.

Tidball-Zeltinger said she hopes "another feeder" for expanded Medicaid will be a growth in preventative health care and screenings.

The department launched its Benefits Eligibility Enrollment System on March 4, meant to streamline processes for benefit programs. The online portal is limited to Medicaid currently, but will eventually include other programs such as child care assistance, SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and energy assistance.

When Medicaid expansion was passed by voters, South Dakota was one of three states without an on-

line account system, according to KFF Health News. Tricia Brooks, a Georgetown professor and expert on Medicaid administration, worried at the time that South Dakota's lack of technology would be a problem for enrollment.

"South Dakota is not advanced in their use of technology," Brooks told KFF in November 2022. "I worry if it's too manually driven that the state will be overwhelmed. And that will slow down the processing."

Online enrollees can now check on their application status, report changes, complete renewals and request appeals. The system also pre-screens qualification for enrollees.

The modernized system replaces South Dakota's roughly 40-year-old data entry system, said Carrie Johnson, division director for economic assistance.

"Maybe that doesn't sound flashy, but it sounds like Mars to me compared to what we worked with," Johnson said.

The department has seen an increase in the number of online applications since its launch.

"It has an electronic interface, so we can verify customer information easier," Johnson said. "We've got more scrutiny. In those eligibility determinations, it's certainly more efficient."

About a quarter of expanded Medicaid patients are between the ages of 19 and 26, or considered "young adults" by the department. Petermann suggested the department reach out to the age group to help "prepare them for a successful start" regarding health care coverage.

"That is something we can take a look at for a disconnect from our typical programs and outreach methods," Petermann said.

A majority of expanded Medicaid patients are between 27 and 54 years old. About 70% of expanded Medicaid patients are single adults without children.

Total Medicaid enrollment in the state stood at 131,464 as of February, with 56% of enrollees being children. For fiscal year 2023, South Dakota covered about 32% of the \$1.23 billion cost of Medicaid in the state, and the federal government covered the rest.

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.

Red states, including SD, fight growing efforts to give 'basic income' cash to residents

Advocates say the concept is an effective way of reducing poverty

BY: KEVIN HARDY, STATELINE - APRIL 17, 2024 6:00 AM

South Dakota state Sen. John Wiik likes to think of himself as a lookout of sorts — keeping an eye on new laws, programs and ideas brewing across the states.

"I don't bring a ton of legislation," said Wiik, a Republican. "The main thing I like to do is try and stay ahead of trends and try and prevent bad things from coming into our state."

This session, that meant sponsoring successful legislation banning cities or counties from creating basic income programs, which provide direct, regular cash payments to low-income residents to help alleviate poverty.

While Wiik isn't aware of any local governments publicly floating the idea in South Dakota, he describes such programs as "bureaucrats trying to hand out checks to make sure that your party registration matches whoever signed the checks for the rest of your life."

The economic gut punch of the pandemic and related assistance efforts such as the expanded child tax credit popularized the idea of directly handing cash to people in need. Advocates say the programs can be administered more efficiently than traditional government assistance programs, and research suggests they increase not only financial stability but also mental and physical health.

Still, Wiik and other Republicans argue handing out no-strings-attached cash disincentivizes work — and having fewer workers available is especially worrisome in a state with the nation's second-lowest unem-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 18 of 80

ployment rate.

South Dakota is among at least six states where GOP officials have looked to ban basic income programs. The basic income concept has been around for decades, but a 2019 experiment in Stockton, California, set off a major expansion. There, 125 individuals received \$500 per month with no strings attached for two years. Independent researchers found the program improved financial stability and health, but concluded that the pandemic dampened those effects.

GOP lawmakers like Wiik fear that even experimental programs could set a dangerous precedent.

"What did Ronald Reagan say, 'The closest thing to eternal life on this planet is a government program?'" Wiik said. "So, if you get people addicted to just getting a check from the government, it's going to be really hard to take that away."

The debate over basic income programs is likely to intensify as blue state lawmakers seek to expand pilot programs. Minnesota, for example, could become the nation's first to fund a statewide program. But elected officials in red states are working to thwart such efforts — not only by fighting statewide efforts but also by preventing local communities from starting their own basic income programs.

Democratic governors in Arizona and Wisconsin recently vetoed Republican legislation banning basic income programs.

Last week, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sued Harris County to block a pilot program that would provide \$500 per month to 1,900 low-income people in the state's largest county, home to Houston.

Paxton, a Republican, argued the program is illegal because it violates a state constitutional provision that says local governments cannot grant public money to individuals.

Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee, a Democrat, called Paxton's move "nothing more than an attack on local government and an attempt to make headlines."

Meanwhile, several blue states are pushing to expand these programs.

Washington state lawmakers debated a statewide basic income bill during this year's short session. And Minnesota lawmakers are debating whether to spend \$100 million to roll out one of the nation's first statewide pilot programs.

"We're definitely seeing that shift from pilot to policy," said Sukhi Samra, the director of Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, which formed after the Stockton experiment.

So far, that organization has helped launch about 60 pilot programs across the country that will provide \$250 million in unconditional aid, she said.

Despite pushback in some states, Samra said recent polling commissioned by the group shows broad support of basic income programs. And the programs have shown success in supplementing — not replacing — social safety net programs, she said.

The extra cash gives recipients freedom of choice. People can fix a flat tire, cover school supplies or celebrate a child's birthday for the first time.

"There's no social safety net program that allows you to do that," she said. "... This is an effective policy that helps our families, and this can radically change the way that we address poverty in this country."

Basic income experiments

The proliferation of basic income projects has been closely studied by researchers.

Though many feared that free cash would dissuade people from working, that hasn't been the case, said Sara Kimberlin, the executive director and senior research scholar at Stanford University's Center on Poverty and Inequality.

Stanford's Basic Income Lab has tracked more than 150 basic income pilots across the country. Generally, those offer \$500 or \$1,000 per month over a short period.

"There isn't anywhere in the United States where you can live off of \$500 a month," she said. "At the same time, \$500 a month really makes a tremendous difference for someone who is living really close to the edge."

Kimberlin said the research on basic income programs has so far been promising, though it's unclear

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 19 of 80

how long the benefits may persist once programs conclude. Still, she said, plenty of research shows how critical economic stability in childhood is to stability in adulthood — something both the basic income programs and the pandemic-era child tax credit can address.

Over the past five years, basic income experiments have varied across the country.

Last year, California launched the nation's first state-funded pilot programs targeting former foster youth.

In Colorado, the Denver Basic Income Project aimed to help homeless individuals. After early successes, the Denver City Council awarded funding late last year to extend that program, which provides up to \$1,000 per month to hundreds of participants.

A 2021 pilot launched in Cambridge, Massachusetts, provided \$500 a month over 18 months to 130 single caregivers. Research from the University of Pennsylvania found the Cambridge program increased employment, the ability to cover a \$400 emergency expense, and food and housing security among participants.

Children in participating families were more likely to enroll in Advanced Placement courses, earned higher grades and had reduced absenteeism.

"It was really reaffirming to hear that when families are not stressed out, they are able to actually do much better," said Geeta Pradhan, president of the Cambridge Community Foundation, which worked on the project.

Pradhan said basic income programs are part of a national trend in "trust-based philanthropy," which empowers individuals rather than imposing top-down solutions to fight poverty.

"There is something that I think it does to people's sense of empowerment, a sense of agency, the freedom that you feel," she said. "I think that there's some very important aspects of humanity that are built into these programs."

While the pilot concluded, the Cambridge City Council committed \$22 million in federal pandemic aid toward a second round of funding. Now, nearly 2,000 families earning at or below 250% of the federal poverty level are receiving \$500 monthly payments, said Sumbul Siddiqui, a city council member.

Siddiqui, a Democrat, pushed for the original pilot when she was mayor during the pandemic. While she said the program has proven successful, it's unclear whether the city can find a sustainable source of funding to keep it going long term.

States look to expand pilots

Tomas Vargas Jr. was among the 125 people who benefited from the Stockton, California, basic income program that launched in 2019.

At the time, he heard plenty of criticism from people who said beneficiaries would blow their funds on drugs and alcohol or quit their jobs.

"Off of \$500 a month, which amazed me," said Vargas, who worked part time at UPS.

But he said the cash gave him breathing room. He had felt stuck at his job, but the extra money gave him the freedom to take time off to interview for better jobs.

Unlike other social service programs like food stamps, he didn't have to worry about losing out if his income went up incrementally. The cash allowed him to be a better father, he said, as well as improved his confidence and mental health.

The experience prompted him to get into the nonprofit sector. Financially stable, he now works at Mayors for a Guaranteed Income.

"The person I was five years ago is not the person that I am now," he said.

Washington state Sen. Claire Wilson, a Democrat, said basic income is a proactive way to disrupt the status quo maintained by other anti-poverty efforts.

"I have a belief that our systems in our country have never been put in place to get people out of them," she said. "They kept people right where they are."

Wilson chairs the Human Services Committee, which considered a basic income bill this session that would have created a pilot program to offer 7,500 people a monthly amount equivalent to the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in their area.

The basic income bill didn't progress during Washington's short legislative session this year, but Wilson said lawmakers would reconsider the idea next year. While she champions the concept, she said there's a lot of work to be done convincing skeptics.

In Minnesota, where lawmakers are considering a \$100 million statewide basic income pilot program, some Republicans balked at the concept of free cash and its cost to taxpayers.

"Just the cost alone should be a concern," Republican state Rep. Jon Koznick said during a committee meeting this month.

State Rep. Athena Hollins, a Democrat who sponsored the legislation, acknowledged the hefty request, but said backers would support a scaled-down version and "thought it was really important to get this conversation started."

Much of the conversation in committee centered on local programs in cities such as Minneapolis and St. Paul. St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter, a Democrat, told lawmakers the city's 2020 pilot saw "groundbreaking" results.

After scraping by for years, some families were able to put money into savings for the first time, he said. Families experienced less anxiety and depression. And the pilot disproved the "disparaging tropes" from critics about people living in poverty, the mayor said.

Carter told lawmakers that the complex issue of economic insecurity demands statewide solutions.

"I am well aware that the policy we're proposing today is a departure from what we're all used to," he said. "In fact, that's one of my favorite things about it."

Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.

U.S. Senate rejects two impeachment articles against DHS Secretary Mayorkas

SD's Thune and Rounds oppose adjournment motion that ends trial

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - APRIL 17, 2024 4:45 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate on Wednesday dismissed two articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

The Democrat-controlled chamber voted, 51-49 along party lines, to adjourn the impeachment trial after finding that the impeachment articles accusing Mayorkas of not complying with federal immigration law and breaching the public trust did not rise to the level of high crimes and misdemeanors and were therefore unconstitutional. South Dakota Republicans John Thune and Mike Rounds voted against the adjournment motion.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on the Senate floor before a series of votes, "The charges brought against Secretary Mayorkas fail to meet the high standard of high crimes and misdemeanors. To validate this gross abuse by the House would be a grave mistake and could set a dangerous precedent for the future."

The adjournment vote followed successful votes to drop the two House-passed articles of impeachment against Mayorkas, as well as a series of Republican motions to adjourn the court of impeachment or enter closed session, which all failed.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska was the only senator to break party ranks during an afternoon vote series. She voted "present" on a motion to drop the first article of impeachment.

Senators were sworn in Wednesday as jurors after House Republican impeachment managers delivered the two articles of impeachment the day before, starting the proceedings. House Republicans voted to impeach Mayorkas, on their second try, in February.

Republicans have demanded a trial, while Senate Democrats indicated they planned to either dismiss the articles or table the trial because they argued the charges against Mayorkas did not reach the constitutional threshold required of impeachment, which is "high crimes and misdemeanors."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 21 of 80

"To validate this gross abuse by the House would be a grave mistake and could set a dangerous precedent for the future," Schumer, a New York Democrat, said.

Republicans blast process

Following the vote, Republicans slammed Democrats, arguing the move to avoid a trial set a precedent. "They created a new precedent saying you don't even have to vote on the articles (of impeachment)," Republican Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri told reporters off the Senate floor.

Missouri Republican Eric Schmitt warned that voters would remember the Senate's decision in the November elections.

"They see what a disaster the border's been," he said to reporters.

Congressional Democrats and the White House have criticized Republicans' efforts to impeach Mayorkas as political and campaign fodder for the November elections. Congressional Republicans and the Biden administration have clashed over immigration policy for years.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell argued Wednesday it was senators' constitutional duty to hold a trial.

"It is the job of this body to consider the articles of impeachment brought before us and to render judgment," the Kentucky Republican said on the Senate floor.

Even if a trial had been held, it's unlikely that the two-thirds majority in the Senate required to remove Mayorkas could have been reached.

In an email, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security said House Republicans have not provided the necessary evidence to warrant an impeachment effort.

"Secretary Mayorkas spent months helping a bipartisan group of Senators craft a tough but fair bill that would give DHS the tools necessary to meet today's border security challenges, but the same House Republicans playing political games with this impeachment chose to block that bipartisan compromise," the spokesperson said.

"Congressional Republicans should stop wasting time with unfounded attacks, and instead do their job by passing bipartisan legislation to properly fund the Department's vital national security missions and finally fix our broken immigration system."

Amid the impeachment proceedings in the Senate, Mayorkas has been making his rounds on Capitol Hill to defend the president's fiscal year 2025 budget for the Department of Homeland Security.

White House Spokesperson for Oversight and Investigations Ian Sams praised the Senate's decision in a statement.

"Once and for all, the Senate has rightly voted down this baseless impeachment that even conservative legal scholars said was unconstitutional," he said.

Several votes

Washington state Democrat Sen. Patty Murray presided over the impeachment proceedings, which included several votes Wednesday afternoon.

Schumer tried to approve by unanimous consent a structure for the trial, including debate time and the number of points of order senators could make, but Schmitt objected.

"I will not assist Sen. Schumer in setting our Constitution ablaze," he said.

Schumer then raised a point of order declaring that the first article of impeachment did not rise to high crimes under the constitution, leading to a series of Republican senators demanding votes on proposals to delay a vote on Schumer's motion

Sen. Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, moved to go to closed session and debate the articles of impeachment but Schumer objected. GOP Sen. Mike Lee of Utah made the same motion. Senators voted on both motions and rejected them 49-51.

Sen. John Kennedy, Republican of Louisiana, made a motion to adjourn the court of impeachment and begin impeachment proceedings on April 30 at noon.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 22 of 80

Kennedy's motion failed 49-51.

GOP Sen. Rick Scott of Florida made the same motion to adjourn, which also failed 49-51.

They went back to the point of order Schumer made that declared the first article of impeachment was unconstitutional. The Senate voted, 51-48, to reject the first article of impeachment on the grounds that it did not rise to the constitutional standard for impeachment, with Murkowski voting present.

Schumer made an identical point of order on the second article of impeachment.

Kennedy again filed a motion to adjourn to May 1, 2004 for impeachment proceedings. He corrected his request to 2024. It again failed 49-51.

GOP Sen. Roger Marshall of Kansas then made a motion to adjourn until Nov. 6 until after the election and "before this body disrespects the Constitution." It failed 49-51.

Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the No. 2 Republican, moved to table Schumer's second point of order that the second article of impeachment is unconstitutional. It failed 49-51.

Senators then approved Schumer's second motion, 51-49.

House action

Georgia's Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene has been at the forefront of impeachment efforts against Mayorkas, first introducing the measure in September.

Greene is also a House impeachment manager, along with GOP Reps. Mark Green of Tennessee, Michael McCaul of Texas, Andy Biggs of Arizona, Ben Cline of Virginia, Andrew Garbarino of New York, Michael Guest of Mississippi, Harriet Hageman of Wyoming, Clay Higgins of Louisiana, Laurel Lee of Florida and August Pfluger of Texas.

Two of the impeachment managers, Biggs and Higgins, came to the Senate Wednesday to watch that chamber's proceedings.

The two articles of impeachment charged Mayorkas with not complying with federal immigration law and breaching the public trust.

The first article of impeachment accused Mayorkas of contributing to myriad problems, including rising profits for smuggling operations, a high backlog of asylum cases in immigration courts, fentanyl-related deaths and migrant children found working in dangerous jobs. Republican state legislatures have moved to roll back child labor laws in industries from the food industry to roofing.

Republicans argued that the first article of impeachment would hold Mayorkas accountable for the large number of migrants that have traveled to the southern border to claim asylum. The Biden administration is dealing with the largest number of migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border in 20 years.

The second article of impeachment charged Mayorkas with breaching public trust by making several statements in congressional testimony that Republicans argue are false, such as Mayorkas telling lawmakers that the southern border is "secure."

The second article also charged Mayorkas with not fulfilling his statutory duty by rolling back Trump-era policies such as terminating contracts that would have continued construction of the border wall and ending the Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy that was ended after it went up to the Supreme Court.

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

U.S. House GOP rolls out aid for Ukraine, Israel; votes planned on TikTok, border security

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 17, 2024 2:19 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans unveiled three bills Wednesday that would provide \$95 billion overall in assistance to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, instead of voting on a similar bipartisan Senate-approved package that's been waiting around for months.

The Ukraine bill would provide \$60.84 billion, the Israel bill would appropriate \$26.38 billion and the Indo-Pacific bill would approve \$8.12 billion in assistance, according to a House GOP summary of the legislation.

President Joe Biden quickly threw his support behind the legislation, which could be voted on as early as Saturday, writing in a statement that Congress "must pass" the three bills as soon as possible.

"Israel is facing unprecedented attacks from Iran, and Ukraine is facing continued bombardment from Russia that has intensified dramatically in the last month," he wrote.

Biden added that he would sign the bills "immediately to send a message to the world: We stand with our friends, and we won't let Iran or Russia succeed."

Votes are forecast on separate measures on a TikTok ban and border security policy, though details were not yet disclosed early Wednesday afternoon.

House Republican leaders hope to vote on funding for each nation or region separately Saturday as well as amendments, though numerous House Republicans have vowed to vote against the rule that sets up debate on the bills.

Both chambers of Congress are scheduled to be on recess next week, adding a time crunch to the debate within the House GOP Conference.

Democrats could bail out Republicans by voting to approve the rule, though that's not typically how the House works. The majority party, currently the GOP, is expected to carry the rule vote on its own, regardless of whether the bill that follows is bipartisan.

The question of aid to Israel gained urgency in Congress following attacks by Iran on that nation last weekend and vows by Israel to retaliate, although it's not yet clear how. Israel is also engaged in a war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, sent a message to members Wednesday morning announcing the three foreign assistance bills would be released and committing to some amendment votes.

"After significant Member feedback and discussion, the House Rules Committee will be posting soon today the text of three bills that will fund America's national security interests and allies in Israel, the Indo-Pacific, and Ukraine, including a loan structure for aid, and enhanced strategy and accountability," Johnson wrote.

The House plans to vote on the package Saturday evening, ensuring "time for a robust amendment process," Johnson wrote.

TikTok, immigration and a motion to vacate

The House will also take votes on a border security bill as well as a separate package that includes a bill banning the social media site TikTok unless it's sold by Chinese owner ByteDance, Johnson wrote.

The House approved the TikTok bill in mid-March, but it's been held up in the Senate ever since as that chamber debates whether to take it up. That bill will now be rolled into a package with "sanctions and other measures to confront Russia, China, and Iran," he wrote.

Johnson's decision to move forward with aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan comes amid increasing frustration from especially conservative members of the House Republican Conference, two of whom are calling for him to resign or face a vote that could remove him from the leadership post.

Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene filed a so-called motion to vacate resolution in March that would oust Johnson from his post if approved. She struggled to find support among her colleagues until Tuesday, when Kentucky Rep. Thomas Massie called for Johnson to resign in a closed-door meeting, then said he'd supported the resolution.

Other far-right members have expressed frustration with Johnson's decision to advance the supplemental

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 24 of 80

spending bills, including Pennsylvania's Scott Perry, who has repeatedly criticized Johnson on social media for not pressing harder for a House GOP border security bill. Republicans have been sharply critical of the Biden administration immigration policy.

"While we always want to help our allies, what are we doing for the American Citizens?" Perry wrote in one of many posts.

House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican, wrote in a statement releasing the foreign aid bills that "if we don't help our friends in time of need, soon enough, we won't have any friends at all."

"Equivocating is not an option, and each bill will be given distinct attention and consideration," Cole wrote. "I look forward to supporting them and providing our allies and partners with the tools they need to defend themselves. America must stand firmly on the side of freedom."

Top Democrat lends support

Connecticut Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democrat on the spending committee, wrote in a statement that she will support the three assistance bills.

"We cannot retreat from the world stage under the guise of putting 'America First,'" DeLauro wrote. "We put America first by demonstrating the power of American leadership — that we have the strength, resolve, and heart to fight for the most vulnerable people, protect their freedom, and preserve their dignity. I urge swift passage of these bills."

The House GOP bills, she wrote, "mirror the Senate-passed package and include support for Ukraine against Russian aggression; Israel in its war against Iran and its proxies, like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis; and our Indo-Pacific partners against an adversarial China."

How is the aid money divided up?

The Ukraine bill would appropriate nearly \$48 billion to the U.S. Defense Department to provide Ukraine with training and equipment, to replenish U.S. stockpiles that have been shipped to Ukraine and to support U.S. armed forces in the region, according to a summary of the bill from House Democrats.

The U.S. State Department would receive \$9.5 billion in "forgivable loans for vital economic and budgetary support for Ukraine's energy sector and other infrastructure needs" and \$2 billion in security assistance for Ukraine and other allies, according to the Democratic summary.

The U.S. Energy Department would receive nearly \$250 million to address any potential nuclear or radiological incidents.

Funding for Israel would be split between the U.S. departments of Defense, Homeland Security and State. Defense would get \$13 billion for replenishing U.S. stockpiles sent to Israel, U.S. Central Command operations and for the Iron Dome, David's Sling and Iron Beam defense systems, according to Democrats' summary.

The State Department would receive \$9.15 billion for humanitarian assistance in Gaza and other locations and \$3.6 billion in security assistance for Israel as well as other Middle Eastern partners.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, housed within DHS, would receive \$400 million for the nonprofit security grant program.

That bill prohibits U.S. funding from going to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, according to the GOP summary.

The third bill, with funding for the Indo-Pacific region, would provide the U.S. Defense Department with \$5.6 billion for "integrated deterrence" and for the submarine industrial base, according to Democrats' summary.

Another \$281.9 million would go to the U.S. Navy for dry dock construction.

The State Department would receive \$2 billion in foreign military financing for U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific region.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 25 of 80

Senate version of aid package

The Senate voted 70-29 in mid-February to approve a \$95 billion emergency spending bill for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, with much of that funding going directly to the U.S. departments of Defense, Energy and State. The weapons or humanitarian assistance would then be distributed to the respective countries.

Much of that Senate package resembles the measures rolled out by Johnson on Wednesday.

Ukraine would have received about \$60 billion, Israel \$14 billion and the Indo-Pacific \$4.8 billion. The package also included the bipartisan Fentanyl Eradication and Narcotics Deterrence, or the FEND Off Fentanyl Act.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, have repeatedly called on House GOP leaders to put that package on the floor for a vote.

Johnson has spent the intervening two months taking the pulse of his lawmakers and plotting a path forward that began to take shape earlier this week.

