

Groton Daily Independent

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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.

Tuesday, April 23

Senior Menu: Pork roast, mashed potatoes and gravy, broccoli and carrots peaches whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sandwich.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, tri taters.

Track at Groton Area, 11 a.m.

Girls Golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



"Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going."

-JIM ROHN

Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Olive Grove Annual Meeting, 7 p.m., Clubhouse

Wednesday, April 24

Senior Menu: Turkey sub sandwich, lettuce and tomato macaroni salad, tropical fruit.

School Breakfast: French toast.

School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, corn.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

High School Baseball: Varsity vs. Madison at 7 p.m. in Groton.

Thursday, April 25

Senior Menu: Ham, sweet potatoes, vegetable blend Provence, baked apples dinner roll.

School Breakfast: Muffins.

School Lunch: Chicken strips, waffle fries.

Girls Golf at Redfield 10 a.m.

Middle School Spring Concert 7 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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1440

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The Supreme Court today will hear arguments on whether a US city can fine or jail people for sleeping outside. The hearing comes amid a rise in housing costs and record levels of homelessness; last year, more than 650,000 people in the US were estimated to be homeless on any given night.

The US military will fully withdraw its roughly 1,000 troops from Niger after the two sides failed to reach a deal allowing American forces to remain in the country, officials said over the weekend. The frayed alliance ends eight months after the Niger military overthrew the government, a move eventually designated as an illegal coup by the US.

The Senate passed a law reauthorizing part of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act minutes after Friday's midnight deadline, overcoming opposition from privacy advocates and former President Donald Trump.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Taylor Swift's "The Tortured Poets Department" hauls in 300 million streams on Spotify on its opening day, a Spotify record ... the album also sold 1.4 million copies on its first day, the most ever for a Swift album.

Roman Gabriel, former NFL MVP and NFL's first Filipino American QB, dies at 83. Sir Andrew Davis, longtime conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, dies at 80.

Kenya's Peres Jepchirchir and Alexander Mutiso Munyao win women's and men's titles at London Marathon. LSU wins its first-ever NCAA women's gymnastics championship.

Science & Technology

Australia's Great Barrier Reef is currently experiencing the worst mass coral bleaching event on record, researchers say. Phenomenon occurs when changing water temperatures cause coral to expel colorful algae, potentially leading to coral death.

Researchers find evidence of cosmic ray bombardment on Earth's surface roughly 42,000 years ago, during a period when the planet's geomagnetic field temporarily flipped.

Scientists identify brain circuit governing foraging behavior in animals; decision making combined history of reward and whether waiting longer increased the amount of food available at different locations.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed Friday (S&P 500 -0.9%, Dow +0.6%, Nasdaq -2.1%); six-day losing streak for the S&P 500 and Nasdaq is the worst for the two since October 2022.

Tesla cuts Full Self-Driving software cost in the US by one-third (\$12K to \$8K) as CEO Elon Musk scraps plans on releasing low-cost electric vehicle to prioritize proliferation of self-driving technology.

Volkswagen workers in Chattanooga, Tennessee, plant vote to unionize Friday, part of United Auto Workers broader push to unionize workers at 10 foreign carmakers with plants in the US; vote at Mercedes plant in Alabama to take place next month.

Politics & World Affairs

House passes \$95B aid package to Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan Saturday, sending bills to Senate; House bill would also ban TikTok in the US unless China-based parent company ByteDance divests.

Fourteen people killed in Israeli military raid in the West Bank. The US expected to sanction Israeli military unit Netzah Yehuda as soon as today for actions in the West Bank prior to Oct. 7 Hamas attacks.

Ecuador voters head to the polls on referendum with 11 measures to expand powers of police and armed forces to combat violence and crime; crime has been on the rise, with at least a dozen politicians killed since January 2023.

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Land of the Queens!

Four queens showed up at the Princess Prom held Sunday at the GHS Gym. Left to right they are Anna Fjeldheim, Homecoming Queen; Anna Bisbee, Miss WOLF Pack's Teen; Faith Flihs, Groton Senior Snow Queen; and Emma Schinkel, Carnival of Silver Skates Queen. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460

Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Exercise reduces joint pain and helps
fight tiredness. - Mayo Clinic

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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

Regular School Board Meeting

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

AGENDA:

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

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

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

NEW BUSINESS:

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

ADJOURN

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BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY

April 23, 2024 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Resolutions for Assessor's Office
 - a. Res #18-24 - Discretionary Formula Specific Historic District
 - b. Res #19-24 - Discretionary for Industrial within Industrial Zoning
 - c. Res #20-24 - Discretionary Assessment for Certain Platted Residential Lots
 - d. Res #21-24 - Discretionary Resolution
5. Allison Tunheim, HR Director
 - a. Approve & Authorize HR Director to sign the Employee Benefit Contracts
6. Operating Transfers from General Fund
7. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Revised Jail Housing Agreement with Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate
8. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Weed & Pest Grants from SD Weed & Pest Control Commission
 - a. Yearly Contractual Grant
 - b. Yellow Toadflax Biological Control Grant
9. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent
 - a. Discuss Load Limits
 - b. Department Update
10. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of April 16, 2024
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Abatements
 - e. Claim Assignments
 - f. Zoning Ordinance - Set Hearing Date/Authorize Advertising
 - g. Plats
 - h. Auditors Report of Accounts
11. Other Business
12. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
13. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

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Access Code: 601-168-909 #

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Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at <https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>

“Dry skin? Join the club”

An exceedingly common question I get in clinic, especially in the heart of a South Dakota winter, is how to remedy dry skin. And the questions aren't just in clinic; my own kids, family, friends, everyone seems to have an occasional problem with dry and irritated skin.

Dry skin is something we are all familiar with; if your dry spots come with a rash or anything else unusual, it may be worth showing it to your primary care provider, as it could be something else entirely. Eczema, a common inflammatory skin condition, often goes along with and is made worse by dryness.

Soothing your dry skin doesn't have to be fancy or expensive. There are a handful of tricks we can all use to help ourselves when it comes to dryness. The first advice is to avoid things that cause your skin to become drier. For many, that means to bathe less. That's right; I said it: bathe less.

Every time you bathe or shower, it washes away natural oils on the skin. Often our instinct when our skin becomes irritated is to wash it more, but in this case more is not better. Of course, I'm not asking you to forego hygiene entirely. But most people can probably bathe every other or every third day. This is especially true of babies and kids who struggle with eczema – cut down the daily baths.

When we do bathe or shower, we can modify factors that will worsen dry skin. The hotter the water, the drier the skin afterward, so try lowering the temperature a bit. Less time spent in the bath or shower can help. And be mindful of the soap or cleanser you use – to reduce dryness, use less soap and a gentler soap. For kids who love the tub, skip the bubble bath and just put some gentle soap on a washcloth at the end of the bath when it is time to wash up.

After that bath or shower, how do you choose from the hundreds of creams or lotions out there claiming to soothe dry skin? The dermatologists I know love products with petroleum jelly (i.e. Vaseline®) for dry skin; remember, I said this didn't need to be fancy! Stick with fragrance-free products and keep it simple. Whatever you choose, slather it on as soon as the skin is dry.

Dry skin affects many of us, but I hope these tips will help the next time you find yourself irritated with this common condition.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices internal medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust, on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

Draft week is here!

As many of you know, the NFL draft is one of my favorite times of the year. I like to compare it to Christmas morning because we can see the gifts under the tree (draft picks), but we don't know what's in them. Will it be the shiny new toy we've been begging Santa for (a new quarterback)? Or will it be boring but useful like some new socks and underwear (a kicker in the middle rounds)? We won't know until we open the presents – but luckily for us, we only have a few more days to wait.

In my previous articles, I tossed out a few names to familiarize yourself with. Today I'll be doing a mock draft of the first five rounds, (since the 6th and 7th rounds are usually players who may not even make the team). I'll be using Pro Football Network's mock draft tool, which I highly recommend checking out yourself, as it has a ton of great features and doesn't cost anything. Just remember, take this all with a grain of salt. The draft is a crapshoot and trying to predict what happens is virtually impossible.

In this mock draft, I traded for the third pick before the draft even started. I firmly believe the six projected first-round quarterbacks fall into two tiers – with Caleb Williams, Jayden Daniels, and Drake Maye in tier one, and JJ McCarthy, Bo Nix, and Michael Penix Jr. making up tier two. By trading into the top three, I guarantee that one of those top-tier QBs will be available. Unfortunately, the cost to trade up from 11 to 3 is steep. New England would settle for nothing less than three first-round picks (11, 23, and next year's 1st), but I got them to toss in a couple of mid-round picks (68 and 103) to go along with the third overall which helped balance the trade.

With the third overall pick in the 2024 NFL Draft, the Minnesota Vikings select... nobody. Caleb Williams and Drake Maye went first and second, respectively, leaving Jayden Daniels available with our pick. As I was getting ready to make the pick, the LA Chargers called, offering picks 5 and 37 for 3 and 68. I knew the Chargers weren't going to take a QB, but it was still a gamble because a QB-needy team could have moved up to number four and swiped Daniels from us. Luckily the gamble paid off and two receivers were drafted at three (Marvin Harrison Jr.) and four (Rome Odunze). And so....

With the fifth overall pick of the 2024 NFL Draft, the Minnesota Vikings select Jayden Daniels, quarterback, LSU. I'm beyond excited. Daniels is the most recent Heisman winner, throwing for 3,812 yards and 40 touchdowns plus 1,134 yards and 10 touchdowns on the ground. He has an incredibly high ceiling as long as the team builds their offense around him, similar to Lamar Jackson in Baltimore.

With the 37th pick, the Vikings draft Byron Murphy II, defensive tackle from Texas. The Vikings are able to upgrade the defensive line by adding Murphy, who many consider to be a first-round caliber player.

With the 103rd pick, I chose Jermaine Burton, wide receiver, Alabama. I was hoping Johnny Wilson would make it this far, but he's off the board so I went with plan B. Burton has elite speed and can take the top off opposing defenses. He'll make a great WR3.

With the 108th pick, I wanted to fill what I feel is the last remaining hole on the Vikings' roster, so I drafted Tanor Bortolini, the center from Wisconsin. Bortolini can also play guard and will get a chance to compete for a starting spot on the Vikings' offensive line.

For pick 129, I had my eyes on a few different players. There were two pass rushers I liked (Jalyx Hunt and Jonah Elliss), and a couple of cornerbacks (Cam Hart and Khyree Jackson). Unfortunately, all four players were drafted right before our pick, forcing me to change my strategy and grab the highest remaining player on the board. So, with the 129th pick, the Vikings take Javon Bullard, safety, Georgia. With Harrison Smith nearing the end of his career, the Vikings need a plan to replace him. Hopefully, this Georgia safety works out better than the last one the Vikings drafted.

With the 157th pick, I went with Ray Davis, running back, Kentucky. I expect the Vikings to take a running back at some point in the draft, considering Aaron Jones is only signed to a one-year deal.

And with the final pick of this mock draft I go with another offensive lineman - Matt Goncalves, tackle from Pittsburgh. He adds some depth to the o-line and can play both left and right tackle.

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EarthTalk®
From the Editors of E - The Environmental Magazine

Dear EarthTalk: Woe the pancakes! Is maple syrup really at risk due to global warming?

-- B. Simmons, Middlebury, VT

Maple syrup, that staple of the American breakfast table, is not only a cherished product across North America, but also plays a significant role in the economies of Quebec and Vermont. This industry generates hundreds of millions of dollars yearly and supports thousands of livelihoods. But its very foundation is under threat from global warming.

The disruption in the switch between cold nights and warm days of early spring, crucial for sap flow, poses a severe challenge to the industry's future.

The organization, Audubon Vermont tells how "a warming climate also presents challenges in shortening the length of the sugaring season"—a critical period for syrup production. This shift not only affects the timing but also threatens to make annual production levels unpredictable. For one, studies project that by the end of the century, the sugaring season could start up to a month earlier, with significant variability in production especially affecting regions at the southern and northern limits of maple tree ranges.

The warming climate is not just affecting the timing of sap flow, but also its quality. As maple trees undergo warmer temperatures and extended growing seasons, they consume more sugar for growth, potentially reducing the sap's sugar content. This necessitates more sap to produce the same amount of syrup, thus increasing effort and resources needed for production. Also, the changing climate may pave the way for invasive species that threaten maple trees, further complicating the challenges.

The impacts of climate change on maple syrup production are not uniform across North America. "Folks who retrieve sap from maple trees in the far Northeastern region will get a longer sap flow season while those in the Southeastern regions will see a reduction," says David Cleaves, Climate Change Advisor for the U.S. Forest Service. This geographic shift underscores the need for flexible and adaptive management strategies to sustain the industry with the changing climate conditions.

Despite these prevalent challenges, there is hope through adaptation and innovation. Ensuring the health of maple forests and maintaining tree diversity are pivotal strategies. Innovations in sap collection technology, for example, are allowing for sap gathering at less-than-optimal temperatures, showcasing the industry's resilience and adaptability.

Beyond the challenges posed by climate change, the industry also faces threats from environmental degradation and economic factors that could further jeopardize its sustainability. Economically, the industry must contend with fluctuating market demands and the risk of cheaper, synthetic alternatives undermining traditional maple syrup. Additionally, the labor-intensive nature of sap collection and syrup production may face challenges in attracting and retaining the necessary workforce. These multifaceted threats require an innovative approach to safeguard the industry, emphasizing not only climate adaptation but also environmental conservation and economic resilience.



Global warming has thrown seasonal predictability out of whack and the maple syrup "industry" is reeling... Credit: Pexels.com.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Forest Service bans prairie dog hunting in part of SD's Conata Basin to protect endangered ferrets

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - APRIL 21, 2024 2:00 PM

The U.S. Forest Service published a final, permanent order Friday that prohibits prairie dog hunting in part of the Buffalo Gap National Grassland in southwestern South Dakota.

The order covers about 125 square miles of black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat in the Conata Basin, within the grassland's Wall Ranger District in Jackson and Pennington counties. The ferrets also inhabit neighboring Badlands National Park.

The black-footed ferret is one of the most endangered mammals in North America and the only ferret species native to the continent. The ferrets prey on prairie dogs, which were decimated by disease in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

The Forest Service had been reissuing temporary bans on prairie dog hunting in the Conata Basin area every 30 days since 2018.

The rest of the nearly 1,000-square-mile national grassland remains open to prairie dog hunters. The order does not affect other types of recreational shooting and does not impact shooting on private or state-owned land.

Permanently closing part of the Conata Basin to prairie dog hunting will "maintain quality ferret habitat with a sufficient food source (prairie dogs), prevent incidental take of the endangered black-footed ferret, and address the safety of agency and contractor personnel as they study and manage the ferrets," the Forest Service wrote in its justification for the permanent order.

The same document noted that prairie dog hunting is "one of the top reasons that people contact the Wall Ranger District."

"While prairie dog hunting can economically benefit outfitters and guides and other local businesses," the document said, "frequent or intense hunting can affect prairie dog population size, behavior, and reproductive rates."

COMMENTARY

Native American voices are finally factoring into energy projects

A hydropower ruling is a victory for environmental justice on tribal lands

EMILY BENTON HITE

DENIELLE PERRY

The U.S. has a long record of extracting resources on Native lands and ignoring tribal opposition, but a decision by federal energy regulators to deny permits for seven proposed hydropower projects suggests that tide may be turning.

As the U.S. shifts from fossil fuels to clean energy, developers are looking for sites to generate electricity from renewable sources. But in an unexpected move, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission denied permits on Feb. 15, 2024, for seven proposed hydropower projects in Arizona and New Mexico.

The reason: These projects were located within the Navajo Nation and were proposed without first

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consulting with the tribe. FERC said it was “establishing a new policy that the Commission will not issue preliminary permits for projects proposing to use Tribal lands if the Tribe on whose lands the project is to be located opposes the permit.”

We are a cultural anthropologist and a water resource geographer who have studied tensions between Indigenous rights, climate governance and water management in the U.S. and globally for over 20 years. In our view, the commission’s decision could mark a historic turning point for government-to-government relations between the U.S. government and tribal nations.

How might this new approach shape future energy development on tribal lands throughout the U.S.? Given the federal government’s long history of exploiting Native American resources without tribal consent, we’re following FERC’s actions for further evidence before assuming that a new era has begun.

Extraction on tribal lands

Around the world, many Indigenous communities argue that their lands have been treated as sacrifice zones for development. This includes the U.S., where the federal government holds 56.2 million acres in trust for various tribes and individuals, mostly in western states.

The trust responsibility requires the U.S. government to protect Indigenous lands, resources and rights and to respect tribal sovereignty. Consulting with tribes about decisions that affect them is fundamental to this relationship.

Energy resources on U.S. Native lands include coal, oil, uranium, solar, wind and hydropower. There is a long history of coal and uranium mining in Navajo territory in the Southwest, and tribal lands now are targets for renewable energy projects. Large fractions of known reserves of critical minerals for clean energy, like copper and cobalt, are on or near Native lands.

Many past energy projects have left scars. Navajo lands are studded with abandoned uranium mining sites that threaten residents’ health. Over 1.1 million acres of tribal lands have been flooded by hundreds of dams built for hydropower and irrigation. Fossil fuel pipelines like Dakota Access in North Dakota and Line 5 in Wisconsin and Michigan carry oil across Native lands, threatening water supplies in the event of leaks or spills.

Hydropower project impacts

The seven permits FERC denied in February 2024 were requested by private companies seeking to build pumped hydropower storage projects. These systems pump water uphill to a reservoir for storage. When power is needed, water is released to flow downhill through turbines, generating electricity as it returns to a lower reservoir or river.

Currently there are over 60 pumped storage proposals pending across the U.S. Pumped storage typically requires constructing massive concrete-lined tunnels, powerhouses, pipelines and transmission systems that can damage surrounding lands.

Withdrawing water for hydropower could disrupt rivers and sacred sites that are culturally and spiritually important for many tribes. These projects also threaten water security – a critical issue in arid western states.

Colorado River water is already over-allocated among western states, which hold legal rights to withdraw more water than is in the river. As a result, many pumped storage projects would require groundwater to fill their reservoirs. The proposed Big Canyon project in Arizona, for example, would require up to 19 billion gallons of groundwater, taken from aquifers that support local springs and streams.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is an independent agency that licenses and oversees interstate transmission of electricity, natural gas and oil; natural gas pipelines and terminals; and hydropower projects. Under a 1986 law, the agency is required to consider factors including environmental quality, biodiversity, recreational activities and tribal input in making licensing decisions.

However, the U.S. government has a long record of carrying out projects despite Native opposition. For example, under the Pick-Sloan Plan, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built five dams on the Missouri

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River in the late 1950s and early 1960s that flooded over 350,000 acres of tribal lands. Tribes were not consulted, and communities were forcibly relocated from their ancestral homelands.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 13175, directing federal agencies to engage in “regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with tribal officials” in developing federal policies that affect tribes. Each agency interprets how to do this.

In his first week in office in 2021, President Joe Biden reaffirmed this responsibility and nominated U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Interior – the first Native American to head the agency that administers the U.S. trust responsibility to Native Americans and Alaska Natives.

FERC’s new direction

Tribes have called FERC’s record of consultation with Native Americans “abysmal.” Recently, however, the agency has started to make its operations more inclusive.

In 2021, it created a new Office of Public Participation, a step its then-chair, Richard Glick, called “long overdue.” And in 2022, the agency released its Equity Action Plan, designed to help underserved groups participate in decisions.

In canceling the projects in February, FERC cited concerns raised by the Navajo Nation, including negative impacts on water, cultural and natural resources and biological diversity. It also stated that “To avoid permit denials, potential applicants should work closely with Tribal stakeholders prior to filing applications to ensure that Tribes are fully informed about proposed projects on their lands and to determine whether they are willing to consider the project development.”

Aligning clean energy and environmental justice

Many more energy projects are proposed or envisioned on or near tribal lands, including a dozen pumped storage hydropower projects on the Colorado Plateau. All 12 are opposed by tribes based on lack of consultation and because tribes are still fighting to secure their own legal access to water in this contested basin under the 1922 Colorado River Compact.

We recently analyzed FERC’s handling of the Big Canyon pumped hydropower storage project, which would be located on Navajo land in Arizona, and concluded that the agency had not adequately consulted with the tribe in its preliminary permitting. In the wake of its February ruling, the agency reopened the public comment period on Big Canyon for an additional 30 days, with a decision likely later in 2024.

The Biden administration has set ambitious targets for halting climate change and accelerating the shift to clean energy while promoting environmental justice. In our view, meeting those goals will require the federal government to more earnestly and consistently live up to its trust responsibilities.

