

Groton Daily Independent

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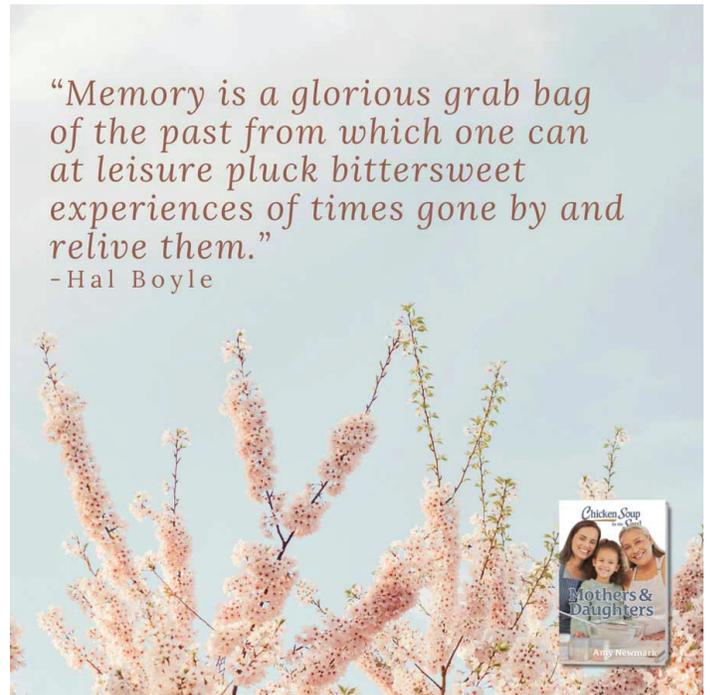
Saturday, April 20

PROM, 7 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.
Princess Prom, 4:30 p.m., GHS Gym

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



"Memory is a glorious grab bag of the past from which one can at leisure pluck bittersweet experiences of times gone by and relive them."

-Hal Boyle

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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Foreign Aid Package Vote

House lawmakers are poised to vote today on a \$95B foreign aid package that consists of three funding bills for Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan, as well as a fourth bill covering an array of measures, including banning TikTok and seizing Russian assets. The House yesterday voted 316-94 (with more Democrats than Republicans voting in favor) to pass a procedural rule teeing up today's final vote.

If passed, the four bills will be sent to the Senate as one measure. The package largely follows the contours of a similar bipartisan measure that passed the Democratic-led Senate earlier this year. President Joe Biden has signaled his support for the House package. See what's included here.

House Speaker Mike Johnson's (R, LA-4) decision to move forward with the bills comes as another Republican, Rep. Paul Gosar (AZ-9), announced he would join Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's (R, GA-14) motion to oust the speaker. Johnson has received pushback from party members who oppose additional aid to Ukraine; the US has so far provided \$44B in military assistance to Ukraine.

Israel, Iran appear to downplay reported Israeli airstrike in central Iran.

Iranian air defenses intercepted at least three drones over the central city of Isfahan overnight Thursday after Israel appeared to launch a limited strike in the region, where a military air base and nuclear facilities are located. Analysts say Israel and Iran's muted responses signal they seek to prevent a wider Middle East conflict.

At least nine people killed in Ukraine after Russian airstrike.

The Ukrainian military said it downed a Russian bomber for the first time since the war began after the aircraft launched a missile strike in Ukraine's eastern region of Dnipro. Three children were among those killed; more than a dozen others were wounded. Russia said the aircraft crashed after a technical malfunction.

Biden administration expands Title IX protections in revised rules.

Title IX is a federal civil rights law first enacted in 1972 and originally created to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in schools and other educational settings (see history). The new regulations codify protections for LGBTQ+ and pregnant students and update how schools respond to alleged sexual misconduct.

Nearly half of China's major cities are sinking, researchers say.

The study, published in the journal Science, found 45% of China's urban areas are sinking over 3 millimeters per year, while 16% are sinking over 10 millimeters per year. The researchers used satellite data from 2015 to 2022 and said the cause of the sinking was partly due to the weight of buildings and groundwater extraction.

Tesla recalls all 3,878 Cybertrucks due to accelerator issue.

The federal safety regulator said the Cybertruck's accelerator pedal can dislodge and become trapped by interior trim, causing the vehicle to unintentionally accelerate. Tesla said it will replace or repair the faulty accelerator pedals. Deliveries of the Cybertruck—Tesla's first pickup truck—began last November.

Grammy-winning singer Mandisa Hundley dies at age 47.

Hundley was a contemporary Christian singer who gained attention after finishing ninth on "American Idol" in 2006. She released her debut album in 2007, receiving a Grammy nomination for best pop and contemporary gospel album. Hundley later won a Grammy in 2014 for best contemporary Christian music album.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Bryan W. in Smyrna, Delaware.

"At an amusement park, my son really wanted a giant stuffed banana prize from a carnival game. We spent an unreasonable amount of money trying to win the banana but to no avail. We gave up. A short time later a young man walked past my son with his friends, carrying a giant stuffed banana. He asked my son if he wanted a banana. 'Yes please,' my son said. The young man said, 'If you can beat me at rock-paper-scissors, it's yours.' Well, my son won! And the young man told him that he won the prize just so he could give it to someone who didn't have one. We promised to pay it forward and could not thank him enough. I don't know who you are but thank you so much for making my son's day special."

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South Dakota State Fair Shifts Official Start Date to Wednesday

Huron, SD - The South Dakota State Fair is excited to announce a significant expansion for 2024, shifting the official start date from Thursday to Wednesday, adding a day to the fair. The change will accommodate all livestock shows within the week of the fair and provide a more enriching and complete experience for exhibitors, vendors, and fairgoers.

The change provides families attending the fair the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the diverse array of fair experiences, while continuing to participate in Open Class, 4-H, and FFA exhibits. These vital showcases form the backbone of the State Fair's agricultural heritage, and it is important to include ample time for participants to enjoy all the activities the South Dakota State Fair has to offer.

Adding Wednesday as an official fair day maximizes participation from livestock producers and vendors and provides increased public enjoyment, diversified programming, educational opportunities, and enhanced family engagement.

Preliminary plans for the first day of the 2024 State Fair, Wednesday, August 28 include:

Admission gates will open at 7 am, with discounted ticket prices;

Open Class Beef Show will begin at 8am;

Vendor buildings will be open from 9 am to 8pm;

Food vendors will be open at 11am;

Entertainment will be on select free stages;

Carnival will open at 3pm;

Grounds entertainment shows will occur throughout the day; and,

Red Wilk Construction Tuff Hedeman Bull Bash in the Grandstand at 8pm.

The 2024 South Dakota State Fair kicks off on Channel Seeds Opening Day Wednesday, August 28, through Monday, September 2. For more information on State Fair events, contact the Fair office at 800-529-0900, visit www.sdstatefair.com or find them on Facebook, Instagram, and X.



Open House Bridal Shower

honoring

Jessica Bjerke

Saturday, April 20, 2024

1:00pm - 3:00pm

Olive Grove Golf Course

Registered at Target and Amazon



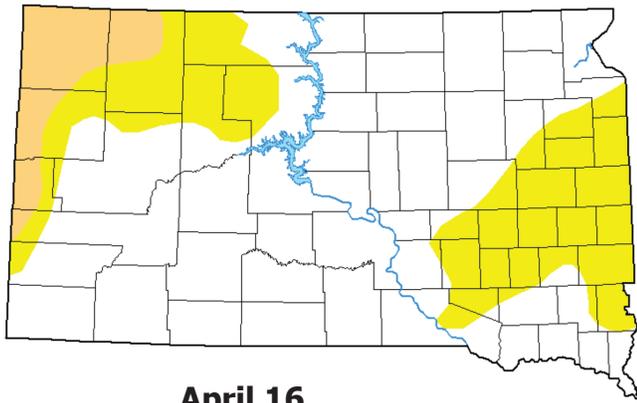
Drought Classification

None
D0 (Abnormally Dry)
D1 (Moderate Drought)

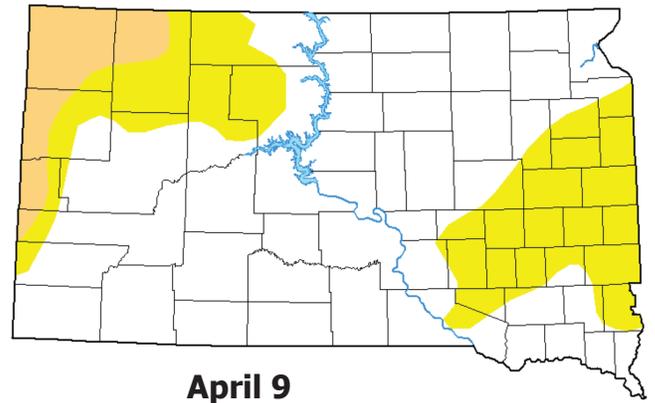
D2 (Severe Drought)
D3 (Extreme Drought)

D4 (Exceptional Drought)
No Data

Drought Monitor



April 16



April 9

The southern High Plains are in the grips of rapidly drying conditions, leading to degradations across Kansas, with conditions bleeding into eastern Colorado and southern Nebraska. Western Kansas has not seen precipitation in over two weeks, providing no relief to the rapidly drying soils and low streamflows. Conditions in Kansas into Oklahoma are seeing rapid deterioration and short-term dryness indicating flash drought conditions.

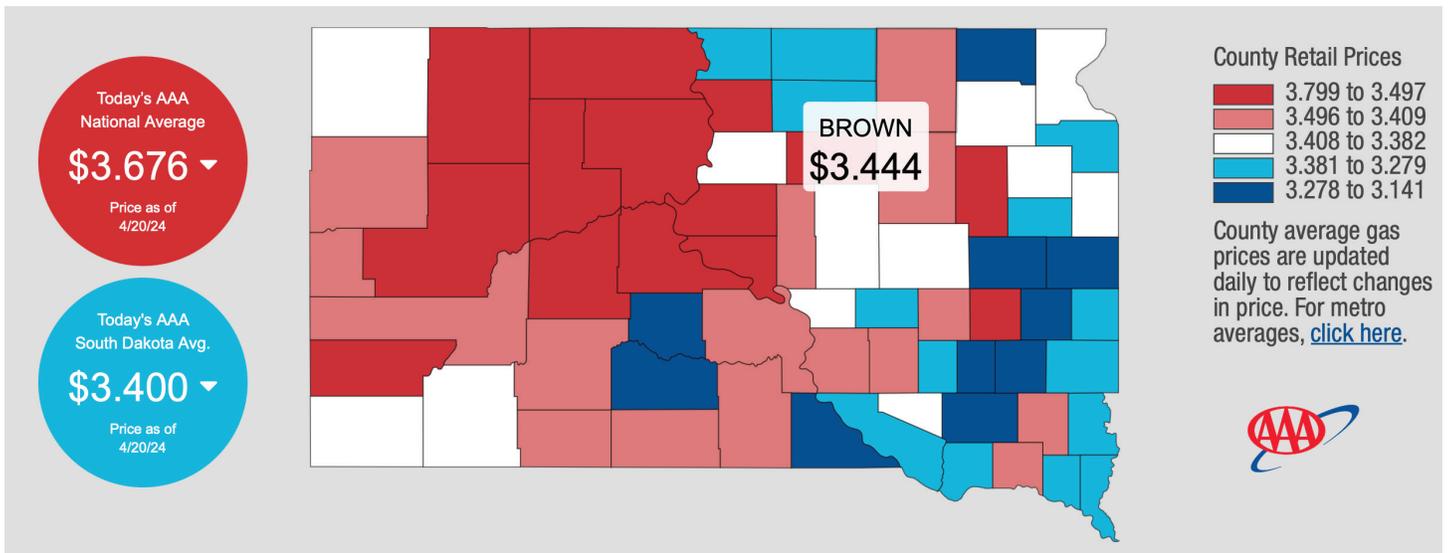
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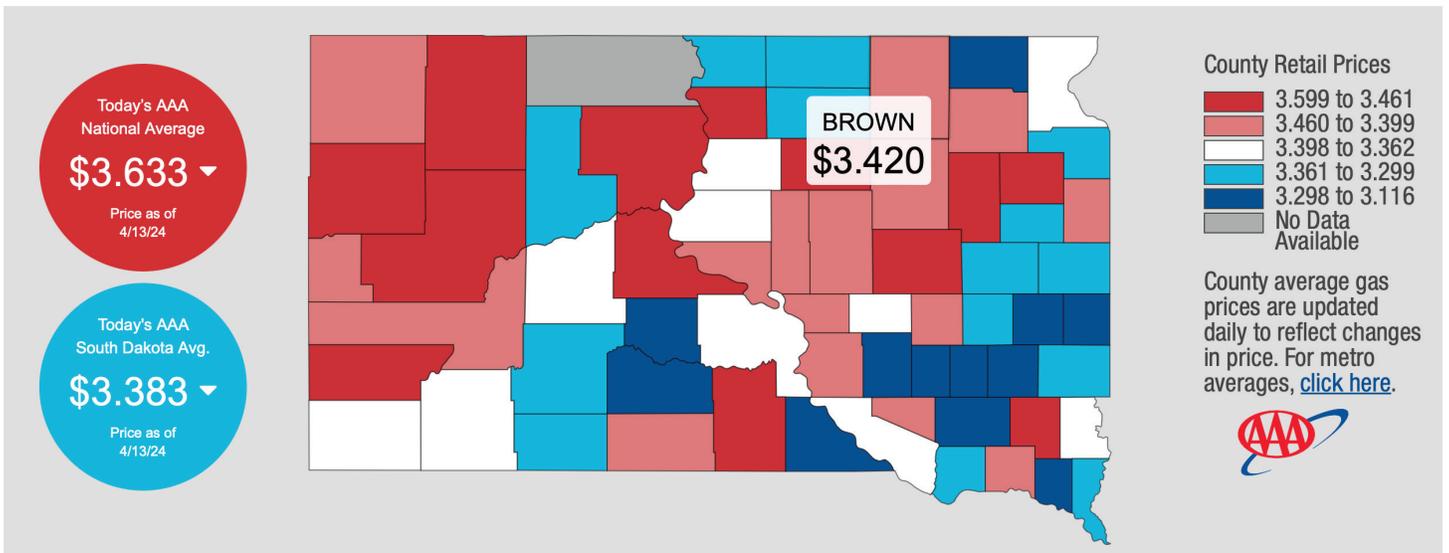
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.400	\$3.551	\$3.971	\$3.708
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.403	\$3.544	\$3.974	\$3.710
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.383	\$3.539	\$3.954	\$3.716
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.268	\$3.420	\$3.838	\$3.717
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.592	\$3.700	\$4.135	\$3.982

This Week



Last Week



U.S. Highway 212 Lane Closures Planned in Watertown

WATERTOWN, S.D. – On Monday, April 22, 2024, work will begin on a reconstruction project on U.S. Highway 212 through Watertown. Lane closures will be placed on Highway 212 in both the eastbound and westbound lanes starting at 19 Street SE to the east for approximately two miles. The Highway 212 project includes pavement repair and signal light work.

During the project, speed limits will be reduced to 45 mph through the work zone. Temporary signals will be placed at the intersection of Highway 212 and 29th Street SE for approximately one week as signal work is completed. The public should expect delays throughout the work zone. The project is anticipated to be complete in three to four weeks.

The primary contractor for this multi-location \$9.5 million project is PCIRoads, LLC. of St. Michael, MN. The overall project completion date for all associated projects is Friday, Oct. 18, 2024.

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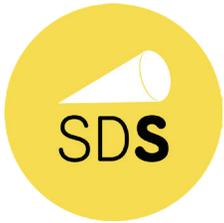
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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Staff to parole board: Prison discipline policy too slow to be useful

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 19, 2024 2:45 PM

An updated discipline policy at the Department of Corrections has so frustrated staff that they sometimes avoid writing up inmates who harass officers.

The South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles heard that message on Wednesday morning as they prepared to conduct a parole hearing for an inmate named Xavier Gainsforth.

Gainsforth, the board learned, had been threatening or verbally abusive toward DOC staff for months. "Staff had given up on writing him up for threats, because he keeps making them," Ryan Howey, a DOC case manager, told the board.

The incidental discussion of discipline policy came about a month after two nights of unrest at the South Dakota State Penitentiary, during which at least one correctional officer was injured.

The unrest came after the DOC curtailed tablet-based messaging and phone calls, a move that upset inmates and family members. During the first incident, journalists gathered outside the penitentiary could hear inmates inside yelling "we want phones." Gov. Kristi Noem said in an interview on the week of the event that the tablets played a role in the start of the incidents.

A representative for state employees told South Dakota Searchlight, however, that recent changes to DOC discipline policy had left inmates feeling empowered to lash out against officers.

A letter from correctional officers released to The Dakota Scout newspaper shortly thereafter made a similar point, suggesting that the tablets were merely the spark, and that the new discipline policy was the reason the disruptions continued.

Board shifts feelings on clemency after hearing from staff

The board members and DOC staffers on hand for Wednesday's parole board meeting at the penitentiary's Jameson Annex didn't speak a word about tablets or the unrest that played out last month.

The question of discipline was instead tied specifically to the board's decision on Gainsforth.

The 29-year-old is in prison on drug charges and a Clay County aggravated assault. Board members John Brown and Ken Albers had offered up Gainsforth to the full board after hearing from him in a two-person screening panel in March.

Before securing a hearing from the full board and a shot at early release, parole eligible inmates must clear such a panel. The two-person panels typically consider inmate discipline, an inmate's plans for work and housing after release, and any coursework and evaluations that might be affixed to the inmate's in-prison record.

At the time of his March screening, Albers said Wednesday, Gainsforth had one major write-up investigation pending for a January incident in which he engaged in what the inmate described as "disruptive conduct." Gainsforth had expected that issue to be resolved by the time Albers brought the case to the full board.

Gainsforth was briefly out on parole last year, but picked up a new drug ingestion charge and returned to prison.

Albers told the board that a decision on how long to keep him for the parole violation had been pushed back six months already, so he thought the board ought to take up the question – provided his disciplinary record was complete enough to judge his readiness for release.

During their initial discussions, some board members appeared ready to consider sending Gainsforth

back out.

Vice Chair Kirsten Aasen noted that while he'd picked up a new felony, that felony is as about as minor as a South Dakotan can get, and denying Gainsforth could make him wait a year for another hearing.

"It was an ingestion felony," Aasen said. "I wouldn't want to set someone out a year for that."

Another board member, Peter Lieberman, said he typically wants parolees who pick up a new felony to sit in prison for at least a year before they get another chance at supervision. But he said "there are exceptions," and reminded the board that South Dakota is the only state in the nation to attach felony charges to ingestion.

Discipline problems revealed

The tenor of the discussion changed after the board asked the DOC staffers on hand for the hearing about Gainsforth's disciplinary history.

The January incident remained unresolved, the board learned, but there was more. Howey told the board that Gainsforth had only recently lost his job as a roving cleaner because he hadn't been doing it. Instead, he'd been using his "red shirt," meaning the shirt worn to indicate job-related freedom of movement, to wander around the facility.

"He never worked," Howey said. "He just uses the red shirt to manipulate the system."

The day after Gainsforth lost his job for being in areas he wasn't supposed to be, Howey said, he somehow got another red shirt, put it on to wander again and ducked staff during the chow time.

Moreover, Howey said, Gainsforth regularly insults or threatens staff, at least once mentioning a gang affiliation.

Officers haven't wanted to discipline him because a recent change to DOC policy has slowed down the process, Howey said. He didn't specify the reason for the slowdown beyond telling board members that it now takes a long time for write-ups to make their way to a disciplinary hearing examiner for review. He said there are two examiners, but "we could probably use 10."

News of the alleged pattern of behavior from Gainsforth was met with surprise. Every parole hearing involves at least some consideration of an inmate's behavior behind the walls. If the record is incomplete, board member Kurt Hall said, "we need to find a way to address that."

More importantly, Hall said, it ought to be addressed for the staff inside the prison.

"We think it's bad here," Hall said. "Think about it as a correctional officer."

Lieberman and Hall both suggested that the DOC provide more hearing examiners for disciplinary incidents.

"How can you have discipline in an institution if threats are ignored?" Lieberman said.

DOC spokesman Michael Winder did not return an email requesting comment on the alleged slowdown in disciplinary proceedings, what specific policies may have contributed to it, or the number of hearing examiners available to conduct contested hearings on disciplinary matters.

The current discipline policy posted on the DOC website shows that Secretary Kellie Wasko signed off on an update last October. The new policy, unlike the one it replaced, says all major infractions must be heard by a disciplinary hearing officer, and that disciplinary officers must be trained prior to serving in the role.

The new policy also says a hearing officer must be "a staff member at the level of lieutenant or above" who is unconnected to the incident behind an alleged infraction.

Inmate: I deserve respect

Gainsforth wasn't in the room for any of the parole board discussion on discipline. When he arrived, board members peppered him with questions about his parole plans, what he'd learned inside, why he hadn't participated in therapeutic coursework and what had happened with his prison job.