'The entire world is waiting'

Schumer said Wednesday morning from the Senate floor that he was waiting to see what exactly the House bills would propose in terms of funding and what makes it out of the House chamber before deciding what the Senate will do.

"The entire world is waiting to see what House Republicans will do about aid to Ukraine, aid to Israel, humanitarian assistance and aid to the Indo-Pacific," Schumer said.

"(Russian leader Vladimir) Putin is watching very closely to see if America will step up and show strength or slink away from a friend in need."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin testified before the House Defense spending panel on Wednesday morning the delay approving aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan "sends a terrible signal to our allies and partners."

Ukraine losing the war to Russia would have significant ramifications for NATO allies in Europe and for the United States, he said.

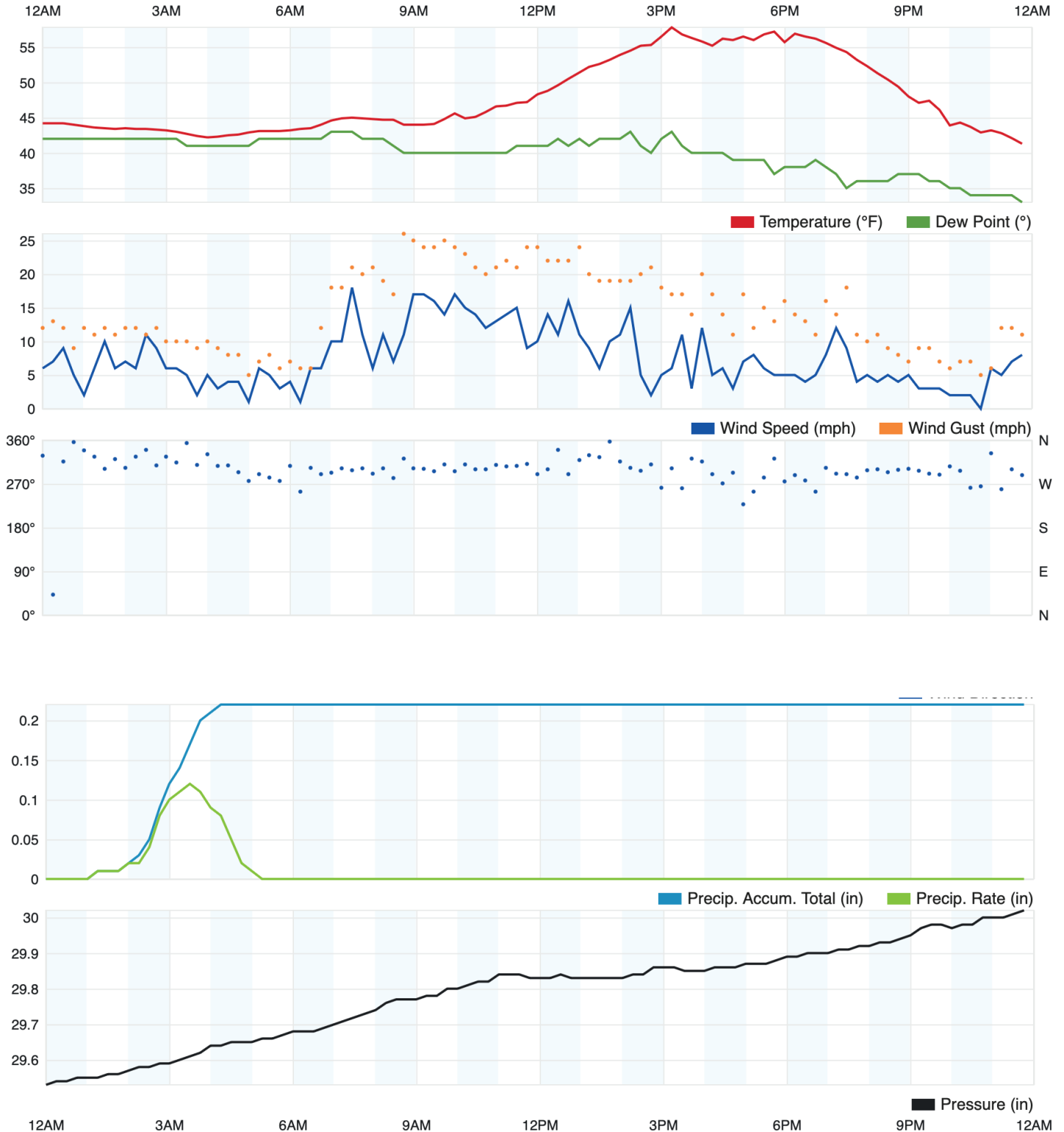
"We all know that Putin won't stop in Ukraine. This will continue. And, you know, our allies on the Eastern Front there are very, very concerned about that," Austin said. "It will also signal to other autocrats around the globe that the United States is not a reliable partner. And so all the alliances and partnerships that we've worked hard to develop over the years will be in question."

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 26 of 80

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 27 of 80

Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday
Night

Saturday



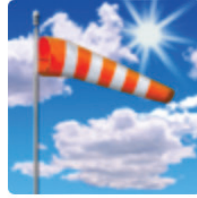
Increasing
Clouds and
Breezy

High: 48 °F



Decreasing
Clouds and
Blustery then
Mostly Clear

Low: 27 °F



Increasing
Clouds and
Breezy

High: 43 °F



Mostly Cloudy
and Blustery
then Mostly
Clear

Low: 25 °F



Mostly Sunny

High: 50 °F

Mainly Dry through the
Weekend!

Today



Increasing Clouds during the day. **Breezy.**
Winds out of the northwest gusting 35-45 mph.

Highs: 45 to 50°

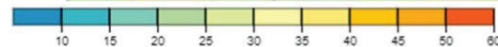
Breezy winds out of the
northwest during the
daytime hours today &
Friday.



Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/aberdeem

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	4/18 Thu			4/19 Fri			4/20 Sat	
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am
Aberdeen	31	37	36	23	35	36	36	24
Britton	35	39	36	25	33	37	36	26
Kennebec	33	36	32	16	33	39	36	22
Miller	32	36	35	20	35	37	35	22
Mobridge	37	40	39	25	35	38	38	24
Pierre	33	36	36	17	30	37	37	21
Sisseton	31	36	35	28	32	35	35	29
Watertown	30	35	35	23	35	37	36	25
Webster	36	41	40	28	39	41	39	31
Wheaton	28	31	29	23	29	31	30	22



For today, expect increasing clouds during the day, along with breezy conditions. Winds will be out of the northwest gusting 35-45 mph. While mainly dry weather will continue through the weekend, there is a small (15%) chance of light rain over far northeastern SD and west central MN this afternoon.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 28 of 80

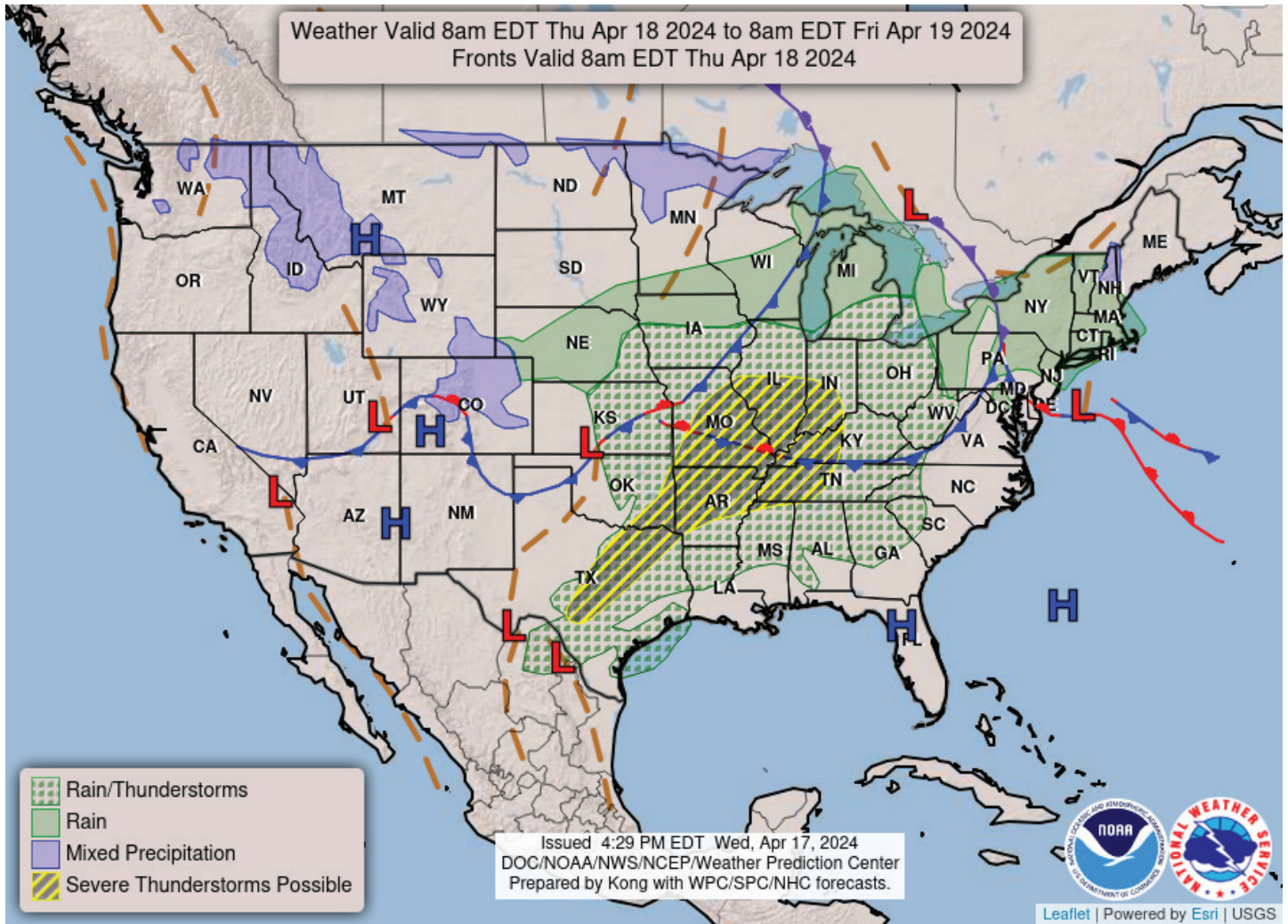
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 3:16 PM
Low Temp: 42 °F at 3:53 AM
Wind: 29 mph at 9:06 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 45 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 89 in 1985
Record Low: 13 in 1953
Average High: 59
Average Low: 32
Average Precip in April.: 0.91
Precip to date in April: 2.34
Average Precip to date: 2.97
Precip Year to Date: 3.29
Sunset Tonight: 8:24:29 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:36:55 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 29 of 80

Today in Weather History

April 18, 1995: Eight inches to two feet of snow fell in central South Dakota in a two day period from the 17th to the 18th. Many businesses, schools, and roads closed on the 18th. Hundreds of power poles were downed due to the heavy snow and high winds in Faulk, Hughes, Sully, Hyde, Hand, Lyman, and Buffalo Counties leaving thousands of people without power. Some significant calf losses also occurred (around 10 to 20 percent in some areas), especially in Hand County. Snowfall amounts included 24.0 inches at Vivian, Ree Heights, and in the Murdo area; 23.0 inches at Kennebec, 18.0 inches at Highmore, 16.0 inches at Blunt, 15.0 inches at Miller and Faulkton, and 8.0 inches at Gettysburg.

1880: More than two dozen tornadoes were reported from Kansas and Arkansas to Wisconsin and Michigan. More than 150 persons were killed, including 99 people in Marshfield, Missouri.

1906: At 5:12 AM, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake hits San Francisco. A devastating fire soon broke out in the city and lasted for several days. About 3,000 people died, and over 80 percent of San Francisco was destroyed.

1944 - California experienced its worst hailstorm of record. Damage mounted to two million dollars as two consecutive storms devastated the Sacramento Valley destroying the fruit crop. (The Weather Channel)

1957 - A dust devil near Dracut MA lifted a small child three feet into the air, and rolled two other children on the ground. Fortunately none of the three were hurt. The dust devil was accompanied by a loud whistling sound as it moved westward. (The Weather Channel)

1970 - Rapid City, SD, received a record 22 inches of snow in 24 hours. (17th-18th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thirty-one cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including International Falls MN with a reading of 88 degrees, and Bismarck ND with a high of 92 degrees. A sharp cold front produced high winds in the western U.S. Winds in Utah gusted to 99 mph at the Park City Angle Station, and capsized a boat on Utah Lake drowning four persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in the southeastern U.S. A strong (F-2) tornado severely damaged seventeen mobile homes near Bainbridge GA injuring three persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. A thunderstorm in Pecos County of southwest Texas produced wind gusts to 90 mph at Imperial. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Heavy snow blanketed the west central valleys and southwest mountains of Colorado with up to 18 inches of snow. Nine cities from the Mid Mississippi Valley to the Middle Atlantic Coast Region reported record low temperatures for the date, including Fort Wayne IND with a reading of 23 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 30 of 80

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

LIVING FEAR-FREE

"It's above me, around me, in me and under me," he said.

"What?" I asked.

"Fear," came the reply. "I am afraid of everything and everybody, anything and anybody."

David gave us a good prescription for fear.

"Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust Him and He will help you." In one brief verse he provides three steps to dealing with our anxieties:

Step One: Commit our concerns. The word "commit" contains a unique picture: it is as though you would "roll" the burden, problem or threat from yourself to God. Imagine putting all your concerns in a wheelbarrow and then rolling them into the presence of God and "dumping" them out at His feet. What a joy!

Step two: Fortify our faith. When we leave our concerns with God, we know that not only does He care about them, but He has the ultimate responsibility for their solution, because we have His Word that – "He will help!"

Step three: Trusting God does not mean that He will remove every problem or give us everything we want. But it does mean that He is totally responsible for our well-being and will meet every need.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to take You at Your Word, to know that you will calm our every fear, give us Your everlasting peace, and provide for all our needs. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust Him and He will help you. Psalm 37:5



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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 31 of 80

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 32 of 80



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.16.24

21 26 36 44 59 2

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$178,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 29 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

10 20 24 29 38 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,950,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 44 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

6 9 19 27 42 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 59 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

2 4 11 25 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$62,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 59 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

7 8 25 39 68 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 28 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

24 29 44 47 54 2

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$98,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 28 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined
Yankton Press & Dakotan. April 15, 2024.

Editorial: 'Election Integrity' And The Basics

A Republican candidate for the District 17 House today finds himself on the outside looking in on the June GOP primary after his candidacy was decertified Friday because it was determined that he didn't have enough valid signatures on his petition.

The candidate, Carson Merkwan of Vermillion, fell short of the required number because he was misinformed by the Secretary of State's office regarding how many signatures he needed. According to the Vermillion Plain Talk, he was told he needed 39 signatures on his petition to make the GOP ballot, but in fact, 50 were required. He turned in a petition with 50 signatures, eight of which were disqualified, but apparently still leaving him with enough room to spare to make the ballot — or so he thought.

On Friday, a circuit judge in Pierre ruled Merkwan ineligible for the June GOP ballot, even though the Secretary of State's office pleaded for his certification by noting that he fell short through no fault of his own. But the judge disagreed ...

This might be dismissed as an unfortunate lapse by the Secretary of State's office, except it sounds a little familiar.

South Dakota Searchlight reported late last month that some officials in the Secretary of State's office had unintentionally misled some independent legislative candidates into believing they needed hundreds more signatures on nominating petitions than the state law requires. The law states the number of signatures needed must equal at least 1% of the votes cast within the district in the last gubernatorial race.

In a way, this represented the opposite of what happened to Merkwan, but it still carries potential ramifications. "There may already be people who looked into running as independents for the South Dakota Senate and House who abandoned the idea after looking at the onerous signature requirements," said retired Rapid City attorney Jay Davis, who said he was seeking the information for a prospective candidate.

So, that's two missteps in the nominating process that are attributed to the office of Secretary of State Monae Johnson, and therein lies some irony.

Johnson won the Republican party nomination for secretary of state in 2022 by successfully ousting incumbent Steve Barnett at the state convention. Her big talking point was "election integrity," which has become a code phrase in some GOP circles for people who may have doubts about the 2020 presidential election. In fact, she managed during her campaign to avoid clearly stating whether she thought Joe Biden was the legitimate presidential winner in 2020, according to Searchlight.

Since coming to office, she has carefully tried to pivot away from some "election integrity" crusaders — who were alienating county auditors — while at the same time talking about paper ballots and the lack of online voting, Searchlight reported.

These two recent missteps raise other questions about "election integrity."

If we wish to take that term literally, it's important to acknowledge that such integrity applies not only to voting, voter registration and the vote-counting process but also to the candidates and the process they must go through to make the ballot.

Putting out inaccurate information about how many signatures independent candidates need could be seen as a simple mistake, as could misinforming a candidate how many signatures he needed to make the primary ballot. But those two missteps together begin raising questions about how integrity, at least in regard to these basic steps in the process, is being handled, other than to pander to certain suspicions.

Fortunately, these mistakes can be overcome by the candidates impacted. The independents who may have been put off by the high signature counts they thought they needed could change their minds, and Merkwan could still file as an independent for the fall general election.

But that doesn't mean all's well that ends well. Ironically, the person who championed election integrity (real or imagined) in order to become secretary of state may be making election integrity an issue by her office's own mistakes.

Minnesota toddler dies after fall from South Dakota hotel window

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Minnesota toddler who fell from a South Dakota hotel's third-floor window has died.

Kathryn and Alex Hein of Lakefield, Minnesota, wrote in a Facebook post that their year-old son, Madden, died Monday, two days after falling at Club House Hotel & Suites in Sioux Falls.

"It is with heavy hearts to say that our sweet baby boy Madden gained his angel wings late on April 15th," the couple wrote. "Madden is going into organ donation. His organs are going to help so many other people. Our little boy is a real-life superhero."

Police are investigating the boy's death, but a Sioux Falls Police Department spokesman, Officer Sam Clemens, told the Minneapolis Star Tribune that there is "nothing to lead us to believe it was anything other than a tragic accident."

Alex Hein is middle school social studies teacher and a high school basketball coach. Kathryn Hein is a kindergarten teacher and helps coach volleyball. The couple also have a 3-year-old daughter and are expecting another child in August, the Star Tribune reported.

China and Indonesia call for cease-fire in Gaza

By EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — The Chinese and Indonesian foreign ministers called for an immediate and lasting cease-fire in Gaza after a meeting in Jakarta on Thursday, condemning the humanitarian costs of Israel's ongoing war against Hamas.

Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi told reporters that the two countries share the same view about the importance of a cease-fire and of resolving the Palestinian problem through a two-state solution.

"I am sure that China would use its influence to prevent escalation," Marsudi said, adding that China and Indonesia "would also fully support Palestine's membership in the U.N."

The meeting took place on the second day of a six-day tour during which Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will also visit Papua New Guinea and Cambodia.

Wang blamed the United States for holding up cease-fire resolutions at the U.N.

"The conflict in Gaza has lasted for half a year and caused a rare humanitarian tragedy in the 21st century. The United Nations Security Council responded to the call of the international community and continued to review the resolution draft on the cease-fire in Gaza, but it was repeatedly vetoed by the United States," Wang told reporters.

The U.S. vetoed a number of proposed Security Council resolutions because they didn't tie cease-fire directly to the release of Israel hostages or condemn Hamas' attacks that prompted the war, before allowing a resolution to pass with an abstention in late March.

American officials have argued that the cease-fire and hostage releases are linked, while Russia, China and many other council members favored unconditional calls for a cease-fire.

"This time, the U.S. did not dare to stand in opposition to international morality and chose to abstain. However, the US claimed that this resolution was not binding," Wang said. "In the eyes of the United States, international law seems to be a tool that can be used whenever it finds useful and discarded if it does not want to use it."

The two ministers also discussed their countries' economic relationship and the South China Sea.

China is Indonesia's largest trading partner, with the trade volume reaching more than \$127 billion. China is also one of Indonesia's largest foreign investors, with investment flows of more than \$7.4 billion in 2023.

Later Thursday, Wang is also scheduled to meet Indonesian President Joko Widodo and president-elect

Prabowo Subianto, who is currently defense minister.

Hard right makes hay with European farmers' anger ahead of June elections

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

ANDEREN, Netherlands (AP) — Inside the barn on the flat fields of the northern Netherlands, Jos Ubels cradles a newborn Blonde d'Aquitaine calf, the latest addition to his herd of over 300 dairy cattle.

Little could be more idyllic.

Little, says Ubels, could be more under threat.

As Europe seeks to address the threat of climate change, it's imposing more rules on farmers like Ubels. He spends a day a week on bureaucracy, answering the demands of European Union and national officials who seek to decide when farmers can sow and reap, and how much fertilizer or manure they can use.

Meanwhile, competition from cheap imports is undercutting prices for their produce, without having to meet the same standards. Mainstream political parties failed to act on farmers' complaints for decades, Ubels says. Now the radical right is stepping in.

Across much of the 27-nation EU, from Finland to Greece, Poland to Ireland, farmers' discontent is gathering momentum as June EU parliamentary elections draw near.

Ubels is the second in command of the Farmers Defense Force, one of the most prominent groups to emerge from the foment. The FDF, whose symbol is a crossed double pitchfork, was formed in 2019 and has since expanded to Belgium. It has ties to similar groups elsewhere in the EU and is a driving force behind a planned June 4 demonstration in Brussels it hopes will bring 100,000 people to the EU capital and help define the outcome of the elections.

"It is time that we fight back," said Ubels. "We're done with quietly listening and doing what we are told."

Has he lost trust in democracy? "No. ... I have lost my faith in politics. And that is one step removed."

The FDF itself puts it more ominously on its website: "Our confidence in the rule of law is wavering!"

This story, supported by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, is part of an ongoing Associated Press series covering threats to democracy in Europe.

'DON'T LET UP!'

In March, protesting farmers from Belgium ran amok at a demonstration outside EU headquarters in Brussels, setting fire to a subway station entrance and attacking police with eggs and liquid manure. In France, protesters tried to storm a government building.

In a video from another protest, in front of burning tires and pallets, FDF leader Mark van den Oever said two politicians made him sick to his stomach, saying they would "soon be at the center of attention." The FDF denies this was a threat of physical violence.

Across the EU, over the winter, tractor convoys blockaded ports and major roads, sometimes for days, in some of the most severe farm protests in half a century.

Farmers and the EU have had a sometimes testy relationship. What's new is the shift toward the extreme right.

Destitute after World War II and with hunger still a scourge in winter, Europe desperately needed food security. The EU stepped in, securing abundant food for the population, turning the sector into an export powerhouse and currently funding farmers to the tune of over 50 billion euros a year.

Yet, despite agriculture's strategic importance, the EU acknowledges that farmers earn about 40% less than non-farm workers, while 80% of support goes to a privileged 20% of farmers. Many of the bloc's 8.7 million farm workers are close to or below the poverty line.

At the same time, the EU is seeking to push through stringent nature and agricultural laws as part of its Green Deal to make the bloc climate-neutral by 2050. Agriculture accounts for more than 10% of EU greenhouse gas emissions, from sources such as the nitrous oxide in fertilizers, carbon dioxide from ve-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 36 of 80

hicles and methane from cattle.