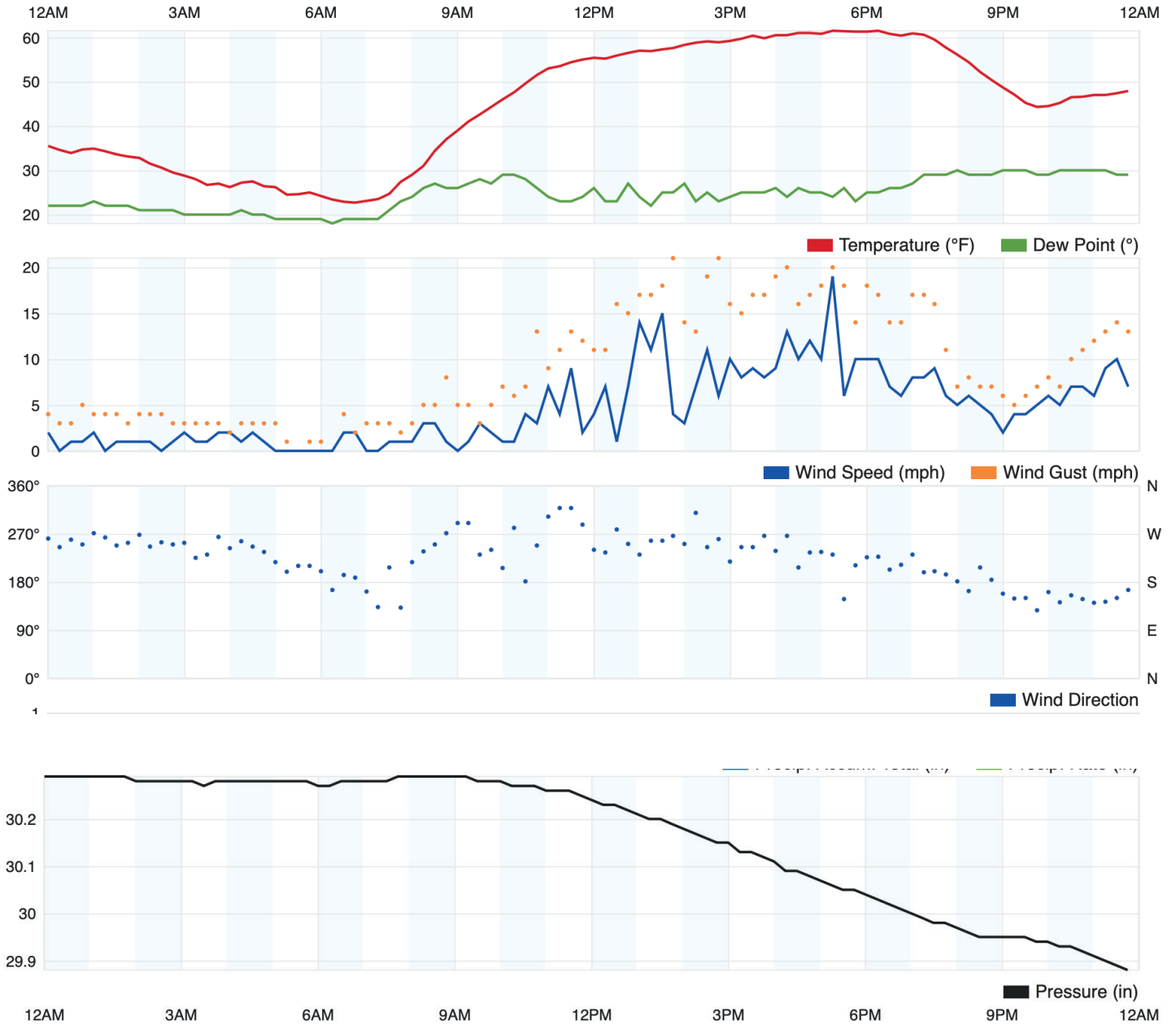
The Conversation.gif
Emily Benton Hite is an assistant professor of sociology and anthropology at Saint Louis University. She studies the intersection of Indigenous rights and hydropower development within the context of climate governance. She also is a primary investigator at the Water Institute and regional co-chair of the Global River Protection Coalition.

Denielle Perry is associate professor at the School of Earth and Sustainability at Northern Arizona University. She investigates river governance issues around the globe with a political ecology lens and through use of multiple methods.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs






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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
 				
Slight Chance Showers then Becoming Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Breezy then Mostly Clear	Partly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny
High: 67 °F	Low: 40 °F	High: 58 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 65 °F

Warmth Continues

<u>Monday</u>	<u>Tuesday</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>
		
Highs: 64-71°F Lows: 37-42°F	Highs: 56-60°F Lows: 33-37°F	Highs: 59-67°F Lows: 43-47°F
Elevated Afternoon Fire Weather	Isolated AM showers Afternoon gusts of 35+ mph possible	

April 21, 2024 2:35 PM

West to northwest winds increase this afternoon at the same time that relative humidity values drop below 20 percent.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 62 °F at 5:40 PM

Low Temp: 23 °F at 6:37 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 1:44 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 57 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1990

Record Low: 15 in 2015

Average High: 61

Average Low: 34

Average Precip in April.: 1.19

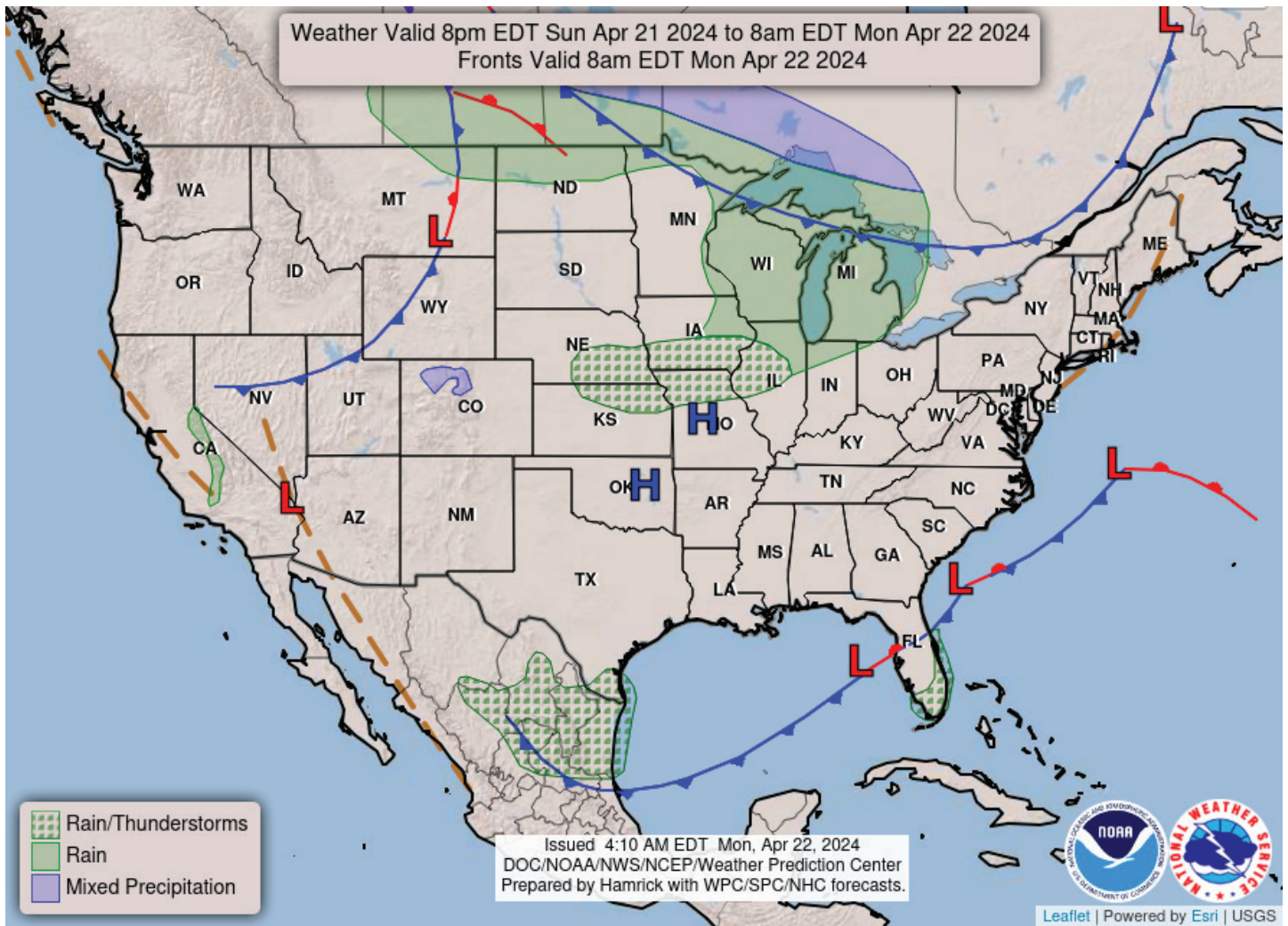
Precip to date in April: 2.34

Average Precip to date: 3.25

Precip Year to Date: 3.29

Sunset Tonight: 8:29:39 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:30:13 am



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Today in Weather History

April 22, 1968: A late season snow storm affected most of South Dakota, with the heaviest snowfall measuring 18 inches at Eagle Butte. Also, localized icing damaged utility lines, and 40 mph winds caused localized blizzard conditions. Some calf losses were reported.

April 22, 1992: With a fresh blanket of snow from a recent snowstorm helping to keep the air cool the high temperature at Sioux Falls only reached 31 degrees. This cold temperature is the latest below freezing high temperature on record in Sioux Falls.

April 22, 2001: Heavy snow of 7 to 15 inches fell across much of central and northeast South Dakota from early on the 22nd to early on the 23rd. Some freezing rain also brought heavy icing in Buffalo, Eastern Lyman, and far southern Roberts counties resulting in some downed trees and branches along with some downed power lines. This late season snowstorm caused many travel problems along with some accidents. There were many vehicles in the ditch along Interstate-29 in Roberts County. Many schools and events were either canceled or delayed on the 22nd and 23rd. The heavy snow also caused problems with ranchers and their livestock with some calves lost in the storm. Around 9:30 am on the 23rd in Kennebec, the heavy snow resulted in the roof of the 40 by 64-foot feed and seed warehouse to collapse. Late season record snowfalls were set at Aberdeen and Pierre. Some snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Timber Lake and Leola, 8 inches at Eagle Butte, Mobridge and Aberdeen, 9 inches at Kennebec and Pollock, 10 inches at Gettysburg, Selby, Redfield, and Webster, and 11 inches at Onida, Mission Ridge, Hosmer, and Columbia. Locations with snowfall amounts of a foot or more included, 12 inches at Britton, Ree Heights, Highmore, Blunt, Seneca, and Pierre, 13 inches at Murdo, Presho, Miller, and Wilmot, 14 inches at Roy Lake and southwest of Harrod, and 15 inches at Saint Lawrence.

1883: A tornado outbreak from Louisiana to Kansas claimed the lives of at least 127 people and injured over 800 others. One of the tornadoes destroyed the town of Beauregard, Mississippi. Click [HERE](#) for more information from GenDisasters.com.

1978: Lightning sometimes strikes tents. In this case, a tent containing some sleeping Girl Scouts was hit by lightning as they were camping at DeGray Lake in Arkansas. Two of the Girl Scouts suffered minor burns.

1980 - A record April heat wave sent the mercury up to the 100 degree mark in Iowa. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Fifteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 96 degrees at Pensacola FL established a record for the month of April. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Heavy snow fell over northern Nebraska, with 15 inches reported at Mullen. Heavy snow also blanketed the mountains of northern Arizona, with 16 inches reported at Munds Park. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-seven cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 96 degrees at Omaha was an April record, and the high of 100 degrees at Lubbock TX equalled their record for April. Hill City KS and Liberal KS tied for honors as the hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 103 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Southern and Central High Plains to northwest Florida during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 67 mph at Gillette WY, hail two inches in diameter west of Roswell NM, and deluged Cheyenne OK with 8.68 inches of rain leaving some parts of the town under five feet of water. Temperatures reached the low 90s in the north central U.S. Chamberlain SD and Pickstown SD tied Presidio TX for honors as the hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 94 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) 1999: A one million dollar air charter Bowling 727 flew into large hail. Although the plane and its 66 occupants landed safely, the aircraft was declared a total loss.

2003: Tropical Storm Ana became the first Atlantic tropical storm since records began in 1871 to form during the month April. Maximum sustained winds reached 55 mph. Starting as a non-tropical area of low pressure on the 18th about 210 miles south-southwest of Bermuda, it was classified as a sub-tropical storm early on the 20th, it gained full tropical characteristics near 0000 UTC on the 21st, developing an "eye" feature.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

SAFE AT SEA

The sky was blue and the sea calm. The freighter Summit Venture was completing its journey into the port of Tampa Bay. But before it arrived at the dock, it crashed into the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. Sadly, thirty-one people lost their lives.

The investigation into this tragedy revealed that the captain who was steering the ship at the time of the accident had been in seven prior incidents. What an unfortunate ending for a journey that was intended to end in happiness.

In our journey through life, we have One who is unsurpassed as a Captain. His skills are unmatched, and His compass is never out of line. He can calm seas and bring storms to a safe ending.

On our voyage through life, we have an infallible Captain available to protect us. David wrote, "The Lord says, I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."

When we put our complete confidence in the Lord, we have a Captain who not only cares for our very best but One who will guide us safely through the storms of life until we are safely at home with Him in heaven.

Prayer: We ask, Father, that we might trust in You as the Captain of our lives knowing that Your presence and protection will guard us always. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord says, I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Psalm 32:8



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 1 Days 16 Hrs 12
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.20.24

6 11 14 15 31 5

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 27 Mins 36
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.21.24

23 24 31 33 40 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 42 Mins 36
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.20.24

3 4 8 25 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$66,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 42
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.20.24

25 28 36 38 68 23

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 11 Mins 36
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.20.24

4 35 41 44 58 25

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$115,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 11 Mins 36
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

News from the Associated Press

With homelessness on the rise, the Supreme Court will weigh bans on sleeping outdoors

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court will consider Monday whether banning homeless people from sleeping outside when shelter space is lacking amounts to cruel and unusual punishment.

The case is considered the most significant to come before the high court in decades on homelessness, which is reaching record levels in the United States.

In California and other Western states, courts have ruled that it's unconstitutional to fine and arrest people sleeping in homeless encampments if shelter space is lacking.

A cross-section of Democratic and Republican officials contend that makes it difficult for them to manage encampments, which can have dangerous and unsanitary living conditions.

But hundreds of advocacy groups argue that allowing cities to punish people who need a place to sleep will criminalize homelessness and ultimately make the crisis worse.

The Justice Department has also weighed in. It argues people shouldn't be punished just for sleeping outside, but only if there's a determination they truly have nowhere else to go.

The case comes from the rural Oregon town of Grants Pass, which started fining people \$295 for sleeping outside to manage homeless encampments that sprung up in the city's public parks as the cost of housing escalated.

The measure was largely struck down by the San Francisco-based 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which also found in 2018 that such bans violated the 8th Amendment by punishing people for something they don't have control over.

The case comes after homelessness in the United States grew a dramatic 12%, to its highest reported level as soaring rents and a decline in coronavirus pandemic assistance combined to put housing out of reach for more Americans, according to federal data.

Some voters in northeast India go back to the polls after violence disrupts first day of election

GUWAHATI, India (AP) — Voters at a handful polling places in a northeastern Indian state went back to the polls amid tight security on Monday after violence disrupted the vote last week.

Indian election authorities voided the results at 11 of Manipur state's nearly 3,000 polling stations after armed men damaged election machines during the first day of voting in national elections on Friday.

State officials said that at at least six of the stations, armed men broke the electronic voting machines which citizens use to cast their ballots.

Manipur has been wracked by ethnic violence between the state's two dominant ethnic groups since May 2023. Around 200 people have been killed and over 60,000 displaced as mobs have rampaged through villages and torched houses.

The unrest broke out when Christian Kukis protested a demand by the mostly Hindu Meiteis for a special status that would let them buy land in hills that populated by Kukis and other tribal groups. The clashes have persisted despite the army's presence in Manipur, a state of 3.7 million people tucked in the mountains on India's border with Myanmar.

The world's largest democratic election began in India on Friday, as millions across 21 states cast their votes. The six-week long multi-phase election is seen as a referendum on Narendra Modi, the populist prime minister who has made Hindu nationalism mainstream as he seeks a third, straight term as the country's leader. The votes will be counted on June 4.

The main opposition Congress party on Friday had alleged that the vote was being rigged in Manipur

and demanded re-polling at 47 stations. Earlier that day, there were incidents of clashes among armed groups in the state. Despite the violence, the state saw 66.5% voter turnout.

Other parts of the state will also head to the polls on April 26 for a second phase of voting.

Toxic: How the search for the origins of COVID-19 turned politically poisonous

By DAKE KANG and MARIA CHENG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The hunt for the origins of COVID-19 has gone dark in China, the victim of political infighting after a series of stalled and thwarted attempts to find the source of the virus that killed millions and paralyzed the world for months.

The Chinese government froze meaningful domestic and international efforts to trace the virus from the first weeks of the outbreak, despite statements supporting open scientific inquiry, an Associated Press investigation found. That pattern continues to this day, with labs closed, collaborations shattered, foreign scientists forced out and Chinese researchers barred from leaving the country.

The investigation drew on thousands of pages of undisclosed emails and documents and dozens of interviews that showed the freeze began far earlier than previously known and involved political and scientific infighting in China as much as international finger-pointing.

As early as Jan. 6, 2020, health officials in Beijing closed the lab of a Chinese scientist who sequenced the virus and barred researchers from working with him.

Scientists warn the willful blindness over coronavirus' origins leaves the world vulnerable to another outbreak, potentially undermining pandemic treaty talks coordinated by the World Health Organization set to culminate in May.

At the heart of the question is whether the virus jumped from an animal or came from a laboratory accident. A U.S. intelligence analysis says there is insufficient evidence to prove either theory, but the debate has further tainted relations between the U.S. and China.

Unlike in the U.S., there is virtually no public debate in China about whether the virus came from nature or from a lab leak. In fact, there is little public discussion at all about the source of the disease, first detected in the central city of Wuhan.

Crucial initial efforts were hampered by bureaucrats in Wuhan trying to avoid blame who misled the central government; the central government, which muzzled Chinese scientists and subjected visiting WHO officials to stage-managed tours; and the U.N. health agency itself, which may have compromised early opportunities to gather critical information in hopes that by placating China, scientists could gain more access, according to internal materials obtained by AP.

In a faxed statement, China's Foreign Ministry defended China's handling of research into the origins, saying the country is open and transparent, shared data and research, and "made the greatest contribution to global origins research." The National Health Commission, China's top medical authority, said the country "invested huge manpower, material and financial resources" and "has not stopped looking for the origins of the coronavirus."

It could have played out differently, as shown by the outbreak of SARS, a genetic relative of COVID-19, nearly 20 years ago. China initially hid infections then, but WHO complained swiftly and publicly. Ultimately, Beijing fired officials and made reforms. The U.N. agency soon found SARS likely jumped to humans from civet cats in southern China and international scientists later collaborated with their Chinese counterparts to pin down bats as SARS' natural reservoir.

But different leaders of both China and WHO, China's quest for control of its researchers, and global tensions have all led to silence when it comes to searching for COVID-19's origins. Governments in Asia are pressuring scientists not to look for the virus for fear it could be traced inside their borders.

Even without those complications, experts say identifying how outbreaks begin is incredibly challenging and that it's rare to know with certainty how some viruses begin spreading.

"It's disturbing how quickly the search for the origins of (COVID-19) escalated into politics," said Mark

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Woolhouse, a University of Edinburgh outbreak expert. "Now this question may never be definitively answered."

CLOUDS OF SECRECY

Secrecy clouds the beginning of the outbreak. Even the date when Chinese authorities first started searching for the origins is unclear.

The first publicly known search for the virus took place on Dec. 31, 2019, when Chinese Center for Disease Control scientists visited the Wuhan market where many early COVID-19 cases surfaced.

However, WHO officials heard of an earlier inspection of the market on Dec. 25, 2019, according to a recording of a confidential WHO meeting provided to AP by an attendee. Such a probe has never been mentioned publicly by either Chinese authorities or WHO.

In the recording, WHO's top animal virus expert, Peter Ben Embarek, mentioned the earlier date, describing it as "an interesting detail." He told colleagues that officials were "looking at what was on sale in the market, whether all the vendors have licenses (and) if there was any illegal (wildlife) trade happening in the market."

A colleague asked Ben Embarek, who is no longer with WHO, if that seemed unusual. He responded that "it was not routine," and that the Chinese "must have had some reason" to investigate the market. "We'll try to figure out what happened and why they did that."

Ben Embarek declined to comment. Another WHO staffer at the Geneva meeting in late January 2020 confirmed Ben Embarek's comments.

The Associated Press could not confirm the search independently. It remains a mystery if it took place, what inspectors discovered, or whether they sampled live animals that might point to how COVID-19 emerged.

A Dec. 25, 2019, inspection would have come when Wuhan authorities were aware of the mysterious disease. The day before, a local doctor sent a sample from an ill market vendor to get sequenced that turned out to contain COVID-19. Chatter about the unknown pneumonia was spreading in Wuhan's medical circles, according to one doctor and a relative of another who declined to be identified, fearing repercussions.

A scientist in China when the outbreak occurred said they heard of a Dec. 25 inspection from collaborating virologists in the country. They declined to be named out of fear of retribution.

WHO said in an email that it was "not aware" of the Dec. 25 investigation. It is not included in the U.N. health agency's official COVID-19 timeline.

When health officials from Beijing arrived in Wuhan on Dec. 31, they decided to disinfect the market before collecting samples, destroying critical information about the virus. Gao Fu, then head of the China CDC, mentioned it to an American collaborator.

"His complaint when I met him was that all the animals were gone," said Columbia University epidemiologist Ian Lipkin.

Robert Garry, who studies viruses at Tulane University, said a Dec. 25 probe would be "hugely significant," given what is known about the virus and its spread.

"Being able to swab it directly from the animal itself would be pretty convincing and nobody would be arguing" about the origins of COVID-19, he said.

But perhaps local officials simply feared for their jobs, with memories of firings after the 2003 SARS outbreak still vivid, said Ray Yip, the founding head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention outpost in China.

"They were trying to save their skin, hide the evidence," Yip said.

The Wuhan government did not respond to a faxed request for comment.

Another early victim was Zhang Yongzhen, the first scientist to publish a sequence of the virus. A day after he wrote a memo urging health authorities to action, China's top health official ordered Zhang's lab closed.

"They used their official power against me and our colleagues," Zhang wrote in an email provided to AP by Edward Holmes, an Australian virologist.

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On Jan. 20, 2020, a WHO delegation arrived in Wuhan for a two-day mission. China did not approve a visit to the market, but they stopped by a China CDC lab to examine infection prevention and control procedures, according to an internal WHO travel report. WHO's then-China representative, Dr. Gauden Galea, told colleagues in a private meeting that inquiries about COVID-19's origins went unanswered.

By then, many Chinese were angry at their government. Among Chinese doctors and scientists, the sense grew that Beijing was hunting for someone to blame.

"There are a few cadres who have performed poorly," President Xi Jinping said in unusually harsh comments in February. "Some dare not take responsibility, wait timidly for orders from above, and don't move without being pushed."

The government opened investigations into top health officials, according to two former and current China CDC staff and three others familiar with the matter. Health officials were encouraged to report colleagues who mishandled the outbreak to Communist Party disciplinary bodies, according to two of the people.

Some people both inside and outside China speculated about a laboratory leak. Those suspicious included right-wing American politicians, but also researchers close to WHO.

The focus turned to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a high-level lab that experimented with some of the world's most dangerous viruses.

In early February 2020, some of the West's leading scientists, headed by Dr. Jeremy Farrar, then at Britain's Wellcome Trust, and Dr. Anthony Fauci, then director of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, banded together to assess the origins of the virus in calls, a Slack channel and emails.