He said he'd spend his time with sober friends, has a job waiting for him, wasn't offered coursework, and only wore a red shirt the day after losing his job because no one told him he'd been fired. Another DOC staff member, however, read the incident report on his dismissal, which aligned with Howey's earlier

description.

As to the insults and threats hurled at staff, Gainsforth said he only talks back to officers when he feels disrespected, or feels that the officers aren't doing what they ought to be.

"I understand that it doesn't help me, but I also understand that me, as a human being, I deserve respect," he said.

Board member Vaughn Beck moved to deny Gainsforth's parole and set his next hearing out a year. He told Gainsforth there are times when it's wiser not to talk back to authority figures, particularly in a prison environment where his behavior is logged and reported to the people who'll decide if he gets a shot at early release.

Disagreements over staff behavior, Beck said, don't justify the harassment of officers.

"You need to show us that you can behave in here," Beck said.

Gainsforth's parole was denied on an 8-1 vote, with Albers casting the lone vote in the inmate's favor.

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

EPA decides to allow E15 ethanol sales this summer

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - APRIL 19, 2024 12:48 PM

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued an emergency fuel waiver Friday that will allow E15 — gasoline blended with 15% ethanol — to be sold during the upcoming summer driving season.

The EPA regulates gasoline sold during the summer to reduce evaporative emissions that contribute to ground-level ozone. That regulation currently prohibits the summer sale of E15 in about two-thirds of the country. But some research has shown little difference between the air-quality impact of E15 and E10, which is available year-round.

The EPA's new action extends a waiver for E10 blends to E15.

"This action will provide communities with relief at the pump from ongoing market supply issues created by the ongoing war in Ukraine and conflict in the Middle East by increasing fuel supply and offering a variety of gasoline fuel blends from which consumers can choose," the EPA said in a news release.

The EPA had previously approved the year-round sale of E15 for states that requested it, including South Dakota, but that separate order doesn't take effect until 2025. Meanwhile, many ag-state leaders had pushed for a waiver this summer.

Most ethanol is made from corn. Farm organizations and ag-state lawmakers were quick to praise the new waiver.

U.S. Sens. John Thune, R-South Dakota, and Dick Durbin, D-Illinois, both members of the Senate Ag Committee, issued a joint statement.

"Year-round access to E15 fuel is a huge win for American drivers, farmers, and the environment," the statement said.

In February, the South Dakota Legislature passed and Gov. Kristi Noem signed a bill that will allow gas stations to claim a fuel tax refund of up to 5 cents per gallon of E15 fuel sold.

Support from Johnson of SD helps set up vote on \$95B in aid for Israel, Ukraine, Taiwan

Thune and Rounds supported similar bill in Senate

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 19, 2024 11:02 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House on Friday moved one step closer to approving billions in military and humanitarian assistance for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, with Democrats providing crucial support to Republican leaders after defections by their hard-right members.

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Lawmakers in the broadly bipartisan 316-94 vote approved a rule that sets up the procedure for debating a handful of amendments and passage of the three separate bills on Saturday, in a rare weekend session. South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson was among the yes votes on the rule.

That rule also sets up debate on a so-called sidecar bill that would implement sanctions against China, Iran and Russia; ban the social media site TikTok unless Chinese owner ByteDance sells it; approve a bipartisan bill to address fentanyl; and numerous other measures.

The House is set to take separate votes to approve all four bills, before bundling them together and sending one package to the U.S. Senate. That chamber could vote to approve the measure as soon as next week.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said Friday that chamber "will move expeditiously" to take up the package once it comes over.

President Joe Biden has said he'll sign the package, a move that would end months of stalemate over whether the United States would aid Ukraine and Israel among ongoing wars. The assistance to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan totals \$95 billion.

'Rational and thoughtful debate' urged

House debate on the rule was broadly bipartisan, though several Republicans bemoaned Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, for moving forward with aid to Ukraine, while some Democrats argued the process should have wrapped up months ago.

Massachusetts Rep. Jim McGovern, the top Democrat on the Rules Committee, said he hoped that on Saturday lawmakers will "have rational and thoughtful debate, knowing that we will have disagreements and knowing that some of us will have different ideas on how we should proceed forward."

"This is the United States House of Representatives. We are supposed to debate issues," McGovern said. "We are supposed to vote on things. And unfortunately, this has become a place where trivial issues get debated passionately and important ones not at all."

McGovern said he has "deep, deep problems about the unconditional aid to Israel," but said that Johnson's decision to break up the bills into separate votes will allow each lawmaker to vote their conscience.

"I believe that Prime Minister (Benjamin) Netanyahu is putting Israel on a path that quite frankly undermines his own country's security," McGovern said. "And I'm outraged by his cruelty and his inhumanity toward the people of Gaza and the West Bank."

McGovern added that nobody is questioning that "Israel has a right to defend itself," but said he believes Israel's conduct against civilians is "outrageous and unconscionable."

Oklahoma Republican Rep. Tom Cole, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, said the rule "creates a full and fair process for floor consideration of these measures."

"It grants ample debate time on these bills and makes in order a series of amendments, ensuring that the entire body has the opportunity to work its will and make our voices heard," Cole said. "It ensures that members have a full 72 hours to review these bills before the vote."

The bills the House will vote on Saturday, Cole said, are crucial to democracy.

"Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan are on the front lines of the struggle to preserve democracy and freedom around the world," he said. "In the case of Ukraine and Israel — these two nations are quite literally in harm's way."

Border security surfaces again

Texas Republican Rep. Chip Roy argued against approving the rule, saying that GOP lawmakers must hold out on key issues until they are able to move border security changes into law.

"We want to get the border closed and secured first. To that I say amen. And where is that, Speaker Johnson?" Roy said.

A trio of senators — Oklahoma Republican James Lankford, Connecticut Democrat Chris Murphy and Arizona independent Kyrsten Sinema — spent months negotiating a bipartisan border security and immi-

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gration bill before releasing it in February. Senate Republicans then blocked it from moving forward after demanding it in exchange for foreign aid.

Johnson has been on thin ice with several members of the far-right Freedom Caucus, including Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and Kentucky's Thomas Massie, who have both called for him to resign and may press for a motion to vacate Johnson from leadership.

Arizona Rep. Paul Gosar became the third co-sponsor of the resolution after the rule vote, writing in a statement that he wants Johnson to do more on border security and immigration policy.

"Our border cannot be an afterthought," Gosar wrote. "We need a Speaker who puts America first rather than bending to the reckless demands of the warmongers, neo-cons and the military industrial complex making billions from a costly and endless war half a world away."

Other members of that group, including Chairman Bob Good of Virginia, are frustrated with Johnson, though they don't want another prolonged public display of GOP disunity before the November elections.

Foreign aid

House Republicans unveiled the assistance bills for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan on Wednesday. The vast majority of that funding would go to the U.S. departments of Defense, Energy and State, which would in turn use the funding to assist the three entities as well as others.

Those bills are similar to the \$95 billion spending package the Senate approved on a broadly bipartisan vote in February, with support from South Dakota Republicans John Thune and Mike Rounds.

The rule approved Friday barred amendments from being considered to the Israel aid bill, but approved four amendments to the Ukraine bill, one amendment to the bill for the Indo-Pacific and two amendments to the TikTok and sanctions sidecar.

When the House approved the rule, the two amendments to the TikTok bill were deemed approved.

House lawmakers proposed 137 amendments to the Ukraine bill, 84 amendments to the Israel bill, 30 amendments to the Indo-Pacific spending bill and 68 amendments to the sidecar bill.

The White House released a Statement of Administration Policy on Friday urging both chambers of Congress to swiftly approve the foreign aid bills.

"The world is watching what the Congress does. Passing this legislation would send a powerful message about the strength of American leadership at a pivotal moment," it said. "The Administration urges both chambers of the Congress to quickly send this supplemental funding package to the President's desk."

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

Pipe supplier sues Summit Carbon Solutions for \$15 million

BY: JARED STRONG - APRIL 19, 2024 4:15 PM

An Arkansas pipe manufacturer is seeking more than \$15 million from a company that wants to build a carbon dioxide pipeline system in states including South Dakota amid delays of their agreement, according to a lawsuit filed this week.

The lawsuit filed by Welspun Tubular says Summit Carbon Solutions commissioned the company to produce about 785 miles of pipe, starting in May 2023, at a total cost of about \$183 million.

But Summit's project — a 2,500-mile pipeline network in five states — has taken longer to get potential approval than the company initially anticipated. It now says construction might begin early next year.

A purchase agreement between the two companies allowed Summit to delay pipe production for up to six months until November 2023, according to the lawsuit complaint filed in state court in Delaware, where Welspun is incorporated.

Welspun was able to further delay the start of production to early 2024 by manufacturing pipe for others, to which Summit agreed, court records show.

But when Welspun notified Summit that it planned to proceed with production in February, Summit

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sought to delay again, according to the lawsuit.

"Summit asked to discuss the status of the project, and those discussions revealed that the project was dramatically off-schedule," the lawsuit says.

In February, Summit canceled the agreement, according to the lawsuit. Welspun claims that entitles it to a \$15 million cancellation charge and partial reimbursement for materials it obtained to manufacture the pipe.

Summit disagrees that it owes the money and hopes to find a compromise.

"Our current dispute with Welspun Tubular revolves around timing issues related to pipe delivery," the company said in a prepared statement. "We're committed to resolving this matter swiftly, and our intention to collaborate with Welspun remains unchanged."

Summit's \$8.5 billion pipeline system would transport captured carbon dioxide from ethanol plants to North Dakota for underground sequestration.

The Iowa Utilities Board is poised to decide whether to issue the company a hazardous liquid pipeline permit.

State regulators in North and South Dakota rejected the company's initial pipeline routes. North Dakota is reconsidering a revised plan, and Summit has said it intends to file a new permit request in South Dakota.

Jared Strong is the senior reporter for the Iowa Capital Dispatch. He has written about Iowans and the important issues that affect them for more than 15 years, previously for the Carroll Times Herald and the Des Moines Register. His investigative work exposing police misconduct has notched several state and national awards. He is a longtime trustee of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, which fights for open records and open government. He is a lifelong Iowan and has lived mostly in rural western parts of the state.

How to vote early for the June 2024 primary election

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - APRIL 19, 2024 6:00 AM

Early voting begins today for South Dakota's June 4 primary election.

Before attempting to vote early, make sure you're registered to vote. If you're unsure about your status, check the state's Voter Information Portal at <https://vip.sdsos.gov/viplogin.aspx> (where you can also view a sample ballot), or contact your county auditor's office.

To cast an early ballot in person, simply go to your county auditor's office.

To cast an early ballot through the mail, download and print an absentee ballot application from <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/voting/absentee-voting.aspx>, or request an application from your county auditor.

Fill out and mail the application to your county auditor with a photocopy of an acceptable photo identification card, or have the form notarized. Acceptable photo identification cards include a South Dakota driver's license or non-driver ID card, tribal ID, passport, student ID issued by a South Dakota high school or college, or any other photo ID issued by the U.S. government.

Biden administration to roll back the Betsy DeVos Title IX rules

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - APRIL 19, 2024 6:00 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Education on Friday announced a final rule that will update Title IX regulations governing how schools respond to sexual misconduct, undoing changes made under the Trump administration and former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

"For more than 50 years, Title IX has promised an equal opportunity to learn and thrive in our nation's schools free from sex discrimination," Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said on a call with reporters on Thursday night. "These final regulations build on the legacy of Title IX by clarifying that all our nation's students can access schools that are safe, welcoming, and respect their rights."

This new rule will roll back Title IX changes overseen by DeVos. Those regulations narrowly defined

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sexual harassment, and directed schools to conduct live hearings to allow those who were accused of sexual harassment or assault to cross-examine their accusers.

Many advocates argued that practice would discourage victims of sexual misconduct from coming forward. President Joe Biden during his campaign in 2020 promised to nix the Trump administration's Title IX regulations.

The final rule will protect students and employees from sex-based discrimination, such as sexual violence and other forms of sex-based harassment. It would also require schools to have in place measures to offer support to those who make complaints.

The rule also sets guidelines for schools, such as treating all forms of sexual discrimination complaints equitably and promptly.

The new rule codifies protections for transgender students from sex discrimination. It prohibits discrimination against LGBTQ students and employees based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

"The final regulations clarify that a school must not separate or treat people differently based on sex in a manner that subjects them to more than de minimis harm, except in limited circumstances permitted by Title IX," according to a fact sheet.

"The final regulations further recognize that preventing someone from participating in school (including in sex-separate activities) consistent with their gender identity causes that person more than de minimis harm."

The rule does not establish new criteria for transgender athletes, which is a separate rule the Department of Education is still finalizing, a senior administration official said. That rule would prevent blanket bans on transgender athletes competing in sports that align with their gender identity. So far, 24 states have passed laws that ban transgender athletes from competing in sports that align with their gender identity.

The new rule also protects students, employees and applicants from discrimination based on pregnancy, childbirth, recovery from pregnancy and other reproductive care.

It requires schools to "provide reasonable modifications for students based on pregnancy or related conditions, allow for reasonable break time for lactation for employees, and access to a clean, private lactation space for students and employees," according to a fact sheet.

Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of Education Catherine Lhamon said on a call with reporters that the final regulations clarify the requirements that schools should follow to address all forms of sex discrimination.

"We look forward to working with schools, students, and families to prevent and eliminate sex discrimination," Lhamon said.

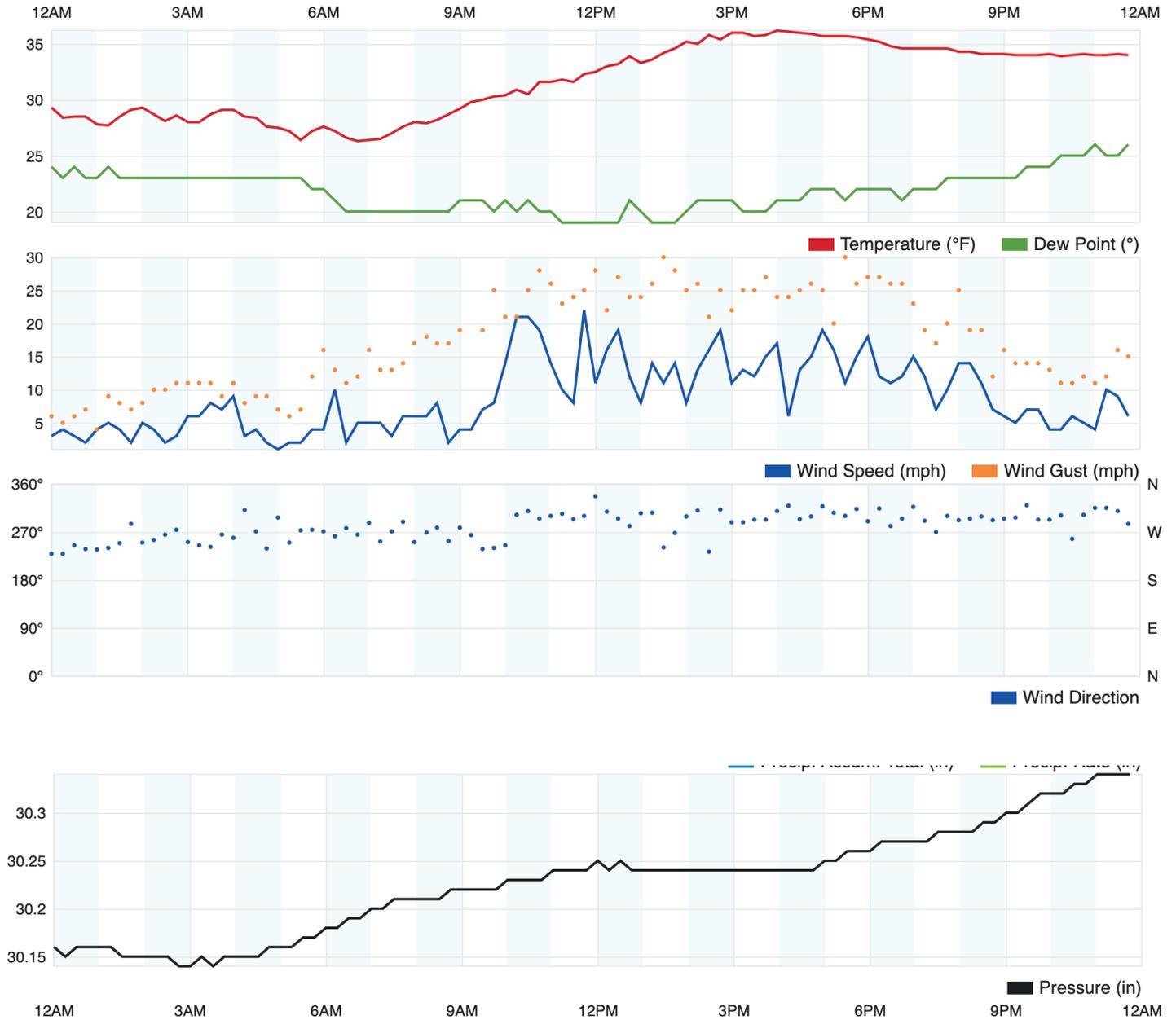
Cardona said that the new rule will go into effect Aug. 1.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 51 °F

Saturday Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 26 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 60 °F

Sunday Night



Partly Cloudy then Mostly Cloudy and Breezy

Low: 40 °F

Monday

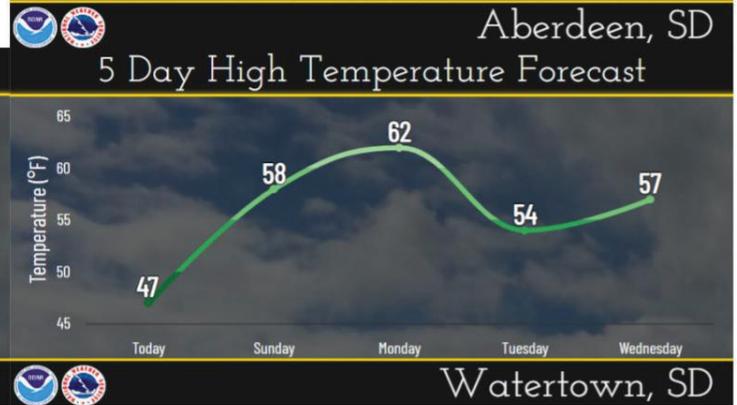
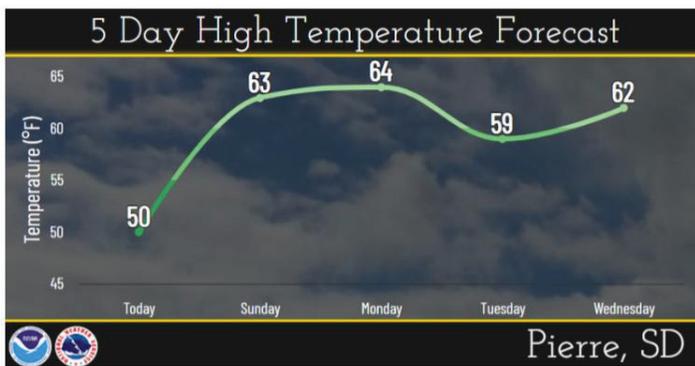
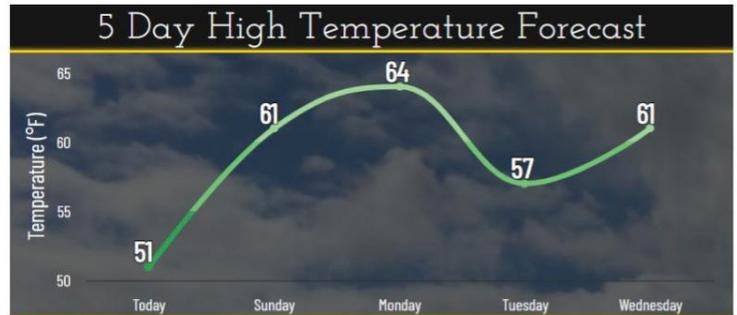


Slight Chance Showers

High: 65 °F

Warmer After Today

- One more cold day
- Warming trend starts Sunday
- <30% chance of rain Monday; additional precipitation potential late in the week



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: April 20, 2024 4:07 AM

There is limited potential for precipitation between now and Thursday. Looks like one more day of cold weather today, before the warming trend kicks off the new week.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 37 °F at 2:52 PM

Low Temp: 26 °F at 5:25 AM

Wind: 30 mph at 1:25 PM

Precip: 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 51 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 93 in 1980