Cutting these emissions has forced short-notice changes on farmers at a time of financial insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic and surging inflation have increased the cost of goods and labor, while farmers' earnings are down as squeezed consumers cut back.

And then there's the war next door. After Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the EU granted tariff-free access for agricultural imports from Ukraine, many of them exempt from the strict environmental standards the bloc enforces on its own producers. Imports surged from 7 billion euros in 2021 to 13 billion euros the following year, causing gluts and undercutting farmers, particularly in Poland.

"Don't let up," Marion Maréchal, the lead candidate for France's extreme right Reconquest! party in the June elections, exhorted farmers at a protest earlier this year. "You have to be in the streets. You have to make yourself heard. You have to —" she tried to finish the sentence but was drowned out by shouts of "Don't Let Up! Don't Let Up!"

FERTILE GROUND

Farming in Europe is about more than just food; it touches on identity. In France, the far right taps into the love of "terroir," that mythical combination of soil, location, culture and climate.

"The French realize that the farmers are the roots of our society," said Maréchal.

Such sentiments echo across Europe. In Ireland, where more than a million people died in the famine of 1845-1852, farming "is deep in our culture, in our psyche," said Environment Minister Eamon Ryan, a Green Party lawmaker.

The far right has used farming as a way to attack mainstream parties. In Italy, the far right has mocked the EU's efforts to promote a low-carbon diet, playing on farmers' fears that lab-grown proteins and insects could one day replace meat.

"Revolt is the language of those who are not listened to. Now, back off," warned far-right Italian lawmaker Nicola Procaccini in February. In a few months, he said, the European elections "will put people back in place of ideologies."

Such calls fall on fertile ground. According to predictions by the European Council on Foreign Relations, the radical right Identity and Democracy group could become the third biggest overall in the next European Parliament, behind the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, but edging out the Liberals and Greens. The farm protests are providing vital leverage.

A SPADE IS A SPADE

One farmer sidestepping militant demonstrations is Bart Dochy in western Belgium. As the Christian Democrat mayor of the farming town of Ledegem and a regional parliamentarian in Flanders, he represents the traditional forces in European farming communities: Christianity and conservatism. When Socialism took the big cities, the countryside and its farmers remained staunchly Christian Democrat.

That's now changed. Once, billboards with the cry, "Save our farmers!" would have come from his party; now, they bear the logo of the far-right Flemish Interest, predicted by polls to become the biggest party in Belgium in June.

"In a sense it is only logical that the extreme parties have specialized in capturing that discontent. They call a spade a spade. And that is good," he said. But farming is complicated, he warned: nature, trade, budgets, commodity prices and geopolitics are all involved. Solutions will have to come from common sense, "not from the extremes."

Dochy's Christian Democrats are part of the biggest group in the EU parliament, the European People's Party, once a strong proponent of the EU's Green Deal. Farmers, after all, are among the biggest losers from climate change, affected at different times by flooding, wildfires, drought and extreme temperatures.

But ever since the demonstrations started, EU politics on agriculture and climate have shifted rightwards, outraging many of the center right's old allies with whom it set up the Green Deal. Measures to reduce pesticide use and protect biodiversity have been weakened, while the protesters' demands to cut regulation have been heard.

But as the rhetoric heats up, so too does the climate. Data for early 2024 shows record-breaking tem-

peratures in Europe. In Greece — where an estimated 1,750 square kilometers (675 square miles) burned in 2023, the worst fire in EU records — wildfires are already breaking out, weeks earlier than expected.

The far right offers no detailed solutions to the climate crisis but it has proved adept at tapping into farmers' frustrations. In its program for the June elections, the Dutch far-right party, the PVV, is short on details but big on slogans about "climate hysteria" and its "tsunami of rules." Nature and climate laws, it said, "should not lead to whole sectors being forced into bankruptcy."

Ubels made the case for farmers' realpolitik.

"The government doesn't listen to us, but the opposition does," he said.

United Arab Emirates struggles to recover after heaviest recorded rainfall ever hits desert nation

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United Arab Emirates struggled Thursday to recover from the heaviest recorded rainfall ever to hit the desert nation, as its main airport worked to restore normal operations even as floodwater still covered portions of major highways and roads.

Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, allowed global carriers on Thursday morning to again fly into Terminal 1 at the airfield.

"Flights continue to be delayed and disrupted, so we urge you to only come to Terminal 1 if you have a confirmed booking," the airport said on the social platform X.

The long-haul carrier Emirates, whose operations had been struggling since the storm Tuesday, had stopped travelers flying out of the UAE from checking into their flights as they tried to move out connecting passengers. Pilots and flight crews had been struggling to reach the airport given the water on roadways. But on Thursday, they lifted that order to allow customers into the airport.

Others who arrived at the airport described hourslong waits to get their baggage, with some just giving up to head home or to whatever hotel would have them.

The UAE, a hereditarily ruled, autocratic nation on the Arabian Peninsula, typically sees little rainfall in its arid desert climate. However, a massive storm forecasters had been warning about for days blew through the country's seven sheikhdoms.

By the end of Tuesday, more than 142 millimeters (5.59 inches) of rainfall had soaked Dubai over 24 hours. An average year sees 94.7 millimeters (3.73 inches) of rain at Dubai International Airport. Other areas of the country saw even more precipitation.

The UAE's drainage systems quickly became overwhelmed, flooding out neighborhoods, business districts and even portions of the 12-lane Sheikh Zayed Road highway running through Dubai.

The state-run WAM news agency called the rain "a historic weather event" that surpassed "anything documented since the start of data collection in 1949."

In a message to the nation late Wednesday, Emirati leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the ruler of Abu Dhabi, said authorities would "quickly work on studying the condition of infrastructure throughout the UAE and to limit the damage caused."

On Thursday, people waded through oil-slicked floodwater to reach cars earlier abandoned, checking to see if their engines still ran. Tanker trucks with vacuums began reaching some areas outside of Dubai's downtown core for the first time as well. Schools remain closed until next week.

Authorities have offered no overall damage or injury information from the floods, which killed at least one person.

"Crises reveal the strength of countries and societies," Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, wrote on X. "The natural climate crisis that we experienced showed the great care, awareness, cohesion and love for every corner of the country from all its citizens and residents."

The flooding sparked speculation that the UAE's aggressive campaign of cloud seeding — flying small planes through clouds dispersing chemicals aimed at getting rain to fall — may have contributed to the

deluge. But experts said the storm systems that produced the rain were forecast well in advance and that cloud seeding alone would not have caused such flooding.

Jeff Masters, a meteorologist for Yale Climate Connections, said the flooding in Dubai was caused by an unusually strong low pressure system that drove many rounds of heavy thunderstorms.

Scientists also say climate change is responsible for more intense and more frequent extreme storms, droughts, floods and wildfires around the world. Dubai hosted the United Nations' COP28 climate talks just last year.

Abu Dhabi's state-linked newspaper The National in an editorial Thursday described the heavy rains as a warning to countries in the wider Persian Gulf region to "climate-proof their futures."

"The scale of this task is more daunting than it appears even at first glance, because such changes involve changing the urban environment of a region that for as long as it has been inhabited, has experienced little but heat and sand," the newspaper said.

Takeaways from this week's reports on the deadly 2023 Maui fire that destroyed Lahaina

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER, REBECCA BOONE, CLAUDIA LAUER and CHRISTOPHER L. KELLER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — More than half a year after the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century burned through a historic Maui town, officials are still trying to determine exactly what went wrong and how to prevent similar catastrophes in the future. But two reports released this week are filling in some of the blanks.

The most recent is a detailed timeline of the fire that tore through the heart of Lahaina on Aug. 8, 2023, killing 101 people. Released Wednesday by Hawaii Attorney General Anne Lopez, it is the first phase of a three-part comprehensive investigation being conducted by the Fire Safety Research Institute, or FSRI, with more coming in the next several months.

The previous day, the Maui Fire Department put out an after-action report produced by the Western Fire Chiefs Association. It detailed the challenges the department faced, as well as more than 100 recommendations for improvements.

Here are the key takeaways from the reports:

COMMUNICATION WAS A STRUGGLE AMID THE CHAOS

A major windstorm was toppling power lines and utility poles throughout Lahaina, and the first fire of the day sparked when a live power line snapped and hit dry brush. But firefighters and police received mixed messages about whether Hawaiian Electric had de-energized the lines, according to the FSRI report.

In the early afternoon — before the initial fire flared back up and began overtaking the town — a utility worker told fire crews that he could not confirm if the lines were de-energized. It wasn't until after homes began catching fire that dispatchers reached Hawaiian Electric and got confirmation that the power was out.

The report also described a communications breakdown between police, firefighters and other emergency officials. Cellular networks were down, and the police and fire agencies used separate channels that public officials and others couldn't listen to. Overwhelmed dispatchers had single operators trying to monitor as many as five or six channels at once.

Residents and tourists had no way to get emergency alerts or communicate with loved ones, and 911 operators were inundated with calls. One of the operators was off-island and wasn't getting geographical location information with calls, and thus didn't know where to send people fleeing the flames.

Meanwhile the head of the Maui Emergency Management Agency, Herman Andaya, was off-island at a work conference and getting regular text messages and calls from staffers about the rapidly changing fires. After a series of evacuations in Lahaina, he asked his assistant if he should come home but was told that "it may look OK," according to the report. A few hours later, after much of the town had burned, Andaya said he would come home the following morning.

An after-action report from police earlier this year also identified communication challenges and recom-

mended that a high-ranking officer be placed in the island's communication center during future emergencies.

THE FIRE WAS SWIFT AND UNRELENTING, AND ESCAPE ROUTES WERE FEW

Firefighters thought they had extinguished the morning blaze, which started near a part of town that is far from the ocean. But less than 40 minutes after they left the scene, the flames reerupted, quickly spreading from home to home in a nearby neighborhood.

Wind gusts that were still toppling power lines pushed embers and burning debris farther into Lahaina.

As firefighters and other emergency crews scrambled to evacuate houses and get people to safety, dark smoke dropped visibility to near-zero at times. Those roads that weren't blocked by trees, utility poles or power lines became jammed with traffic that sometimes ground to a standstill.

But the time people had to escape would likely have been tight even if the roads were all clear: Within 90 minutes, spot fires were burning all the way to the ocean, according to the FSRI report, and spreading north and south.

Some people died in their cars. Others leaped into the ocean to escape the flames. Still others abandoned vehicles and fled on foot.

RESOURCES WERE SCATTERED AND STRETCHED THIN

Firefighters risked their lives again and again — packing survivors into fire trucks to get them to safety, physically carrying victims away from danger, and taking shelter behind their own disabled vehicles — according to Tuesday's report.

Many of the department's crews and engines were already deployed to fight other wildfires on a different part of the island when Lahaina began to burn. The back-up fire engines used in emergencies weren't fully stocked with equipment, and valuable minutes were lost restocking them before they could be put into action.

The report also highlighted a lack of mutual aid agreements between Hawaii counties, which meant that there was no standard way to request help from neighboring islands. The agencies also lacked a plan for evacuating tourists and residents who did not speak English — and language barriers made it difficult for the firefighters to warn some people of the need to flee.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

FSRI investigators are still trying to get some records from the Maui Emergency Management Agency. Research program manager Derek Alkonis said Wednesday that they requested incident activity logs and other records from MEMA on multiple occasions but still had not received all the data.

Alkonis did not go into detail about what he called "a difficulty with gaining information" from the agency, but said the reason is "going to be analyzed in subsequent reports."

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is working on a report about the origin and cause of the fire on behalf of the Maui Fire Department. That report is not yet complete but is expected to be released in the next few months.

Israelis grapple with how to celebrate Passover, a holiday about freedom, while many remain captive

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Every year, Alon Gat's mother led the family's Passover celebration of the liberation of the ancient Israelites from Egypt thousands of years ago. But this year, Gat is struggling with how to reconcile a holiday commemorating freedom after his mother was slain and other family members abducted when Hamas attacked Israel.

Gat's sister, Carmel, and wife, Yarden Roman-Gat, were taken hostage in the Oct. 7 attack. His wife was freed in November but his sister remains captive.

"We can't celebrate our freedom because we don't have this freedom. Our brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers are still in captivity and we need to release them," Gat said.

On Monday, Jews around the world will begin celebrating the weeklong Passover holiday, recounting the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 40 of 80

biblical story of their exodus from Egypt after hundreds of years of slavery. But for many Israelis, it's hard to fathom a celebration of freedom when friends and family are not free.

The Hamas attack killed some 1,200 people, while about 250 others were taken hostage. About half were released in a weeklong cease-fire in November, while the rest remain in Gaza, more than 30 of them believed to be dead.

For many Jews, Passover is a time to reunite with family and recount the exodus from Egypt at a meal known as the Seder. Observant Jews avoid grains, known as chametz, a reminder of the unleavened bread the Israelites ate when they fled Egypt quickly with no time for dough to rise.

But this year many families are torn about how — or even if — to celebrate.

When Hamas attacked Kibbutz Be'eri, Gat, his wife, 3-year-old daughter, parents and sister hid for hours in their rocket-proof safe room. But fighters entered the house and killed or abducted everyone inside, except for his father who hid in the bathroom. His mother was dragged into the street and shot.

Gat, his arms and legs bound, was shoved into a car with his wife and daughter. During a brief stop, they managed to flee. Knowing he could run faster, Roman-Gat handed him their daughter. Gat escaped with her, hiding in a ditch for nearly nine hours. His wife was recaptured and held in Gaza for 54 days.

Passover this year will be more profound as freedom has taken on a new meaning, Roman-Gat told The Associated Press.

"To feel wind upon your face with your eyes closed. To shower. To go to the toilet without permission, and with the total privacy and privilege to take as long as I please with no one urging me, waiting for me at the other side to make sure I'm still theirs," she said in a text message.

Still, Passover will be overshadowed by deep sorrow and worry for her sister-in-law and the other hostages, she said. The family will mark the holiday with a low-key dinner in a restaurant, without celebration.

As hard as it is in times of pain, Jews have always sought to observe holidays during persecution, such as in concentration camps during the Holocaust, said Rabbi Martin Lockshin, professor emeritus at Canada's York University, who lives in Jerusalem.

"They couldn't celebrate freedom but they could celebrate the hope of freedom," he said.

The crisis affects more than the hostage families. The war, in which 260 soldiers have been killed, casts a shadow over a normally joyous holiday. The government has also scaled back festivities for Independence Day in May in light of the mood and fearing public protests.

Likewise, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, capped by the three-day Eid al-Fitr feast, was a sad, low-key affair for Palestinians. Over 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced by the fighting, and Hamas health officials say nearly 34,000 people have been killed in the Israeli offensive.

The scenes of suffering, devastation and hunger in Gaza have received little attention in Israel, where much of the public and national media remain heavily focused on the aftermath of the Oct. 7 attack and ongoing war.

After several months of fits and starts, negotiations on a deal to release the remaining hostages appears at a standstill — making it unlikely they will be home for Passover.

The hostages' pain has reverberated around the world, with some in the Jewish diaspora asking rabbis for prayers specifically for the hostages and Israel to be said at this year's Seder. Others have created a new Haggadah, the book read during the Seder, to reflect the current reality.

Noam Zion, the author of the new Haggadah, has donated 6,000 copies to families impacted by the war.

"The Seder is supposed to help us to relive past slavery and liberation from Egypt and to learn its lessons, but in 2024 it must also ask contemporary questions about the confusing and traumatic present and most important, generate hope for the future," said Zion, emeritus member of the faculty of Jewish studies at the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

The revised Haggadah includes excerpts from hostage families urging people not to hate despite their pain. It offers a guide for navigating the mixed feelings during the holiday, while posing existential questions about the Jews and the state of Israel.

Some families say it's too painful to celebrate at all.

The girlfriend of Nirit Lavie Alon's son was abducted from the Nova music festival. Two months later

the family was informed by Israel's military that Inbar Haiman, a 27-year-old graffiti artist, was dead, her body still in Gaza.

"It's impossible to celebrate a freedom holiday," said Alon. Instead of being with family this year, she's going to spend a few days in the desert. There will be no closure until all of the hostages are back, including the remains of those who were killed, she said.

Ahead of Passover, some families are still holding out hope their relatives will be freed in time.

Shlomi Berger's 19-year-old daughter, Agam, was abducted two days after the start of her army service along the border with Gaza.

Videos of her bloodied face emerged shortly after the Hamas attack, one showing an armed man pushing her into a truck, another showing her inside the vehicle with other hostages. The only proof of life he's had since was a call from a released hostage, wishing him happy birthday from Agam, who she'd been with in the tunnels, he said.

Still, he refuses to give up hope.

"The Passover story says we come from slaves to free people, so this is a parallel story," Berger said. "This is the only thing I believe that will happen. That Agam will get out from darkness to light. She and all of the other hostages."

Once a fringe Indian ideology, Hindu nationalism is now mainstream, thanks to Modi's decade in power

By KRUTIKA PATHI and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

AHMEDABAD, India (AP) — Hindu nationalism, once a fringe ideology in India, is now mainstream. Nobody has done more to advance this cause than Prime Minister Narendra Modi, one of India's most beloved and polarizing political leaders.

And no entity has had more influence on his political philosophy and ambitions than a paramilitary, right-wing group founded nearly a century ago and known as the RSS.

"We never imagined that we would get power in such a way," said Ambalal Koshti, 76, who says he first brought Modi into the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the late 1960s in their home state, Gujarat.

Modi was a teenager. Like other young men — and even boys — who joined, he would learn to march in formation, fight, meditate and protect their Hindu homeland.

A few decades earlier, while Mahatma Gandhi preached Hindu-Muslim unity, the RSS advocated for transforming India — by force, if necessary — into a Hindu nation. (A former RSS worker would fire three bullets into Gandhi's chest in 1948, killing him months after India gained independence.)

Modi's spiritual and political upbringing from the RSS is the driving force, experts say, in everything he's done as prime minister over the past 10 years, a period that has seen India become a global power and the world's fifth-largest economy.

At the same time, his rule has seen brazen attacks against minorities — particularly Muslims — from hate speech to lynchings. India's democracy, critics say, is faltering as the press, political opponents and courts face growing threats. And Modi has increasingly blurred the line between religion and state.

At 73, Modi is campaigning for a third term in a general election, which starts Friday. He and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party are expected to win. He's challenged by a broad but divided alliance of regional parties.

Supporters and critics agree on one thing: Modi has achieved staying power by making Hindu nationalism acceptable — desirable, even — to a nation of 1.4 billion that for decades prided itself on pluralism and secularism. With that comes an immense vote bank: 80% of Indians are Hindu.

"He is 100% an ideological product of the RSS," in said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, who wrote a Modi biography. "He has delivered their goals."

UNITING HINDUS

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 42 of 80

Between deep breaths under the night sky in western India a few weeks ago, a group of boys recited an RSS prayer in Sanskrit: "All Hindus are the children of Mother India ... we have taken a vow to be equals and a promise to save our religion."

More than 65 years ago, Modi was one of them. Born in 1950 to a lower-caste family, his first exposure to the RSS was through shakhas — local units — that induct boys by combining religious education with self-defense skills and games.

By the 1970s, Modi was a full-time campaigner, canvassing neighborhoods on bicycle to raise RSS support. "At that time, Hindus were scared to come together," Koshti said. "We were trying to unite them."

The RSS — formed in 1925, with the stated intent to strengthen the Hindu community — was hardly mainstream. It was tainted by links to Gandhi's assassination and accused of stoking hatred against Muslims as periodic riots roiled India.

For the group, Indian civilization is inseparable from Hinduism, while critics say its philosophy is rooted in Hindu supremacy.

Today, the RSS has spawned a network of affiliated groups, from student and farmer unions to nonprofits and vigilante organizations often accused of violence. Their power — and legitimacy — ultimately comes from the BJP, which emerged from the RSS.

"Until Modi, the BJP had never won a majority on their own in India's Parliament," said Christophe Jaffrelot, an expert on Modi and the Hindu right. "For the RSS, it is unprecedented."

SCALING HIS POLITICS

Modi got his first big political break in 2001, becoming chief minister of home state Gujarat. A few months in, anti-Muslim riots ripped through the region, killing at least 1,000 people.

There were suspicions that Modi quietly supported the riots, but he denied the allegations and India's top court absolved him over lack of evidence.

Instead of crushing his political career, the riots boosted it.

Modi doubled down on Hindu nationalism, Jaffrelot said, capitalizing on religious tensions for political gain. Gujarat's reputation suffered from the riots, so he turned to big businesses to build factories, create jobs and spur development.

"This created a political economy — he built close relations with capitalists who in turn backed him," Jaffrelot said.

Modi became increasingly authoritarian, Jaffrelot described, consolidating power over police and courts and bypassing the media to connect directly with voters.

The "Gujarat Model," as Modi coined it, portended what he would do as a prime minister.

"He gave Hindu nationalism a populist flavor," Jaffrelot said. "Modi invented it in Gujarat, and today he has scaled it across the country."

BIG PLANS

In June, Modi aims not just to win a third time — he's set a target of receiving two-thirds of the vote. And he's touted big plans.

"I'm working every moment to make India a developed nation by 2047," Modi said at a rally. He also wants to abolish poverty and make the economy the world's third-largest.

If Modi wins, he'll be the second Indian leader, after Jawaharlal Nehru, to retain power for a third term.

With approval ratings over 70%, Modi's popularity has eclipsed that of his party. Supporters see him as a strongman leader, unafraid to take on India's enemies, from Pakistan to the liberal elite. He's backed by the rich, whose wealth has surged under him. For the poor, a slew of free programs, from food to housing, deflect the pain of high unemployment and inflation. Western leaders and companies line up to court him, turning to India as a counterweight against China.

He's meticulously built his reputation. In a nod to his Hinduism, he practices yoga in front of TV crews and the U.N., extols the virtues of a vegetarian diet, and preaches about reclaiming India's glory. He refers to himself in the third person.

P.K. Laheri, a former senior bureaucrat in Gujarat, said Modi "does not risk anything" when it comes to winning — he goes into the election thinking the party won't miss a single seat.

The common thread of Modi's rise, analysts say, is that his most consequential policies are ambitions of the RSS.

In 2019, his government revoked the special status of disputed Kashmir, the country's only Muslim-majority region. His government passed a citizenship law excluding Muslim migrants. In January, Modi delivered on a longstanding demand from the RSS — and millions of Hindus — when he opened a temple on the site of a razed mosque.

The BJP has denied enacting discriminatory policies and says its work benefits all Indians.

Last week, the BJP said it would pass a common legal code for all Indians — another RSS desire — to replace religious personal laws. Muslim leaders and others oppose it.

But Modi's politics are appealing to those well beyond right-wing nationalists — the issues have resonated deeply with regular Hindus. Unlike those before him, Modi paints a picture of a rising India as a Hindu one.

Satish Ahlani, a school principal, said he'll vote for Modi. Today, Ahlani said, Gujarat is thriving — as is India.

"Wherever our name hadn't reached, it is now there," he said. "Being Hindu is our identity; that is why we want a Hindu country. ... For the progress of the country, Muslims will have to be with us. They should accept this and come along."

