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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.

Postponed to April 29: 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.

Sunday, April 21

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

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



Princess Prom, 4:30 p.m., GHS Gym
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School 10:15 a.m.; Choir 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's at 9 a.m. and Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Monday, April 22

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes and gravy, Harvard beets, pineapple tidbits, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: meatballs, mashed potatoes.

School Board meeting 7 p.m.

JH Track at Britton, 3:30 p.m.

Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Senior Citizen meet at the Groton Community Center with noon potluck

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study 6:30 a.m.

High School Baseball: JV vs. W-I-N at Northville, doubleheader, 5:30 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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1440

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Breaking news: US officials say Israel has retaliated against Iran for Saturday's drone and missile attack (see previous write-up). Iranian news agencies have reported explosions near the central city of Isfahan. Israel hasn't commented as of this writing. This is a developing story.

The world's largest democratic elections begin in India today as nearly 1 billion voters head to the polls. Over the next six weeks, voters will determine the composition of the 543-member Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's parliament responsible for nominating a prime minister.

Thousands of people were evacuated near Mount Ruang volcano in northern Indonesia yesterday following repeated eruptions since Tuesday. Officials also released a tsunami alert over concerns the 2,400-foot-tall mountain might partially collapse into the sea amid the seismic activity, a phenomenon that claimed over 400 lives on the adjacent island in 1871.

Taylor Swift today released her highly anticipated 11th original studio album, "The Tortured Poets Department." The album comes as the musician is set to continue her international Eras Tour next month, the highest-grossing music tour in history and the first to surpass \$1B in sales.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NHL Stanley Cup playoffs kick off tomorrow; see full bracket and schedule. NBA playoffs begin in earnest tomorrow after play-in tournament wraps up tonight.

Dickey Betts, Allman Brothers Band cofounder and Rock & Roll Hall of Famer, dies at 80. Listen to some of the Allman Brothers Band's best hits.

Writers for "Sesame Street" to strike if contract agreement isn't reached by today. Japanese animation studio Studio Ghibli to become first company awarded honorary Palme d'Or by Cannes Film Festival.

Science & Technology

Meta reveals Llama 3, the latest update to its large language model and flagship AI assistant.

Materials scientists create "goldene," single-atom-thick sheets of gold similar to carbon-based graphene; material is expected to have uses in nanoelectronics, advanced chemistry, and more.

Archaeologists uncover partial fossil of what is believed to be the largest-ever snake; 60-million-year-old specimen, found in an Indian mine, stretched nearly 50 feet.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq -0.5%); S&P 500 notches longest losing streak since October. Digital marketing firm Ibotta shares rise as much as 33% in New York Stock Exchange debut, valuing the Walmart-backed company at \$3.6B; shares close up 17%.

Netflix's Q1 subscriber growth beats estimates, rising 16% year-over-year; company plans to stop providing quarterly membership numbers in 2025. Google fires 28 employees after multicity protests against the tech giant's cloud contract with the Israeli government.

US existing home sales fall 4.3% month-over-month in March, the largest monthly decline since November 2022; median home price of \$393,500 is up 4.8% from a year ago, the highest median price for any March on record.

Politics & World Affairs

Biden administration reportedly working on deal to forge diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel. The US, the UK impose sanctions on Iran's drone program after Iran's weekend attack on Israel. The US vetoes UN Security Council resolution that would have paved the way for the state of Palestine to join the UN as a full member.

Polish man arrested for allegedly spying for Russian military intelligence to help with alleged assassination plot against Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

All 12 jurors selected in former President Donald Trump's criminal hush money trial in Manhattan; opening arguments to begin Monday.

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Yesterday I attended the annual Heartland Energy meeting in Madison. While a lot of it was numbers and information, the one that got my attention was AI (Artificial Intelligence).

In the past when I saw something about AI, it was usually negative. The presenters from Dakota State University put a very positive spin on AI and for the first time, I was exposed what AI could actually do.

One of the Apps is ChatGPT. You can download it on your phone. There are other Apps as well.

Just to show you the power of AI, I presented it with the following:

Write me a 150-word speech about how it is great to live in Groton, South Dakota.

This is what is produced. Unedited, I might add.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Living in Groton, South Dakota is nothing short of extraordinary. Nestled amidst the serene beauty of the Midwest, Groton offers a lifestyle that harmonizes with nature and community spirit. Here, the pace of life allows for genuine connections and a sense of belonging that is rare to find elsewhere.

In Groton, we cherish our small-town values while embracing modern amenities. Whether it's enjoying a peaceful stroll along our picturesque streets or participating in lively community events, there's always something to do and someone to share it with.

Our schools provide a top-notch education, and our tight-knit community supports one another through thick and thin. From stunning sunsets to friendly faces, Groton embodies the essence of wholesome living.

So, I invite you to experience the magic of Groton, South Dakota firsthand. Come join us, and discover why calling Groton home is truly a blessing.

Thank you.

I don't know about you, but this technology is amazing. But it really is not new. In fact, AI has been around since 1956. It's just taking time to evolve into what it is today and what is yet to come in the future. You may not know this, but the baseball stories are actually created by AI. The play-by-play information is entered in an iPad and when the game is done, in a matter of seconds, a story is generated from that information.

The use of AI is certainly unlimited and be used to enhance our work.



Open House Bridal Shower

honoring

Jessica Bjerke

Saturday, April 20, 2024

1:00pm - 3:00pm

Olive Grove Golf Course

Registered at Target and Amazon



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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

Regular School Board Meeting

April 22, 2024 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Program Overview Presentations
 - a. K-12 Music...D. Yeigh, T. Pietz
 - b. Art... J. Harry
 - c. Health/PE, Athletics... K. Gerlach, L. Grieve, A. Schuring
3. Second reading and approval of recommended changes to MS/HS Student Handbook.
4. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Canvass election results from School District Opt-Out Election held April 9, 2024.
2. Approve 2024-2025 GTA Negotiated Agreement and issue 2024-2025 teacher contracts with return date of Friday, May 3.
3. Approve Groton Elementary Comprehensive Needs Assessment Action Plan.
4. Approve Intent-to-Participate in SD Title-III Consortium for 2024-2025 school year.
5. Executive session pursuant SDCL1-25-2(1) for personnel and SDCL1-25-2(4) for negotiations.

ADJOURN

Northern State University Campus Master Plan **2023** UPDATE



Northern State University Releases Updated Campus Master Plan

ABERDEEN, S.D. — Northern State University, working with CO-OP Architecture and Confluence, is excited to announce the completion of its updated campus master plan. The plan, developed from August 2022 to November 2023, shows the university's commitment to creating a dynamic and enriching environment for its students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community.

The master planning process involved assessing the current campus, identifying priorities, and exploring new planning strategies. This approach helped Northern State University understand how to best use its resources and infrastructure to support its academic and community engagement goals.

The planning process involved university leadership, faculty, staff, students, and community members. Their insights and perspectives helped shape a master plan that reflects the hopes and vision of the entire Northern State University community.

Dr. Neal Schnoor, president of Northern State University, recognizes the value of the new campus master plan, stating, "The master plan is a crucial document that will help guide future projects and provide a

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clear vision for the development of our campus. It not only addresses our current needs but also outlines potential improvements and enhancements that can be made to support learning, collaboration, and innovation at Northern State University."

CO-OP Architecture and Confluence guided the master planning process, which involved developing several planning scenarios tailored to the university's goals. These scenarios were brought to life through detailed drawings, diagrams, and strategic recommendations, which are shown in the final master plan document.

As Northern State University shares its updated campus master plan, it reinforces its commitment to continuous improvement and strategic growth. The plan will serve as a roadmap for future projects, ensuring that each initiative aligns with the university's objectives of providing an exceptional educational experience for its students and serving the region and state. By adopting this plan, Northern State University demonstrates its ongoing dedication to academic excellence, community engagement, and the success of every student.

To view the Northern State University campus master plan, please visit https://northern.edu/sites/default/files/2024-04/NSU_Master_plan_2024.pdf

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Company with \$36 million SD 911 contract says outage caused by Missouri light pole installation

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 18, 2024 3:10 PM

A 911 outage affecting hundreds of calls for emergency services throughout South Dakota on Wednesday night was caused by a company installing a light pole in Kansas City, Missouri, according to South Dakota's 911 telecommunications provider Lumen, formerly known as CenturyLink.

Lumen, which is headquartered in Louisiana, said the outage was caused by a third party but did not offer any further explanation about how the light pole installation caused the outage.

The outage included 911 services in South Dakota, Nebraska and Nevada. Another 911 service outage was reported in Texas, but Lumen said it does not provide 911 service there.

"Our techs identified the issue and worked hard to fix it as quickly as possible," a company representative said in an email to South Dakota Searchlight. "We apologize for the inconvenience and appreciate our customers' patience and understanding."

Lumen has had other 911 outages in South Dakota, Midwest

This is at least the second time there's been a 911 service outage through Lumen in South Dakota this year. South Dakota signed its contract with Lumen for "Next Generation 911 services" in 2019 and has since renewed the contract until 2029. The contract is for up to \$36.33 million.

An outage in January disrupted 911 service in southeastern South Dakota, leaving customers in Lincoln, Union, Miner and Minnehaha counties unable to call 911 with a landline for hours, according to reporting from Siouxland Proud. Last year, Lumen reported two separate fiber optic lines had been accidentally cut in Minneapolis and in Omaha, which blocked calls from being received by more than half of Nebraska's 911 centers for about 10 hours.

After a 2020 outage in South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Colorado, Arizona, Utah and North Carolina, the Federal Communications Commission investigated whether Lumen, in addition to three other companies, failed to deliver 911 calls and timely notify public safety customers. In a settlement, Lumen agreed to implement a compliance plan and pay a \$3.8 million civil penalty.

The FCC posted on X, formerly Twitter, Wednesday night that it was investigating the most recent outages.

FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel followed up with a statement Thursday: "When you call 911 in an emergency, it is vital that call goes through. The FCC has already begun investigating the 911 multi-state outages that occurred last night to get to the bottom of the cause and impact."

Outage did not affect emergency response times, officials say

The Wednesday outage began around 8 p.m. Central time and service was restored by 11 p.m., according to the state Department of Public Safety. The outage forced public safety officials and dispatchers to quickly change how they responded to incoming calls for service across the state.

Sioux Falls Fire Assistant Chief Mike Gramlick said in a news conference Thursday the city had never experienced an outage of "this magnitude or duration."

The city of Sioux Falls sent out a news release about the outage around 9 p.m., followed by a phone alert to area residents. During the time of the outage, the local dispatch received 112 calls for service —

79 phone calls, which were rerouted to a separate line, and 33 text messages, Gramlick said after the press conference.

That's significantly more text messages for 911 services than normal, Gramlick added.

"Call if you can, text if you can't. There are great uses for texting, chief among them domestic violence situations or if the caller has a hearing impairment," Gramlick told South Dakota Searchlight.

He said the higher number of text messages indicated the effectiveness of the phone alert encouraging the use of texting, which remained operational during the outage.

"This would be a very clear indication of the effectiveness of the communications that went out," Gramlick said.

In other areas of the state, such as Pennington County, which has its county seat in Rapid City, communications personnel used caller ID information to call people back immediately and respond to their needs. Chad Landis, office coordinator with Pennington County 911, said there was a delay of "less than seconds" in connecting with the caller and dispatching emergency services.

"Our dispatchers were able to continue to provide all of the emergency services without interruption," Landis said, encouraging residents across South Dakota to save their local non-emergency phone number to their mobile contacts in case another outage occurs.

Pennington County received 34 emergency phone calls during the outage — not including more than 100 "test" phone calls from the public that came in after the county sent alerts about the outage. The county also put out an alert Wednesday night asking people to stop making test calls. Landis said the non-emergency calls "presented some challenges."

"On a normal working shift for a dispatcher, they're handling phone calls while dispatching radio traffic and emergency services," Landis said. "Getting a huge uptick in all these calls — 100 more than we normally would get during that time frame — puts additional stress on the staff already here."

Landis said there were eight dispatchers monitoring phone lines at the start of the outage, but another four were called in to handle the additional call load.

Questions to the state Department of Public Safety regarding operations of the 911 text messaging service, why it was not affected by the outage and the role Lumen plays in 911 security have not yet been answered.

The representative with Lumen did not respond to South Dakota Searchlight questions regarding the company's next steps or how the company plans to prevent more outages.

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.

Native Americans have shorter life spans. Better health care isn't the only answer.

BY: ARIELLE ZIONTS, KFF HEALTH NEWS - APRIL 18, 2024 6:30 AM

HISLE, S.D. — Katherine Goodlow is only 20, but she has experienced enough to know that people around her are dying too young.

Goodlow, a member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, said she's lost six friends and acquaintances to suicide, two to car crashes, and one to appendicitis. Four of her relatives died in their 30s or 40s, from causes such as liver failure and COVID-19, she said. And she recently lost a 1-year-old nephew.

"Most Native American kids and young people lose their friends at a young age," said Goodlow, who is considering becoming a mental health therapist to help her community. "So, I'd say we're basically used to it, but it hurts worse every time we lose someone."

Native Americans tend to die much earlier than white Americans. Their median age at death was 14 years younger, according to an analysis of 2018-21 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The disparity is even greater in Goodlow's home state. Indigenous South Dakotans who died between

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2017 and 2021 had a median age of 58 — 22 years younger than white South Dakotans, according to state data.

Donald Warne, a physician who is co-director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health and a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, can rattle off the most common medical conditions and accidents killing Native Americans.

But what's ultimately behind this low life expectancy, agree Warne and many other experts on Indigenous health, are social and economic forces. They argue that in addition to bolstering medical care and fully funding the Indian Health Service — which provides health care to Native Americans — there needs to be a greater investment in case management, parenting classes, and home visits.

"It's almost blasphemy for a physician to say," but "the answer to addressing these things is not hiring more doctors and nurses," Warne said. "The answer is having more community-based preventions."

The Indian Health Service funds several kinds of these programs, including community health worker initiatives, and efforts to increase access to fresh produce and traditional foods.

Private insurers and state Medicaid programs, including South Dakota's, are increasingly covering such services. But insurers don't pay for all the services and aren't reaching everyone who qualifies, according to Warne and the National Academy for State Health Policy.

Warne pointed to Family Spirit, a program developed by the Johns Hopkins center to improve health outcomes for Indigenous mothers and children.

Chelsea Randall, the director of maternal and child health at the Great Plains Tribal Leaders' Health Board, said community health workers educate Native pregnant women and connect them with resources during home visits.

"We can be with them throughout their pregnancy and be supportive and be the advocate for them," said Randall, whose organization runs Family Spirit programs across seven reservations in the Dakotas, and in Rapid City, South Dakota.

The community health workers help families until children turn 3, teaching parenting skills, family planning, drug abuse prevention, and stress management. They can also integrate the tribe's culture by, for example, using their language or birthing traditions.

The health board funds Family Spirit through a grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration, Randall said. Community health workers, she said, use some of that money to provide child car seats and to teach parents how to properly install them to counter high rates of fatal crashes.

Other causes of early Native American deaths include homicide, drug overdoses, and chronic diseases, such as diabetes, Warne said. Native Americans also suffer a disproportionate number of infant and maternal deaths.

The crisis is evident in the obituaries from the Sioux Funeral Home, which mostly serves Lakota people from the Pine Ridge Reservation and surrounding area. The funeral home's Facebook page posts obituaries for older adults, but also for many infants, toddlers, teenagers, young adults, and middle-aged residents.

Misty Merrival, who works at the funeral home, blames poor living conditions. Some community members struggle to find healthy food or afford heat in the winter, she said. They may live in homes with broken windows or that are crowded with extended family members. Some neighborhoods are strewn with trash, including intravenous needles and broken bottles.

Seeing all these premature deaths has inspired Merrival to keep herself and her teenage daughter healthy by abstaining from drugs and driving safely. They also talk every day about how they're feeling, as a suicide-prevention strategy.

"We've made a promise to each other that we wouldn't leave each other like that," Merrival said.

Many Native Americans live in small towns or on poor, rural reservations. But rurality alone doesn't explain the gap in life expectancy. For example, white people in rural Montana live 17 years longer, on average, than Native Americans in the state, according to state data reported by Lee Enterprises newspapers.

Many Indigenous people also face racism or personal trauma from child or sexual abuse and exposure to drugs or violence, Warne said. Some also deal with generational trauma from government programs and policies that broke up families and tried to suppress Native American culture.

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Even when programs are available, they're not always accessible.

Families without strong internet connections can't easily make video appointments. Some lack cars or gas money to travel to clinics, and public transportation options are limited.

Randall, the health board official, is pregnant and facing her own transportation struggles.

It's a three-hour round trip between her home in the town of Pine Ridge and her prenatal appointments in Rapid City. Randall has had to cancel several appointments when family members couldn't lend their cars.

Goodlow, the 20-year-old who has lost several loved ones, lives with seven other people in her mother's two-bedroom house along a gravel road. Their tiny community on the Pine Ridge Reservation has homes and ranches but no stores.

Goodlow attended several suicide-prevention presentations in high school. But the programs haven't stopped the deaths. One friend recently killed herself after enduring the losses of her son, mother, best friend, and a niece and nephew.

A month later, another friend died from a burst appendix at age 17, Goodlow said. The next day, Goodlow woke up to find one of her grandmother's parakeets had died. That afternoon, she watched one of her dogs die after having seizures.

"I thought it was like some sign," Goodlow said. "I started crying and then I started thinking, 'Why is this happening to me?'"

Warne said the overall conditions on some reservations can create despair. But those same reservations, including Pine Ridge, also contain flourishing art scenes and language and cultural revitalization programs. And not all Native American communities are poor.

Warne said federal, state, and tribal governments need to work together to improve life expectancy. He encourages tribes to negotiate contracts allowing them to manage their own health care facilities with federal dollars because that can open funding streams not available to the Indian Health Service.

Katrina Fuller is the health director at Sičanġu Co, a nonprofit group on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. Fuller, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, said the organization works toward "wicozani," or the good way of life, which encompasses the physical, emotional, cultural, and financial health of the community.

Sičanġu Co programs include bison restoration, youth development, a Lakota language immersion school, financial education, and food sovereignty initiatives.

"Some people out here that are struggling, they have dreams, too. They just need the resources, the training, even the moral support," Fuller said. "I had one person in our health coaching class tell me they just really needed someone to believe in them, that they could do it."

Arielle Zions, rural health care correspondent for KFF Health News, is based in South Dakota. She primarily covers South Dakota and its neighboring states and tribal nations. Arielle previously worked at South Dakota Public Broadcasting, where she reported on business and economic development. Before that, she was the criminal justice reporter at the Rapid City Journal and a general assignment reporter at the Nogales International, on the border of Arizona and Mexico. She graduated from Pitzer College in Claremont, California. Arielle lives in Rapid City with her cat, Sully.

Full jury selected in Trump's criminal trial on hush-money charges

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 18, 2024 6:54 PM

The New York state court trying former President Donald Trump on criminal charges empaneled a full 12-person jury on the third day of the trial Thursday, according to reports.

The trial approached the end of its first phase Thursday afternoon as one of six alternate jurors was also selected. Selection of more alternates will continue Friday.

Juan Merchan, the judge overseeing the case, said Tuesday that oral arguments could begin as early as the start of next week, and the selection of jurors appeared to make that possibility more likely. The court did not meet Wednesday.

Seven jurors had been chosen before Thursday, but two were excused before the court broke for lunch. Seven more jurors were chosen in the afternoon.

The trial, which could go weeks, is keeping Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for president, away from the campaign trail. He complained to reporters as he exited the courtroom that the trial was interfering with his campaign, CNN reported.

During a break Thursday, the former president posted a message on his social media platform blasting the U.S. House bipartisan foreign aid package, which Republican Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana has endorsed.

A New York grand jury last year charged Trump with 34 felony counts of falsifying business records, saying he lied about payments his former attorney and fixer Michael Cohen made to adult film star Stormy Daniels in the leadup to the 2016 presidential election to cover up an affair. Trump has denied the affair.

Cohen is expected to take the stand during the trial, and Trump's defense team will likely make his credibility a major issue. Cohen first denied any role in the payments, but later admitted to paying Daniels \$130,000.

In 2018, he pleaded guilty to federal charges, including perjury, for lying to a congressional committee about a separate incident and served a prison sentence. Some polling suggests a guilty verdict in the trial could hurt Trump's standing with voters, though observers differ on whether even a felony conviction would seriously erode his base of support.

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

BLM to finalize rule allowing federal leases targeted at protection of natural areas

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 18, 2024 5:02 PM

The Bureau of Land Management will publish a final rule soon allowing the nation's public lands to be leased for environmental protection, a Thursday news release from the Interior Department said.

The rule, which both proponents and detractors say marks a shift in the agency's focus toward conservation, directs land managers at the agency to identify landscapes in need of restoration and to create plans to fill those needs.

It also creates two new types of leases focused on protecting natural areas. The BLM already leases parcels of land for extractive industries including energy development, mining and livestock grazing.

The rule is likely to set off a conflict in Congress, where Republicans immediately on Thursday renewed their criticism of President Joe Biden's conservation policies.

In a deviation from the March 2023 draft rule that proposed a new category of conservation leases, the final rule will allow two new types of leases: restoration and mitigation.

Restoration leases will be "a tool for investment in the health of our public lands" an agency fact sheet reads. Lessees would be empowered to work to restore lands, including those impacted by other uses.

Similarly, mitigation leases would be a tool to offset the impacts of other BLM land uses. The agency said an example could be a solar power company that has a facility on BLM land may receive a mitigation lease to restore nearby habitat to mitigate the impact of its development.

The rule is in line with BLM's multiple-use mandate that requires balancing energy development, mining, recreation and other uses on the nation's public lands, the agency said.

"As stewards of America's public lands, the Interior Department takes seriously our role in helping bolster landscape resilience in the face of worsening climate impacts," Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said in a statement.

"Today's final rule helps restore balance to our public lands as we continue using the best-available science to restore habitats, guide strategic and responsible development, and sustain our public lands for

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generations to come.”

BLM released a 178-page preliminary version of the rule Thursday, saying a substantially similar version would be published as a final rule “in the coming days.”

Congressional fight ahead

The rule has met with polarized reaction since the draft proposal was released in March 2023.

Reaction to the final rule from across the political spectrum began arriving within minutes of the announcement Thursday.

Conservation groups and environmental advocates cheered the rule for prioritizing conservation, while Republicans worried it would restrict other types of uses on public lands.

The Mountain Pact, a coalition of local leaders from Western states, released a statement praising the rule.

“The BLM’s Public Lands Rule highlights the need for the agency to work with local communities to focus on the conservation of land, water, and wildlife to ensure communities can protect future access to federal public lands while combating the growing impacts of climate change,” Patrice Horstman, the chair of the Coconino County, Arizona, Board of Supervisors, said in the statement.

David Willms, associate vice president for public lands at the National Wildlife Federation, said in a written statement the rule gives BLM “new tools to restore and conserve degraded lands, while supporting robust local economies. The rule will help the agency identify intact landscapes that wildlife depend on for survival, which will ensure that they thrive for decades to come.”

Democrats in Congress also applauded the measure.

Colorado’s Diana DeGette, the ranking member on the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy and Climate, called the move “a significant accomplishment for land conservation and wildlife protection.”

“I am proud that BLM and the Biden Administration are continuing to lead in defending our natural world,” she said in a statement.

Pledge to repeal

But Republicans pledged to undo it.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the top Republican on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, promised he and North Dakota’s senior Republican senator would challenge the rule with a resolution under the Congressional Review Act. The law allows lawmakers to try to repeal executive branch rulemaking.

“The people of Wyoming depend on access to public lands for their livelihoods — including energy and mineral production, grazing, and recreation,” Barrasso said in a statement “With this rule, President Biden is allowing federal bureaucrats to destroy our way of life. Senator John Hoeven and I will introduce a Congressional Review Act resolution to repeal this outrageous rule.”

The closely divided U.S. Senate has approved Congressional Review Act resolutions on environmental and agricultural issues in which rural-state Democrats or those in tough reelection races, such as centrist West Virginian Joe Manchin III, Ohio’s Sherrod Brown or Jon Tester of Montana, align with Republicans.

Republicans on the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee approved a bill, sponsored by Utah Republican John Curtis, last year to block the rule from taking effect. The legislation has not received a vote from the full House.

“This rule from the Biden Administration undermines the very people who rely on our federal lands for ranching, grazing, recreation, and beyond,” Curtis said in a Thursday release.