Record Low: 111 in 2013

Average High: 60

Average Low: 33

Average Precip in April.: 1.04

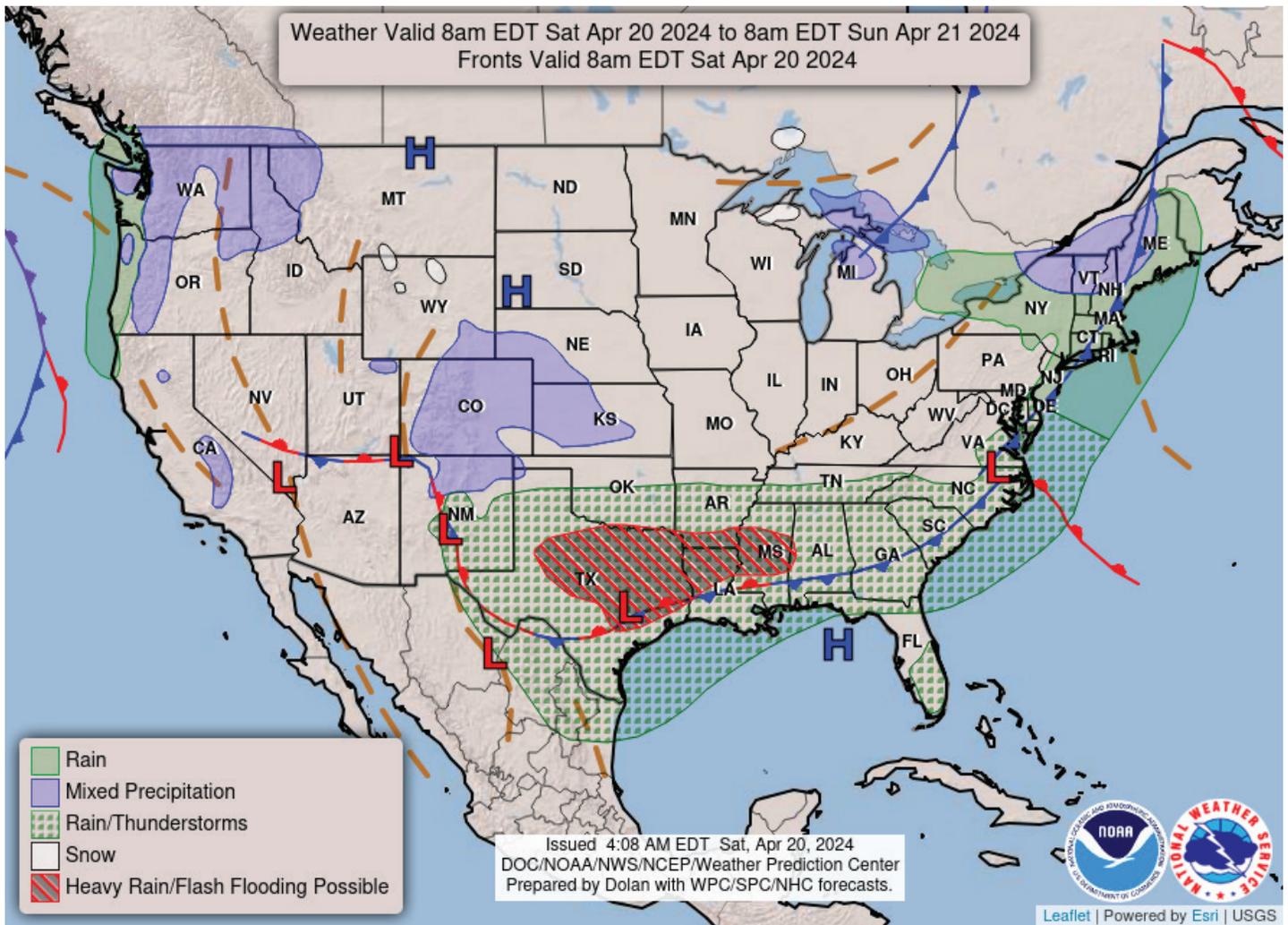
Precip to date in April: 2.34

Average Precip to date: 3.10

Precip Year to Date: 3.29

Sunset Tonight: 8:27:04 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:33:32 am



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Today in Weather History

April 20, 1966: Canadian high pressure brought frigid air to the Rockies and northern Plains. Record lows included: 3 below in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, two below in Cheyenne and Casper, Wyoming, two above in Rapid City, 11 above in Fargo, Williston, and Aberdeen, and 15 in Huron.

April 20, 2007: Severe thunderstorms moved through parts of central and northeast South Dakota during the afternoon and evening hours, producing large hail. The most significant hail measured 1.75 inches in diameter and fell 3 miles east of Westport, in Brown County.

1901 - A spring storm produced unusually heavy snow in northeast Ohio. Warren received 35.5 inches in thirty-six hours, and 28 inches fell at Green Hill. Akron OH established April records of 15.6 inches in 24 hours, and 26.6 inches for the month. Pittsburgh PA established April records of 12.7 inches in 24 hours, and 13.5 inches for the month. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1912: A tornado moved north-northeast from 5 miles southeast of Rush Center, KS across the east half of Bison, KS. Farms were wiped out near Rush Center. The loss at Bison was \$70,000 as half of the town, about 50 homes, were damaged or destroyed. There were 15 injuries in town. A dozen farms were nearly wiped out. Debris from the farmhouses was carried for 8 miles. A senior man who made light of the storm was killed with his granddaughter on a farm 2 miles southwest of Bison.

1920: Tornadoes in Mississippi and Alabama killed 219 persons. Six tornadoes of F4 intensity were reported. Aberdeen, Mississippi was hard hit by an F4 tornado that killed 22 people. This same tornado killed 20 in Marion County, Alabama. Nine people in one family died in Winston County, Alabama.

1952 - The tankers Esso Suez and Esso Greensboro crashed in a thick fog off the coast of Morgan City LA. Only five of the Greensboro's crew survived after the ship bursts into flame. (David Ludlum)

1984: A temperature of 106 degrees at Del Rio, Texas set a new record high for April.

1987 - Fifty-two cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The high of 92 degrees at Memphis TN was a record for April, and the high of 94 at Little Rock AR equalled their April record. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A storm in the western U.S. brought heavy rain to parts of California. Mount Wilson was soaked with 4.15 inches of rain in 24 hours. The heavy rain caused some flooding and mudslides in the Los Angeles area, and a chain reaction collision of vehicles along the Pomona Freeway which resulted in 26 injuries. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Hot weather spread from the southwestern U.S. into the Great Plains Region. Twenty-three cities reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 104 degrees at Tucson AZ was an April record, and highs of 87 at Provo UT, 90 at Pueblo CO, and 85 at Salt Lake City UT, equalled April records. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - A fast moving Pacific storm produced heavy snow in the central mountains and the Upper Arkansas Valley of Colorado, with a foot of snow reported at Leadville. Thunderstorms in the south central U.S. produced wind gusts to 76 mph at Tulsa OK, and heavy rain which caused flooding of Cat Claw Creek in the Abilene TX area. Lightning struck the building housing a fish farm in Scott AR killing 10,000 pounds of fish. Many of the fish died from the heat of the fire. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004: A strong F3 tornado moved across the town of Utica, near LaSalle-Peru in north-central Illinois. This tornado destroyed several homes, a machinery building, and a tavern. The roof of the tavern collapsed, killing eight people inside; many of these people had come into town from nearby mobile homes, seeking sturdier shelter. The tornado dissipated on a steep bluff on the northeast side of the city. Another tornado developed shortly afterward, crossing I-80 near Ottawa. Several other tornadoes developed across north central and northeast Illinois, affecting areas around Joliet and Kankakee.

2006 - Up to five feet of snow falls in the Dakotas. I-94 and other highways were closed, power was out for thousands and caused at least four deaths.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ON BEING FEAR-FILLED

A world-famous surgeon was being interviewed by a television reporter for a series on the advances being made in the medical profession. Coming to the last question, the reporter asked, "Tell me doctor, what is your greatest fear?"

After thinking for a moment, he replied, "That I may no longer feel the pains of my patients."

For him, feeling that was essential if he was to help others. It moved him as he performed surgery on those in need of healing.

Sympathy is meant to stir us to service, to help us see the needs of others and to move us into action.

Without sympathy we would do little to help the least, the last and the lost.

Paul said, "Share each other's troubles and problems." Sympathy enables us to see the needs that others have and do something about them. It is the very foundation from which love and obedience to fulfill the commandments of Christ flows.

No Christian should ever feel that they are beyond the requirement of or excused from helping and praying for others. At all times and in all situations we are to be alert to the needs of others and respond as Jesus did.

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes that we might see the things that You saw and be moved by the things that moved You and then do as You did in love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2



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: 04.19.24

19 30 34 46 58 3

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$202,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

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: 16 Hrs 48 Mins 57 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.19.24

5 8 24 28 34 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 3 Mins 58 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

2 4 11 25 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$62,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 3 Mins 58 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.17.24

7 8 25 39 68 7

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 32 Mins 58 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: 17 Hrs 32 Mins 58 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

News from the Associated Press

The EPA is again allowing summer sales of higher ethanol gasoline blend, citing global conflicts

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency cleared the way Friday for a higher blend of ethanol to be sold nationwide for the third summer in a row, citing global conflicts that it says are putting pressure on the world's fuel supply.

The agency announced an emergency waiver that will exempt gasoline blended with 15% ethanol from an existing summertime ban. Gasoline with 10% ethanol is already sold nationwide, but the higher blend has been prohibited in the summer because of concerns it could worsen smog during warm weather.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan said the waiver was warranted because of "Russia's unjustified, unprovoked, and unconscionable war against Ukraine" and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, which he said are putting pressure on the global fuel supply. He said the diminished U.S. refining capacity is also a factor.

The biofuels industry and politicians in the Midwestern states where ethanol is produced from corn praised the EPA's decision. They have portrayed ethanol as a product that helps farmers, reduces prices at the pump and lessens greenhouse gases because the fuel burns more cleanly than gasoline.

"Allowing uninterrupted sales of E15 will help extend gasoline supplies, prevent fuel shortages, protect air quality and reduce carbon emissions," said Renewable Fuels Association President and CEO Geoff Cooper.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds called the decision "a huge victory for Iowa farmers, American energy independence, and consumers."

Environmentalists and others, however, have said increased ethanol production can increase carbon releases because it results in more corn production, leading to increased use of fertilizer and greater releases of nitrate. Synthetic and natural fertilizers also are a leading source of water pollution.

Iowa leads the nation in ethanol production, followed by Nebraska, Illinois, South Dakota, Minnesota and Indiana.

Most gasoline sold across the country today is blended with 10% ethanol, though 15% blends are becoming increasingly common, especially in the Midwest.

The EPA has approved sales of E15 for cars and trucks manufactured after 2000. The RFA estimates that the higher blend will cost consumers more than 25 cents a gallon less than 10% ethanol.

Earlier this year, the EPA permanently approved year-round E15 sales in eight Midwestern states, starting next year. The waiver announced Friday is temporary and only applies this year.

Man who set himself on fire outside Trump trial dies of injuries, police say

NEW YORK (AP) — A man who doused himself in an accelerant and set himself on fire outside the courthouse where former President Donald Trump is on trial has died, police said.

The New York City Police Department told The Associated Press early Saturday that the man was declared dead by staff at an area hospital.

The man was in Collect Pond Park around 1:30 p.m. Friday when he took out pamphlets espousing conspiracy theories, tossed them around, then doused himself in an accelerant and set himself on fire, officials and witnesses said.

A large number of police officers were nearby when it happened. Some officers and bystanders rushed to the aid of the man, who was hospitalized in critical condition.

The man, who police said recently traveled from Florida to New York, had not breached any security checkpoints to access the park.

The park outside the courthouse has been a gathering spot for protesters, journalists and gawkers

throughout Trump's trial, which began with jury selection Monday.

Through Friday, the streets and sidewalks in the area around the courthouse were generally wide open and crowds have been small and largely orderly.

Authorities said they were also reviewing the security protocols, including whether to restrict access to the park. The side street where Trump enters and leaves the building is off limits.

"We may have to shut this area down," New York City Police Department Deputy Commissioner Kaz Daughtry said at a news conference outside the courthouse Friday, adding that officials would discuss the security plan soon.

About 1,300 people from Myanmar flee into Thailand after clashes broke out in a key border town

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — About 1,300 people have fled from eastern Myanmar into Thailand, officials said Saturday, as fresh fighting erupted at a border town that has recently been captured by ethnic guerillas.

Fighters from the Karen ethnic minority last week captured the last of the Myanmar army's outposts in and around Myawaddy, which is connected to Thailand by two bridges across the Moei River.

The latest clashes were triggered in the morning when the Karen guerillas launched an attack against Myanmar troops who were hiding near the 2nd Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge, a major crossing point for trade with Thailand, said police chief Pittayakorn Phetcharat in Thailand's Mae Sot district. He estimated about 1,300 people fled into Thailand.

Thai officials reported people had started crossing since Friday following clashes in several areas of Myawaddy.

The fall of Myawaddy is a major setback for the military that seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021. Myanmar's once-mighty armed forces have suffered a series of unprecedented defeats since last October, losing swathes of territory including border posts to both ethnic fighters, who have been fighting for greater autonomy for decades, and pro-democracy guerrilla units that took up arms after the military takeover.

The clashes, involving drone attacks from the Karen forces and airstrikes by the Myanmar military, had subsided by noon Saturday compared to the morning, but Mae Sot police chief Pittayakorn Phetcharat said he could still hear sporadic gunshots. He said Thai authorities would move people fleeing into a safer area.

Footage from the Thai border showed Thai soldiers maintaining guard near the bridge with sounds of explosions and gunshots in the background. People with children waded across the river with their belongings and were received by Thai officials on the river bank. Several are seen taking shelter in buildings along the river bank on the Myanmar side.

Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin wrote on the social media platform X on Saturday that he was closely monitoring the situation at the border.

"I do not desire to see any such clashes have any impact on the territorial integrity of Thailand and we are ready to protect our borders and the safety of our people. At the same time, we are also ready to provide humanitarian assistance if necessary," he wrote.

In March, Thailand delivered its first batch of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar for about 20,000 displaced people.

Nikordej Balangura, a spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told reporters on Friday that Thailand is currently working to expand its aid initiative.

As Russia edges toward a possible offensive on Kharkiv, some residents flee. Others refuse to leave

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KHARKIV, Ukraine (AP) — A 79-year-old woman makes the sign of the cross and, gripping her cane, leaves her home in a quaint village in northeast Ukraine.

Torn screens, shattered glass and scorched trees litter the yard of Olha Faichuk's apartment building in Lukiantsi, north of the city of Kharkiv. Abandoned on a nearby bench is a shrapnel-pierced cellphone that belonged to one of two people killed when a Russian bomb struck, leaving a blackened crater in its wake.

"God, forgive me for leaving my home, bless me on my way," Faichuk said, taking one last look around before slowly shuffling to an evacuation vehicle.

Unlike embattled front-line villages further east, attacks on the border village near the Russian region of Belgorod, were rare until a wave of air strikes began in late March.

Russia seemingly exploited air defense shortages in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, to pummel the region's energy infrastructure and terrorize its 1.3 million residents. Nearly 200,000 city dwellers remain without power, while 50% of the region's population still suffers from outages, officials say.

As utilities clamber to meet electricity demand before the onset of winter in six months, Russia continues to unleash deadly aerial-glide bombs to drive more residents away. Some officials and analysts warn it could be a concerted effort by Moscow to shape conditions for a summer offensive to seize the city.

Acknowledging the need to strengthen air defenses, Oleh Syniehubov, the governor of Kharkiv region, said: "We clearly understand that the enemy actually uses this vulnerability every day."

Kharkiv's struggles reflect a wider problem: As Western allies drag their feet in delivering promised aid to Kyiv, Moscow is patiently escalating until — it hopes — Ukrainian resistance snaps.

30 SECONDS

The attacks, which began on March 22, annihilated Kharkiv's ability to generate and distribute electricity.

Missiles fired from Belgorod take 30 seconds to reach their targets in Kharkiv, just 30 kilometers (18 miles) away, which is about the same amount of time that air defense systems need to respond. In the last barrage, Russia launched 22 missiles simultaneously to swarm and disorient those defenses, Syniehubov said.

Energy workers also had just 30 seconds to find cover.

At CHP-5, a plant in Kharkiv that generates electricity and heat, the acrid stench of smoke still hangs in the air. Its damaged generator and turbine must be replaced, according to plant manager Oleksandr Minkovich.

The plant supplied 50% of the region's electricity and 35% of the city's heating, Minkovich said. It has been attacked six times since the Russian invasion began, but the latest barrage destroyed "any possibility" for power generation, he said.

Spare parts for the Soviet-era plant can only be sourced from Russia, and full restoration would likely take years, he said. But Minkovitch hopes Ukraine's Western partners will provide modern technology to decentralize power in time for winter.

Without this, he said, he's unsure how to meet demand.

To keep the lights on, power is diverted to Kharkiv from neighboring regions, but this process overloads the grid and causes unscheduled blackouts. Businesses rarely know when, and for how long, they can rely on the grid.

"We wake up every day and have no idea if we will have power or not," said Oleh Khromov, the owner of a popular Kharkiv restaurant, Protagonist.

UNLIVABLE HOMES

Of dozens of former residents, only 10 remain in Faichuk's apartment block in Lukiantsi.

"Why are they killing us?" Valentyna Semenchenko, 71, said, weeping as her friend was driven away.

Serhii Novikov, a volunteer with the NGO "I Am Saved," which organizes evacuations, said the uptick in Russia's use of aerial-glide bombs is making more communities near the Belgorod border uninhabitable.

If a bomb even falls close to a house, then that "house that is not suitable for habitation because the

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shock wave is so large that it destroys everything in its path," Novikov said.

Yulia Shdanevych made the painful decision to leave her home in the nearby village of Liptsi after two adults and a child were killed in an April 10 air strike. Earlier missile and mortar attacks didn't cause any deaths, but that changed with the introduction of aerial bombs.

"Before they would target one manufacturing building," Shdanevych said. "Now it's as though they are attacking civilians directly."

There was no power at a Kharkiv shelter when Shdanevych arrived, and she filled out paperwork by the light of a battery-powered lamp. Director Ihor Kasinsky said the facility suffers from power and water outages.

Before the war, 2,000 people lived in the village of Rubizhne, 14 kilometers from the Russian border. Today, only 60 remain, including Olha Bezborodova. But she is uncertain how long she will stay.

"It's really hard. If we had light it would be easier," Bezborodova said, cradling her toddler. She said organizations have helped her to fix her home, "but they (the Russians) are not finished, they are bombing all the time."

THE RESISTANCE

Ukrainian officials are divided on the significance of the recent attacks on Kharkiv.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said it is no secret that Russia wants to take the region, but Ukraine's military intelligence calls rumors of an upcoming offensive a "psychological operation" to stir panic. Analysts argue a larger offensive can't be ruled out, pointing to the intensity of recent assaults.

Ukraine is not taking any chances and has established fortifications on the outskirts of the city.

Oleksander, an engineer with one company involved in that work, said crews have been digging anti-tank ditches, laying dragon's teeth and building a network of trenches to keep Russian forces at bay. He was not permitted to share his last name or that of his company for security reasons.

He has a deadline of early May to complete the job. "We will be on time," he said.

Meanwhile, cafes and restaurants remain busy in Kharkiv, where locals have grown accustomed to speaking over the roar of generators. In Protagonist, an alternative menu presents options to order when the power is off.

"The people who are staying here and keeping businesses open and trying to do something, they are not tragic characters with nowhere to go," said Khromov. "They are a special kind of perverted enthusiast who are trying to make sense of it, who are still interested in building something."

At a bakery nearby, workers manually record sales, so they can ration power to keep food cool.

"We try to cope," said Oleksandra Silkina, 34.

"We have been attacked since 2022, all the time, so we are used to these attacks," she added. "We won't leave this city. It's our city."

Senate passes reauthorization of key US surveillance program after midnight deadline

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After its midnight deadline, the Senate voted early Saturday to reauthorize a key U.S. surveillance law after divisions over whether the FBI should be restricted from using the program to search for Americans' data nearly forced the statute to lapse.

The legislation approved 60-34 with bipartisan support would extend for two years the program known as Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. It now goes to President Joe Biden's desk to become law. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Biden "will swiftly sign the bill."

"In the nick of time, we are reauthorizing FISA right before it expires at midnight," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said when voting on final passage began 15 minutes before the deadline. "All day long, we persisted and we persisted in trying to reach a breakthrough and in the end, we have succeeded."

U.S. officials have said the surveillance tool, first authorized in 2008 and renewed several times since then, is crucial in disrupting terror attacks, cyber intrusions, and foreign espionage and has also produced

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intelligence that the U.S. has relied on for specific operations, such as the 2022 killing of al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri.

"If you miss a key piece of intelligence, you may miss some event overseas or put troops in harm's way," Sen. Marco Rubio, the top Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said. "You may miss a plot to harm the country here, domestically, or somewhere else. So in this particular case, there's real-life implications."

The proposal would renew the program, which permits the U.S. government to collect without a warrant the communications of non-Americans located outside the country to gather foreign intelligence. The reauthorization faced a long and bumpy road to final passage Friday after months of clashes between privacy advocates and national security hawks pushed consideration of the legislation to the brink of expiration.

Though the spy program was technically set to expire at midnight, the Biden administration had said it expected its authority to collect intelligence to remain operational for at least another year, thanks to an opinion earlier this month from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which receives surveillance applications.

Still, officials had said that court approval shouldn't be a substitute for congressional authorization, especially since communications companies could cease cooperation with the government if the program is allowed to lapse.

House before the law was set to expire, U.S. officials were already scrambling after two major U.S. communication providers said they would stop complying with orders through the surveillance program, according to a person familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private negotiations.