They drafted a paper suggesting a natural evolution, but even among themselves, they could not agree on the likeliest scenario. Some were alarmed by features they thought might indicate tinkering.

"There have (been) suggestions that the virus escaped from the Wuhan lab," Holmes, the Australian virologist, who believed the virus originated in nature, wrote in a Feb. 7, 2020, email. "I do a lot of work in China, and I can (assure) you that a lot of people there believe they are being lied to."

American scientists close to researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology warned counterparts there to prepare.

James DeLuc, head of a Texas lab, emailed his Wuhan colleague on Feb. 9, 2020, saying he'd already been approached by U.S. officials. "Clearly addressing this will be essential, with any kind of documentation you might have," he wrote.

The Chinese government was conducting its own secret investigation into the Wuhan Institute. Gao, the then-head of the China CDC, and another Chinese health expert revealed its existence in interviews months and years later. Both said the investigation found no evidence of wrongdoing, which Holmes, the Australian virologist, also heard from another contact in China. But Gao said even he hadn't seen further details, and some experts suspect they may never be released.

WHO started negotiations with China for a further visit with the virus origins in mind, but it was China's Foreign Ministry that decided the terms.

Scientists were sidelined and politicians took control. China refused a visa for Ben Embarek, then WHO's top animal virus expert. The itinerary dropped nearly all items linked to an origins search, according to draft agendas for the trip obtained by the AP. And Gao, the then-head of the China CDC who is also a respected scientist tasked with investigating the origins, was left off the schedule.

Instead, Liang Wannian, a politician in the Communist Party hierarchy, took charge of the international delegation. Liang is an epidemiologist close to top Chinese officials and China's Foreign Ministry who is widely seen as pushing the party line, not science-backed policies, according to nine people familiar with the situation who declined to be identified to speak on a sensitive subject.

Significantly, it was Liang who ordered the Wuhan market disinfected before samples could be collected, according to a Chinese media interview with a top China CDC official that was later deleted. He instead promoted an implausible theory that the virus came from contaminated frozen food imported into China. Liang did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

Most of the WHO delegation was not allowed to go to Wuhan, which was under lockdown. The few who

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did learned little. They again had no access to the Wuhan Institute of Virology or the wildlife market and obtained only scant details about China CDC efforts to trace the coronavirus there.

On the train, Liang lobbied the visiting WHO scientists to praise China's health response in their public report. Dr. Bruce Aylward, a senior adviser to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, saw it as the "best way to meet China's need for a strong assessment of its response."

The new section was so flattering that colleagues emailed Aylward to suggest he "dial it back a bit."

"It is remarkable how much knowledge about a new virus has been gained in such a short time," read the final report, which was reviewed by China's top health official before it went to Tedros.

As criticism of China grew, the Chinese government deflected blame. Instead of firing health officials, they declared their virus response a success and closed investigations into the officials with few job losses.

"There were no real reforms, because doing reforms means admitting fault," said a public health expert in contact with Chinese health officials who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter.

In late February 2020, the internationally respected doctor Zhong Nanshan appeared at a news conference and said that "the epidemic first appeared in China, but it did not necessarily originate in China."

Days later, Chinese leader Xi ordered new controls on virus research. A leaked directive from China's Publicity Department ordered media not to report on the virus origins without permission, and a public WeChat account reposted an essay claiming the U.S. military created COVID-19 at a Fort Detrick lab and spread it to China during a 2019 athletic competition in Wuhan. Days later, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson repeated the accusation.

The false claims enraged U.S. President Donald Trump, who began publicly blaming China for the outbreak, calling COVID-19 "the China virus" and the "kung-flu."

Chinese officials told WHO that blood tests on lab workers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology were negative, suggesting they hadn't been previously infected with bat coronaviruses. But when WHO pressed for an independent audit, Chinese officials balked and demanded WHO investigate the U.S. and other countries as well.

By blaming the U.S., Beijing diverted blame. It was effective in China, where many Chinese were upset by racially charged criticism. But outside China, it fueled speculation of a lab leak coverup.

By the time WHO led another visit to Wuhan in January 2021, a year into the pandemic, the atmosphere was toxic.

Liang, the Chinese health official in charge of two earlier WHO visits, continued to promote the questionable theory that the virus was shipped into China on frozen food. He suppressed information suggesting it could have come from animals at the Wuhan market, organizing market workers to tell WHO experts no live wildlife was sold and cutting recent photos of wildlife at the market from the final report. There was heavy political scrutiny, with numerous Chinese officials who weren't scientists or health officers present at meetings.

Despite a lack of direct access, the WHO team concluded that a lab leak was "extremely unlikely." So it came as an infuriating surprise to Chinese officials when, months later, WHO chief Tedros said that it was "premature" to rule out the lab leak theory, saying such lab accidents were "common," and pressed China to be more transparent.

China told WHO any future missions to find COVID-19 origins should be elsewhere, according to a letter obtained by AP. Since then, global cooperation on the issue has ground to a halt; an independent group convened by WHO to investigate the origins of COVID-19 in 2021 has been stymied by the lack of cooperation from China and other issues.

Chinese scientists are still under heavy pressure, according to 10 researchers and health officials. Researchers who published papers on the coronavirus ran into trouble with Chinese authorities. Others were barred from travel abroad for conferences and WHO meetings. Gao, the then-director of the China CDC, was investigated after U.S. President Joe Biden ordered a review of COVID-19 data, and again after giving interviews on the virus origins.

New evidence is treated with suspicion. In March 2023, scientists announced that genetic material col-

lected from the market showed raccoon dog DNA mixed with COVID-19 in early 2020, data that WHO said should have been publicly shared years before. The findings were posted, then removed by Chinese researchers with little explanation.

The head of the China CDC Institute of Viral Disease was forced to retire over the release of the market data, according to a former China CDC official who declined to be named to speak on a sensitive topic.

"It has to do with the origins, so they're still worried," the former official said. "If you try and get to the bottom of it, what if it turns out to be from China?"

Other scientists note that any animal from which the virus may have originally jumped has long since disappeared.

"There was a chance for China to cooperate with WHO and do some animal sampling studies that might have answered the question," said Tulane University's Garry. "The trail to find the source has now gone cold."

The Latest | 2 suspects arrested in a Jerusalem car attack

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli police said they have arrested two people after a car slammed into pedestrians in Jerusalem on Monday, lightly wounding three.

Footage taken by a CCTV camera and aired by Israeli media showed a car plowing into three ultra-Orthodox Jews, sending at least two flying over the dashboard.

Palestinians have carried out periodic attacks on Israeli cities and towns since the country's war against Hamas began on Oct. 7. During that time, violence has surged in the West Bank.

Also Monday, Palestinian civil defense in Gaza said it had found 210 bodies on the grounds of a Khan Younis hospital, and Israel's chief of military intelligence resigned over the failure to prevent the Oct. 7 attack, the first senior official to do so.

The conflict, now in its seventh month, has sparked regional unrest pitting Israel and the U.S. against Iran and allied militant groups across the Middle East. Israel and Iran traded fire directly this month, raising fears of all-out war.

The war was sparked by the unprecedented Oct. 7 raid into southern Israel in which Hamas and other militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel says militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, at least two-thirds of them children and women. It has devastated Gaza's two largest cities and left a swath of destruction. Around 80% of the territory's population have fled to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave.

The U.S. House of Representatives approved a \$26 billion aid package on Saturday that includes around \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza, which experts say is on the brink of famine, as well as billions for Israel. The U.S. Senate could pass the package as soon as Tuesday, and President Joe Biden has promised to sign it immediately

Currently:

- Israel's chief of military intelligence resigns, citing failure to prevent Oct. 7 attacks
- Israeli strikes on Rafah kill 22, mostly children
- A Palestinian baby in Gaza is born an orphan
- Iran's supreme leader tacitly acknowledges that Tehran hit little in its attack on Israel
- Israel and Iran's apparent strikes and counterstrikes give new insights into both militaries
- Israeli leaders criticize expected U.S. sanctions against military unit in West Bank

Here is the latest:

GAZA HEALTH OFFICIALS REPORT 54 KILLED IN THE LAST 24 HOURS

CAIRO — The Gaza Health Ministry said the bodies of 54 people killed by Israeli strikes have been brought to hospitals over the past 24 hours. Hospitals also received 104 injured, it said Monday.

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That brings the overall Palestinian death toll from the Israel-Hamas war to at least 34,151, the ministry said. Another 77,084 have been injured, it said.

The Health Ministry does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its tallies but has said that women and children make up most of those killed.

The Israeli military says it has killed 12,000 militants, without providing evidence to back up the claim.
210 BODIES FOUND IN SOUTHERN GAZA HOSPITAL

CAIRO — The Palestinian civil defense in the Gaza Strip said Monday it had uncovered 210 bodies from a temporary burial ground inside the main hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis.

The burial area in the Nasser hospital was built when Israeli forces were besieging the facility last month. At the time, people were not able to bury the dead in a cemetery and dug graves in the hospital yard, the group said.

In a statement, the department said a total of 210 bodies have been recovered from the hospital yard since Friday.

The civil defense said some of the bodies were of people killed during the hospital siege. Others were killed when Israeli forces raided the hospital, also last month.

After the military withdrew from Khan Younis earlier this month, residents have been returning to the site in search of the bodies of their loved ones with the aim of burying them in permanent graves elsewhere.

Civil defense workers began recovering bodies from the cemetery more than a week after Israel's military withdrew its forces from the city. The International Committee of the Red Cross has given 1,500 body bags and protective gear to the civil defense to help dig up the cemetery and move the bodies, it said.

Israel sent troops into Khan Younis in December, part of its blistering ground offensive that came in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel.

ISRAELIS PREPARE TO CELEBRATE PASSOVER WITH RELATIVES STILL IN CAPTIVITY

JERUSALEM — Israelis were set to begin celebrating Passover, a holiday meant to symbolize freedom, on Monday, against the backdrop of a brutal war in Gaza and the continued captivity of over 100 hostages in the strip.

Passover is a major Jewish holiday, celebrated over the course of a week, that commemorates the biblical story of the exodus of ancient Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Jews will gather for a meal, called a "seder," on Monday night to read the Passover story aloud.

In Israel, some prepared to leave chairs at the seder table empty to symbolize the captives remaining in Gaza.

Of some 250 hostages captured during the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, roughly 130 remain in captivity. Efforts to strike a deal to secure their return have stalled, and Israeli officials say at least 30 are now dead.

Many Israelis also have friends or family members killed or wounded in the Hamas attack, which killed 1,200 across southern Israel, according to Israeli authorities.

"I can't imagine celebrating Pesach, the freedom holiday, without my son," said Dalit Shtivi, whose son Idan Shtivi is being held hostage in Gaza. "I'm begging there will be a deal."

In Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim, families threw bread into small fires on the street and dunked dishes into cauldrons of boiling water. It's typical for observant Jews to cleanse their homes of "chametz," or grains, before the start of Passover to commemorate the unleavened bread the Jews ate in their flight from Egypt.

2 ARRESTED AFTER JERUSALEM CAR ATTACK

JERUSALEM — Israeli police say they have arrested two suspects believed to have rammed a car into a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem Monday morning, lightly wounding three.

The police said the two suspects were found after fleeing the scene and hiding near a closed business.

The Monday attack was the latest to strike Israeli cities and towns since the war against Hamas broke out on Oct. 7. Palestinians have during that time carried out a number of attacks against Israelis, some of them deadly. During that time, violence has also surged in the West Bank.

ISRAEL ARRESTS SUSPECT IN KILLING OF 14-YEAR OLD SETTLER

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TEL AVIV, Israel — Israeli authorities said they had arrested a suspect in the killing of a 14-year-old Jewish West Bank settler.

The teen's disappearance earlier this month sparked rampages by Israeli settlers in a number of Palestinian communities. At least one Palestinian man was killed, Palestinian health officials said, and dozens were injured in the rampages and in confrontations with the settlers.

A joint statement Monday by the Israeli internal security agency, Shin Bet, Israeli police and the military said Ahmed Dawabsheh, 21, was arrested in an overnight raid in the Palestinian village of Duma. Duma was one of the areas where the settlers rampaged after 14-year-old Binyamin Achimair's disappearance.

The developments were the latest tensions roiling the West Bank, which has seen surging violence since the war in Gaza began on Oct. 7.

3 WOUNDED AS CAR SLAMS INTO PEDESTRIANS IN JERUSALEM

JERUSALEM — Israeli police said a car slammed into pedestrians in Jerusalem on Monday, wounding three people lightly.

The three were injured when a car ran them over in the neighborhood of Romema, northeast of the city center.

Footage of the incident taken by a CCTV camera and aired by Israeli media showed a car plowing into three ultra-Orthodox Jews, sending at least two flying over the dashboard. Two people exit the car with a gun, and appear to attempt to shoot, but fumble with the gun before running out of the camera's view.

Police said they were searching for the two attackers, who they said had exited the vehicle with a sub-machine gun and fled the scene.

Palestinians have carried out a number of attacks in Israeli cities and towns, some of them deadly, since the war against Hamas broke out on Oct. 7.

Israeli military intelligence chief resigns over his role in failing to prevent Oct. 7 attack

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The head of Israeli military intelligence resigned on Monday over the failures surrounding Hamas' unprecedented Oct. 7 attack, the military said, becoming the first senior figure to step down over his role in the deadliest assault in Israel's history.

Maj. Gen. Aharon Haliva's resignation could set the stage for more resignations among Israel's top security brass over Hamas' attack, when militants blasted through Israel's border defenses, rampaged through Israeli communities unchallenged for hours and killed 1,200 people, most civilians, while taking roughly 250 hostages into Gaza. That attack set off the war against Hamas in Gaza, now in its seventh month.

"The intelligence directorate under my command did not live up to the task we were entrusted with. I carry that black day with me ever since, day after day, night after night. I will carry the horrible pain of the war with me forever," Haliva wrote in his resignation letter, which was provided by the military.

Haliva, as well as other military and security leaders, were widely expected to resign in response to the glaring failures that led up to Oct. 7 and the scale of its ferocity.

But the timing of the resignations has been unclear because Israel is still fighting Hamas in Gaza and battling the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah in the north. Tensions with Iran are also at a high following attacks between the two enemies. Some military experts have said resignations at a time when Israel is engaged on multiple fronts is irresponsible and could be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

Shortly after the attack, Haliva had publicly said that he shouldered blame for not preventing the assault as the head of the military department responsible for providing the government and the military with intelligence warnings and daily alerts.

While Haliva and others have accepted blame for failing to stop the attack, others have stopped short, most notably Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has said he will answer tough questions about his role but has not outright acknowledged direct responsibility for allowing the attack to unfold. He has also not indicated that he will step down, although a growing protest movement is demanding elections

be held soon.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid welcomed the resignation, saying it was “justified and dignified.”

“It would be appropriate for Prime Minister Netanyahu to do the same,” he wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

The Hamas attack, which came on a Jewish holiday, caught Israel and its vaunted security establishment entirely off guard. Israelis’ sense of faith in their military — seen by most Jews as one of the country’s most trustworthy institutions — was shattered in the face of Hamas’ onslaught. The resignation could help restore some of that trust.

The attack set off the devastating war that has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to the local health ministry. The ministry’s count doesn’t distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, but it says at least two-thirds of the dead are children and women.

The fighting has devastated Gaza’s two largest cities, and driven 80% of the territory’s population to flee to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave. The war has sparked a humanitarian catastrophe that has drawn warnings of imminent famine.

The attack also sent shock waves through the region. Beyond Hezbollah and Iran, tensions have rocked the Israeli-occupied West Bank, as well as cities and towns within Israel itself.

On Monday, Israeli police said that a car had slammed into pedestrians in Jerusalem, wounding three lightly, and security camera video showed two men exiting the car with a rifle before fleeing the scene. Police later said they arrested the two men.

Europe is the fastest-warming continent, at nearly twice the average global rate, report says

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

NAPLES, Italy (AP) — Europe is the fastest-warming continent and its temperatures are rising at roughly twice the global average, two top climate monitoring organizations reported Monday, warning of the consequences for human health, glacier melt and economic activity.

The U.N.’s World Meteorological Organization and the European Union’s climate agency, Copernicus, said in a joint report that the continent has the opportunity to develop targeted strategies to speed up the transition to renewable resources like wind, solar and hydroelectric power in response to the effects of climate change.

The continent generated 43% of its electricity from renewable resources last year, up from 36% the year before, the agencies say in their European State of the Climate report for last year. More energy in Europe was generated from renewables than from fossil fuels for the second year running.

The latest five-year averages show that temperatures in Europe are now running 2.3 degrees Celsius (4.1 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, compared to 1.3 degrees Celsius higher globally, the report says — just shy of the targets under the 2015 Paris climate accord to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

“Europe saw yet another year of increasing temperatures and intensifying climate extremes — including heat stress with record temperatures, wildfires, heat waves, glacier ice loss and lack of snowfall,” said Elisabeth Hamdouch, the deputy head of unit for Copernicus at the EU’s executive commission.

The report serves up a continental complement for WMO’s flagship state of the global climate report, which has been published annually for three decades, and this year came with a “red alert” warning that the world isn’t doing enough to fight the consequences of global warming.

Copernicus has reported that March marked the 10th straight month of record monthly temperatures. The average sea-surface temperature for the ocean across Europe hit its highest annual level in 2023, the Europe report said.

The European report focuses this year on the impact of high temperatures on human health, noting that deaths related to heat have risen across the continent. It said more than 150 lives were lost directly last year in connection with storms, floods and wildfires.

The cost of weather- and climate-related economic losses in 2023 were estimated at more than 13.4

billion euros (about \$14.3 billion).

"Hundreds of thousands of people were affected by extreme climate events in 2023, which have been responsible for large losses at continental level, estimated to be at least in the tens of billions of euros," said Copernicus director Carlo Buontempo.

Extreme weather fanned heat waves, wildfires, droughts and flooding, the report said. High temperatures have contributed to a loss of glacier ice on the continent, including in the Alps — which have lost about 10% of their remaining glacier ice over the last two years.

Still, the report's authors pointed to some exceptions, such as how temperatures were below average in Scandinavia and Iceland even if the mercury was higher than average across much of the continent as a whole.

Biden is marking Earth Day by announcing \$7 billion in federal solar power grants

By ALEXA ST. JOHN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is marking Earth Day by announcing \$7 billion in federal grants for residential solar projects serving 900,000-plus households in low- and middle-income communities. He also plans to expand his New Deal-style American Climate Corps green jobs training program.

The grants are being awarded by the Environmental Protection Agency, which unveiled the 60 recipients on Monday. The projects are expected to eventually reduce emissions by the equivalent of 30 million metric tons of carbon dioxide and save households \$350 million annually, according to senior administration officials.

Biden's latest environmental announcements come as he is working to energize young voters for his reelection campaign. Young people were a key part of a broad but potentially fragile coalition that helped him defeat then-President Donald Trump in 2020. Some have joined protests around the country of the administration's handling of Israel's war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Senior administration officials said young Americans are keenly invested in the Biden climate agenda and want to actually help enact it. The Climate Corps initiative is a way for them to do that, the officials said.

Solar is gaining traction as a key renewable energy source that could reduce the nation's reliance on fossil fuels, which emit planet-warming greenhouse gases. Not only is it clean, but solar energy can also boost the reliability of the electric grid.

But solar energy can have high costs for initial installation, making it inaccessible for many Americans — and potentially meaning a mingling of environmental policy with election-year politics.

Forty-nine of the new grants are state-level awards, six serve Native American tribes and five are multi-state awards. They can be used for investments such as rooftop solar and community solar gardens.

Biden is making the announcement at northern Virginia's Prince William Forest Park, about 30 miles southwest of Washington. It was established in 1936 as a summer camp for underprivileged youth from Washington, part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps to help create jobs during the Great Depression.

Biden used executive action last year to create the American Climate Corps modeled on Roosevelt's New Deal. He is announcing Monday that nearly 2,000 corps positions are being offered across 36 states, including jobs offered in partnership with the North American Building Trades Unions.

Biden has often used Earth Day as a backdrop to further his administration's climate initiatives. Last year, he signed an executive order creating the White House Office of Environmental Justice, meant to help ensure that poverty, race and ethnic status do not lead to worse exposure to pollution and environmental harm.

He has tried to draw a contrast with GOP congressional leaders, who have called for less regulation of oil production to lower energy prices. Biden officials counter that GOP policies benefit highly profitable oil companies and could ultimately undermine U.S. efforts to compete with the Chinese in the renewable energy sector.

Biden will use his Virginia visit to discuss how "a climate crisis fully manifest to the American people in communities all across the country, is also an opportunity for us to come together," said White House

National Climate Adviser Ali Zaidi.

He said the programs can “unlock economic opportunity to create pathways to middle-class-supporting careers, to save people money and improve their quality of life.”

The awards came from the Solar for All program, part of the \$27 billion “green bank” created as part of a sweeping climate law passed in 2022. The bank is intended to reduce climate and air pollution and send money to neighborhoods most in need, especially disadvantaged and low-income communities disproportionately impacted by climate change.

EPA Deputy Administrator Janet McCabe said she was “looking forward to these funds getting out into the community, giving people skills, putting them to work in their local communities, and allowing people to save on their energy bills so that they can put those dollars to other needs.”

Among those receiving grants are state projects to provide solar-equipped roofs for homes, college residences and residential-serving community solar projects in West Virginia, a non-profit operating Mississippi solar lease program and solar workforce training initiatives in South Carolina.

The taxpayer-funded green bank has faced Republican opposition and concerns over accountability for how the money gets used. EPA previously disbursed the other \$20 billion of the bank’s funds to nonprofits and community development banks for clean energy projects such as residential heat pumps, additional energy-efficient home improvements and larger-scale projects like electric vehicle charging stations and community cooling centers.

Ecuadorians vote overwhelmingly in referendum to approve toughening fight against gangs

GONZALO SOLANO undefined

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — Ecuador’s fledgling president got a resounding victory Sunday in a referendum that he touted as a way to crack down on criminal gangs behind a spiraling wave of violence.

An official quick count showed that Ecuadorians overwhelmingly voted “yes” to all nine questions focused on tightening security measures, rejecting only two more controversial economic proposals.

The quick count was announced by the head of the Electoral National Council, Diana Atamaint. It confirmed a private exit poll released hours before that indicated a resounding victory and sign of support for President Daniel Noboa, the scion of a wealthy banana exporting family.