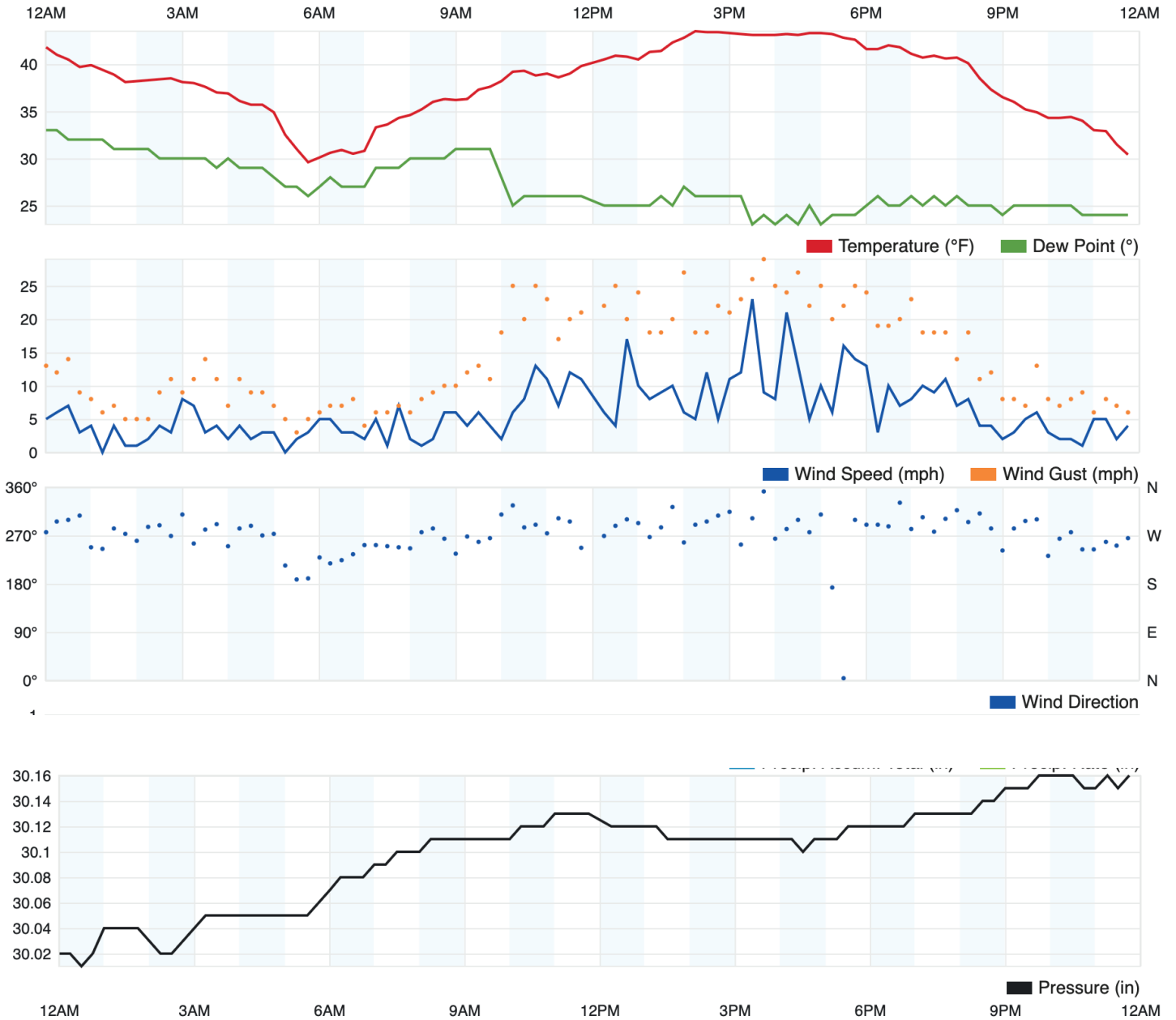
House Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman of Arkansas said Thursday he would do “everything in (his) power” to get Curtis’ bill through the House.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today

Tonight

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



Breezy.
Partly Sunny
then Slight
Chance Snow
Showers

High: 42 °F



Slight Chance
Snow Showers
and Blustery
then Mostly
Clear

Low: 25 °F



Sunny

High: 50 °F



Clear

Low: 26 °F



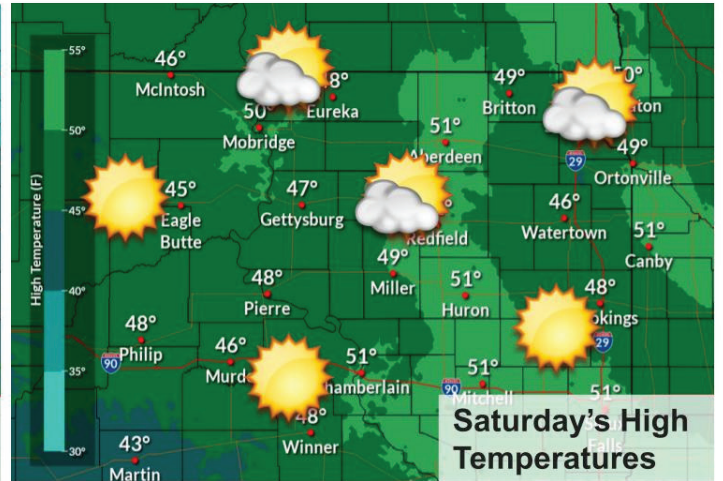
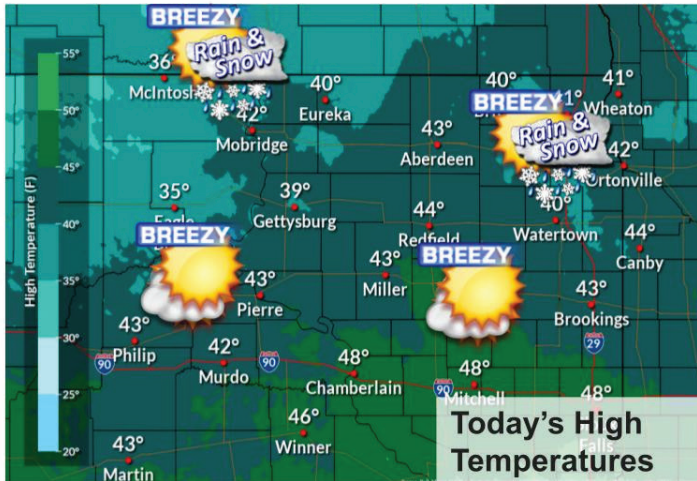
Sunny

High: 60 °F

Staying Cool Today And Saturday

Cooler Canada-sourced air will be sticking around today and Saturday. This should keep temperatures near to below normal for the next couple of days; cold enough, in fact, to produce snow showers for some locations this afternoon.

There is a warming trend expected, though, for the second half of the weekend into next week, along with rain chances on Monday.



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: April 19, 2024 3:51 AM

Cooler Canada-sourced air will be sticking around today and Saturday. This should keep temperatures near to below normal for the next couple of days; cold enough, in fact, to produce snow showers for some locations this afternoon. There is a warming trend expected, though, for the second half of the weekend into next week, along with rain chances on Monday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 44 °F at 2:38 PM

Low Temp: 30 °F at 5:42 AM

Wind: 29 mph at 3:33 PM

Precip: 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 45 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1923

Record Low: 12 in 1988

Average High: 59

Average Low: 33

Average Precip in April.: 0.97

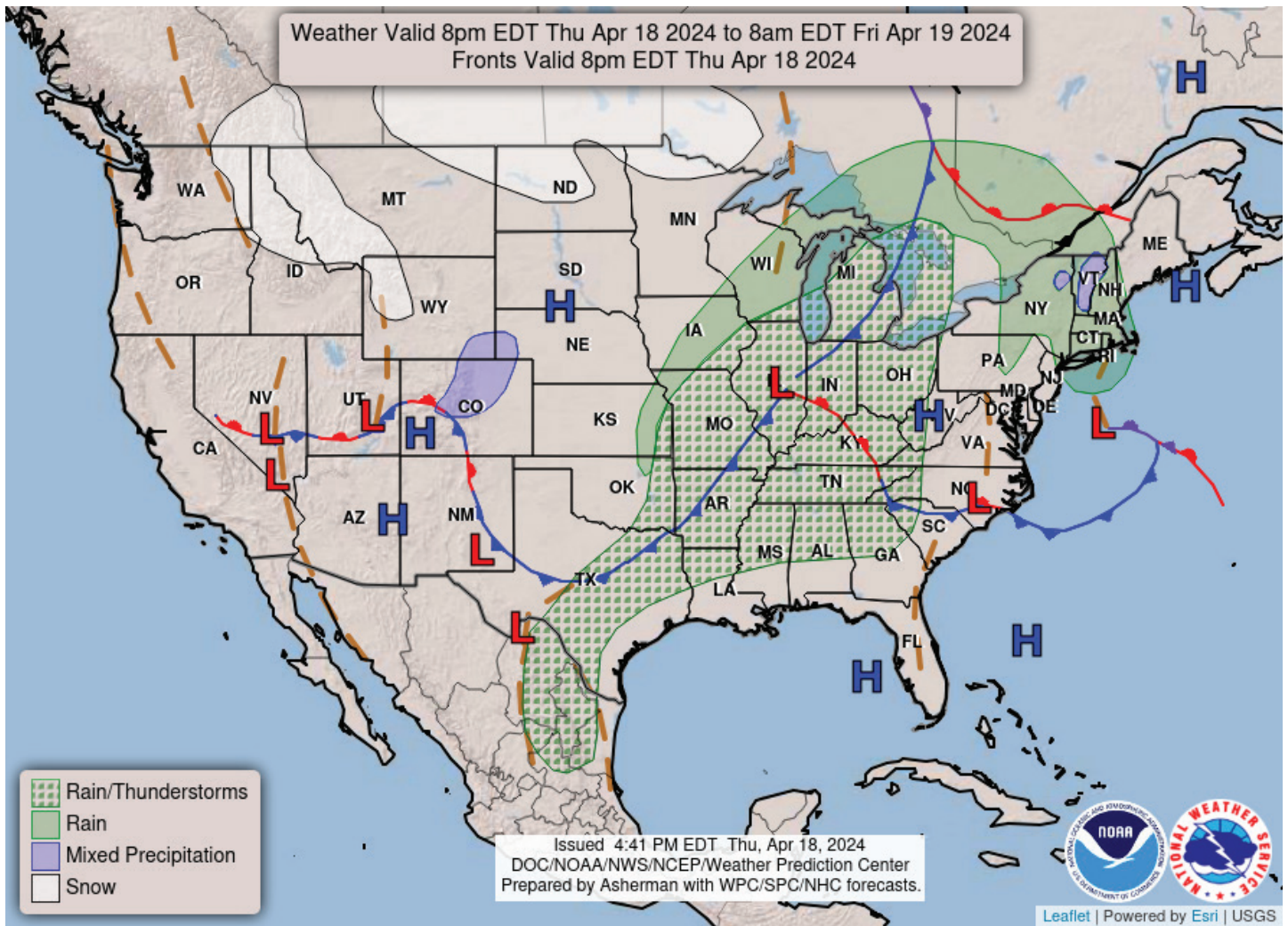
Precip to date in April: 2.34

Average Precip to date: 3.03

Precip Year to Date: 3.29

Sunset Tonight: 8:24:29 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:36:55 am



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Today in Weather History

April 19, 1955: An F2 tornado moved NNW from 16 miles Southwest of Aberdeen, in the Townships of Good Hope and Highland. Only the houses were left intact on the four farms that were torn apart. Also, an F2 tornado destroyed barns 8 miles Southeast of Gettysburg causing \$8,000 in damage. In Corson and Dewey Counties, two F0 tornadoes touched down, one after the other, causing over \$3,000 worth of damage and injuring two people. An additional F2 tornado moved NNW in Clear Lake and Richland Townships. Buildings were destroyed on five farms.

April 19, 1971: An unofficial rainfall amount of 6 inches in 24 hours was reported at White River. An official number of 4 plus inches was reported at Murdo, causing the washout of a railroad and derailment of a freight train. The Ghost Hawk Dam broke on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, and the flood waters damaged a trailer home and two cars. Flooding occurred along the Bad, White, and Little White Rivers and Pine Creek.

April 19, 2006: An intense spring snowstorm swept across the Dakotas, dumping up to 5 feet of snow. The heaviest snow fell in the Black Hills, with 59.4 inches at Lead, SD. Bowman, ND reported 18 inches. The storm closed highways including I-94 in North Dakota, cutting power to thousands and was responsible for at least four deaths. Further west, 1 to 3 feet of snow and 50 to 60 mph winds caused drifts up to 10 feet, widespread power outages, and livestock losses.

1775: The first engagement of the Revolutionary War took place under crisp, clear weather at Lexington-Concord.

1927: A deadly tornado outbreak occurred across the central part of Illinois, killing 21 people. The first tornado touched down near Hardin, traveling northeast through Carrollton, then skimmed the south side of Springfield. At Carrollton, a teacher was killed as she held the door of the school shut, saving the lives of her students. The second tornado, peaking at estimated F4 intensity, touched down on the southeast side of Springfield, then moved to affect the towns of Riverton, Buffalo Hart, Chestnut, and Cornland. In Buffalo Hart, only three houses were left standing, while the northern half of Cornland was leveled. The tornado track was 65 miles, ending in Ford County.

1941 - The temperature at Sodus, NY, soared to 95 degrees. The next day Albany, NY, reported a record for April of 93 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1973 - Glenrock, WY, received 41 inches of snow in just 24 hours, and a storm total of 58 inches, to establish two state records. (18th-20th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1976 - The northeastern U.S. was in the midst of an early season heat wave, and the Boston Marathon took place in 90 degree heat. At Providence RI the mercury hit 98 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1986: A major storm system produced ten tornadoes in Texas. One of these tornadoes virtually annihilated the town of Sweetwater. The tornado struck at the unlikely time of 7:17 am. One person was killed, and 100 were injured.

1987 - Forty cities in the central U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 80s and lower 90s for Easter Sunday. Fort Smith AR reported a record high of 95 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms over the southeastern U.S. early in the day spawned a strong (F-3) tornado which destroyed seventeen homes and severely damaged thirty houses near Madison FL killing four persons and injuring eighteen others. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A dozen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 98 degrees at Hanksville UT equalled their record for April. Tucson AZ reported their earliest 100 degree reading of record. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Five cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date as readings dipped into the 20s and upper teens. Elkins WV reported a record low of 20 degrees. Thunderstorms over the Southern Plains produced golf ball size hail at San Angelo TX, and up to four inches of rain in southwestern Oklahoma. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1996 - One of the most memorable tornado outbreaks in Illinois history occurred on April 19, 1996. During the day, 33 tornadoes were reported as supercells erupted and moved across the state during the afternoon and evening hours. Wind estimates in excess of 170 mph were associated with some of the stronger tornadoes, one of which ripped through nearby Ogden, IL. (University of Illinois WW2010)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

"MY FATHER KNOWS!"

A customer was watching young James help his father move boxes of shoes from one location to another. Seeing the pile grow higher and higher in the boy's arms, he politely asked, "Son, I don't see how you can carry any more. Isn't that too much for you?"

Cheerfully he responded, "Sir, my father knows how much I can carry."

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, wanted to give them a burst of encouragement as they faced the temptations in a sinful culture. So, he said, "God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it." In other words, "He knows how much you can carry."

No one is immune from the temptations of life. Even if we feel that we are being singled out by God for a special examination, we must realize that others have faced similar temptations and have successfully resisted them. We have God's Word that He will always give us the strength to face the temptations and avoid sinning.

The issue is not about being able to face and flee temptation; the issue is whether or not we want to.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to realize that Your Son faced every temptation that we will face yet remained sinless. May we, as He did, call on You for help. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. 1 Corinthians 10:13



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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.16.24

21 26 36 44 59 2

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$178,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 2 Mins 24 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 17 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.18.24

4 10 16 44 45 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 32 Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

2 4 11 25 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$62,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 32 Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

7 8 25 39 68 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 1 Mins 24 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 1 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Light pole installation in Missouri hits fiber line, knocks out 911 service in several states

By SARAH BRUMFIELD, JOSH FUNK and JIM SALTER Associated Press

Workers installing a light pole in Missouri cut into a fiber line, knocking out 911 service for emergency agencies in Nebraska, Nevada and South Dakota, an official with the company that operates the line said Thursday.

Problems with 911 calls in a Texas city along the U.S. border with Mexico were unrelated, officials said, but the widespread outage created concerns about what was causing the problems.

For most agencies, it turned out to be the result of simple human error.

In Kansas City, Missouri, workers installing a light pole for another company Wednesday cut into a Lumen Technologies fiber line, Lumen global issues director Mark Molzen said in an email to The Associated Press. Service was restored within 2 1/2 hours, he said. There were no reports of 911 outages in Kansas City.

Meanwhile, the difficulties some cellphone callers experienced making 911 calls in in Del Rio, Texas, were apparently because of an outage involving a cellular carrier, not the city's 911 system, city spokesman Peter Ojeda said. Lumen is not a 911 service provider for Texas.

Federal officials were looking into the outage.

"When you call 911 in an emergency, it is vital that call goes through. The FCC has already begun investigating the 911 multi-state outages that occurred last night to get to the bottom of the cause and impact," Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel said in a statement.

The outages created confusion for some people trying to reach emergency agencies.

The Dundy County Sheriff's Office in Nebraska warned in a social media post Wednesday night that 911 callers would receive a busy signal and urged people to instead call the administrative phone line. About three hours later, officials said mobile and landline 911 services had been restored.

In Douglas County, home to Omaha and more than a quarter of Nebraska's residents, officials first learned there was a problem when calls from certain cellphone companies showed up in a system that maps calls but didn't go through over the phone. Operators started calling back anyone whose call didn't go through, and officials reached out to Lumen, which confirmed the outage. Service was restored by 4 a.m.

Kyle Kramer, the technical manager for Douglas County's 911 Center, said the outage highlights the potential problems of having so many calls go over the same network.

"As things become more interconnected in our modern world, whether you're on a wireless device or a landline now, those are no longer going over the traditional old copper phone wires that may have different paths in different areas," Kramer said. "Large networks usually have some aggregation point, and those aggregation points can be a high risk."

Kramer said this incident and the two previous 911 outages he has seen in the past year in Omaha make him concerned that communications companies aren't building enough redundancy into their networks.

"I would hope that all of the telcos would put as much effort as possible into making sure they do diversify as much as they can to try and avoid this," Kramer said.

The South Dakota Department of Public Safety said in a statement on social media Wednesday night that the 911 service interruption occurred throughout the state. The agency noted that texting to 911 was working in most locations and people could still reach local law enforcement through non-emergency lines. Less than two hours later, service was restored.

Officials in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, said during a news conference Thursday that the outage was unprecedented.

"To our knowledge, we have never experienced an outage of this magnitude or duration," Assistant Fire Chief Mike Gramlick said.

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department 911 Communications also warned Wednesday evening of an

outage affecting 911 and non-emergency calls in a social media post. Calls from landlines were not working, but officials said they could see the numbers of those who called from cellphones.

"Dial on a mobile device, and we will be able to see your number and will call you back right away," the department posted.

About two hours later, it said service was restored and everyone who called during the outage had received assistance.

Roger Entner, an analyst with Recon Analytics, said the depth of buried fiber lines varies greatly. In some places, often in neighborhoods, that can be just a few inches, while elsewhere they can be much deeper.

Entner said he was surprised by the outage because it is common to have "redundant lines," meaning that if one is damaged, a backup will continue to carry the service.

Brian Fontes, CEO of the National Emergency Number Association, said the outage highlights the importance of congressional funding to update critical telecommunications services.

The threat to connectivity is exacerbated in the current environment "where specialized 9-1-1 trunks and selective routers create single points of failure," Fontes said in a statement. He urged Congress to fund an upgraded system to better withstand disasters and cyberattacks.

In Del Rio, a city of 35,000, police said Wednesday that "an outage with a major cellular carrier" was to blame for the issues. Del Rio had the opposite problem of Las Vegas — 911 calls from some cellphones didn't work, so those needing help were urged to use a landlines or another cell carrier.

The outages, ironically, occurred in the midst of National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

Two shootings, two different responses — Maine restricts guns while Iowa arms teachers

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Six months after a deadly mass shooting by an Army reservist, Maine lawmakers this week passed a wide-ranging package of new gun restrictions.

Three months after a fatal school shooting, Iowa lawmakers this week passed legislation allowing trained teachers and staff to carry guns on school property.

Two states. Two tragedies. Two different approaches to improving public safety.

"We live in two different Americas, in essence," said Daniel Webster, a health policy professor affiliated with the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

"We see terrible acts of gun violence; no one wants them, of course," Webster said. "But we see this through different lenses."

Legislatures in about 20 states already have passed measures this year to expand gun rights or restrict access to firearms. Dozens more proposals are pending. The divide continues a trend seen last year, when more than half the states enacted firearms legislation, with Democrats generally favoring more limits and Republicans more freedoms for gun owners.

LIMITS ON GUNS IN MAINE

Maine has a tradition of hunting and gun ownership. But after an Army reservist killed 18 people and wounded 13 others in Lewiston, Democratic Gov. Janet Mills called for a variety of new laws aimed at preventing dangerous people from possessing guns and strengthening mental health services.

Before adjourning its 2024 session early Thursday, lawmakers approved measures imposing a 72-hour waiting period for gun purchases, expanding background checks on private gun sales and criminalizing sales to certain prohibited people. They also passed a ban on devices that convert semi-automatic firearms into rapid-firing weapons like machine guns, and enhanced an existing law that allows judges to temporarily remove guns from people during a mental health crisis.

A gun safety coalition praised it as a significant step forward in response to constituents' concerns after the Lewiston shooting. But Republican state Sen. Lisa Keim criticized colleagues for "using the tragedy to advance legislation" that had been unable to pass previously.

GUNS IN IOWA SCHOOLS

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In Perry, Iowa, a school principal and sixth-grade student died and several others were wounded when a 17-year-old student opened fire in January.

A 2021 state law already allowed schools to authorize individuals to carry firearms, though some districts have not done so because of concerns about insurance coverage.

The legislation given final approval Monday by the Republican-led Legislature builds upon the prior law by allowing teachers and staff who undergo gun safety training to get a professional permit to carry guns in schools. If they do, they would be protected from criminal or civil liability for use of reasonable force.

The legislation also requires large school districts to station a police officer or private security guard at each high school, unless the school board votes not to do so. Most of those school districts already have security staff.

DIVERGING STATE LAWS

Republican-led legislatures in Kentucky, Nebraska, South Dakota, Tennessee and Utah also passed measures this year that would expand the ability of some people to bring guns into schools. A bill passed in Wyoming allots \$480,000 to reimburse schools for the cost of training employees to carry guns on school property.

Louisiana and South Carolina, led by Republican lawmakers and governors, each enacted laws allowing people to carry concealed guns without a permit. The National Rifle Association, which supported the measures, said similar laws now exist in 29 states.

By contrast, the Democrat-led Delaware Legislature passed legislation requiring people wanting to buy a handgun to first be fingerprinted, undergo training and obtain a state permit.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, signed a pair of new laws imposing restrictions. One sets a seven-day waiting period to purchase firearms — more than double the three-day period required by the federal government for a background check.

Another new law in New Mexico prohibits carrying firearms within 100 feet (30 meters) of polling places, with an exemption for concealed-carry permit holders. Voting site restrictions on guns now exist in about one-third of the states and Washington, D.C., according to the gun-violence prevention group Giffords.

BUCKING PARTY TRENDS

Not all new gun policies diverge along partisan lines.

Republican Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin this year vetoed 30 gun-related bills passed by the Democratic-led General Assembly that he said would have trampled on constitutional rights. Yet Youngkin also signed some gun restrictions: One bans devices that convert semi-automatic handguns into automatic weapons. Another allows felony charges against parents who let a child have access to a firearm after being notified the child poses a threat of violence.

While signing several gun rights measures, Republican Gov. Mark Gordon of Wyoming also vetoed legislation that would have allowed people to carry concealed guns in public schools and government meetings. Gordon cited concerns the bill could have exceeded the separation of powers provision in the state constitution.

And in some cases, high-profile shootings have prompted lawmakers to avoid taking action on proposals they might otherwise have considered.

Missouri's Republican-led House had been prepared to debate bills exempting guns and ammunition from sales taxes and allowing people with concealed-carry permits to bring guns onto public transportation. But after the deadly shooting at the Kansas City Chiefs Super Bowl celebration, House Majority Leader Jon Patterson said those bills would not be brought up this year.

Chicago's response to migrant influx stirs longstanding frustrations among Black residents

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The closure of Wadsworth Elementary School in 2013 was a blow to residents of the majority-Black neighborhood it served, symbolizing a city indifferent to their interests.

So when the city reopened Wadsworth last year to shelter hundreds of migrants, without seeking community input, it added insult to injury. Across Chicago, Black residents are frustrated that long-standing needs are not being met while the city's newly arrived are cared for with a sense of urgency, and with their tax dollars.

"Our voices are not valued nor heard," says Genesis Young, a lifelong Chicagoan who lives near Wadsworth.

Chicago is one of several big American cities grappling with a surge of migrants. The Republican governor of Texas has been sending them by the busload to highlight his grievances with the Biden administration's immigration policy.

To manage the influx, Chicago has already spent more than \$300 million of city, state and federal funds to provide housing, health care, education and more to over 38,000 mostly South American migrants desperate for help. The speed with which these funds were marshaled has stirred widespread resentment among Black Chicagoans. But community leaders are trying to ease racial tensions and channel the public's frustrations into agitating for the greater good.