Attorney General Merrick Garland praised the reauthorization and reiterated how "indispensable" the tool is to the Justice Department.

"This reauthorization of Section 702 gives the United States the authority to continue to collect foreign intelligence information about non-U.S. persons located outside the United States, while at the same time codifying important reforms the Justice Department has adopted to ensure the protection of Americans' privacy and civil liberties," Garland said in a statement Saturday.

But despite the Biden administration's urging and classified briefings to senators this week on the crucial role they say the spy program plays in protecting national security, a group of progressive and conservative lawmakers who were agitating for further changes had refused to accept the version of the bill the House sent over last week.

The lawmakers had demanded that Majority Leader Chuck Schumer allow votes on amendments to the legislation that would seek to address what they see as civil liberty loopholes in the bill. In the end, Schumer was able to cut a deal that would allow critics to receive floor votes on their amendments in exchange for speeding up the process for passage.

The six amendments ultimately failed to garner the necessary support on the floor to be included in the final passage.

One of the major changes detractors had proposed centered around restricting the FBI's access to information about Americans through the program. Though the surveillance tool only targets non-Americans in other countries, it also collects communications of Americans when they are in contact with those targeted foreigners. Sen. Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Democrat in the chamber, had been pushing a proposal that would require U.S. officials to get a warrant before accessing American communications.

"If the government wants to spy on my private communications or the private communications of any American, they should be required to get approval from a judge, just as our Founding Fathers intended in writing the Constitution," Durbin said.

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

But members on both the House and Senate intelligence committees as well as the Justice Department warned requiring a warrant would severely handicap officials from quickly responding to imminent national security threats.

"I think that is a risk that we cannot afford to take with the vast array of challenges our nation faces around the world," Democratic Sen. Mark Warner, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Friday.

House on the brink of approving Ukraine and Israel aid after months of struggle

By STEPHEN GROVES and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House is preparing in a rare Saturday session to approve \$95 billion in foreign aid for Ukraine, Israel and other U.S. allies, Democrats and Republicans joining together behind the legislation after a grueling months-long fight over renewed American support for repelling Russia's invasion into Ukraine.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson — putting his job on the line — relied on Democratic support this week to set up a series of votes on three aid bills, as well as a fourth that contains several other foreign policy proposals. If the votes are successful, the package will go to the Senate, where passage in the coming days is nearly assured. President Joe Biden has promised to sign it immediately.

Passage through the House would clear away the biggest hurdle to Biden's funding request, first made in October as Ukraine's military supplies began to run low. The GOP-controlled House, skeptical of U.S. support for Ukraine, struggled for months over what to do, first demanding that any assistance be tied to policy changes at the U.S. southern border — only to immediately reject a bipartisan Senate offer along those very lines.

Reaching an endgame has been an excruciating lift for Johnson that has tested both his resolve and his support among Republicans, with a small but growing number now openly urging his removal from the speaker's office. Yet congressional leaders cast the votes as a turning point in history — an urgent sacrifice as U.S. allies are beleaguered by wars and threats from continental Europe to the Middle East to Asia.

"The only thing that has kept terrorists and tyrants at bay is the perception of a strong America, that we would stand strong," Johnson said this week. "And we will. I think that Congress is going to show that. This is a very important message that we are going to send the world."

Still, Congress has seen a stream of world leaders visit in recent months, from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, all but pleading with lawmakers to approve the aid. Globally, the delay left many questioning America's commitment to its allies.

At stake has also been one of Biden's top foreign policy priorities — halting Russian President Vladimir Putin's advance in Europe. After engaging in quiet talks with Johnson, the president quickly endorsed Johnson's plan this week, paving the way for Democrats to give their rare support to clear the procedural hurdles needed for a final vote.

"It's long past time that we support our democratic allies in Israel, Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific and provide humanitarian assistance to civilians who are in harm's way in theaters of conflict like Gaza, Haiti and the Sudan," House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said at a news conference Friday.

Voting on the package is likely to create unusual alliances in the House. While aid for Ukraine will likely win a majority in both parties, a significant number of progressive Democrats are expected to vote against the bill aiding Israel as they demand an end to the bombardment of Gaza that has killed thousands of civilians.

At the same time, Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, has loomed large over the fight, weighing in from afar via social media statements and direct phone calls with lawmakers as he tilts the GOP to a more isolationist stance with his "America First" brand of politics. Ukraine's defense once enjoyed robust, bipartisan support in Congress, but as the war enters its third year, a bulk of Republicans oppose further aid.

At one point in the months-long slog to get Ukraine assistance through Congress, Trump's opposition essentially doomed the bipartisan Senate proposal on border security. This week, Trump also issued a

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social media post that questioned why European nations were not giving more money to Ukraine, though he spared Johnson from criticism and said Ukraine's survival was important.

Still, the ultraconservative House Freedom Caucus has derided the legislation as the "America Last" foreign wars package and urged lawmakers to defy Republican leadership and oppose it because the bills do not include border security measures.

Johnson's hold on the speaker's gavel has also grown more tenuous in recent days as three Republicans, led by Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, supported a "motion to vacate" that can lead to a vote on removing the speaker. A few more were expected to soon join, said Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, who is urging Johnson to voluntarily step aside.

The speaker's office has been working furiously to whip up support for the bill, as well as for Johnson. It arranged a series of press calls in the lead-up to the final votes on the package, first with Jewish leaders, then with Christian groups, to show support for the speaker and the legislation he is bringing to the floor.

Ari Fleischer, a former White House press secretary under President George W. Bush, said it was about time the United States "did something to support Israel, fight Vladimir Putin and stand up to China."

"Coming together like this is a refreshing reminder of the old days when foreign policy had bipartisan support," he said.

The package includes several Republican priorities that Democrats endorse, or at least are willing to accept. Those include proposals that allow the U.S. to seize frozen Russian central bank assets to rebuild Ukraine; impose sanctions on Iran, Russia, China and criminal organizations that traffic fentanyl; and legislation to require the China-based owner of the popular video app TikTok to sell its stake within a year or face a ban in the United States.

Still, the all-out push to get the bills through Congress is a reflection not only of politics, but realities on the ground in Ukraine. Top lawmakers on national security committees, who are privy to classified briefings, have grown gravely concerned about the situation in recent weeks. 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.

"I really do believe the intel and the briefings that we've gotten," Johnson said, adding, "I think that Vladimir Putin would continue to march through Europe if he were allowed."

A former ambassador to Ukraine under President George W. Bush, John Herbst, said the months-long delay in approving more American assistance has undoubtedly hurt Ukrainian troops on the battlefield.

But it's not yet too late, Herbst added. "The fact that it's coming now means that disaster has been averted."

Israel and Iran's apparent strikes and counterstrikes give new insights into both militaries

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israel demonstrated its military dominance over adversary Iran in its apparent precision strikes that hit near military and nuclear targets deep in the heart of the country, meeting little significant challenge from Iran's defenses and providing the world with new insights into both militaries' capabilities.

The international community, Israel and Iran all signaled hopes that Friday's airstrikes would end what has been a dangerous 19-day run of strikes and counterstrikes, a highly public test between two deep rivals that had previously stopped short of most direct confrontation.

The move into open fighting began April 1 with the suspected Israeli killing of Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria. That prompted Iran's retaliatory barrage last weekend of more than 300 missiles and drones that the U.S., Israel and regional and international partners helped bat down without significant damage in Israel. And then came Friday's apparent Israeli strike.

As all sides took stock, regional security experts predicted that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government and the country's allies would emerge encouraged by the Israeli military's superior

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performance. In response to international appeals, however, both Israel and Iran had appeared to be holding back their full military force throughout the more than two weeks of hostilities, aiming to send messages rather than escalate to a full-scale war.

Crucially, experts also cautioned that Iran had not brought into the main battle its greatest military advantage over Israel — Hezbollah and other Iran-allied armed groups in the region. Hezbollah in particular is capable of straining Israel's ability to defend itself, especially in any multifront conflict.

Overall, "the big-picture lesson to take away is that unless Iran does absolutely everything at its disposal all at once, it is just the David, and not the Goliath, in this equation," said Charles Lister, a senior fellow and longtime regional researcher at the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

Aside from those Iranian proxy forces, "the Israelis have every single advantage on every single military level," Lister said.

In Friday's attack, Iranian state television said the country's air defense batteries fired in several provinces following reports of drones. Iranian army commander Gen. Abdolrahim Mousavi said crews targeted several flying objects.

Lister said it appeared to have been a single mission by a small number of Israeli aircraft. After crossing Syrian airspace, it appears they fired only two or three Blue Sparrow air-to-surface missiles into Iran, most likely from a standoff position in the airspace of Iran's neighbor Iraq, he said.

Iran said its air defenses fired at a major air base near Isfahan. 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.

Israel has not taken responsibility for either the April 1 or Friday strikes.

The Jewish Institute for National Security of America, a Washington-based center that promotes Israeli-U.S. security ties, quickly pointed out that Friday's small strike underscored that Israel could do much more damage "should it decide to launch a larger strike against Iran's nuclear facilities."

Iran's barrage last weekend, by contrast, appears to have used up most of its 150 long-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching Israel, more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) away, said retired Gen. Frank McKenzie, former commander of the U.S. military's Central Command.

Especially given the distance involved and how easy it is for the U.S. and others to track missile deployments by overhead space sensors and regional radar, "it is hard for Iran to generate a bolt from the blue against Israel," McKenzie said.

Israelis, for their part, have "shown that Israel can now hit Iran from its soil with missiles, maybe even drones," said Alex Vatanka, director of the Iran program at the Middle East Institute.

Iran's performance Friday, meanwhile, may have raised doubts about its ability to defend against such an attack, Vatanka said. Iran is about 80 times the size of Israel and thus has much more territory to defend, he noted.

Plus, Israel demonstrated that it can rally support from powerful regional and international countries, both Arab and Western, to defend against Iran.

The U.S. led in helping Israel knock down Iran's missile and drone attack on April 13. Jordan and Gulf countries are believed to have lent varying degrees of assistance, including in sharing information about incoming strikes.

The two weeks of hostilities also provided the biggest showcase yet of the growing ability of Israel to work with Arab nations, its previous enemies, under the framework of U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. forces in the Middle East.

The U.S. under the Trump administration moved responsibility for its military coordination with Israel into Central Command, which already hosted U.S. military coordination with Arab countries. The Biden administration has worked to deepen the relationship.

But while the exchange of Israeli-Iran strikes revealed more about Iran's military abilities, Lebanon-based Hezbollah and other Iranian-allied armed groups in Iraq and Syria largely appeared to stay on the sidelines.

Hezbollah is one of the most powerful militaries in the region, with tens of thousands of experienced fighters and a massive weapons arsenal.

After an intense war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 that killed more than a thousand Lebanese civilians and dozens of Israeli civilians, both sides have held back from escalating to another full-scale conflict. But Israeli and Hezbollah militaries still routinely fire across each other's borders during the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Hezbollah "is Iran's only remaining potential advantage in this whole broader equation," Lister said.

Six months of fighting in Gaza have "completely stretched" Israel's military, he said. "If Hezbollah went all out and launched the vast majority of its rocket and missile arsenal at Israel, all at once, the Israelis would seriously struggle to deal with that."

And in terms of ground forces, if Hezbollah suddenly opened a second front, the Israel Defense Forces "would be incapable at this point" of fighting full-on with both Hezbollah and Hamas, he said.

California is rolling out free preschool. That hasn't solved challenges around child care

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY AP Education Writer

CONCORD, Calif. (AP) — A year before I-Ting Quinn's son was old enough for kindergarten, she and her husband had the option to enroll him in "transitional kindergarten," a program offered for free by California elementary schools for some 4-year-olds.

Instead, they kept their son, Ethan, in a private day care center in Concord, California, at a cost of \$400 a week.

Transitional kindergarten's academic emphasis was appealing, but Ethan would have been in a half-day program, and options for afterschool child care were limited. And for two parents with hectic work schedules in the hospitality industry, there was the convenience of having Ethan and his younger brother at the same day care, with a single stop for morning drop-off and evening pickup.

"Ethan is navigating changes at home with a new younger brother and then possibly a new school where he is the youngest," Quinn said. "That doesn't even include the concerns around drop-off and pickups, including transportation to and from his class to afterschool care at a different location. It is just a lot to consider."

Investments that California and other states have made in public preschool have helped many parents through a child care crisis, in which quality options for early learners are often scarce and unaffordable. But many parents say the programs don't work for their families. Even when Pre-K lasts the whole school day, working parents struggle to find child care before 9 a.m. and after 3 p.m.

No state has a more ambitious plan for universal preschool than California, which plans to extend eligibility for transitional kindergarten to all 4-year-olds by fall 2025 as part of a \$2.7 billion, four-year expansion. The idea is to provide a two-year kindergarten program to prepare children earlier for the rigors of elementary school.

Enrollment in the optional program has grown more slowly than projected. Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, had estimated about 120,000 students would enroll last year; however, the average daily attendance was around 91,000 students.

Through December of this year, the average daily attendance was about 125,000 students, said Sara Cortez, a policy analyst for the California Legislative Analyst's Office.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, some families no longer see the same value in traditional kindergarten. Some are just as happy with programs that don't have an academic component. School days requiring midday pickups also can sway families toward private day cares, Head Start programs and other alternatives offering full-day care.

Some schools hosting transitional kindergarten offer child care before or after instruction, but not all.

"If your school doesn't offer those wraparound child care services at the beginning or end of school days, then staying in child care may be the only option parents have," said Deborah Stipek, a former dean of the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University, who has advocated for equitable access to early

childhood education in California.

States including Iowa, Michigan, New Jersey and Washington have provided early learning options similar to transitional kindergarten, and there is evidence of the program's benefits.

In California, where the programs are taught by educators with the same credential requirements as kindergarten teachers, a five-year study found their students entered kindergarten with stronger mathematics and literacy skills. In Michigan, where the transitional kindergarten program is not offered statewide, the programs have been linked to increases in third-grade test scores in math and English. A California study, however, found no such test score increase by third or fourth grade.

"Kids are getting the opportunity to become familiar with the school environment before they start kindergarten," said Anna Shapiro, a policy researcher at RAND who has studied early childhood program effectiveness for about a decade and analyzed the TK program in Michigan.

Another benefit to transitional kindergarten is that it's free.

María Maldonado, who has seven children and works at a deli in Los Angeles, sends her 4-year-old daughter, Audrey, to transitional kindergarten at Para Los Niños Charter Elementary School. Her daughter likes it so much, Maldonado said she would happily pay even if it wasn't free.

The program includes afterschool care, so Audrey remains at the school from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. Audrey is learning to read and can count to 35, and asks to stay at the school longer when her parents arrive well before pickup time, her mother said.

Maldonado only wishes she had heard about the program sooner for her other children. She said she was sold on the school after visiting and speaking to the teachers.

"Academically, they have to learn everything they're taught. But if the atmosphere is good, that's a combination that will keep kids happy. As a result, this girl loves going to school," she said.

As of this school year, California's transitional kindergarten was open only to 4-year-old children who turn 5 by early April. The cutoff will widen to include more kids this fall in a graduated expansion.

For Ethan's parents, the emphasis on play-based learning at his day care center, run by KinderCare, was an important factor in their decision to keep him there, in addition to the all-day care.

"There are families who choose to stay with us because we have full-time, full-year care," said Margot Gould, senior manager of government relations for KinderCare, which operates in 40 states.

Ethan's father, Scott Quinn, recalls thinking, "How bad can it be?" when they opted out of transitional kindergarten. But he has been discouraged to see Ethan — one of the oldest kids in his day care class — pick up the behavior of kids who are several years younger than him.

"In retrospect, it would have been better to send him to school to be around kids his age and older," he said.

I-Ting Quinn said she also has feelings of regret as she sees Ethan outgrow some of his previous needs, including a midday nap. The couple considered enrolling him in TK midway through the school year, but ultimately decided it would cause too much stress in managing the logistics of their work schedules.

Raising Ethan was her first exposure to the fragmented landscape of early education, and she said she wishes she started considering the options even before she was pregnant.

"That's easier said than done," she said. The Quinns are planning to move to Connecticut this year to be closer to family and are looking into kindergarten options for Ethan. "We are for sure enrolling him in a public kindergarten. Not only is he ready, but we are."

Tennessee Volkswagen employees overwhelmingly vote to join United Auto Workers union

By KRISTIN M. HALL and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (AP) — Employees at a Volkswagen factory in Chattanooga, Tennessee, overwhelmingly voted to join the United Auto Workers union Friday in a historic first test of the UAW's renewed effort to organize nonunion factories.

The union wound up getting 2,628 votes, or 73% of the ballots cast, compared with only 985 who voted

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no in an election run by the National Labor Relations Board.

Both sides have five business days to file objections to the election, the NLRB said. If there are none, the election will be certified and VW and the union must "begin bargaining in good faith."

President Joe Biden, who backed the UAW and won its endorsement, said the union's win follows major union gains across the country including actors, port workers, Teamsters members, writers and health care workers.

"Together, these union wins have helped raise wages and demonstrate once again that the middle-class built America and that unions are still building and expanding the middle class for all workers," he said in a statement late Friday.

Twice in recent years, workers at the Chattanooga plant have rejected union membership in plantwide votes. Most recently, they handed the UAW a narrow defeat in 2019 as federal prosecutors were breaking up a bribery-and-embezzlement scandal at the union.

But this time, they voted convincingly for the UAW, which is operating under new leadership directly elected by members for the first time and basking in a successful confrontation with Detroit's major automakers.

The union's pugnacious new president, Shawn Fain, was elected on a platform of cleaning up after the scandal and turning more confrontational with automakers. An emboldened Fain, backed by Biden, led the union in a series of strikes last fall against Detroit's automakers that resulted in lucrative new contracts.

The new contracts raised union wages by a substantial one-third, arming Fain and his organizers with enticing new offers to present to workers at Volkswagen and other companies.

Next up for a union vote are workers at Mercedes factories near Tuscaloosa, Alabama, who will vote on UAW representation in May.

Fain said he was not surprised by the size of the union's win Friday after the two previous losses.

"I think it's the reality of where we are and the times that we're in," he said Friday night. "Workers are fed up in being left behind."

The win, he said, will help the growing unionization effort in the rest of the country.

"This gives workers everywhere else the indication that it's OK," Fain said. "All we've heard for years is we can't win here, you can't do this in the South, and you can."

Worker Vicky Holloway of Chattanooga was among dozens of cheering workers celebrating at an electrical workers union hall near the VW plant. She said the overwhelming vote for the union came this time because her colleagues realized they could have better benefits and a voice in the workplace.

"Right now we have no say," said Holloway, who has worked at the plant for 13 years and was there for the union's previous losses. "It's like our opinions don't matter."

In a statement, Volkswagen thanked workers for voting and said 83.5% of the 4,300 production workers cast ballots in the election.

Six Southern governors, including Tennessee's Bill Lee, warned the workers in a joint statement this week that joining the UAW could cost them their jobs and threaten the region's economic progress.

But the overwhelming win is a warning to nonunion manufacturers, said Marick Masters, a business professor at Wayne State University in Detroit who studies the union.

"This is going to send a powerful message to all of those companies that the UAW is knocking at the door, and if they want to remain nonunion, they've got to step up their game," Masters said.

He expects other nonunion automakers to become more aggressive at the plants, and that anti-union politicians will step up their efforts to fight the union.

Shortly after the Detroit contracts were ratified, Volkswagen and other nonunion companies handed their workers big pay raises.

Last fall, Volkswagen raised production worker pay by 11%, lifting top base wages to \$32.40 per hour, or just over \$67,000 per year. VW said its pay exceeds the median household income for the Chattanooga area, which was \$54,480 last May, according to the U.S. Labor Department.

But under the UAW contracts, top production workers at GM, for instance, now earn \$36 an hour, or about \$75,000 a year excluding benefits and profit sharing. By the end of the contract in 2028, top-scale

GM workers would make over \$89,000.

The VW plant will be the first the UAW has represented at a foreign-owned automaking plant in the South. It will not, however, be the first union auto assembly plant in the South. The UAW represents workers at two Ford assembly plants in Kentucky and two GM factories in Tennessee and Texas, as well as some heavy-truck manufacturing plants.

Also, more than three decades ago, the UAW was at a Volkswagen factory in New Stanton, Pennsylvania, east of Pittsburgh. VW closed the plant that made small cars in the late 1980s.

The drug war devastated Black and other minority communities. Is marijuana legalization helping?

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Wash. (AP) — When Washington state opened some of the nation's first legal marijuana stores in 2014, Sam Ward Jr. was on electronic home detention in Spokane, where he had been indicted on federal drug charges. He would soon be off to prison to serve the lion's share of a four-year sentence.

A decade later, Ward, who is Black, recently posed in a blue-and-gold throne used for photo ops at his new cannabis store, Cloud 9 Cannabis. He greeted customers walking in for early 4/20 deals. And he reflected on being one of the first beneficiaries of a Washington program to make the overwhelmingly white industry more accessible to people harmed by the war on drugs.

"It feels great to know that I'm the CEO of a store, with employees, people depending on me," Ward said. "Just being a part of something makes you feel good."