Congress moving swiftly on bipartisan action to punish Iran after revenge attack on Israel

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iran's attack against Israel over the weekend has spurred a flurry of bipartisan legislative action in Congress, uniting lawmakers against the country even as the risk of a larger regional war looms.

Several measures introduced and passed in the House and Senate seek to both publicly condemn Iran and punish the Islamic Republic financially. Lawmakers have denounced Iran's actions, which came in response to a suspected Israeli strike weeks earlier on an Iranian consular building in Syria that killed two Iranian generals.

"The world is on fire, and history will judge us for our action," said Rep. Mike McCaul, R-Texas, chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, during a news conference Tuesday.

The swift, bipartisan condemnation of Iran has put on sharp display the durability of American support for Israel, even amid growing partisan division over how the country is handling its more than six-month war with Hamas.

The House passed nearly a dozen bills by Wednesday that would, among other things, issue a slate of new sanctions and other financial restrictions against Iran and its leaders. Other legislation looks to prevent current Iranian officials sanctioned from evading those penalties and urge the European Union to "expeditiously" designate Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization as the U.S. has already done.

On the other side of the Capitol, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday advanced five bills, including ones that targeted Iran for its human rights record and would require sanctions on ports and refineries that receive and process Iranian oil.

"Iran's direct attack on Israel this week underscores the need to further cut off the Iranian regime's key revenue streams," Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire said in a statement. "I urge my colleagues in the Senate to support this bill — which has already passed the House — so that we can send it to President Biden's desk immediately."

A number of the bills had passed the House weeks before Hamas' deadly attack on Israel in October but have been stalled in the Senate committee. An Israeli offensive in Gaza has since caused widespread devastation and killed over 33,000 people, according to local health officials. Israel's conduct of the war has revealed the depth of unease among U.S. lawmakers as concerns over the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza have caused even some of President Joe Biden's closest allies to threaten conditioning future

aid to Israel.

Congressional Democrats have been reluctant to challenge Biden's handling of the ongoing conflict and related regional tensions that have taken shape, mindful that criticism could further weaken Biden in his reelection campaign against former President Donald Trump.

But the attack on Saturday has proven to consolidate public support for the Biden administration's quick response as it ordered U.S. forces to help Israel down "nearly all" the 300 drones and missiles that were headed its way.

It also comes as House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., released legislation Wednesday that would provide \$95 billion in aid collectively to Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan. The aid package had been held up for months over Republican opposition to continuing wartime funding for Ukraine as it battles Russia. Iran's attack on Israel added urgency to Johnson's plans to bring the issue to the floor for a vote.

While the measures targeting Iran have received overwhelming support — with the series of House bills mostly passing with at least 300 votes — there has been a quiet but growing dissent among progressive Democratic lawmakers in both chambers, who warn that legislative efforts could risk further escalation in the Middle East.

"Following last weekend's unprecedented response by Iran to Israel's attack on its consulate, the Republican Majority is explicitly leveraging a series of bills to further escalate tensions in the Middle East," Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., said in a statement Tuesday. "This is a blatant attempt to distract from their own incompetence."

The strike on Saturday marked the first time Iran has launched a direct military assault on Israel despite decades of enmity dating back to the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Israel has vowed to retaliate against Iran, risking further expanding the shadow war between the two foes into a direct conflict.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, condemned Iran's attack in a statement but called on his colleagues to respond cautiously. He warned that further U.S. action against Iran could lead to a dangerous escalation that could drag America into a war in the Middle East.

"Cooler heads must now prevail to ensure peace in the region and security for Israel," Sanders said.

Jury selection in Trump hush money trial faces pivotal stretch as former president returns to court

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Jury selection in the hush money trial of Donald Trump enters a pivotal and potentially final stretch Thursday as lawyers look to round out the panel of New Yorkers that will decide the first-ever criminal case against a former president.

Seven jurors have been picked so far, including an oncology nurse, a software engineer, an information technology professional, a sales professional, an English teacher and two lawyers. Eleven more people must still be sworn in, with the judge saying he anticipated opening statements in the landmark case to be given as early as next week.

The seating of the Manhattan jury — whenever it comes — will be a seminal moment in the case, setting the stage for a trial that will place the former president's legal jeopardy at the heart of the campaign against Democrat Joe Biden and feature potentially unflattering testimony about Trump's private life in the years before he became president.

The process of picking a jury is a critical phase of any criminal trial but especially so when the defendant is a former president and the presumptive Republican nominee. Prospective jurors have been grilled on their social media posts, personal lives and political views as the lawyers and judge search for biases that would prevent them from being impartial. Inside the court, there's broad acknowledgment of the futility in trying to find jurors without knowledge of Trump, with a prosecutor this week saying that lawyers were not looking for people who had been "living under a rock for the past eight years."

To that end, at least some of the jurors selected acknowledged having their own opinions about Trump. "I find him fascinating and mysterious," one juror selected for the case, an IT professional, said under

questioning. "He walks into a room and he sets people off, one way or the other. I find that really interesting. 'Really? This one guy could do all of this? Wow.' That's what I think."

The process has moved swifter than expected, prompting Trump when leaving the courthouse on Tuesday to complain to reporters that the judge, Juan Merchan, was "rushing" the trial.

The case centers on a \$130,000 payment that Trump's lawyer and personal fixer, Michael Cohen, made shortly before the 2016 election to porn actor Stormy Daniels to prevent her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump from becoming public in the race's final days.

Prosecutors say Trump obscured the true nature of the payments in internal records when his company reimbursed Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges in 2018 and is expected to be a star witness for the prosecution.

Trump has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels, and his lawyers argue the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses.

Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. He could face up to four years in prison if convicted, though it's not clear that the judge would opt to put him behind bars. Trump would almost certainly appeal any conviction.

The hush money case is one of four criminal prosecutions Trump is confronting as he vies to reclaim the White House, but it's possible that it will be the sole case to reach trial before November's presidential election. Appeals and other legal wrangling have caused delays in cases charging Trump with plotting to overturn the 2020 election results and with illegally hoarding classified documents.

Climate change concerns grow, but few think Biden's climate law will help, AP-NORC poll finds

By ALEXA ST. JOHN and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

Like many Americans, Ron Theusch is getting more worried about climate change.

A resident of Alden, Minnesota, Theusch has noticed increasingly dry and mild winters punctuated by short periods of severe cold — symptoms of a warming planet.

As he thinks about that, future generations are on his mind. "We have four children that are in their 20s," the 56-year-old truck driver and moderate Democrat said. "It's like, what's our grandkids' world going to be like?"

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that 45% of adults in the United States say they have become more concerned about climate change over the past year, including roughly 6 in 10 Democrats and one-quarter of Republicans.

President Joe Biden's signature climate change policy, the Inflation Reduction Act, was intended to address some of those fears, investing billions in incentives for consumers and businesses to move toward clean energy sources. Biden has pointed to this climate agenda as a major presidential success during his run for reelection. But the poll suggests that although the law has already affected some Americans, it's not widely known among the general population — and may not be the electoral boost Biden is looking for.

About one-quarter of Americans say tax credits for renewable energy projects such as wind power have benefited people like them so far, with similar numbers for incentives for companies to manufacture clean energy technologies in the U.S. rather than abroad, tax credits for individuals to add solar panels to their homes, or subsidies and tax credits for electric vehicles and energy-efficient appliances like heat pumps. Those numbers are fairly substantial for a law that passed less than two years ago, where the benefits largely hinge on big-ticket purchases like cars or home improvements.

Promoting electric vehicles has also been a major focus for the Biden administration, and 15% of U.S. adults say electric vehicles have had a good impact on them personally.

"I totally agree with the act because it's done so many things for people," said Charles Lopez, a 65-year-old liberal Democrat from the Florida Keys. "They help everybody ... I'm not ready for a full electric, but I'll get there when there's enough charging stations."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 46 of 80

But the people who have benefited from the law are disproportionately Democrats. And while only about 1 in 10 U.S. adults think the individual tax credits and subsidies have hurt people like them, those provisions of the law aren't yet registering with the majority of Americans — roughly one-quarter say those credits haven't made a difference to people like them. Nearly 4 in 10 in each instance don't know enough to have an opinion about them.

"I still think that, as much as we'd like for them to be implemented in a way that we can actually see results, it's not really happening in my eyes," said Sandra Sherman, a 62-year-old resident of Vero Beach, Florida, who identifies as a liberal Democrat. "With solar panels, although it seems like a really good idea, I see very few people in the area in Florida that I live in that actually have them."

Generally, U.S. adults also aren't confident the IRA will have an impact even in more time. The poll found that only between 23% and 35% of U.S. adults say the law's key components will eventually help address climate change. About 2 in 10 think the main provisions of the law will make no difference in addressing climate change, and about one-third don't know enough to say.

"A lot of the public feeling on it is, 'well something needs to be done,' but not necessarily knowing what needs to be done or not even necessarily having strong feelings about what needs to be done," said David Weakliem, a University of Connecticut professor emeritus.

Biden still has an advantage over his opponent, former President Donald Trump, when it comes to climate change generally. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults and two-thirds of Democrats have "a lot" or "some" trust in Biden on climate change. That includes 29-year-old Jaime Said, a moderate Republican.

Biden has "talked about it more and he has mentioned a few plans of things he wants to do. So even if he doesn't do them, at the very least he's thinking about them. That's kind of headed in the right direction," Said, a medical student in Panama City, Florida, said.

"I know already, right off the bat, (Trump is) not going to address it much," Said added. "That's why I don't have too much faith in him doing anything about it."

Only about 3 in 10 say they have "a lot" or "some" trust in Trump with regard to addressing climate change.

But one of Biden's major pitches for the IRA — that it will help the American economy and U.S. workers — doesn't seem to be resonating. According to the poll, only about 2 in 10 Americans say the law has done more to help the U.S. economy, while about one-quarter think it's done more to hurt the economy, and about half think it either made no difference or don't know enough to say.

And broadly, a majority of Americans say the federal government is currently doing "too little" to address climate change. They generally agree it's important for the government to support climate solutions. About half say it's extremely or very important to limit the use of products and technologies that harm the environment, and nearly half say it's important for the government to pass stricter environmental laws and regulations. About 4 in 10 say it's important for the government to build a national network of public charging stations for electric vehicles, which is another Biden administration priority.

Most say it's extremely or very important for the federal government to invest in new, environmentally friendly technologies, and most, like 38-year-old Julio Carmona, a health program associate who lives in Stratford, Connecticut, and identifies as a moderate Democrat, say the same about enforcing current environmental regulations.

"We can all do our part when it comes to saving energy, recycling and all those other things," said Carmona. "But if the big corporations aren't doing it, I think that, for me, would be where the government should start."

Senate rejects impeachment articles against Mayorkas, ending trial against Cabinet secretary

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate dismissed all impeachment charges against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on Wednesday, ending the House Republican push to remove the Cabinet secretary from office over his handling of the U.S.-Mexico border and shutting down his trial before arguments even began.

Senators voted to dismiss both articles of impeachment and end the proceedings, with Democrats arguing that the articles were unconstitutional. The first article charged Mayorkas with “willful and systemic refusal to comply” with immigration law and second article charged him with a “breach of trust” for saying the border was secure. The votes were 51-48 and 51-49, both along party lines.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the House Republicans’ charges failed to meet “the high standard of high crimes and misdemeanors” and could set a dangerous precedent.

“For the sake of the Senate’s integrity and to protect impeachment for those rare cases we truly need it, senators should dismiss today’s charges,” said Schumer, D-N.Y., as he opened Wednesday’s session.

Senate Republicans had argued for a full impeachment trial after the House narrowly voted in February to impeach Mayorkas for his handling of the border, stating in the two articles that he “willfully and systematically” refused to enforce immigration laws.

An outright dismissal of House Republicans’ prosecution of Mayorkas, with no chance to argue the case, is an embarrassing defeat for House Republicans and embattled House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., who made the impeachment a priority. And it is likely to resonate politically for both Republicans and Democrats in a presidential election year when border security has been a top issue.

Republicans argue that President Joe Biden has been weak on the border as arrests for illegal crossings skyrocketed to more than 2 million people during the last two years of his term, though they have fallen from a record high of 250,000 in December amid heightened enforcement in Mexico. Democrats say that instead of impeaching Mayorkas, Republicans should have accepted a bipartisan Senate compromise aimed at reducing the number of migrants who come into the U.S. illegally.

House impeachment managers delivered the charges to the Senate on Tuesday, standing in the well of the Senate and reading them aloud to a captive audience. But they did not get a chance to present the case before the Senate dismissed it.

The historic nature of the trial — the first time in nearly 150 years that a Cabinet secretary was impeached — contrasted with the almost routine feel of the proceedings after senators have sat through two previous impeachment trials against former President Donald Trump in 2020 and 2021. And with a quick dismissal almost inevitable, the Senate never even set up the chamber for the occasion, which usually includes tables on each side for the impeachment managers and defense lawyers.

Still, there was a bit of the traditional pomp. As the trial began, senators approached the front of the Senate in groups of four to sign an oath book that is stored in the National Archives.

Schumer called for the votes to dismiss the two charges after Republicans rejected a proposed agreement for Senate debate time and several votes on GOP objections. Missouri Sen. Eric Schmitt stood in the chamber and said Republicans wouldn’t accept Schumer’s offer because Democrats were “bulldozing 200 years of precedent” on impeachments by trying to dismiss the trial.

Angry Republicans called for several votes to delay the inevitable final outcome, but none of them passed as Democrats and three Independents held together.

Frustrated, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said “history will not judge this moment well.”

“This process must not be abused,” McConnell said. “It must not be short-circuited.”

At the same time, Republicans similarly moved to dismiss former President Donald Trump’s second impeachment trial in 2021, weeks after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. All but five GOP senators — including McConnell — voted to end the trial, arguing it was unconstitutional because Trump had

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 48 of 80

already left office.

After Democrats dismissed the charges, Johnson and members of his House GOP leadership team said in a joint statement that "by voting unanimously to bypass their constitutional responsibility, every single Senate Democrat has issued their full endorsement of the Biden Administration's dangerous open border policies."

Even if the Senate had held a trial, Republicans would not have been able to win the support of the two-thirds of the Senate that is needed to convict and remove Mayorkas from office — Democrats control the Senate, 51-49, and they remained united against the impeachment effort. Not one House Democrat supported it, either.

Even some Republicans questioned the impeachment effort from the start. Utah Sen. Mitt Romney had said for weeks that he was considering voting with Democrats to dismiss the charges but ultimately voted with his own party. After the votes, he said he does not believe the charges rise to high crimes but he did not want to dismiss them because "it was important to engage in some level of debate."

Mayorkas, who was in New York on Wednesday to launch a campaign for children's online safety, reiterated that he's focused on the work of his department. "The Senate is going to do what the Senate considers to be appropriate as that proceeds," he said. "I am here in New York City on Wednesday morning fighting online sexual exploitation and abuse. I'm focused on our mission."

Department spokeswoman Mia Ehrenberg said after the votes that the Senate's decision to end the trial "proves definitively that there was no evidence or Constitutional grounds to justify impeachment."

Johnson delayed sending the articles to the Senate for weeks while both chambers finished work on government funding legislation and took a two-week recess. Johnson had said he would send them to the Senate last week, but he punted again after Senate Republicans said they wanted more time to prepare.

At a hearing with Mayorkas on Tuesday about President Joe Biden's budget request for the department, some of the House impeachment managers previewed the arguments they would have made.

Tennessee Rep. Mark Green, the chairman of the House Homeland Security panel, told the secretary he has a duty under the law to control and guard U.S. borders, and "during your three years as secretary, you have failed to fulfill this oath. You have refused to comply with the laws passed by Congress, and you have breached the public trust."

Mayorkas defended the department's efforts but said the nation's immigration system is "fundamentally broken, and only Congress can fix it."

The impeachment trial was the third in five years. Democrats impeached Trump twice, once over his dealings with Ukraine and the second time in the days after the Capitol attack. Trump was acquitted by the Senate both times.

Schumer said the charges against Mayorkas did not compare to those against Trump and were engineered to help the former president as he runs again this year. He said the Republican charges were policy disputes, not high crimes, and it was important to set a precedent.

"Secretary Mayorkas has not been accused of treason or accepting bribes or unlawfully attacking our elections or anything of the sort," Schumer said. "He did not blackmail a foreign power to dig dirt on a political opponent. Nor did he incite a violent mob to wage an insurrection against the peaceful transfer of power."

He called the Republican case "an illegitimate and profane abuse of the U.S. Constitution."

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, a Democrat, acknowledged that dismissing the trial was "a different Senate process," but said the "risk of normalizing what the House did is bigger than the risk of establishing a new precedent in the Senate."

The Latest | Netanyahu says Israel will decide how to respond as Iran warns against retaliation

By The Associated Press undefined

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would decide whether and how to respond to Iran's major air assault earlier this week, brushing off calls for restraint from close allies.

Israel has vowed to respond to Iran's unprecedented attack, leaving the region bracing for further escalation after months of fighting in Gaza. Israel's allies have been urging Israel to hold back on any response to the attack that could spiral.

The diplomatic pressure came as Iran's president warned that even the "tiniest" invasion of its territory would bring a "massive and harsh" response.

Over the weekend, Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel after an apparent Israeli strike killed two Iranian generals. Israel and Iran have waged a long shadow war, but the strike was Iran's first direct military attack on Israel. Israel says it and its partners intercepted nearly all the missiles and drones.

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi warned Israel against any retaliation as he addressed an annual army parade, which was moved from its usual route and not broadcast live on state TV — possibly to avoid being targeted. In remarks carried by Iran's official IRNA news agency, Raisi said the weekend attack was limited, and that if Iran had wanted to carry out a bigger attack, "nothing would remain from the Zionist regime."

Regional tensions have increased since the start of the latest Israel-Hamas war on Oct. 7, when Hamas and Islamic Jihad, two militant groups backed by Iran, carried out a cross-border attack that killed 1,200 people in Israel and kidnapped 250 others. Israel responded with an offensive in Gaza that has caused widespread devastation and killed more than 33,800 people, according to local health officials.

Currently:

- Netanyahu brushes off calls for restraint as Iran warns against retaliation
- Lebanon says Israeli agents likely killed Hezbollah-linked currency exchanger
- EU leaders vow to impose tougher sanctions against Iran
- The G7 eyes targeted sanctions on Iran and a message of restraint
- US House's Ukraine, Israel aid package gains Biden's support. What's inside the package?

Here is the latest:

U.S. AND 47 OTHER COUNTRIES CONDEMN IRANIAN ATTACK ON ISRAEL

UNITED NATIONS – The United States and 47 other countries issued a statement unequivocally condemning attacks on Israel by Iran "and its militant partners."

The statement issued Wednesday night calls their "dangerous and destabilizing actions" an escalation "that poses a grave threat to international peace and security."

The Iranian attack on Saturday marked the first time Tehran has launched a direct military assault on Israel. Israeli authorities said Iran launched more than 300 drones and missiles, 99% of which were intercepted by air defenses in tandem with the U.S., Britain, France and Jordan.

The attack took place less than two weeks after a suspected Israeli strike in Syria killed two Iranian generals in an Iranian consulate building in Damascus.

The 48 mainly Western countries also condemned the fact that the ballistic and cruise missiles and attack drones "violated the airspace of several regional states, putting at risk the lives of innocent people in those countries, and appeared to traverse airspace near the holy sites in Jerusalem."

The countries also condemned Iran's seizure of a Portuguese-flagged commercial ship near the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday and called for the immediate release of the ship and its crew.

"We welcome the efforts to avert a further immediate escalation of violence in the region following the successful coordinated efforts to defend against Iran's attack," the statement said. "We call on all regional parties to take steps to avert further escalation of the situation."

UNRWA HEAD SAYS ISRAEL IS TRYING TO END ITS OPERATIONS IN GAZA

UNITED NATIONS – The head of the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees is accusing Israel of trying to end its operations in Gaza and the West Bank.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 50 of 80

Philippe Lazzarini is urging the U.N. Security Council to safeguard his agency's critical role as the relief agency for Palestinians.

Lazzarini told the council Wednesday that Israel has banned the agency from delivering aid to Gaza. International experts have warned that famine is imminent in the northern part of the territory.

Since the war began, Lazzarini said, 178 personnel from the agency known as UNRWA have been killed. More than 160 of the agency's premises, which were mostly used to shelter Palestinians, have been damaged or destroyed, killing more than 400 people.

"We demand an independent investigation and accountability for the blatant disregard for the protected status of humanitarian workers, operations, and facilities under international law," UNRWA's commissioner general said.

Israel has alleged that 12 of UNRWA's thousands of workers participated in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel that sparked the war. Lazzarini pledged to implement recommendations and strengthen safeguards to ensure UNRWA's neutrality.

QATAR SAYS IT'S RETHINKING ITS MEDIATOR ROLE

DOHA, Qatar — Qatar's prime minister said Wednesday the country is reevaluating its role as a mediator between Israel and Hamas.

Qatar has been a key intermediary throughout the war in Gaza. It, along with the U.S. and Egypt, was instrumental in helping negotiate a brief halt to the fighting in November that led to the release of dozens of hostages.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said there had been an "abuse" of Qatar's mediation for "narrow political interests."

He did not name one side in his remarks. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has criticized Qatar and recently threatened to shutter Qatar-owned broadcaster Al Jazeera.

Top Hamas leaders live in exile in Qatar, which is seen as one of the only parties with influence over the militant group.

Al Thani said there were "limits" to the role of mediator and "to the ability to which we can contribute to these negotiations in a constructive manner."

Mediators have been trying to push Hamas and Israel toward a cease-fire deal, but the sides remain far apart on key terms.

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL URGES 'MAXIMUM RESTRAINT'

UNITED NATIONS — U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is reiterating his call for "maximum restraint" between Israel and Iran.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters Wednesday that rhetoric in the Middle East is becoming "increasingly dangerous." Dujarric said the world and the region "cannot afford another open conflict."

The comments follow the Israeli prime minister's vow to respond to Tehran's first direct attack against his country and the Iranian's president's warning of a massive response if Israel does.

UN SECURITY COUNCIL TO VOTE ON PALESTINIAN STATE

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council is scheduled to vote this week on a resolution that would give a green light for a Palestinian state to join the United Nations as a full member, a move opposed by the United States.

The vote was scheduled for Friday afternoon. But Arab nations are pressing for a vote Thursday, when the council is holding a ministerial meeting on the Palestinian Authority's request for full U.N. membership.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas delivered the application in 2011. That bid failed because the Palestinians did not get the required minimum support of nine of the Security Council's 15 members.

In early April, after years of failed on-and-off peace talks, the Palestinians turned to the United Nations again to fulfill their dream of an independent state, sending a letter to the Security Council that was supported by 140 countries.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, had promised to veto any resolution endorsing Palestinian membership.

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood reiterated the longstanding position last week: "The issue of full

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 51 of 80

Palestinian membership is a decision that should be negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians.”

Israel says such steps are an attempt to sidestep the negotiating process. Israel’s current right-wing government is dominated by hard-liners who oppose Palestinian statehood.

ISRAEL’S AIR FORCE REVIEWS ITS DEFENSE OF IRAN’S ATTACK

SDEROT, Israel -- An Israeli military official says the air force is preparing for future attacks from Iran. The official said Wednesday that the air force has been reviewing its successful defense against Iran’s missile attack over the weekend as it makes adjustments for potential additional fighting.