The outcry over migrants in Chicago and other large Democrat-led cities is having wider implications in an election year: The Biden administration is now advocating a more restrictive approach to immigration in its negotiations with Republicans in Congress.

Since the Wadsworth building reopened as a shelter, Young has felt "extreme anxiety" because of the noise, loitering and around-the-clock police presence that came with it. More than anything, she and other neighbors say it is a reminder of problems that have been left unsolved for years, including high rates of crime, unemployment and homelessness.

"I definitely don't want to seem insensitive to them and them wanting a better life. However, if you can all of a sudden come up with all these millions of dollars to address their housing, why didn't you address the homeless issue here," said Charlotte Jackson, the owner of a bakery and restaurant in the South Loop neighborhood.

"For so long we accepted that this is how things had to be in our communities," said Chris Jackson, who co-founded the bakery with his wife. "This migrant crisis has made many people go: 'Wait a minute, no it doesn't.'"

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson declined to comment for this story.

The city received more than \$200 million from the state and federal government to help care for migrants after Johnson appealed to Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker and President Joe Biden. The president will be in Chicago in August to make his reelection pitch at the 2024 Democratic National Convention.

Some Black Chicagoans are protesting the placement of shelters in their neighborhoods, but others aim to turn the adversity into an opportunity.

"Chicago is a microcosm to the rest of the nation," said the Rev. Janette C. Wilson, national executive director of the civil rights group PUSH for Excellence. Black communities have faced discrimination and underinvestment for decades and are justifiably frustrated, Wilson said. The attention the migrants are receiving is deserved, she added, but it's also a chance for cities to reflect on their responsibility to all underserved communities.

"There is a moral imperative to take care of everybody," Wilson said.

After nearly two years of acrimony, the city has begun to curb some accommodations for migrants — which has caused its own backlash. The city last month started evicting migrants who overstayed a 60-day limit at shelters, prompting condemnation from immigrant rights groups and from residents worried about public safety.

Marlita Ingram, a school guidance counselor who lives in the South Shore neighborhood, said she is

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concerned about the resources being shared “equitably” between migrants and longtime residents. But she also believes “it doesn’t have to be a competition” and sympathizes with the nearly 6,000 migrant children now enrolled in Chicago’s public schools.

As the potential for racial strife rises, some activists are pointing to history as a cautionary tale.

Hundreds of thousands of Black southerners moved to Chicago in the early 20th century in search of greater freedoms and economic opportunities. White Chicagoans at the time accused them of receiving disproportionate resources from the city, and in 1919 tensions boiled over.

In a surge of racist attacks in cities across the U.S. that came to be known as “Red Summer,” white residents burned large swaths of Chicago’s Black neighborhoods and killed 38 Black people, including by lynching.

“Those white folks were, like, ‘Hell no, they’re coming here, they’re taking our jobs,’” said Richard Wallace, founder of Equity and Transformation, a majority-Black community group that co-hosted in a forum in March to improve dialogue between Black and Latino residents.

He hears echoes of that past bigotry — intentional or not — when Black Chicagoans complain about the help being given to migrants. “How did we become like the white folks who were resisting our people coming to the city of the Chicago?” he said.

Labor and immigrant rights organizers have worked for years to tamp down divisions between working class communities. But the migrant crisis has created tensions between the city’s large Mexican American community and recently arrived migrants, many of whom hail from Venezuela.

“If left unchecked, we all panic, we’re all scared, we’re going to retreat to our corners,” said Leone Jose Bicchieri, executive director of Working Family Solidarity, a majority-Hispanic labor rights group. “The truth is that this city wouldn’t work without Black and Latino people.”

Black Americans’ views on immigration and diversity are expansive. The Civil Rights Movement was instrumental in pushing the U.S. to adopt a more inclusive immigration policy.

About half of Black Americans say the United States’ diverse population makes the country strong, including 30% who say it makes the U.S. “much stronger,” according to a March poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Many leaders in Black neighborhoods in and around Chicago are trying to strike a balance between acknowledging the tensions without exacerbating them.

“Our church is divided on the migrant crisis,” said the Rev. Chauncey Brown, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Maywood, Illinois, a majority-Black suburb of Chicago where some migrants are living in shelters.

There has been a noticeable uptick of non-English speakers in the pews, many of whom have said they are migrants in need of food and other services, Brown said. Some church members cautioned him against speaking out in support of migrants or allotting more church resources to them. But he said the Bible’s teachings are clear on this issue.

“When a stranger enters your land, you are to care for them as if they are one of your own,” he said.

Iran fires at suspected Israeli attack drones near Isfahan air base and nuclear site

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran fired air defenses at a major air base and a nuclear site early Friday morning near the central city of Isfahan after spotting drones, which were suspected to be part of an Israeli attack in retaliation for Tehran’s unprecedented drone-and-missile assault on the country.

No Iranian official directly acknowledged the possibility that Israel attacked, and the Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment. However, tensions have been high since the Saturday assault on Israel amid its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip and its own strikes targeting Iran in Syria.

U.S. officials declined to comment as of early Friday, but American broadcast networks quoting unnamed U.S. officials said Israel carried out the attack. The New York Times quoted anonymous Israeli officials

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claiming the assault, which came on Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's 85th birthday. Israeli politicians also made comments hinting that the country had launched an attack.

Air defense batteries fired in several provinces over reports of drones being in the air, state television reported. Iranian army commander Gen. Abdolrahim Mousavi said crews targeted several flying objects.

"The explosion this morning in the sky of Isfahan was related to the shooting of air defense systems at a suspicious object that did not cause any damage," Mousavi said. Others suggested the drones may be so-called quadcopters — four rotor, small drones that are commercially available.

Authorities said air defenses fired at a major air base in Isfahan, which long has been home to Iran's fleet of American-made F-14 Tomcats — purchased before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Tasnim also published a video from one of its reporters, who said he was in the southeastern Zerdenjan area of Isfahan, near its "nuclear energy mountain." The footage showed two different anti-aircraft gun positions, and details of the video corresponded with known features of the site of Iran's Uranium Conversion Facility at Isfahan.

"At 4:45, we heard gunshots. There was nothing going on," he said. "It was the air defense, these guys that you're watching, and over there too."

The facility at Isfahan operates three small Chinese-supplied research reactors, as well as handling fuel production and other activities for Iran's civilian nuclear program.

Isfahan also is home to sites associated with Iran's nuclear program, including its underground Natanz enrichment site, which has been repeatedly targeted by suspected Israeli sabotage attacks.

State television described all atomic sites in the area as "fully safe." The United Nations' nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, also said "there is no damage to Iran's nuclear sites" after the incident.

The IAEA "continues to call for extreme restraint from everybody and reiterates that nuclear facilities should never be a target in military conflicts," the agency said.

Iran's nuclear program has rapidly advanced to producing enriched uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels since the collapse of its atomic deal with world powers after then-President Donald Trump withdrew America from the accord in 2018.

While Iran insists its program is for peaceful purposes, Western nations and the IAEA say Tehran operated a secret military weapons program until 2003. The IAEA has warned that Iran now holds enough enriched uranium to build several nuclear weapons if it chose to do so — though the U.S. intelligence community maintains Tehran is not actively seeking the bomb.

Dubai-based carriers Emirates and FlyDubai began diverting around western Iran about 4:30 a.m. local time. They offered no explanation, though local warnings to aviators suggested the airspace may have been closed.

Iran then grounded commercial flights in Tehran and across areas of its western and central regions. Iran later restored normal flight service, authorities said.

Around the time of the incident in Iran, Syria's state-run SANA news agency quoted a military statement saying Israel carried out a missile strike targeting an air defense unit in its south and causing material damage. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said the strike hit a military radar for government forces. It was not clear if there were casualties, the Observatory said.

That area of Syria is directly west of Isfahan, some 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) away, and east of Israel.

Meanwhile in Iraq, where a number of Iranian-backed militias are based, residents of Baghdad reported hearing sounds of explosions, but the source of the noise was not immediately clear.

The incident Friday in Iran also sparked concerns about the conflict again escalating across the seas of the Middle East, which have been seeing attacks by the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels of Yemen on shipping over the war in Gaza.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center warned ships in the region that they could see increased drone activity in the skies.

"There are currently no indications commercial vessels are the intended target," it wrote.

The Houthis have launched at least 53 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sank another since

November, according to the U.S. Maritime Administration.

Houthi attacks have dropped in recent weeks as the rebels have been targeted by a U.S.-led airstrike campaign in Yemen and as shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined over the threat.

However, Iranian state-run media sought to downplay the incident after the fact, airing footage of an otherwise-peaceful Isfahan morning. That could be intentional, particularly after Iranian officials for days have been threatening to retaliate for any Israeli retaliatory attack on the nation.

"As long as Iran continues to deny the attack and deflect attention from it and no further hits are seen, there is space for both sides to climb down the escalation ladder for now," said Sanam Vakil, the director of the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House.

Biden's new Title IX rules protect LGBTQ+ students, but transgender sports rule still on hold

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

The rights of LGBTQ+ students will be protected by federal law and victims of campus sexual assault will gain new safeguards under rules finalized Friday by the Biden administration.

The new provisions are part of a revised Title IX regulation issued by the Education Department, fulfilling a campaign pledge by President Joe Biden. He had promised to dismantle rules created by former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who added new protections for students accused of sexual misconduct.

Notably absent from Biden's policy, however, is any mention of transgender athletes.

The administration originally planned to include a new policy forbidding schools from enacting outright bans on transgender athletes, but that provision was put on hold. The delay is widely seen as a political maneuver during an election year in which Republicans have rallied around bans on transgender athletes in girls' sports.

Instead, Biden is officially undoing sexual assault rules put in place by his predecessor and current election-year opponent, former President Donald Trump. The final policy drew praise from victims' advocates, while Republicans said it erodes the rights of accused students.

The new rule makes "crystal clear that everyone can access schools that are safe, welcoming and that respect their rights," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said.

"No one should face bullying or discrimination just because of who they are, who they love," Cardona told reporters. "Sadly, this happens all too often."

Biden's regulation is meant to clarify schools' obligations under Title IX, the 1972 women's rights law that outlaws discrimination based on sex in education. It applies to colleges and elementary and high schools that receive federal money. The update is to take effect in August.

Among the biggest changes is new recognition that Title IX protects LGBTQ+ students — a source of deep conflict with Republicans.

The 1972 law doesn't directly address the issue, but the new rules clarify that Title IX also forbids discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTQ+ students who face discrimination will be entitled to a response from their school under Title IX, and those failed by their schools can seek recourse from the federal government.

Many Republicans say Congress never intended such protections under Title IX. A federal judge previously blocked Biden administration guidance to the same effect after 20 Republican-led states challenged the policy.

Rep. Virginia Foxx, a Republican from North Carolina and chair of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, said the new regulation threatens decades of advancement for women and girls.

"This final rule dumps kerosene on the already raging fire that is Democrats' contemptuous culture war that aims to radically redefine sex and gender," Foxx said in a statement.

The revision was proposed nearly two years ago but has been slowed by a comment period that drew 240,000 responses, a record for the Education Department.

Many of the changes are meant to ensure that schools and colleges respond to complaints of sexual

misconduct. In general, the rules widen the type of misconduct that institutions are required to address, and it grants more protections to students who bring accusations.

Chief among the changes is a wider definition of sexual harassment. Schools now must address any unwelcome sex-based conduct that is so "severe or pervasive" that it limits a student's equal access to an education.

Under the DeVos rules, conduct had to be "severe, pervasive and objectively offensive," a higher bar that pushed some types of misconduct outside the purview of Title IX.

Colleges will no longer be required to hold live hearings to allow students to cross-examine one another through representatives — a signature provision from the DeVos rules.

Live hearings are allowed under the Biden rules, but they're optional and carry new limits. Students must be able to participate from hearings remotely, for example, and schools must bar questions that are "unclear or harassing."

As an alternative to live hearings, college officials can interview students separately, allowing each student to suggest questions and get a recording of the responses.

Those hearings were a major point of contention with victims' advocates, who said it forced sexual assault survivors to face their attackers and discouraged people from reporting assaults. Supporters said it gave accused students a fair process to question their accusers, arguing that universities had become too quick to rule against accused students.

Victims' advocates applauded the changes and urged colleges to implement them quickly.

"After years of pressure from students and survivors of sexual violence, the Biden Administration's Title IX update will make schools safer and more accessible for young people, many of whom experienced irreparable harm while they fought for protection and support," said Emma Grasso Levine, a senior manager at the group Know Your IX.

Despite the focus on safeguards for victims, the new rules preserve certain protections for accused students.

All students must have equal access to present evidence and witnesses under the new policy, and all students must have equal access to evidence. All students will be allowed to bring an advisor to campus hearings, and colleges must have an appeals process.

In general, accused students won't be able to be disciplined until after they're found responsible for misconduct, although the regulation allows for "emergency" removals if it's deemed a matter of campus safety.

The latest overhaul continues a back-and-forth political battle as presidential administrations repeatedly rewrite the rules around campus sexual misconduct.

The DeVos rules were themselves an overhaul of an Obama-era policy that was intended to force colleges to take accusations of campus sexual assault more seriously. Now, after years of constant changes, some colleges have been pushing for a political middle ground to end the whiplash.

Staff and shoppers return to 'somber' Sydney shopping mall 6 days after mass stabbings

By MARK BAKER and KEIRAN SMITH Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — Shoppers and workers returned to a "really quiet" Sydney mall Friday, where six days earlier an assailant stabbed six people to death and wounded more than a dozen others in an attack that police believe targeted women.

Westfield Bondi Junction mall near world-famous Bondi Beach had opened Thursday, although shops inside were closed, for a "community reflection day." New South Wales state Premier Chris Minns described it as "the first step in healing" in what has been a traumatic week for Australia's largest city.

There was a large police and security presence, with guards wearing black stab-proof vests posted on each level of the mall. Visitors numbered in the hundreds, but were fewer than the usual expected on a Friday during school holidays.

One visitor, Anthony Simpson, shopping with his two children, described the atmosphere at the usually

busy shopping center as "somber."

"It's got an eerie feeling, I guess you could say," Simpson said.

Another shopper, local Bondi resident Stephen Roy, simply said the mall was "really quiet."

Authorities said counseling services were available on site for retail workers and visitors.

Echoing similar calls made by the NSW government, the union that represents retail workers asked shoppers to be mindful and sensitive of how they interact with the shopping center's staff.

"It's going to be a pretty confronting day for many people," SDA NSW union secretary Bernie Smith said to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on Friday. "If you are in those shops, sure, you should acknowledge what's happened, but don't retraumatize workers by asking them what happened on that day."

A large floral tribute outside the mall that began on Sunday has continued to grow since the attack, as Sydney residents try and come to terms with the shocking attack.

A condolence book and a floral tribute had also been set up inside the shopping mall for visitors to pay their respects.

A candlelight vigil at nearby Bondi Beach is planned on Sunday evening to honor the victims.

The assailant, Joel Cauchi, was shot and killed by a police officer during his knife attack in the mall. The reopening of shops Friday coincided with a teenager being charged by police with terrorism offenses for the attack Monday at a Sydney church that wounded two Christian clerics.

The teen spoke in Arabic about the Prophet Muhammad being insulted after he stabbed Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel and the Rev. Isaac Royel during the Assyrian Orthodox service. He was later overpowered by parishioners, sustaining severe hand injuries.

Some have said the mall attack should be designated an act of terrorism if investigators found Cauchi's motivation was to target women. Five of the six people he killed were women, while the man who died was a mall security guard. The majority of those wounded were also women.

Police have ruled out terrorism, and Cauchi's family said he had a long history of schizophrenia.

Australia's Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus would not be drawn into the suggestion but said more needed to be done to prevent violence against women.

"I think we can talk about violence against women without blurring lines into something else," he told ABC Radio on Friday.

5 Japanese workers narrowly escape suicide bombing that targeted their vehicle in Pakistan

By ADIL JAWAD Associated Press

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — A suicide bomber detonated his explosive-laden vest near a van carrying Japanese autoworkers, who narrowly escaped the attack Friday that wounded three bystanders in Pakistan's port city of Karachi, police said.

The van had been heading to an industrial area where the five Japanese nationals worked at Pakistan Suzuki Motors, local police chief Arshad Awan said. He said police escorting the Japanese returned fire after coming under attack, killing an accomplice of the suicide bomber whose remains were found from the scene of the attack.

"All the Japanese who were the target of the attack are safe," he said.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif denounced the attack on the Japanese nationals. In separate statements, they praised police for quickly responding and foiling the attack. They also vowed to eliminate terrorism and prayed for the speedy recovery of those wounded in the attack.

Images on local news channels showed a damaged van, as police officers arrived at the scene of the attack. Awan said the three passersby who were wounded in the attack were in stable condition at a hospital.

Police were escorting the van after receiving reports about possible attacks on foreigners who are working in Pakistan on various Chinese-funded and other projects, said Tariq Mastoi, a senior police officer. He said

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a timely and quick response from the guards and police foiled the attack and both attackers were killed.

No one immediately claimed responsibility, but suspicion is likely to fall on a small separatist group or the Pakistani Taliban who have stepped up attacks on security forces in recent years. Insurgents have also targeted Chinese who are working in Pakistan on projects relating to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which includes a multitude of megaprojects such as road construction, power plants and agriculture.

In March, five Chinese and their Pakistani driver were killed when a suicide bomber in northwest Pakistan rammed his explosive-laden car into a vehicle when they were heading to the Dasu Dam, the biggest hydropower project in Pakistan, where they worked.

However, Japanese working in Pakistan have not been the target of any such attacks.

Karachi is the largest city in Pakistan and the capital of southern Sindh province.

AP Explains: 4/20 grew from humble roots to marijuana's high holiday

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Saturday marks marijuana culture's high holiday, 4/20, when college students gather — at 4:20 p.m. — in clouds of smoke on campus quads and pot shops in legal-weed states thank their customers with discounts.

This year's edition provides an occasion for activists to reflect on how far their movement has come, with recreational pot now allowed in nearly half the states and the nation's capital. Many states have instituted "social equity" measures to help communities of color, harmed the most by the drug war, reap financial benefits from legalization. And the White House has shown an openness to marijuana reform.

Here's a look at 4/20's history:

WHY 4/20?

The origins of the date, and the term "420" generally, were long murky. Some claimed it referred to a police code for marijuana possession or that it derived from Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Women No. 12 & 35," with its refrain of "Everybody must get stoned" — 420 being the product of 12 times 35.

But the prevailing explanation is that it started in the 1970s with a group of bell-bottomed buddies from San Rafael High School, in California's Marin County north of San Francisco, who called themselves "the Waldos." A friend's brother was afraid of getting busted for a patch of cannabis he was growing in the woods at nearby Point Reyes, so he drew a map and gave the teens permission to harvest the crop, the story goes.

During fall 1971, at 4:20 p.m., just after classes and football practice, the group would meet up at the school's statue of chemist Louis Pasteur, smoke a joint and head out to search for the weed patch. They never did find it, but their private lexicon — "420 Louie" and later just "420" — would take on a life of its own.

The Waldos saved postmarked letters and other artifacts from the 1970s referencing "420," which they now keep in a bank vault, and when the Oxford English Dictionary added the term in 2017, it cited some of those documents as the earliest recorded uses.

HOW DID '420' SPREAD?

A brother of one of the Waldos was a close friend of Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh, as Lesh once confirmed in an interview with the Huffington Post, now HuffPost. The Waldos began hanging out in the band's circle and the slang spread.

Fast-forward to the early 1990s: Steve Bloom, a reporter for the cannabis magazine High Times, was at a Dead show when he was handed a flier urging people to "meet at 4:20 on 4/20 for 420-ing in Marin County at the Bolinas Ridge sunset spot on Mt. Tamalpais." High Times published it.

"It's a phenomenon," one of the Waldos, Steve Capper, now 69, once told The Associated Press. "Most things die within a couple years, but this just goes on and on. It's not like someday somebody's going to say, 'OK, Cannabis New Year's is on June 23rd now.'"

While the Waldos came up with the term, the people who made the flier distributed at the Dead show

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— and effectively turned 4/20 into a holiday — remain unknown.

HOW IS IT CELEBRATED?

With weed, naturally.

Some celebrations are bigger than others: The Mile High 420 Festival in Denver, for example, typically draws thousands and describes itself as the largest free 4/20 event in the world. Hippie Hill in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has also attracted massive crowds, but the gathering was canceled this year, with organizers citing a lack of financial sponsorship and city budget cuts.

College quads and statehouse lawns are also known for drawing 4/20 celebrations, with the University of Colorado Boulder historically among the largest, though not so much since administrators banned the annual smokeout over a decade ago.

Some breweries make beers that are 420-themed, but not laced, including SweetWater Brewing in Atlanta, which is throwing a 420 music festival this weekend and whose founders went to the University of Colorado.

Lagunitas Brewing in Petaluma, California, releases its "Waldos' Special Ale" every year on 4/20 in partnership with the term's coiners. That's where the Waldos will be this Saturday to sample the beer, for which they picked out "hops that smell and taste like the dankest marijuana," one Waldo, Dave Reddix, said via email.

4/20 has also become a big industry event, with vendors gathering to try each other's wares.

THE POLITICS

The number of states allowing recreational marijuana has grown to 24 after recent legalization campaigns succeeded in Ohio, Minnesota and Delaware. Fourteen more states allow it for medical purposes, including Kentucky, where medical marijuana legislation that passed last year will take effect in 2025. Additional states permit only products with low THC, marijuana's main psychoactive ingredient, for certain medical conditions.

But marijuana is still illegal under federal law. It is listed with drugs such as heroin under Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act, meaning it has no federally accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.

The Biden administration, however, has taken some steps toward marijuana reform. The president has pardoned thousands of people who were convicted of "simple possession" on federal land and in the District of Columbia.

The Department of Health and Human Services last year recommended to the Drug Enforcement Administration that marijuana be reclassified as Schedule III, which would affirm its medical use under federal law.

According to a Gallup poll last fall, 70% of adults support legalization, the highest level yet recorded by the polling firm and more than double the roughly 30% who backed it in 2000.

Vivian McPeak, who helped found Seattle's Hempfest more than three decades ago, reflected on the extent to which the marijuana industry has evolved during his lifetime.

"It's surreal to drive by stores that are selling cannabis," he said. "A lot of people laughed at us, saying, 'This will never happen.'"

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

McPeak described 4/20 these days as a "mixed bag." Despite the legalization movement's progress, many smaller growers are struggling to compete against large producers, he said, and many Americans are still behind bars for weed convictions.

"We can celebrate the victories that we've had, and we can also strategize and organize to further the cause," he said. "Despite the kind of complacency that some people might feel, we still got work to do. We've got to keep earning that shoe leather until we get everybody out of jails and prisons."

For the Waldos, 4/20 signifies above all else a good time.

"We're not political. We're jokesters," Capper has said. "But there was a time that we can't forget, when it was secret, furtive. ... The energy of the time was more charged, more exciting in a certain way.

"I'm not saying that's all good — it's not good they were putting people in jail," he continued. "You wouldn't want to go back there."

Russia pummels exhausted Ukrainian forces with smaller attacks ahead of a springtime advance

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian troops are ramping up pressure on exhausted Ukrainian forces to prepare to seize more land this spring and summer as muddy fields dry out and allow tanks, armored vehicles and other heavy equipment to roll to key positions across the countryside.

With the war in Ukraine now in its third year and a vital U.S. aid package for Kyiv slowed down in Congress, Russia has increasingly used satellite-guided gliding bombs — which allow planes to drop them from a safe distance — to pummel Ukrainian forces beset by a shortage of troops and ammunition.

Despite Moscow's advantage in firepower and personnel, a massive ground offensive would be risky and — Russian military bloggers other experts say — unnecessary if Russia can stick to smaller attacks across the front line to further drain the Ukraine military.

"It's potentially a slippery slope where you get like a death by a thousand cuts or essentially death by a thousand localized offensives," Michael Kofman, a military expert with the Carnegie Endowment, said in a recent podcast to describe the Russian tactic. If the Russians stick to their multiple pushes across the front, he said, "eventually they may find more and more open terrain."

Last summer's counteroffensive by Ukraine was doomed when advancing Ukrainian units got trapped on vast Russian minefields and massacred by artillery and drones. The Russians have no reason to make that same mistake.

UKRAINIAN FORCES EXPOSED

Last November, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ordered his forces to build trenches, fortifications and bunkers behind the more than 1,000-kilometer front line, but analysts say construction work moved slowly, leaving areas unprotected.

"If the defensive lines had been built in advance, the Ukrainians wouldn't have retreated in such a way," Ukrainian military expert Oleh Zhdanov said. "We should have been digging trenches through the fall and it would have stemmed Russian advances. Now everything is exposed, making it very dangerous."

In a recent podcast, Kofman also said that Kyiv is "quite behind on effectively entrenching across the front" and "Ukraine does not have good secondary lines."

After capturing the Ukrainian stronghold of Avdiivka, Russian troops are zeroing in on the hill town of Chasiv Yar, which would allow them to move toward Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, key cities in the Kyiv-controlled part of the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine. Russia illegally annexed Donetsk and three other regions in 2022, and the Kremlin sees fully controlling that region as a priority.