A major argument for legalizing the adult use of cannabis was to stop the harm caused by disproportionate enforcement of drug laws that sent millions of Black, Latino and other minority Americans to prison and perpetuated cycles of violence and poverty. Studies have shown that minorities were incarcerated at a higher rate than white people, despite similar rates of cannabis use.

But efforts to help those most affected participate in — and profit from — the legal marijuana sector have been halting.

Since 2012, when voters in Washington and Colorado approved the first ballot measures to legalize recreational marijuana, legal adult use has spread to 24 states and the District of Columbia. Nearly all have "social equity" provisions designed to redress drug war damages.

Those provisions include erasing criminal records for certain pot convictions, granting cannabis business licenses and financial help to people convicted of cannabis crimes, and directing marijuana tax revenues to communities that suffered.

"Social equity programs are an attempt to reverse the damage that was done to Black and brown communities who are over-policed and disproportionately impacted," said Kaliko Castille, former president of the Minority Cannabis Business Association.

States have varying ways of defining who can apply for social equity marijuana licenses, and they're not necessarily based on race.

In Washington, an applicant must own more than half the business and meet other criteria, such as having lived for at least five years between 1980 and 2010 in an area with high poverty, unemployment or cannabis arrest rates; having been arrested for a cannabis-related crime; or having a below-median household income.

Legal challenges over the permitting process in states like New York have slowed implementation.

After settling other cases, New York — which has issued 60% of all cannabis licenses to social equity applicants, according to regulators — is facing another lawsuit. Last month, the libertarian-leaning Pacific Legal Foundation alleged it favors women- and minority-owned applicants in addition to those who can demonstrate harm from the drug war.

"It's that type of blanket racial and gender preference that the Constitution prohibits," said Pacific Legal attorney David Hoffa.

Elsewhere, deep-pocketed corporations that operate in multiple states have acquired social equity licenses,

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possibly frustrating the intent of the laws. Arizona lawmakers this year expressed concern that licensees had been pressured by predatory businesses into ceding control.

Difficulty in finding locations due to local cannabis business bans or in obtaining bank loans due to continued federal prohibition has also prevented candidates from opening stores. In some cases, the very things that qualified them for licenses — living in poor neighborhoods, criminal records and lack of assets — have made it hard to secure the money needed to open cannabis businesses.

The drafters of Washington's pioneering law were preoccupied with keeping the U.S. Justice Department from shutting down the market. They required background checks designed to keep criminals out.

"A lot of the early states, they simply didn't have social equity on their radar," said Jana Hrdinova, administrative director of the Drug Enforcement and Policy Center at Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law.

Many states that legalized more recently — including Arizona, Connecticut, Ohio, Maryland and Missouri — have had social equity initiatives from the start.

Washington established its program in 2020. But only in the past several months has it issued the first social equity retail licenses. Just two — including Ward's — have opened.

Washington Liquor and Cannabis Board Member Ollie Garrett called the progress so far disappointing, but said officials are working with applicants and urging some cities to rescind zoning bans so social equity cannabis businesses can open.

The state, which collects roughly half a billion dollars a year in marijuana tax revenue, is making \$8 million available in grants to social equity licensees to help with expenses, such as security systems and renovations, as well as business coaching.

It also is directing \$250 million to communities harmed by the drug war — including housing assistance, small-business loans, job training and violence prevention programs.

Ward's turnaround is one officials hope to see repeated.

He started dealing marijuana in his teens, he said. In 2006, a customer pulled a gun on him, and Ward was shot in the hand.

A single father of seven children, he continued dealing drugs to support them, he said, until he was indicted in 2014 — along with 30 other people — in an oxycodone distribution conspiracy. He served nearly three years in prison.

Ward, now 39, spent that time taking classes, working out and training other inmates. He started a personal training business after he was released, got a restaurant job and joined a semipro football team, the Spokane Wolfpack.

That's where he met Dennis Turner, a Black entrepreneur who briefly owned the team. Turner had worked as a restaurant manager on cruise ships, for the postal service and as a corrections officer before investing his savings — \$6,000 — in a friend's medical marijuana growing operation. They used the proceeds to help open a medical dispensary in Cheney, a small college town southwest of Spokane, that eventually became an adult-use marijuana retailer.

In Washington's social equity program, Turner saw an opportunity to make Ward a business executive. The two joined Rashel Palmer, whose husband co-owns the football team, in launching Cloud 9 at a cost of around \$400,000. They picked Arlington, Washington — 320 miles (515 kilometers) away — because it's a quickly growing city with limited cannabis competition, they said.

Ward "saw me as a guy that he looked up to, that did good business, was self-made and came out the trenches, and he just wanted to pick my brain," Turner said.

Turner is working to open cannabis stores in New Mexico and Ohio through social equity programs in those states. He hopes one day to sell them for tens of millions of dollars. In the meantime, he intends to use his businesses to support local charities, such as the Boys and Girls Club in Arlington and the Carl Maxey Center, which provides services to the Black community in Spokane.

Another new social equity licensee is David Penn Jr., 47, who helped persuade Pasco, in south-central Washington, to rescind its ban. Penn, who is Black, was arrested on a crack cocaine charge as a teenager. In 2011, he was kicked out of his apartment after a marijuana bust.

A friend with two other cannabis outlets is financing Penn's store. His location, a dirt-floored building next to a gas station, still needs to be built out. State grants will help, but won't be enough.

"It's like they're giving you the carriage, but you need the horses to get this thing going," Penn said.

Haiti's former capital seeks to revive its hey-day as gang violence consumes Port-au-Prince

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

CAP-HAITIEN, Haiti (AP) — They call it Okap, home to Haiti's kings, emancipated slaves and revolutionaries.

Sitting on the shimmering north coast, the city of Cap-Haïtien was abandoned as a capital during the waning years of the French colonial era and again when the Kingdom of Haiti fell after its king died by suicide and his teenage son was slain.

It was once known as the Paris of the Antilles, and now it is on the brink of becoming what some say is Haiti's de facto capital as Port-au-Prince crumbles under the onslaught of powerful gangs.

"History repeats itself," Yvrose Pierre, Cap-Haïtien mayor, told The Associated Press on a recent afternoon.

Business owners, anxious parents and even historic state ceremonies have been relocating here, and that began even before gangs started attacking key government infrastructure in Port-au-Prince in late February. Gunmen have burned police stations, stormed Haiti's two biggest prisons to release more than 4,000 inmates and fired on the country's main international airport, which hasn't reopened since closing in early March.

Right now, "Cap-Haïtien is the only city that connects Haiti to the world," Pierre said.

Palm trees dot the city that is home to roughly 400,000 people who walk about freely and stay out late. They don't have to sidestep bodies strewn on sidewalks, run to avoid being hit by stray bullets or flinch if a pop-pop-pop fills the air, confident it's only fireworks. Such luxuries are absent in Port-au-Prince.

More than 2,500 people were killed or injured in gang violence from January to March across Haiti, a more than 50% increase from the same period last year, according to a report Friday by the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti. The vast majority of violence is in Port-au-Prince.

Pierre credits Cap-Haïtien's tranquility to the recent demolition of more than 1,500 homes in the city's southern outskirts that gangs had infiltrated.

The calm is one of the biggest reasons the city has attracted some of the nearly 95,000 people who have fled Port-au-Prince's gang violence in the past month alone.

Local authorities recently demanded that all new arrivals register at City Hall to keep track of the influx.

"A lot of people are coming, and there's a risk of this becoming unbalanced," the mayor said. "Cap-Haïtien doesn't have enough resources to welcome everyone who is fleeing violence."

She said that there are no camps or shelters for the migrants and that the city is struggling to provide food and housing for everyone, with some people forced to sleep in front of churches and grocery stores.

Schools also are overwhelmed.

At the Bell Angelot school in downtown Cap-Haïtien, officials have seen a 10% increase in enrollment and say it is still rising.

"There are too many students," director Jocelyn Laguerre said.

He said he has had to hire new teachers and add more courses because many children arriving from Port-au-Prince are extremely behind in their studies since gang violence has forced hundreds of schools there to close.

And not all the incoming families are able to pay, which Laguerre said he understands.

"We know what is happening in this country," he said.

There is no security at Laguerre's school — a sharp contrast to Port-au-Prince, where heavily armed guards are a fixture at institutions where students of all ages have been kidnapped and gangs have extorted principals.

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In general, private guards are largely absent in many businesses across Cap-Haïtien. On a recent afternoon, the clacks of dominoes played on a rickety outdoor table mingled with fans arguing over a yellow card issued during the Real Madrid-Manchester City soccer match, which attracted dozens of people who crowded around the doorways of open-air bars.

No one looked around in fear they might be assaulted, kidnapped or killed.

"There is more peace here than in other cities," Alfred Joseph said as he sat in a red plastic chair in a nearby lush public park. "For me, Cap-Haïtien has always been the capital of Haiti."

Despite the charms of the city, it shares many of Port-au-Prince's familiar woes: poverty, grinding traffic and mountains of garbage that choke the streets, rivers and ocean.

But the absence of violence is enough for Baby Dovelus, who returned to Cap-Haïtien after a student was kidnapped at her daughter's school in Port-au-Prince.

"It was a big relief," she said of the move. "I feel good here. It's my city."

Others planning to move to Cap-Haïtien include the mother and female cousin of a university student who provided only his first name, John, for safety reasons.

John said he himself moved from Port-au-Prince to Cap-Haïtien after gang violence forced his university to close last month. He flew to Florida on Friday after obtaining a visa to study for a master's degree in information technology.

He worries about his mother and cousin making the hours-long trip by bus from Port-au-Prince, which is more than 100 miles (200 kilometers) south of Cap-Haïtien. The gangs that control the main road heading north from Port-au-Prince have shot at public buses.

"Everyone is in danger," he said.

As Haitians continue streaming into Cap-Haïtien, some caution that the only way for the city to really become the capital again is to decentralize the government. All state-related business is currently conducted only in Port-au-Prince.

Patrick Almonor, Cap-Haïtien's deputy mayor, has hope. He believes that if his city avoids Port-au-Prince's mistake of concentrating everything in a small area, it's possible.

"We deserve to be the capital," he said. "This is about to change."

Record Store Day celebrates indie retail music sellers as they ride vinyl's popularity wave

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Special LP releases, live performances and at least one giant block party are scheduled around the U.S. Saturday as hundreds of shops celebrate Record Store Day during a surge of interest in vinyl and the day after the release of Taylor Swift's latest album.

There were no announced Record Store Day specials for the arrival of Swift's "The Tortured Poets Department" on Friday, but her fans always anxiously look forward to the new albums and accompanying collectible LPs.

In suburban strip malls and big city downtowns, indie record stores are often the first to recognize and promote emerging artists. Years before Swift was setting Grammy records and selling out concerts in Japan, Bull Moose Music in Portland, Maine, was giving away one of her autographed guitars in an enter-to-win contest.

"We were carrying her music before all the big stores. We always knew she would be a star," said Chris Brown of employee-owned Bull Moose and a co-founder of Record Store Day.

A wave of interest in physical records, especially LPs, has helped keep the independent stores going, Brown said. And LPs have gotten a huge boost from Swift, who has been dubbed the "Vinyl Queen" for releases of her work in limited physical record offerings with specialized content and striking covers.

The Recording Industry Association of America said in its 2023 year end report that revenues from vinyl records grew 10% to \$1.4 billion last year. That was the 17th consecutive year of growth and accounted for 71% of physical format revenues.

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WHAT IS RECORD STORE DAY?

Record Store Day is a celebration of the estimated 1,400 independent record stores in the U.S. and thousands more worldwide that endure long after the demise of megastores like Tower Records.

While most people stream their music on services such as Spotify and Apple Music, old-school LPs remain popular for collectors who prefer the packaging and the listening experience of records.

"For me, records sound better than any CD," said Michael Iffland, a 70-year-old retiree who was considering some Beatles singles at the Tracks in Wax record store in Phoenix. "It's just cool having a record in your hand, looking at the cover graphics and listening to that wonderful sound."

HOW DID RECORD STORE DAY START?

Owners and employees of the independent stores came up with the idea at a gathering in 2007 as a way to draw attention to their unique culture on the third Saturday of April.

The first Record Store Day was on April 19, 2008, and cities around the U.S. later declared the celebration an official holiday, including New York City, Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

"For us, records have never gone out of style," said Waric Cameron, co-owner of Josey Records in Dallas. "It's the biggest day of the year for us," added his business partner, Luke Sardello. "It's like the Super Bowl of record stores."

Jamal Alnasr, owner of Village Revival Records in New York's Greenwich Village, called Record Store Day "one of my biggest money growers of the year. People even camp outside the night before."

WHAT'S BEING PLANNED THIS YEAR?

Record Store Day is typically marked by special vinyl and CD releases and various promotional products and events featuring artists and labels. Metallica spent hours on the first Record Store Day meeting fans at Rasputin Music in the San Francisco Bay area.

Jesse "Boots Electric" Hughes of Eagles of Death Metal was declared a Record Store Day ambassador in 2009 and a string of other artists followed in subsequent years, including Ozzy Osbourne, Iggy Pop, Jack White, Fred Armisen, as well as Swift in 2022.

There were 387 planned releases announced for this year's Record Store Day.

Paramore, the event's 2024 ambassador, will have a pair of physical releases of the digital album that featured celebrity remixes from songs on its 2023 "This is Why" album.

Rock band Pearl Jam will release 15,000 copies of a "Dark Matter" LP, with a ghostly black and yellow cover. Icelandic-American traditional pop singer Laufey will offer up 4,200 copies of "A Night at the Symphony," a live album recorded in Reykjavik with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra.

In some cases, the record itself will serve as a canvas. Death Cab for Cutie will release 2,500 copies of its "Live at the Showbox" on pink marble vinyl. Fleetwood Mac will have a limited edition of its hugely popular "Rumours," still a top seller since its 1977 release, with a photograph of the album cover featuring Stevie Nicks and Mick Fleetwood stamped on the vinyl.

"People get really excited and look forward to the releases," said Tracks in Wax owner Tim Stamper, who always orders a few. "It's more important for us than Christmas."

Jeff Maimon, 38, who was in the store on a visit from Chicago, said Record Store Day "was always a very special day. It's all about the excitement of standing outside and waiting in line to see what kind of specials you can get."

A giant block party with 14 live performances is planned Saturday at Vinyl Tap in Nashville, Tennessee, owner Todd Hedrick said. The performers will include Lzzy and Joe of Halestorm and The Watson Twins.

"We'll shut down the street, bring in five or six food trucks," along with about 25 vendors, Hedrick said.

"And it coincides with our other favorite holiday, 4/20," Hedrick added, referring to marijuana-oriented celebrations held annually on April 20.

WHAT ABOUT THE QUEEN OF VINYL?

Swift, who is credited by fans and record stores alike with igniting new interest in vinyl LPs, has not announced any special releases for this Record Store Day.

The hugely popular Swift set a new record this year when she won a fourth album of the year award at the Grammy Awards for "Midnights." She previously had been tied with Frank Sinatra, Stevie Wonder and

Paul Simon with three albums.

Swift's re-recorded "1989 (Taylor's Version)" last year became the first album to sell more than 1 million vinyl LPs within a calendar year in the U.S. Her "Midnights" album in 2022 became the first major album release to have its vinyl sales outpace CDs since 1987.

Lawsuits under New York's new voting rights law reveal racial disenfranchisement even in blue states

BY AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

FREEMPORT, N.Y. (AP) — Weihua Yan had seen dramatic demographic changes since moving to Long Island's Nassau County.

Its Asian American population alone had grown by 60% since the 2010 census. Why then, he wondered, did he not see anyone who looked like him on the county's local governing body, the 19-member Nassau County Legislature?

Last year, he decided to do something about it and ran for one of the seats. He pulled together a campaign team that knocked on 10,000 doors and developed what they believed would be a solid strategy — focusing on their potential base: white Democrats and people of color, especially Asian voters.

The strategy worked to drive voter turnout, but it didn't help Yan win. His bid to become the first Asian American on the county's governing body fell short, and he thinks he knows why.

Minority residents and voter advocates blame a redistricting process overseen by the county Legislature, which has a Republican majority. They say the county political map drawn after the 2020 census was done to mostly preserve the existing power structure, and in doing so prevented minority voters from electing a board that was more representative of the area's burgeoning diversity.

The county is now facing a lawsuit over those maps. Four Latino residents and a local civil rights organization sued the Legislature earlier this year, claiming it manipulated the mapmaking process to dilute the influence of the county's Black, Latino and Asian communities. Whites are just 56% of the county's nearly 1.4 million people but comprise nearly 80% of its governing body.

Yan isn't part of the lawsuit, but said he supports its goal.

"When I look at Nassau County, there's been an increase in population of Asian communities ever since I moved here 16 years ago," he said. "However, there was not a single elected office held in Nassau County by Asian Americans. So for me, we really have to make sure that we have our own true representation."

The action against Nassau County is one of at least four lawsuits that have been filed under New York's Voting Rights Act, which was enacted two years ago. New York is among at least seven mostly Democratic-controlled states that took action to protect voting rights after lawmakers became frustrated by the tide of new voting restrictions in many Republican-led states after the 2020 election and the failure of voting rights legislation in Congress.

The lawsuits, which include challenges filed against Mount Pleasant, Cheektowaga and Newburgh, help dispel a longstanding narrative that racial voting discrimination happens only in the South or in deeply Republican states.

"New York is not immune from racial inequity and racial vote dilution simply because it may tend to vote more in a progressive way than Southern states," said Perry Grossman, who is director of voting rights at the New York Civil Liberties Union and helped write the new state law.

Under the federal Voting Rights Act, some states and local governments were required to get approval in advance from the U.S. Department of Justice before making voting-related changes because of their history of discrimination. That practice, known as preclearance, was effectively ended by a 2013 Supreme Court ruling.

Although Nassau County wasn't subject to the preclearance provision, it had a history of racial segregation since the early 1900s, especially related to housing and policing, according to the lawsuit. The Ku Klux Klan held rallies and burned crosses throughout Nassau County in the 1920s.

Drastic differences remain today between communities that are affluent and mostly white and ones that

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are more diverse, said Lucas Sanchez, co-executive director of New York Communities for Change, which is a plaintiff in the Nassau County lawsuit.

"Long Island is a place that was built on the principle of exclusion, that was built on the principle of segregation," he said. "The map, as it stands, keeps us away from the table, denies us seats at the table, and this is why we're a part of this lawsuit."

Mary Studdert, spokeswoman for the Nassau County Legislature Republican Majority, said the current map conforms to the law and is a result of public feedback that combines communities of interest.

The lawsuit paints a different picture. It says the map splits minority communities or combines them with others that are starkly different, diluting the political power of their voters.

The lawsuit cites the village of Freeport, which is nearly 44% Latino and 32% Black. Under the county's map, part of the village was folded into a district that includes Merrick, which is predominantly white. The district's representative more than likely will always be someone from Merrick, said Maria Jordan-Awalom, a plaintiff who is Latina and a Freeport resident.

She said a dearth of parks and poor roads is one way to distinguish Freeport from Merrick. She also referenced a local Black Lives Matter protest in 2020 as an example of the towns' differences. She and at least 100 demonstrators marched along what she called an imaginary wall between Freeport and Merrick. Local media reported on a public outcry from Merrick residents, some telling the protesters to "go back West" to Freeport.

"We're not connected in any way," said Jordan-Awalom, who also is president of the Freeport School Board. "For the decision-makers to make this choice, to connect us and lump us with this community that doesn't even want to be a part of our community and doesn't want to have any relationship with us as residents, it's just mind-boggling."

The village of New Hyde Park, which also was mentioned in the lawsuit, provides another example showing how the redistricting process has diluted the voting power of minority communities.

Nearly a third of its residents are Asian, but it was stripped from the district where Yan lives during the latest round of map-drawing. Added instead was Manhasset, which is overwhelmingly white. Yan plans to run again, but the district's boundaries don't seem to give him a successful route, advocates said.

"I don't want this opportunity to pass because, win or lose, I've always wanted to make sure that Asian Americans have the right representation," Yan said. "Without people representing us, we don't have a voice at the table."

Redistricting experts expect more lawsuits under the new state voting rights acts, especially if current litigation succeeds. But Grossman, of the Civil Liberties Union, hopes the challenges become more of a lesson that pushes jurisdictions to focus on improving parks, libraries, schools and other amenities in minority communities.

"My hope is that what these initial cases do is provide the foundation for a lot more collaborative resolution because my strong preference is not to see taxpayer money going to litigation," he said. "I hope that local governments in New York and elsewhere see state voting rights acts as an opportunity to do better."

The NBA playoffs are finally here. And as LeBron James says, 'it's a sprint now'

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

There's a 64-win team in Boston that ran away with the league's best record. The defending champions in Denver, a group that won 57 games. A fearless young bunch in Oklahoma City, whose No. 1 seed was no fluke. A trio of Villanova alums in New York, who turned the Knicks into a real contender.

And, once again, there's LeBron James, too.