Among the measures approved are President Noboa’s call to deploy the army in the fight against the gangs, to loosen obstacles for extraditing accused criminals and to lengthen prison sentences for convicted drug traffickers.

Ecuador was traditionally one of South America’s most peaceful countries, but it has been rocked in recent years by a wave of violence, much of it spilling over from neighboring Colombia, the world’s largest producer of cocaine. Last year, the country’s homicide rate shot up to 40 deaths per 100,000 people, one of the highest in the region.

Noboa has rallied popular support by confronting the gangs head on. That task became more urgent in January when masked gunmen, some on orders from imprisoned drug traffickers, terrorized residents and took control of a television station while it was live on the air in an unprecedented show of force.

Following the rampage, the 36-year-old president decreed an “internal armed conflict,” enabling him to use emergency powers to deploy the army in pursuit of about 20 gangs now classified as “terrorists.”

The referendum, in which more than 13 million Ecuadorians were called to vote, contained measures to extend those powers and put them on firmer legal ground.

For some analysts, the Ecuadorian leader must show results to live up to people’s support.

“This gives him some vigor,” said Andrea Endara, analyst and professor at Casa Grande University. But “if the president does not begin to take actions to demonstrate that having voted ‘yes’ brings results to reduce insecurity, this support will quickly be diluted.”

Some of the measures approved imply changes to Ecuador’s constitution, but because they were previ-

ously endorsed by the Constitutional Court, Noboa only needs to publish them in the official gazette to go into effect. Some of those initiatives are the ones related to the use of the army and extradition.

For the changes that require changing some general laws, the president will have to send a reform proposal to the Assembly, which will have 60 days to process them.

Noboa, ahead of the final tally, celebrated the results. "We've defended the country," he said in a message posted on social media. "Now we will have more tools to fight against the delinquent and restore peace to Ecuador's families."

Noboa's law and order rhetoric recalls the policies of El Salvador's wildly popular president, Nayib Bukele, a fellow millennial, and could give him a boost politically as he prepares to run for reelection next year.

Noboa, is serving the final 18 months of a presidential term left vacant when fellow conservative Guillermo Lasso resigned amid a congressional investigation into allegations of corruption. Noboa was elected following a shortened but bloody campaign that saw one of his top rivals brazenly assassinated while campaigning.

"We can't live in fear of leaving our homes," Leonor Sandoval, a 39-year-old homemaker, said after voting for all 11 of the proposals.

From Sin City to the City of Angels, building starts on high-speed rail line

By KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Work is set to begin Monday on a \$12 billion high-speed passenger rail line between Las Vegas and the Los Angeles area, with officials projecting millions of ticket-buyers will be boarding trains by 2028.

Brightline West, whose sister company already operates a fast train between Miami and Orlando in Florida, aims to lay 218 miles (351 kilometers) of new track between a terminal to be built just south of the Las Vegas Strip and another new facility in Rancho Cucamonga, California. Almost the full distance is to be built in the median of Interstate 15, with a station stop in San Bernardino County's Victorville area.

In a statement, Brightline Holdings founder and Chairperson Wes Edens called the moment "the foundation for a new industry."

Brightline aims to link other U.S. cities that are too near to each other for flying between them to make sense and too far for people to drive the distance, Edens said.

CEO Mike Reininger has said the goal is to have trains operating in time for the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg is scheduled to take part in Monday's groundbreaking. Brightline received \$6.5 billion in backing from the Biden administration, including a \$3 billion grant from federal infrastructure funds and approval to sell another \$2.5 billion in tax-exempt bonds. The company won federal authorization in 2020 to sell \$1 billion in similar bonds.

The project is touted as the first true high-speed passenger rail line in the nation, designed to reach speeds of 186 mph (300 kph), comparable to Japan's Shinkansen bullet trains.

The route between Vegas and L.A. is largely open space, with no convenient alternate to I-15. Brightline's Southern California terminal will be at a commuter rail connection to downtown Los Angeles.

The project outline says electric-powered trains will cut the four-hour trip across the Mojave Desert to a little more than two hours. Forecasts are for 11 million one-way passengers per year, or some 30,000 per day, with fares well below airline travel costs. The trains will offer rest rooms, Wi-Fi, food and beverage sales and the option to check luggage.

Las Vegas is a popular driving destination for Southern Californians. Officials hope the train line will relieve congestion on I-15, where motorists often sit in miles of crawling traffic while returning home from a Las Vegas weekend.

The Las Vegas area, now approaching 3 million residents, draws more than 40 million visitors per year. Passenger traffic at the city's Harry Reid International Airport set a record of 57.6 million people in 2023. An average of more than 44,000 automobiles per day crossed the California-Nevada state line on I-15 in

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2023, according to Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority data.

Florida-based Brightline Holdings already operates the Miami-to-Orlando line with trains reaching speeds up to 125 mph (200 kph). It launched service in 2018 and expanded service to Orlando International Airport last September. It offers 16 round-trips per day, with one-way tickets for the 235-mile (378-kilometer) distance costing about \$80.

Other fast trains in the U.S. include Amtrak's Acela, which can top 150 mph (241 kph) while sharing tracks with freight and commuter service between Boston and Washington, D.C.

Ideas for connecting other U.S. cities with high-speed passenger trains have been floated in recent years, including Dallas to Houston; Atlanta to Charlotte, North Carolina; and Chicago to St. Louis. Most have faced delays.

In California, voters in 2008 approved a proposed 500-mile (805-kilometer) rail line linking Los Angeles and San Francisco, but the plan has been beset by rising costs and routing disputes. A 2022 business plan by the California High-Speed Rail Authority projected the cost had more than tripled to \$105 billion.

Aid approval brings Ukraine closer to replenishing troops struggling to hold front lines

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian commander Oleksiy Tarasenko witnessed a frightening shift last month in Russia's efforts to punch through Kyiv's defense of the industrial region known as the Donbas.

Standing against Russia's unyielding advance in the strategic front-line town of Chasiv Yar, he noticed that, instead of making typical light infantry assaults, Moscow's forces were taking brazen risks by launching battalion- and platoon-sized attacks, sometimes with up to 10 combat vehicles.

His men destroyed up to 80 tanks in the weeks that followed, but it did not slow the enemy. The confidence of the Russian military reflected the Kremlin's knowledge that Ukraine's ammunition supplies were dwindling as the U.S. dawdled over approving more military aid.

Saturday's passage by the U.S. House of Representatives of a much-awaited \$61 billion package for Ukraine puts the country a step closer to an infusion of new firepower that will be rushed to the front line to fight Moscow's latest attacks. But the clock is ticking, with Russia using all its might to achieve its most significant gains since its invasion by a May 9 deadline. In the meantime, Kyiv has no choice but to wait for replenishment.

Seeing a window of opportunity, Russia has seized the momentum on the battlefield and forced Kyiv's forces to cede tactically significant territory, one painful meter (yard) after another.

Wave after wave of mechanized units came for Tarasenko's brigade. Protected under an umbrella of attack drones and artillery fire, they reached the foot of Chasiv Yar, which is the gateway to Ukraine's defensive backbone in the Donetsk region.

"They concentrated disproportionately enormous resources in this direction," said Tarasenko, deputy commander of the 5th Separate Assault Brigade. "The most difficult thing is to cope with this constant onslaught from the enemy, which does not change, even though the enemy is losing a lot of military equipment and soldiers."

The Pentagon has said it could get weapons moving to Ukraine within days if the Senate and President Joe Biden give final approval to the aid package. But experts and Ukrainian lawmakers said it could take weeks for the assistance to reach troops, giving Russia more time to degrade Ukrainian defenses.

The seven-month effort to pass the package effectively held Ukraine hostage to the internal politics of its biggest ally. It also raised concerns about how the shifting sands of American politics will influence future military support.

European partners cannot match the volume and scope of American assistance, which remains Kyiv's main hope to win the war. But that support has come with red lines, including rules that forbid using Western-supplied weapons for strikes inside the Russian Federation. Some Ukrainian officials argue that

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such limits handicap their ability to cripple the enemy's more robust capabilities.

Assuming the assistance arrives in the next two months, plans are afoot for a potential late-summer offensive. Analysts have argued that future support should not count on one big decisive battle, but a sustained strategy over many years.

But first, Ukraine must hold off Russia's attempts to break defensive lines and entrenched positions.

In the past month, The Associated Press spoke to a dozen commanders across the active zones of the eastern front line, from Kupiansk in the northeast to Bakhmut farther south. They said their soldiers have rationed shells and struggled to repel enemy attacks with insufficient artillery ammunition.

They are also running critically low on air-defense missiles, not only for high-end Patriot systems that protect cities, but also for tactical air systems. That has given Russian fighter-bombers an opportunity to lob thousands of deadly aerial glide bombs against Ukrainian positions, razing defenses to the ground, something Russia's air force has not been able to do before.

Since January, the Kremlin has seized 360 square kilometers (140 square miles) of Ukrainian territory, roughly the size of the American city of Detroit, according to the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War.

Ukrainian commanders have complained about dire ammunition shortages since late December. By February, heads of artillery units in several regions said they had less than 10% of the supplies they needed as Kyiv rushed to economize shells.

Nowhere are supplies more needed than in Chasiv Yar, where after weeks of fierce fighting, Moscow is intent on conquering the town. Ukraine's commander in chief, Oleksandr Syrski, said Russia's top military leadership ordered its soldiers to capture the town by May 9, Russia's Victory Day, a holiday that marks the defeat of Nazi Germany.

To reach that goal, Russia unleashes daily drone assaults and glide bombs on Ukrainian forces that have no way to counterattack.

Time is of the essence, said Yurii Fedorenko, a battalion commander of the 92nd Brigade in the Chasiv Yar region.

"They simply destroyed our positions with massive strikes. Now those positions are constantly hit by artillery, making it impossible to recapture them," he said.

"Now we have nothing to answer the enemy with," he added.

Commanding men who have reached extreme levels of burnout, Fedorenko acknowledged the Russians were steadily advancing. At the time of the interview, Russian forces were just 500 meters (1,640 feet) from the town, he said.

The soldiers who died to protect land that was lost could have been spared if the U.S. aid had been approved earlier, he said.

"Our losses could be reduced to a minimum, and we would not have lost territories that would later have to be reconquered."

Russia picked up momentum soon after gaining control of Avdiivka in February. Immediately, Moscow's troops sought to reinforce their tactical success and push further into larger, strategically significant towns — Kostiantynivka, Sloviansk and Druzhkivka — that together form the fortress wall of Ukraine's main defense of the Donetsk region.

A win in Chasiv Yar, which had a prewar population of 12,000, would bring Russia one step closer to breaking that barricade.

"If the Russians manage to take Chasiv Yar, they are only about 5 to 7 kilometers away from the southernmost link in that chain," said George Barros, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War. If Russia manages to push into the seam between Kostiantynivka and Druzhkivka, it would be able to attack the fortress belt, he said.

"Then we get into the territory where the Russians might be making some really substantial operational gains and eroding Ukraine's ability to defend the rest of Donetsk," he said.

An injection of new supplies would give Ukrainian forces cover and help them push the enemy back.

But Russia will continue to have the upper hand in both manpower and ammunition. The Russian military has the ability to generate 20,000 to 30,000 new volunteers per month, and it holds a roughly 6-to-1 advantage in artillery.

Until now, that reality has precluded any potential for a Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Russian fighters “do not have the feeling that they will now lose some critical armored vehicle unit or soldier unit for which they will no longer have new reinforcements,” Tarasenko said. “They don’t worry about it. That is their advantage.”

Local election workers fear threats to their safety as November nears. One group is trying to help

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. (AP) — The group gathered inside the conference room, mostly women, fell silent as the audio recording began to play.

The male voice, clearly agitated, railed against what he thought had been fraud that cost former President Donald Trump reelection four years ago.

“You’re gonna pay for it,” said the man, filling his message with expletives and suggesting his target’s throat be slashed with a knife. “We will ... take you out. Your family, your life.”

The call had been directed at one of their own, a city clerk who had overseen elections in 2020 in her suburban Detroit community. The former clerk, Tina Barton, played the recording of the call she had received to an audience that included several dozen local election clerks and a few law enforcement officials who had gathered recently inside an office building conference room in northern Michigan.

“I want you to understand this voicemail is the same type of thing that we’re seeing across the country, and it can find you anywhere you are — small community, large community, Michigan, Arizona. It can find you,” said Barton, who was overseeing elections in Rochester Hills when she received the voicemail a week after the 2020 presidential election.

The recent gathering in Traverse City, a picturesque community on the shores of Lake Michigan in a county that has twice voted for Trump, was part of a national effort to train local election workers on how they can respond to threats and work with law enforcement to counter them.

As the nation barrels toward another highly charged presidential election, the threats to election offices that have been an alarming consequence of Trump’s false claims about his 2020 loss loom as a perilous wildcard for the thousands of local government workers who will oversee the indispensable infrastructure of the nation’s democracy this fall. The constant threats and harassment have contributed to an exodus of election officials across the country.

Barton left her job in Rochester Hills shortly after the 2020 election and later became part of the newly formed Committee for Safe and Secure Elections. Since joining, she has given nearly 100 presentations throughout the country.

Earlier this month, The Associated Press was granted rare access inside the committee’s training session in Traverse City and allowed to observe the scenarios election workers are likely to face this year and the discussions about how they and law enforcement can prepare for them.

“None of these scenarios are sensational. They are all things that have already happened in some way, shape or form across the country,” Barton tells the group. “To say, ‘Oh, that could never happen.’ These things are already happening.”

Barton’s partner in the training is Justin Smith, the former sheriff in Larimer County, Colorado, who signed up after retiring last year and hearing directly from local election officials about the onslaught of threats they have faced since 2020.

During the training, Smith often speaks directly to the police officers and sheriff’s deputies in the room, explaining the role they play in elections and how the environment has changed since 2020. In past years, election officials were likely to deal with issues on their own, such as protesters or unruly citizens looking to promote their candidates at polling places.

"It's not that simple anymore," Smith tells the group. "We need to be at the table and be part of the solution."

To election officials, he explains how law enforcement has historically sought to keep its distance from anything to do with elections, mindful of First Amendment concerns and not wanting to interfere with anyone's right to vote.

Barton guides the election officials through various scenarios and encourages them to think through their responses, when it makes sense to alert law enforcement and when to consider releasing information to the public.

"I know there's been some, maybe disgruntlement across the country from some election officials that feel that they haven't gotten the response from law enforcement that they thought law enforcement should give," Barton tells the election officials. "So these conversations help us understand what they can actually do in those scenarios and what they can't do."

She said election offices might deal with everything from threatening emails and phone calls to an AI-generated robocall sent to poll workers telling them to stay home on Election Day. One of the scenarios Barton presents to the group mirrors events that unfolded in the days immediately after elections last fall, when local election offices in a handful of states received letters in the mail that contained fentanyl, a highly potent synthetic opioid.

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, whose office helped sponsor and coordinate the Traverse City training, said it's imperative for law enforcement and election officials to work together to ensure a smooth election in November.

Benson said her office has been providing grants to election offices to help them boost security. The federal government also is engaged in the effort. The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency will assess the physical security of local election offices and has written guidance for workers on how to de-escalate tense situations.

Michael D. Shea, the sheriff in Grand Traverse County, said he was surprised at how vulnerable election officials can be because of the requirements associated with their job. He said it was understandable to have some concerns about elections, particularly with the use of technology in parts of the voting process, but said he trusted experts and his local election officials.

"The goal is a safe, secure, fair election," said Shea, who attended the training. "And we intend to make that happen."

Race car in Sri Lanka veers off track killing 7 people and injuring 20, officials say

By BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — A race car veered off the track during a competition in Sri Lanka on Sunday and rammed into a crowd of spectators and race officials, killing seven people and injuring 20 others, officials said.

Thousands of spectators looked on as the mishap took place during a race in the town of Diyatalawa in the tea-growing central hills, about 180 kilometers (110 miles) east of the capital Colombo.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the mishap.

Police spokesman Nihal Thalduma said one of the cars veered off the track and crashed into spectators and officials of the event. Seven people, including four officials, were killed and another 20 were being treated at a hospital, said Thalduma. He said three of the injured were in critical condition.

Thalduma said police have launched an investigation into the accident, which was the 17th out of 24 events scheduled. The race was suspended after the accident.

About 45,000 spectators had gathered at the race circuit at a Sri Lankan military academy. The event was organized by the Sri Lankan army and Sri Lanka Automobile Sports.

Prosecutors to make history with opening statements in hush money case against Trump

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — For the first time in history, prosecutors will present a criminal case against a former American president to a jury Monday as they accuse Donald Trump of a hush money scheme aimed at preventing damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public.

A 12-person jury in Manhattan is set to hear opening statements from prosecutors and defense lawyers in the first of four criminal cases against the presumptive Republican nominee to reach trial.

The statements are expected to give jurors and the voting public the clearest view yet of the allegations at the heart of the case, as well as insight into Trump's expected defense.

Attorneys will also introduce a colorful cast of characters who are expected to testify about the made-for-tabloids saga, including a porn actor who says she had a sexual encounter with Trump and the lawyer who prosecutors say paid her to keep quiet about it.

Trump is charged with 34 felony counts of falsifying business records and could face four years in prison if convicted, though it's not clear if the judge would seek to put him behind bars. A conviction would not preclude Trump from becoming president again, but because it is a state case, he would not be able to attempt to pardon himself if found guilty. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

Unfolding as Trump vies to reclaim the White House, the trial will require him to spend his days in a courtroom rather than the campaign trail. He will have to listen as witnesses recount salacious and potentially unflattering details about his private life.

Trump has nonetheless sought to turn his criminal defendant status into an asset for his campaign, fundraising off his legal jeopardy and repeatedly railing against a justice system that he has for years claimed is weaponized against him.

Hearing the case is a jury that includes, among others, multiple lawyers, a sales professional, an investment banker and an English teacher.

The case will test jurors' ability to set aside any bias but also Trump's ability to abide by the court's restrictions, such as a gag order that bars him from attacking witnesses. Prosecutors are seeking fines against him for alleged violations of that order.

The case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg revisits a chapter from Trump's history when his celebrity past collided with his political ambitions and, prosecutors say, he sought to prevent potentially damaging stories from surfacing through hush money payments.

One such payment was a \$130,000 sum that Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, gave to porn actor Stormy Daniels to prevent her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump from emerging into public shortly before the 2016 election.

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.

To convict Trump of a felony, prosecutors must show he not only falsified or caused business records to be entered falsely, which would be a misdemeanor, but that he did so to conceal another crime.

The allegations don't accuse Trump of an egregious abuse of power like the federal case in Washington charging him with plotting to overturn the 2020 presidential election, or of flouting national security protocols like the federal case in Florida charging him with hoarding classified documents.

But the New York prosecution has taken on added importance because it may be the only one of the four cases against Trump that reaches trial before the November election. Appeals and legal wrangling have delayed the other three cases.

Pro-China President Muizzu's party sweeps Maldives parliamentary elections, preliminary results say

By MOHAMEED SHARUHAN Associated Press

MALE, Maldives (AP) — Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's political party has swept parliamentary elections in a strong endorsement of his pro-China foreign policy, according to preliminary results reported Monday by local media.

The People's National Congress won 70 out of 93 seats in Sunday's vote, and along with three seats secured by its allies has taken absolute control of Parliament, according to the preliminary results.

The Maldivian Democratic Party, led by former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as pro-India, held 65 seats in the previous Parliament but won only 15 seats, the news site Mihaaru.com reported.

Official results are expected later Monday.

The election was closely watched by regional powers India and China, which are competing for influence in the archipelago nation, which has a strategic location in the Indian Ocean.

Muizzu's election as president last year sharpened the rivalry between India and China as he took a pro-China stand and acted to remove Indian troops stationed on one of Maldives' islets.

Sunday's election was easier than expected for Muizzu, who had been expected to face a tough fight because some of his allies had fallen out and more parties entered the race.

Six political parties and independent groups fielded 368 candidates for the 93 seats in Parliament. The number of seats is six more than in the previous Parliament following adjustments for population growth.

Muizzu ran for president on a campaign theme of "India out," accusing his predecessor of compromising national sovereignty by giving India too much influence.

At least 75 Indian military personnel were stationed in the Maldives and their known activities were operating two aircraft donated by India and assisting in the rescue of people stranded or faced with calamities at sea. Muizzu has taken steps to have civilians take over those activities.

Relations were strained further when Indian social media activists started a boycott of tourism in Maldives. That was in retaliation for three Maldivian deputy ministers making derogatory statements about Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for raising the idea of promoting tourism in Lakshadweep, India's own string of islands similar to the Maldives.

India has fallen from being the top source of foreign visitors to Maldives to No. 6, according to Maldives government statistics.

Muizzu visited China earlier this year and negotiated an increase in the number of tourists and inbound flights from China.

In 2013, Maldives joined China's "Belt and Road" initiative meant to build ports and highways to expand trade — and China's influence — across Asia, Africa and Europe.

A Palestinian baby in Gaza is born an orphan in an urgent cesarean section after an Israeli strike

By MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Sabreen Jouda came into the world seconds after her mother left it.

Their home was hit by an Israeli airstrike shortly before midnight Saturday. Until that moment, the family was like so many other Palestinians trying to shelter from the war in Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah.

Sabreen's father was killed. Her 4-year-old sister was killed. Her mother was killed.

But emergency responders learned that her mother, Sabreen al-Sakani, was 30 weeks pregnant. In a rush at the Kuwaiti hospital where the bodies were taken, medical workers performed an emergency cesarean section.

Little Sabreen was near death herself, fighting to breathe. Her tiny body lay in the recovery position on a small piece of carpet as medical workers gently pumped air into her open mouth. A gloved hand tapped at her chest.

She survived.

On Sunday, in the hours after the airstrike, she whimpered and wriggled inside an incubator at the nearby Emirati hospital's neonatal intensive care unit. She wore a diaper too big for her and her identity was scrawled in pen on a piece of tape around her chest: "The martyr Sabreen al-Sakani's baby."

"We can say there is some progress in her health condition, but the situation is still at risk," said Dr. Mohammad Salameh, head of the unit. "This child should have been in the mother's womb at this time, but she was deprived of this right."

He described her as a premature orphan girl.

But she is not alone.