Zhdanov said Ukraine doesn't have the firepower to repel Russian attacks.

"They promised to have a defensive line 10 kilometers (6 miles) behind Avdiivka where our troops could get and dig in, but there is none," he said.

Gen. Christopher Cavoli, head of U.S. European Command, sounded the alarm before Congress last week, warning that Ukraine will be outgunned 10 to one by Russia in a matter of weeks if Congress does not approve more military aid.

IN RUSSIA'S SIGHTS

After securing another term in a preordained election in March, President Vladimir Putin vowed to carve out a "sanitary zone" to protect Russia's border regions from Ukrainian shelling and incursions.

Putin didn't give any specifics, but Russian military bloggers and security analysts said that along with a slow push across the Donetsk region, Moscow could also try to capture Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv, which Russia tried and failed to take in the opening days of the war.

In a possible sign of a looming attack on Kharkiv, a city of 1.1 million about 30 kilometers (some 20 miles) south of the border, Russia has ramped up strikes on power plants in the area, inflicting significant damage and causing blackouts.

Ukraine doesn't have enough air defense to protect Kharkiv and other cities, and the constant Russian strikes are part of Moscow's strategy to "suffocate" it by destroying its infrastructure and forcing its resi-

dents to leave, Zhdanov said.

Retired Lt. Gen. Andrei Gurulev, now on the defense committee of Russia's lower chamber of parliament, acknowledged that capturing Kharkiv is a major challenge, and he predicted the military would try to surround it.

"It can be enveloped and blockaded," he said, adding that taking Kharkiv would open the way for a push deep into Ukraine and require more Russian troops.

After Putin's order for "partial mobilization" of 300,000 reservists last fall proved so unpopular that hundreds of thousands fled abroad to avoid being drafted, the Kremlin tried a different approach: It promised relatively high wages and other benefits to beef up its forces with volunteer soldiers. The move appears to have paid off as Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said the military recruited 540,000 volunteers in 2023.

"There are no plans for a new wave of mobilization," Viktor Bondarev, deputy head of defense affairs committee in the upper house of parliament, said in remarks carried by state RIA Novosti news agency. "We are doing well with the combat capability that we have."

Soldiers who lost limbs in Gaza fighting are finding healing on Israel's amputee soccer team

By PAMELA SAMPSON Associated Press

RAMAT GAN, Israel (AP) — When Ben Binyamin was left for dead, his right leg blown off during the Hamas attack on the Tribe of Nova music festival, the Israeli professional soccer player thought he would never again play the game he loved.

"When I woke up," the 29-year-old said, "I felt I was going to spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair."

Then Binyamin learned about a chance to be "normal" again: Israel's national amputee soccer team.

The team, which includes two Israeli soldiers who lost limbs fighting in the war with Hamas, has offered all three a chance to heal from life-altering wounds suffered during the Oct. 7 attacks and Israel's ensuing war in Gaza. It heads to France in June for the European Amputee Football Championships. Some 16 teams, mostly from Europe, will compete.

"It's the best thing in my life," said 1st Sgt. Omer Glikstal of the team's twice-weekly practices at a stadium in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan. The 20-year-old soldier from Haifa regularly played soccer until his life was turned upside-down when a rocket-propelled grenade shattered his left foot during a battle in Gaza in November.

"It's a very different game than I used to play, but in the end, it's the same," he said.

Dozens of Israelis lost limbs during the Hamas attacks that killed some 1,200 people in southern Israel and the war that followed. Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, home to a major rehabilitation center, says it alone has treated about 60 amputees.

Israel's Defense Ministry says 1,573 soldiers have been wounded since Israel began its ground offensive in late October, in which troops have engaged in close combat with Hamas militants. The military did not have specific statistics on amputees but said some 320 soldiers were critically wounded.

The Israeli athletes and others who lost limbs have benefited from a world-class medical system that has decades of experience treating young people injured in wars and conflict.

In Gaza, unknown numbers of Palestinians have also lost limbs in a war that has claimed nearly 34,000 lives, according to Gaza health officials. Gaza's health system has been overwhelmed by the war, and doctors and patients say they often need to choose between amputation or death. Before the war, Gaza also had a fledgling team of amputee soccer players wounded in previous conflicts with Israel.

Shaked Bitton, an Israeli army division commander, lost his right leg when he was shot by a Hamas sniper with a .50-caliber round — the type that can blast through concrete — near the Jabaliya refugee camp in late October. "I heard two shots. I fell down. I looked back," the 21-year-old soldier said, "and I saw my leg."

Bitton thought his life was over — he had never even met an amputee before — until he was visited in

the hospital by others who had lost limbs and successfully resumed their lives.

Among them was Zach Shichrur, founder of Israel's national amputee soccer team. Severely injured when a bus ran over his foot at age 8, he knew what these men were going through, and he offered them hope.

"There is nothing greater than to go out and compete at the international level when you have the Israeli flag on your chest. Most of us, if not all, could not have even imagined something like this," said Shichrur, 36, an attorney and the team's captain.

Since its founding five years ago, the Israeli team has met with growing success, placing third in the Nations League in Belgium in October. That qualified it to compete in the European championship in June.

Amputee soccer teams have six fielder players who are missing lower limbs; they play on crutches and without prosthetics. Each team has a goalkeeper with a missing upper extremity. The pitch is smaller than standard.

At team practices, the Israeli players are undeterred by the absence of an arm or a leg — whether from an accident, a war injury or a birth defect.

"We all have something in common. We've been through a lot of hard and difficult times. It unites us," said Aviran Ohana, a cybersecurity expert whose right leg is shorter than his left due to a birth defect, and who has played with the team for two years.

On a recent April evening, the team started its warm-up with sprints around the pitch, the men speeding forward propelled by one leg, steadied by their crutches.

A game against able-bodied teenagers followed. Benyamin, dripping with sweat, kicked the ball with his left leg as the coach shouted from the sidelines: "Forward! Forward!" Every goal was celebrated.

Sir Ludwig Guttmann, a Jewish neurologist who fled Nazi Germany in 1939 and settled in Britain, is credited with pioneering competitive sports as a form of rehabilitation. Guttmann, who organized the first competition for wheelchair athletes on the opening day of the 1948 London Olympic Games, is considered the father of the Paralympic Games, and his legacy has enhanced the lives of thousands of handicapped athletes.

In Israel today, the amputee soccer team offers the players the excitement of competition — and the healing powers of sport, said Michal Nechama, the team's physical therapist.

"They need it for their soul," she said. "It gives them joy, pride. That extra thing that you can't give in a hospital."

The Latest | Iran says air defense batteries fire after explosions reported near major air base

By The Associated Press undefined

Iran fired air defense batteries Friday reports of explosions near a major air base at the city of Isfahan, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. It remained unclear if the country was under attack, but tensions remain high after Iran's unprecedented missile-and-drone attack on Israel. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

IRNA said the defenses fired across several provinces. It did not elaborate on what caused the batteries to fire, though people across the area reported hearing the sounds.

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

The U.S. on Thursday vetoed a widely backed U.N. resolution that would have paved the way for full United Nations membership for a state of Palestine. The vote in the 15-member Security Council was 12 in favor, the United States opposed and two abstentions.

Separately, the U.S. and Britain announced that they were imposing a new round of sanctions on Iran. The moves came as European Union leaders meeting in Brussels vowed to ramp up sanctions on Iran to target its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon.

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The U.S. sanctions target individuals and entities that produce engines that power drones and are involved in steel production. The latest British measures target several Iranian military organizations, individuals and entities involved in Iran's drone and ballistic missile industries.

The Iranian attack on Saturday marked the first time that Tehran 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.

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 33,900 people, according to local health officials.

Currently:

- Iran fires air defense batteries in provinces as explosions heard near Isfahan
- US and UK issue new sanctions on Iran in response to Tehran's weekend attack on Israel.
- NATO and the EU urge G7 nations to step up air defense for Ukraine and expand Iran sanctions.
- US Congress moving swiftly on bipartisan action to punish Iran after revenge attack on Israel.
- Palestinian soccer renews call for sanctions against Israel at FIFA congress amid Hamas conflict.

Here is the latest:

IRAN SAYS AIR DEFENSES FIRE AFTER REPORTS OF EXPLOSIONS NEAR MAJOR AIRBASE

Iran fired air defense batteries early Friday morning after reports of explosions near a major air base at the city of Isfahan, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

It remained unclear if the country was under attack. However, tensions remain high after Iran's unprecedented missile-and-drone attack on Israel. One government official suggested sites may have been targeted by drones.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

IRNA said the defenses fired across several provinces. It did not elaborate on what caused the batteries to fire, though people across the area reported hearing the sounds.

In particular, IRNA said air defenses fired at a major air base in Isfahan, which long has been home to Iran's fleet of American-made F-14 Tomcats — purchased before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The semiofficial Fars and Tasnim news agencies also reported the sound of blasts, without giving a cause. State television acknowledged "loud noise" in the area.

Isfahan also is home to sites associated with Iran's nuclear program, including its underground Natanz enrichment site, which has been repeatedly targeted by suspected Israeli sabotage attacks. However, state television described all sites in the area as "fully safe."

Dubai-based airlines Emirates and FlyDubai began diverting flights around western Iran about 4:30 a.m. local time. They offered no explanation, though local warnings to aviators suggested the airspace may have been closed.

Iran later announced it grounded commercial flights in Tehran and across areas of its western and central regions. Loudspeakers informed customers of the incident at Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran, online videos purported to show.

Meanwhile in Iraq, where a number of Iranian-backed militias are based, residents of Baghdad reported hearing sounds of explosions, but the source of the noise was not immediately clear.

US VETOES RESOLUTION BACKING FULL UN MEMBERSHIP FOR PALESTINE

UNITED NATIONS — The United States has vetoed a widely backed U.N. resolution that would have paved the way for full United Nations membership for a state of Palestine.

The vote in the 15-member Security Council was 12 in favor, the United States opposed and two abstentions.

The resolution would have recommended that the 193-member General Assembly approve Palestine becoming the 194th member of the United Nations. Some 140 countries have already recognized a state

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of Palestine, so its admission would have been approved. There are no vetoes in the General Assembly. It was the second Palestinian attempt to become a full member of the United Nations. It came as the war in Gaza has put the more than 75-year-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict at center stage.

Palestinian membership "needs to be the outcome of the negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians," U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood said. It "is something that would flow from the result of those negotiations.

IRAN SAYS IT WILL RESPOND TO ANY ISRAELI ATTACK

UNITED NATIONS – Iran's foreign minister is again warning Israel that any use of force in response to his country's recent drone and missile attacks will be "decisive" and "make the regime regret its actions."

Hossein Amirabdollahian told a ministerial meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Thursday that Iran's attack over the weekend was a legitimate response to a suspected Israeli missile strike on its embassy compound in Syria on April 1 has concluded. Therefore, he said, Israel "must be compelled to stop any further military adventurism against our interests."

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel will retaliate.

Amirabdollahian warned, "Certainly, in case of any use of force by the Israeli regime, and violating our sovereignty, the Islamic Republic of Iran will not hesitate a bit to assert its inherent rights to give a decisive and proper response to make the regime regret its actions."

Iran and its allies fired more than 300 drones and missiles toward Israel, and 99% were blocked by Israeli air defenses with help from the U.S., Britain, France and Jordan. A 7-year-old girl was hurt, and an Israeli base suffered minor damage.

US REITERATES CONCERNS ABOUT MAJOR MILITARY ACTION IN RAFAH

WASHINGTON — Senior U.S. and Israeli officials have held a virtual meeting where Washington again "expressed concerns" about the possibility of a major offensive by Israel in the Gaza Strip city of Rafah amid its war with Hamas.

A readout of Thursday's meeting by U.S. and Israeli teams known as the Strategic Consultative Group said that "Israeli participants agreed to take these concerns into account and to have further follow up discussions between experts."

U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan was among those discussing Iran's recent attack of Israel with drones and ballistic missiles. The U.S. detailed "efforts to further enhance Israel's defense" including through "advanced capabilities" and cooperation from a coalition of international allies.

The Israeli side was led by Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer and National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi.

The readout said both sides "agreed on the shared objective to see Hamas defeated in Rafah." But the U.S. has long been worried about the effects a major Israeli military operation could have on Rafah's civilian population.

PALESTINIAN PROFESSOR WHO SAID ISRAEL IS COMMITTING GENOCIDE IS ARRESTED

JERUSALEM — Israeli police have arrested a Palestinian professor for speech deemed incendiary after she said Israel is committing genocide in Gaza and rallied colleagues and students to support a cease-fire.

Police arrested Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian on Thursday at her home in the Old City of Jerusalem, said Hassan Jabareen, director of Adalah, a legal rights group, and part of a team representing her.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian is a law professor at Hebrew University whose work focuses on gender-based violence. The university suspended her in March after she circulated a petition calling for a cease-fire in Gaza and said in interviews that Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians.

"What she's said is critical of the Israel government," said Jabareen. "It does not constitute a crime."

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who oversees the national police force, issued a statement praising the police.

"This arrest sends an important message — whoever incites against the state of Israel cannot hide behind this or that position or title," he said.

GUTERRES REITERATES CALLS FOR DE-ESCALATION OF TENSIONS

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations chief says "the Middle East is on a precipice" and is urging all

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countries to work together to prevent any actions that could spark a regionwide conflict.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a ministerial meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Thursday that "this moment of maximum peril must be a time for maximum restraint."

"One miscalculation, one miscommunication, one mistake, could lead to the unthinkable: a full-scale regional conflict that would be devastating for all involved, and for the rest of the world," he warned.

Guterres said the international community has a shared responsibility to engage in "comprehensive diplomatic action" to de-escalate violence and tensions in the Mideast, starting with Gaza.

GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY REPORTS 71 PEOPLE KILLED IN THE LAST 24 HOURS

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — The Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip says that 71 bodies were taken to hospitals over the past 24 hours.

It said Thursday that a total of at least 33,970 Palestinian have been killed since the Israel-Hamas war erupted more than six months ago. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its tallies but has said women and children make up most of those killed.

Palestinian medical officials say an Israeli airstrike overnight on the southern town of Rafah killed eight members of a family, including four children and three women, who had been displaced from northern Gaza.

More than half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have sought refuge in Rafah, on the border with Egypt. Israel has vowed to expand its ground offensive to the city.

The Health Ministry says people in Gaza City and other parts of the north are meanwhile living with no "real" medical services. It says northern Gaza needs field hospitals with 200 beds that also include operation rooms, intensive care units and laboratories.

OFFICIALS AT G7 MEETING CALL FOR NEW SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN

CAPRI, Italy — Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani opened the first working session of the Group of Seven meeting in Italy by calling for new sanctions against Iran for its weekend attack on Israel.

The Israel-Hamas war and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine were taking center stage at the meeting of foreign ministers from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States. On Wednesday, EU leaders meeting in Brussels vowed to ramp up sanctions on Iran to target its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said at the G7 meeting that the existing EU sanctions regime would be strengthened and expanded to punish Tehran and help prevent future attacks on Israel. At the same time, he said, Israel needed to exercise restraint.

"I don't want to exaggerate but we are on the edge of a war, a regional war in the Middle East, which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world, and in particular to Europe," he warned. "So stop it."

FAMILY OF NEPALI MAN HELD BY HAMAS APPEAL FOR HIS RELEASE

KATHMANDU, Nepal — Family members of the Nepali man still being held captive by Hamas militants after the Oct. 7 attack in Israel have called for his release.

Relatives of Bipin Joshi, 23, traveled from their home in western Nepal to the capital, Kathmandu, to make a public appeal on Thursday.

"My life has been devastated since his kidnapping," his father, Mahananda Joshi, said. "He is my only son without whom I cannot even imagine living my life. I love my son more than my life."

"I beg of you to kindly bring my son back home safe and alive," he said.

Joshi was abducted in the Oct. 7 attack in which 10 Nepalis were killed. Six other Nepalis survived, but many of them sustained injuries. They have returned to Nepal.

There has been no news of Joshi since the day he was taken captive. Nepal's government has given several assurances to the family that it was working with Israeli authorities to get him freed. But relatives were appealing for more to be done.

CHINA AND INDONESIA CALL FOR A CEASE-FIRE IN GAZA

The Chinese and Indonesian foreign ministers called for an immediate and lasting cease-fire in Gaza after a meeting Thursday in Jakarta, condemning the humanitarian costs of the Israel-Hamas war.

Indonesia's foreign minister, Retno Marsudi, told reporters that the two countries share the same view

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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."

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi blamed the United States for holding up cease-fire resolutions at the United Nations.

The U.S. vetoed a number of proposed U.N. Security Council resolutions because they didn't tie a 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.

Here's what you need to know about the world's largest democratic election kicking off in India

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — The world's largest democratic election could also be one of its most consequential.

With a population of over 1.4 billion people and close to 970 million voters, India's general election pits Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an avowed Hindu nationalist, against a broad alliance of opposition parties that are struggling to play catch up.

The 73-year-old Modi first swept to power in 2014 on promises of economic development, presenting himself as an outsider cracking down on corruption. Since then, he has fused religion with politics in a formula that has attracted wide support from the country's majority Hindu population.

India under Modi is a rising global power, but his rule has also been marked by rising unemployment, attacks by Hindu nationalists against minorities, particularly Muslims, and a shrinking space for dissent and free media.

HOW DOES THE ELECTION WORK?

The six-week-long general election started Friday and results will be announced June 4. The voters, who make up more than 10% of the world's population, will elect 543 members for the lower house of Parliament for a five-year term.

The polls will be held in seven phases, and ballots will be cast at more than a million polling stations. Each phase will last a single day with several constituencies across multiple states voting that day. The staggered polling allows the government to deploy tens of thousands of troops to prevent violence and transport election officials and voting machines.

India has a first-past-the-post multiparty electoral system in which the candidate who receives the most votes wins. To secure a majority, a party or coalition must breach the mark of 272 seats.

India uses electronic voting machines.

WHO IS RUNNING?

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party and his main challenger, Rahul Gandhi of the Indian National Congress, represent Parliament's two largest factions. Several other important regional parties are part of an opposition bloc.

Opposition parties, which have been previously fractured, have united under a front called INDIA, or Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, to deny Modi a third straight election victory.

The alliance has fielded a single main candidate in most constituencies. But it has been roiled by ideological differences and personality clashes, and has not yet decided on its candidate for prime minister.

Most surveys suggest Modi is likely to win comfortably, especially after he opened a Hindu temple in northern Ayodhya city in January, which fulfilled his party's long-held Hindu nationalist pledge.

Another victory would cement Modi as one of the country's most popular and important leaders. It would follow a thumping win in 2019, when the BJP clinched an absolute majority by sweeping 303 parliamentary seats. The Congress party managed only 52 seats.

WHAT ARE THE BIG ISSUES?

For decades, India has clung doggedly to its democratic convictions, largely due to free elections, an independent judiciary, a thriving media, strong opposition and peaceful transition of power. Some of

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these credentials have seen a slow erosion under Modi's 10-year rule, with the polls seen as a test for the country's democratic values.

Many watchdogs have now categorized India as a "hybrid regime" that is neither a full democracy nor a full autocracy.

The polls will also test the limits of Modi, a populist leader whose rise has seen increasing attacks against religious minorities, mostly Muslims. Critics accuse him of running on a Hindu-first platform, endangering the country's secular roots.

Under Modi, the media, once viewed as vibrant and largely independent, have become more pliant and critical voices muzzled. Courts have largely bent to Modi's will and given favorable verdicts in crucial cases. Centralization of executive power has strained India's federalism. And federal agencies have bogged down top opposition leaders in corruption cases, which they deny.

Another key issue is India's large economy, which is among the fastest growing in the world. It has helped India emerge as a global power and a counterweight to China. But even as India's growth soars by some measures, the Modi government has struggled to generate enough jobs for young Indians, and instead has relied on welfare programs like free food and housing to woo voters.

The U.N.'s latest Asia-Pacific Human Development Report lists India among the top countries with high income and wealth inequality.

12 students and teacher killed at Columbine to be remembered at 25th anniversary vigil

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The 12 students and one teacher killed in the Columbine High School shooting will be remembered Friday in a vigil on the eve of the 25th anniversary of the tragedy.

The gathering, set up by gun safety and other organizations, is the main public event marking the anniversary, which is more subdued than in previous milestone years.

Former Arizona Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, who began campaigning for gun safety after she was nearly killed in a mass shooting, will be among those speaking at the vigil. So will Nathan Hochhalter, whose sister Anne Marie was paralyzed after she was shot at Columbine. Several months after the shooting, their mother, Carla Hochhalter, took her own life.

The organizers of the vigil, which will also honor all those impacted by the shooting, include Colorado Ceasefire, Brady United Against Gun Violence and Colorado Faith Communities United Against Gun Violence, but they say it will not be a political event.

Tom Mauser, whose son Daniel, a sophomore who excelled in math and science, was killed at Columbine, decided to set up the vigil after learning school officials did not plan to organize a large community event as they did on the 20th anniversary. Mauser, who became a gun safety advocate after the shooting, said he realizes that it takes a lot of volunteers and money to put together that kind of event but he wanted to give people a chance to gather and mark the passage of 25 years since the shooting, a significant number people can relate to.

"For those who do want to reflect on it, it is something for them," said Mauser, who is on Colorado Ceasefire's board and asked the group to help organize the event at a church near the state Capitol in Denver. It had been scheduled to be held on the steps of the Capitol but was moved indoors because of expected rain.

Mauser successfully led the campaign to pass a ballot measure requiring background checks for all firearm buyers at gun shows in 2000 after Colorado's legislature failed to change the law. It was designed to close a loophole that helped a friend of the Columbine gunmen obtain three of the four firearms used in the attack.

A proposal requiring such checks nationally, inspired by Columbine, failed in Congress in 1999 after passing the Senate but dying in the House, said Robert Spitzer, professor emeritus at the State University of New York-Cortland and author of several books on gun politics.

Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore ran on a gun safety agenda against Republican George W. Bush the following year, but after his stance was mistakenly seen as a major reason for his defeat, Democrats largely abandoned the issue for the following decade, Spitzer said. But gun safety became a more prominent political issue again after the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting, he said.

Without much action nationally on guns, Democrat-led and Republican-controlled states have taken divergent approaches to responding to mass shootings.

Those killed at Columbine included Dave Sanders, a teacher who was shot as he shepherded students to safety during the attack. He lay bleeding in a classroom for almost four hours before authorities reached him. The students killed included one who wanted to be a music executive like his father, a senior and captain of the girls' varsity volleyball team, and a teen who enjoyed driving off-road in his beat-up Chevy pickup.

Sam Cole, another Colorado Ceasefire board member, said he hopes people will come out to remember the victims and not let the memory of them fade. The students killed would now be adults in the prime of their lives with families of their own, he said.

"It's just sad to think that they are always going to be etched in our mind as teenagers," he said.

Jury selection could be nearing a close in Donald Trump's hush money trial in New York

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

NEW YORK (AP) — A third panel of potential jurors will be questioned Friday in Donald Trump's hush money case, drawing jury selection a step closer to completion in the first criminal trial of a former U.S. president.

After a jury of 12 New Yorkers was seated Thursday, lawyers are now expected to turn their attention to picking remaining alternates who can vow to set aside their personal views and impartially judge the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. Thursday's court proceedings demonstrated unpredictability in the jury selection process of such a high-profile case, with two jurors who had been seated a day earlier being dismissed from the panel.

The judge has suggested that opening statements in the criminal trial could begin as early as Monday, before prosecutors begin laying out their case alleging a scheme to cover up negative stories Trump feared would hurt his 2016 presidential campaign.

The trial will place Trump in a Manhattan courtroom for weeks, forcing him to juggle his dual role as criminal defendant and political candidate against the backdrop of his hotly contested race against President Joe Biden. It will feature salacious and unflattering testimony his opponent will no doubt seize on to try to paint Trump as unfit to return as commander in chief.

Judge Juan M. Merchan is also expected to hold a hearing Friday to consider a request from prosecutors to bring up Trump's prior legal entanglements if he takes the stand in the hush money case. Manhattan prosecutors have said they want to question Trump about his recent civil fraud trial that resulted in a \$454 million judgment after a judge found Trump had lied about his wealth for years. He is appealing that verdict.

Trump says he did nothing wrong, and has cast himself as the victim of a politically motivated justice system bent on keeping him out of the White House. He has lashed out on social media about the judge, prosecutors and potential witnesses, prompting the district attorneys to seek sanctions for possible violations of a gag order in the criminal case.

After Thursday's court proceedings, Trump complained to reporters that he should have been out campaigning but was in court instead for what he said was a "very unfair trial."

"Everybody's outraged by it," he said. "You know the whole world's watching this New York scam."

The jury of Manhattanites includes a sales professional, a software engineer, a security engineer, an English teacher, a speech therapist, multiple lawyers, an investment banker and a retired wealth manager.

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

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 that the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses.

Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. He could get 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.