The NBA playoffs are about to begin with the Celtics and Nuggets the heavy favorites — at least according to BetMGM Sportsbook — to collide in the Finals, and no shortage of teams have realistic belief that they can win the whole thing as well. After a seven-month ramp-up through training camp, a preseason, the regular season, the inaugural NBA Cup and then a play-in tournament, the league finally wakes up on

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Saturday with 16 teams left in the chase for the Larry O'Brien Trophy.

"Come Saturday, there are 15 other teams that want what we have," Denver coach Michael Malone said. "We have the world championship trophy and everybody's trying to take it from us."

Let the games begin. The Nuggets — with most of last season's core back this year, including probable NBA MVP Nikola Jokic — are trying to become the eighth franchise to win back-to-back titles. They'll open that quest against the Lakers and James, who is seeking a fifth title and has never hidden that this is, by far, the time of year that matters most to him.

"There ain't no more pace," said the 39-year-old James, the league's oldest active player and all-time scoring leader who is seeking a fifth NBA title. "Pace yourself for what? Now it's the sprint. It's a sprint now. We already went through the marathon."

Round 1 begins Saturday with four games: Orlando at Cleveland, Phoenix at Minnesota, Philadelphia at New York and the Los Angeles Lakers at Denver. On Sunday, four more Game 1s await: Miami at Boston in a rematch of the last two East finals, Dallas at the Los Angeles Clippers, Indiana at Milwaukee and New Orleans at Oklahoma City.

The Thunder won 22 games three seasons ago, then 24 games the year after that. Those days are long gone already: 40 wins last season showed the potential, and 57 wins this season — with no full-time starter over age 25 — suggest that OKC's time may be now.

"It means a little more, how we got here, for sure," said Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the Thunder guard who is a legit MVP candidate after averaging 30.1 points this season. "But at the end of the day, it's home-court advantage, I guess, until the Finals. And that's always a plus when your home court is like ours."

They are young, they might be brash, and they certainly are fun. Thunder guard Jalen Williams was asked why he wasn't wearing his division title T-shirt when the Thunder clinched the No. 1 seed: "This leather jacket cost a lot," he said, drawing laughs.

The Thunder weren't expected to be in this position; they were given 100-1 odds to win the NBA title when the season started. Boston is a very different story; much was expected from the Celtics, and they delivered.

All Boston did this season was put up the fifth-best record in franchise history, which is a big deal for any team and an even bigger deal when a team is as storied as the Celtics franchise. Of the four Boston teams that had better regular season records, three went on to win NBA titles.

"You can't even expect that you're going to be a 64-win team," Celtics President Brad Stevens said. "That's a really hard threshold to meet no matter how good you are, no matter how well organized you are from a coaching standpoint, how many options you have from a playing standpoint. That's just a hard thing to do."

There is no apparent weakness with the Celtics, who finished the season ranked No. 1 in offensive rating, No. 2 in points per game, No. 3 in defensive rating and No. 5 in points allowed per game. Jayson Tatum, Jaylen Brown and Kristaps Porzingis all finished averaging at least 20 points per game; only two other Celtics teams had three 20-point scorers in a season. And they added Jrue Holiday — a U.S. Olympian this summer, just like Tatum — in the offseason to help anchor a defense built for this time of year.

"Everybody has that right mindset," Celtics guard Derrick White said. "We're looking forward to this."

The Knicks lost Julius Randle and have somehow kept climbing, led by its Villanova trio — MVP candidate Jalen Brunson, Josh Hart and Donte DiVincenzo. They get a showdown first-round series against Joel Embiid and the 76ers, a team that was vying for probably a top-2 seed before Embiid got hurt and missed much of the year.

"We just focus on getting better, every single day," Brunson said.

There are some new faces in the playoffs: The Thunder, Indiana — the highest scoring team in the league this season — and Orlando are all playing at this time of year for the first time since 2020. Indiana faces a Milwaukee team that will open without star Giannis Antetokounmpo, and the Magic take on a Cleveland team that hasn't won a playoff series without James in uniform since 1993.

"We're going to enjoy this," Magic coach Jamahl Mosley said, "because they deserve to."

Odds are, it'll be either Boston, Oklahoma City, Denver, New York, Milwaukee or Minnesota winning the

title. Since 1984, 39 of the 40 NBA champions have entered the playoffs seeded 1, 2 or 3 in their conference. That said, it's been an unpredictable year. And the playoffs inevitably bring surprises. "The reality is we're going to have to play well on Sunday," Stevens said. "And beyond."

Trump forced to listen silently to people insulting him as he trades a cocoon of adulation for court

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — He seems "selfish and self-serving," said one woman.

The way he carries himself in public "leaves something to be desired," said another.

His "negative rhetoric and bias," said another man, is what is "most harmful."

Over the past week, Donald Trump has been forced to sit inside a frigid New York courtroom and listen to a parade of potential jurors in his criminal hush money trial share their unvarnished assessments of him.

It's been a dramatic departure for the former president and presumptive GOP nominee, who is accustomed to spending his days in a cocoon of cheering crowds and constant adulation. Now a criminal defendant, Trump will instead spend the next several weeks subjected to strict rules that strip him of control over everything from what he is permitted to say to the temperature of the room.

"He's the object of derision. It's his nightmare. He can't control the script. He can't control the cinematography. He can't control what's being said about him. And the outcome could go in a direction he really doesn't want," said Tim O'Brien, a Trump biographer and critic.

While Trump is occasionally confronted by protesters, generally he lives a life sheltered from criticism. After leaving the White House, Trump moved to his Mar-a-Lago waterfront club in Palm Beach, Florida, where he is surrounded by doting paid staff and dues-paying members who have shelled out tens of thousands of dollars to be near him.

Many days, Trump heads to his nearby golf course, where he is "swarmed by people wanting to shake his hand, take pictures of him, and tell him how amazing he is," said Stephanie Grisham, a longtime aide who broke with Trump after the storming of the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

When he returns to Mar-a-Lago in the afternoon, members lunching on the patio often stand and applaud. He receives the same standing ovation at dinner, which often ends with Trump playing DJ on his iPad, blasting favorites like "It's a Man's Man's Man's World" by James Brown.

Grisham, who spent long stretches traveling with Trump and at Mar-a-Lago during his 2016 campaign and as White House press secretary, described staff constantly serving as cheerleaders and telling Trump what he wanted to hear. To avoid angry outbursts, they requested motorcade routes that avoided protests and left a stack of positive press clips every morning on the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office.

Now, Trump faces a trial that could result in felony convictions and possible prison time. And he will have to listen to more critics, without being able to punch back verbally — something he revels in doing.

Among the expected witnesses in the trial are his former lawyer and fixer, Michael Cohen, and the porn actor who alleged she had sex with him, Stormy Daniels. Both have savaged him in interviews and books as well as on social media.

Trump campaign spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said Trump proved during his first week in court that "he will remain defiant in the face of this unprecedented political lawfare" and said, "It is clear that his support from the American people will only grow as they watch Joe Biden, Alvin Bragg and the Democrats putting on this bogus show trial six months before the election."

New Yorkers who said they couldn't approach the case fairly were excused during jury selection. But one of the women with the harshest assessments of him will be among those who will determine his fate on 34 counts of falsifying business records.

"I don't like his persona, how he presents himself in public," said the woman, who has lived in upper Manhattan for the last 15 years. The woman said she didn't agree with some of Trump's politics, which she called "outrageous."

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"He just seems very selfish and self-serving, so I don't really appreciate that in any public servant," she said, adding that while she doesn't "know him as a person," how he "portrays himself in public, it just seems to me it is not my cup of tea."

Trump's legal team took issue with her responses, but they were out of challenges by the time she was up for consideration.

Judge Juan Manuel Merchan has withheld the names of prospective jurors for safety concerns.

On Friday, one prospective juror, who said she had attended the 2017 Women's March protesting Trump's inauguration, complained of the influence he has over his base.

"I think his rhetoric at times enables people to feel as if they have permission to discriminate or act on their negative impulses," she said, citing people she has heard make homophobic or racist comments. Still, she said she didn't have strong feelings about the former president and wasn't sure of his current policy positions.

Another man said he'd grown up admiring the former president and business mogul's real estate portfolio and even thinking he might someday live in Trump Tower. But he had come to oppose Trump's "negative rhetoric and bias against people that he speaks about."

At other times, lawyers read aloud social media posts from prospective jurors mocking Trump and celebrating his defeats.

One prospective juror, an older white woman, was struck from the jury pool by the judge after Trump's legal team uncovered years-old social media posts that described Trump as a "racist, sexist" narcissist.

One of Trump's attorneys called the posts "vitriolic."

"She harbors a deep hatred for him," said the lawyer, Susan Necheles. "She said that 'I wouldn't believe Donald Trump if his tongue were notarized'" and that he was "anathema" to everything she was taught about love.

Confronted with the posts inside the courtroom, the juror said she understood why they'd be concerning to the defense, but her views had evolved. "Election policies can get pretty spicy and Mr. Trump can get pretty spicy," she said.

Merchan, the judge, also dismissed a man who in 2017 had shared a Facebook post celebrating the defeat of one of Trump's policies in court. "Get him out and lock him up!" it read in part.

Court rules require Trump to be present throughout the trial. He can't storm out of the courtroom like he did during a recent defamation trial. He is also barred by a gag order from attacking any of the jurors, including on his Truth Social platform.

He has already been admonished by Merchan for audibly uttering something and gesturing while one juror was answering questions.

"I will not tolerate any jurors being intimidated in this courtroom," said Merchan, who previously warned Trump he could be sent to jail for engaging in disruptive behavior in court.

Trump's assessments in the courthouse weren't all bad, however, with a perhaps surprising number of potential jurors saying they had no strong opinions about one of the best known and most divisive men on the planet.

In fact, the process seemed to reveal more supporters than might be expected in a borough where President Joe Biden captured 87% of the vote in 2020.

One potential juror Thursday who spoke of Trump in glowing terms said he was "impressed" with Trump's career as a successful businessman.

"I mean he was our president, pretty amazing. He is a businessman in New York. He has forged his way, you know, he made kind of history in terms of like where he started and where he has become," said the man, who said he saw his own story similarly.

On Tuesday, another man expressed regret that he couldn't juggle the trial with his job.

"Your Honor, as much as I would love to serve for New York and one of our great presidents, I could not give up my job for six-plus weeks," he said.

Many said they had read his book "The Art of the Deal."

Even the woman who criticized his persona and ended up on the jury anyway acknowledged his appeal to voters.

"Sometimes the way he may carry himself in public leaves something to be desired. At the same time, I can relate to sometimes being a bit unfiltered," she said. "I see him speak to a lot of people in America. I think there is something to be said about that."

USC cancels graduation keynote by filmmaker amid controversy over decision to drop student's speech

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The University of Southern California further shook up its commencement plans Friday, announcing the cancelation of a keynote speech by filmmaker Jon M. Chu just days after making the controversial choice to disallow the student valedictorian from speaking.

The private university in Los Angeles on Monday said it was canceling valedictorian Asna Tabassum's speech at the May 10 ceremony because of safety concerns. Tabassum, who is Muslim, has expressed support for Palestinians in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, and university officials said the response to her selection as valedictorian had "taken on an alarming tenor." They did not cite any specific threats.

The university's decision was met with praise from pro-Israel organizations but condemnation from free speech groups and the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Students and faculty marched across campus Thursday in silent protest of the university's decision.

Now, university officials say they are "redesigning" the entire commencement program.

"Given the highly publicized circumstances surrounding our main-stage commencement program, university leadership has decided it is best to release our outside speakers and honorees from attending this year's ceremony," the university said in an unsigned statement posted Friday. "We've been talking to this exceptional group and hope to confer these honorary degrees at a future commencement or other academic ceremonies."

Chu was slated to deliver the keynote address at the May 10 ceremony. He is a 2003 graduate of the university who has since directed films like "Crazy Rich Asians" and "Wicked," an adaptation for the Broadway musical set for release last this year.

More than 65,000 people are expected to gather on campus for commencement, including 19,000 graduates.

"Although this should have been a time of celebration for my family, friends, professors, and classmates, anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian voices have subjected me to a campaign of racist hatred because of my uncompromising belief in human rights for all," Tabassum said in a statement earlier this week.

The Israel-Hamas war has presented a challenge for colleges under pressure to preserve free speech and open debate, and campuses are expected to be further tested as commencement speeches get underway in the coming weeks.

At Columbia University on Thursday, New York police removed a pro-Palestinian protest encampment and arrested more than 100 demonstrators. Most of them were charged with trespassing at the Ivy League-institution.

Several students involved in the protest said they also were suspended from Columbia and nearby Barnard College. The school said it was still identifying students involved in the protest and added more suspensions would be forthcoming.

"Students have a right to free speech but do not have a right to violate university policies and disrupt learning on campus," said New York Mayor Eric Adams, who said the city was asked by university officials to remove the encampment.

Bitcoin's latest 'halving' has arrived. Here's what you need to know

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The “miners” who chisel bitcoins out of complex mathematics are taking a 50% pay cut — effectively reducing new production of the world's largest cryptocurrency, again.

Bitcoin's latest “halving” occurred Friday night. Soon after the highly anticipated event, the price of bitcoin held steady at about \$63,907.

Now, all eyes are on what will happen down the road. Beyond bitcoin's long-term price behavior, which relies heavily on other market conditions, experts point to potential impacts on the day-to-day operations of the asset's miners themselves. But, as with everything in the volatile cryptoverse, the future is hard to predict.

Here's what you need to know.

WHAT IS BITCOIN HALVING AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Bitcoin “halving,” a preprogrammed event that occurs roughly every four years, impacts the production of bitcoin. Miners use farms of noisy, specialized computers to solve convoluted math puzzles; and when they complete one, they get a fixed number of bitcoins as a reward.

Halving does exactly what it sounds like — it cuts that fixed income in half. And when the mining reward falls, so does the number of new bitcoins entering the market. That means the supply of coins available to satisfy demand grows more slowly.

Limited supply is one of bitcoin's key features. Only 21 million bitcoins will ever exist, and more than 19.5 million of them have already been mined, leaving fewer than 1.5 million left to pull from.

So long as demand remains the same or climbs faster than supply, bitcoin prices should rise as halving limits output. Because of this, some argue that bitcoin can counteract inflation — still, experts stress that future gains are never guaranteed.

HOW OFTEN DOES HALVING OCCUR?

Per bitcoin's code, halving occurs after the creation of every 210,000 “blocks” — where transactions are recorded — during the mining process.

No calendar dates are set in stone, but that divvies out to roughly once every four years.

WILL HALVING IMPACT BITCOIN'S PRICE?

Only time will tell. Following each of the three previous halvings, the price of bitcoin was mixed in the first few months and wound up significantly higher one year later. But as investors well know, past performance is not an indicator of future results.

“I don't know how significant we can say halving is just yet,” said Adam Morgan McCarthy, a research analyst at Kaiko. “The sample size of three (previous halvings) isn't big enough to say ‘It's going to go up 500% again,’ or something.”

At the time of the last halving in May 2020, for example, bitcoin's price stood at around \$8,602, according to CoinMarketCap — and climbed almost seven-fold to nearly \$56,705 by May 2021. Bitcoin prices nearly quadrupled a year after July 2016's halving and shot up by almost 80 times one year out from bitcoin's first halving in November 2012. Experts like McCarthy stress that other bullish market conditions contributed to those returns.

Friday's halving also arrives after a year of steep increases for bitcoin. As of Friday night, bitcoin's price stood at \$63,907 per CoinMarketCap. That's down from the all-time-high of about \$73,750 hit last month, but still double the asset's price from a year ago.

Much of the credit for bitcoin's recent rally is given to the early success of a new way to invest in the asset — spot bitcoin ETFs, which were only approved by U.S. regulators in January. A research report from crypto fund manager Bitwise found that these spot ETFs, short for exchange-traded funds, saw \$12.1 billion in inflows during the first quarter.

Bitwise senior crypto research analyst Ryan Rasmussen said persistent or growing ETF demand, when paired with the “supply shock” resulting from the coming halving, could help propel bitcoin's price further.

“We would expect the price of Bitcoin to have a strong performance over the next 12 months,” he said. Rasmussen notes that he's seen some predict gains reaching as high as \$400,000, but the more “consen-

sus estimate" is closer to the \$100,000-\$175,000 range.

Other experts stress caution, pointing to the possibility the gains have already been realized.

In a Wednesday research note, JPMorgan analysts maintained that they don't expect to see post-halving price increases because the event "has already been already priced in" — noting that the market is still in overbought conditions per their analysis of bitcoin futures.

WHAT ABOUT MINERS?

Miners, meanwhile, will be challenged with compensating for the reduction in rewards while also keeping operating costs down.

"Even if there's a slight increase in bitcoin price, (halving) can really impact a miner's ability to pay bills," Andrew W. Balthazor, a Miami-based attorney who specializes in digital assets at Holland & Knight, said. "You can't assume that bitcoin is just going to go to the moon. As your business model, you have to plan for extreme volatility."

Better-prepared miners have likely laid the groundwork ahead of time, perhaps by increasing energy efficiency or raising new capital. But cracks may arise for less-efficient, struggling firms.

One likely outcome: Consolidation. That's become increasingly common in the bitcoin mining industry, particularly following a major crypto crash in 2022.

In its recent research report, Bitwise found that total miner revenue slumped one month after each of the three previous halvings. But those figures had rebounded significantly after a full year — thanks to spikes in the price of bitcoin as well as larger miners expanding their operations.

Time will tell how mining companies fare following this latest halving. But Rasmussen is betting that big players will continue to expand and utilize the industry's technology advances to make operations more efficient.

WHAT ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

Pinpointing definitive data on the environmental impacts directly tied to bitcoin halving is still a bit of a question mark. But it's no secret that crypto mining consumes a lot of energy overall — and operations relying on pollutive sources have drawn particular concern over the years.

Recent research published by the United Nations University and Earth's Future journal found that the carbon footprint of 2020-2021 bitcoin mining across 76 nations was equivalent to emissions of burning 84 billion pounds of coal or running 190 natural gas-fired power plants. Coal satisfied the bulk of bitcoin's electricity demands (45%), followed by natural gas (21%) and hydropower (16%).

Environmental impacts of bitcoin mining boil largely down to the energy source used. Industry analysts have maintained that pushes towards the use of more clean energy have increased in recent years, coinciding with rising calls for climate protections from regulators around the world.

Production pressures could result in miners looking to cut costs. Ahead of the latest halving, JPMorgan cautioned that some bitcoin mining firms may "look to diversify into low energy cost regions" to deploy inefficient mining rigs.

Final jurors seated for Trump's hush money case, with opening statements set for Monday

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

NEW YORK (AP) — The final jurors were seated Friday in Donald Trump's hush money trial, and an appellate judge rejected the former president's latest bid to halt the case as a hectic day in court set the stage for opening statements to begin Monday.

The panel of New Yorkers who will decide the first criminal trial of a former U.S. president took final shape after lawyers spent days quizzing dozens of potential jurors on whether they can impartially judge Trump in the city where he built his real estate empire before being elected in 2016.

The trial thrusts Trump's legal problems into the heart of his hotly contested race against President Joe Biden, with Trump's opponent likely to seize on unflattering and salacious testimony to make the case that

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the presumptive Republican nominee is unfit to return as commander in chief.

Trump, meanwhile, is using the prosecution as a political rallying cry, casting himself as a victim while juggling his dual role as criminal defendant and presidential candidate.

Judge Juan Merchan said lawyers will present opening statements Monday morning before prosecutors begin laying out their case alleging a scheme to cover up negative stories Trump feared would hurt his 2016 campaign. He has pleaded not guilty and says the stories were false.

Despite the failure of repeated previous attempts to delay the trial, a Trump attorney was in an appeals court hours after the jury was seated, arguing that Merchan rushed through jury selection and that Trump cannot get a fair trial in Manhattan.

"To think an impartial jury could be found in that period of time, I would respectfully submit, is untenable," attorney Clifford Robert said.

Justice Marsha Michael denied the request just minutes after a brief hearing.

Back in the trial court, Merchan expressed frustration as Trump's lawyers pressed to revisit a litany of pretrial rulings.

"At some point, you need to accept the court's rulings," Merchan said. "There's nothing else to clarify. There's nothing else to reargue. We're going to have opening statements on Monday morning. This trial is starting."

Just after the jury was seated, emergency crews responded to a park outside the courthouse, where a man had set himself on fire. The man took out pamphlets espousing conspiracy theories and spread them around the park before dousing himself in a flammable substance and setting himself aflame, officials said. He was in critical condition Friday afternoon.

Trump has spent the week sitting quietly in the courtroom as lawyers pressed potential jurors on their views about him in a search for any bias that would preclude them from hearing the case. During breaks in the proceedings, he has railed against the case on social media or to TV cameras in the hallway, calling it a politically motivated "witch hunt."

"This Trial is a Long, Rigged, Endurance Contest, dealing with Nasty, Crooked People, who want to DESTROY OUR COUNTRY," he wrote Friday on social media.

Over five days of jury selection, dozens of people were dismissed from the jury pool after saying they didn't believe they could be fair. Others expressed anxiety about having to decide such a consequential case with outsized media attention, even though the judge has ruled that jurors' names will be known only to prosecutors, Trump and their legal teams.