Israel has promised to respond against Iran, raising the possibility of a full-blown war, with Lebanon’s well-armed Hezbollah militant group almost certainly joining the fold.

Hezbollah, which has been locked in daily tit-for-tat fighting with Israel through the six-month Gaza war, is believed to have well over 100,000 rockets and missiles in its arsenal. Combined with Iran’s weapons, that could pose a major test for Israel’s air defense systems.

“We are preparing ourselves for the next time, debriefing the mission and seeing how could we prepare ourselves for the for the next attack,” said Brig. Gen. Doron Gavish, the former commander of Israel’s air defense who is now serving in reserves. He spoke to reporters at a military base in southern Israel.

Iran says its strike was a response to an alleged Israeli airstrike that killed two Iranian generals in Syria on April 1.

Israel says 99% of the more than 300 missiles and drones that Iran launched were intercepted. It was assisted a coalition of international partners and the fact that Iran telegraphed its attack ahead of time.

ISRAEL SAYS IT ARRESTED AND KILLED MILITANTS IN BEIT HANOUN

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said Wednesday that it arrested and killed militants in an operation in the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun over the past week.

The announcement comes after Palestinians said troops conducted raids there and forced displaced people to leave their shelters.

The military said it was a “focused operation” meant to remove militants from a civilian area. It did not say how many people were killed or arrested.

It said it targeted two facilities used as schools after intelligence pointed to militants from Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The military said forces told civilians to leave the building before raiding it.

Palestinians had reported heavy bombardment of Beit Hanoun. Witnesses said many people had been interrogated and some adults were detained and taken to unknown locations.

Palestinians have said the forces have left the town. The military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether the operation was over.

It was the latest in a series of Israeli raids in northern Gaza.

14 WOUNDED IN HEZBOLLAH ATTACK ON NORTHERN ISRAEL

JERUSALEM — A drone and rocket attack by the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah on a border town in Israel’s north wounded 14 soldiers, Israel’s military says.

Wednesday’s strike hit a community center in the town of Arab al-Aramshe where soldiers were sleeping, the military said. Six soldiers were seriously wounded, two were moderately wounded and six were lightly wounded.

Hezbollah has said it targeted a military facility on the border to avenge the killing of a number of its fighters, including a commander, in Israeli strikes the previous day.

The Israeli military said its fighter jets responded by striking the areas from where the projectiles were fired, without elaborating on the location. It also said its fighters struck other Hezbollah military compounds in Naqoura and Yarine in south Lebanon.

Israel’s rescue service Magen David Adom said earlier that at least 13 people were wounded, without disclosing their identities.

Hezbollah, which is sponsored by Iran, has exchanged fire with Israeli forces on a near-daily basis since the start of the war in Gaza.

ITALY WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO ANY UN PEACEKEEPING IN GAZA

Italy’s foreign minister says Rome would be willing to contribute troops to any possible U.N. peacekeeping

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 52 of 80

force for Gaza, even though no such proposal is currently on the table and Israel has rejected the idea.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani suggested a U.N. force under Arab command could help provide security if Israel and the Palestinians make headway on an eventual two-state solution. He said the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Lebanon could be the model.

"If there is the solution and for a short time we need the presence of the United Nations under Arab control, we are ready for sending Italian soldiers," Tajani said ahead of a Group of Seven foreign ministers meeting in Capri.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ruled out a foreign peacekeeping force in Gaza after the war, saying only Israel is capable of keeping the territory demilitarized.

GERMANY STANDS IN 'FULL SOLIDARITY' WITH ISRAEL

TEL AVIV, Israel — German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Wednesday expressed her country's full solidarity with Israel in the face of Iran's attack on the weekend.

She vowed consequences for Iran and said the European Union was working on imposing on further sanctions.

"We will not tolerate this. We stand in full solidarity with Israel," she told reporters. "Iran and its proxies such as Hezbollah or the Houthis must not be allowed to add fuel to the fire."

Baerbock called on Israel to exercise restraint in its reaction to Iran's attack in order to avoid a further escalation of the conflict.

"Everyone must now act prudently and responsibly. I'm not talking about giving in. I'm talking about prudent restraint, which is nothing less than strength," the German minister said. "Because Israel has already shown strength with its defensive victory at the weekend."

The minister also called for the release of the Israeli hostages in Gaza and demanded more humanitarian aid for Gaza's civilian population.

ARROW 3 MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEM USED SUCCESSFULLY, MAKER SAYS

JERUSALEM — The Arrow 3 missile defense system, designed to intercept long-range ballistic missiles, was deployed successfully against a missile salvo for the first time over the weekend to repel the Iranian attack on Israel, the system's maker said Wednesday.

Speaking to The Associated Press, Boaz Levy, chief executive of state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries, the primary builder of the Arrow system, said that the system has been "operational for decades," but was used Saturday "for the very first time against ballistic missiles in a salvo scenario," intercepting high-flying munitions inside and outside the atmosphere.

Of about 300 drones and missiles launched by Iran into Israeli airspace Saturday night, the military says that 99% were intercepted by Israel's multilayered air defense system, wounding only one person — a young girl.

"There is no hermetic seal. no system can give you an hermetic seal. But we did succeed to have 99% of success," said Levy.

The Arrow's success Saturday night in defending Israel is likely to please Germany, which recently signed a contract with Israel and the United States to procure Arrow 3. When operational, the system could protect much of Europe from long-range ballistic missiles.

UK FOREIGN SECRETARY DAVID CAMERON IN ISRAEL FOR MEETINGS

JERUSALEM — U.K. Foreign Secretary David Cameron says "it's clear the Israelis are making a decision to act" against Iran, but he hopes it will do so "in a way that is smart as well as tough and also does as little as possible to escalate this conflict."

Cameron landed in Israel on Wednesday for meetings with senior Israeli and Palestinian officials.

He said his main aim was to "focus back the eyes of the world back on the hostage situation" and urged Hamas to agree to a temporary cease-fire agreement.

Cameron told broadcasters that "the real need is to refocus back on Hamas, back on the hostages, back on getting the aid in, back on getting a pause in the conflict in Gaza."

Cameron is due to travel from the Middle East to a meeting of Group of Seven foreign ministers in Italy.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 53 of 80

He said he wanted the group of wealthy industrialized nations to “show a united front” and impose coordinated sanctions on Iran in response to its “malign activity” in the region.

“They need to be given a clear and unequivocal message by the G7 and I hope that will happen at the weekend,” Cameron said.

RIGHTS GROUP SAYS ISRAELI FORCES JOINED OR FAILED TO STOP SETTLER ATTACKS ON PALESTINIANS

JERUSALEM — Human Rights Watch says Israeli forces either took part in or failed to stop settler attacks on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank that displaced hundreds of people from several Bedouin communities last fall.

Settler violence surged after the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that triggered the war in Gaza, leading to the complete uprooting of at least seven Palestinian Bedouin communities and displacement from several others, according to the New York-based rights group.

Settlers launched another wave of attacks late last week after a 14-year-old Israeli boy was killed in what Israeli authorities say was a militant attack. The United Nations’ human rights office on Tuesday called on Israeli security forces to “immediately end their active participation in and support for settler attacks on Palestinians.”

The Human Rights Watch report released Wednesday focused on the earlier rash of violence. The rights group says Israeli settlers assaulted Palestinians, stole their belongings and livestock and threatened to kill them if they did not leave permanently. The settlers also destroyed homes and schools.

The military didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

IRAN THREATENS ‘MASSIVE’ RESPONSE IF ISRAEL LAUNCHES ‘TINIEST INVASION’

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran’s president has warned that the “tiniest invasion” by Israel would bring a “massive and harsh” response, as the region braces for potential Israeli retaliation after Iran’s attack over the weekend.

President Ebrahim Raisi spoke Wednesday at an annual army parade that was relocated to a barracks north of the capital, Tehran, from its usual venue on a highway in the city’s southern outskirts. Iranian authorities gave no explanation for its relocation, and state TV did not broadcast it live, as it has in previous years.

Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel over the weekend in response to an apparent Israeli strike on Iran’s embassy compound in Syria on April 1 that killed 12 people, including two Iranian generals.

Israel, with help from the United States, the United Kingdom, neighboring Jordan and other nations, successfully intercepted nearly all the missiles and drones.

Israel has vowed to respond, without saying when or how, while its allies have urged all sides to avoid further escalation.

Raisi said Saturday’s attack was a limited one, and that if Iran had wanted to carry out a bigger attack, “nothing would remain from the Zionist regime.” His remarks were carried by the official IRNA news agency.

UN APPEALS FOR \$2.8 BILLION TO PROVIDE AID TO 3 MILLION PALESTINIANS

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations is appealing for \$2.8 billion to provide desperately needed aid to 3 million Palestinians, stressing that tackling looming famine in war-torn Gaza doesn’t only require food but sanitation, water and health facilities.

Andrea De Domenico, the head of the U.N. humanitarian office for Gaza and the West Bank, told reporters Tuesday that “massive operations” are required to restore those services and meet minimum standards — and this can’t be done during military operations.

He pointed to the destruction of hospitals, water and sanitation facilities, homes, roads and schools, adding that “there is not a single university that is standing in Gaza.” De Domenico said there are signs of Israel’s “good intention” to get humanitarian aid into Gaza, but the U.N. keeps pushing because it’s not enough. He pointed to Israeli denials and delays on U.N. requests for aid convoys to enter Gaza.

The U.N. humanitarian official called for a complete change of focus to recognize that preventing famine goes beyond providing flour for bread or pita and to recognize that “water, sanitation and health are fundamental to curb famine.”

25 years after Columbine, trauma shadows survivors of the school shooting

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Hours after she escaped the Columbine High School shooting, 14-year-old Missy Mendo slept between her parents in bed, still wearing the shoes she had on when she fled her math class. She wanted to be ready to run.

Twenty-five years later, and with Mendo now a mother herself, the trauma from that horrific day remains close on her heels.

It caught up to her when 60 people were shot dead in 2017 at a country music festival in Las Vegas, a city she had visited a lot while working in the casino industry. Then again in 2022, when 19 students and two teachers were shot and killed in Uvalde, Texas.

Mendo had been filling out her daughter's pre-kindergarten application when news of the elementary school shooting broke. She read a few lines of a news story about Uvalde, then put her head down and cried.

"It felt like nothing changed," she recalls thinking.

In the quarter-century since two gunmen at Columbine shot and killed 12 fellow students and a teacher in suburban Denver — an attack that played out on live television and ushered in the modern era of school shootings — the traumas of that day have continued to shadow Mendo and others who were there.

Some needed years to view themselves as Columbine survivors since they were not physically wounded. Yet things like fireworks could still trigger disturbing memories. The aftershocks — often unacknowledged in the years before mental health struggles were more widely recognized — led to some survivors suffering insomnia, dropping out of school, or disengaging from their spouses or families.

Survivors and other members of the community plan to attend a candlelight vigil on the steps of the state's capitol Friday night, the eve of the shooting's anniversary.

April is particularly hard for Mendo, 39, whose "brain turns to mashed potatoes" each year. She shows up at dentist appointments early, misplaces her keys, forgets to close the refrigerator door.

She leans on therapy and the understanding of an expanding group of shooting survivors she has met through The Rebels Project, a support group founded by other Columbine survivors following a 2012 shooting when a gunman killed 12 people at a movie theater in the nearby suburb of Aurora. Mendo started seeing a therapist after her child's first birthday, at the urging of fellow survivor moms.

After she broke down over Uvalde, Mendo, a single parent, said she talked to her mom, took a walk to get some fresh air, then finished her daughter's pre-kindergarten application.

"Was I afraid of her going into the public school system? Absolutely," Mendo said of her daughter. "I wanted her to have as normal of a life as possible."

Researchers who've studied the long-term effects of gun violence in schools have quantified protracted struggles among survivors, including long-term academic effects like absenteeism and reduced college enrollment, and lower earnings later in life.

"Just counting lives lost is kind of an incorrect way to capture the full cost of these tragedies," said Maya Rossin-Slater, an associate professor in the Stanford University School of Medicine's Department of Health Policy.

Mass killings have recurred with numbing frequency in the years since Columbine, with almost 600 attacks in which four or more people have died, not including the perpetrator, since 2006, according to data compiled by The Associated Press.

More than 80% of the 3,045 victims in those attacks were killed by a firearm.

Nationwide hundreds of thousands of people have been exposed to school shootings that are often not mass-casualty events but still traumatic, Rossin-Slater said. The impacts can last a lifetime, she added, resulting in "kind of a persistent, reduced potential" for survivors.

Those who were present at Columbine say the years since have given them time to learn more about what happened to them and how to cope with it.

Heather Martin, now 42, was a Columbine senior in 1999. In college, she began crying during a fire drill,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 55 of 80

realizing later that a fire alarm had gone off for three hours when she and 60 other students hid in a barricaded office during the high school shooting. She couldn't return to that class and was marked absent each time, and says she failed it after refusing to write a final paper on school violence, despite telling her professor of her experience at Columbine.

It took 10 years for her to see herself as a survivor, after she was invited back with the rest of the class of 1999 for an anniversary event. She saw fellow classmates having similar struggles and almost immediately decided to go back to college to become a teacher.

Martin, a co-founder of The Rebels Project, named after Columbine's mascot, said 25 years has given her time to struggle and figure out how to work out of those struggles.

"I just know myself so well now and know how I respond to things and what might activate me and how I can bounce back and be OK. And most importantly I think I can recognize when I am not OK and when I do need to seek help," she said.

Kiki Leyba, a first-year teacher at Columbine in 1999, was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder soon after the shooting. He felt a strong sense of commitment to return to the school, where he threw himself into his work. But he continued to have panic attacks.

To help him cope, he had sleeping pills and some Xanax for anxiety, Leyba said. One therapist recommended chamomile tea.

Things got harder for him after the 2002 graduation of Mendo's class, the last cohort of students who lived through the shooting since they had been through so much together.

By 2005, after years of not taking care of himself and suffering from lack of sleep, Leyba said he would often check out from family life, sleeping in on the weekends and turning into a "blob on the couch." Finally, his wife Kallie enrolled him in a one-week trauma treatment program, arranging for him to take the time off from work without telling him.

"Thankfully that really gave me a kind of a foothold ... to do the work to climb out of that," said Leyba, who said breathing exercises, journaling, meditation and anti-depressants have helped him.

Like Mendo and Martin, he has traveled around the country to work with survivors of shootings.

"That worst day has transformed into something I can offer to others," said Leyba, who is in Washington, D.C. this week meeting with officials about gun violence and promoting a new film about his trauma journey.

Mendo still lives in the area, and her 5-year-old daughter attends school near Columbine. When her daughter's school locked down last year as police swarmed the neighborhood during a hostage situation, Mendo recalled worrying things like: What if my child is in danger? What if there is another school shooting like Columbine?

When Mendo picked up her daughter, she seemed a little scared, and she hugged her mom a little tighter. Mendo breathed deeply to stay calm, a technique she had learned in therapy, and put on a brave face.

"If I was putting down some fear, she would pick it up," she said. "I didn't want that for her."

Tsunami alert after a volcano in Indonesia has several big eruptions and thousands are told to leave

By EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian authorities issued a tsunami alert Wednesday after eruptions at Ruang mountain sent ash thousands of feet high. Officials ordered more than 11,000 people to leave the area.

The volcano on the northern side of Sulawesi island had at least five large eruptions in the past 24 hours, Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation said. Authorities raised their volcano alert to its highest level.

At least 800 residents left the area earlier Wednesday.

Indonesia, an archipelago of 270 million people, has 120 active volcanoes. It is prone to volcanic activity because it sits along the "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines around the Pacific Ocean.

Authorities urged tourists and others to stay at least 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) from the 725-meter (2,378 foot) Ruang volcano.

Officials worry that part of the volcano could collapse into the sea and cause a tsunami as in a 1871 eruption there.

Tagulandang island to the volcano's northeast is again at risk, and its residents are among those being told to evacuate.

Indonesia's National Disaster Mitigation Agency said residents will be relocated to Manado, the nearest city, on Sulawesi island, a journey of six hours by boat.

In 2018, the eruption of Indonesia's Anak Krakatau volcano caused a tsunami along the coasts of Sumatra and Java after parts of the mountain fell into the ocean, killing 430 people.

UN agency helping Palestinians in Gaza seeks support against Israel's demands for its dissolution

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The head of the U.N. agency that has helped millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank for decades urged the Security Council on Wednesday to ensure its survival as Israel again demanded its dissolution, accusing the agency of becoming part of Hamas' "terror war machine."

Philippe Lazzarini told the council that dismantling the agency known as UNRWA would deepen Gaza's humanitarian crisis and speed up the onset of famine. International experts have warned of imminent famine in northern Gaza and said half the territory's 2.3 million people could be pushed to the brink of starvation if the six-month Israeli-Hamas war intensifies.

Lazzarini said ending the agency's operations also would have other "lasting repercussions" on Gaza, leaving a half million children without education and "fueling anger, resentment and endless cycles of violence." In addition, it would jeopardize the transition when the war ends by depriving Gaza's population of essential services, including health care, food and other humanitarian aid, he said.

Israeli Ambassador Gilad Erdan claimed, without providing evidence, that UNRWA has been totally infiltrated by Hamas, which controlled Gaza before the war. He also accused UNRWA of being part of a Palestinian plot to annihilate Israel and becoming "the world's biggest advocate for a one-state solution" run by Palestinians.

"Today in Gaza, UNRWA is Hamas and Hamas is UNRWA," Erdan said.

"Israel cannot and will not allow UNRWA to continue in Gaza as it did in the past," he said, telling the council there are alternative aid organizations and U.N. agencies that can help Palestinians in the territory. "The time has come to defund UNRWA," he said.

The clash over UNRWA follows Israeli allegations that 12 of the agency's 13,000 workers in Gaza participated in the surprise Oct. 7 Hamas attack into southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people and forced 250 others into captivity.

The allegations led to the suspension of contributions to UNRWA by the United States and more than a dozen other countries.

It also sparked two investigations — one by the U.N.'s internal watchdog of the 12 UNRWA staff who have been fired and a second, independent probe into how the U.N. agency ensures its neutrality.

A report on the second investigation is to be released Monday, and Lazzarini pledged to implement its recommendations and strengthen safeguards to ensure UNRWA is neutral.

He argued that the real aim of Israel's efforts to end UNRWA's operations is "about ending the refugee status of millions of Palestinians." He called allegations that UNRWA is perpetuating their refugee status "false and dishonest."

"The agency exists because a political solution does not," Lazzarini said.

He accused the international community of containing rather than resolving the more than 75-year-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He said when a Palestinian state that can deliver education, health care and social support is established, UNRWA's role will be finished.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 57 of 80

Israel got no support for getting rid of UNRWA at the Security Council meeting. All 15 council members, including the United States, Israel's closest ally, voiced support for the agency along with Arab and European representatives.

The delighted Palestinian U.N. ambassador, Riyad Mansour, told reporters after the meeting: "Wasn't today's debate impressive? Everyone except one" backed UNRWA.

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood said the United States recognizes "UNRWA's indispensable role in distributing humanitarian assistance and maintaining continuity of care in Gaza." He called UNRWA "the bedrock of support for the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank."

Wood urged Israel to end its ban on UNRWA delivering desperately needed aid to Gazans, saying "the lifting of restrictions on its work" is critical to averting famine.

Lazzarini told the council that since Oct. 7, 178 UNRWA personnel have been killed and over 160 of its premises that were mostly used to shelter Palestinians have been damaged or destroyed, killing more than 400 people. He said some UNRWA premises vacated by the agency have been used by Israeli forces, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, and its headquarters has been occupied "militarily," amid allegations of tunnels under the premises.

"We demand an independent investigation and accountability for the blatant disregard for the protected status of humanitarian workers, operations and facilities under international law," he said.

At the start of the council meeting, members and diplomats in the chamber observed a minute of silence in tribute to all humanitarian workers who had been killed.

Wood said the United States is "deeply concerned Israel has not done enough to protect humanitarian aid workers or civilians."

He reiterated demands from President Joe Biden to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on April 4 that Israel "implement a series of specific, concrete and measurable steps to address civilian harm, humanitarian suffering and the safety of aid workers."

Lazzarini told reporters after the meeting that he has never received any documents from Israel on its allegations about Hamas' involvement in UNRWA.

"There is a lot of disinformation going on," he said, and allegations must be substantiated so UNRWA can take proper action.

The U.S. Congress has suspended any money for the agency until March 2025. The United States was UNRWA's biggest donor. Lazzarini said for the current U.S. fiscal year it contributed nearly \$400 million, and the agency will have to compensate for that shortfall.

He said most countries have resumed funding UNRWA, with "just a handful" waiting for Monday's report on its operations before taking a final decision. UNRWA now has funding until the end of June, he said.

Biden vows to shield US steel industry by blocking Japanese merger and seeking new Chinese tariffs

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — President Joe Biden suggested to cheering, unionized steelworkers on Wednesday that his administration would thwart the acquisition of U.S. Steel by a Japanese company, and he called for a tripling of tariffs on Chinese steel, seeking to use trade policy to win over working-class votes in the battleground state of Pennsylvania.

The Democratic president's pitch comes as Donald Trump, his likely Republican opponent, tries to chart a path back to the White House with tough-on-China rhetoric and steep tariff proposals of his own.

During a visit to the Pittsburgh headquarters of United Steelworkers, Biden said U.S. Steel "has been an iconic American company for more than a century and it should remain totally American."

Administration officials are reviewing the proposed acquisition of U.S. Steel by Japan's Nippon Steel, and Biden said last month he would oppose the deal, saying it was "vital for it to remain an American steel company that is domestically owned and operated."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 58 of 80

But in front of a union audience, he went much further in pledging he may block it.

"American-owned, American-operated by American union steelworkers — the best in the world — and that's going to happen, I promise you," he said.

In another step that his administration argues can protect domestic steelworkers, Biden also announced that he will push for higher tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum, aiming to insulate American producers from a flood of cheap imports.

Biden's push on steel reflects the intersection of international trade policy with his reelection effort, although the White House insisted they were more about shielding American manufacturing from unfair trade practices overseas than firing up a union audience.

The current tariff rate is 7.5% for both steel and aluminum but could climb to 25% under Biden's proposal. The president said he was asking his trade representative to seek the increase, and separate tariffs of 10% on aluminum and 25% on steel would also remain in place.

The U.S. imported roughly \$6.1 billion in steel products in the 12 months ending in February 2023, but just 3% of those imports came from China, according to Census Bureau figures. Citing existing trade barriers, the American Iron and Steel Institute said China last year accounted for even less — just 2.1% of U.S. steel imports — making it America's seventh-biggest source of foreign steel.

However, a senior administration official said there are concerns about China ramping up exports, making the higher tariff levels necessary as a preventative measure.

Liu Pengyu, a spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said the "U.S. is making the same mistake again and again" by seeking increased tariffs. In a statement, he also dismissed levies already in place as "the embodiment of unilateralism and protectionism of the U.S."

Biden insisted that getting tougher on China was sound policy, including when it comes to preventing the exportation of advanced technologies that could "undermine our national security."