Trump faces four criminal cases, but it's not clear that any others will reach trial before the November election. Appeals and legal wrangling have caused delays in the other three cases charging Trump with plotting to overturn the 2020 election results and with illegally hoarding classified documents.

Emergency rooms refused to treat pregnant women, leaving one to miscarry in a lobby restroom

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One woman miscarried in the restroom lobby of a Texas emergency room as front desk staff refused to admit her. Another woman learned that her fetus had no heartbeat at a Florida hospital, the day after a security guard turned her away from the facility. And in North Carolina, a woman gave birth in a car after an emergency room couldn't offer an ultrasound. The baby later died.

Complaints that pregnant women were turned away from U.S. emergency rooms spiked in 2022 after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, federal documents obtained by The Associated Press reveal.

The cases raise alarms about the state of emergency pregnancy care in the U.S., especially in states that enacted strict abortion laws and sparked confusion around the treatment doctors can provide.

"It is shocking, it's absolutely shocking," said Amelia Huntsberger, an OB/GYN in Oregon. "It is appalling that someone would show up to an emergency room and not receive care -- this is inconceivable."

It's happened despite federal mandates that the women be treated.

Federal law requires emergency rooms to treat or stabilize patients who are in active labor and provide a medical transfer to another hospital if they don't have the staff or resources to treat them. Medical facilities must comply with the law if they accept Medicare funding.

The Supreme Court will hear arguments Wednesday that could weaken those protections. The Biden administration has sued Idaho over its abortion ban, even in medical emergencies, arguing it conflicts with the federal law.

"No woman should be denied the care she needs," Jennifer Klein, director of the White House Gender Policy Council, said in a statement. "All patients, including women who are experiencing pregnancy-related emergencies, should have access to emergency medical care required under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act."

PREGNANCY CARE AFTER ROE

Pregnant patients have "become radioactive to emergency departments" in states with extreme abortion restrictions, said Sara Rosenbaum, a George Washington University health law and policy professor.

"They are so scared of a pregnant patient, that the emergency medicine staff won't even look. They just want these people gone," Rosenbaum said.

Consider what happened to a woman who was nine months pregnant and having contractions when she arrived at the Falls Community Hospital in Marlin, Texas, in July 2022, a week after the Supreme Court's ruling on abortion. The doctor on duty refused to see her.

"The physician came to the triage desk and told the patient that we did not have obstetric services or capabilities," hospital staff told federal investigators during interviews, according to documents. "The nurs-

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ing staff informed the physician that we could test her for the presence of amniotic fluid. However, the physician adamantly recommended the patient drive to a Waco hospital."

Investigators with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services concluded Falls Community Hospital broke the law.

Reached by phone, an administrator at the hospital declined to comment on the incident.

The investigation was one of dozens the AP obtained from a Freedom of Information Act request filed in February 2023 that sought all pregnancy-related EMTALA complaints the previous year. One year after submitting the request, the federal government agreed to release only some complaints and investigative documents filed across just 19 states. The names of patients, doctors and medical staff were redacted from the documents.

Federal investigators looked into just over a dozen pregnancy-related complaints in those states during the months leading up to the U.S. Supreme Court's pivotal ruling on abortion in 2022. But more than two dozen complaints about emergency pregnancy care were lodged in the months after the decision was unveiled. It is not known how many complaints were filed last year as the records request only asked for 2022 complaints and the information is not publicly available otherwise.

The documents did not detail what happened to the patient turned away from the Falls Community Hospital.

'SHE IS BLEEDING A LOT'

Other pregnancies ended in catastrophe, the documents show.

At Sacred Heart Emergency Center in Houston, front desk staff refused to check in one woman after her husband asked for help delivering her baby that September. She miscarried in a restroom toilet in the emergency room lobby while her husband called 911 for help.

"She is bleeding a lot and had a miscarriage," the husband told first responders in his call, which was transcribed from Spanish in federal documents. "I'm here at the hospital but they told us they can't help us because we are not their client."

Emergency crews, who arrived 20 minutes later and transferred the woman to a hospital, appeared confused over the staff's refusal to help the woman, according to 911 call transcripts.

One first responder told federal investigators that when a Sacred Heart Emergency Center staffer was asked about the gestational age of the fetus, the staffer replied: "No, we can't tell you, she is not our patient. That's why you are here."

A manager for Sacred Heart Emergency Center declined to comment. The facility is licensed in Texas as a freestanding emergency room, which means it is not physically connected to a hospital. State law requires those facilities to treat or stabilize patients, a spokeswoman for the Texas Health and Human Services agency said in an email to AP.

Sacred Heart Emergency's website says that it no longer accepts Medicare, a change that was made sometime after the woman miscarried, according to publicly available archives of the center's website.

Meanwhile, the staff at Person Memorial Hospital in Roxboro, North Carolina, told a pregnant woman, who was complaining of stomach pain, that they would not be able to provide her with an ultrasound. The staff failed to tell her how risky it could be for her to depart without being stabilized, according to federal investigators. While en route to another hospital 45 minutes away, the woman gave birth in a car to a baby who did not survive.

Person Memorial Hospital self-reported the incident. A spokeswoman said the hospital continues to "provide ongoing education for our staff and providers to ensure compliance."

In Melbourne, Florida, a security guard at Holmes Regional Medical Center refused to let a pregnant woman into the triage area because she had brought a child with her. When the patient came back the next day, medical staff were unable to locate a fetal heartbeat. The center declined to comment on the case.

WHAT'S THE PENALTY?

Emergency rooms are subject to hefty fines when they turn away patients, fail to stabilize them or transfer them to another hospital for treatment. Violations can also put hospitals' Medicare funding at risk.

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But it's unclear what fines might be imposed on more than a dozen hospitals that the Biden administration says failed to properly treat pregnant patients in 2022.

It can take years for fines to be levied in these cases. The Health and Human Services agency, which enforces the law, declined to share if the hospitals have been referred to the agency's Office of Inspector General for penalties.

For Huntsberger, the OB-GYN, EMTALA was one of the few ways she felt protected to treat pregnant patients in Idaho, despite the state's abortion ban. She left Idaho last year to practice in Oregon because of the ban.

The threat of fines or loss of Medicare funding for violating EMTALA is a big deterrent that keeps hospitals from dumping patients, she said. Many couldn't keep their doors open if they lost Medicare funding.

She has been waiting to see how HHS penalizes two hospitals in Missouri and Kansas that HHS announced last year it was investigating after a pregnant woman, who was in preterm labor at 17 weeks, was denied an abortion.

"A lot of these situations are not reported, but even the ones that are — like the cases out of the Midwest — they're investigated but nothing really comes of it," Huntsberger said. "People are just going to keep providing substandard care or not providing care. The only way that changes is things like this."

NEXT UP FOR EMTALA

President Joe Biden and top U.S. health official Xavier Becerra have both publicly vowed vigilance in enforcing the law.

Even as states have enacted strict abortion laws, the White House has argued that if hospitals receive Medicare funds they must provide stabilizing care, including abortions.

In a statement to THE AP, Becerra called it the "nation's bedrock law protecting Americans' right to life- and health-saving emergency medical care."

"And doctors, not politicians, should determine what constitutes emergency care," he added.

Idaho's law does not allow abortions if a mother's health is at risk. But the state's attorney general has argued that its abortion ban is "consistent" with federal law, which calls for emergency rooms to protect an unborn child in medical emergencies.

"The Biden administration has no business rewriting federal law to override Idaho's law and force doctors to perform abortions," Idaho Attorney General Raúl Labrador said in a statement earlier this year.

Now, the Supreme Court will weigh in. The case could have implications in other states like Arizona, which is reinstating an 1864 law that bans all abortions, with an exception only if the mother's life is at risk.

EMTALA was initially introduced decades ago because private hospitals would dump patients on county or state hospitals, often because they didn't have insurance, said Alexa Kolbi-Molinas of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Some hospitals also refused to see pregnant women when they did not have an established relationship with physicians on staff. If the court nullifies or weakens those protections, it could result in more hospitals turning away patients without fear of penalty from the federal government, she said.

"The government knows there's a problem and is investigating and is doing something about that," Kolbi-Molinas said. "Without EMTALA, they wouldn't be able to do that."

Music Review: Taylor Swift's 'The Tortured Poets Department' is great sad pop, meditative theater

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

Who knew what Taylor Swift's latest era would bring? Or even what it would sound like? Would it build off the moodiness of "Midnights" or the folk of "evermore"? The country or the '80s pop of her latest re-records? Or its two predecessors in black-and-white covers: the revenge-pop of "Reputation" and the literary Americana of "folklore"?

"The Tortured Poets Department," here Friday, is an amalgamation of all of the above, reflecting the artist who — at the peak of her powers — has spent the last few years re-recording her life's work and touring

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its material, filtered through synth-pop anthems, breakup ballads, provocative and matured considerations.

In moments, her 11th album feels like a bloodletting: A cathartic purge after a major heartbreak delivered through an ascendant vocal run, an elegiac verse, or mobile, synthesized productions that underscore the powers of Swift's storytelling.

And there are surprises. The lead single and opener "Fortnight" is "1989" grown up — and features Post Malone. It might seem like a funny pairing, but it's a long time coming: Since at least 2018, Swift's fans have known of her love for Malone's "Better Now."

"But Daddy I Love Him" is the return of country Taylor, in some ways — fairytale songwriting, a full band chorus, a plucky acoustic guitar riff, and a cheeky lyrical reversal: "But Daddy I love him / I'm having his baby / No, I'm not / But you should see your faces." (Babies appear on "Florida!!!" and the bonus track "The Manuscript" as well.)

The fictitious "Fresh Out The Slammer" begins with a really pretty psych guitar tone that disappears beneath wind-blown production; the new wave-adjacent "My Boy Only Breaks His Favorite Toys" brings back "Barbie": "I felt more when we played pretend than with all the Kens / 'Cause he took me out of my box."

Even before Florence Welch kicks off her verse in "Florida!!!," the chorus' explosive repetition of the song title hits hard with nostalgic 2010s indie rock, perhaps an alt-universe Swiftian take on Sufjan Stevens' "Illinois."

As another title states, "So Long, London," indeed.

It would be a disservice to read Swift's songs as purely diaristic, but that track — the fifth on this album, which her fans typically peg as the most devastating slot on each album — evokes striking parallels to her relationship with a certain English actor she split with in 2023. Place it next to a sleepy love ode like "The Alchemy," with its references to "touchdown" and cutting someone "from the team" and well ... art imitates life.

Revenge is still a pervasive theme. But where the reprisal anthems on "Midnights" were vindictive, on "The Tortured Poets Department," there are new complexities: "Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?" combines the musical ambitiousness of "evermore" and "folklore" — and adds a resounding bass on the bridge — with sensibilities ripped from the weapons-drawn, obstinate "Reputation." But here, Swift mostly trades victimhood for self-assurance, warts and all.

"Who's afraid of little old me?" she sings. "You should be," she responds.

And yet, "The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived" may be her most biting song to date: "You didn't measure up in any measure of a man," she sings atop propulsive piano. "I'll forget you, but I won't ever forgive," she describes her target, likely the same "tattooed golden retriever," a jejune description, mentioned in the title track.

Missteps are few, found in other mawkish lyrics and songs like "Down Bad" and "Guilty as Sin?" that falter when placed next to the album's more meditative pop moments.

Elsewhere, Swift holds up a mirror to her melodrama and melancholy — she's crying at the gym, don't tell her about "sad," is she allowed to cry? She died inside, she thinks you might want her dead; she thinks she might just die. She listens to the voices that tell her "Lights, camera, bitch, smile / Even when you want to die," as she sings on "I Can Do It with a Broken Heart," a song about her own performances — onstage and as a public figure.

"I'm miserable and nobody even knows!" she laughs at the end of the song before sighing, "Try and come for my job."

"Clara Bow" enters the pantheon of great final tracks on a Swift album. The title refers to the 1920s silent film star who burned fast and bright — an early "It girl" and Hollywood sex symbol subject to vitriolic gossip, a victim of easy, everyday misogyny amplified by celebrity. Once Bow's harsh Brooklyn accent was heard in the talkies, it was rumored, her career was over.

In life, Bow later attempted suicide and was sent to an asylum — the same institution that appears on "Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?" "Clara Bow" works as an allegory and a cautionary tale for Swift, the same way Stevie Nicks' "Mabel Normand" — another tragic silent film star — functioned for the Fleetwood Mac

star.

Nicks appears in "Clara Bow," too: "You look like Stevie Nicks in '75 / The hair and lips / Crowd goes wild." Later, Swift turns the camera inward, and the song ends with her singing, "You look like Taylor Swift in this light / We're loving it / You've got edge / She never did." The album ends there, on what could be read as self-deprecation but stings more like frustrating self-awareness.

Swift sings about a tortured poet, but she is one, too. And isn't it great that she's allowed herself the creative license?

Allman Brothers Band co-founder and legendary guitarist Dickey Betts dies at 80

By STEVEN WINE and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

Dickey Betts, who died Thursday at age 80, really was born a ramblin' man.

He left home at 16 to join the circus and became a renowned guitarist touring the world with the Allman Brothers Band. He wrote the group's biggest hit, "Ramblin' Man," and remained on the road until he reached the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Betts died at his home in Osprey, Florida, his manager of 20 years, David Spero, said by phone. He had been battling cancer for more than a year and had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Spero said.

"He was surrounded by his whole family and he passed peacefully. They didn't think he was in any pain," he said.

Betts shared lead guitar duties with Duane Allman in the original Allman Brothers Band to help give the group its unique sound and create a new genre, Southern rock. The band blended blues, country, R&B and jazz with '60s rock to produce a distinct sound that influenced a host of major acts, including Lynyrd Skynyrd, ZZ Top, Phish, Jason Isbell and Chris Stapleton, among many others.

"My first concert was Dickey Betts at Coleman's in Rome, New York in 1983," blues-rock guitarist Joe Bonamassa said in an Instagram post Thursday, crediting Betts with inspiring his favorite electric guitar model. "Blew my mind and made me want a Les Paul."

Other tributes came from members of the Allman Brothers Band's extended family.

Guitarist Derek Trucks and his wife and bandmate, Susan Tedeschi, posted on their Instagram account that Betts was "one of best to ever do it."

Trucks joined the Allman Brothers Band in 1999. His uncle Butch Trucks was one of the band's two founding drummers.

Bassist Berry Duane Oakley, son of Allman Brothers founding bassist Berry Oakley, honored his "Uncle Dickey" on Facebook, saying: "If not for him, I don't think I would be a touring musician. The cat in the hat will never be forgotten, and will always be honored not only for the wonderful life he lived, but the wonderful music he has left behind for all of us to share and remember."

Founded in 1969, the Allmans were a pioneering jam band, trampling the traditional formula of three-minute pop songs by performing lengthy compositions in concert and on record. The band was also notable as a biracial group from the Deep South.

Duane Allman died in a motorcycle accident in 1971, and Berry Oakley was killed in a motorcycle crash the following year. That left Betts and Allman's younger brother, Gregg, as the band's leaders, but they frequently clashed, and substance abuse caused further dysfunction. The band broke up at least twice before reforming, and has had more than a dozen lineups.

The Allman Brothers Band was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1995 and earned a Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award in 2012. Betts left the group for good in 2000. He also played solo and with his own band Great Southern, which included his son, guitarist Duane Betts.

Forrest Richard Betts was born Dec. 12, 1943, and raised in the Bradenton, Florida, area, near the highway 41 he sang about in "Ramblin' Man." His family had lived in area since the mid-19th century.

A descendant of Canadian fiddlers, Betts was listening to string bands before he even started school. He developed a fondness for country, bluegrass and Western swing, and played the ukulele and banjo

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before focusing on the electric guitar because it impressed girls. But he usually did his songwriting on an acoustic guitar.

Betts changed schools often because his father worked construction, and those memories later inspired him to write "Ramblin' Man." His first big road trip came when he joined the circus to play in a band.

He returned home, and with Oakley joined a group that became the Jacksonville, Florida-based band Second Coming. One night in 1969, Betts and Oakley jammed with Duane Allman, already a successful session musician, and his younger brother. Together they formed the Allman Brothers Band.

Betts "excelled at anything that caught his attention," according to a statement posted Thursday on the Allman Brothers Band's official website. "He was passionate in life, be it music, songwriting, fishing, hunting, boating, golf, karate or boxing."

The group moved to Macon, Georgia, and released a self-titled debut album in 1969. A year later came the album "Idlewild South," highlighted by Betts' instrumental composition "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed," which soon became a concert favorite.

The 1971 double album "At Fillmore East," now considered among the greatest live albums of the classic rock era, was the Allmans' commercial breakthrough and cemented their performing reputation by showcasing the unique guitar interplay between Allman and Betts. Their styles contrasted, with Allman playing bluesy slide guitar, while Betts' solos and singing tugged the band toward country. When layered in harmony, their playing was especially distinctive.

The group also had two drummers — Butch Trucks and John Lee "Jaimoe" Johanson, a Black musician from Mississippi who helped integrate Southern rock.

Duane Allman died four days after "Fillmore" was certified as a gold record, but the band carried on and crowds continued to grow. The 1973 album "Brothers and Sisters" rose to No. 1 on the charts and featured "Ramblin' Man," with Betts singing the lead and bringing twang to the Top 40. The song's intro suggested a fiddle tune, while the coda was inspired by Derek and the Dominos' "Layla," an earlier hit that had featured Duane Allman.

"Ramblin' Man" reached No. 2 on the singles charts and was kept out of the No. 1 spot by "Half Breed" by Cher, who later married Gregg Allman. Betts' composition became a classic-rock standard, with his soaring guitar reverberating in neighborhood bars around the country for decades.

"Ramblin' Man" was the Allmans' only Top Ten hit, but Betts' catchy 7 ½-minute instrumental composition "Jessica," recorded in 1972, also showed his knack for melodic hooks and became an FM radio staple. Painstaking in his approach to songwriting, Betts spent two months composing "Jessica," which was inspired by the music of jazz guitar great Django Reinhardt.

Betts also wrote or co-wrote some of the Allmans' other best-loved songs, including "Blue Sky" and "Southbound."

Dormant for most of the 1980s, the Allman Brothers Band launched a comeback in 1990 with Warren Haynes joining Betts on guitar.

Betts recorded three more studio albums and toured with the band over the next decade, but he had an acrimonious split from the Allman Brothers in 2000. His bandmates suspended the guitarist from their summer tour and issued a statement blaming "creative differences."

Betts said Gregg Allman and the other members delivered the news in a fax implying he needed treatment for substance abuse. Betts took legal action and settled with the band in arbitration. The breakup was permanent. Gregg Allman and Butch Trucks died in 2017.

After leaving the Allmans for good, Betts continued to play with his own group and lived in the Bradenton area with his wife, Donna.

12 jurors have been picked for Donald Trump's hush money trial. Selection of alternates is ongoing

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — A jury of 12 people was seated Thursday in former President Donald Trump's history-making hush money trial, propelling the proceedings closer to opening statements and the start of weeks of dramatic testimony.

The court quickly turned to selecting alternate jurors, with the process on track to wrap up by the end of the week. Prosecutors could begin presenting their case early next week.

The jury of Manhattanites includes a sales professional, a software engineer, a security engineer, a teacher, a speech therapist, multiple lawyers, an investment banker and a retired wealth manager.

The first-ever trial of a former American president is unfolding in New York during this year's race for the White House, meaning the presumptive Republican nominee will spend his days in court confronted by salacious and unflattering testimony about his personal life while simultaneously campaigning to reclaim the office he held for four years.

He's made clear his determination to use his legal jeopardy, already a central issue in the race against Democratic incumbent Joe Biden, to his advantage. After a full day of jury selection, he complained to reporters that he should have been out campaigning but was in court instead for what he said was a "very unfair trial."

"Everybody's outraged by it," he said. "You know the whole world's watching this New York scam."

Jury selection proceeded at a plodding pace earlier Thursday when two jurors were dismissed, one after expressing doubt about her ability to be fair following disclosure of details about her identity and the other over concerns that some of his answers in court may have been inaccurate.

But lawyers who began the day with only five jurors settled on the remaining seven in quick succession, along with one alternate. Judge Juan Merchan has said his goal is to have six alternates.

The process of picking a jury is a critical phase in 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 any bias 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. A prosecutor this week said lawyers were not looking for people who had been "living under a rock for the past eight years."

To that end, multiple jurors chosen for the panel acknowledged having personal opinions of Trump or his presidency.

One juror, a man who works in investment banking, earlier described himself as "ambivalent" about Trump, adding, "I might not like some of his policies, but there has been some good" for the country.

A woman picked for the jury said she thought Trump seemed "very selfish and self serving," adding, "I don't really appreciate that from any public servant." Defense lawyers were out of peremptory strikes, which would allow them to dismiss a juror without giving a reason.

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

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 that the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses.

Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. He could get 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.

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Trump faces four criminal cases, but it's not clear that any others will reach trial before the November election. Appeals and legal wrangling have caused delays in the other three cases charging Trump with plotting to overturn the 2020 election results and with illegally hoarding classified documents.

The jury selection process picked up momentum Tuesday with the selection of seven jurors. But on Thursday, Merchan revealed in court that one of the seven, a cancer nurse, had "conveyed that after sleeping on it overnight she had concerns about her ability to be fair and impartial in this case."

And though jurors' names are being kept confidential, the woman told the judge and the lawyers that she had doubts after she said aspects of her identity had been made public.

"Yesterday alone I had friends, colleagues and family push things to my phone regarding questioning my identity as a juror," she said. "I don't believe at this point that I can be fair and unbiased and let the outside influences not affect my decision making in the courtroom."

A second seated juror was dismissed after prosecutors raised concerns that he may not have been honest in answering a jury selection question by saying that he had never been accused or convicted of a crime.

The IT professional was summoned to court to answer questions after prosecutors said they found an article about a person with the same name who had been arrested in the 1990s for tearing down posters pertaining to the political right in suburban Westchester County.

A prosecutor also disclosed that a relative of the man may have been involved in a deferred prosecution agreement in the 1990s with the Manhattan district attorney's office, which is prosecuting Trump's case.

Because the juror was questioned Thursday at the judge's bench, off-microphone and out of earshot of reporters, it was not known whether the man confirmed or denied that either instance was connected to him.

After dismissing from the jury the nurse who had already been selected, Merchan ordered journalists in court not to report prospective jurors' answers to questions about their current and former employers.

"We just lost, probably, what probably would have been a very good juror for this case, and the first thing that she said was she was afraid and intimidated by the press, all the press, and everything that had happened," Merchan said.

In other developments, prosecutors asked for Trump to be held in contempt over a series of social media posts this week.

The district attorney's office on Monday sought a \$3,000 fine for Trump for three Truth Social posts they said violated the judge's gag order limiting what he can say publicly about witnesses. Since then, prosecutors said Trump made seven additional posts that they believe violate the order.

Several of the posts involved an article that referred to former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen as a "serial perjurer," and one from Wednesday repeated a claim by a Fox News host that liberal activists were lying to get on the jury, said prosecutor Christopher Conroy.

Trump lawyer Emil Bove said Cohen "has been attacking President Trump in public statements," and Trump was just replying.

The judge already scheduled a hearing for next week on the prosecution's request for contempt sanctions over Trump's posts.

US vetoes widely supported resolution backing full UN membership for Palestine

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United States vetoed a widely backed U.N. resolution Thursday that would have paved the way for full United Nations membership for Palestine, a goal the Palestinians have long sought and Israel has worked to prevent.

The vote in the 15-member Security Council was 12 in favor, the United States opposed and two abstentions, from the United Kingdom and Switzerland. U.S. allies France, Japan and South Korea supported the resolution.

The strong support the Palestinians received reflects not only the growing number of countries recog-

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nizing their statehood but almost certainly the global support for Palestinians facing a humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Gaza, now in its seventh month.

The resolution would have recommended that the 193-member U.N. General Assembly, where there are no vetoes, approve Palestine becoming the 194th member of the United Nations. Some 140 countries have already recognized Palestine, so its admission would have been approved, likely by a much higher number of countries.

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood told the Security Council that the veto “does not reflect opposition to Palestinian statehood but instead is an acknowledgment that it will only come from direct negotiations between the parties.”

The United States has “been very clear consistently that premature actions in New York — even with the best intentions — will not achieve statehood for the Palestinian people,” deputy State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said.

His voice breaking at times, Palestinian U.N. Ambassador Riyad Mansour told the council after the vote: “The fact that this resolution did not pass will not break our will and it will not defeat our determination.”

“We will not stop in our effort,” he said. “The state of Palestine is inevitable. It is real. Perhaps they see it as far away, but we see it as near.”

This is the second Palestinian attempt for full membership and comes as the war in Gaza has put the more than 75-year-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict at center stage.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas first delivered the Palestinian Authority’s application for U.N. membership in 2011. It failed because the Palestinians didn’t get the required minimum support of nine of the Security Council’s 15 members.

They went to the General Assembly and succeeded by more than a two-thirds majority in having their status raised from a U.N. observer to a non-member observer state in 2012. That opened the door for the Palestinian territories to join U.N. and other international organizations, including the International Criminal Court.