One woman who had been chosen to serve on the jury was dismissed Thursday after she raised concerns over messages she said she got from friends and family when aspects of her identity became public. On Friday, another woman broke down in tears while being questioned by a prosecutor about her ability to decide the case based only on evidence presented in court.

"I feel so nervous and anxious right now," the woman said. "I'm so sorry. I wouldn't want someone who feels like this to judge my case either. I don't want to waste the court's time."

As more potential jurors were questioned Friday, Trump appeared to lean over at the defense table, scribbling on some papers and exchanging notes with one of his lawyers. He occasionally perked up and gazed at the jury box, including when one would-be juror said he had volunteered in a "get out the vote" effort for Hillary Clinton's campaign. That man was later excused.

Trump spoke to reporters before Friday's proceedings got underway, lambasting a gag order that prosecutors have accused him of violating. Merchan has scheduled arguments for next week on prosecutors' request to hold Trump in contempt of court and fine him for social media posts they say defy limits on what he can say about potential witnesses.

"The gag order has to come off. People are allowed to speak about me, and I have a gag order," Trump said.

Merchan also heard arguments Friday on prosecutors' request to bring up Trump's prior legal entanglements if he takes the witness stand in the hush money case. Trump has said he wants to testify, but he

is not required to and can always change his mind.

Manhattan prosecutors have said they want to question Trump about, among other cases, 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. Merchan said he would rule on the matter in the coming days.

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 is involved in 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.

BNSF Railway says it didn't know about asbestos that's killed hundreds in Montana town

By MATTHEW BROWN and AMY BETH HANSON Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — BNSF Railway attorneys told a Montana jury Friday that the railroad should not be held liable for the lung cancer deaths of two former residents of an asbestos-contaminated Montana town, one of the deadliest sites in the federal Superfund pollution program.

Attorneys for the company say the corporate predecessors of the railroad, owned by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate, didn't know the vermiculite they hauled over decades from a nearby mine was filled with hazardous microscopic asbestos fibers or that asbestos was dangerous.

BNSF attorney Chad Knight said the railroad could only be held liable if it could have foreseen the health hazards of asbestos based on information available decades ago when the alleged exposures happened.

"In the 50s, 60s and 70s no one in the public suspected there might be health concerns," Knight said.

The case in federal civil court is the first of numerous lawsuits against the Texas-based railroad corporation to reach trial over its past operations in Libby, Montana. Current and former residents of the small town near the U.S.-Canada border want BNSF held accountable for its alleged role in asbestos exposure that health officials say has killed several hundred people and sickened thousands.

The seven-member jury met briefly Friday and planned to resume deliberations on Monday morning. They were instructed to decide if the railroad was at fault in the deaths and if so, the amount of damages to award to their estates. If the jurors find that the railroad should also face punitive damages, a separate hearing would determine that amount.

Looming over the proceedings is W.R. Grace & Co., a chemical company that operated a mountaintop vermiculite mine 7 miles (11 kilometers) outside of Libby until it was closed 1990. The Maryland-based company played a central role in Libby's tragedy and has paid significant settlements to victims.

U.S. District Court Judge Brian Morris has referred to the the chemical company as "the elephant in the room" in the BNSF trial. He reminded jurors several times that the case was about the railroad's conduct, not W.R. Grace's separate liability.

How much W.R. Grace revealed about the asbestos dangers to Texas-based BNSF and its corporate predecessors has been sharply disputed. The plaintiffs argued that railroad higher-ups were aware, but that workers on the ground in Libby were left out of the loop.

"We're here to make a party that accepts zero responsibility accept an appropriate amount of responsi-

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bility," plaintiffs' attorney Mark Lanier said. "This is the fault of the bigwigs in the corporate office."

The judge instructed the jury it could only find the railroad negligent based on its actions in the Libby Railyard, not for hauling the vermiculite.

The railroad said it was obliged under law to ship the vermiculite, which was used in insulation and for other commercial purposes. It said W.R. Grace employees had concealed the health hazards from the railroad.

Former railroad workers said during testimony and in depositions that they knew nothing about the risks of asbestos. They said Grace employees were responsible for loading the hopper cars, plugging the holes of any cars leaking vermiculite and occasionally cleaned up material that spilled in the rail yard.

The estates of the two deceased plaintiffs have argued that the W.R. Grace's actions don't absolve BNSF of its responsibility for failing to clean up the vermiculite that spilled in the railyard in the heart of the community.

Their attorneys said BNSF should have known about the dangers because Grace put signs on rail cars carrying vermiculite warning of potential health risks. They showed jurors an image of a warning label allegedly attached to rail cars in the late 1970s that advised against inhaling the asbestos dust because it could cause bodily harm.

Family members of Tom Wells and Joyce Walder testified that their lives ended soon after they were diagnosed with mesothelioma. The families said the dust blowing from the rail yard sickened and killed them.

In a March 2020 video of Wells played for jurors and recorded the day before he died, he lay in a home hospital bed, struggling to breathe.

"I've been placed in a horrible spot here, and the best chance I see at release — relief for everybody — is to just get it over with," he said. "It's just not something I want to try and play hero through because I don't think that there's a miracle waiting."

The Environmental Protection Agency descended on Libby after the 1999 news reports. In 2009 it declared in Libby the nation's first ever public health emergency under the federal Superfund cleanup program.

The pollution in Libby has been cleaned up, largely at public expense. Yet the long timeframe over which asbestos-related diseases develop means people previously exposed are likely to continue getting sick for years to come, health officials say.

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

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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 flyer 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 — 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 burning 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."

Israel, Iran play down apparent Israeli strike.

The muted responses could calm tensions -- for now

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel and Iran on Friday both played down an apparent Israeli airstrike near a major air base and nuclear site in central Iran, signaling the two bitter enemies are ready to prevent their latest eruption of violence from escalating into a full-blown regional war.

But the indecisive outcome of weeks of tensions — which included an alleged Israeli strike that killed two Iranian generals, an unprecedented Iranian missile barrage on Israel and the apparent Israeli strike early Friday in the heart of Iran — did little to resolve the deeper grievances between the foes and left the door open to further fighting.

"It appears we're closer than ever to a broad regional war, despite the fact that the international community will most likely make a great effort to de-escalate tensions," wrote Amos Harel, the military-affairs commentator for the Israeli daily Haaretz.

Israel has long considered Iran to be its greatest enemy — citing the Islamic Republic's calls for Israel's destruction, its controversial nuclear program and its support for hostile proxies across the Middle East.

These tensions have risen since Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Iranian-backed Palestinian groups, attacked Israel on Oct. 7, sparking a devastating Israeli offensive in Gaza that has continued for more than six months. Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed proxy in Lebanon, immediately began striking Israeli targets, opening up tit-for-tat fighting along a second front, while Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, Syria and Yemen have also fired missiles and drones at Israel throughout the war.

While Israel and Iran have waged a shadow war for years, mostly in neighboring Syria, they have largely avoided direct confrontations. That changed after an April 1 airstrike killed two Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in the Syrian capital of Damascus. Although Israel did not comment, Iran blamed Israel for the strike and vowed revenge.

Iran responded with its first-ever direct attack on Israel, launching over 300 missiles and attack drones late Saturday night. Israel, working with a U.S.-led international coalition, said it intercepted 99% of the incoming fire, though a handful of missiles managed to land, causing minor damage to an Israeli military base and seriously wounding a young girl.

In Friday's attack, Iranian state television said that air defense batteries fired in several provinces over reports of drones in the air. Iranian army commander Gen. Abdolrahim Mousavi said crews targeted several flying objects.

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"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.

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

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. The apparent attack Friday came on Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's 85th birthday.

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

Iranian officials made no mention of possible Israeli involvement. That could be intentional, particularly after Iranian officials for days have been threatening to respond to any Israeli retaliatory attack.

Israel also had no comment on the apparent attack, though one hard-line government minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, hinted at his dissatisfaction, with a one-word tweet early Friday, using a slang word for weak or lame.

But Italy's foreign minister, Antonio Tajani, said at a summit of Western leaders in Capri that the U.S. received "last-minute" information from Israel about the attack. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken did not dispute that, but said: "We were not involved in any offensive operations."

Yoel Guzansky, a former Iran expert in the Israeli prime minister's office, said Israel appears to have carried out the attack to "check off a box" by sending a message to Iran without doing anything too provocative that could upset the United States, which had urged restraint, or spark further Iranian retaliation.

"It seems very limited, to send a message that 'we can strike you inside of Iran,'" said Guzansky a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank.

He said "the current round" of violence appears to be over, but that "nothing has changed" with Israel still facing Iranian-backed threats on various fronts.

"I see further rounds," he said. And the next time, if Iran surprises Israel or allies don't assist in Israel's defense, "the outcome will be different."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an end to the strikes.

"It is high time to stop the dangerous cycle of retaliation in the Middle East," his office said.

Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Institute and a longtime regional analyst, challenged Iran's claims that drones carried out the attacks. It appears instead that a small number of Israeli aircraft flew from Israel over Syria — striking at least two southern Syria military bases that have air defense systems along the way, he said.

They then entered Iraqi airspace, from where they fired a small number of Blue Sparrow air-to-surface ballistic missiles, likely without ever entering Iranian airspace, Lister said.

Accounts of explosions over Iraq support that scenario, and so does debris from what appears to be the booster of an Israeli-made Blue Sparrow missile that Iraqi security found in a field outside Baghdad, Lister said.

"In other words, the Israelis would never have needed to enter Iranian airspace to conduct this attack," Lister said. "I think this was Israel's way of just sending a message that we can reach you anywhere we want."

If this latest round subsides, Israel can now return its focus to its ongoing war in Gaza and the simmering fighting with Hezbollah. With neither of those fronts letting up, the risk of further run-ins with Iran remains high, though neither side appears eager after Friday's apparent Israeli attack.

"Neither side is ready to jump over the brink," said Alex Vatanka, director of the Iran program at the Middle East Institute. But he added a major caveat.

"Probably we're going to go back to the proxy war," he said, but now it's a proxy war with the risk of "that sudden eruption of state-to-state war. Which we didn't have to worry about before."

The Latest | Opening statements in Trump hush money trial set for Monday after latest appeal fails

NEW YORK (AP) — Opening statements in Donald Trump's hush money case are set to begin next week after a jury of 12 people and six alternates was seated Friday. The seating of the jury sets the stage for weeks of testimony in a case charging Trump with falsifying business records to suppress stories about his sex life emerging in the final days of the 2016 election.

A failed last-minute bid in appeals court by the former president's lawyers to stay the trial, as well as a hearing to decide whether prosecutors would be allowed to question Trump about his recent civil court losses capped Friday's proceedings.

Judge Juan M. Merchan said he would reserve judgment on the latter and would issue a decision in the coming days.

Shortly after the jury was seated Friday, emergency crews responded to a park across the street from the courthouse, where a person was on fire. The man was taken to a hospital where he was in critical condition in the burn unit, police said at a news conference.

The hush money case is the first of Trump's four indictments to reach trial and is the first criminal trial against a former U.S. commander-in-chief.

At the heart of the allegations is a \$130,000 payment made to porn actor Stormy Daniels by Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, 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 such payments in internal business documents. Trump has said none of the alleged sexual encounters occurred. He has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records.

Currently:

- The hush money case is just one of Trump's legal cases. See the others [here](#)
- Judge in Trump case orders media not to report where potential jurors work
- Social media searches play central role in jury selection for Trump's trial
- Only 1 in 3 US adults think Trump acted illegally in New York hush money case, AP-NORC poll shows

Here's the latest:

TRUMP CALLS THE TRIAL A 'WITCH HUNT'

Donald Trump returned to the cameras Friday afternoon to deliver a brief closing message following his first week as a criminal defendant.

"This is really a concerted witch hunt, very simple," Trump charged to reporters.

The presumptive GOP nominee complained of his treatment in New York, calling out Arthur Engoron and Lewis Kaplan, the judges who heard his earlier New York civil fraud trial and defamation case.

"What's happening here with the judicial system is an outrage," he said, before casting the case, yet again, as an effort to damage his candidacy.

"This is the only way they think they can win, but it's not going to work," he said.

APPEALS COURT DENIES REQUEST TO HALT HUSH MONEY CASE

An appeals court judge has once again denied a request by Donald Trump's attorneys to halt his criminal hush money trial as they seek to have the case moved outside of Manhattan.

Justice Marsha Michael issued the ruling on Friday just minutes after a brief hearing. The arguments in the midlevel appeals court came only hours after the jury selection process concluded in Trump's criminal trial, which is currently taking place roughly 2 miles (3.22 kilometers) south.

The ruling allows opening statements to take place as soon as Monday in Trump's criminal trial.

MERCHAN AGAIN REFUSES BLANKET IMMUNITY REQUEST

As a taxing week of jury selection and legal arguments neared an end with yet more back-and-forth over legal particulars, Judge Juan M. Merchan told Trump's lawyers to stop importuning him to revisit his litany of pretrial rulings in the hush money case.

"I've entertained your arguments in good faith, I've handed down decisions, but at some point, you need

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to accept the court's rulings," Merchan said during a Friday hearing.

"There's nothing else to clarify. There's nothing else to reargue. We're going to have opening statements on Monday morning. This trial is starting."

Merchan also refused again to give Trump's lawyers a blanket ruling excluding certain evidence from his time in the White House on presidential immunity grounds.

Rather, the judge said, Trump's lawyers can argue for immunity on a piece-by-piece basis during the trial.

The defense has argued that three of Trump's 2018 tweets about Michael Cohen and his 2018 financial disclosure report — all of which are publicly available — are official acts and therefore fall under presidential immunity. They also contend any testimony about official acts Trump took as president, such as the accounts of former White House staff, should be excluded.

TRUMP'S LAWYERS FIGHT TO KEEP HIS OTHER CASES OUT OF HUSH MONEY TRIAL

Donald Trump's lawyers are fighting to keep prosecutors in his hush money case from questioning him, if he testifies, about the outcome of his recent civil fraud trial as well as a separate defamation case.

In the fraud trial, state Judge Arthur Engoron found that Trump, his company and key executives deceived bankers and insurers for years by grossly padding his wealth on financial statements used to secure loans and coverage.

In the second case, a jury found that Trump defamed writer E. Jean Carroll after she accused him of sexual assault years earlier.

Trump lawyer Emil Bove argued those allegations, dating to the 1990s, are "too attenuated, too far back in time to call into question President Trump's credibility at this trial."

Trump has said he wants to testify at the hush money trial, but he is not required to and can always change his mind.

Judge Juan M. Merchan said he would reserve judgment on whether prosecutors can ask Trump about his past legal setbacks if he chooses to testify.

Merchan said he would issue a decision in the coming days.

TRUMP LAWYER ARGUES FOR STAY OF TRIAL PENDING MOTION FOR CHANGE OF VENUE

An attorney for Donald Trump argued Friday in an appeals court for an interim stay of the former president's hush money trial, say that jury selection was rushed and prevented the seating of a fair and impartial jury.

"The way that such a large cross section of people were immediately disqualified because of the biases they mentioned to the court is proof positive ... to the predispositions of these people," Clifford Robert said.

Robert argued for an interim stay of the trial pending a motion to have the trial venue moved outside of Manhattan.

In a brief response, Steven Wu, the appellate chief for the Manhattan district attorney's office, accused Trump's attorneys of mischaracterizing the jury selection process, which he described as "unusually detailed and careful."

He added that Trump had "amplified and stoked the very press coverage" that had caused some jurors to reconsider if they could serve impartially.

"We have 18 ordinary New Yorkers ready to serve on Monday morning when this trial should begin," Wu added. "It would be unfair to them and it would be unfair to the public for this trial to be delayed further."

A decision on the appeal is expected this afternoon.

JUDGE AGREES TO SEAL SOME EVIDENCE

Donald Trump's lawyers and prosecutors in his hush money case are sparring over the prosecution's request to seal four pieces of evidence.

This includes phone records and approximately 39,000 contacts stored in Michael Cohen's cellphone.

Prosecutors had sought to keep that evidence out of public view because it pertained to third parties not involved in the case. Judge Juan M. Merchan agreed over the objections of Trump's lawyers, who argued prosecutors were trying to make an end run around transparency and trampling Trump's right to a public trial.

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TRUMP BACK IN COURT

Court has resumed in Donald Trump's hush money trial.

With jury selection complete, the former president and lawyers in the case have returned to court for a hearing on prosecutors' desire to question the former president — if he testifies — about his recent civil court losses.

Trump raised his fist before returning to the courtroom.

MAN WHO SET HIMSELF ON FIRE ACROSS FROM COURTHOUSE IS IN CRITICAL CONDITION, POLICE SAY

The man who set himself on fire across the street from the courthouse where Donald Trump's hush money trial is taking place is in critical condition in a burn unit, police said Friday.

The man first walked into the park around 1:30 p.m., took out pamphlets espousing conspiracy theories and spread them around the park before he doused himself in an accelerant and set himself on fire, officials said.

Officials believe the man had traveled from Florida to New York in the past few days.

Authorities said they were reviewing the security protocols outside the courthouse.

"We are very concerned. Of course we are going to review our security protocols," Chief of Department Jeffrey Maddrey said.

TRUMP LEGAL TEAM ASKS APPEALS COURT TO INTERVENE

Donald Trump's legal team has asked the New York state appellate court to intervene in his hush money trial, filing another application with a midlevel appeals court on Friday.

A hearing was scheduled for 3:30 p.m.

The documents weren't immediately publicly available, but Trump's lawyers have gone to the appeals court before trying to get the trial delayed or moved out of Manhattan. They have argued that Trump can't get a fair trial there because of intense publicity.

The trial judge had rejected that request.

POLICE NEWS CONFERENCE EXPECTED

New York police are expected to hold a news conference at 2:45 p.m. Friday after a man set himself on fire in the park across the street from the courthouse where Donald Trump's hush money trial is taking place.

Passersby rushed to douse the flames and the man was rushed away on a stretcher by emergency crews.

COURT WAS

BEING DISMISSED FOR BREAK AS FIRE BROKE OUT

Judge Juan M. Merchan, seemingly unaware of what was unfolding outside the courthouse on Friday afternoon, told newly selected jurors in Donald Trump's hush money trial that opening statements are set for Monday at 9:30 a.m.

Merchan is expected to hold a hearing Friday at 3:15 p.m. on the prosecution's desire to question the former president, should he testify, regarding his recent civil court losses.

PERSON RUSHED AWAY ON STRETCHER AFTER FIRE EXTINGUISHED OUTSIDE COURT

Emergency crews rushed away a person on a stretcher after fire was extinguished outside the Manhattan courthouse where jury selection was taking place Friday in Donald Trump's hush money criminal case.

No other details were immediately available from police.

A full jury of 12 people and six alternates had been seated in Trump's hush money case just minutes earlier, drawing the first criminal trial of a former U.S. president a step closer to opening statements.

FULL JURY OF 12 PEOPLE AND 6 ALTERNATES SEATED

A jury of 12 people and six alternates was seated on Friday in former President Donald Trump's hush money criminal trial.

The completion of the jury selection process tees up the first-ever criminal trial of a former U.S. president for opening statements and weeks of testimony in a case charging Trump with falsifying business records to suppress stories about his sex life emerging in the final days of the 2016 election.

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

THIRD AND FOURTH ALTERNATES SELECTED

Two more alternates in Donald Trump's hush money case have been selected, leaving just two more alternate juror slots to be filled.

SECOND ALTERNATE JUROR PICKED

A second alternate juror has been selected in Donald Trump's hush money case. The individual joins the other 12 jurors and the first alternate who were sworn in during jury selection proceedings on Thursday. Four more alternates are still needed.

An alternate juror listens to the testimony, just like all the other jurors, but doesn't join in the deliberations unless one of the main jurors needs to drop out or is removed.

MORE WOULD-BE JURORS EXCUSED

Another individual was dismissed from jury selection in Donald Trump's criminal trial Friday after blurting out that she felt anxious during a separate panelist's questioning.

"With this line of questioning, I'm getting the same anxiety and self-doubt" that other excused jurors were raising, the woman said.

Her comment came as Trump lawyer Susan Necheles asked a different jury candidate several questions about her ability to fairly evaluate the credibility of a witness like ex-Trump lawyer Michael Cohen, who went to prison for lying to Congress and other crimes.

At least a half-dozen potential jurors have been excused from consideration during the fourth day of jury selection, with several citing anxiety and nervousness brought on by potentially being connected to the high-profile trial.

SELECTION PROCESS IS PUSHING SOME POTENTIAL JURORS TO BREAKING POINTS

Over the past few days, more than a couple of prospective jurors in Donald Trump's hush money trial have highlighted the stress and anxiety they have felt during the selection process.

One woman was being questioned Friday by a prosecutor about her ability to decide the case based only on courtroom evidence when she began to cry.

"I feel so nervous and anxious right now," the woman said through tears. "I'm so sorry. I wouldn't want someone who feels like this to judge my case either. I don't want to waste the court's time. I don't want to waste anyone's time."

After conferring briefly with the prosecution and defense, Judge Juan M. Merchan dismissed the woman from consideration.