"Welcome to her. She is the daughter of my dear son. I will take care of her. She is my love, my soul. She is a memory of her father. I will take care of her," said Ahalam al-Kurdi, her paternal grandmother. She clutched her chest and rocked with grief.

At least two-thirds of the more than 34,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza since this war began have been children and women, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The other Israeli airstrike in Rafah overnight killed 17 children and two women from an extended family.

Not everyone is immediately recovered after such attacks.

"My son was also with them. My son became body parts and they have not found him yet. They do not recognize him," said Mirvat al-Sakani, Sabreen's maternal grandmother. "They have nothing to do with anything. Why are they targeting them? We don't know why, how? We do not know."

On Sunday, the survivors buried the dead. Children in bloodied wraps were placed in body bags and into the dusty ground as families wailed.

Little boys watched and tried to keep their footing at the edge of a grave.

Kennedy says he loves his family 'either way' after relatives endorse Biden's campaign over his

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

ROYAL OAK, Mich. (AP) — Independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on Sunday acknowledged endorsements from more than a dozen of his relatives who are backing Democratic President Joe Biden, noting that he feels no ill will over the family political divide.

"Some of them don't like the fact that I'm running," Kennedy said of his relatives, after a comedy showcase in suburban Detroit to benefit his campaign.

Kennedy — who last year launched an independent presidential bid after first challenging Biden for the Democratic nomination — was reacting to the endorsements from his sister and other relatives last week, a move by the Biden campaign that signals how seriously the president's team is taking a long-shot candidate using his last name's lingering Democratic magic to siphon support from the incumbent.

In Philadelphia, Kerry Kennedy, a daughter of former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, niece of former President John F. Kennedy and sister of the current presidential candidate, called Biden "my hero," saying — without mention of her brother — that the family wanted to "make crystal clear" their support for reelecting Biden.

Biden, who keeps a bust of Robert F. Kennedy in the Oval Office, said the endorsements were "an incredible honor."

Going on to describe family debates he said his father orchestrated among his children, Kennedy said Sunday night that the exercise showed him a respectful way to take opposing positions with people he cares about without taking it personally.

"I debated them with information and passion and not to hate each other because we disagreed with each other," he said. "I love my family, either way."

Kennedy — who mentioned Biden's Oval Office RFK bust, as well as his relatives currently working both in the Biden's administration and on his own presidential campaign — made his remarks in Michigan, where last week, the campaign secured access to the general election ballot. In front of the suburban Detroit

theater ahead of the performances, several dozen protesters opposed Kennedy's appearance, with signs aiming to align Kennedy with former President Donald Trump.

Kennedy has spoken publicly in the past about disagreeing with his family on many issues, but maintains it can be done in "friendly" ways. After a super political action committee supporting his campaign produced a TV ad during the Super Bowl that relied heavily on imagery from John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential run, Kennedy Jr. apologized to his relatives on the X social media platform, saying he was sorry if the spot "caused anyone in my family pain."

"I love my family. I feel that they love me," he said Sunday. "And I wish the same thing would happen for all of our country, where we disagree with each other without hating on each other."

Iran's supreme leader tacitly acknowledges that Tehran hit little in its attack on Israel

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Iran's supreme leader on Sunday dismissed any discussion of whether Tehran's unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel hit anything there, a tacit acknowledgment that despite launching a major assault, few projectiles actually made it through to their targets.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's comments before senior military leaders didn't touch on the apparent Israeli retaliatory strike on Friday on the central city of Isfahan, even though air defenses opened fire and Iran grounded commercial flights across much of the country.

Analysts believe both Iran and Israel, regional archrivals locked in a shadow war for years, are trying to dial back tensions following a series of escalatory attacks between them as the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip rages on and inflames the wider region.

Khamenei, 85, made the comments in a meeting attended by the top ranks of Iran's regular military, police and paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, a powerful force within its Shiite theocracy.

"Debates by the other party about how many missiles were fired, how many of them hit the target and how many didn't, these are of secondary importance," Khamenei said in remarks aired by state television.

"The main issue is the emergence of the Iranian nation and Iranian military's will in an important international arena. This is what matters."

Iran launched hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles that sought to overwhelm Israel's air defenses in the April 13 attack — the first on Israel by a foreign power since Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein launched Scud missiles at Israel in the 1991 Gulf War.

However, Israeli air defenses and fighter jets, backed by the U.S., the United Kingdom and neighboring Jordan, shot down the vast majority of the incoming fire.

Satellite images analyzed Saturday by The Associated Press showed the Iranian attack caused only minor damage at the Nevatim air base in southern Israel, including taking a chunk out of a taxiway that Israel quickly repaired.

Iran's attack came in response to a suspected Israeli strike on April 1 targeting a consular building next to the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, Syria, which killed two Guard generals and others.

"Today, thanks to the work done by our armed forces, the Revolutionary Guard, the army, the police, each in its own way, praise be to Allah the image of the country around the world has become commendable," added Khamenei, despite Iran facing public anger over its economy and crackdowns on dissent.

In other developments, Iraqi security forces in the western Nineveh province area were searching for "outlaw elements" who fired missiles across the border into Syria late Sunday, targeting a base for U.S.-led coalition forces, Iraq's Security Media Cell said.

The searchers had found and destroyed a missile launcher, the statement added.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the reported attack.

Maj. Gen. Tahseen al-Khafaji, head of the Security Media Cell, said about five missiles were launched across the border but it was unclear if they had hit or caused any damage at the targeted base.

U.S. officials did not comment on whether any U.S. facility had been specifically targeted. One official said a coalition fighter destroyed a launcher in self-defense after reports of a failed rocket attack near a coalition base at Rumalyn, Syria. No U.S. personnel were injured, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details that were not yet public.

Two nights earlier, an explosion struck a base in Iraq belonging to the Popular Mobilization Forces, a coalition of Iran-allied militias, killing one person and injuring eight.

Militia officials initially described the explosion at the Kalsu military base north of Babylon as an airstrike that they blamed on U.S. forces. The U.S. Central Command denied it had carried out any airstrikes in Iraq, and Iraq's Security Media Cell said the country's air defense command had not detected any drones or war planes in near Babylon before or during the explosion.

The PMF is designated as an "independent military formation" within the Iraqi armed forces.

In recent months, some of the coalition's member groups have staged attacks on U.S. forces based in the region, which they said was in retaliation for Washington's support of Israel in its war with Hamas in Gaza. Those attacks halted after three U.S. soldiers were killed in a strike on a base in Jordan, near the Syrian border in late January, prompting U.S. retaliatory strikes in Iraq.

Terry Anderson, AP reporter abducted in Lebanon and held captive for years, has died at 76

By ANDREW MELDRUM and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Terry Anderson, the globe-trotting Associated Press correspondent who became one of America's longest-held hostages after he was snatched from a street in war-torn Lebanon in 1985 and held for nearly seven years, has died at 76.

Anderson, who chronicled his abduction and torturous imprisonment by Islamic militants in his best-selling 1993 memoir "Den of Lions," died on Sunday at his home in Greenwood Lake, New York, said his daughter, Sulome Anderson.

Anderson died of complications from recent heart surgery, his daughter said.

"Terry was deeply committed to on-the-ground eyewitness reporting and demonstrated great bravery and resolve, both in his journalism and during his years held hostage. We are so appreciative of the sacrifices he and his family made as the result of his work," said Julie Pace, senior vice president and executive editor of the AP.

"He never liked to be called a hero, but that's what everyone persisted in calling him," said Sulome Anderson. "I saw him a week ago and my partner asked him if he had anything on his bucket list, anything that he wanted to do. He said, 'I've lived so much and I've done so much. I'm content.'"

After returning to the United States in 1991, Anderson led a peripatetic life, giving public speeches, teaching journalism at several prominent universities and, at various times, operating a blues bar, Cajun restaurant, horse ranch and gourmet restaurant.

He also struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder, won millions of dollars in frozen Iranian assets after a federal court concluded that country played a role in his capture, then lost most of it to bad investments. He filed for bankruptcy in 2009.

Upon retiring from the University of Florida in 2015, Anderson settled on a small horse farm in a quiet, rural section of northern Virginia he had discovered while camping with friends.

"I live in the country and it's reasonably good weather and quiet out here and a nice place, so I'm doing all right," he said with a chuckle during a 2018 interview with The Associated Press.

In 1985, Anderson became one of several Westerners abducted by members of the Shiite Muslim group Hezbollah during a time of war that had plunged Lebanon into chaos.

After his release, he returned to a hero's welcome at AP's New York headquarters.

Louis D. Boccardi, the president and chief executive officer of the AP at the time, recalled Sunday that Anderson's plight was never far from his AP colleagues' minds.

"The word 'hero' gets tossed around a lot but applying it to Terry Anderson just enhances it," Boccardi

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said. "His six-and-a-half-year ordeal as a hostage of terrorists was as unimaginable as it was real — chains, being transported from hiding place to hiding place strapped to the chassis of a truck, given often inedible food, cut off from the world he reported on with such skill and caring."

As the AP's chief Middle East correspondent, Anderson had been reporting for several years on the rising violence gripping Lebanon as the country fought a war with Israel, while Iran funded militant groups trying to topple its government.

On March 16, 1985, a day off, he had taken a break to play tennis with former AP photographer Don Mell and was dropping Mell off at his home when gun-toting kidnappers dragged him from his car.

He was likely targeted, he said, because he was one of the few Westerners still in Lebanon and because his role as a journalist aroused suspicion among members of Hezbollah.

"Because in their terms, people who go around asking questions in awkward and dangerous places have to be spies," he told the Virginia newspaper The Review of Orange County in 2018.

What followed was nearly seven years of brutality during which he was beaten, chained to a wall, threatened with death, often had guns held to his head and was kept in solitary confinement for long periods of time.

Anderson was the longest held of several Western hostages Hezbollah abducted over the years, including Terry Waite, the former envoy to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had arrived to try to negotiate Anderson's release.

By Anderson's and other hostages' accounts, he was also their most hostile prisoner, constantly demanding better food and treatment, arguing religion and politics with his captors, and teaching other hostages sign language and where to hide messages so they could communicate privately.

He managed to retain a quick wit and biting sense of humor during his long ordeal. On his last day in Beirut he called the leader of his kidnappers into his room to tell him he'd just heard an erroneous radio report saying he'd been freed and was in Syria.

"I said, 'Mahmound, listen to this, I'm not here. I'm gone, babes. I'm on my way to Damascus.' And we both laughed," he told Giovanna Dell'Orto, author of "AP Foreign Correspondents in Action: World War II to the Present."

He learned later his release was delayed when a third party who his kidnappers planned to turn him over to left for a tryst with the party's mistress and they had to find someone else.

Mell, who was in the car during the abduction, said Sunday that he and Anderson shared an uncommon bond.

"Our relationship was much broader and deeper, and more important and meaningful, than just that one incident," Mell said.

Mell credited Anderson with launching his career in journalism, pushing for the young photographer to be hired by the AP full-time. After Anderson was released, their friendship deepened. They were each the best man at each other's wedding and were in frequent contact.

Anderson's humor often hid the PTSD he acknowledged suffering for years afterward.

"The AP got a couple of British experts in hostage decompression, clinical psychiatrists, to counsel my wife and myself and they were very useful," he said in 2018. "But one of the problems I had was I did not recognize sufficiently the damage that had been done.

"So, when people ask me, you know, 'Are you over it?' Well, I don't know. No, not really. It's there. I don't think about it much these days, it's not central to my life. But it's there," he said.

Anderson said his faith as a Christian helped him let go of the anger. And something his wife later told him also helped him to move on: "If you keep the hatred you can't have the joy."

At the time of his abduction, Anderson was engaged to be married and his future wife was six months pregnant with their daughter, Sulome.

The couple married soon after his release but divorced a few years later, and although they remained on friendly terms Anderson and his daughter were estranged for years.

"I love my dad very much. My dad has always loved me. I just didn't know that because he wasn't able

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to show it to me," Sulome Anderson told the AP in 2017.

Father and daughter reconciled after the publication of her critically acclaimed 2017 book, "The Hostage's Daughter," in which she told of traveling to Lebanon to confront and eventually forgive one of her father's kidnappers.

"I think she did some extraordinary things, went on a very difficult personal journey, but also accomplished a pretty important piece of journalism doing it," Anderson said. "She's now a better journalist than I ever was."

Terry Alan Anderson was born Oct. 27, 1947. He spent his early childhood years in the small Lake Erie town of Vermilion, Ohio, where his father was a police officer.

After graduating from high school, he turned down a scholarship to the University of Michigan in favor of enlisting in the Marines, where he rose to the rank of staff sergeant while seeing combat during the Vietnam War.

After returning home, he enrolled at Iowa State University where he graduated with a double major in journalism and political science and soon after went to work for the AP. He reported from Kentucky, Japan and South Africa before arriving in Lebanon in 1982, just as the country was descending into chaos.

"Actually, it was the most fascinating job I've ever had in my life," he told The Review. "It was intense. War's going on — it was very dangerous in Beirut. Vicious civil war, and I lasted about three years before I got kidnapped."

Anderson was married and divorced three times. In addition to his daughter, he is survived by another daughter, Gabrielle Anderson, from his first marriage; a sister, Judy Anderson; and a brother, Jack Anderson.

"Though my father's life was marked by extreme suffering during his time as a hostage in captivity, he found a quiet, comfortable peace in recent years. I know he would choose to be remembered not by his very worst experience, but through his humanitarian work with the Vietnam Children's Fund, the Committee to Protect Journalists, homeless veterans and many other incredible causes," Sulome Anderson said in a statement Sunday.

Memorial arrangements were pending, she said.

Mary J. Blige, Cher, Ozzy Osbourne, A Tribe Called Quest and Foreigner get into Rock Hall

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Mary J. Blige, Cher, Foreigner, A Tribe Called Quest, Kool & The Gang and Ozzy Osbourne have been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, a class that also includes folk-rockers Dave Matthews Band and singer-guitarist Peter Dinklage.

Alexis Korner, John Mayall and Big Mama Thornton earned the Musical Influence Award, while the late Jimmy Buffett, MC5, Dionne Warwick and Norman Whitfield will get the Musical Excellence Award. Pioneering music executive Suzanne de Passe won the Ahmet Ertegun Award.

"Rock 'n' roll is an ever-evolving amalgam of sounds that impacts culture and moves generations," John Sykes, chairman of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Foundation, said in a statement. "This diverse group of inductees each broke down musical barriers and influenced countless artists that followed in their footsteps."

The induction ceremony will be held Oct. 19 at the Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse in Cleveland, Ohio. It will stream live on Disney+ with an airing on ABC at a later date and available on Hulu the next day.

Those music acts nominated this year but didn't make the cut included Mariah Carey, Lenny Kravitz, the late Sinéad O'Connor, soul-pop singer Sade, Britpoppers Oasis, hip-hop duo Eric B. & Rakim and alt-rockers Jane's Addiction.

There had been a starry push to get Foreigner — with the hits "Urgent" and "Hot Blooded" — into the hall, with Mark Ronson, Jack Black, Slash, Dave Grohl and Paul McCartney all publicly backing the move. Ronson's stepfather is Mick Jones, Foreigner's founding member, songwriter and lead guitarist.

Osbourne, who led many parents in the 1980s to clutch their pearls with his devil imagery and sludgy music, goes in as a solo artist, having already been inducted into the hall with metal masters Black Sabbath.

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Four of the eight nominees — Cher, Foreigner, Frampton and Kool & the Gang — were on the ballot for the first time.

Cher — the only artist to have a No. 1 song in each of the past six decades — and Blige, with eight multi-platinum albums and nine Grammy Awards, will help boost the number of women in the hall, which critics say is too low.

Artists must have released their first commercial recording at least 25 years before they're eligible for induction.

Nominees were voted on by more than 1,000 artists, historians and music industry professionals. Fans voted online or in person at the museum, with the top five artists picked by the public making up a "fans' ballot" that was tallied with the other professional ballots.

Last year, Missy Elliott, Willie Nelson, Sheryl Crow, Chaka Khan, "Soul Train" creator Don Cornelius, Kate Bush and the late George Michael were some of the artists who got into the hall.

Nelly Korda ties LPGA Tour record with 5th straight victory, wins Chevron Championship for 2nd major

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

THE WOODLANDS, Texas (AP) — Nelly Korda couldn't have imagined the incredible run she's put together this season while at home recovering from a blood clot that required surgery in 2022.

"Because obviously then I was just more scared for my health," she said. "Competing was kind of on the back seat. I was not thinking about competing at all. But I think all of the sad times and the health scares that I have gone through have made me who I am today."

Fully healthy now, Korda is seemingly unstoppable. The world's No. 1 player hasn't lost a tournament since January, and now she's a two-time major champion.

Korda etched her name in the LPGA Tour record books Sunday, winning her record-tying fifth straight tournament with a two-stroke victory in the Chevron Championship.

Korda joins Nancy Lopez (1978) and Annika Sorenstam (2004-05) as the only players to win five consecutive LPGA events. Her previous major victory was in 2021 at the Women's PGA Championship.

"It's been an amazing feeling these past couple weeks knowing that I can go on this stretch and that if I stay in my bubble and I keep golf in a sense simple and let it flow, then I can have so, so much fun out here," she said.

Korda shot a 3-under 69 in the final to outlast Maja Stark of Sweden, who birdied her final two holes to shoot 69 and pull within one. Korda stayed aggressive on the par-5 18th, easily clearing the lake in front of the green and setting up an easy up-and-down birdie for a two-shot victory.

She had a four-day total of 13-under 275 at Carlton Woods.

Korda nearly aced the par-3 17th, with her tee shot hitting the hole and hopping in the air before settling within 10 feet. She settled for par to maintain her two-shot lead.

Korda wowed the large crowd, which followed her throughout the day, by chipping into the wind for birdie on the par-4 10th hole to take a four-stroke lead. The 25-year-old raised her club above her head with one hand and pumped her fist after the ball rolled into the hole.

Her parents — former Australian Open tennis champion Petr Korda and Regina Rajchrtova — beamed as she was presented with the trophy.

"She had a difficult '22 and '23 in certain ways," Petr Korda said. "She did not win a tournament in '23 and some things probably made her humble and (she) put a lot of work into where she is right now. Without the work and commitment, she would not be here. So seeing that, I'm very happy."

Korda's older sister, Jessica, is a six-time LPGA winner who's taking a break from golf after giving birth to her first child.

Korda took home \$1.2 million from a purse of \$7.9 million, a significant increase from last year's purse of \$5.2 million. That brings her season earnings to \$2,424,216 and her career earnings to \$11,361,489.

Winners had been jumping into Poppie's Pond off the 18th green at Mission Hills since 1988, and Korda

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became the second to do it in Texas by doing a cannonball off a small dock into brown-tinged water. World No. 2 Lilia Vu was first to jump into the pond here after her win last season. Vu withdrew from this year's tournament before the first round after experiencing "severe discomfort" in her back during warmups.

While still shivering from her post-win plunge Sunday, Korda confirmed she'll be competing in the JM Eagle LA Championship next week in Los Angeles. She was then asked about the possibility of becoming the first to ever win six straight LPGA tournaments.

"I'm going to enjoy this right now and then I'll think about that," she said. "But yeah, it's been an amazing time. Hopefully keep the streak alive. But I've been so grateful to compete week in and week out and get the five in a row, too."

Masters champion Scottie Scheffler is on a similar tear, on his way to a fourth victory in five starts until rain interrupted the final round of the RBC Heritage. He couldn't help but check in on Korda.

"I actually was checking the scores this afternoon when we were in the rain delay," he said. "I'm extremely happy for her and proud of her. That's some pretty special stuff. It's been a treat to watch."

Korda entered the last round one shot off the lead after completing the last seven holes of the weather-delayed third round early Sunday morning on a windy and unseasonably cool day. She was wiped out after her big win because she'd been up since 4 a.m. to prepare for the end of the third round.

She birdied two of her first four holes to take the lead. Lauren Coughlin birdied Nos. 13 and 14 to get within two strokes, but bogeys on the 16th and 17th holes put her four behind. She shot a final-round 68 to finish tied for third with Brooke Henderson.

Coughlin got emotional when discussing her best finish in a major.

"It's really cool to see all of the work that I've put in, especially with my putting and my short game, and putting specifically showed off this week, as well," she said.

Henderson was tied with Korda for second to start the last round after she shot a 64 in the third round to set a scoring record for the tournament since its move from Mission Hills, California, to Texas last year. But the Canadian, who has 13 LPGA wins with two majors, also faltered early in the final round, with a bogey and a double bogey in the first four holes.

Haeran Ryu of South Korea shot a bogey-free 67 to enter the final round leading Korda by one. But the 2023 Rookie of the Year bogeyed the first two holes of the fourth round. She closed with a 74 and finished fifth.

Eighteen-year-old amateur Jasmine Koo provided an unlikely highlight on the 18th hole. Her second shot bounced off the advertising board in the water and back into play. She ended up with a birdie to shoot 71.

'Great bravery and resolve.' Reaction to the death of Terry Anderson, AP reporter held hostage

The Associated Press undefined

A courageous correspondent who reported from the world's trouble spots. A supporter of humanitarian causes. A good friend.

Those were among the reactions to the death of Terry Anderson, the former chief Middle East correspondent for The Associated Press. Anderson was one of America's longest-held hostages after he was abducted from Lebanon in 1985 and held for almost seven years. Anderson, 76, died Sunday in Greenwood Lake, New York, of complications from recent heart surgery.

"Terry was deeply committed to on-the-ground eyewitness reporting and demonstrated great bravery and resolve, both in his journalism and during his years held hostage. We are so appreciative of the sacrifices he and his family made as the result of his work." - Julie Pace, senior vice president and executive editor of the AP.

"The word 'hero' gets tossed around a lot but applying it to Terry Anderson just enhances it. His six-and-a-half-year ordeal as a hostage of terrorists was as unimaginable as it was real — chains, being transported from hiding place to hiding place strapped to the chassis of a truck, given often inedible food, cut off from

the world he reported on with such skill and caring." - Louis D. Boccardi, the president and chief executive officer of the AP at the time of Anderson's captivity.

"He never liked to be called a hero, but that's what everyone persisted in calling him." - Sulome Anderson, daughter. "Though my father's life was marked by extreme suffering during his time as a hostage in captivity, he found a quiet, comfortable peace in recent years. I know he would choose to be remembered not by his very worst experience, but through his humanitarian work with the Vietnam Children's Fund, the Committee to Protect Journalists, homeless veterans and many other incredible causes."