He said he delivered a similar message to Chinese President Xi Jinping during previous conversations, telling him, "You'll use them for all the wrong reasons, so you're not going to get those advanced computer chips."

Biden criticized Trump for failing to take such steps, saying that "for all his tough talk on China, it never occurred to my predecessor to do any of that."

The administration also promised to pursue investigations against countries and importers that try to saturate existing markets with Chinese steel, and said it was working with Mexico to ensure that Chinese companies cannot circumvent the tariffs by shipping steel there for subsequent export to the United States.

"The president understands we must invest in American manufacturing. But we also have to protect those investments and those workers from unfair exports associated with China's industrial overcapacity," said White House national economic adviser Lael Brainard.

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai also announced Wednesday that her office, acting on a petition from five national labor unions, was investigating China for "targeting the maritime, logistics and shipbuilding sectors for dominance."

China's Commerce Ministry responded hours later that the "U.S. petition is full of false accusations."

It "misinterprets normal trade and investment activities as damaging to U.S. national security and corporate interests," the ministry said in a statement. "And blames China for the U.S.'s own industrial issues, lacking factual basis and running counter to common sense in economics."

China produces about half of the world's steel and is making far more than its domestic market needs. It sells steel on the world market for less than half what U.S.-produced steel costs, senior Biden administration officials said.

The first step to the higher tariffs is the completion of a review of Chinese trade practices. Once Biden gives the official authorization, there will be a public notice and a comment period that could take weeks.

Biden is on a three-day Pennsylvania swing that began in his childhood hometown of Scranton on Tuesday and will include a visit to Philadelphia on Thursday. After ignoring the first two days of Trump's hush money trial in New York, Biden made a veiled reference to it on Wednesday, joking that his predecessor is "busy right now."

Biden's announcement on steel tariffs was cheered by U.S. steelmakers. Kevin Dempsey, president of the American Iron and Steel Institute, accused China of disrupting "world markets both by subsidizing the production of steel and other products, and by dumping those products in the U.S. and other markets."

To coincide with the announcement, Biden's campaign released a 60-second ad that will air on Pennsylvania television for the next five days. It features a steelworker, who is also a small-town mayor, praising the president's economic policies.

Higher tariffs can carry major economic risks. Steel and aluminum could become more expensive, possibly increasing the costs of cars, construction materials and other key goods for U.S. consumers. Also, inflation has already been a drag on Biden's political fortunes, and his turn toward protectionism echoes Trump's playbook.

The former president, who has said he would never allow the acquisition of U.S. Steel by a foreign company to go through, imposed broader tariffs on Chinese goods during his administration and has threatened to increase levies on Chinese goods unless they trade on his preferred terms as he campaigns for another term.

An outside analysis by the consultancy Oxford Economics has suggested that putting in place the tariffs Trump has proposed could hurt the overall U.S. economy.

Biden is off on details of his uncle's WWII death as he calls Trump unfit to lead the military

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday misstated key details about his uncle's death in World War II as he honored the man's wartime service and said Donald Trump was unworthy of serving as commander in chief.

While in Pittsburgh, Biden spoke about his uncle, 2nd Lt. Ambrose J. Finnegan Jr., aiming to draw a contrast with reports that Trump, while president, had called fallen service members "suckers" and "losers."

Finnegan, the brother of Biden's mother, "got shot down in New Guinea," Biden said. The president said Finnegan's body was never recovered and "there used to be a lot of cannibals" in the area. Biden, who also relayed a version of the story earlier in the day after stopping by the memorial in Scranton, was off on the particulars.

The U.S. government's record of missing service members does not attribute Finnegan's death to hostile action or indicate cannibals were any factor.

"We have a tradition in my family my grandfather started," said Biden, a toddler at the time of his uncle's death in 1944. "When you visit a gravesite of a family member — it's going to sound strange to you — but you say three Hail Marys. And that's what I was doing at the site."

Referring to Trump, the presumptive GOP presidential nominee, Biden said, "That man doesn't deserve to have been the commander in chief for my son, my uncle."

Biden's elder son, Beau, died in 2015 of brain cancer, which the president has stated he believes was linked to his son's yearlong deployment in Iraq, where the military used burn pits to dispose of waste.

Some former Trump officials have claimed the then-president disparaged fallen service members as "suckers" and "losers" when, they said, he did not want to travel in 2018 to a cemetery for American war dead in France. Trump denied the allegation, saying, "What animal would say such a thing?"

According to the Pentagon's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, Biden's uncle, known by the family as "Bosie," died on May 14, 1944, while a passenger on an Army Air Forces plane that, "for unknown reasons," was forced to ditch in the Pacific Ocean off the northern coast of New Guinea. "Both engines failed at low altitude, and the aircraft's nose hit the water hard," the agency states in its listing of Finnegan. "Three men failed to emerge from the sinking wreck and were lost in the crash."

The agency said Finnegan was a passenger on the plane when it was lost. "He has not been associated with any remains recovered from the area after the war and is still unaccounted-for," according to the agency.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 60 of 80

White House spokesman Andrew Bates did not address the discrepancy between the agency's records and Biden's account when he issued a statement on the matter.

"President Biden is proud of his uncle's service in uniform," Bates said, adding Finnegan "lost his life when the military aircraft he was on crashed in the Pacific after taking off near New Guinea."

Biden "highlighted his uncle's story as he made the case for honoring our 'sacred commitment ... to equip those we send to war and take care of them and their families when they come home,' and as he reiterated that the last thing American veterans are is 'suckers' or 'losers.'"

The Democratic president also misstated when uncles enlisted in the military, saying they joined "when D-Day occurred, the next day," in June 1944, when they actually joined weeks after the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor.

After Finnegan's death, a local newspaper published a telegram from Gen. Douglas MacArthur expressing condolences to Finnegan's family:

"Dear Mr. Finnegan: In the death of your son, Second Lieutenant Ambrose J. Finnegan Jr., while in service of his country, you have my profound sympathy. Your consolation may be that he died in the uniform of our beloved country, serving in a crusade from which a better world for all will come. Very faithfully, Douglas MacArthur."

Biden, in his 2008 book "Promises to Keep," made only brief mention of his uncle, describing him as flyer who was killed in New Guinea.

Democrats clear path to bring proposed repeal of Arizona's near-total abortion ban to a vote

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Democrats in the Arizona Senate cleared a path to bring a proposed repeal of the state's near-total ban on abortions to a vote after the state's highest court concluded the law can be enforced and the state House blocked efforts to undo the long-dormant statute.

Although no vote was taken on the repeal itself, Republican Sens. T.J. Shope and Shawna Bolick sided with 14 Democrats in the Senate on Wednesday in changing rules to let a repeal proposal advance after the deadline for hearing bills had passed. Proponents say the Senate could vote on the repeal as early as May 1.

If the proposed repeal wins final approval from the Republican-controlled Legislature and is signed into law by Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs, the 2022 statute banning the procedure after 15 weeks of pregnancy would become the prevailing abortion law.

The move by the Senate came after Republicans in the Arizona House, for the second time in a week, blocked attempts on Wednesday to bring a repeal bill to a vote. One Republican joined 29 Democrats in the Arizona House to bring the repeal measure to a vote Wednesday, but the effort failed twice on 30-30 votes.

The state's near-total ban, which predates Arizona's statehood, permits abortions only for saving the woman's life and provides no exceptions for rape or incest. It carries a sentence of two to five years in prison for doctors or anyone else who assists in an abortion.

Last week, the Arizona Supreme Court drastically altered the legal landscape for terminating pregnancies in the state, concluding the 1864 law can be enforced and suggesting doctors can be prosecuted under the statute.

The debate in the House over whether to allow a vote on the repeal proposal was much fierier than in the Senate. Members from pro-life groups packed the House's gallery and gave a standing ovation after efforts to bring the repeal bill to a vote was defeated.

House Speaker Ben Toma said those wanting to repeal the law were demanding action too soon, noting the court decision to revive the law came only a week ago. He said the only way he would bring the repeal bill to a vote would be if his fellow Republicans wanted it.

"We have deeply held beliefs," Toma said. "And I would ask everyone in this chamber to respect the fact

that someone wants to believe that abortion is in fact the murder of children.”

Democratic Rep. Alma Hernandez of Tucson said Republicans are failing to act on a matter of great importance to Arizonans. “This is what we are arguing about right now: whether or not we should overturn something that is archaic, something that is going to really impact women in Arizona,” Hernandez said. “And yet we want to talk about a process or the right process.”

Rep. Matt Gress, the Phoenix Republican who joined with Democrats in trying to bring the repeal measure to a vote, said the 160-year-old law doesn’t reflect the values of most people living in the state.

“We need to get that taken care of and get it taken care of as soon as possible,” Gress said. “I think the eyes of the nation are on Arizona.”

In a statement, Hobbs, who supports a repeal of the law, said, “Republican extremists in the House have yet again failed to do the right thing. In just one week living under this new reality, women, doctors, and healthcare providers have already begun to feel the devastating effects of living under a total abortion ban. We cannot go on like this.”

The Center for Arizona Policy, a longtime backer of anti-abortion proposals before the Legislature, released a statement saying, “Today was a victory for life, even if only temporarily. Most pro-life lawmakers kept their promise today to protect the unborn and their mothers and not repeal Arizona’s pre-Roe law.”

The Civil War era law had been blocked since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wade decision guaranteed the constitutional right to an abortion nationwide.

After Roe v. Wade was overturned in June 2022, then-Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, a Republican, persuaded a state judge to lift an injunction that blocked enforcement of the 1864 ban. Brnovich’s Democratic successor, Attorney General Kris Mayes, urged the state’s high court to hold the line against it.

The state’s highest court said enforcement of the 1864 law won’t begin for at least two weeks. However, it could be up to two months, based on an agreement reached in a related case in Arizona. _____ Associated Press writer Scott Sonner in Reno, Nevada, contributed to this report.

Lawyers for Nassar assault survivors have reached \$100M deal with Justice Department, AP source says

By ED WHITE Associated Press

The U.S. Justice Department has agreed to pay approximately \$100 million to settle claims with about 100 people who say they were sexually assaulted by sports doctor Larry Nassar, a source with direct knowledge of the negotiations told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The deal has not been finalized and no money has been paid, the source said on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to speak before a formal announcement.

An internal investigation found that FBI agents mishandled abuse allegations by women more than a year before Nassar was arrested in 2016.

The settlement was first reported by The Wall Street Journal. A Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment.

Nassar was a Michigan State University sports doctor as well as a doctor at Indianapolis-based USA Gymnastics. He is serving decades in prison for assaulting female athletes, including medal-winning Olympic gymnasts, under the guise of treatment.

Lawyers filed claims against the government, focusing on a 15-month period when FBI agents in Indianapolis and Los Angeles had knowledge of allegations against Nassar but apparently took no action, beginning in 2015. The Justice Department inspector general confirmed fundamental errors.

Nassar’s assaults continued until his arrest in fall 2016, authorities said.

The assault survivors include decorated Olympians Simone Biles, Aly Raisman and McKayla Maroney.

“I’m sorry that so many different people let you down, over and over again,” FBI Director Christopher Wray told survivors at a Senate hearing in 2021. “And I’m especially sorry that there were people at the FBI who had their own chance to stop this monster back in 2015 and failed.”

The Michigan attorney general’s office ultimately handled the assault charges against Nassar, while fed-

eral prosecutors in western Michigan filed a child sex abuse images case against him.

Michigan State University, which was also accused of missing chances over many years to stop Nassar, agreed to pay \$500 million to more than 300 women and girls who were assaulted. USA Gymnastics and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee made a \$380 million settlement.

What's inside the \$95 billion House package focused on aiding Ukraine and Israel

KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Mike Johnson has unveiled a long-awaited package of bills that will provide military aid to Ukraine and Israel, replenish U.S. weapons systems and give humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza.

The package totals \$95.3 billion in spending, which matches the total that the Senate passed in mid-February. But there are also a few differences with the Senate bill designed to win over some House conservatives.

Here's a look at what is in the bills that Johnson hopes to pass by this weekend.

UKRAINE

The aid to support Ukraine totals about \$61 billion. Republicans on the House Appropriations Committee said that more than a third of that amount would be dedicated to replenishing weapons and ammunition systems for the U.S. military.

The overall amount of money provided to Ukraine for the purchase of weapons from the U.S. is roughly the same in the House and Senate bills — \$13.8 billion.

The main difference between the two packages is that the House bill provides more than \$9 billion in economic assistance to Ukraine in the form of "forgivable loans." The Senate bill included no such provision seeking repayment.

The president would be authorized to set the terms of the loan to Ukraine and also be given the power to cancel it. Congress could override the cancellation but would have to generate enough votes to override a veto, a high bar considering how the two chambers are so evenly divided.

Johnson, as he seeks GOP support for the package, noted that former President Donald Trump has endorsed a "loan concept."

He also noted that the House package includes a requirement for the Biden administration to provide a plan and a strategy to Congress for what it seeks to achieve in Ukraine. The plan would be required within 45 days of the bill being signed into law. House Republicans frequently complain that they have yet to see a strategy from Biden for winning the war.

The bill said the report from the administration must be a multiyear plan that spells out "specific and achievable objectives." It also asked for an estimate of the resources required to achieve the U.S. objectives and a description of the national security implications if the objectives are not met.

ISRAEL

Aid in the legislation to support Israel and provide humanitarian relief to citizens of Gaza comes to more than \$26 billion. The amount of money dedicated to replenishing Israel's missile defense systems totals about \$4 billion in the House and Senate bills. An additional \$2.4 billion for current U.S. military operations in the regions is also the same in both bills.

Some conservatives have been critical of the aid for Gaza. At the end of the day, though, Johnson risked losing critical Democratic support for the package if Republicans had excluded it. The humanitarian assistance comes to more than \$9 billion for Gaza, where millions of Palestinians face starvation, lack of clean water and disease outbreaks.

INDO-PACIFIC

The investments to counter China and ensure a strong deterrence in the region come to about \$8 billion. The overall amount of money and the investments in the two bills is about the same with a quarter of funds used to replenish weapons and ammunition systems that had been provided to Taiwan.

NBA bans Jontay Porter after gambling probe shows he shared information, bet on games

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Toronto Raptors player Jontay Porter was banned for life from the NBA on Wednesday after a league probe found he disclosed confidential information to sports bettors and wagered on games, even betting on the Raptors to lose.

Porter is the second person to be banned by Commissioner Adam Silver for violating league rules. The other was now-former Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling in 2014, shortly after Silver took office.

In making the announcement, Silver called Porter's actions "blatant."

"There is nothing more important than protecting the integrity of NBA competition for our fans, our teams and everyone associated with our sport, which is why Jontay Porter's blatant violations of our gambling rules are being met with the most severe punishment," Silver said.

The investigation started once the league learned from "licensed sports betting operators and an organization that monitors legal betting markets" about unusual gambling patterns surrounding Porter's performance in a game on March 20 against Sacramento. The league determined that Porter gave a bettor information about his own health status prior that game and said that another individual — known to be an NBA bettor — placed an \$80,000 bet that Porter would not hit the numbers set for him in parlays through an online sports book. That bet would have won \$1.1 million.

Porter took himself out of that game after less than three minutes, claiming illness, none of his stats meeting the totals set in the parlay. The \$80,000 bet was frozen and not paid out, the league said, and the NBA started an investigation not long afterward.

"You don't want this for the kid, you don't want this for our team and we don't want this for our league, that's for sure," Raptors President Masai Ujiri said Wednesday in Toronto, speaking shortly before the NBA announced Porter's ban. "My first reaction is obviously surprise, because none of us, I don't think anybody, saw this coming."

Later, after the NBA revealed the ban, the Raptors said they are "fully supportive of the league's decision to ban Jontay Porter from the NBA and are grateful for the swift resolution to this investigation. We will continue to cooperate with all ongoing inquiries."

The league has partnerships and other relationships with more than two dozen gaming companies, many of whom advertise during NBA games in a variety of ways. Silver himself has been a longtime proponent of legal sports wagering, but the league has very strict rules for players and employees regarding betting.

And what Porter was found to have done was in violation of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, which states: "Any Player who, directly or indirectly, wagers money or anything of value on any game or event in the Association or in the NBA G League shall, on being charged with such wagering, be given an opportunity to answer such charges after due notice, and the decision of the Commissioner shall be final, binding, and conclusive and unappealable."

Silver cautioned last week that this move was possible, saying what Porter was accused of represented "cardinal sin" in the NBA. Porter has not commented since the investigation began, and never played for the Raptors again — he was listed as out for all of Toronto's games for the remainder of the season citing personal reasons.

The league also determined that Porter — the brother of Denver Nuggets forward Michael Porter Jr. — placed at least 13 bets on NBA games using someone else's betting account. The bets ranged from \$15 to \$22,000; the total wagered was \$54,094 and generated a payout of \$76,059, or net winnings of \$21,965.

Those wagers did not involve any game in which Porter played, the NBA said. But three of the wagers were multi-game parlays, including a bet where Porter — who was not playing in the games involved — wagered on the Raptors to lose. All three of those bets lost.

"While legal sports betting creates transparency that helps identify suspicious or abnormal activity, this matter also raises important issues about the sufficiency of the regulatory framework currently in place,

including the types of bets offered on our games and players," Silver said. "Working closely with all relevant stakeholders across the industry, we will continue to work diligently to safeguard our league and game."

Porter was on what is called a two-way contract, meaning he could play for both the Raptors and their affiliate in the G League. His salary for this year was around \$410,000; had the Raptors signed him to a standard NBA contract next season, as seemed possible, his salary would have exceeded \$2 million.

The 24-year-old Porter averaged 4.4 points, 3.2 rebounds and 2.3 assists in 26 games, including five starts. He also played in 11 games for Memphis in the 2020-21 season.

ESPN first reported the investigation, which it said surrounded Porter's performance in games on Jan. 26 and March 20. In both games, Porter played briefly before leaving citing injury or illness. Porter played 4 minutes, 24 seconds against the Los Angeles Clippers in the first of those games, then 2:43 against Sacramento in the second game.

In both of those games, Porter did not come close to hitting the prop-wager lines for points, rebounds and 3-pointers that bettors could play at some sportsbooks. For example, one set of prop wagers for Porter for the Clippers game was set at 5.5 points, 4.5 rebounds and 1.5 assists; he finished with no points, three rebounds and one assist. For the Kings game, they were around 7.5 points and 5.5 rebounds; Porter finished that game with no points and two rebounds.

The league said its probe "remains open and may result in further findings," and that those findings are being shared with federal prosecutors.

Netanyahu brushes off calls for restraint, saying Israel will decide how to respond to Iran's attack

By JULIA FRANKEL and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday his country would be the one to decide whether and how to respond to Iran's major air assault earlier this week, brushing off calls for restraint from close allies.

Israel has vowed to respond to Iran's unprecedented attack without saying when or how, leaving the region bracing for further escalation after months of unrest linked to the ongoing war in Gaza.

Israel's allies have been urging Israel since the attack to hold back on any response that could spiral. These calls were repeated on Wednesday during visits by the British and German foreign ministers.

The diplomatic pressures came as Iran's president warned that even the "tiniest" invasion of its territory would bring a "massive and harsh" response. Violence meanwhile surged on Wednesday between Israel and the Iran-backed Lebanese militant Hezbollah group, which fired a volley of rockets and drones on northern Israel. The attack wounded at least 14 Israeli soldiers, six seriously, the army said. The military said it struck Hezbollah targets deep inside Lebanon in response.

Speaking to a meeting of his Cabinet, Netanyahu said he met Wednesday with both visiting foreign ministers and thanked them for their countries' support. But he said Israel would make the call on its own on how to respond despite "all sorts of suggestions and advice" coming from Israel's allies, some of whom — including the United States, the United Kingdom and France — helped Israel repel Iran's drone and missile assault.

"I want to be clear: we will make our decisions ourselves. The state of Israel will do whatever is necessary to defend itself," Netanyahu said.

Despite the tough rhetoric, Israel appears unlikely to attack Iran directly without at least the support of its top ally, the U.S. But it could resort to more covert methods such as targeting senior Iranian commanders or Iran-backed groups in other countries, or launching a cyber attack.

It's unclear how Iran would then respond, given the heightened tensions — any miscalculation by either side risks setting off a regional war.

President Joe Biden's administration on Tuesday said it would place new sanctions on Iran and has worked to coordinate a global rebuke of the attack while urging all sides to de-escalate. U.S. officials said

earlier this week that Biden told Netanyahu that Washington would not participate in any offensive action against Iran.

Over the weekend, Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel in response to an apparent Israeli strike on Iran's Embassy compound in Syria on April 1 that killed 12 people, including two Iranian generals.

Israel says it and its partners successfully intercepted nearly all the missiles and drones. A 7-year-old girl was wounded in the attack, which did not cause any deaths or major damage.

Israel and Iran have waged a shadow war for decades, but the strike over the weekend was the first direct Iranian military attack on Israel.

With tensions surging, Israel's allies have reinforced a message of restraint. British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock each appealed for calm while on separate visits to the region.

Cameron said "it's clear the Israelis are making a decision to act" against Iran, but he hoped they would do so "in a way that is smart as well as tough and also does as little as possible to escalate this conflict." He spoke after meeting with Israel's President Isaac Herzog, whose office is mainly ceremonial.

Baerbock said Germany stands "in full solidarity with Israel" but called on it to exercise restraint.

"Everyone must now act prudently and responsibly. I'm not talking about giving in. I'm talking about prudent restraint, which is nothing less than strength," she told reporters. "Because Israel has already shown strength with its defensive victory at the weekend."

The ministers said they would push for further international sanctions on Iran.

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi warned Israel against any retaliation as he addressed an annual army parade, which had been relocated to a barracks from its usual route and was not carried live on state TV — possibly because of fears that it could be targeted.

In remarks carried by Iran's official IRNA news agency, Raisi said the weekend attack was limited, and that if Iran had wanted to carry out a bigger attack, "nothing would remain from the Zionist regime."

Regional tensions have soared since the Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel launched by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Palestinian militant groups supported by Iran. The attack killed some 1,200 Israelis, and the militants took around 250 hostages. Israel responded with one of the deadliest and most destructive military onslaughts in recent history, killing nearly 34,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, who do not distinguish between combatants and civilians in their count but say most of the dead are women and children.

Israel has withdrawn most of its forces from Gaza after major offensives that left its two biggest cities — Gaza City and Khan Younis — in ruins. But Israeli officials say the war is not over and that they plan to send ground forces into the southernmost Gaza city of Rafah, where more than half the territory's population of 2.3 million people have sought refuge from fighting elsewhere.

Hamas is still holding around 130 hostages, a quarter of whom are believed to be dead, and international efforts to broker a cease-fire and hostage release have made little progress.

Hezbollah, another close Iran ally, has traded fire with Israel along the border on a near-daily basis since the war began, in a low-intensity conflict that risks igniting all-out war. Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria have also launched attacks, and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have targeted international shipping in the Red Sea, portraying it as a blockade of Israel.