The outsized media attention and public interest in the case isn't the only thing driving some would-be jurors to their breaking points, though. Those called into the courtroom are also answering a lengthy list of personal questions, revealing details about their family life and brushes with the law that have stirred other emotional responses.

METALWORKING, BOXING AND MORE AMONG POTENTIAL JURORS' HOBBIES

A section of the questionnaire asking would-be jurors in Donald Trump's hush money trial what they like to do in their spare time has revealed an eclectic array of hobbies and passions.

During the week, the court has been introduced to Manhattanites who enjoy metalworking, scuba diving and seeing the New York Philharmonic. There were also several yogis, hikers and one man who said he cleans his local dog park as "meditation."

One woman said she takes her kids to Rubik's Cube competitions and another said she used to be an amateur boxer, though noted that "black eyes were frowned upon" in her profession. Earlier in the week, a different prospective juror joked that he had no spare time, adding later, "I guess my hobby is my family."

POTENTIAL JUROR REPORTS CONNECTIONS TO SOME PEOPLE IN TRUMP'S ORBIT

New York is the most populous city in the U.S., but Donald Trump's hush money trial has shown that it can also feel a lot like a small town.

One prospective juror said she had connections to not one but two people who've been in Trump's orbit: the former president's ex-lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen and former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who backed Trump in 2020 but later ran against him.

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The woman disclosed that she works at the same company as a Cohen relative — though they've never crossed paths — and that someone in her family is friends with Christie. Despite that, she assured the court that she could be fair and impartial.

QUESTIONNAIRE PHASE BEGINS AGAIN

The latest questionnaire round in jury selection in Donald Trump's hush money trial began Friday with a prospective juror saying she has anxiety and isn't sure she can serve. She said that she takes medication for the condition and that as more days pass, "I don't think I will be able to be completely fair" and focused on the trial.

Judge Juan M. Merchan excused her.

Because 22 prospective jurors are being questioned, Merchan granted a prosecutor's request for five extra minutes of questioning. Instead of 20 minutes, prosecutors will have 25 questions to inquire of the group.

Another potential juror, a woman with adult children, said she doesn't believe in watching the news. She added that her husband sends her news that seems important and that she has no strong opinions on Trump.

As potential jurors ran through the questionnaire, Trump appeared to lean over at the defense table, scribbling on some papers and occasionally exchanging notes with his lawyers.

But when another potential juror mentioned that he follows the White House Instagram account, including when Trump was in office, the former president looked up and toward the jury box.

COURT IS IN SESSION

Donald Trump shuffled through papers at the defense table Friday morning after walking into Manhattan court for the fourth day of jury selection in his hush money trial.

He turned stoic and stern as news photographers came in to snap pictures of him, as is the daily custom before court resumes.

Twenty-two possible jurors are being brought in as jury selection is set to resume. As many as five alternate jurors must be selected before jury selection is over. One alternate was already sworn in at the end of the day Thursday.

AS HUSH MONEY TRIAL REACHES DAY 4, TRUMP LOSES BID TO HALT SEPARATE JAN. 6 LAWSUITS

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 a separate criminal case accusing him of conspiring to overturn his election defeat to President Joe Biden plays out.

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.

'THE GAG ORDER HAS TO COME OFF,' TRUMP SAYS

Speaking to reporters inside the lower Manhattan courthouse, former President Donald Trump once again railed against his hush money trial, demanding Judge Juan M. Merchan lift a gag order limiting what he can say publicly about witnesses.

"The gag order has to come off. People are allowed to speak about me and I have a gag order," he said.

Prosecutors with the Manhattan district attorney's office are currently looking to fine Trump over violating his gag order after disparaging witnesses in the case on social media. A hearing is set for next week.

TRUMP ARRIVES AT COURT FOR MORE JURY SELECTION

Donald Trump raised his right fist as he headed to his motorcade while leaving Trump Tower on Friday. Soon afterward, the former president arrived at the court in Manhattan where more potential jurors will be questioned in his hush money case.

THIRD PANEL OF POTENTIAL JURORS TO BE QUESTIONED

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.

After a jury of 12 New Yorkers was seated Thursday, lawyers were 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.

Judge Juan M. Merchan has suggested that opening statements in the criminal trial could begin as early as Monday.

Trump has pleaded not guilty.

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.

IN COURT THURSDAY, THE JUROR COUNT REMAINED SHIFTY

Jury selection in Donald Trump's hush money case proceeded at a plodding pace Thursday when two of the initial seven seated jurors were dismissed.

But late in the day, lawyers settled on the remaining seven in quick succession, along with one alternate. Judge Juan M. Merchan has said his goal is to have five additional alternates.

Even with the roster of 12 jurors set, it's still possible that the lineup may change as proceedings continue Friday.

TRUMP'S LEGAL ENTANGLEMENTS COULD BE A TRIAL ISSUE

Judge Juan M. Merchan was expected to hold a hearing Friday to consider a request from prosecutors to bring up Donald 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."

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 lobby restroom of a Texas emergency room as front desk staff refused to check her in. 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

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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 (EMTALA)."

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 nursing 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

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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.

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 allows abortion only if the life, not the health, of the mother 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."

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 who have arrived in the city since 2022, 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.

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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 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.

Ukraine, Israel aid advances in rare House vote as Democrats help Republicans push it forward

By STEPHEN GROVES, LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With rare bipartisan momentum, the House pushed ahead Friday on a foreign aid package of \$95 billion for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and humanitarian support as a robust coalition of lawmakers helped it clear a procedural hurdle to reach final votes this weekend. Friday’s vote produced a seldom-seen outcome in the typically hyper-partisan House, with Democrats helping Republican Speaker

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Mike Johnson's plan advance overwhelmingly 316-94. Final House approval could come this weekend, when the package would be sent to the Senate.

It was a victory for the strategy Johnson set in motion this week after he agonized for two months over the legislation. Still, Johnson has had to spend the past 24 hours making the rounds on conservative media working to salvage support for the wartime funding, particularly for Ukraine as it faces a critical moment battling Russia, but also for his own job as the effort to remove him as speaker grew.

"Ukrainians desperately need lethal aid right now. ... We cannot allow Vladimir Putin to roll through another country and take it," Johnson told the conservative host of The Mark Levin Show about the Russian president's invasion of Ukraine. "These are very serious matters with global implications."

Johnson said after the vote that while it wasn't "perfect legislation," it was the "best possible product" Republicans can get given their thin majority in one chamber of Congress.

After months of delay, the House worked slowly but deliberately once Johnson made up his mind this week to plough ahead with a package that matches, with a few alterations, what the Senate passed in February. President Joe Biden sent a swift endorsement of the speaker's plan and, in a rare moment, Donald Trump, the Republican presumed presidential nominee who opposes most overseas aid for Ukraine, has not derailed the speaker's work.

"The world is watching what the Congress does," the White House said in a statement. "Passing this legislation would send a powerful message about the strength of American leadership at a pivotal moment."

In an extremely rare step, the members of the House Rules Committee joined forces late Thursday in a near midnight vote, the four Democrats giving their support on a procedural step, to push past the Republican majority's three hardline holdouts to send the package to the House floor for debate on a 9-3 vote. It was a moment unseen in recent House memory.

Democratic leader Rep. Hakeem Jeffries said that he spoke with Johnson on Thursday night to ensure the bill would clear the Rules Committee.

"It's long past time that we support our democratic allies," Jeffries said after the vote.

"House Democrats have once again cleared the way for legislation that's important to the American people."

Johnson will need to rely on Democrats again Saturday to turn back amendments Republicans have offered that could kill the package. One from hardline Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene would reduce spending for Ukraine to zero.

Greene has filed a "motion to vacate" the speaker from office, and it drew another supporter Friday as Rep. Paul Gosar, an Arizona Republican, co-sponsored the motion. Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, another co-sponsor, suggested that before the House breaks next week others could follow, building pressure on Johnson to step down.

Rep. Eli Crane, a hardline conservative from Arizona, also said he was "open" to joining the move to oust Johnson.

"I definitely sense that there's a souring to Republican leadership," he said.

Greene could launch a bid to evict Johnson from the speaker's office, should she call it up for a vote, much the way Republicans booted Kevin McCarthy from the position last fall. Jeffries, the Democratic leader, remained noncommittal to helping Johnson keep the speaker's gavel, though some Democrats have suggested they would be inclined help defeat the motion to vacate through procedural maneuvers.

With one of the most narrow House majorities in modern times, Johnson can only afford to lose a single vote or two from his Republican ranks to pass any bill. That dynamic has thrust him into the arms of Democrats as he searches for votes to pass the package.

Without his Republican majority fully behind him, Johnson could not shape the package as the ultra-conservatives demand lest he lose Democratic backing. It forced him to leave behind tough security measures to clamp down on migration at the U.S.-Mexico border.

At best, Johnson has been able to carve up a Senate-passed version of the bill into separate parts, as is the preference among House Republicans, and the final votes will be on distinct measures — for Ukraine, Israel and Indo-Pacific allies.

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The package would also include a fourth provision that includes many Republican priorities that Democrats endorse, or at least are willing to accept. Those include proposals that allow the U.S. to seize frozen Russian central bank assets to rebuild Ukraine; impose sanctions on Iran, Russia, China and criminal organizations that traffic fentanyl; and potentially ban the video app TikTok if its China-based owner doesn't sell its stake within a year.

Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the vote showed "the world that Democrats understand the world and our allies. That we're going to stand by them and make sure that we give them the support and the aid that they need, that we care about humanitarian concerns."

He added that in his 26 years in the House, he had never seen one party have to help the other like Democrats did this week.

"It just shows how the Republicans cannot manage the House and the House floor to get things done," Meeks said.

Republicans, even those who supported the process, were severely disappointed it had come to this.

"I'm concerned," said Rep. Ryan Zinke, R-Mont., who voted for the procedural step but, was nevertheless displeased with the process. "This is reflective of the controversy in the country: How much aid?"

Passing each bill, in votes expected Saturday, will require Johnson to form complicated bipartisan coalitions on each, with Democrats for example ensuring Ukraine aid is approved, but some left-leaning progressives refusing to back military aid for Israel over the destruction of Gaza. Still, Jeffries said that a majority of Democrats would vote Saturday for the packages of aid for Ukraine, Israel and allies in Asia.

The components would then be automatically stitched back together into a single package sent to the Senate where hardliners there are also planning procedural moves to stall final approval.

Not a toddler, not a parent, but still love 'Bluey'? You're not alone

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A small blue dog with an Australian accent has captured the hearts of people across the world.

She's the title character of "Bluey," a kids' program consisting of seven-minute episodes that have enraptured children and adults alike. This week's release of its longest episode yet — at a whopping 28 minutes — prompted an outpouring of appreciation for the show, even from those who are neither toddler nor parent.

"Bluey" follows an Australian blue heeler who, along with her sister (a red heeler named Bingo), navigates the days between home and school. It's a favorite among children for its playful humor, but it also appeals to adults reminiscing about childhood.

"My childhood experience wasn't the greatest so I've always resonated with shows where life is good," says Miriam Neel, who lives in Colorado. "The parents in 'Bluey' enable imagination and creativity and really get involved with their kids, and I wish I had those experiences."

Neel is 32 and has chosen not to have any children of her own. She says the show has become part of her morning routine and is often a go-to choice for background noise when she is working from home.

"I'm not going to speak for the entire generation, but millennials find comfort in cartoons. It's what a lot of us grew up watching," she said. "And if I'm going to spend time watching something I'd rather watch something that doesn't make me afraid of the world, like any of the 'Law & Order' shows."

"Bluey," which now boasts more than 150 episodes, premiered in Australia in 2018 and began streaming on Disney+ in 2020. It also has been adapted into a digital series where famous fans like Bindi Irwin and Eva Mendes read some of the popular storybooks, and a live theater show that travels around the world.

The show has also won multiple awards, including the Australian Film Institute Award for best children's television drama every year since 2019 and an International Emmy Kids Award.

The series provides a child's perspective into morning routines, errands and chores, while also giving viewers a glimpse of what life is like for parents through mother Chilli and father Bandit.

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This week's special episode, "The Sign," explores the emotions surrounding themes that resonate with both children and adults — moving houses, marriage, infertility and relationships after divorce. In addition to these universal themes, the episode wraps up the third season with Easter eggs for dedicated fans.

Lindsey Schmidt, 40, says the show's continuity keeps her family looking forward to more.

"There are so many callbacks to previous episodes," says Schmidt, who lives in Ohio with her husband and three children. "The shows that we watch with our kids regularly don't reflect our lives like this show does. These anthropomorphic dogs feel just like us."

But there are mixed feelings about the ending of the episode — SPOILER — in which the Heeler family scraps their move. Some families who relocate often for work found it unrealistic. Meg Korzon, 31, is in the process of a cross-country relocation with her four children because her husband is in the military. It's her seventh move in 10 years.

"I was hoping it would be an episode that aligned itself with the realities of life, our lives, as a military family," she says. "I was selfishly disappointed because it could have been an episode about change and growth."

But the show does not shy away from other difficult topics — and that is part of the charm for adults as well.

"As a parent you aspire to be as good of parents as Chilli and Bandit are as parents. They always have a great way of talking kids through issues," Schmidt's 40-year-old husband John says, adding that the couple often refers back to episodes when trying to explain things to their children.

The series has touched on topics of aging, death and making friends as an adult. It also has introduced a character who uses sign language and another with ADHD.

Jacqueline Nesi, an assistant professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown University, notes that "Bluey" promotes self-regulation and conflict resolution for children and engaged parenting and patience for adults.

"We see them working through some of the challenges that we, as parents, might be facing, too. And at the same time, they offer a nice model for different parenting skills — asking open-ended questions to facilitate kids' creativity, using natural consequences when they misbehave, actively playing with them and letting them take the lead," she says.

The show has also done a lot to expose children to the world of animation, flaunting different styles in the episodes "Escape" and "Dragon," providing a near-voiceless episode in "Rain," and breaching the fourth wall in "Puppets," where the show stops briefly to zoom out on the creation of just a couple seconds of animated frames.

It's also credited with appealing to dogs — and not because the characters are the same species.

Research has said dogs have vision similar to red-green color blindness in humans, meaning their color spectrum is limited to blue, yellow, brown and shades of gray — which happen to be the colors of the Heeler family. There were more pets named Bluey, Bingo, Chilli and Bandit across the U.S. last year, too, according to Rover.

So it's fairly safe to say "Bluey" has appeal across species, as well as generations.

"I used to tell people what do 'The Sopranos,' 'The Wire' and 'Breaking Bad' have in common? They all have lower IMDb scores than Bluey. It used to anyway. I watched all these great shows, but I think 'Bluey' is still a favorite, maybe because I have kids. But I put it right up there with all of them," John Schmidt says, admitting that he and his wife have watched the episodes without their children.

Schmidt says the episode tied a nice bow to end the season, and would be a perfect series finale otherwise.

"I get emotional about the potential of Bluey no longer having new episodes," says Schmidt. "But we'll see."

5 Japanese workers in Pakistan escape suicide blast targeting their van. A Pakistani bystander dies

By ADIL JAWAD Associated Press

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — A suicide bomber targeted a van carrying Japanese nationals in Pakistan's port city of Karachi on Friday, police said. The Japanese nationals escaped unharmed but officials later said one bystander was killed.

Initially, police said the van was heading to an industrial area where the five Japanese nationals worked when it came under attack, local police chief Arshad Awan said. Police escorting the Japanese returned fire, killing a second attacker, the bomber's accomplice, he said.

"All the Japanese who were the target of the attack are safe," Awan added.

Police had initially said the five worked at Pakistan Suzuki Motors but later corrected that statement, saying it was another factory.

Images on local news channels showed a damaged van as police officers arrived at the scene. The three passersby who were wounded in the attack were taken to the hospital, where one later died. The two others were said to be in stable condition.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif denounced the attack in separate statements, praised police for their quick response and vowed to eliminate terrorism. They also offered prayers for the casualties.

The Foreign Ministry confirmed the Japanese nationals were unhurt and said it "strongly condemns this heinous act of terrorism. All necessary measures will be taken to bring the perpetrators to justice."

"Pakistan remains committed to ensuring the safety of foreign nationals residing in the country," the ministry said.

The ministry said two Pakistani nationals were killed in Friday's attack, which contradicted the statements from police and hospital officials who said one of the three wounded died. The discrepancy could not immediately be reconciled.

The van was given a police escort following reports of possible attacks targeting foreigners working in Pakistan on various Chinese-funded and other projects, said Tariq Mastoi, a senior police officer. He said 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 separatists or the Pakistani Taliban, who have stepped up attacks on security forces in recent years.

Insurgents have also targeted Chinese 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 northwestern 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.

Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, is the capital of southern Sindh province.

Separately, an Afghan Taliban religious scholar, Mohammad Omar Jan Akhundzada, was killed on Thursday by gunmen inside a mosque in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, a local police officer Akram Ullah said.

No one claimed responsibility for that attack.

Chief Afghan Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid on Friday denounced the killing of Akhundzada, saying he taught at a jihadi seminary in Afghanistan's Kandahar province and was a member of the Taliban oversight committee of Islamic scholars.

Many Afghan leaders and scholars lived in Quetta and elsewhere in Pakistan before the Afghan Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in mid-August 2021 as U.S. and NATO forces withdrew. Most then went back and it was unclear why Akhundzada was still in Pakistan.

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,

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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. Binyamin, 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."

Today in History: April 20 2 students kill 12 at Columbine High School

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, April 20, the 111th day of 2024. There are 255 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 20, 1999, the Columbine High School massacre took place in Colorado as two students shot and killed 12 classmates and one teacher before taking their own lives.

On this date:

In 1812, the fourth vice president of the United States, George Clinton, died in Washington at age 72, becoming the first vice president to die while in office.

In 1861, Col. Robert E. Lee resigned his commission in the United States Army. (Lee went on to command the Army of Northern Virginia in the Civil War, and eventually became general-in-chief of the Confederate forces.)

In 1912, Boston's Fenway Park hosted its first professional baseball game while Navin Field (later Tiger Stadium) opened in Detroit. (The Red Sox defeated the New York Highlanders 7-6 in 11 innings; the Tigers beat the Cleveland Naps 6-5 in 11 innings.)

In 1916, the Chicago Cubs played their first game at Wrigley Field (then known as Weeghman Park); the Cubs defeated the Cincinnati Reds 7-6.

In 1971, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the use of busing to achieve racial desegregation in schools.

In 1972, Apollo 16's lunar module, carrying astronauts John W. Young and Charles M. Duke Jr., landed on the moon.

In 1986, following an absence of six decades spent in the West, Russian-born pianist Vladimir Horowitz performed in the Soviet Union to a packed audience at the Grand Hall of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow.

In 2003, U.S. Army forces took control of Baghdad from the Marines in a changing of the guard that thinned the military presence in the capital.

In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI celebrated his final Mass in the United States before a full house in Yankee Stadium, blessing his enormous U.S. flock and telling Americans to use their freedoms wisely.

In 2010, an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil platform, leased by BP, killed 11 workers and caused a blow-out that began spewing an estimated 200 million gallons of crude into the Gulf of Mexico. (The well was finally capped nearly three months later.)

In 2012, a judge ruled that George Zimmerman could be released on \$150,000 bail while he awaited trial

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on a charge of murdering 17-year-old Trayvon Martin during a February 2012 confrontation in a Sanford, Florida gated community. (Zimmerman was acquitted.)

In 2013, a magnitude-7.0 earthquake struck the steep hills of China's southwestern Sichuan province, leaving nearly 200 people dead.

In 2016, five former New Orleans police officers pleaded guilty to lesser charges in the deadly shootings on a bridge in the days following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said reports of accidental poisonings from cleaners and disinfectants were up about 20 percent in the first three months of the year; researchers believed it was related to the coronavirus epidemic.

In 2022, Russian forces tightened the noose around die-hard Ukrainian defenders holed up at a Mariupol steel plant amid desperate new efforts to open an evacuation corridor for trapped civilians in the ruined city.

In 2023, The giant new rocket from Elon Musk's SpaceX exploded minutes after blasting off on its first test flight and crashed into the Gulf of Mexico.

Today's Birthdays: Former Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., is 88. Actor George Takei is 87. Singer Johnny Tillotson is 86. Bluegrass singer-musician Doyle Lawson (Quicksilver) is 80. Actor Judith O'Dea is 79. Rock keyboardist Craig Frost (Grand Funk Railroad, Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet Band) is 76. Actor Jessica Lange is 75. Actor Veronica Cartwright is 75. Actor Clint Howard is 65. Actor Crispin Glover is 60. Actor Andy Serkis is 60. Olympic silver medal figure skater Rosalynn Sumners is 60. Actor William deVry is 56. Country singer Wade Hayes is 55. Actor Shemar Moore is 54. Actor Carmen Electra is 52. Reggae singer Stephen Marley is 52. Rock musician Marty Crandall (The Shins) is 49. Actor Joey Lawrence is 48. Country musician Clay Cook (Zac Brown Band) is 46. Actor Clayne Crawford is 46. Actor Tim Jo is 40. Actor Carlos Valdes (TV: "The Flash") is 35.