"Our relationship was much broader and deeper, and more important and meaningful, than just that one incident," Don Mell, former AP photographer who was with Anderson when gun-toting kidnappers dragged him from his car in Lebanon.

"Through his life and his work, Terry Anderson reminded us that journalism is a dangerous business, and foreign correspondents, in particular, take great personal risk to keep the public informed. ... For many years, Mr. Anderson had the distinction of being the longest held U.S. journalist hostage. He lived to see that unfortunate record eclipsed by journalist Austin Tice, currently held in Syria for nearly 12 years. When Anderson was kidnapped, the Press Club flew a banner across its building to remind journalists and the public of his plight. Similarly the Club now has a banner for Austin Tice." - statement of the National Press Club.

15 people injured when tram collides with guardrail at Universal Studios theme park near Los Angeles

UNIVERSAL CITY, Calif. (AP) — More than a dozen people suffered mostly minor injuries when a tram used for tours crashed into a railing at Universal Studios Hollywood near Los Angeles, authorities and the company said.

Los Angeles County Fire Department units responded shortly after 9 p.m. Saturday to the theme park in Universal City, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) northwest of downtown LA, the agency said in a social media post.

The California Highway Patrol said that while the tram was negotiating a turn, its last car collided with a metal guardrail, "causing it to tilt and eject multiple passengers."

The fire department said 15 people were taken to hospitals with minor injuries. The highway patrol's statement on Sunday said some of the injuries were moderate, but didn't specify a number.

Universal Studios Hollywood said in a statement Sunday afternoon that tours have resumed with a modified route.

"Our thoughts continue to be with the guests who were involved, and we are thankful that based on agency reports, the injuries sustained were minor. We are working closely with public agencies, including the California Highway Patrol, as we continue our review of the incident and safety remains a top priority," the statement said.

The highway patrol, which is leading the investigation, said alcohol and drugs were not considered a factor.

The tram circuit, called the World-Famous Studio Tour, offers a glimpse behind the scenes of Universal movies including "Jaws" and Jordan Peele's "Nope." The theme park will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the tour starting Friday.

Israeli strikes on southern Gaza city of Rafah kill 22, mostly children, as US advances aid package

By MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli strikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight killed 22 people, including 18 children, health officials said Sunday, as the United States was on track to approve billions of dollars of additional military aid to Israel, its close ally.

Israel has carried out near-daily air raids on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million

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has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. It has also vowed to expand its ground offensive against the Hamas militant group to the city on the border with Egypt despite calls for restraint, including from the U.S.

"In the coming days, we will increase the political and military pressure on Hamas because this is the only way to bring back our hostages and achieve victory. We will land more and painful blows on Hamas — soon," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement. He didn't give details.

The first Israeli strike in Rafah killed a man, his wife and their 3-year-old child, according to the nearby Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. The woman was pregnant and the doctors saved the baby, the hospital said. The second strike killed 17 children and two women from an extended family.

"These children were sleeping. What did they do? What was their fault?" asked one relative, Umm Ka-reem. Mohammed al-Beheiri said that his daughter, Rasha, and her six children, the youngest 18 months old, were among those killed. A woman and three children were still under the rubble.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, at least two-thirds of them children and women. It has devastated Gaza's two largest cities and left a swath of destruction. Around 80% of the territory's population have fled to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave.

The \$26 billion aid package approved by the U.S. House of Representatives on Saturday includes around \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza, which experts say is on the brink of famine. The U.S. Senate could pass the package as soon as Tuesday, and President Joe Biden has promised to sign it immediately.

The conflict, now in its seventh month, has sparked regional unrest pitting Israel and the U.S. against Iran and allied militant groups across the Middle East. Israel and Iran traded fire directly this month, raising fears of all-out war.

Tensions have also spiked in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israeli troops killed two Palestinians who the military says attacked a checkpoint with a knife and a gun near the southern West Bank town of Hebron early Sunday. The Palestinian Health Ministry said that the two killed were 18 and 19, from the same family. No Israeli forces were wounded, the army said.

Later, the military said its forces shot dead a 43-year-old Palestinian woman after she tried to stab a soldier in the northern West Bank near Beka'ot settlement.

The Palestinian Red Crescent rescue service said that it had recovered 14 bodies from an Israeli raid in the Nur Shams urban refugee camp in the West Bank that began late Thursday. Those killed include three militants from the Islamic Jihad group and a 15-year-old boy. The military said it killed 14 militants and arrested eight suspects. Ten Israeli soldiers and one border police officer were wounded.

In a separate incident in the West Bank, an Israeli man was wounded in an explosion on Sunday, the Magen David Adom rescue service said. A video circulating online shows a man approaching a Palestinian flag planted in a field. When he kicks it, it appears to trigger an explosive device.

At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most have been killed during Israeli military raids or in violent protests.

The war was sparked by an unprecedented Oct. 7 raid into southern Israel in which Hamas and other militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel says militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets to call for a new election to replace Netanyahu and a deal with Hamas to release the hostages. Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until Hamas is destroyed and all hostages are returned.

The war has killed at least 34,097 Palestinians and wounded another 76,980, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry doesn't differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count. It says the real toll is likely higher as many bodies are stuck beneath the rubble or in areas that medics can't reach.

Israel blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the militants fight in dense, residential neighborhoods. The military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children. The military says it has killed more than 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence.

Ukrainian and Western leaders laud US aid package while the Kremlin warns of 'further ruin'

By SAMYA KULLAB and ELISE MORTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian and Western leaders on Sunday welcomed a desperately needed aid package passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, as the Kremlin warned that passage of the bill would "further ruin" Ukraine and cause more deaths.

Ukrainian commanders and analysts say the long-awaited \$61 billion military aid package — including \$13.8 billion for Ukraine to buy weapons — will help slow Russia's incremental advances in the war's third year — but that more will likely be needed for Kyiv to regain the offensive.

The House swiftly approved \$95 billion in foreign aid for Ukraine, Israel and other U.S. allies in a rare Saturday session as Democrats and Republicans banded together after months of hard-right resistance over renewed American support for repelling Russia's full-scale invasion.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had warned that his country would lose the war without U.S. funding, said that he was grateful for U.S. lawmaker' decision.

Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," Zelenskyy said that the aid package would "send the Kremlin a powerful signal that (Ukraine) will not be the second Afghanistan."

Zelenskyy said Ukraine would prioritize long-range weapons and air defenses to "break the plans of Russia" in an expected "full-scale offensive," for which Ukrainian forces are preparing.

The aid package will go to the U.S. Senate, which could pass it as soon as Tuesday. U.S. President Joe Biden has promised to sign it immediately.

It still could take weeks for it to reach the front line, where it is desperately needed.

"With this we can stop (Russian troops) and reduce our losses," said infantry soldier Oleksandr. He has been fighting around Avdiivka, the city in the Donetsk region that Ukraine lost to Russia in February after months of intense combat.

Ammunition shortages linked to the aid holdup over the past six months have led Ukrainian military commanders to ration shells, a disadvantage that Russia seized on this year — taking the city of Avdiivka and currently inching towards the town of Chasiv Yar, also in Donetsk.

"The Russians come at us in waves — we become exhausted, we have to leave our positions. This is repeated many times," Oleksandr told The Associated Press. He didn't give his full name for security reasons. "Not having enough ammunition means we can't cover the area that is our responsibility to hold when they are assaulting us."

In Kyiv, many welcomed the U.S. vote as a piece of good news after a tough period that has seen Russia grind out gains along the front line, and step up attacks on Ukraine's energy system and other infrastructure.

"I heard our president officially say that we can lose the war without this help. Thanks very much and yesterday was a great event," said Kateryna Ruda, 43.

Tatyana Ryavchenuk, the wife of a Ukrainian soldier, noted the need for more weapons, lamenting that soldiers "have nothing to protect us."

"They need weapons, they need gear, they need it. We always need help. Because without help, our enemy can advance further and can be in the center of our city," the 26-year-old said.

Other Western leaders, who have been scrambling to come up with ways to fill the gap left by stalled U.S. military aid, also lauded Congress' decision.

"Ukraine is using the weapons provided by NATO Allies to destroy Russian combat capabilities. This makes us all safer, in Europe & North America," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg posted on X.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that "Ukraine deserves all the support it can get against Russia," and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called the vote it "a strong signal in these times."

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk thanked House Speaker Mike Johnson, while also noting the holdup in Congress. "Better late than too late. And I hope it is not too late for Ukraine," he wrote on X.

In Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Saturday called the approval of aid to Ukraine "expected

and predictable.”

The decision “will make the United States of America richer, further ruin Ukraine and result in the deaths of even more Ukrainians, the fault of the Kyiv regime,” Peskov was quoted as saying by Russian news agency Ria Novosti.

“The new aid package will not save, but, on the contrary, will kill thousands and thousands more people, prolong the conflict, and bring even more grief and devastation,” Leonid Slutsky, head of the Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs, wrote on Telegram.

Washington-based think tank the Institute for the Study of War said the logistics of getting U.S. assistance to the front line would mean that “Ukrainian forces may suffer additional setbacks” while waiting for it to arrive.

“But they will likely be able to blunt the current Russian offensive assuming the resumed U.S. assistance arrives promptly,” it said in its latest assessment of the conflict.

Olexiy Haran, professor of comparative politics at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, said that Ukraine was grateful for aid from the U.S. and other Western countries, “but the problem is, frankly speaking, it’s too late and it’s not enough.”

“This is the third year of the war and we still don’t have aviation, new aviation. We don’t have enough missiles, so we cannot close the skies. Moreover, recently we didn’t have even artillery shells,” he said.

“That’s why the situation was very, very difficult and the Russians used it to start their offensive. So that’s why it is so important for us. And definitely if we’d received it half a year before, we would have saved the lives of many Ukrainians, civilians included.”

Matthew Savill, military sciences director at the Royal United Services Institute think tank, said that the aid, while welcome, “can probably only help stabilize the Ukrainian position for this year and begin preparations for operations in 2025.”

“Predictability of funding through 2024 and into 2025 will help the Ukrainians plan the defense this year, especially if European supplies of ammunition also come through, but further planning and funds will be required for 2025, and we have a U.S. election between now and then,” he said.

Responding to a question on NBC about how long Ukraine will still need aid packages, Zelenskyy said “it depends on when we actually get weapons on the ground.”

“The decision to supply F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, we had it a year ago,” he said. “We still don’t have the jets in Ukraine.”

In other developments:

— On the ground, Russia’s Defense Ministry said Sunday that its troops had taken control of the village of Bohdanivka in the Donetsk region. Ukrainian officials haven’t yet commented.

— One person was killed and four others were wounded in Russian shelling in Ukrainsk on Sunday, according to the prosecutor’s office in Ukraine’s partially occupied Donetsk region. In the Odesa region, four people were wounded in a missile attack, Gov. Oleh Kiper said.

— Two suspects were detained Sunday after two Ukrainian soldiers killed a police officer at a checkpoint in the Vinnytsia region. The soldiers opened fire on Maksym Zaretskyi, 20, early Saturday after he stopped their car for a routine inspection. Zaretskyi’s partner was wounded but survived. The head of Ukraine’s National Police, Ivan Vyhovsky, said the suspects, a father and son aged 52 and 26, were detained in Ukraine’s Odesa region.

Israeli leaders criticize expected US sanctions against military unit that could further strain ties

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli leaders on Sunday harshly criticized an expected decision by the U.S. to impose sanctions on a unit of ultra-Orthodox soldiers in the Israeli military.

The decision, expected as soon as Monday, would mark the first time the U.S. has imposed sanctions on a unit inside the Israeli military and would further strain relations between the two allies, which have

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grown increasingly tense during Israel's war in Gaza.

While U.S. officials declined to identify the unit expected to be sanctioned, Israeli leaders and local media identified it as Netzah Yehuda — an infantry battalion founded roughly a quarter of a century ago to incorporate ultra-Orthodox men into the military. Many religious men receive exemptions from what is supposed to be compulsory service.

Israeli leaders condemned the anticipated decision as unfair, especially at a time when Israel is at war, and vowed to oppose it.

"If anyone thinks they can impose sanctions on a unit in the IDF, I will fight it with all my might," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

Netzah Yehuda, or Judea Forever, has historically been based in the occupied West Bank and some of its members have been linked to abuses against Palestinians. It makes up just a small part of Israel's military presence in the territory.

The unit came under heavy American criticism in 2022 after an elderly Palestinian-American man was found dead shortly after he was detained at a West Bank checkpoint.

A Palestinian autopsy said Omar Assad, 78, had underlying health conditions, but had suffered a heart attack caused by "external violence."

It said doctors found bruises on his head, redness on his wrists from being bound and bleeding in his eyelids from being tightly blindfolded. A military investigation said that Israeli soldiers assumed that Assad was asleep when they cut off the cables binding his hands. They didn't offer medical help when they saw that he was unresponsive and left the scene without checking to see if he was alive.

Assad had lived in the U.S. for four decades. After an outcry from the U.S. government, the Israeli military said the incident "was a grave and unfortunate event, resulting from moral failure and poor decision-making on the part of the soldiers." It said one officer was reprimanded and two other officers reassigned to non-commanding roles, over the incident.

But the army decided against criminal prosecution, saying military investigators could not directly link their actions to the death of the U.S. citizen.

Human rights groups long have argued that Israel rarely holds soldiers accountable for the deaths of Palestinians.

Investigators said soldiers were forced to restrain Assad because of his "aggressive resistance." Assad's family has expressed skepticism that the behavior of an ailing 78-year-old could justify such harsh treatment.

Amid the uproar with the U.S., Israel moved Netzah Yehuda out of the West Bank in late 2022 and re-assigned it to northern Israel. The battalion was moved to the southern border with Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack triggered the ongoing war.

In a statement Sunday, the army said its Netzah Yehuda soldiers "are currently participating in the war effort in the Gaza Strip."

"The battalion is professionally and bravely conducting operations in accordance to the IDF Code of Ethics and with full commitment to international law," it said. It said that if the unit is sanctioned, "its consequences will be reviewed."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that he had made a decision on reviews of allegations that several Israeli military units had violated conditions for receiving U.S. assistance outlined in the so-called Leahy Law and that they would soon be made public.

The White House declined to comment and referred to Blinken's comments from Friday.

Benny Gantz, a former military chief, defense minister and current member of Israel's War Cabinet, said in a statement that he spoke Sunday evening with Blinken and told him the expected decision is a "mistake" because it would harm Israel's international legitimacy during wartime and because Israel's judicial system is "strong and independent."

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, another member of the War Cabinet, said he delivered a similar message to the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Jack Lew, and planned on talking to Blinken as well in hopes of blocking the expected decision. He said punishing the unit could cast a shadow over the entire Israeli military. "That's not the way to behave with partners and friends," he said.

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Two U.S. officials familiar with the situation said the U.S. announcement could come as soon as Monday. The officials said about five Israeli units were investigated and all but one had been found to have taken action to remedy the violations. The Leahy Law, named for former Sen. Patrick Leahy, bars U.S. aid from going to foreign military units that have committed human rights abuses.

A reservist in the Netzah Yehuda unit, Sgt. Maj. Nadav Nissim Miranda, said the Assad death was "an unfortunate incident" but also an aberration. He told Channel 12 TV that targeting the battalion would hurt efforts to encourage religious men to enlist.

But Yesh Din, an Israeli legal advocacy group, said the case was not isolated. It said one out of every five soldiers convicted of harming Palestinians or their property since 2010 comes from Netzah Yehuda, making it the unit with the highest conviction rate for such cases.

The U.S. review was launched before the Hamas war and not connected to recent Israeli actions inside Gaza or the West Bank — which has experienced a dramatic spike in deadly violence since the Gaza war erupted. The U.S. has also recently imposed sanctions against violent settlers.

Gadi Shamni, a retired general who once served as the military's commander over the West Bank, said a main problem with the unit is that it was traditionally assigned exclusively to the West Bank. Violence between troops and Palestinians and settlers and Palestinians has surged there in recent years. In contrast, he said other units regularly rotate in and out of the volatile area.

He said the exposure to nonstop friction and violence had caused a level of "tiredness" among the troops. Nonetheless, he said it was a stereotype to punish the entire unit and it would have been better to target specific individuals or commanders.

But Ori Givati, the director of advocacy at Breaking the Silence, an Israeli group of former combat soldiers critical of Israel's occupation, said the problems run much deeper than any particular unit.

He said abuses of power by soldiers toward Palestinians are systematic and the lack of repercussions for wrongdoings are fueling incidents like the death of Assad.

Israeli hard-liners blasted the expected U.S. decision. Israel's ultranationalist national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, said the U.S. crossed a "red line," and Tally Gotliv, a member of Netanyahu's Likud party, accused the U.S. of antisemitism.

But even the head of the opposition, former Prime Minister Yair Lapid, rejected the move.

He said the anticipated sanctions are "a mistake and we must act to cancel them." He noted that "the source of the problem is not at the military level but at the political level."

London police to meet with Jewish leaders as protests spark concerns about the safety of Jews

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — London's police commissioner will meet with senior members of the Jewish community on Monday after the force bungled its apology for suggesting an "openly Jewish" man's presence along the route of a pro-Palestinian march risked provoking the demonstrators.

Amid calls for his resignation, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Mark Rowley is also expected to meet with London Mayor Sadiq Khan and Home Secretary James Cleverly, who together are responsible for law and order in the city.

"We remain focused on doing everything possible to ensure Jewish Londoners feel safe in this city," the Metropolitan Police Service said in a statement Sunday. "We know recent events and some of our recent actions have contributed to concerns felt by many."

The meeting comes as London police struggle to manage tensions sparked by the Israel-Hamas war, with some Jewish residents saying they feel threatened by repeated pro-Palestinian marches through the streets of the U.K. capital.

The marches have been largely peaceful. However, many demonstrators accuse Israel of genocide and a small number have shown support for Hamas, the group that led the Oct. 7 attack on Israel and which has been banned by the U.K. government as a terrorist organization.

The Metropolitan Police force has deployed thousands of officers during each of the dozen major marches as it seeks to protect the rights of the pro-Palestinian protesters and prevent clashes with counterdemonstrators and Jewish residents.

In addition to meeting with leaders of the Jewish community, senior police officers wrote to the man at the center of the latest controversy, offering to meet with him to apologize and discuss what more could be done to "ensure Jewish Londoners feel safe."

Gideon Falter, chief executive of the Campaign Against Antisemitism, was wearing a traditional Jewish skullcap when he was stopped by police while trying to cross a street in central London as demonstrators filed past on April 13.

One officer told Falter he was worried that the man's "quite openly Jewish" appearance could provoke a reaction from the protesters, according to video posted on social media by the campaign group. A second officer then told Falter he would be arrested if he refused to be escorted out of the area, because he would be "causing a breach of the peace."

Metropolitan Police initially apologized for the language the officer used in describing Falter's appearance, but said counterdemonstrators had to be aware "that their presence is provocative."

The department later deleted that apology from its social media accounts and issued a second statement. "In an effort to make a point about the policing of protest we caused further offense," the force said on Friday. "This was never our intention. ... Being Jewish is not a provocation. Jewish Londoners must be able to feel safe in the city."

Haitians scramble to survive, seeking food, water and safety as gang violence chokes the capital

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — As the sun sets, a burly man bellows into a megaphone while a curious crowd gathers around him. Next to him is a small cardboard box with several banknotes worth 10 Haitian gourdes — about 7 U.S. cents.

"Everyone give whatever they have!" the man shouts as he grabs the arms and hands of people entering a neighborhood in the capital of Port-au-Prince that has been targeted by violent gangs.

The community recently voted to buy a metal barricade and install it themselves to try to protect residents from the unrelenting violence that killed or injured more than 2,500 people in Haiti from January to March.

"Every day I wake up and find a dead body," said Nounè-Carme Manoune, an immigration officer.

Life in Port-au-Prince has become a game of survival, pushing Haitians to new limits as they scramble to stay safe and alive while gangs overwhelm the police and the government remains largely absent. Some are installing metal barricades. Others press hard on the gas while driving near gang-controlled areas. The few who can afford it stockpile water, food, money and medication, supplies of which have dwindled since the main international airport closed in early March. The country's biggest seaport is largely paralyzed by marauding gangs.

"People living in the capital are locked in, they have nowhere to go," Philippe Branchat, International Organization for Migration chief in Haiti, said in a recent statement. "The capital is surrounded by armed groups and danger. It is a city under siege."

Phones ping often with alerts reporting gunfire, kidnappings and fatal shootings, and some supermarkets have so many armed guards that they resemble small police stations.

Gang attacks used to occur only in certain areas, but now they can happen anywhere, any time. Staying home does not guarantee safety: One man playing with his daughter at home was shot in the back by a stray bullet. Others have been killed.

Schools and gas stations are shuttered, with fuel on the black market selling for \$9 a gallon, roughly three times the official price. Banks have prohibited customers from withdrawing more than \$100 a day, and checks that used to take three days to clear now take a month or more. Police officers have to wait

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weeks to be paid.

"Everyone is under stress," said Isidore Gédéon, a 38-year-old musician. "After the prison break, people don't trust anyone. The state doesn't have control."

Gangs that control an estimated 80% of Port-au-Prince launched coordinated attacks on Feb. 29, targeting critical state infrastructure. They set fire to police stations, shot up the airport and stormed into Haiti's two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates.

At the time, Prime Minister Ariel Henry was visiting Kenya to push for the U.N.-backed deployment of a police force. Henry remains locked out of Haiti, and a transitional presidential council tasked with selecting the country's next prime minister and Cabinet could be sworn in as early as this week. Henry has pledged to resign once a new leader is installed.

Few believe this will end the crisis. It's not only the gangs unleashing violence; Haitians have embraced a vigilante movement known as "bwa kale," that has killed several hundred suspected gang members or their associates.

"There are certain communities I can't go to because everyone is scared of everyone," Gédéon said. "You could be innocent, and you end up dead."

More than 95,000 people have fled Port-au-Prince in one month alone as gangs raid communities, torching homes and killing people in territories controlled by their rivals.

Those who flee via bus to Haiti's southern and northern regions risk being gang-raped or killed as they pass through gang-controlled areas where gunmen have opened fire.

Violence in the capital has left some 160,000 people homeless, according to the IOM.

"This is hell," said Nelson Langlois, a producer and cameraman.