Algerian U.N. Ambassador Amar Bendjama, the Arab representative on the council who introduced the resolution, called Palestine’s admission “a critical step toward rectifying a longstanding injustice” and said that “peace will come from Palestine’s inclusion, not from its exclusion.”

In explaining the U.S. veto, Wood said there are “unresolved questions” on whether Palestine meets the criteria to be considered a state. He pointed to Hamas still exerting power and influence in the Gaza Strip, which is a key part of the state envisioned by the Palestinians.

Wood stressed that the U.S. commitment to a two-state solution, where Israel and Palestine live side-by-side in peace, is the only path for security for both sides and for Israel to establish relations with all its Arab neighbors, including Saudi Arabia.

“The United States is committed to intensifying its engagement with the Palestinians and the rest of the region, not only to address the current crisis in Gaza, but to advance a political settlement that will create a path to Palestinian statehood and membership in the United Nations,” he said.

Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, reiterated the commitment to a two-state solution but asserted that Israel believes Palestine “is a permanent strategic threat.”

“Israel will do its best to block the sovereignty of a Palestinian state and to make sure that the Palestinian people are exiled away from their homeland or remain under its occupation forever,” he said.

He demanded of the council and diplomats crowded in the chamber: “What will the international community do? What will you do?”

Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have been stalled for years, and Israel’s right-wing government is dominated by hard-liners who oppose Palestinian statehood.

Israeli U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan called the resolution “disconnected to the reality on the ground” and warned that it “will cause only destruction for years to come and harm any chance for future dialogue.”

Six months after the Oct. 7 attack by the Hamas militant group, which controlled Gaza, and the killing of 1,200 people in “the most brutal massacre of Jews since the Holocaust,” he accused the Security Council

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of seeking “to reward the perpetrators of these atrocities with statehood.”

Israel’s military offensive in response has killed over 32,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s health ministry, and destroyed much of the territory, which speaker after speaker denounced Thursday.

After the vote, Erdan thanked the United States and particularly President Joe Biden “for standing up for truth and morality in the face of hypocrisy and politics.”

He called the Palestinian Authority — which controls the West Bank and the U.S. wants to see take over Gaza where Hamas still has sway — “a terror supporting entity.”

The Israeli U.N. ambassador referred to the requirements for U.N. membership – accepting the obligations in the U.N. Charter and being a “peace-loving” state.

“How can you say seriously that the Palestinians are peace loving? How?” Erdan asked. “The Palestinians are paying terrorists, paying them to slaughter us. None of their leaders condemns terrorism, nor the Oct. 7 massacre. They call Hamas their brothers.”

Despite the Palestinian failure to meet the criteria for U.N. membership, Erdan said most council members supported it.

“It’s very sad because your vote will only embolden Palestinian rejectionism every more and make peace almost impossible,” he said.

Choctaw artist Jeffrey Gibson confronts history at US pavilion as its first solo Indigenous artist

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

VENICE, Italy (AP) — Jeffrey Gibson’s takeover of the U.S. pavilion for this year’s Venice Biennale contemporary art show is a celebration of color, pattern and craft, which is immediately evident on approaching the bright red facade decorated by a colorful clash of geometry and a foreground dominated by a riot of gigantic red podiums.

Gibson, a Mississippi Choctaw with Cherokee descent, is the first Native American to represent the United States solo at the Venice Biennale, the world’s oldest contemporary art show. For context, the last time Native American artists were included was in 1932.

Gibson, 52, accepts the weight of the honor, but he prefers to focus on how his participation can forge greater inclusion going forward.

“The first is not the most important story,” Gibson told The Associated Press this week before the pavilion’s inauguration on Thursday. “The first is hopefully the beginning of many, many, many more stories to come.”

The commission, his first major show in Europe, comes at a pivotal moment for Gibson. His 2023 book “An Indigenous Present” features more than 60 Indigenous artists, and he has two major new projects, a facade commission for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and an exhibition at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

Gibson’s eye-catching exhibition titled “the space in which to place me,” features text in beadwork sculptures and paintings taken from U.S. founding documents, music, sermons and proverbs to remind the viewer of the broken promises of equity through U.S. history. The vibrant use of color projects optimism. In that way, Gibson’s art is a call to action.

“What I find so beautiful about Jeffrey’s work is its ability to function as a prism, to take the traumas of the past and the questions about identity and politics and refract them in such a way that things that realities that have become flattened ... can become these beautiful kaleidoscopes, which are joyous and celebratory and critical all at the same time,” said Abigail Winograd, one of the exhibition’s curators.

“When I see people walk through the pavilion and kind of gasp when they walk from room to room, that’s exactly what we wanted,” Winograd said.

Entering the pavilion, the beaded bodices of sculptures in human form are emblazoned with dates of U.S. legislation that promised equity, the beading cascading into colorful fringe. A painting quotes George Washington writing, “Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth,” in geometric letters

that meld into a colorful patterned background.

By identifying specific moments in U.S. history, Gibson said that he wants to underline that “people who are fighting for equity and justice today, we’re not the first.

“This has been a line in the history of American culture. But I’m hoping that people will think about why ... some of these things ... have either been revoked or have not come into fruition,” he said.

Craft is at the center of Gibson’s art, both in defiance of past denigration of craft and as a way to confront “the traumatic histories of Native American people,” he said.

“There is something very healing about the cycle of making,” Gibson explained.

The pavilion’s intricate beaded sculptures owe a debt to Native American makers of the past without imitating them, employing couture techniques to create something completely new. In the way of his forbears, Gibson uses beads sourced from all over the world, including vintage beads from Japan and China, and glass beads from the Venetian island of Murano.

Paper works incorporate vintage beadwork purchased from websites, estate and garage sales in mixed media displays that honor the generations of Native American makers that preceded him.

Gibson’s themes fit well into the message of inclusion of the main Biennale exhibition, titled “Stranieri Ovunque -- Strangers Everywhere,” which runs in tandem with around 90 national pavilions from April 20-Nov. 24.

His personal history has placed him firmly in what he calls the “diasporic history of Indigenous people.” His father’s job took his family abroad when he was a child to Germany and then South Korea, and he later studied in Chicago and London. His partner is Norwegian artist Rune Olsen.

Through all of this, Gibson has picked up traditions and practices that go beyond his Indigenous background.

“I’ve looked at op art, pattern and decoration. I’ve looked at psychedelia, I have taken part in rave culture and queer culture and drag and the whole spectrum,” Gibson said.

“And so for me, I would not be telling you the whole truth if I only chose to spoke about indigeneity. But my body is an Indigenous body — it’s all funneled through this body,” he said. “And so my hope is that by telling my experience, that everyone else can project their own kind of intersected, layered experience into the world.”

Police arrest dozens of pro-Palestinian protesters at Columbia, including congresswoman’s daughter

NEW YORK (AP) — New York police removed a pro-Palestinian protest encampment at Columbia University on Thursday and arrested more than 100 demonstrators, including the daughter of a prominent Minnesota congresswoman.

Several students involved in the protest said they also were suspended from Columbia and Barnard College, including Isra Hirsi, who is the daughter of Democratic U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar.

Omar had questioned Columbia’s president, Nemat Shafik, at a hearing Wednesday in Congress about the school’s targeting of pro-Palestinian protesters.

Police said 108 people, including Hirsi, were charged with trespassing at the private Ivy League institution. Two people were also charged with obstructing government administration.

New York Mayor Eric Adams said the city was asked in writing by university officials to remove the encampment.

“Students have a right to free speech, but do not have a right to violate university policies and disrupt learning on campus,” Adams said.

The students had been protesting on campus since early Wednesday, opposing Israeli military action in Gaza and demanding the school divest from companies they claim “profit from Israeli apartheid.”

Shafik issued a statement saying the school had warned protesters on Wednesday that they would be suspended if the encampment was not removed. School officials made the decision Thursday to call in police and clear out the demonstrators, she said.

"The individuals who established the encampment violated a long list of rules and policies," she wrote. Shafik also said the university tried through several channels "to engage with their concerns and offered to continue discussions if they agreed to disperse."

The school said it was still identifying students involved in the protest Thursday and added more suspensions would be forthcoming.

Police moved in early Thursday afternoon, using zip ties to arrest protesters and escort them to waiting buses before removing the tents.

Police Commissioner Edward Caban said the arrests were peaceful and the protesters were cooperative. Pro-Palestinian protesters reorganized on campus a short time later, chanting, "Shame"

"We demand full amnesty for all students disciplined for their involvement in the encampment or the movement for Palestinian liberation," the protest coalition said in a statement.

Email and voice messages were left with Omar's office on Thursday afternoon seeking comment.

Judge in Trump case orders media not to report where potential jurors work

By DAVID BAUDER and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — The judge in Donald Trump's hush money trial ordered the media on Thursday not to report on where potential jurors have worked and to be careful about revealing information about those who will sit in judgment of the former president.

Judge Juan Merchan acted after one juror was dismissed when she expressed concerns about participating in the trial after details about her became publicly known.

The names of the jurors are supposed to be a secret, but the dismissed juror told Merchan she had friends, colleagues and family members contacting her to ask whether she was on the case. "I don't believe at this point I can be fair and unbiased and let the outside influences not affect my decision-making in the courtroom," she said.

Merchan then directed journalists present in the courthouse not to report it when potential jurors told the court their specific workplaces, past or present. That put journalists in the difficult position of not reporting something they heard in open court.

Some media organizations were considering whether to protest having that onus placed on them. Generally, the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution bars judges from ordering journalists not to disclose what they hear and see in courtrooms open to the public, though there are exceptions, such as when military security is at stake.

New York criminal defense lawyer Ron Kuby said that while judges typically can't control what the media reports, other options are available to protect juror anonymity, including restricting what reporters see and hear in the courtroom.

"There are actions the judge could take," he said. "Courts have extraordinary powers to protect jurors from tampering and intimidation. It is really where a court's power is at its peak."

The court action underscored the difficulty of trying to maintain anonymity for jurors in a case that has sparked wide interest and heated opinions, while lawyers need to sift through as much information as possible in a public courtroom to determine who to choose.

Despite the setback, 12 jurors were seated by the end of Thursday for the historic trial. Trump is charged with falsifying his company's business records to cover up an effort during the 2016 presidential election campaign to squash negative publicity about alleged marital infidelity. Part of the case involves a \$130,000 payment made to porn actor Stormy Daniels to prevent her from making public her claims of a sexual meeting with Trump years earlier. Trump has denied the encounter.

New York state law requires trial attorneys to get the names of jurors, but the judge has ordered the lawyers in Trump's case not to disclose those names publicly. The jurors' names haven't been mentioned in court during three days of jury selection.

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Still, enough personal information about the jurors was revealed in court that people might be able to identify them anyway.

Some news organizations described details including what Manhattan neighborhoods potential jurors lived in, what they did for a living, what academic degrees they had earned, how many children they had, what countries they grew up in and what their spouses did for a living.

On Fox News Channel Wednesday night, host Jesse Watters did a segment with a jury consultant, revealing details about people who had been seated on the jury and questioning whether some were "stealth liberals" who would be out to convict Trump.

Besides his order about employment history, Merchan said he was asking the media to "simply apply common sense and refrain from writing about anything that has to do, for example, with physical descriptions."

He said "there was really no need" for the media to mention one widely-reported tidbit that a juror speaks with an Irish accent.

Anonymous juries have long existed, particularly in terrorism and mob-related cases or when there is a history of jury tampering. They have been ordered more frequently in the last two decades with the rising influence of social media and the anonymous hate speech that is sometimes associated with it. Usually courtroom artists are told they aren't permitted to draw the face of any juror in their sketches; New York courts do not permit video coverage of trials.

During the Trump defamation trial in Manhattan federal court earlier this year, jurors had heightened protection of their identities by a security-conscious judge who routinely did not allow anyone in his courtroom to have a cellphone, even if it was shut off. Jurors were driven to and from the courthouse by the U.S. Marshals Service and were sequestered from the public during trial breaks.

When asked general questions about themselves during jury selection in that case, prospective jurors often gave vague answers that would have made it nearly impossible to determine much about them.

After the ruling in that case, Judge Lewis A. Kaplan ordered the anonymous jury not to disclose the identities of any of the people they served with, and advised jurors not to disclose their service. So far, none have come forward publicly.

Kuby said the ability of lawyers at Trump's trial to research the backgrounds of jurors was important.

"Both sides have interest in preventing sleeper jurors who have their own agenda from serving on the jury," he said.

Neema Rahmani, a former federal prosecutor who is president of the West Coast Trial Lawyers, said the difficulty at the Trump trial is weeding out people with extreme viewpoints.

"Everyone in the entire country knows who Donald Trump is," Rahmani said. "Some think he's a criminal traitor and insurrectionist. Others think he's a hero. You don't have a lot of people in the middle."

Legislation that could force a TikTok ban revived as part of House foreign aid package

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and HALELUYA HADERO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Legislation that could ban TikTok in the U.S. if its China-based owner doesn't sell its stake won a major boost late Wednesday when House Republican leaders included it in a package of bills that would send aid to Ukraine and Israel. The bill could be law as soon as next week if Congress moves quickly.

The TikTok legislation, which passed the House in March and has widespread support in both chambers, was included in the House package as leaders have worked to win votes for the foreign aid bills and after negotiations with the Senate over how long the Chinese technology firm ByteDance Ltd. would have to sell its stake in the app to continue operating in the United States. President Joe Biden has said he would sign the TikTok legislation if it reaches his desk.

The new version of the legislation won a key endorsement from Senate Commerce Committee Chairwoman Maria Cantwell, who said in a statement that she had successfully pushed to extend the period

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from six months to a year to give the company enough time to find a buyer. While the original bill had a six-month deadline for TikTok to be sold, the revised legislation would give nine months and a possible three-month extension if a sale was in progress.

"Extending the divestment period is necessary to ensure there is enough time for a new buyer to get a deal done," said Cantwell, who had previously expressed doubts about the bill. "I support this updated legislation."

If Congress passes the TikTok bill, it would be an extraordinary and unusual moment in which both parties unite against one company – something lawmakers are usually reluctant to do. But the popular social media app has prompted widespread outrage on Capitol Hill, where there is bipartisan concern about Chinese threats to the United States and where few members use the platform themselves.

Opponents say they believe the ban would be unconstitutional, and there would be likely court challenges if it passes. There has been aggressive pushback from the company, content creators who make money on the app and some of the platform's 170 million U.S. users, many of whom are young. In some cases, lawmakers have received profanity-laced calls from users who were prompted by the app to call their representatives in Congress.

To date, the U.S. government has not provided evidence that shows TikTok shared U.S. user data with the Chinese government, or that Chinese authorities have tinkered with the company's popular algorithm, which influences what Americans see.

Since mid-March, TikTok has spent \$5 million on TV ads opposing the legislation, according to AdImpact, an advertising tracking firm. The ads have included a range of content creators, including a nun, extolling the positive impacts of the platform on their lives and arguing a ban would trample on the First Amendment.

TikTok has also spent money on Facebook and Instagram ads that, among other things, talk about investments in data safety. In addition, the company has mounted a lobbying campaign in Washington that included flying in content creators who rely on the platform for income.

Alex Haurek, a spokesman for the company, said in a statement Thursday that "It is unfortunate that the House of Representatives is using the cover of important foreign and humanitarian assistance to once again jam through a ban bill that would trample the free speech rights of 170 million Americans, devastate 7 million businesses, and shutter a platform that contributes \$24 billion to the U.S. economy, annually."

Nadya Okamoto, a content creator who has roughly four million followers on TikTok, said she's been having conversations with other creators who are experiencing "so much anger and anxiety" about the bill and how it's going to impact their lives. The 26-year-old, whose company "August" sells menstrual products and is known for her advocacy around destigmatizing menstrual periods, makes most of her income from TikTok.

"This is going to have real repercussions," she said.

Dan Ives, a tech analyst at the financial advisory firm Wedbush Securities, said such a sale would be very complex to carry out, even with an extended timeline.

The platform would come with a hefty price tag that only the biggest tech companies could afford, something that's likely to raise antitrust concerns. Then, there's the issue of TikTok's algorithm, the app's secret sauce that recommends videos to users. The bill bars ByteDance from controlling TikTok's algorithm, and a potential sale is likely to face opposition from China, which has been clamping down on exports of recommendation algorithms by Chinese tech companies.

"Buying TikTok without the algorithm would be like buying a Ferrari without the engine," said Ives.

Some investors, including former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and "Shark Tank" star Kevin O'Leary, have already voiced interest in buying TikTok's U.S. business. If a sale isn't approved and the platform does get banned, Ives said it would be a "dream scenario" for Snapchat, Meta and YouTube, which have faced stiff competition from TikTok the past few years.

If the bill does pass, it would be the most significant step Congress has taken in decades to regulate the tech industry. For years Congress has failed to act on legislation that would protect users' privacy, protect children online, make companies more liable for their content and put loose guardrails around artificial intelligence, among other things.

Still, it is a narrow shot at one company when many lawmakers would like to see broader change. Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has been pushing for years for tech regulation. If the TikTok bill passes, he said, "it will be the first guardrail we put on anything on social media."

Warner said there are a lot of other things that Congress needs to do, "but you've got to start someplace." While most lawmakers support the TikTok bill, some have said it would set a dangerous precedent.

"The passage of the House TikTok ban is not just a misguided overreach; it's a draconian measure that stifles free expression, tramples constitutional rights, and disrupts the economic pursuits of millions of Americans," Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul posted on X after the House passed it.

Others are defending the app's loyal users.

"I am a NO on the TikTok bill we are about to vote on," Florida Rep. Maxwell Frost posted on X before the House vote. At 27, Frost is much younger than most of his colleagues.

"I believe the bill does set TikTok up to be banned," Frost said. "There are first amendment issues I see with taking away a platform that over 170 million Americans use, and this won't fix the serious issues we have with data privacy."

Jenna Leventoff, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, previewed potential First Amendment challenges to the bill.

"Congress cannot take away the rights of over 170 million Americans who use TikTok to express themselves, engage in political advocacy, and access information from around the world," she said.

The Latest | 12 jurors and 1 alternate seated in Trump hush money case

NEW YORK (AP) — Twelve jurors and one alternate have been seated in Donald Trump's hush money case, quickly propelling the jury selection process forward after a morning that saw two previously sworn-in jurors dismissed — one after she expressed new doubt in her ability to be fair and impartial following the disclosure of details about her identity and the other over concerns that he may not have been truthful about whether he had ever been accused or convicted of a crime.

Lawyers in the trial now need to select five alternates to round out the panel that will decide the first-ever criminal case against a former U.S. president.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records as part of an alleged scheme to bury stories he feared could hurt his 2016 campaign.

The allegations focus on payoffs to two women, porn actor Stormy Daniels and Playboy model Karen McDougal, who said they had extramarital sexual encounters with Trump years earlier, as well as to a Trump Tower doorman who claimed to have a story about a child he alleged Trump had out of wedlock. Trump says none of the alleged sexual encounters occurred.

The case is the first of Trump's four indictments to reach trial.

Currently:

- Jury selection process follows a familiar pattern with an unpredictable outcome
- Trump lawyers say Stormy Daniels refused subpoena outside a Brooklyn bar
- After 7 jurors were seated in Trump's trial on Tuesday, he trekked to a New York bodega to campaign
- Only 1 in 3 US adults think Trump acted illegally in New York hush money case, AP-NORC poll shows
- Trump trial: Why can't Americans see or hear what is happening inside the courtroom?

Here's the latest:

FIRST WITNESS IN TRUMP'S TRIAL UNDER WRAPS

Prosecutors declined to tell Donald Trump's legal team who the first witnesses in his hush money trial would be, complaining that he has been posting on social media about witnesses in the run-up to the trial.

Trump lawyer Todd Blanche offered to assure the court that it wouldn't happen, saying he would "commit to the court and the people that President Trump will not Truth about any witness."

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"That he will not tweet about any witnesses? I don't think you can make that representation," Judge Juan M. Merchan said.

1 ALTERNATE JUROR SEATED

One alternate juror in Donald Trump's hush money trial late Thursday, leaving lawyers in the case to select five more and rapidly bringing the trial closer to opening statements.

The jury includes a sales professional, a software engineer, an English teacher and multiple lawyers.

ALL 12 JURORS SEATED

All 12 jurors in Donald Trump's hush money trial have been seated, quickly propelling the jury selection process forward late Thursday afternoon. Lawyers now need to select six alternates to round out the panel that will decide the first-ever criminal case against a former U.S. president.

TWO MORE JURORS SEATED IN TRUMP TRIAL

Two more jurors have been seated in Donald Trump's hush money trial, bringing the number of seated jurors back to seven.

The newly seated jurors replace two jurors who were sworn in on Tuesday, but who were both dismissed by Judge Juan M. Merchan earlier Thursday.

The first juror was excused after she expressed new doubt in her ability to be fair and impartial following the disclosure of details about her identity while the other was dismissed over concerns that some of his answers in court may have been inaccurate.

POTENTIAL JURORS WARNED ABOUT IMPLICIT BIAS

As they questioned prospective jurors in Donald Trump's hush money trial, attorneys for the former president warned them about the impacts of implicit bias.

"The problem with biases is they color the way you look at the world. What you may believe and may not," Susan Necheles said. "We wouldn't allow someone who has a strong dislike for a certain type of people to sit on a jury of that type of person."

Necheles was responding to remarks from two possible jurors about their opinions of Trump.

A woman from the Upper West Side had acknowledged, in response to questions, that she did have strong feelings about the former president. "Yes. I disagree with most of his policies," she said.

Shortly after, another woman spoke in even stronger terms. "He just seems very selfish and self-serving, so I don't really appreciate that in any public servant," she said.

Trump appeared to perk up during both comments, turning around to look in the direction of the box. Both women said it would not impact their ability to act impartially.

PROSECUTOR TELLS POSSIBLE JURORS THEY'LL HAVE TO USE 'COMMON SENSE' TO COME TO CONCLUSIONS

Assistant District Attorney Joshua Steinglass began his questioning of the prospective jurors in Donald Trump's hush money trial much the same way he did earlier this week — acknowledging the unusual publicity surrounding the case and asking the group of 18 seated in the box whether it would impact their ability to evaluate evidence fairly.

He called first on a lifelong Manhattan resident who works in law enforcement. "I could be objective," the man told him.

During subsequent questioning of an attorney who previously said she'd followed the case closely and could still be impartial, the individual told Steinglass that she had since changed her mind.

"I'm worried that I know too much," she said. "I'm worried that it's going to seep in, in some way," she added.

Steinglass thanked her for her candor and moved on.

Steinglass later acknowledged that no witness will say that Trump directly told them: "Let's pull the wool over the American public's eye so I can get elected."

Rather, the prosecutor said, jurors would have to analyze the evidence and apply "common sense" to draw conclusions.

CHILLY COURTROOM AS QUESTIONING RESUMES

A chill of sorts came over the proceedings in Donald Trump's criminal case when Trump lawyer Todd

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Blanche asked the judge whether the temperature in the courtroom could be raised.

Manhattan's main criminal courthouse is over 80 years old, and the building has many quirks.

Judge Juan M. Merchan said if they tried to raise the heat even slightly, the room would probably end up getting way too hot.

"There's no question it's cold, but I'd rather be a little cold than sweat," the judge said.

Still, Merchan later addressed the frigid nature of the courtroom ahead instructing prospective jurors how voir dire — the process of lawyers from both sides asking them questions — works.

"I want to apologize that it's chilly in here," he said, eliciting laughs. "We're trying to do the best we can to control the temperature, but it's one extreme or the other."

COURT BREAKS FOR LUNCH

Court proceedings in former President Donald Trump's hush money case have halted for a lunch break. Proceedings will resume at 2:15 p.m. ET.

The most recent crop of 18 potentials in the jury box, including an initial juror who was excused and replaced by another man, have now gone through the standard screening questionnaire. After lunch, they will be questioned by lawyers.

QUESTIONING OF POTENTIAL JURORS RESUMES

Legal counsel in Donald Trump's criminal trial has returned to questioning prospective jurors in the case after Judge Juan M. Merchan dismissed a second previously seated juror.

While multiple seated and prospective jurors are lawyers, another potential jury member has a good deal of experience specifically being a juror.

The longtime Manhattanite said that over the years, she's been a juror in a criminal trial and a civil insurance fraud case that both reached verdicts. She also served as an alternate juror on a malpractice case that was resolved during deliberations, she said.

The woman, who works as a paralegal, said there was no reason she couldn't serve as a juror in Trump's case, too.

MERCHAN DISMISSES A SECOND SEATED JUROR

Judge Juan M. Merchan has removed a second seated juror from Donald Trump's hush money trial after prosecutors raised concerns that the man may not have been truthful about whether he had ever been accused or convicted of a crime.

The decision came after the judge questioned the jurors alongside lawyers out of earshot of reporters. The judge later said the juror had "expressed annoyance about how much information about him had been out in the public."

That echoes the concerns of another juror dismissed earlier Thursday. She said family members and friends questioned her about being a juror even though their names are being kept secret.

PROSPECTIVE JURORS GIVING VAGUER ANSWERS TO EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

Instead of disclosing where they work, as other potential jurors in Donald Trump's hush money case had done earlier this week, the latest group gave more generic answers on Thursday.