Columbia's president rebuts claims she has allowed the university to become a hotbed of antisemitism

By COLLIN BINKLEY and ANNIE MA Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) — Columbia University's president took a firm stance against antisemitism in a congressional hearing on Wednesday, but she faced bruising criticism from Republicans who say her actions haven't supported her words, especially when it comes to disciplining faculty and students accused of bias.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 66 of 80

Nemat Shafik's visit to Capitol Hill was a reprise of a December hearing that led to the resignations of presidents at Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania. It's part of a Republican campaign to investigate antisemitism at America's most prestigious universities since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

After the other Ivy League presidents' equivocation led to weeks of backlash, Shafik focused her message on fighting antisemitism rather than protecting free speech.

"Antisemitism has no place on our campus, and I am personally committed to doing everything I can to confront it directly," Shafik said in her opening comments.

On key questions, she took a more decisive stance than her Ivy League colleagues, who gave lawyerly answers when asked if calls for the genocide of Jews would violate campus policies. Asked the same question, Shafik and three other Columbia leaders responded definitively: yes.

But Shafik hedged on whether certain phrases invoked by some supporters of the Palestinians rise to harassment.

Rep. Lisa McClain, a Republican from Michigan, asked her if phrases such as "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" or "long live intifada" are antisemitic.

"I hear them as such, some people don't," Shafik said.

McClain posed the same question to David Schizer, who leads an antisemitism task force at Columbia. He said those phrases are antisemitic.

It was a shaky moment for an Ivy League president who otherwise dodged the gotcha questions that turned the previous hearing into a frenzy for Republicans, who cast elite schools as hotbeds of hatred toward Jews.

Unlike in December, much of the questioning on Wednesday focused on Columbia's handling of faculty who are accused of antisemitism. Given the protections offered by university tenure, disciplining faculty is a thorny question for universities whose professors are weighing in on the Israel-Hamas war.

Shafik was hammered on the issue by Rep. Elise Stefanik, a New York Republican and a driving force behind the hearings.

Stefanik asked about Mohamed Abdou, a visiting Arab studies professor who expressed support for Hamas on social media after Oct. 7. Shafik said she shared Stefanik's "repugnance" over Abdou's comments, adding that he had been terminated.

"He is grading his students' papers and will never teach at Columbia again," she said.

"Mr. Abdou is not grading papers right now," Stefanik later countered. She said she heard Abdou attended a pro-Palestinian demonstration at Columbia Wednesday morning, in apparent violation of the school's new rules limiting protests to certain hours and locations.

Shafik was also grilled over Columbia's handling of Joseph Massad, a professor of modern Arab politics, accused of calling the Oct. 7 attacks "awesome," "astonishing," "astounding" and "incredible."

Shafik said Massad had been reprimanded and removed as chair of an academic review committee. When Stefanik revealed that a Columbia website still listed Massad as the committee chair, she demanded Shafik's commitment to remove him from the post.

"I think that would be — I think I would — yes," Shafik said.

Massad is a tenured professor, which generally brings added protection against firing, including for expressing controversial opinions. When asked if Massad could lose his job, Shafik wouldn't give a clear answer.

"There are some very complex issues around tenure," she said.

In a comment to the Associated Press, Massad denied being reprimanded. He said members of Congress distorted his comments, and he disputed praising the killing of 1,200 Jews. Massad said he was not removed as chair of the academic review committee and that his term ends in the coming weeks.

Columbia professor Marcel Agüeros, a leader at the college's chapter of the American Association of University presidents, expressed dismay at how much Shafik conceded to Republicans on faculty discipline.

"The university has processes, and those processes are intended to protect academic freedom," he said. "Faculty whose speech is not necessarily what I would say myself, they have a right to that speech."

Complaints of antisemitism and Islamophobia have been on the rise at the New York campus of 35,000

students, prompting the school to adopt new limits on demonstrations. Protests can be held only on weekdays at certain times and locations, with advance notice to school officials.

Some civil rights groups, students and faculty say the policy curbs free expression. But Shafik cited it as evidence that the school is serious about protecting students, saying 15 students have been suspended and six are on probation for breaches.

"I promise you, from the messages I'm hearing from students, they are getting the message that violations will have consequences," she said.

Her vision clashes with one presented by Republicans in Congress and some Jewish students who say antisemitism goes unchecked at Columbia, citing a Jewish student who was beaten on campus while putting up posters of Israeli hostages, and protesters who chanted phrases that some consider a call for the genocide of Jews.

"The problem is, action on campus doesn't match your rhetoric today," said Rep. Aaron Bean, a Florida Republican. "Your students, their message is quite different. Their message is one of fear."

Some Columbia students who support Palestinians were frustrated they were not allowed into the hearing.

"This is not an honest conversation that we are having today in this committee," said Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Democrat from Minnesota who is Muslim, after speaking with the students.

The December hearing featured the Harvard and Penn presidents, as well as the leader of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. During heated questioning, Stefanik asked them whether "calling for the genocide of Jews" would violate each university's code of conduct.

Liz Magill, then-president of Penn, and Claudine Gay, then-president of Harvard, both said it would depend on the situation. MIT president Sally Kornbluth said she had not heard of anyone calling for the genocide of Jews on campus, and that speech "targeted at individuals, not making public statements," would be considered harassment.

Almost immediately, the careful responses from the university presidents drew criticism from donors, alumni and politicians. Magill resigned soon after the hearing and Gay stepped down in January following accusations of plagiarism.

Boeing put under Senate scrutiny during back-to-back hearings on aircraft maker's safety culture

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

An engineer at Boeing said Wednesday that the aircraft company, in rushing to produce as many planes as possible, is taking manufacturing shortcuts that could lead to jetliners breaking apart.

"They are putting out defective airplanes," the engineer, Sam Salehpour, told members of a Senate subcommittee.

Salehpour was testifying about Boeing's 787 Dreamliner, hundreds of which are in use by airlines, mostly on international routes. He spoke while another Senate committee held a separate hearing on the safety culture at Boeing.

The dual hearings were a sign of the intense pressure on Boeing since a door-plug panel blew off a 737 Max jetliner during an Alaska Airlines flight in January. The company is under multiple investigations, and the FBI has told passengers from the flight that they might be victims of a crime. Regulators limited Boeing's rate of aircraft production, and even minor incidents involving its planes attract news coverage.

Salehpour alleged that workers at a Boeing factory used excessive force to jam together sections of fuselage on the Dreamliner. The extra force could compromise the carbon-composite material used for the plane's frame, he said.

The engineer said he studied Boeing's own data and concluded "that the company is taking manufacturing shortcuts on the 787 program that could significantly reduce the airplane's safety and the life cycle."

Salehpour said that when he raised concern about the matter, his boss asked whether he was "in or out" – part of the team, or not. "Are you going to just shut up?' ... that's how i interpreted it," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 68 of 80

Boeing said retaliation is strictly prohibited. A spokesperson said the company encourages employees to speak up, and that since January it has seen more than a 500% increase in employee reports on a company portal.

The hearing of the investigations subcommittee marked the first time Salehpour has described his concern about the 787 and another plane, the Boeing 777, in public. Senators said they were shocked and appalled by the information. Democrats and Republicans alike expressed their dismay with the iconic American aircraft manufacturer.

The company says claims about the Dreamliner's structural integrity are false. Two Boeing engineering executives said this week that in both design testing and inspections of planes — some of them 12 years old — there were no findings of fatigue or cracking in the composite panels. They suggested that the material, formed from carbon fibers and resin, is nearly impervious to fatigue, which is a constant worry with conventional aluminum fuselages.

The Boeing officials also dismissed another of Salehpour's allegations: that he saw factory workers jumping on sections of fuselage on another one of Boeing's largest passenger planes, the 777, to make them align.

Separately on Wednesday, the Senate Commerce Committee heard testimony from members of an expert panel that found serious flaws in Boeing's safety culture.

One of the panel members, MIT aeronautics lecturer Javier de Luis, said employees hear Boeing leadership talk about safety, but workers feel pressure to push planes through the factory as fast as they can.

In talking to Boeing workers, de Luis said he heard "there was a very real fear of payback and retribution if you held your ground."

The dual hearings added to criticism that has been heaped on Boeing since the door plug blew off an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 Max as it flew over Oregon. Major safety failures have pushed Boeing into a crisis that has already resulted in a management shakeup, including the CEO's decision to step down at the end of this year.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, said the public is looking to Washington to assure that boarding a plane is not getting more dangerous.

"Flying commercial remains the safest way to travel, but understandably, recent incidents have left the flying public worried. The perception is things are getting worse," he said.

The Federal Aviation Administration, which regulates airlines and aircraft manufacturers, was also heavily criticized during Wednesday's hearings.

The FAA was battered for the way it approved the 737 Max nearly a decade ago without fully understanding a key flight-control system. Two Max jets crashed in 2018 and 2019, killing 346 people. Critics continue to accuse the agency of being too cozy with Boeing.

"The FAA needs to be a regulator. They need to do their job. That's the missing piece right now," Joe Jacobsen, a former Boeing and FAA engineer, told the investigations subcommittee.

The FAA is now under a new administrator, Mike Whitaker, who has taken a tougher approach to Boeing. He limited Boeing's production of 737 Max jets and gave the company until May 28 to produce a detailed plan for how it will fix manufacturing problems and resolve safety concerns.

Boeing is facing separate investigations by the FAA, the Justice Department and the National Transportation Safety Board. The Justice Department could reopen a 2021 agreement in which Boeing avoided criminal prosecution on a charge of misleading regulators about the Max. In exchange, the company agreed to pay \$2.5 billion — mostly to airline customers.

All the attention is taking a chunk from Boeing stock, which has tumbled in price by nearly one-third since the Alaska Airlines panel blowout. Shares of the Arlington, Virginia, company have lost 32% — more than \$47 billion in market value.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, the Connecticut Democrat who chairs the investigations subcommittee, and the panel's senior Republican, Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, have asked Boeing and the FAA for troves of documents going back six years. Blumenthal said his subcommittee plans to hold more hearings on Boeing and hopes to hear from CEO David Calhoun.

In interviews and messages to employees, Calhoun has said many times that Boeing is taking steps to

improve its manufacturing quality and safety culture. He called the Alaska Airlines accident a “watershed moment” from which a better Boeing will emerge.

There is plenty of skepticism about comments like that.

“We need to look at what Boeing does, not just what it says it’s doing,” said Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in US more likely to believe in climate change: AP-NORC poll

By TERRY TANG and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States are more likely than the overall adult population to believe in human-caused climate change, according to a new poll. It also suggests that partisanship may not have as much of an impact on this group’s environmental views, compared to Americans overall.

A recent poll from AAPI Data and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds 84% of AAPI adults agree climate change exists. In comparison, 74% of U.S. adults hold the same sentiment. And three-quarters of AAPI adults who accept climate change is real attribute it entirely or mostly to human activity. Among the general U.S. adult population surveyed in an AP-NORC poll in September, only 61% say humans are causing it.

The poll is part of an ongoing project exploring the views of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, whose views can usually not be highlighted in other surveys because of small sample sizes and lack of linguistic representation.

Scientists overwhelmingly agree that heat-trapping gases released from the combustion of fossil fuels are pushing up global temperatures, upending weather patterns and endangering animal species. Many scientific organizations have made public statements on the issue.

In terms of partisanship, the percentage of AAPI Democrats, 84%, who acknowledge climate change falls exactly in line with the share of Democrats overall in the September poll. The share of AAPI Republicans who believe there is a climate crisis is lower, but they somewhat outnumber Republicans in general, 68% versus 49%.

Adrian Wong, 26, of Whippany, New Jersey, is registered as unaffiliated but leans Republican. A biology major in college, the Chinese American says the science behind climate change is indisputable.

“I’ve probably done more or looked more into it than the average person has,” Wong said. “It’s to me clear that it’s changing due to human activity, not natural shifts.”

There has been growing conflict within the Republican Party between those who insist climate change is a progressive-generated hoax and those — mostly younger generations — who say the issue cannot be ignored. GOP lawmakers, in general, refuse to consider measures like mandated lowering of carbon emissions. However, some consider that an untenable position long-term. American Conservation Coalition, the largest conservative environmental group in the nation, has said Republicans running for office cannot risk alienating people who care about climate change.

Wong is not surprised that AAPI conservatives like himself recognize that the climate is changing. He thinks they are more highly educated and more likely to be exposed to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

“It wouldn’t surprise me if they were more likely to have studied more and actually more likely to have studied in science and STEM-related fields rather than, say like, finance or something,” Wong said.

While climate change is an afterthought to her parents, Analisa Harangozo, 35, of Alameda, California, worries a great deal about it. She has noticed a rise in “crazy heatwaves and droughts and just like crazy weather in general” in the San Francisco Bay Area. She and her husband are teaching their sons — ages 7 and 4 — to take small steps to reduce their carbon footprint like composting, growing food and eating less meat. They’re also trying to minimize their accumulation of household items.

“I always second-guess myself, ‘Do I really need this?’” Harangozo said. “Stuff will eventually end up in the landfill. So, we’re really mindful with the products we buy, and whether or not they can be recycled

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 70 of 80

or they're made from materials that are natural, like wood or what-not."

A registered independent with Democratic leanings, Harangozo is open to proposals from California Gov. Gavin Newsom and other state lawmakers to slash greenhouse gas emissions and invest in renewable energy.

"I'm not knowledgeable enough to know what an attainable goal is," she said. "But, whatever it takes to actually make a difference, I'm all for it. I fully support."

Karthick Ramakrishnan, a public policy professor at the University of California, Riverside, and founder of AAPI Data, said the richness and detail of the data shows environmental groups need to consider reaching out to AAPI populations. They make up a relatively small share of the U.S. population — around 7%, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of 2021 census data — but their numbers are growing quickly.

"Asian American and Pacific Islander voters are environmental voters," Ramakrishnan said. "Many of us still have an image in our minds of a particular kind of person maybe of a particular race, gender or age group. What we see here is across the board Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders care about the environment."

Asian American and Pacific Islanders may also have more of a stake in climate change because of connections to relatives abroad. China, considered one of the world's biggest emitters of greenhouse gases alongside the U.S., vowed last year to reduce emissions. More Chinese companies are considering selling wind and solar power equipment in other countries. Around this time last year, Japan was preparing for another sweltering summer and risks of floods and landslides. That country has also pledged to curb emissions.

Heavy rains swept across Pakistan last month, causing landslides and leaving over 36 people dead and dozens of others injured. In 2022, unprecedented rainfall and flooding in that country killed more than 1,700. In India, farmers are grappling with frequent cyclones and extreme heat. In southern India, the city of Bengaluru is seeing water levels running desperately low after an unusually hot February and March.

"There's a fairly high level concern of what climate change means to low-income countries," Ramakrishnan said. "That sensitivity is either because people still have friends or family back in their home country or at least have some concern about what climate change does to other countries."

The poll of 1,005 U.S. adults who are Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders was conducted from March 4-11, 2024, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based Amplify AAPI Panel, designed to be representative of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.9 percentage points. ___ This story has been corrected to show Adrian Wong is 26, not 22.

Tesla asks shareholders to restore \$56B Elon Musk pay package that was voided by Delaware judge

By TOM KRISHER, STAN CHOE and MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writers

DETROIT (AP) — Tesla is asking shareholders to restore a \$56 billion pay package for CEO Elon Musk that was rejected by a Delaware judge this year, and to shift the company's corporate home to Texas.

The changes, to be voted on by stockholders at a June 13 annual meeting, could be a tougher sell than when it was first approved in 2018. The Austin, Texas, electric vehicle maker is struggling with falling global sales, slowing electric vehicle demand, an aging model lineup and a stock price that has tumbled 37% so far this year.

In January, Chancellor Kathaleen St. Jude McCormick ruled that Musk is not entitled to the landmark stock compensation that was to be granted over 10 years.

Ruling on a lawsuit from a shareholder, she voided the pay package, saying that Musk essentially controlled the board, making the process of enacting the compensation unfair to stakeholders. "Musk had extensive ties with the persons tasked with negotiating on Tesla's behalf," she wrote in her ruling.

But in a letter to shareholders released in a regulatory filing on Wednesday, Chairperson Robyn Denholm

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 71 of 80

said that Musk has delivered on the growth it was looking for at the automaker, with Tesla meeting all of the stock value and operational targets in the 2018 package that was approved by shareholders. Shares are up 571% since the pay package began.

"Because the Delaware Court second-guessed your decision, Elon has not been paid for any of his work for Tesla for the past six years that has helped to generate significant growth and stockholder value," Denholm wrote. "That strikes us — and the many stockholders from whom we already have heard — as fundamentally unfair, and inconsistent with the will of the stockholders who voted for it."

In the filing, Tesla said it intends to appeal the decision. If shareholders approve the new package, disclosure and procedural deficiencies and breaches of the board's fiduciary duty detailed by McCormick should be fixed, the filing said.

But Tesla said shareholders may still challenge the ratification vote. Even if it does pass, Tesla said it may not fully resolve the matter and a Delaware court could find the ratification itself is not fair to shareholders.

If shareholders don't ratify the plan, Tesla said it may need to negotiate a replacement with Musk. That may take a lot of time and expense "in light of the criticism" detailed in the Delaware suit.

Tesla is going the route of ratification, instead of trying to negotiate a new package with Musk, which the company said would likely need to be of similar magnitude to the previous package in order to keep him.

Because it's trying for ratification instead of a new plan, Tesla said it "did not substantively re-evaluate the amount or term" of the package and did not hire another compensation consultant to weigh in on it.

In the 2018 plan, Musk would not get salary or cash bonuses. Instead he was to receive only stock options, and only if the company met certain thresholds. It would need to grow its total market value by certain amounts, while also hitting targets for revenue and pretax earnings, and other items.

Many CEOs at big companies need to hit targets to get a lot of their possible compensation. That's to encourage decisions that benefit the company and shareholders at large. But Musk was unusual in having all of his pay dependent on such measures.

When the company's board drew up the compensation plan, it said it thought the hurdles would be challenging to meet. Some outsiders agreed.

But the shareholder plaintiff in the Delaware suit alleged the company's proxy wrongly characterized all the milestones that triggered vesting in the stock options as "stretch" goals, even though internal projections indicated that three operational milestones were likely to be achieved within 18 months of the stockholder vote.

The board said it believed in 2018 that "many of Tesla's prior successes were driven significantly by Mr. Musk's leadership." And it wanted to motivate Musk to "devote his time and energy" to the company when he also had interests in other companies.

Erik Gordon, a lawyer and business professor at the University of Michigan, said that since Tesla would still be a Delaware corporation at the time of the vote on the package, shareholders could still challenge it in Delaware courts.

But because Tesla disclosed facts in the proxy about the board's ties to Musk, he would expect Tesla to win. "If the uninterested shareholders are properly informed and they vote in favor of it, the court actually has nothing to do," Gordon said. Delaware courts, he said, "want the corporations to disclose and let the shareholders decide."

Musk may not see much legal benefit from moving Tesla's corporate home to Texas, because the law governing executive pay is similar to Delaware's, Gordon said. "There's no Texas case that tells you if this had happened in Texas you'd have gotten a different result."

Tesla posted record deliveries of more than 1.8 million electric vehicles worldwide in 2023, but the value its shares has eroded quickly this year as EV sales soften.

The company said it delivered 386,810 vehicles from January through March, nearly 9% fewer than it sold in the same period last year. Future growth is in doubt and it may be a challenge to get shareholders to back a fat pay package in an environment where competition has increased worldwide.

The proxy statement filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission does not address Musk's demand to own 25% of Tesla shares for him to pursue artificial intelligence and robotics at the company. At

present he owns 20.5% of the company.

In January Musk challenged the Tesla board in a post on X, the social media platform he now owns, to come up with a new compensation package. Unless he gets 25%, he wrote that he'd prefer to build products outside of Tesla, apparently with another company.

Wedbush analyst Dan Ives, who is normally bullish on Tesla, said in an interview that the filing doesn't address multiple issues including Musk's future compensation.

"It's the elephant in the room because Musk has threatened over X, and it's been a massive overhang" for Tesla stock, Ives said.

Musk, he said, needs to commit to being Tesla CEO for three to five years and developing artificial intelligence with the company. When Tesla announces first-quarter earnings next week, Musk needs to spell out growth plans, including the status of the Model 2, a small EV that costs about \$25,000, Ives said. Otherwise, dark days lie ahead, he said.

"There's a feeling like the plane is crashing into the ocean and the board is focused on their own salted peanuts," he said.

At the time of the Delaware court ruling, Musk's package was worth more than \$55.8 billion, but the stock slide has cut that to \$44.9 billion at the close of trading on Friday, Tesla's filing said.

Starting last year, Tesla has cut prices as much as \$20,000 on some models. The price cuts caused used electric vehicle values to drop and clipped Tesla's profit margins.

This week, Tesla said it was letting about 10% of its workers go, about 14,000 people.

Shares of Tesla Inc. closed down about 1% in Wednesday.

Pentagon leaders press Congress for Ukraine funding, saying battlefield situation is dire

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ukraine and Israel both desperately need the military weapons that are being held up by Congress' failure to pass a funding package for the two countries at war, Pentagon leaders told House appropriators Wednesday, calling the situation in Ukraine dire.

"Whether it's munitions, whether it's vehicles, whether it's platforms," Ukraine is being outmatched by the Russians, Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. "I'll just tell you that Ukraine right now is facing some dire battlefield conditions."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, seated alongside Brown, told lawmakers that time matters.

"We're already seeing things on the battlefield begin to shift a bit in Russia's favor. We are seeing them make incremental gains. We're seeing the Ukrainians be challenged in terms of holding the line," he said.

Their grim assessments came as House Republicans wrangle over the \$95 billion foreign aid bill that the Senate passed in February. That legislation provides funding for Ukraine, Israel and other allies, as well as humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza and Ukraine and replenishment cash for the U.S. military to replace weapons sent to Ukraine.

House Speaker Mike Johnson was forging ahead Wednesday toward votes later this week on the funding, even as he risks losing his leadership post in the bitterly divided Republican caucus.

President Joe Biden urged Congress to pass the aid, saying that besides critical support to Israel and Ukraine, it would offer "desperately needed humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza." He said he would sign the funding package right away, sending a message that "we won't let Iran or Russia succeed."

Members of the House panel lamented the gridlock that has stalled the foreign aid, but several said they are hopeful the legislation will begin to move.

Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., noted the "chilling" comments by Gen. Christopher Cavoli, the top U.S. military commander for Europe last week. He told the committee that Ukraine will be outgunned 10 to one by Russia within a matter of weeks if Congress doesn't approve the funding.

"Without the United States assistance, Ukraine will literally run out of ammunition and more civilians in Ukraine will be murdered by Russia," McCollum said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 73 of 80

Brown told lawmakers that Israel also critically needs support in the bill, including air defense interceptors and munitions to defend itself following Iran's attack over the weekend. Iran launched about 300 missiles and drones toward Israel on Saturday, but the vast majority were shot down by Israeli defenses or U.S. and other allies. The attack came less than two weeks after a suspected Israeli strike in Syria killed two Iranian generals in an Iranian consular building.

Israel has vowed to retaliate as the U.S. and other allies urge restraint.

The funding issue dominated the hearing, including its impact on the U.S. military and defense companies scattered across 30 states. The Pentagon's comptroller, Michael McCord, said the Defense Department has already spent about \$2 billion for military operations in Europe and the Middle East to ensure troops and allies there are secure.

Some of that includes the movement of Navy ships to help protect Israel over the weekend and the extended deployment of ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to safeguard commercial and military vessels being targeted by Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen.