Langlois, his wife and three children spent two nights lying flat on the roof of their home as gangs raided the neighborhood.

"Time after time, we peered over to see when we could flee," he recalled.

Forced to split up because of the lack of shelter, Langlois is living in a Vodou temple and his wife and children are elsewhere in Port-au-Prince.

Like most people in the city, Langlois usually stays indoors. The days of pickup soccer games on dusty roads and the nights of drinking Prestige beer in bars with hip-hop, reggae or African music playing are long gone.

"It's an open-air prison," Langlois said.

The violence has also forced businesses, government agencies and schools to close, leaving scores of Haitians unemployed.

Manoune, the government immigration officer, said she has been earning money selling treated water since she has no work because deportations are stalled.

Meanwhile, Gédéon said he no longer plays the drums for a living, noting that bars and other venues are shuttered. He sells small plastic bags of water on the street and has become a handyman, installing fans and fixing appliances.

Even students are joining the workforce as the crisis deepens poverty across Haiti.

Sully, a 10th grader whose school closed nearly two months ago, stood on a street corner in the community of Pétiion-Ville selling gasoline that he buys on the black market.

"You have to be careful," said Sully, who asked that his last name be withheld for safety. "During the morning it's safer."

He sells about five gallons a week, generating roughly \$40 for his family, but he cannot afford to join his classmates who are learning remotely.

"Online class is for people more fortunate than me, who have more money," Sully said.

The European Union last week announced the launch of a humanitarian air bridge from the Central American country of Panama to Haiti. Five flights have landed in the northern city of Cap-Haïtien, site of Haiti's sole functioning airport, bringing 62 tons of medicine, water, emergency shelter equipment and other essential supplies.

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But there is no guarantee that critical items will reach those who most need them. Many Haitians remain trapped in their homes, unable to buy or look for food amid whizzing bullets.

Aid groups say nearly 2 million Haitians are on the verge of famine, more than 600,000 of them children.

Nonetheless, people are finding ways to survive.

Back in the neighborhood where residents are installing a metal barricade, sparks fly as one man cuts metal while others shovel and mix cement. They are well underway, and hope to finish the project soon.

Others remain skeptical, citing reports of gangs jumping into loaders and other heavy equipment to tear down police stations and, more recently, metal barricades.

Unprecedented wave of narco-violence stuns Argentina city

By ISABEL DEBRE and ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

ROSARIO, Argentina (AP) — The order to kill came from inside a federal prison near Argentina's capital. Unwitting authorities patched a call from drug traffickers tied to one of the country's most notorious gangs to collaborators on the outside. Hiring a 15-year-old hit man, they sealed the fate of a young father they didn't even know.

At a service station on March 9 in Rosario, the picturesque hometown of soccer star Lionel Messi, 25-year-old employee Bruno Bussanich was whistling to himself and checking the day's earnings just before he was shot three times from less than a foot away, surveillance footage shows. The assailant fled without taking a peso.

It was the fourth gang-related fatal shooting in Rosario in almost as many days. Authorities called it an unprecedented rampage in Argentina, which had never witnessed the extremes of drug cartel violence afflicting some other Latin American countries.

A handwritten letter was found near Bussanich's body, addressed to officials who want to curb the power drug kingpins wield from behind bars. "We don't want to negotiate anything. We want our rights," it says. "We will kill more innocent people."

Shaken residents interviewed by The Associated Press across Rosario described a sense of dread taking hold.

"Every time I go to work, I say goodbye to my father as if it were the last time," said 21-year-old Celeste Núñez, who also works at a gas station.

The string of killings offer an early test to the security agenda of populist President Javier Milei, who has tethered his political success to saving Argentina's tanking economy and eradicating narco-trafficking violence.

Since taking office Dec. 10, the right-wing leader has promised to prosecute gang members as terrorists and change the law to allow the army into crime-ridden streets for the first time since Argentina's brutal military dictatorship ended in 1983.

His law-and-order message has empowered the hardline governor of Santa Fe province, which includes Rosario, to clamp down on incarcerated criminal gangs that authorities say orchestrated 80% of shootings last year. Under the orders of Governor Maximiliano Pullaro, police have ramped up prison raids, seized thousands of smuggled cellphones and restricted visits.

"We are facing a group of narco-terrorists desperate to maintain power and impunity," Milei said after Bussanich was killed, announcing the deployment of federal forces in Rosario. "We will lock them up, isolate them, take back the streets."

Milei won 56% of the vote in Rosario, where residents praise his focus on a problem largely neglected by his predecessors. But some worry the government's combative approach traps them in the line of fire.

Gangs started their deadly retaliations just hours after Pullaro's security minister shared photos showing Argentine prisoners crammed together on the floor, heads pressed against each other's bare backs — a scene reminiscent of El Salvador President Nayib Bukele's harsh anti-gang crackdown.

"It's a war between the state and the drug traffickers," said Ezequiel, a 30-year-old employee at the gas station where Bussanich was killed. Ezequiel, who gave only his first name for fear of reprisals, said his

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mother has since begged him to quit. "We're the ones paying the price."

Even Milei's supporters have mixed feelings about the crackdown, including Germán Bussanich, the father of the slain gas station worker.

"They're putting on a show and we're facing the consequences," Bussanich told reporters.

A leafy city 300 kilometers (180 miles) northwest of Buenos Aires, Rosario is where revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara was born, Messi first kicked a soccer ball and the Argentine flag was first raised in 1812. But it most recently won notoriety because its homicide numbers are five times the national average.

Tucked into a bend in the Paraná River, Rosario's port morphed into Argentina's drug trafficking hub as regional crackdowns pushed the narcotics trade south and criminals started squirreling away cocaine in shipping containers spirited down the river to markets abroad. Although Rosario never suffered the car bombs and police assassinations gripping Mexico, Colombia and most recently Ecuador, the splintering of street gangs has fueled bloodshed.

"It's not close to the violence in Mexico because we still have the deterrence capacity of the government in Argentina," said Marcelo Bergman, a social scientist at the National University of Tres de Febrero in Argentina. "But we need to keep an eye on Rosario because the major threats come not so much from big cartels but when these groups proliferate and diversify."

Drug traffickers keep a tight grip over Rosario's poor neighborhoods full of young men vulnerable to recruitment. One of them was Víctor Emanuel, a 17-year-old killed two years ago by rival gangsters in an area where street murals pay tribute to slain criminal leaders. No one was arrested.

"My neighbors know who's responsible," his mother, Gerónima Benítez, told the AP, her eyes shiny with tears. "I looked for help everywhere, I knocked on the doors of the judiciary, the government. No one answered."

A fearful existence is all Benítez has ever known. But now, for the first time in Argentina, warring drug traffickers are banding together and terrorizing parts of the city previously considered safe.

Imprisoned gang leaders in Latin America have long run criminal enterprises remotely with the help of corrupt guards. But according to an indictment unveiled last week, incarcerated gang bosses in Argentina have been passing instructions on how to kill random civilians via family visits and video calls.

Court documents say the bosses paid underage hit men up to \$450 to target four of the recent victims in Argentina's third-largest city. The killing of Bussanich, two taxi drivers and a bus driver in less than a week in March, federal prosecutors say, "shattered the peace of an entire society."

Street emptied. Schools closed. Bus drivers picketed. People were too terrified to leave their homes.

"This violence is on another level," 20-year-old Rodrigo Dominguez said from an intersection where a dangling banner demanded justice for another bus driver slain there weeks earlier. "You can't go outside."

Panic was still palpable in Rosario last week, as police swarmed the streets and normally bustling bars closed early for lack of customers. A diner managed by Messi's family, a draw for fans, reported quiet nights and less profit. Women in one neighborhood said they carry 22-caliber pistols. Analía Manso, 37, said she was too scared to send her children to school.

Pope Francis last month said he was praying for his countrymen in Rosario.

Assaults and public threats continue. This month, a sign appeared on a highway overpass warning Argentine Security Minister Patricia Bullrich that gangs would extend their offensive to Buenos Aires if the government doesn't back down.

Authorities have sought to reassure the public by sending hundreds of federal agents into Rosario. The AP spent a night with police last week as officers patrolled neighborhoods logging suspicious activity and setting up checkpoints.

Georgina Wilke, a 45-year-old Rosario officer in the explosives squad, said she welcomes federal intervention, including the military, to get crime under control. "We've been hit very hard," Wilke said.

Omar Pereira, the provincial secretary of public security, promised the efforts represent a shift from failed tactics of the past.

"There were always pacts, implicit or explicit, between the state and criminals," Pereira said, describing

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how authorities long looked the other way. "What's the idea of this government? There is no pact."

But experts are skeptical a tough-on-crime approach will stop drug traffickers from buying control over Argentina's police and prisons.

"Unless the government fixes its problems with corruption, the crackdown on prisons is unlikely to have any long-term effect," said Christopher Newton, an investigator at Colombia-based research organization InSight Crime.

For years, Rosario's 1.3 million residents have watched warily as presidents and their promises come and go while the violence endures.

"It's like a cancer that grows and grows," said Benítez from her home, its windows protected by wrought-iron bars.

"We, on the outside, live in prison," she said. "Those inside have everything."

Earth Day: How one grocery shopper takes steps to avoid 'pointless plastic'

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT and MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Nature wraps bananas and oranges in peels. But in some modern supermarkets, they're bagged or wrapped in plastic too.

For Judith Enck, that's the epitome of pointless plastic. The baby food aisle is similarly distressing for her, with its rows and rows of blended fruits, vegetables and meat in single-use pouches that have replaced glass jars.

Less than 10% of plastic is recycled. Most is buried, burned or dumped. Recycling rates for glass, aluminum and cardboard are far higher. And cardboard or paper packaging is biodegradable.

The global theme for Earth Day on Monday is planet vs. plastic. Plastic production continues to ramp up globally and is projected to triple by 2050 if nothing changes. Most of it is made from fossil fuels and chemicals. As the world transitions away from using fossil fuels for electricity and transportation, plastics offer a lifeboat for oil and gas companies as a market that can grow.

The Earth Day environmental movement is calling for "the end of plastics for the sake of human and planetary health." People are increasingly breathing, eating and drinking tiny particles of plastic, though researchers say more work is necessary to determine its effect on human health. Millions of tons of plastic wind up in the ocean each year.

This week, thousands of negotiators and observers representing most of the world's nations are gathering in Ottawa to craft a treaty to try to end the rapidly escalating levels of plastic pollution.

Plastic is everywhere in modern society. That's evident whenever you go grocery shopping, said Enck, a former Environmental Protection Agency regional administrator who now heads up the advocacy group Beyond Plastics. There are things shoppers can do if they want to use less plastic.

On a recent trip to the Honest Weight Food Co-op in Albany, Enck bought almond butter and yogurt in glass containers. She asked that her fish be wrapped in paper and not placed in a plastic bag. She steered clear of bagged carrots and breezed past the lettuce packed in what she calls "plastic coffins."

She keeps reusable shopping bags in her car, a common practice in New York since the state banned plastic carryout bags several years ago.

"Even small steps make a difference because big supermarkets notice when people ask for less packaged material. Also, our kids pay attention. If they're shopping with us and you talk about why you're reaching for the glass jar rather than the plastic jar, it's an opportunity for education," she said.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: How do you avoid plastic packaging and products at the grocery store?

I tell everyone you're not going to be perfect, but do the best you can and focus on things you buy most often. I just could not keep buying those plastic orange juice jugs. So what I did on the juice was, I bought a really nice glass pitcher with a lid on it. And for juices and lemonade, I only buy the frozen concentrate. You avoid the plastic altogether. It takes a little bit of time to melt it and add three cans of

water. But most people can manage that.

AP: Many shoppers start in the produce aisle. What are some tips?

I bring reusable cloth produce bags because I don't want to use those thin plastic bags. So if I need a couple of apples, a couple of avocados, I'll put them right into my reusable produce bag. I try to buy loose carrots rather than carved carrots in little plastic bags. I will never, ever buy bananas if they're in a plastic bag, which in my store they usually are not, but I have seen that sometimes. It's pretty easy to buy loose peppers. I never put broccoli into a plastic bag. You know, you don't need a lot of those produce bags.

The real dilemma is the fresh berries. Now they do come in number two plastic, which is supposed to be recyclable. I know that Driscoll's is starting to sell strawberries in a little cardboard box, which I am waiting for.

AP: What do you do when plastic is unavoidable?

For crackers, you can recycle the outside box if it's cardboard, but then there's usually a plastic bag inside or a waxy bag that you can't recycle. But you can use that waxy bag or those little plastic bags if you have pets. I don't have a pet, but my friends use bread bags and chip bags when they pick up pet poop. So why buy pet poop bags, you can just save those.

I do use regular trash bags. I don't knock myself out on that. I try not to fill it up. If you can reduce your waste generation, you're not buying as many bags. I think it's very important to compost at home if you have the space.

AP: Where have you seen improvement?

The household goods aisle. I am excited about the changes. For detergent you can get concentrates. I only use powder in the dishwasher. I strongly recommend that people avoid the plastic pods. And you can recycle the cardboard boxes from the powdered soaps. You don't have to get it in plastic. I also think the beverage aisle has some real opportunities for recycling. Better than most other aisles.

AP: What could be done so shoppers have more options?

The nice thing about paper, cardboard, glass and metal is it can be easily made from recycled content. And it actually is recyclable. You can put it in your recycling bin. And if it gets littered, the paper in the cardboard, in particular, doesn't stick around for centuries.

If we were to pass a strong packaging law to reduce plastic packaging at the state or national level, you would have packaging engineers thinking about what happens after the packaging is used. New York is considering a law right now that would reduce plastic packaging. Unless we adopt new laws, it's not going to change because the voluntary pledges by companies are falling short across the board. That's the only way to solve this.

Lama Rod describes himself as a Black Buddhist Southern Queen. He wants to free you from suffering

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

ROME, Ga (AP) — Instead of traditional maroon and gold Tibetan Buddhist robes, Lama Rod Owens wore a white animal print cardigan over a bright yellow T-shirt with an image of singer Sade, an Africa-shaped medallion and mala beads — the most recognizable sign of his Buddhism.

"Being a Buddhist or a spiritual leader, I got rid of trying to wear the part because it just wasn't authentic to me," said Owens, 44, who describes himself as a Black Buddhist Southern Queen.

"For me, it's not about looking like a Buddhist. It's about being myself," he said at his mother's home in Rome, Georgia. "And I like color."

The Harvard Divinity School -educated lama and yoga teacher blends his training in the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism with pop culture references and experiences from his life as a Black, queer man, raised in the South by his mother, a pastor at a Christian church.

Today, he is an influential voice in a new generation of Buddhist teachers, respected for his work focused on social change, identity and spiritual wellness.

On the popular mindfulness app Calm, his wide-ranging courses include "Coming Out," "Caring for your

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Grief," and "Radical Self-Care" (sometimes telling listeners to "shake it off" like Mariah Carey). In his latest book, "The New Saints," he highlights Christian saints and spiritual warriors, Buddhist bodhisattvas and Jewish tzaddikim among those who have sought to free people from suffering.

"Saints are ordinary and human, doing things any person can learn to do," Owen writes in his book, where he combines personal stories, traditional teachings and instructions for meditations.

"Our era calls for saints who are from this time and place, speak the language of this moment, and integrate both social and spiritual liberation," he writes. "I believe we all can and must become New Saints."

But how? "It's not about becoming a superhero," he said, stressing the need to care for others.

And it's not reserved for the canonized. "Harriet Tubman is a saint for me," he said about the 19th century Black abolitionist known for helping enslaved people escape to freedom on the Underground Railroad. "She came to this world and said, 'I want people to be free.'"

Owens grew up in a devout Baptist and Methodist family. His life revolved around his local church.

When he was 13, his mother, who owns a baseball cap that reads: "God's Girl," became a United Methodist minister. He calls her the single greatest impact in his life.

"Like a lot of Black women, she embodied wisdom and resiliency and vision. She taught me how to work. And she taught me how to change because I saw her changing."

He was inspired by her commitment to a spiritual path, especially when she went against the wishes of some in her family, who — like in many patriarchal religions — believed a woman should not lead a congregation.

"I'm very proud of him," said the Rev. Wendy Owens, who sat near her son in her living room, decorated with their photographs and painted portraits.

"He made his path. He walked his path, or he might have even ran his path," she said. "Don't know how he got there, but he got there."

A life devoted to spirituality seemed unlikely for her son after he entered Berry College, a nondenominational Christian school. It didn't deepen his relationship with Christianity. Instead, he stopped attending church. He wanted to "develop a healthy sense of self-worth" about his queerness, and was dismayed by conservative religious views on gender and sexuality. He felt the way that God had been presented to him was too rigid, even vengeful. So, in his words, he "broke up with God."

His new religion, he said, became service. He trained as an advocate for sexual assault survivors, and volunteered for projects on HIV/AIDS education, homelessness, teen pregnancy and substance abuse.

"Even though I wasn't doing this theology anymore, what I was definitely doing was following the path of Jesus: feeding people, sheltering people."

After college, he moved to Boston and joined Haley House, a nonprofit partly inspired by the Catholic Worker Movement that runs a soup kitchen and affordable housing programs.

There, he said, he met people across a range of religious traditions — "from Hinduism to Christian Science to all the denominations of Christianity, Buddhists, Wiccans, Muslims. Monastics from different traditions, everyone."

A Buddhist friend gave him a book that helped him find his spiritual path: "Cave in the Snow," by Tibetan Buddhist nun Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo.

The British-born nun spent years isolated in a cave in the Himalayas to follow the rigorous path of the most devoted yogis. She later founded a nunnery in India focused on giving women in Tibetan Buddhism some of the opportunities reserved for monks.

"When I started exploring Buddhism, I never thought, 'Oh, Black people don't do this, or maybe this is in conflict with my Christian upbringing,'" Owens said. "What I thought was: 'Here's something that can help me to suffer less. ... I was only interested in how to reduce harm against myself and others.'"

At Harvard Divinity School, he was again immersed in religious diversity — even a Satanist was there.

"What I love about Rod is that he's deeply himself no matter who he's with," said Cheryl Giles, a Harvard Divinity professor who mentored him and who now considers him one of her own teachers.

"When I think of him, I think of this concept of Bodhisattva in Buddhism, the deeply compassionate being who is on the path to awakening and sees the suffering of the world and makes a commitment to

help liberate others," said Giles.

"And I love," she said, "that he's Black and Buddhist."

Through Buddhism, mindfulness and long periods of silent retreats, Owens eventually reconciled with God.

"God isn't some old man sitting on a throne in the clouds, who's, like, very temperamental," he said. "God is space and emptiness and energy. God is always this experience, inviting us back through our most divine, sacred souls. God is love."

His schedule keeps him busy these days — appearing in podcasts and social media, speaking to college students and leading meditations, yoga and spiritual retreats across the world.

So much inspires him. He wrote his latest book listening to Beyonce and thinking about the work of choreographer Alvin Ailey. There's Toni Morrison and James Baldwin. He loves Tony Kushner's "Angels in America." And pioneering fashion journalist Andre Leon Talley of Vogue magazine, who he says taught him to appreciate beauty.

"I want people to feel the same way when they experience something that I talk about or write about," Owens said. "That's part of the work of the artist — to help us to feel and to not be afraid to feel. To help us dream differently, inspire us and shake us out of our rigidity to get more fluid."

Young brother and sister dead, several hurt when vehicle crashes into Michigan birthday party

BERLIN TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — A young brother and sister died and several people were injured, some of them seriously, when a vehicle driven by a suspected drunken driver crashed into a young child's birthday party Saturday at a boat club, a Michigan sheriff said.

An 8-year-old girl and her 5-year-old brother died at the scene in the crash, when a 66-year-old woman drove 25 feet (7.6 meters) into the building about 3 p.m. at the Swan Creek Boat Club in Berlin Township, about 30 miles (48.2 kilometers) south of Detroit, Monroe County Sheriff Troy Goodnough said.

"The scene was described by the first responders as extremely chaotic, with high level of emotions of those directly involved and those who witnessed this horrific incident," he said.

Three children and six adults were taken to area hospitals by two helicopters or ambulances with life-threatening injuries, he said. Others injured were given first aid at the scene and some were taken to hospitals by private vehicles.

Goodnough did not identify the woman driving the vehicle but said she was taken into custody and held at the Monroe County Jail suspected of operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated causing death. She was cooperating with authorities and likely would face more charges as the investigation continues, he said.

Authorities were notified the woman may have been at a nearby tavern before the incident, Goodnough said, adding they closed the establishment and planned to execute a search warrant there as part of the investigation.

The House passes billions in aid for Ukraine and Israel after months of struggle. Next is the Senate

By STEPHEN GROVES and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House has approved \$95 billion in foreign aid for Ukraine, Israel and other U.S. allies in a rare weekend session as Democrats and Republicans banded together after months of hard-right resistance over renewed American support for repelling Russia's invasion.

With an overwhelming vote Saturday, the \$61 billion in aid for Ukraine passed in a matter of minutes, a strong showing as American lawmakers race to deliver a fresh round of U.S. support to the war-torn ally. Many Democrats cheered on the House floor and waved blue-and-yellow flags of Ukraine.

Aid to Israel and the other allies also won approval by healthy margins, as did a measure to clamp down on the popular platform TikTok, with unique coalitions forming to push the separate bills forward. The whole package will go to the Senate, which could pass it as soon as Tuesday. President Joe Biden has

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promised to sign it immediately.

"We did our work here, and I think history will judge it well," said a weary Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., who risked his own job to marshal the package to passage.

Biden spoke separately with Johnson and Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries to thank them for "putting our national security first" by advancing the legislation, the White House said.

"I urge the Senate to quickly send this package to my desk so that I can sign it into law and we can quickly send weapons and equipment to Ukraine to meet their urgent battlefield needs," the president said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine said he was "grateful" to both parties in the House and "personally Speaker Mike Johnson for the decision that keeps history on the right track," he said on X, formerly Twitter.

"Thank you, America!" he said.

The scene in Congress was a striking display of action after months of dysfunction and stalemate fueled by Republicans, who hold the majority but are deeply split over foreign aid, particularly for Ukraine. Johnson relied on Democrats to ensure the military and humanitarian funding — the first major package for Ukraine since December 2022 — won approval.