The shift in demeanor came after Judge Juan M. Merchan scolded the press for reporting identifiable details about the potential jurors, ordering them not to report on questions about their current and former employers and noting the answers would be redacted from court transcripts.

"There's a reason that this is an anonymous jury," Merchan had said. "It kind of defeats the purpose of that when so much information is put out there that it is very easy for anyone to identify who the jurors are."

It wasn't clear if they were directly instructed to avoid giving specifics about their employers.

The first prospective juror was an attorney who mentioned having attended the Women's March and reading a book by former Manhattan prosecutor Mark Pomerantz. Pomerantz previously oversaw the investigation into the allegations at the center of the hush money case, and his book detailed his work on it.

"I've discussed the legal merits of this case with many coworkers," she added. When asked whether she could still be a fair and impartial juror despite that, she let out a deep sigh before responding, "Yes."

OVER HALF OF LATEST JURY POOL EXCUSED

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Fifty-seven out of the second round of 96 potential jurors in Donald Trump's hush money trial have been excused after saying they can't serve.

Some 48 people indicated Thursday morning that they could not serve fairly and impartially. An additional nine said they couldn't serve for some other reason, which they were not asked to state.

SECOND PANEL OF 96 PROSPECTIVE JURORS NOW IN COURT FOR QUESTIONING

The second wave of potential jurors in Donald Trump's criminal trial is now in court to begin the questioning phase of jury selection.

As with the first big group, the judge will explain the basics of jury service along with the case, then ask for a show of hands from any panelists who don't believe they can serve fairly and impartially. After, he'll ask for a similar indication from any who don't believe they can serve for another reason.

More than half of the 96 potential jurors in the first group were dismissed after they said they couldn't be fair and impartial.

STATUS OF ANOTHER SEATED JUROR IN LIMBO

The status of a second juror seated for Donald Trump's hush money trial was in limbo Thursday after he failed to report to court to address concerns that some of his answers in court may not have been accurate.

Prosecutors found an article from the 1990s about a man with the same name as the juror being arrested for tearing down political advertisements in suburban Westchester County. The posters were on the political right, Assistant District Attorney Joshua Steinglass said.

Steinglass also disclosed that a relative of the man may have been involved in a nonprosecution agreement in the 1990s with the Manhattan district attorney's office, which is prosecuting Trump's case.

Judge Juan M. Merchan had instructed the man to come to court at 9:15 a.m. Thursday to answer questions and verify whether the people involved were him or his relative.

Merchan noted the juror's apparent "reluctance to come in" and asked both sides if they'd consent to having him removed without further inquiry. Trump lawyer Todd Blanche declined, saying he wanted to first hear what the man had to say.

Under questioning earlier this week, the man had said he hadn't been convicted of a crime.

PROSECUTORS WANT TRUMP SANCTIONED FOR MORE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Prosecutors in Donald Trump's hush money trial told Judge Juan M. Merchan on Thursday that they wanted the former president held in contempt and sanctioned for seven more posts they said violated his gag order.

Trump's new posts came after the prosecutors initially sought a \$3,000 fine on Monday for three other Truth Social posts.

Prosecutor Christopher Conroy said several of the new posts involved an article that referred to former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen as a "serial perjurer" and another from Wednesday that repeated a claim by a Fox News host that liberal activists were lying to get on the jury.

Trump lawyer Emil Bove said Cohen "has been attacking President Trump in public statements," and that Trump was just replying.

Merchan had already scheduled a hearing for next week on the prosecution's request for contempt sanctions over Trump's posts.

JUDGE ORDERS JOURNALISTS NOT TO REPORT ON POTENTIAL JURORS' EMPLOYERS

After dismissing a seated juror in Donald Trump's hush money trial, Judge Juan M. Merchan admonished the media for reporting details about the seated and potential jurors that could be used to identify them, ordering them not to report prospective jurors' answers to questions about their current and former employers.

"As evidenced by what's happened already, it's become a problem," he said Thursday morning.

He also directed reporters to "abide by common sense" and avoid writing about the physical characteristics of the people called to serve.

"We just lost what probably would have been a very good juror," the judge continued. "She said she was afraid and intimidated by the press, all the press."

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PREVIOUSLY SEATED JUROR EXCUSED, CITING IMPARTIALITY CONCERNS

A juror who had been selected for Donald Trump's criminal hush money trial was dismissed Thursday after she told the court she'd become concerned about her ability to be impartial.

Although the jurors' names are being kept confidential, the woman, a nurse, "conveyed that after sleeping on it overnight she had concerns about her ability to be fair and impartial in this case," Judge Juan M. Merchan said before calling her into the room for questioning.

The woman said her family members and friends were questioning her about being a juror.

With the woman's dismissal, the total number of seated jurors dropped to six. Attorneys now need to pick 12 more people to serve on the panel that will decide the former president's criminal case.

Merchan admonished the media for reporting details about the jurors that could be used to identify them.

"There's a reason that this is an anonymous jury," Merchan said. "It kind of defeats the purpose of that when so much information is put out there that it is very easy for anyone to identify who the jurors are."

"The press is certainly entitled to write about anything that's said on the record because it's on the record," Merchan said, but he added that he's directing reporters to "abide by common sense" and not do things like writing about physical characteristics of the people called to serve.

TRUMP ARRIVES IN COURT AS TRIAL RESUMES

Donald Trump sat at the defense table in a Manhattan courtroom Thursday morning, talking on a cell phone for about 30 seconds before his lawyers came over and put it away.

Trump looked sternly ahead while being photographed, a stark contrast from a moment earlier when he was casually chatting with lawyer Todd Blanche before the photographers arrived.

While the trial cannot be televised, Judge Juan M. Merchan is allowing a handful of still photographers to shoot photos of Trump before each day's proceedings start.

Harvey Weinstein was famously admonished for playing with his phone by a different judge during his trial in the same courtroom four years ago.

Trump's cell phone usage happened while court was not in session and before the judge had taken the bench.

Generally, cell phone usage — and certainly making or taking calls — is prohibited in New York courtrooms.

TRUMP HEADS TO COURT FOR ANOTHER DAY OF JURY SELECTION

Former president Donald Trump has left Trump Tower, on his way to court in Manhattan on Thursday for another day of jury selection in his criminal hush money trial.

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

Merchan has suggested that opening statements could start on Monday.

JURY SELECTION MARKS A CRITICAL PHASE IN THE TRIAL

The seating of the Manhattan jury in Donald Trump's hush money trial 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 U.S. commander-in-chief and the presumptive Republican nominee for this year's presidential election.

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."

US and UK issue new sanctions on Iran in response to Tehran's weekend attack on Israel

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. and U.K. on Thursday imposed a new round of sanctions on Iran as concern grows that Tehran's unprecedented attack on Israel could fuel a wider war in the Middle East.

The sanctions are meant to hold Iran accountable for its weekend attack and to deter further such activity. But the practical impact is likely to be limited because many of the targeted companies already were subject to U.S. sanctions and the individuals singled out for new sanctions are unlikely to have assets in U.S. jurisdictions.

Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control targeted 16 people and two entities in Iran that produce engines that power the drones used in the April 13 attack on Israel. OFAC also sanctioned five firms involved in steel production and three subsidiaries of Iranian automaker Bahman Group — which is accused of materially supporting Iran's military and other sanctioned groups. A representative from Bahman was not immediately available for comment.

Additionally, the U.K. targeted several Iranian military branches and individuals involved in Iran's drone and ballistic missile industries.

President Joe Biden said in a statement that he had directed U.S. Treasury "to continue to impose sanctions that further degrade Iran's military industries." "Let it be clear to all those who enable or support Iran's attacks," he said, "we will not hesitate to take all necessary action to hold you accountable."

U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said in a statement that the sanctions "will further limit Iran's ability to destabilize the region."

In addition, the U.S. Commerce Department is imposing new controls to restrict Iran's access to commercial grade microelectronics, which applies to items manufactured outside the U.S. that are produced using U.S. technology.

The actions come after U.S. officials earlier this week warned that they were readying new sanctions in response to Iran's activity in the region and to prevent future attacks. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill also have been quickly pushing forward legislation that would financially punish the Islamic Republic and its leaders.

Deputy State Department spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters Thursday that the U.S. reimposed travel restrictions on the Iranian delegation at the United Nations that prevents them from traveling outside a two-block radius of U.N. headquarters. These restrictions were imposed during the Trump administration but were lifted very early on by the Biden administration.

Iran's attack on Israel early Sunday came in response to what it says was an Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Syria earlier this month. Israel's military chief said Monday that his country will respond to the Iranian attack, while world leaders caution against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence.

European Union leaders also vowed on Wednesday to ramp up sanctions on Iran, targeting its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the existing EU sanctions regime would be strengthened and expanded to punish Tehran and help prevent future attacks on Israel. At the same time, he said, Israel needed to exercise restraint.

"I don't want to exaggerate, but we are on the edge of a war, a regional war in the Middle East, which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world, and in particular to Europe," he warned. "So stop it."

The U.S. has already sanctioned hundreds of entities and people in Iran — from the central bank and government officials to drone producers and money exchangers — accused of materially supporting Iran's Revolutionary Guard and foreign militant groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis.

And U.S. efforts to limit Iran's income from oil and petroleum products span back decades.

The question remains how effective sanctions will be, and have been, in preventing Iran from ramping up its production of military equipment. American defense officials accuse Iran of supplying drones to Russia as it pursues its invasion of Ukraine, which has reached a third year.

Richard Goldberg, who served as the director for countering Iranian weapons of mass destruction at

the National Security Council during the Trump administration, called the new sanctions "important but unimpactful."

Goldberg, who is a senior adviser at the Washington think tank Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said the sanctions rightly impose restrictions on entities involved in Iran's manufacture of missiles and drones and reinforce some actions affecting key industries already on the books. But he said the new sanctions do not move the ball in forcing the Iranians to seriously change their calculus.

Daniel Pickard, a sanctions attorney at Buchanan, Ingersoll & Rooney in Washington, said "Iran is now and has been for years the biggest funder of terrorism and sanctions aren't going to stop that — its the idea that the country is being essentially divorced from the international financial system" he said.

Citing the possibility of sanctions stifling Iran's economy — "it could only take one more push for its economy to go into an unstoppable slide."

Earlier this week, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said during a press conference that the U.S. has "been working to diminish Iran's ability to export oil."

"There may be more that we could do," she said.

Trump loses bid to halt Jan. 6 lawsuits while he fights criminal charges in the 2020 election case

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump lost a bid Thursday to pause a string of lawsuits accusing him of inciting the U.S. Capitol attack, while the former president fights his 2020 election interference criminal case in Washington.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta in Washington denied defense lawyers' request to put the civil cases seeking to hold Trump responsible for the Jan. 6, 2021, riot on hold while the criminal case accusing him of conspiring to overturn his election defeat to President Joe Biden plays out.

It's the latest legal setback for the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, whose trial in a separate criminal case related to hush money payments made during the 2016 campaign began this week with jury selection in New York.

The lawsuits brought by Democratic lawmakers and police officers who defended the Capitol on Jan. 6 seek civil damages for harm they say they suffered during the attack, which aimed to stop Congress' certification of Biden's victory.

Trump has claimed he can't be sued over the riot that left dozens of police officers injured, arguing that his words during a rally before the storming of the Capitol addressed "matters of public concern" and fell within the scope of absolute presidential immunity.

Washington's federal appeals court ruled in December that the lawsuits can move forward, rejecting Trump's sweeping claims that presidential immunity shields him from liability. The court, however, said Trump can continue to fight, as the cases proceed, to try to prove that his actions were taken in his official capacity as president.

In court papers filed last month, Trump's lawyers told the judge that "basic fairness to criminal defendants" warrants pausing the civil cases until after the 2020 election criminal case is resolved. They argued that allowing the lawsuits to proceed could force Trump to "prematurely telegraph" his defense strategies in the criminal case.

Mehta, who was appointed to the bench by former President Barack Obama, said the public has an interest in the prompt resolution of the civil lawsuits in addition to the criminal case. And the judge said "appropriate safeguards" can be put in place to allow for the lawsuits to advance without infringing on Trump's Fifth Amendment right to avoid self-incrimination.

The Supreme Court is set to hear arguments next week on Trump's claim that he is immune from criminal prosecution in the election interference case brought by special counsel Jack Smith. The ruling will determine whether Trump will have to stand trial in the case accusing him of a sprawling conspiracy to stay in power after Americans voted him out of office.

Kennedy family makes 'crystal clear' its Biden endorsement in attempt to deflate RFK Jr.'s candidacy

By ZEKE MILLER, WILL WEISSERT and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — President Joe Biden scooped up endorsements from at least 15 members of the Kennedy political family during a campaign stop Thursday as he aims to undermine Donald Trump and marginalize the candidacy of independent Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Kerry Kennedy, a daughter of former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, niece of former President John F. Kennedy and sister of the current presidential candidate, delivered the endorsements in Philadelphia by calling Biden "my hero."

"We want to make crystal clear our feelings that the best way forward for America is to reelect Joe Biden and Kamala Harris for four more years," she said.

She never directly mentioned her brother, but insisted "there are only two candidates with any chance of winning the presidency" this year, framing the campaign as a choice between Biden and Trump, with no room for a third party contender.

Biden, who keeps a bust of Robert F. Kennedy in the Oval Office, said the endorsements were "an incredible honor." He said Trump, the former president who is the presumptive Republican nominee, was a threat to America's democratic traditions and that "now it's time to keep going and not slow down because there's so much at stake."

The decision to highlight the Kennedy family's support more than six months from Election Day is an indication of how seriously Biden's team is taking a long shot candidate using his last name's lingering Democratic magic to siphon support from the incumbent.

Kennedy Jr. played down the endorsements, writing on social media that his family was "divided in our opinions but united in our love for each other." He said his campaign was about "healing America."

Given Kennedy Jr.'s quixotic political positions and the expectation this year's campaign will be decided by thin margins, both Democrats and Republicans worry that he could be a spoiler. As a reminder of that potentially decisive role, officials in Michigan said Kennedy qualified for the state ballot on Thursday.

Biden used Thursday's event, which capped a three-day swing in Pennsylvania, to keep up the pressure on Trump.

"Donald Trump's vision is one of anger, hate, revenge and retribution," Biden said, adding, "I have a very different view of America, one of hope and optimism."

After the event, Biden thanked about three dozen supporters and volunteers who were gearing up to call voters or knock on doors for his campaign.

"What you're doing here is bigger than me, bigger than you, bigger than all of us combined. It's about what kind of country our kids are going to live in," Biden said.

He portrayed the election as less about keeping himself in office than keeping Trump out, saying the race was important "not because I'm running" but because of "what happens if we lose this election."

The Kennedy family endorsements are hardly a surprise. Members of the prominent Democratic family have been vocal that they don't see eye to eye politically with Kennedy Jr., who started as a protest primary challenger to Biden in the Democratic Party and now is running as an independent. Biden last month hosted more than 30 members of Kennedy's extended family at the White House for St. Patrick's Day, when family members posed with the president in the Rose Garden and Oval Office.

Later, Biden and members of the Kennedy family were to meet with supporters at a campaign event, and some Kennedy were planning to make calls to voters and knock on doors on Biden's behalf.

Several notable members of the family were not endorsing, including Caroline Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador to Australia, and nonprofit leader Maria Shriver, which the Biden campaign said was due to their nonpolitical professional roles.

Shriver, however, has been a conspicuous White House guest recently, attending the State of the Union and speaking at a women's history month reception last month.

Bernard Tamas of Valdosta State University, an expert on third parties, said it was unclear whether Ken-

nedey Jr. would pull more votes from Democrats or Republicans.

"He is pro-science when it comes to the environment, but a conspiracy theorist when it comes to vaccines," Tamas said.

Kennedy Jr.'s lack of a clear political lane limits his potential impact on the election, Tamas said, but Democrats appear to be more concerned because his last name could lead some voters to believe that he is carrying on his family's political legacy.

Other than that, Tamas said, "I don't know what else he has to attract progressive voters."

Kennedy Jr. has spoken publicly in the past about disagreeing with his family on many issues, but maintains it can be done in "friendly" ways. After a super political action committee supporting his campaign produced a TV ad during the Super Bowl that relied heavily on imagery from John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential run, Kennedy Jr. apologized to his relatives on the X social media platform, saying he was sorry if the spot "caused anyone in my family pain."

The Democratic National Committee has hired a communications team to combat the appeal of third-party candidates, Kennedy Jr. first among them. The DNC also filed a recent Federal Election Commission complaint against Kennedy Jr.'s campaign, charging that it coordinated too closely with an affiliated super PAC to get his name on the presidential ballot in some states.

Kennedy Jr. is also viewed warily by the Trump campaign. While Trump has released a recent video saying, "If I were a Democrat, I'd vote for RFK Jr. every single time over Biden," he has sometimes criticized Kennedy Jr. as being more "radical left" than Biden.

On his way out of town, Biden made a swing by a Wawa, accompanied by Mayor Chelle Parker, where he picked up some food and ordered a black and white milkshake. That served to cover Biden's bases on one front, given his stop Wednesday in Pittsburgh at a Sheetz, a rival convenience chain.

Biden's travels across Pennsylvania this week were an opportunity to reconnect with his roots, starting on Tuesday in Scranton, where he lived until age 10. He swung by his childhood home, a three-story colonial that his family rented, and reminisced about attending Mass at St. Paul's.

In Pittsburgh, he called for higher tariffs on steel and aluminum from China to protect U.S. industry from what he called unfair competition. But even that event involved some nostalgia, as Biden recalled an endorsement from the steelworkers when he was "a 29-year-old kid" from Delaware running for U.S. Senate.

"It changed everything," he said.

Coyotes officially leaving Arizona for Salt Lake City following approval of sale to Utah Jazz owners

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Sports Writer

TEMPE, Ariz. (AP) — The Arizona Coyotes are officially headed to Salt Lake City.

The NHL Board of Governors voted unanimously Thursday to approve a \$1.2 billion sale from Alex Meruelo to Utah Jazz owners Ryan and Ashley Smith, clearing the way for the franchise's move to Utah next season.

The deal includes a provision for Arizona to get an expansion team if a new arena is built within the next five years. The deal will be facilitated through the NHL, with \$200 million going to league owners as a relocation fee.

"We expressed our interest publicly with the NHL," Ryan Smith told The Associated Press. "It's probably been two years where we've said, 'Hey, look, we really believe Utah can be an incredible hockey town.' You look at all the demographics, we were just talking about the Olympics and you think about the Olympics coming back. It all kind of made sense."

Smith will take over the franchise's hockey operations and Meruelo will maintain his business operations in Arizona in an effort to secure and develop a tract of land for a new arena in north Phoenix.

Meruelo also retains ownership of the Tucson Roadrunners, the franchise's AHL affiliate, and hopes to move them to Mullett Arena, the Coyotes' temporary home shared with Arizona State University the past two seasons. He plans to pay back the \$1 billion once an expansion team is approved.

"The NHL's belief in Arizona has never wavered," NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said in a statement.

"We thank Alex Meruelo for his commitment to the franchise and Arizona, and we fully support his ongoing efforts to secure a new home in the desert for the Coyotes. We also want to acknowledge the loyal hockey fans of Arizona, who have supported their team with dedication for nearly three decades while growing the game."

Meruelo will retain the Coyotes' name, logo and trademark, so Smith's group will have to rename the team. The team will play at Delta Center, home of the Jazz, until a new arena can be built.

"We'll start with Utah on the jersey and we'll figure out the logo and everything else, and what it is that we are, but that's a one-way door," Smith said. "You've got to do it once. And with this timeline, I think both the league feels better and we feel better to just run the process and then we'll drop it when we drop it."

The sale ends the Coyotes' long-running bid to find a permanent home.

The franchise shared an arena with the NBA's Phoenix Suns after relocating from Winnipeg, moved to Glendale and ended up at Mullett Arena when the city of Glendale backed out of a lease agreement.

Meruelo had been adamant about not wanting to sell the team despite receiving numerous offers since buying the team in 2019. When an auction for the land in north Phoenix got pushed back to June, the Coyotes had no guarantee a deal for a new arena would go through.

With the NHL and players' association hesitant for the Coyotes to play at 5,000-seat Mullett Arena for a third season, Meruelo opted to sell the team, his focus shifting to the new arena and expansion team.

"I agree with Commissioner Gary Bettman and the National Hockey League, that it is simply unfair to continue to have our players, coaches, hockey front office, and the NHL teams they compete against, spend several more years playing in an arena that is not suited for NHL hockey," Meruelo said in a statement. "But this is not the end for NHL hockey in Arizona. I have negotiated the right to reactivate the team within the next five years, and have retained ownership of the beloved Coyotes name, brand and logo. I remain committed to this community and to building a first-class sports arena and entertainment district without seeking financial support from the public."

The Coyotes played their final game in Arizona on Wednesday night, a 5-2 win over the playoff-bound Edmonton Oilers. The players celebrated on the ice with team personnel and a few handed their sticks over the glass to fans, who chanted "We love you Coy-otes!"

"It's tough to take it all in," Coyotes rookie forward Logan Cooley said. "A lot of noise, a lot of personal stuff and obviously the organization, you hear you're going one spot then you're going to the next spot. We've done a good job in this locker room focusing on keeping out the noise and getting better as a team, striving to be the team we want to be one day."

Officials from Salt Lake City and the city's 2034 Olympic bid supported Smith's attempt to bring hockey to Utah, giving the state two major professional franchises.

"This announcement is about more than bringing an NHL team to Salt Lake City — it's a defining moment in our trajectory, becoming a catalyst for a positive vision that integrates community, connection, and more possibilities for families, residents, and visitors to experience our capital city," Salt Lake City Mayor Erin Mendenhall said in a statement. "I'm thankful for the close partnership with Ryan & Ashley Smith, and the entire SEG team. This is the beginning of a new era that will generate exciting opportunities for our communities, amplify pride and unlock new potential in our downtown core."

Once praised, settlement to help sickened BP oil spill workers leaves most with nearly nothing

By TRAVIS LOLLER and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

When a deadly explosion destroyed BP's Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico, 134 million gallons of crude erupted into the sea over the next three months — and tens of thousands of ordinary people were hired to help clean up environmental devastation from the biggest offshore oil spill in U.S. history.

These workers were exposed to crude oil and the chemical dispersant Corexit while picking up tar balls along the shoreline, laying booms from fishing boats to soak up slicks and rescuing oil-covered birds.

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Recognizing that some members of cleanup crews had likely become sick, BP agreed to a medical claims settlement two years after the 2010 disaster. Experts hailed it as “an extraordinary achievement” that would compensate workers fairly with little hassle.

But it hasn't turned out that way.

The effort has fallen far short of expectations, leaving many workers who claimed lasting health effects stranded with little or no payment.

Through the settlement, BP has paid ill workers and coastal residents a tiny fraction — \$67 million — of the billions the company has spent on restitution for economic and environmental damage. The vast majority — 79% — received no more than \$1,300 each.

Many workers claiming illnesses from the spill were forced to sue — and they've fared worse. All but a handful of roughly 4,800 lawsuits seeking compensation for health problems have been dismissed.

Attorneys familiar with the cases say they are unaware of any that have gone to trial and know of only one that's been settled. Former boat captain John Maas received \$110,000 from BP for his lung ailments in 2022, according to a confidential copy of the settlement.

The repeated failures demonstrate how extremely difficult it is to prove to a court that a specific illness is caused by chemical exposure — even when those chemicals are recognized causes of illness more generally.

An Associated Press investigation that included dozens of interviews with cleanup workers, attorneys and experts, and a review of voluminous court filings revealed:

—A single switched word in the settlement prevented thousands of workers from receiving anything over the minimum of \$1,300 each. To get more, they had to file individual lawsuits — an option that almost always led to defeat.

—Most federal judges hearing those cases required a level of proof connecting chemical exposure to worker illnesses that the lead government epidemiologist studying the spill says is likely impossible to meet.

—Big law firms representing dozens or even thousands of workers failed their clients in various ways. After BP accused one firm of manufacturing medical claims, its cases were dismissed in big batches.

Robin Greenwald, one of the plaintiffs' attorneys who negotiated the settlement, said even her firm has not been able to win a single medical case against BP.

“I wanted people to get their day in court and they win or lose at trial,” said Greenwald, a former federal environmental prosecutor. “Let a jury decide. ... But they weren't even given the chance to do that.”

BP declined to comment for this story, citing ongoing litigation 14 years after the spill.

GETTING SICK

After the explosion on April 20, 2010, the spill was spectacular. A camera live-streamed the rupture on cable news, showing the world in real time gushing oil that wouldn't stop. Oil floated on the Gulf and washed ashore, covering plants, birds and other animals.

To break up oil, roughly 1.8 million gallons of Corexit were dropped from planes and sprayed from boats — far more than previous U.S. oil spills. The manufacturer said it was safer than dish soap.