Without the supplemental funding, McCord said the \$2 billion would have to be absorbed by the base budget and shifted from other spending on things like facilities and equipment maintenance.

"So there is an impact on our forces and our readiness as well if we cannot get the supplemental approved," he said.

Austin also repeated a selling point that defense leaders have been making to lawmakers over the past several months: The funding bill will directly help the American defense industry that is building Abrams tanks, ammunition and other weapons and equipment.

He said about \$50 billion in the supplemental will flow through the defense industrial base "creating good American jobs in more than 30 states."

A neglected burial ground for migrants on Greek island of Lesbos has been given a drastic overhaul

LESBOS, Greece (AP) — Most drowned making the hazardous sea crossing from nearby Turkey, while others died of natural causes in migrant camps on the Greek island of Lesbos.

After years of neglect, a makeshift burial ground for migrants on the island has been cleaned up and landscaped to provide a dignified resting place for the dead, and for their relatives to visit.

Earth Medicine, the Lesbos-based charity that handled the project near the village of Kato Tritos, formally handed over the redesigned cemetery to municipal officials on Wednesday.

"We wanted it to be clear that this was a burial ground, (mostly) for people who died at sea — some of whom have been identified while others have not," Earth Medicine spokesman Dimitris Patounis said. "It used to be just a field."

For years, Lesbos has been a major destination for people seeking a better life in the European Union. They leave Turkish shores crammed into small, unseaworthy vessels provided by smuggling gangs. About 3,800 people have made the journey so far this year.

Before the intervention, the weed-choked graves were marked by a simple stone with a number written on it by marker, or, in the rare cases when it was available, a name. Currently, about 200 neat, uniform gray slabs filled with white gravel cover each grave, clearly listing whatever is known of the occupant.

"Now people will be able to visit when their (dead) relatives are identified," Patounis said.

Officials stress that the burial ground is nondenominational, with recent inhumation services conducted by an Imam, a Greek Orthodox or a Catholic priest, according to the deceased's known beliefs.

"This was done with human dignity in mind, without any religious affiliation," Patounis said.

The cemetery lies about a kilometer (1/2 mile) outside Kato Tritos in central Lesbos, around 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the island capital of Mytilini. Other migrants have been buried in the past in municipal cemeteries in other parts of the island, but this is the only burial ground specifically for migrants.

Things to know as courts and legislatures act on transgender kids' rights

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Three court rulings across the U.S. this week delved into laws restricting the rights of transgender kids, including the first time the U.S. Supreme Court has gotten involved in a ban on gender-affirming care.

Most Republican-controlled states have now banned gender-affirming health care such as puberty blockers and hormones for transgender minors, and blocked transgender girls from participating in girls sports competitions.

Most of the measures face legal challenges, and this week's rulings went both ways. The Supreme Court said Idaho can enforce its ban against gender-affirming health for minors while lawsuits proceed. An Ohio state judge put on hold a law against health care and sports participation that was about to kick in there. And a federal appeals court ruled that West Virginia cannot keep a transgender girl from participating on her school's track team.

Here are things to know about the court rulings and the latest legislative action.

OHIO JUDGE PUTS STATE LAW ON HOLD

On Tuesday, an Ohio judge blocked enforcement of a law that was to take effect on April 24, banning gender-affirming care for minors and keeping transgender girls off girls sports teams at schools.

Franklin County Judge Michael Holbrook said in his written opinion that it's likely the law, adopted in January with a legislative override of Republican Gov. Mike DeWine's veto, violates a requirement that the state's laws address just one issue. He noted that lawmakers added the ban on gender-affirming care to the sports-related legislation because they were unable to adopt it separately.

The ban on enforcement is in effect for two weeks or until a judge holds a hearing for a request to halt enforcement while the case works its way through the courts.

THE SUPREME COURT HAS ITS FIRST SAY ON A BAN

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Monday that Idaho can enforce its ban on providing puberty blockers or hormones to minors. The law also bans gender-affirming surgery, which is extremely rare for those under 18 anyway.

At least two dozen states have put similar bans into law in the last few years, nearly all of them challenged in court. Twenty other states are currently enforcing them.

The Idaho ruling was the first time the issue reached the Supreme Court.

But the justices did not dive into the constitutionality of the ban. Instead, they ruled 6-3 that enforcement can proceed, except against the two transgender teens who sued. And most of the justice's written opinions dealt with judicial procedure, exploring whether it's proper for courts to impose universal injunctions blocking laws while questions about them move through the courts.

OTHER CASES ON GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE ARE IN PLAY

The first ban on gender-affirming care for minors was adopted by Arkansas in 2021.

It was also the first to be blocked entirely — not just temporarily — by a federal court.

Last week, 10 judges on the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis heard arguments on Arkansas' appeal of the ruling that blocked the law.

Circuit court appeals often take months to decide, and any ruling is likely to be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which has already been asked to block similar laws that are in effect in Kentucky and Tennessee.

COURT SAYS WEST VIRGINIA ATHLETE CANNOT BE BARRED

A three-judge panel from another federal appeals court, the Richmond, Virginia-based 4th U.S. Circuit, ruled 2-1 Tuesday that the West Virginia's ban against girls sports competition by transgender girls violates the rights of one teen athlete who challenged it.

The result: 13-year-old Becky Pepper Jackson, who has identified as a girl since she was in third grade, can stay on her middle school's girls cross country and track and field teams.

Attorney General Patrick Morrisey said in a statement that the ban remains in place for others, though an ACLU-West Virginia spokesperson said it's not clear that there are any other kids in the state are impacted by the law.

Other judges have temporarily blocked enforcement in Arizona, Idaho and Utah. But the New York City-based 2nd Circuit revived a challenge to Connecticut's policy of letting transgender girls compete in girls sports, sending it back to a lower court last year without ruling on its merits.

At least 24 states have laws or policies on the books barring transgender girls and women from certain sports competitions, and most are enforcing them.

And some local bans are being litigated: A federal judge ruled refused to block the New York state government from taking legal action against Nassau County's ban, which is also being challenged by a local roller derby league.

THE LEGISLATIVE BATTLES AREN'T OVER, EITHER

The pace of Republican efforts to pass state restrictions has slowed this year, but measures before legislatures continue to target transgender people.

On Monday, Tennessee lawmakers gave near-final passage to a bill that would require public school employees to notify parents if their student identifies in school as transgender. States including Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, North Carolina already have similar laws in place.

Last week, Alabama lawmakers advanced legislation to define who is considered a man or a woman based on reproductive systems rather than gender identity. Lawmakers in more than a dozen states also are seeking this year to codify a definition of the sexes.

Stephen Curry tells the AP why 2024 is the right time to make his Olympic debut

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Golden State guard Stephen Curry knew he was running out of chances to play in what would be his first Olympics, so he and his wife Ayesha started planning many months ago about how to make the Paris Games work for their family.

Their growing family, that is.

Ayesha Curry revealed in March that she is pregnant with the couple's fourth child and the baby is due in June. That's not entirely by accident; the couple thought ahead with hopes of keeping the Olympic months of July and August clear — just in case.

"We thought about it ahead of time, which was nice," Curry said. "If the timing didn't work at a certain month in the fall, we actually would have made a different decision knowing the Olympics were on the radar. So, thankfully, the Lord looked out for us and if everything goes to plan, I'll be available this summer."

That is, indeed, the plan. Curry was one of the 12 names formally announced by USA Basketball on Wednesday as the initial roster for this year's Paris Olympics. It's entirely possible that the roster gets tweaked between now and the first practice in early July — injuries or long playoff runs could spark changes — but Curry has been planning to make his Olympic debut this summer for some time.

"I wanted to play in the last two that I was eligible for," Curry said, referring to the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games and the Tokyo Games that were delayed to 2021 because of the pandemic. "Watching guys that I've been competing against the last 10 years all have that experience win gold medals, watching three of my teammates (Kevin Durant, Klay Thompson and Draymond Green) win gold medals, I knew I wanted to do that."

It would be logical to think that part of the recruitment pitch to Curry this time around was the fact that the Olympic team is coached by Steve Kerr, his coach with the Warriors.

That wasn't really the case. Curry had talks with Durant and LeBron James about teaming up — those talks sparked in part by the U.S. taking a less star-studded team to the World Cup at Manila last summer and finishing fourth — but Kerr wasn't pushing his best player to play this year.

"He wanted to do it," Kerr said. "He's excited. I think 2016 would have been the year that made the most sense. In 2020, there was the pandemic. But I've never had the discussion with him. Going to the Finals wears you down and we had gone in 2015 and 2016. Then 2021 comes around, there was the pandemic, but now, it makes perfect sense. It's another box to check in his career."

There aren't too many of those boxes unchecked. And this might really be the last one of any significance left.

He's the NBA's all-time 3-point recordholder, a four-time NBA champion, 10-time All-Star, nine-time (and probably soon to be 10-time) All-NBA selection, a two-time scoring champion, a two-time MVP, a Finals MVP, an All-Star MVP and a member of the league's 75th anniversary team. He even helped put together one of the more memorable moments in All-Star history this year, when he faced off with WNBA star Sabrina Ionescu — someone he simultaneously mentors and admires — in a 3-point contest.

The legacy has long been secure. But a little extra gold wouldn't hurt.

"That's the goal," Curry said.

Curry and the Warriors won 46 games this season but didn't make the NBA playoffs, falling to Sacramento on Tuesday in an elimination game of the Western Conference play-in tournament, 118-94. So, the next time he's slated to play for real is now July, when the Americans convene for training camp in Las Vegas. The U.S. opens Olympic play against Serbia on July 28.

Curry has played with "USA" across his chest plenty of times before, going back 17 years. He was on the under-19 team that won gold at the 2007 Global Games and won silver in that year's U19 world championships — "that burned," Curry said, "because you hate losing at anything."

He hasn't lost a game with the national team since — 18 games, 18 wins. The Americans went 9-0 on their way to gold at the 2010 world championship (now called the World Cup), then went 9-0 on the way to another gold at the World Cup in 2014.

"I definitely wanted this experience," Curry said of playing in an Olympics. "I think the timing is just right. I'm later in my career. This is probably the last opportunity I have to play. And that made it a much easier decision to say, 'This makes sense.' And then I was talking to some other guys who were interested in playing, so you knew this could be a great team."

Russian missiles slam into a Ukraine city and kill 17 people as the war approaches a critical stage

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Three Russian missiles slammed into a downtown area of the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv on Wednesday, hitting an eight-floor apartment building and killing at least 17 people, authorities said.

At least 61 people, including three children, were wounded in the morning attack, Ukrainian emergency services said, as rescue workers searched through partially demolished buildings and tall mounds of rubble. Chernihiv lies about 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of the capital, Kyiv, near the border with Russia and Belarus, and has a population of around 250,000 people.

The latest Russian bombardment came as the war has stretched into its third year and approaches what could be a critical juncture. A lack of further military support from Ukraine's Western partners increasingly leaves it at the mercy of the Kremlin's bigger forces.

Through the winter months, Russia made no dramatic advance along the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line, focusing instead on attritional warfare. However, Ukraine's shortage of artillery ammunition, troops and armored vehicles has allowed the Russians to gradually push forward, military analysts say.

A crucial factor is the holdup in Washington of approval for an aid package that includes roughly \$60 billion for Ukraine. House Speaker Mike Johnson said Sunday that he would try to move the package forward this week.

Ukraine's need is acute, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

"The Russians are breaking out of positional warfare and beginning to restore maneuver to the battlefield because of the delays in the provision of U.S. military assistance to Ukraine," the ISW said in an assessment late Tuesday, adding that "only the U.S. can provide rapidly and at scale."

Ukraine got some good news Wednesday from Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala, who said his country has secured 500,000 artillery shells for Ukraine from countries outside the European Union. The first shells

are due for delivery in June.

The 27-nation EU promised a year ago to send Ukraine 1 million artillery shells, but the bloc was unable to produce that many.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pleaded with Western countries to provide more air defense equipment, including more surface-to-air Patriot guided missile systems. He said the Chernihiv strike "would not have happened if Ukraine had received enough air defense equipment and if the world's determination to counter Russian terror was also sufficient."

Zelenskyy told PBS in an interview broadcast earlier this week that Ukraine recently ran out of air defense missiles while it was defending against a major missile and drone attack that destroyed one of Ukraine's largest power plants, part of a recent Russian campaign targeting energy infrastructure.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba repeated Zelenskyy's appeal as he prepared to attend a Group of Seven foreign ministers' meeting in Italy.

"We need at least seven more Patriot batteries to protect our cities and economic centers from destruction," Kuleba told German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung in an interview published Wednesday. "Why is it so difficult to find seven Patriot batteries?"

Ukrainian forces are digging in, building fortifications in anticipation of a major Russian offensive that Kyiv officials say could come as early as next month.

Ukraine is using long-range drone and missile strikes behind Russian lines which are designed to disrupt Moscow's war machine.

Russia's defense ministry said a Ukrainian drone was shot down over the Tatarstan region early Wednesday. That's the same area that was targeted in early April by Ukraine's deepest strike so far inside Russia, about 1,200 kilometers (745 miles) east of Ukraine.

Ukrainian drone developers have been extending the weapons' range.

Another Ukrainian drone was shot down over the Mordovia region, roughly 350 kilometers (220 miles) east of Moscow, the ministry said. That is 700 kilometers (430 miles) from the Ukrainian border.

About an hour before the Mordovia attack, Russia's civil aviation authority halted flights at airports in two of the country's largest cities, Nizhny Novgorod and Tatarstan's Kazan, because of safety concerns.

Also, unconfirmed reports said a Ukrainian missile struck an airfield in occupied Crimea. Neither Russian nor Ukrainian officials confirmed the strike, but local authorities temporarily closed a road where the airfield is located. Russian news agency Tass quoted the local mayor as saying windows in a mosque and a private house in the region were shattered in a blast there.

Myanmar's ousted leader Suu Kyi moved from prison to house arrest due to heat, military says

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Myanmar's jailed former leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been moved from prison to house arrest as a health measure due to a heat wave, the military government said as it freed more than 3,000 prisoners under an amnesty to mark this week's traditional New Year holiday.

Those released included several political prisoners, including a member of the Kachin minority who is one of the country's most prominent Christian church leaders.

Suu Kyi, 78, and Win Myint, the 72-year-old former president of her ousted government, were among the elderly and infirm prisoners moved to house arrest because of the severe heat, military spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun told foreign media representatives late Tuesday. The move had not yet been publicly announced in Myanmar as of Wednesday afternoon.

Suu Kyi's transfer comes as the army has suffered a string of major defeats at the hands of pro-democracy resistance fighters and their allies in ethnic minority guerrilla forces. The nationwide conflict began after the army ousted the elected government in February 2021, imprisoned Suu Kyi and began suppressing nonviolent protests that sought a return to democratic rule.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 78 of 80

Suu Kyi has been serving a 27-year prison term on a variety of criminal convictions in a specially built annex of the main prison in the capital Naypyitaw, where Myanmar's meteorological department said temperatures reached 39 degrees Celsius (102.2 degrees Fahrenheit) on Tuesday afternoon. Win Myint was serving an eight-year prison sentence in Taungoo in the Bago region.

Suu Kyi's supporters and independent analysts say the charges were fabricated in an attempt to discredit her and legitimize the military's seizure of power.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, an independent group that monitors casualties and arrests, more than 20,351 people arrested on political charges since the 2021 army takeover are still in detention, most of whom have not received criminal convictions.

Suu Kyi's health has reportedly deteriorated in prison. In September last year, reports emerged that she was suffering from symptoms of low blood pressure including dizziness and loss of appetite, but had been denied treatment at qualified facilities outside the prison system.

Those reports could not be independently confirmed, but her younger son Kim Aris said in interviews that he had heard that his mother has been extremely ill and has been suffering from gum problems and was unable to eat.

News about Suu Kyi is tightly controlled by the military government, and even her lawyers are banned by a gag order from talking to the media about her cases. Her legal team also has been unable to meet with her face to face since December 2022.

Whether the latest move is meant to be temporary was not announced.

Spokesperson Zaw Min Tun did not say where the released prisoners were being moved to in his remarks to U.S.-government funded Voice of America and Britain's BBC, but there was no indication it might be one of her own former homes.

Before being sent to prison, Suu Kyi was reportedly held in a military safe house inside an army base.

Other prisoners were released for the Thingyan New Year holiday, state-run MRTV television announced Wednesday, but it wasn't immediately clear how many were political detainees. Aung Myo Kyaw of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners said the group had heard of 7-10 people released in Yangon and nine from a prison in the central regions of Magway.

Local media in the northern state of Kachin reported that Hkalam Samson, former head of the Kachin Baptist Convention and chairman of the Kachin National Consultative Assembly, was among those freed. A resident of the state's capital, Myitkyina, who said he visited the prison to welcome Samson's release, posted a brief video of the laughing and smiling minister being greeted outside the prison. The visitor asked to remain anonymous to safeguard his personal security.

Samson was a prominent advocate of human rights in Myanmar and in 2019 was part of a delegation that met U.S. President Trump at the White House to discuss the military's abuse of ethnic minorities. He was detained in December 2022 while preparing to fly to Thailand for a health checkup, and in April last year was handed a six-year prison term after being convicted of violating laws on unlawful association, incitement and counter-terrorism.

Christians make up about 6% of Myanmar's overwhelmingly Buddhist population.

MRTV said that the head of the ruling military council, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, had pardoned 3,303 prisoners, including 28 foreigners who will be deported from Myanmar. He also reduced sentences for others. Mass amnesties on the holiday are not unusual in Myanmar.

Family and friends gathered outside the gates of Insein Prison, in northern Yangon, waiting expectantly and scanning the windows of buses that brought the released detainees out of the vast complex. Some held up signs with the names of the people they were seeking, in the same fashion as at an airport arrival hall.

Amid tearful reunions, Khin Thu Zar said she was happy, but that she would have to call her family.

"My family still doesn't know about my release," she said. She, like many political detainees, had been held on a charge of incitement, a catch-all offense widely used to arrest critics of the government and punishable by up to three years in prison.

Suu Kyi, the daughter of Myanmar's martyred independence hero Gen. Aung San, spent almost 15 years

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 79 of 80

as a political prisoner under house arrest by previous military governments between 1989 and 2010. Her tough stand against military rule turned her into a symbol of the nonviolent struggle for democracy and won her the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson of the shadow National Unity Government, told The Associated Press that all political prisoners, including Suu Kyi and Win Myint, were unjustly detained and should be freed without conditions. The NUG views serves as an umbrella opposition organization.

He said it was unacceptable for the military government to resolve its difficulties by playing political games, such as changing prisoners' places of detention and reducing sentences. The army's recent battlefield setbacks, including last week's loss to resistance forces of Myawaddy, a major trading town on the border with Thailand, is seen by many as underlining its increasing weakness.

Today in History: April 18

San Francisco's great earthquake sets off fires, thousands die

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, April 18, the 109th day of 2024. There are 257 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 18, 1906, a devastating earthquake struck San Francisco, followed by raging fires; estimates of the final death toll range between 3,000 and 6,000.

On this date:

In 1775, Paul Revere began his famous ride from Charlestown to Lexington, Massachusetts, warning colonists that British Regular troops were approaching.

In 1865, Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston surrendered to Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman near Durham Station in North Carolina, bringing further closure to the Civil War, which had formally ended.

In 1923, the first game was played at the original Yankee Stadium in New York; the Yankees defeated the Boston Red Sox 4-1.

In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser seized power as he became prime minister of Egypt.

In 1955, physicist Albert Einstein died in Princeton, New Jersey, at age 76.

In 1966, Bill Russell was named player-coach of the Boston Celtics, becoming the NBA's first Black coach.

In 1978, the Senate approved the Panama Canal Treaty, providing for the complete turnover of control of the waterway to Panama on the last day of 1999.

In 1983, 63 people, including 17 Americans, were killed at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, by a suicide bomber.

In 2002, police arrested actor Robert Blake in the shooting death of his wife, Bonny Lee Bakley, nearly a year earlier. (Blake was acquitted at his criminal trial and found liable for her death in a civil trial.)

In 2012, Dick Clark, the ever-youthful television host and producer who helped bring rock 'n' roll into the mainstream on "American Bandstand" and rang in the New Year for the masses at Times Square, died at age 82.

In 2013, the FBI released surveillance camera images of two suspects in the Boston Marathon bombing and asked for the public's help in identifying them.

In 2015, a ship believed to be carrying migrants from Africa sank in the Mediterranean off Libya; about 500 are believed to have died.

In 2016, "Hamilton," Lin-Manuel Miranda's hip-hop stage biography of America's first treasury secretary, won the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

In 2018, Cuba's government selected 57-year-old First Vice President Miguel Mario Diaz-Canel Bermudez as the sole candidate to succeed President Raul Castro, a move that installed someone from outside the Castro family in the country's highest office for the first time in nearly six decades; the 86-year-old Castro would remain head of the Communist Party.

In 2019, the final report from special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation was made public; it

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 297 ~ 80 of 80

outlined Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election but did not establish that members of the Trump campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government.

In 2022, Russia launched a long-feared, full-scale offensive to take control of Ukraine's east, the country's mostly Russian-speaking industrial heartland, where Moscow-backed separatists had been fighting Ukrainian forces for eight years.

In 2023, Fox and Dominion Voting Systems reached a \$787 million settlement in the voting machine company's defamation lawsuit, averting a trial in a case that exposed how the top-rated network chased viewers by promoting lies about the 2020 presidential election.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Clive Revill is 94. Actor Robert Hooks is 87. Actor Hayley Mills is 78. Actor James Woods is 77. Actor-director Dorothy Lyman is 77. Actor Cindy Pickett is 77. Actor Rick Moranis is 71. Actor Melody Thomas Scott is 68. Actor Eric Roberts is 68. Actor John James is 68. Rock musician Les Pattinson (Echo and the Bunnymen) is 66. Author-journalist Susan Faludi is 65. Actor Jane Leeves is 63. Ventriloquist-comedian Jeff Dunham is 62. Talk show host Conan O'Brien is 61. Actor Eric McCormack is 61. Actor Maria Bello is 57. Actor Mary Birdsong is 56. Actor David Hewlett is 56. Rock musician Greg Eklund (The Oolahs) is 54. Actor Lisa Locicero is 54. Actor Tamara Braun is 53. TV chef Ludovic Lefebvre is 53. Actor Fredro Starr is 53. Actor David Tennant is 53. Rock musician Mark Tremonti is 50. R&B singer Trina (Trina and Tamara) is 50. Actor Melissa Joan Hart is 48. Actor Sean Maguire is 48. Actor Kevin Rankin is 48. Actor Bryce Johnson is 47. Reality TV star Kourtney Kardashian (kar-DASH'-ee-uhn) is 45. Detroit Tigers first baseman and DH Miguel Cabrera is 41. Actor America Ferrera is 40. Actor Tom Hughes is 39. Actor Ellen Woglom (TV: "Marvel's Inhumans") is 37. Actor Vanessa Kirby is 36. Actor Alia Shawkat is 35. Actor Britt Robertson is 34. Actor Chloe Bennet is 32. Rock singer Nathan Sykes (The Wanted) is 31. Actor Moises Arias is 30.