But lab research on human tissue and animals has revealed Corexit can damage cells that protect the airways and cause scarring that narrows breathing tubes, according to Dr. Veena Antony, a University of Alabama professor of pulmonary and critical care medicine who has studied Corexit's effect on lung tissue. Over time, she said, the process can make it harder and harder to breathe.

“I genuinely believe that there was harm done and we didn't realize the harm was being done — and now people are suffering,” said Antony, who testified as an expert witness in one suit against BP. “I would not, at the present time, put my hand even in Corexit without wearing double gloves.”

The current producer of Corexit, ChampionX, said the dispersant was pre-approved by the government for use on oil spills and the manufacturer had no role in deciding when or how to spray it.

Oil itself has long been known to cause illness. One of its toxic components is benzene, which can cause conditions ranging from skin irritation to cancer.

But now researchers, including Dale Sandler at the National Institutes of Health, are finding that spill workers exposed to amounts of oil assumed safe have suffered from dizziness, nausea, lung problems

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and heart attacks.

"The exposures on average were still pretty low," said Sandler, an epidemiologist leading the GuLFSTUDY, a major effort to quantify workers' exposure and track health woes over years. "What surprised us is that we did see a wide range of health effects that were associated with these exposures."

Sandler said the study is the largest ever of an oil spill and is ongoing. "We're looking at long-term risks like diabetes, cancer incidence," she said.

What researchers have found so far is echoed by other studies, including one involving about 3,500 Coast Guard responders. The responders who reported breathing oil fumes were 40% to 50% more likely to have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-like symptoms and sinus problems compared to those who said they didn't breathe fumes. And responders who reported exposure to both oil and Corexit were more than twice as likely to suffer shortness of breath.

A PROMISING SETTLEMENT

Proving to a court that a specific person's illness was likely caused by their exposure to oil or Corexit can be difficult.

Yet the settlement for medical claims was supposed to make it easier for workers: BP would agree exposure to the spill could cause a host of known health issues — and workers suffering from them could file claims for payment. Initially, attorneys advocating for the settlement said it could help as many as 200,000 possibly injured workers and residents.

The settlement also included \$105 million from BP for regional health outreach and free health checkups for exposed workers every three years for 21 years.

But things quickly went awry.

The third-party administrator hired to handle claims, Garretson Resolution Group, initially rejected 78% of roughly 37,000 claims. After many were resubmitted, around 36% still were rejected and claimants received nothing.

Greenwald was especially frustrated her clients' claims were repeatedly deemed deficient. "We had many a meeting with Garretson's team to try to shake them loose of some of their narrow reading and obsession with deficiencies," she said. "We clearly knew the claim form. We negotiated it."

Matthew Garretson, founder of Garretson Resolution Group, defended his claims handling in an email, saying, "it was the process the parties agreed upon and we had to administer the settlement exactly in the way the parties' Settlement Agreement mandated." The company was paid roughly \$115 million to \$120 million for administering claims and for the outreach program and medical checkup effort as of 2018, he said.

There was a bigger problem.

At the most basic level, workers could submit affidavits attesting to their medical problems and collect \$1,300 — and residents could collect \$900. About 18,000 received that much.

Those with longer-term illnesses who had proof from medical tests could collect up to \$60,700, or more if they had been hospitalized.

But few people had that proof. Forty of about 23,000 with approved claims collected the maximum award — less than 0.2%.

Many people lacked health insurance or easy access to a doctor and the required medical tests — a problem U.S. District Court Judge Carl Barbier, who approved the settlement, acknowledged in a hearing.

"Speaking for south Louisiana, I know — you're dealing with people who are probably at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. Most of these people, I feel sure, likely have no health insurance," he said.

Even when people did seek medical attention, doctors untrained in treating chemical exposures often did not link illnesses to a patient's cleanup work in medical records, according to Greenwald.

THE NATIONS CLIENTS

The Nations Law Firm, based in Houston, represented thousands of workers like Paul Loup IV, who helped clean an oil-contaminated beach in Pascagoula, Mississippi for several months.

Loup, 68, says he now has chronic respiratory issues, making it hard to stand or speak at length. He

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quit his job as a procurement manager because it involved too much travel.

The firm had wanted to help clients collect more than the settlement's \$1,300 minimum, so it developed a plan to obtain needed medical proof.

It was an assembly line. Out-of-state nurse practitioners who were paid \$20 per plaintiff entered medical histories based on information the law firm — not a doctor — provided. Firm-designed forms listed illnesses that paid more under the settlement — and doctors could simply circle them. The forms included a statement linking a patient's illness to oil spill work — with a line for the doctor to sign. Doctors didn't keep their own patient records.

While such a process might seem suspect, firm founder Howard Nations said in an interview that he met with the claims administrator Garretson to try to develop an acceptable one.

Garretson rejected the claims — not based on the process, but on a deadline.

THE DEADLINE AND A SWITCHED WORD

The settlement was designed to make it easy to collect money for illnesses that surfaced quickly after crude oil exposure. People with diseases that can show up years later — such as cancer — would be forced to file individual federal lawsuits.

Early settlement drafts defined this second group as people with a disease that "manifests" after April 16, 2012. However, a later draft changed the word "manifests" to "diagnosed."

In 2014, BP seized on that change to argue no one diagnosed after the deadline could receive an award for a long-term illness through the settlement.

That meant two people could have the same illness, but the one who got a diagnosis before the deadline could file a claim for compensation while the other would need to file a suit instead.

Judge Barbier said that's not how he was led to believe the settlement he okayed would work.

"It is rather strange ... that the court would approve a settlement, a class settlement that really doesn't settle thousands of claims and requires them to file another lawsuit," Barbier said at a 2014 hearing. "I mean, it doesn't sound like much of a settlement."

BP attorneys said any other interpretation would invite fraud, allowing opportunistic law firms to pay for a medical diagnosis after the deadline to get a settlement claims payout. They also said the word change was requested by the workers' own attorneys, and Stephen Herman, co-lead counsel for plaintiffs' attorneys, testified they didn't recall how it happened.

Despite his doubts, Barbier said he had to follow the settlement language.

His ruling forced thousands of workers out of the relatively easy administrative claims process into federal courts throughout the South.

THE FEDERAL LAWSUITS

The ruling was devastating for Nations clients whose only option was to file federal lawsuits.

After BP attorneys alleged in Mississippi federal court that the firm manufactured medical diagnoses, Nations agreed to dismiss its cases by the dozens. In an interview, Nations did not deny BP's allegations but said the cases were unwinnable without an adequate expert witness.

Loup, the former beach cleanup worker, said he didn't know until informed by a reporter last year that his case had been dismissed years earlier. "I call (Nations) every six months or so ... and they've just said it's going to take some time," he said.

Another Nations client was Jeff Herring, the deckhand of Maas, the boat captain believed to be the only person whose case reached a settlement.

When their boat was sprayed with Corexit, Herring started throwing up so badly an ambulance was called to pick him up. Although released from the hospital after a few days, he developed chronic sinus and respiratory problems, according to his lawsuit.

Months later, a doctor at an oil spill medical station referred him to a specialist, and he was hospitalized again, said Herring, now 39. An X-ray found spots on his lungs, and he was supposed to go to New Orleans for further testing but never did.

"That would have took another two weeks being in a hospital over there," he said. "I couldn't because

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I had to get back to work.”

Noting he had no insurance, Herring said he received about \$8,000 through the claims process — not enough to even pay hospital bills.

Herring’s suit was thrown out in 2020 along with 235 other Nations cases, but he said he wasn’t told.

Howard Nations said the firm communicated with clients about the status of their cases and although the individual suits were dismissed, he intends to go back to Judge Barbier with new arguments.

EXPERT WITNESSES

Other law firms met a different obstacle:

Workers filing individual lawsuits have to prove they were exposed to enough oil or dispersant to — more likely than not — cause their illness.

The workers’ experts relied on studies, such as those from the National Institutes of Health and the Coast Guard, that found people exposed to oil and Corexit were more likely to develop certain illnesses.

But BP’s experts maintained workers needed to show exactly how much oil and dispersant they had inhaled or ingested and that it was sufficient to cause their sickness.

Greenwald, the attorney who helped craft the settlement, said meeting such a standard is almost impossible: “I mean, ‘How deep did you breathe? Right at the moment you were standing there, was the wind blowing?’” she said. “What mortal human would be able to testify about that?”

Most judges have sided with BP, rejecting workers’ experts as unreliable and effectively ending the cases.

Sandler, the NIH epidemiologist, said its researchers went to great lengths to develop data on exposure like nothing ever been done before. “I’m not sure that they’ll ever meet the standards that the court is imposing on what constitutes evidence,” she said.

It also can be difficult to find an expert witness who knows the science but doesn’t have a conflict of interest through work with the oil industry.

The Falcon Law Firm brought on Jerald Cook, a retired Navy physician trained in occupational and environmental medicine, as an expert on numerous cases. He was rejected again and again by judges as BP poked holes in his professional history and work.

“Your report really doesn’t balance the evidence favoring your conclusions with the evidence that disfavors your conclusions; isn’t that fair?” a BP attorney asked Cook in a deposition.

“Yeah. I think that’s — that’s fair,” Cook replied.

He declined comment, and Falcon did not reply to requests for comment.

Some law firms that took on hundreds of cases have simply buckled under the strain, begging judges for more time so their overloaded experts could produce reports.

LOOKING FORWARD

It’s not completely over.

The Downs Law Group, which has lost hundreds of cases against BP, is appealing in the 5th and the 11th U.S. Circuit Courts of Appeals, hoping they’ll rule federal district judges have misconstrued the level of proof needed for toxic exposure cases. One of those judges said the issue is “very ripe for the Supreme Court to resolve.”

“It has a broader reach than the BP oil spill,” said Jason Clark, a Downs attorney. “If the burden is one that’s too high for any plaintiff to meet, then a lot of people who are exposed ... are never going to see justice.”

Meanwhile, Downs is talking to thousands of people interested in suing over illnesses such as cancer that emerged years after the spill, Clark said.

Sandler, the NIH epidemiologist, said the high burden of proof demanded by most judges means “people can’t win.”

“I think at the end of the day, did the oil from the oil spill make people sick? Yes,” Sandler said. “Now, courts may view this from a very different lens, but from a public health standpoint — yes, the oil spill made people sick.”

Two shootings, two different responses — Maine restricts guns while Iowa arms teachers

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Six months after a deadly mass shooting by an Army reservist, Maine lawmakers this week passed a wide-ranging package of new gun restrictions.

Three months after a fatal school shooting, Iowa lawmakers this week passed legislation allowing trained teachers and staff to carry guns on school property.

Two states. Two tragedies. Two different approaches to improving public safety.

"We live in two different Americas, in essence," said Daniel Webster, a health policy professor affiliated with the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

"We see terrible acts of gun violence; no one wants them, of course," Webster said. "But we see this through different lenses."

Legislatures in about 20 states already have passed measures this year to expand gun rights or restrict access to firearms. Dozens more proposals are pending. The divide continues a trend seen last year, when more than half the states enacted firearms legislation, with Democrats generally favoring more limits and Republicans more freedoms for gun owners.

LIMITS ON GUNS IN MAINE

Maine has a tradition of hunting and gun ownership. But after an Army reservist killed 18 people and wounded 13 others in Lewiston, Democratic Gov. Janet Mills called for a variety of new laws aimed at preventing dangerous people from possessing guns and strengthening mental health services.

Before adjourning its 2024 session early Thursday, lawmakers approved measures imposing a 72-hour waiting period for gun purchases, expanding background checks on private gun sales and criminalizing sales to certain prohibited people. They also passed a ban on devices that convert semi-automatic firearms into rapid-firing weapons like machine guns, and enhanced an existing law that allows judges to temporarily remove guns from people during a mental health crisis.

A gun safety coalition praised it as a significant step forward in response to constituents' concerns after the Lewiston shooting. But Republican state Sen. Lisa Keim criticized colleagues for "using the tragedy to advance legislation" that had been unable to pass previously.

GUNS IN IOWA SCHOOLS

In Perry, Iowa, a school principal and sixth-grade student died and several others were wounded when a 17-year-old student opened fire in January.

A 2021 state law already allowed schools to authorize individuals to carry firearms, though some districts have not done so because of concerns about insurance coverage.

The legislation given final approval Monday by the Republican-led Legislature builds upon the prior law by allowing teachers and staff who undergo gun safety training to get a professional permit to carry guns in schools. If they do, they would be protected from criminal or civil liability for use of reasonable force.

The legislation also requires large school districts to station a police officer or private security guard at each high school, unless the school board votes not to do so. Most of those school districts already have security staff.

DIVERGING STATE LAWS

Republican-led legislatures in Kentucky, Nebraska, South Dakota, Tennessee and Utah also passed measures this year that would expand the ability of some people to bring guns into schools. A bill passed in Wyoming allots \$480,000 to reimburse schools for the cost of training employees to carry guns on school property.

Louisiana and South Carolina, led by Republican lawmakers and governors, each enacted laws allowing people to carry concealed guns without a permit. The National Rifle Association, which supported the measures, said similar laws now exist in 29 states.

By contrast, the Democrat-led Delaware Legislature passed legislation requiring people wanting to buy a handgun to first be fingerprinted, undergo training and obtain a state permit.

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New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, signed a pair of new laws imposing restrictions. One sets a seven-day waiting period to purchase firearms — more than double the three-day period required by the federal government for a background check.

Another new law in New Mexico prohibits carrying firearms within 100 feet (30 meters) of polling places, with an exemption for concealed-carry permit holders. Voting site restrictions on guns now exist in about one-third of the states and Washington, D.C., according to the gun-violence prevention group Giffords.

BUCKING PARTY TRENDS

Not all new gun policies diverge along partisan lines.

Republican Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin this year vetoed 30 gun-related bills passed by the Democratic-led General Assembly that he said would have trampled on constitutional rights. Yet Youngkin also signed some gun restrictions: One bans devices that convert semi-automatic handguns into automatic weapons. Another allows felony charges against parents who let a child have access to a firearm after being notified the child poses a threat of violence.

While signing several gun rights measures, Republican Gov. Mark Gordon of Wyoming also vetoed legislation that would have allowed people to carry concealed guns in public schools and government meetings. Gordon cited concerns the bill could have exceeded the separation of powers provision in the state constitution.

And in some cases, high-profile shootings have prompted lawmakers to avoid taking action on proposals they might otherwise have considered.

Missouri's Republican-led House had been prepared to debate bills exempting guns and ammunition from sales taxes and allowing people with concealed-carry permits to bring guns onto public transportation. But after the deadly shooting at the Kansas City Chiefs Super Bowl celebration, House Majority Leader Jon Patterson said those bills would not be brought up this year.

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 tried to wring itself out Thursday after the heaviest recorded rainfall ever to hit the desert nation, with its main airport allowing more flights even as floodwater still covered portions of major highways and communities.

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. And long-haul carrier Emirates, crucial to East-West travel, began allowing local passengers to arrive at Terminal 3, their base of operations.

However, Dubai Airports CEO Paul Griffiths said in an interview with The Associated Press that the airfield needed at least another 24 hours to resume operations close to its usual schedule. Meanwhile, one desert community in Dubai saw floodwaters continue to rise Thursday to as much as 1 meter (3 feet) as civil defense officials struggled to pump out the water.

"We were looking at the radar thinking, 'Goodness, if this hits, then it's going to be cataclysmic,'" Griffiths said of the storm. "And indeed it was."

The airport ended up needing 22 tankers with vacuum pumps to get water off its grounds. Griffiths acknowledged that taxiways flooded during the rains, though the airport's runways remained free of water to safely operate. Online videos of a FlyDubai flight landing with its reverse thrust spraying out water caught the world's attention.

"It looks dramatic, but it actually isn't that dramatic," Griffiths said.

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 also had a hard time reaching the airport given the water on roadways.

But on Thursday, Emirates lifted that order to allow customers into the airport. That saw some 2,000

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people come into Terminal 3, again sparking long lines, Griffiths said.

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.

Meanwhile, intense floods also have struck neighboring Oman in recent days. Authorities on Thursday raised the death toll from those storms to at least 21 killed.

The UAE's drainage systems quickly became overwhelmed Tuesday, 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.

However, at least one community saw the effects of the rainfall only get worse Thursday. Mudon, a development by the state-owned Dubai Properties, saw flooding in one neighborhood reach as much as 1 meter. Civil defense workers tried to pump the water out, but it was a struggle as people waded through the floodwater.

Residents of Mudon, who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity given the UAE's strict laws governing speech, described putting together the equivalent of nearly \$2,000 to get a tanker to the community Wednesday. They alleged the developers did nothing to help prior to that, even as they called and emailed. They also said a nearby sewage processing facility failed, bringing more water into their homes.

"A lot of people were in denial of how bad it was," one homeowner said as civil defense officials waded through the water, bringing bottled water on a raft.

Dubai Holding, a state-owned company that has Dubai Properties as an arm, did not respond to questions. It's part of a wider nexus that U.S. diplomats have called "Dubai Inc." — all properties overseen by the city-state's ruling family.

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.

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.

NFL draft has potential to set a record for most players on offense selected in the first round

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

The NFL draft will be offensive.

We're not talking about hurt feelings. This draft has the potential to set a record for most offensive players selected in the first round.

No draft has seen more than 19 players on offense chosen in the first round. That happened three times, most recently in 2009.

Many draft experts are predicting more than 20 offensive players will go in the first round and some have up to 25.

The AP's final mock draft had 22 going in the first round, including 10 offensive linemen, six wide receivers, five quarterbacks and one tight end.

Quarterbacks get the most attention, of course. Caleb Williams is ticketed for the Chicago Bears with the No. 1 pick.

Beyond him, there are plenty of questions. The Washington Commanders need a franchise QB and will choose from Jayden Daniels, the 2023 Heisman Trophy winner, and Drake Maye at No. 2. J.J. McCarthy's stock has soared since leading Michigan to a national championship and he could end up in the top five, with some analysts even putting him ahead of Daniels and Maye.

Michael Penix Jr. and Bo Nix are in the second tier, but could end up drafted in the latter part of the opening round.

"The quarterback position is a hard position to evaluate and I'd say with the history of the draft, there's guys that hit and there's guys that don't," Arizona Cardinals general manager Monti Ossenfort said. "There's a lot of things that go into what makes a good quarterback, not only on field but off the field, and I think that's why that position is such a challenging evaluation for a lot of people in the game."

The Las Vegas Raiders own the 13th pick, so they'd have to move up to secure one of the top four guys. They enter the draft with veteran Gardner Minshew and second-year pro Aidan O'Connell and could stay put to take the best player available and still end up with Penix or Nix later.

"There's really no consensus boards, at least since I've been in the league," Raiders GM Tom Telesco said. "You've got 32 different teams that look at things 32 different ways. So our ranking may be different than other rankings, so I don't know if there's necessarily a top three and a next two or a next three. ... It's going to be a little bit different for everybody, depending on what you're looking for."

Wide receivers are a hot commodity with Marvin Harrison Jr., Malik Nabers and Rome Odunze not only considered among the top five potential picks but the best players in the entire draft.

"I think you could make a case the three highest-graded players in this draft are the three receivers," NFL Network draft analyst Daniel Jeremiah said.

Brian Thomas Jr., Adonai Mitchell and Troy Franklin round out the six wideouts in the AP's mock first round. Other potential first-round picks include Ladd McConkey and Xavier Legette. It's such a deep class of receivers that teams could wait to snag an eventual starter on Day 2 or even Day 3.

Protecting the quarterback is critical to a team's success, so there's always an emphasis on offensive linemen, especially tackles.

Joe Alt is the consensus top lineman and is expected to be a top-10 pick. J.C. Latham, Olumuyiwa Fashanu, Taliese Fuaga and Troy Fautanu could go in the top 20. Amarius Mims, Graham Barton, Tyler Guyton and Jordan Morgan are also in the mix. Jackson Powers-Johnson is the top interior lineman in the draft.

"They're all really talented," Jeremiah said. "When you look at that top group of guys, really I would say you're talking about Alt, Fashanu, Fuaga, Latham. I would think those are pretty unanimous, whatever order you have them, those are kind of the top four guys."

For teams looking at defense, the draft has several talented edge rushers and cornerbacks. The AP's mock draft has four players at each of those positions going in the first round, along with two interior defensive linemen.

Edge rushers Dallas Turner, Laiatu Latu, Jared Verse and Chop Robinson, cornerbacks Quinyon Mitchell, Terrion Arnold, Nate Wiggins and Kool-Aid McKinstry, and defensive tackles Byron Murphy and Jer'Zhan Newton are among the best defensive players.

Many teams prioritize edge rushers, and Turner is expected to be the first defensive player selected — possibly by Atlanta at No. 8.

Only once in the past 57 years have the first seven picks all been offensive players. That happened in 2021.

"When you look at the history of drafts, you can look at a lot of times like, 'OK, we really need a pressure player, so make sure you get that,'" Falcons GM Terry Fontenot said. "But we can look back at drafts where someone reached on a pressure player and left some really good football players on the board at other positions.

"It's a strong draft. We're going to be staring at some really good players at eight, or whether we're up a little bit or whether we're back a little bit, and that's the excitement. We're wide open."

Every personnel boss says the same until they're on the clock.

Climate change concerns grow, but few think Biden's climate law will help, an 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."

But the people who say they 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."

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

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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 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 her 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 ques-

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tions 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."

Today in History: April 19

80 killed in Waco Siege, 168 killed in Oklahoma City bombing

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, April 19, the 110th day of 2024. There are 256 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 19, 1993, the 51-day siege at the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, ended as fire destroyed the structure after federal agents began smashing their way in; about 80 people, including two dozen children and sect leader David Koresh, were killed. Then on the same date in 1995, Timothy McVeigh, seeking to strike at the government he blamed for the Waco deaths, destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. (McVeigh was convicted of federal murder charges and executed in 2001.)

On this date:

In 1775, the American Revolutionary War began with the battles of Lexington and Concord.

In 1865, a funeral was held at the White House for President Abraham Lincoln, assassinated five days earlier; his coffin was then taken to the U.S. Capitol for a private memorial service in the Rotunda.

In 1897, the first Boston Marathon was held; winner John J. McDermott ran the course in two hours, 55 minutes and 10 seconds.

In 1912, a special subcommittee of the Senate Commerce Committee opened hearings in New York into the Titanic disaster.

In 1943, during World War II, tens of thousands of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto began a valiant but ultimately futile uprising against Nazi forces.

In 1977, the Supreme Court, in *Ingraham v. Wright*, ruled 5-4 that even severe spanking of schoolchildren by faculty members did not violate the Eighth Amendment ban against cruel and unusual punishment.

In 1989, 47 sailors were killed when a gun turret exploded aboard the USS Iowa in the Caribbean.

In 2005, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Germany was elected pope in the first conclave of the new millennium; he took the name Benedict XVI.

In 2012, Levon Helm, drummer and singer for The Band, died in New York City at age 71.

In 2013, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv), a 19-year-old college student wanted in the

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Boston Marathon bombings, was taken into custody after a manhunt that had left the city virtually paralyzed; his older brother and alleged accomplice, 26-year-old Tamerlan (TAM'-ehr-luhn), was killed earlier in a furious attempt to escape police.

In 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Black man, died a week after suffering a spinal cord injury in the back of a Baltimore police van while he was handcuffed and shackled. (Six police officers were charged; three were acquitted and the city's top prosecutor eventually dropped the three remaining cases.)

In 2017, Fox News Channel's parent company fired Bill O'Reilly following an investigation into harassment allegations, bringing a stunning end to cable news' most popular program.

In 2018, Raul Castro turned over Cuba's presidency to Miguel Mario Diaz-Canel Bermudez, the first non-Castro to hold Cuba's top government office since the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro and his younger brother Raul.

In 2022, Russia assaulted cities and towns along a boomerang-shaped front hundreds of miles long and poured more troops into Ukraine in a pivotal battle for control of the country's eastern industrial heartland of coal mines and factories.

In 2023, a Pennsylvania grand jury accused nine men with connections to the Jehovah's Witnesses of child sexual abuse.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Elinor Donahue is 87. Rock musician Alan Price (The Animals) is 82. Actor Tim Curry is 78. Pop singer Mark "Flo" Volman (The Turtles; Flo and Eddie) is 77. Actor Tony Plana is 72. Former tennis player Sue Barker is 68. Motorsports Hall of Famer Al Unser Jr. is 62. Actor Tom Wood is 61. Former recording executive Suge Knight is 59. Singer-songwriter Dar Williams is 57. Actor Kim Hawthorne (TV: "Greenleaf") is 56. Actor Ashley Judd is 56. Singer Bekka Bramlett is 56. Latin pop singer Luis Miguel is 54. Actor Jennifer Esposito is 52. Actor Jennifer Taylor is 52. Jazz singer Madeleine Peyroux (PAY'-roo) is 50. Actor James Franco is 46. Actor Kate Hudson is 45. Actor Hayden Christensen is 43. Actor vis 43. Actor-comedian Ali Wong is 42. Actor Victoria Yeates is 41. Actor Kelen Coleman is 40. Actor Zack Conroy is 39. Actor Courtland Mead is 37. Retired tennis player Maria Sharapova is 37. NHL forward Patrik Laine is 26.