The morning opened with a somber and serious debate and an unusual sense of purpose as Republican and Democratic leaders united to urge quick approval, saying that would ensure the United States supported its allies and remained a leader on the world stage. The House's visitor galleries were crowded with onlookers.

"The eyes of the world are upon us, and history will judge what we do here and now," said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Passage through the House cleared 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 struggled for months over what to do, first demanding that any assistance for Ukraine be tied to policy changes at the U.S.-Mexico 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 the Indo-Pacific.

"Sometimes when you are living history, as we are today, you don't understand the significance of the actions of the votes that we make on this House floor, of the effect that it will have down the road," said New York Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "This is a historic moment."

Opponents, particularly the hard-right Republicans from Johnson's majority, argued that the U.S. should focus on the home front, addressing domestic border security and the nation's rising debt load, and they warned against spending more money, which largely flows to American defense manufacturers, to produce weaponry used overseas.

Still, Congress has seen a stream of world leaders visit in recent months, from 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 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, paving the way for Democrats to give their rare support to clear the procedural hurdles needed for a final vote.

"We have a responsibility, not as Democrats or Republicans, but as Americans to defend democracy wherever it is at risk," Jeffries said during the debate.

While aid for Ukraine failed to win a majority of Republicans, several dozen progressive Democrats voted against the bill aiding Israel as they demanded an end to the bombardment of Gaza that has killed

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thousands of civilians. A group of roughly 20 hard-right Republicans voted against every portion of the aid package, including for allies like Israel and Taiwan that have traditionally enjoyed support from the GOP.

Some Republicans also angrily objected to their counterparts waving Ukrainian flags during the vote. Rep. Kat Cammack, a Florida Republican, said on X she was "infuriated" by the display and was working on legislation to prohibit the flags of foreign nations on the House floor.

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 majority of Republicans opposed further aid. Trump ally Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., offered an amendment to zero out the money, but it was rejected.

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 did 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 Greene, supported a "motion to vacate" that can lead to a vote on removing the speaker. Egged on by far-right personalities, she is also being joined by a growing number of lawmakers including Reps. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., and Thomas Massie, R-Ky., who is urging Johnson to voluntarily step aside.

The package included several Republican priorities that Democrats endorsed, 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 tide of the war as Russia pummels Ukrainian forces beset by a shortage of troops and ammunition.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., announced the Senate would begin procedural votes on the package Tuesday, saying, "Our allies across the world have been waiting for this moment."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, as he prepared to overcome objections from his right flank next week, said, "The task before us is urgent. It is once again the Senate's turn to make history."

Crush of lawsuits over voting in multiple states creates a shadow war for the 2024 election

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — As President Joe Biden and Donald Trump step up their campaigning in swing states, a quieter battle is taking place in the shadows of their White House rematch.

The Republican National Committee, newly reconstituted under Trump, has filed election-related lawsuits in nearly half the states. Recent lawsuits over voter roll maintenance in Michigan and Nevada are part of a larger strategy targeting various aspects of voting and election administration.

It's not a new strategy. But with recent internal changes at the RNC and added pressure from the former president, the legal maneuvering is expected to play an increasingly significant role for the party as Election Day in November approaches. The lawsuits are useful for campaign messaging, fundraising and raising doubts about the validity of the election.

Danielle Alvarez, a senior adviser to the RNC and the Trump campaign, said the lawsuits were one of the organization's main priorities this year.

"This is something that's very important to President Trump," she said. "He has said that this is something the RNC should do year-round."

Democrats and legal experts are warning about how the lawsuits might overwhelm election officials and

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undermine voter confidence in the the results of the balloting.

The Democratic National Committee has a legal strategy of its own, building "a robust voter protection operation, investing tens of millions of dollars," to counter the GOP's efforts that seek to restrict access to the polls, spokesperson Alex Floyd said.

"The RNC is actively deploying an army of lawyers to make it harder for Americans' ballots to be counted," he said.

Election litigation soared after the 2020 election as Trump and his allies unsuccessfully challenged his loss to Biden in dozens of lawsuits.

Experts that year wondered whether the blitz of legal action was an aberration caused by false claims of a stolen election and changes to voting processes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, said Miriam Seifter, attorney with the State Democracy Research Initiative at the University of Wisconsin Law School.

They quickly realized that wasn't the case as the 2022 midterms also generated a high number of election-related lawsuits. This year is projected to be similar, she said.

"Litigation seems to now be a fixture of each parties' political and electoral strategies," Seifter said.

Voter ID rules, mail ballots and voter roll maintenance are among the RNC's litigation targets. The latest is a lawsuit this month alleging that Michigan has failed to keep its voter rolls up to date.

Maintaining accurate voter rolls by updating voters' status is routine for election officials, who watch for death notices, changes in motor vehicle records or election mail being repeatedly returned. Michigan also uses ERIC, an interstate data-sharing pact that helps states update voter lists but has been targeted by conspiracy theories.

Opponents of the lawsuit have said it relies on unsubstantiated, flawed data and runs the risk of purging legitimate voters.

"They're claiming there's a problem because one piece of data doesn't match another piece of data," said Justin Levitt, a Loyola Law School professor. "But the pieces of data they're trying to match don't measure the same thing. It's like saying, 'I just looked at the clock and it's different from the temperature on my thermometer.'"

This is not a new tactic, said Caren Short, director of legal and research for the League of Women Voters, which has filed to intervene in the Michigan lawsuit. She said most previous lawsuits have been from "more fringe groups" rather than directly from the RNC.

"Now seeing a prominent political party attempting to purge people from the rolls, it's very concerning," she said.

In the past four years, Michigan's voter rolls have been targeted in three similar unsuccessful lawsuits. Just days after the Michigan lawsuit was filed, the RNC filed a similar one in Nevada.

A federal appeals court earlier sided with the RNC in a lawsuit in Pennsylvania questioning whether officials should count improperly dated absentee ballots. A Wisconsin lawsuit is targeting absentee voting procedures and ballot drop boxes. An RNC lawsuit in Arizona is aiming to invalidate or adjust the state's 200-page elections manual while another in Mississippi seeks to prevent mail ballots from being counted if they are postmarked by Election Day but received days later.

Various other groups have filed similar litigation recently, including a lawsuit against the Maryland State Board of Elections claiming the state's voting system is not in compliance with federal and state law.

Marly Hornik, CEO of United Sovereign Americans, one of the groups behind the Maryland lawsuit, said more lawsuits are intended in other states this year. On its website, United Sovereign Americans, which Hornik said formed last summer, announced plans to file lawsuits in 23 states.

The GOP and affiliated groups are involved in dozens of other cases with more on the way, RNC officials have said. In this election cycle, the RNC's legal team has been involved in more than 80 lawsuits in 23 states, said Alvarez, the RNC spokesperson.

She said part of the reason for the flurry of lawsuits was the lifting of a federal consent decree in 2018 that had sharply limited the RNC's ability to challenge voter verification and other "ballot security."

During an interview this month with Fox News, the RNC chairman, Michael Whatley, emphasized the party's plans to prioritize election-related litigation. He said the RNC is recruiting and training tens of

thousands of poll observers and working with thousands of attorneys.

On Friday, the RNC announced plans to train poll watchers, poll workers and lawyers and send out more than 100,000 attorneys and volunteers to monitor vote-counting across battleground states in November.

Prioritizing election litigation also is reflected in recent changes within the RNC since Whatley and Lara Trump, the former president's daughter-in-law, took control and reshaped the organization with a renewed focus on "election integrity." The RNC now has "election integrity directors" in 13 states.

Christina Bobb, who has promoted false claims of a stolen 2020 election and was part of a Trump-backed fake elector scheme, was tapped to lead the department.

"One of our biggest changes from last cycle to this cycle was making the election integrity department its own department with its own dedicated budget and focus," Alvarez said.

Rick Hasen, an election law expert and professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, said most of the lawsuits are unlikely to win in court but "serve as a basis for fundraising and are trying to keep this issue front and center as a campaign issue."

Democracy groups and legal experts said the lawsuits could pave the way for false narratives challenging the validity of the 2024 election while consuming time and staff at election offices across the country. Post-election lawsuits also could delay or obstruct certification of the results.

"I worry about these lawsuits that are not designed to clarify the rules but instead to lay the groundwork for false claims that an election their side lost was stolen or rigged," said David Becker, founder and executive director of the Center for Election Innovation & Research, which advises local election officials nationwide. "We saw this in 2020. We saw it in 2022. And we're beginning to see the planting of seeds of doubt in the minds of the electorate again in 2024."

Chinese foreign minister arrives in Cambodia, Beijing's closest Southeast Asian ally

By SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi arrived in Cambodia on Sunday for a three-day official visit to reaffirm ties with Beijing's closest ally in Southeast Asia. His visit is the last stop on a three-nation regional swing that also took him to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

He is visiting amid foreign concerns about two big Chinese-funded projects in Cambodia — a planned canal and a naval base — that critics allege could aid Beijing's strategic military interests in Southeast Asia.

China is Cambodia's most important ally and benefactor, with strong influence in its economy. That is illustrated by numerous Chinese-funded projects — particularly infrastructure, including airports and roads, but also private projects such as hotels, casinos and property development. More than 40% of Cambodia's \$10 billion in foreign debt is owed to China.

Wang is scheduled to have separate meetings with Prime Minister Hun Manet and his father, Hun Sen, now serving as president of the Senate after serving for 38 years as Cambodia's head of government until he stepped down last year to be succeeded by his son. Wang was also granted a royal audience with King Norodom Sihamoni.

Hun Manet has shown no sign of deviating from his father's pro-Beijing foreign policy. In August 2023, Wang visited Cambodia just days after Hun Sen announced he would step down as prime minister in favor of his eldest son.

Beijing's support allows Cambodia to disregard Western concerns about its poor record on human and political rights, and in turn Cambodia generally supports Beijing's positions on foreign policy issues such as its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Cambodia has recently reiterated its determination to go ahead with the Chinese-financed 180-kilometer (112-mile) long, \$1.7 billion Funan Techo Canal project across four provinces in the southern part of the country to connect the capital, Phnom Penh, to the Gulf of Thailand.

The plan has raised concern from neighboring Vietnam, where some scholars speculated the 100-meter (330-foot) -wide and 5.4 meter (18-foot) -deep canal could make it easier for China to send military forces

southward, close to Vietnam's southern coast. There are often frosty relations between Vietnam and its massive northern neighbor China, which aggressively claims maritime territory claimed by Hanoi and in 1979 staged a brief invasion.

The United States has also weighed in on the project, appealing for transparency on the part of Cambodia's government. Wesley Holzer, a U.S. Embassy spokesperson in Phnom Penh, was quoted as telling the Voice of America that "the Cambodian people, along with people in neighboring countries and the broader region, would benefit from transparency on any major undertaking with potential implications for regional water management, agricultural sustainability, and security,"

Hun Manet, speaking Thursday to government officials and villagers in southern Takeo province, dismissed the Vietnamese concern and vowed to push forward with the project, which he said would provide a huge benefit to Cambodia.

China also is involved with another project causing foreign concern, its Ream Naval Base on the Gulf of Thailand, which the United States and some international security analysts say is destined to serve as a strategic outpost for Beijing's navy.

The Ream base initially attracted attention in 2019 when The Wall Street Journal reported that an early draft of an agreement seen by U.S. officials would allow China 30 years' use of the base, where it would be able to post military personnel, store weapons and berth warships.

Hun Sen in response repeatedly denied there was such an agreement, pointing out that Cambodia's constitution does not allow foreign military bases to be established on its soil and declaring that visiting ships from all nations are welcome.

The base is situated on the Gulf of Thailand, adjacent to the South China Sea, where China has aggressively asserted its claim to virtually the entire strategic waterway. The U.S. has refused to recognize China's sweeping claims and routinely conducts military maneuvers there to reinforce its status as international waters.

On Dec. 7, two Chinese naval vessels became the first ships to dock at a new pier at the base, coinciding with an official visit to Cambodia by China's top defense official.

When it comes to government planes and political trips, who pays for a president's campaign travel?

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's no simple matter to move the commander in chief from point A to B, and it's even more complicated when the president is seeking a second term.

President Joe Biden recently spent three days in Pennsylvania, a pivotal state in the 2024 campaign, and he plans to be in Virginia and Florida this coming week. The Democratic incumbent is seeking an edge over Republican Donald Trump as he ramps up his travels around the country.

Here's a look at how much it costs and who pays the bill during the campaign season.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

It's not cheap to fly the president's fleet.

The White House uses Sikorsky helicopters known as Marine One when the president is aboard, as well as custom Boeing 747s that are immediately recognizable as the iconic humpback Air Force One. (Sometimes the president uses a more modest modified 757 if his destination is nearby or if a runway isn't long enough to accommodate the bigger plane.)

Marine One costs between \$16,700 and almost \$20,000 per hour to operate, according to Pentagon data for the 2022 budget year. Air Force One is even more expensive: roughly \$200,000 per hour.

But those figures only scratch the surface of the real cost. There also are military cargo planes that travel ahead of the president to make sure his armored limousines are in place, not to mention the enormous security apparatus that follows the president everywhere.

New aircraft are in the works because the current versions are decades old. Sikorsky is producing 23 updated helicopters to serve as Marine One. Boeing is building two new Air Force One planes, and they

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are scheduled to be finished by 2028. According to the Pentagon, the planes will come with all enhancements, including "a mission communication system," a "self-defense system" and even "autonomous baggage loading."

WHO PAYS FOR THE TRAVEL?

When the president flies for political purposes, the campaign is supposed to pay the bill. But during an election year, the line between governing and campaigning can be fuzzy.

For example, Biden held an official event Wednesday in Pittsburgh, where he announced his proposal for higher tariffs on steel imported from China. The event, however, was a not-so-subtle opportunity for the president to rub shoulders with union members who are critical to his reelection, and he jabbed at Trump in his remarks. (At one point Biden joked that the former president was "busy right now," a reference to the hush money trial that recently got underway in New York.)

It's up to the White House counsel's office to figure out what percentage of the president's travels are campaign related. That determines how much the federal government should be reimbursed by the Biden campaign. Sometimes the calculations aren't straightforward, such as when the White House adds an official event to an otherwise political trip.

Norm Eisen, a White House ethics lawyer under President Barack Obama, said both Republicans and Democrats have usually hewed closely to regulations.

"We had a set of rules on how to do the allocations," he said. "They're intricate, and we stuck to them."

No matter what, taxpayers end up on the hook for most of the cost. Campaigns do not pay for all the Secret Service agents and the rest of the security apparatus. In fact, they usually only cover the cost of Air Force One passengers who are flying for explicitly political purposes — sort of like buying a ticket on a particularly exclusive private jet.

HOW MUCH HAS BIDEN PAID?

Biden's campaign and his joint fundraising committee have been stockpiling travel cash in an escrow account maintained by the Democratic National Committee. From January 2023 until the end of last month, they deposited nearly \$6.5 million.

Some of that money goes to general campaign logistics, such as staff expenses and advance work. The account is also used to reimburse the federal government for official aircraft used to transport the president, the first lady, the vice president and the second gentleman when they travel for the reelection effort.

So far, not much money has found its way back to the U.S. Treasury. As of the latest data available, just \$300,000 has been provided.

It's safe to assume that Biden's campaign will end up forking over much more than that once the campaign is over. Trump's team reimbursed the federal government nearly \$4.7 million for travel expenses during the 2020 race.

But Biden probably won't have trouble covering his bills. His campaign and the DNC had more than \$192 million in cash on hand at the end of March.

Nikola Jokic leads NBA champ Denver Nuggets past LeBron James and Lakers 114-103 in playoff opener

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Sports Writer

DENVER (AP) — Unlike their crowd that drowned out the Los Angeles Lakers' pregame introductions, the defending NBA champion Denver Nuggets were a little late to the playoff party Saturday night.

They turned up their offense and defense after a sputtering start, however, powering past the Lakers 114-103 behind Nikola Jokic's 32 points and 12 rebounds in the Western Conference playoff opener, their ninth consecutive triumph over the Lakers.

After watching LeBron James score 19 first-half points, capped by a pull-up 3 from 32 feet in the final second that put the Lakers up 60-57, the Nuggets limited the NBA's career scoring leader to nine points in the second half and didn't allow him to even take a shot in the fourth quarter until just 1:20 remained.

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"We're not going anywhere," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "This is the playoffs. No team in the playoffs, if you get down 12 early, you're not going to just take your ball and go home. We still have plenty of fight left in us and we know that we were better than what we were playing early.

"That's a good team over there. They came into the playoffs playing extremely well, and they showed it. LeBron was on course, I thought he's about to have 50 points tonight, the way he was playing and shooting the ball."

James finished with 27 points and Anthony Davis had 32.

That wasn't nearly enough to match the reigning champs' prowess.

Two other Nuggets matched Jokic's double-double — Jamal Murray (22 points, 10 assists) and Aaron Gordon (12 points, 11 rebounds) — and Michael Porter Jr. came close with 19 points and eight boards.

Denver handed James just his fourth loss in 17 first-round openers, but Malone said, "We've got to watch the film to see what we can do better. This is going to be a hell of a series."

The Lakers haven't beaten the Nuggets since Dec. 16, 2022. They'll try again Monday night in Game 2 at Ball Arena, where Denver is now 34-8 this season.

"To be honest, we are desperate, too. We don't want to lose at home," Jokic said. "I think every game is going to be interesting. So, hopefully we are going to match and be even more physical than them."

Lakers coach Darvin Ham concurred with Malone's sentiment about a competitive series, saying, "Everybody's going to lose their mind over one game, and give them their credit, they held serve at home. They're a tough home team, tough to beat in general, but they're really good at home. ... (But) we did a lot of good things out there tonight."

Denver just did more things better.

The Nuggets had 15 offensive rebounds for 18 second-chance points, 10 more than the Lakers, who grabbed just six offensive boards. And the Nuggets committed just four turnovers — just one by their starters — while the Lakers turned the ball over a dozen times, including a whopping seven by James.

"I thought we played some good ball tonight, just could have been better," James said. "You don't have much room for error versus Denver's team, especially at their home floor. They're just a team that's been through everything. Obviously, they're the defending champions, so you gotta execute, you gotta make shots, you gotta defend. And then you can't give them extra possessions."

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope, who scored all 12 of his points after halftime, made a trio of 3-pointers in a 13-0 run the Nuggets used to seize control in the third quarter at 89-74.

Porter excelled on the court, as coach Malone predicted he would, after a trying week for his family that saw one younger brother, Coban Porter, sentenced to six years in jail for a fatal drunken driving crash on Friday and another, former Toronto Raptors guard Jontay Porter, banned from the NBA for betting on basketball and disclosing confidential information to other bettors.

"I think I definitely tried to compartmentalize," Porter said. "Some bad and sad stuff happened to a couple of my brothers, but I got 15, 16 more brothers in here. So I knew I had to be here for them and come in here and do my job."

The Nuggets entered these playoffs with bull's-eyes on their backs but supremely confident of their chances to repeat after tying a franchise record with 57 regular season wins, four more than last year.

One sign of their looseness: Jokic, who's starring in a teaser for "Despicable Me 4" where he seeks therapy because the Minions think he's their boss, arrived at Ball Arena decked out in a black-and-gray striped scarf and gray pants, looking like Felonius Gru -- the lead character from the movie franchise.

James should have shown up dressed like Vector because he played the perfect villain, at least until halftime.

Denver swept the Lakers in last season's Western Conference finals, the next-to-last step the Nuggets had to clear before claiming their first NBA title.

"I don't ever get into the 'here we go again' mindset," James said. "One game, they protected their home court. We have another opportunity on Monday to come back and be better."

Biden sees a \$35 price cap for insulin as a pivotal campaign issue. It's not that clear-cut

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rarely a day goes without President Joe Biden mentioning insulin prices.

He promotes a \$35 price cap for the medication for Americans on Medicare — in White House speeches, campaign stops and even at non-health care events around the country. His reelection team has flooded swing-state airwaves with ads mentioning it, in English and Spanish.

All that would seemingly add up to a sweeping political and economic impact. The reality is more complicated.

As his campaign tries to emphasize what it sees as an advantage over presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump, Biden often overstates what those people who are eligible for the price cap once paid for insulin. It's also not clear whether the number of Americans being helped will be enough to help sway November's election, even in the most closely contested states that could come down to a few thousand votes.

"It is about political signaling in a campaign much more than it is about demonstrating for people that they benefit from the insulin cap," said Drew Altman, president and CEO of KFF, a nonprofit that researches health care issues. "It is a way to make concrete the fact that you are the health care candidate."

Many who are benefiting from the price cap were already getting insulin at reduced prices, were already Biden supporters, or both. Others who need reduced-price insulin, meanwhile, cannot get it because they do not have Medicare or private health insurance.

Biden's campaign is emphasizing the president's successful efforts to reduce insulin prices and contrasting that with Trump, who first ran for president promising to lower drug prices but took limited action in office.

"It's a powerful and tangible contrast," said Biden campaign spokesman Charles Lutvak. "And it's one we are campaigning on early, aggressively, and across our coalition."

PRICE REDUCTIONS ACROSS THE BOARD

Roughly 8.4 million people in the United States control their blood sugar levels with insulin, and more than 1 million have Type 1 diabetes and could die without regular access to it. The White House says nearly 4 million older people qualify for the new, lower price.

The price cap for Medicare recipients was part of the Inflation Reduction Act, which originally sought to cap insulin at \$35 for all those with health insurance. When it passed in 2022, it was scaled back by congressional Republicans to apply only to older adults.

The Biden administration has also announced agreements with drugmakers Sanofi, Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly, to cap insulin co-payments at \$35 for those with private insurance. They account for more than 90% of the U.S. insulin market.

But Biden says constantly that many people used to pay up to \$400 monthly, which is an overstatement. A Department of Health and Human Services study released in December 2022 found that people with diabetes who were enrolled in Medicare or had private insurance paid an average of \$452 annually, not monthly.

The high prices the president cites mostly affected people without health insurance. But the rates of the uninsured have fallen to record lows because of the Obama administration's signature health care law and the Biden White House's aggressive efforts to ensure those eligible to enroll are doing so more frequently.

So, in effect, one of the administration's policy initiatives is undermining the economic argument for another.

That effort has not reached everyone, though.

Yanet Martinez who lives in Phoenix and supports Biden. She does not work or have health insurance, but gets insulin for around \$16 per month thanks to steep discounts at her local clinic.

The lower prices only apply if her husband, a landscaper, does not make enough to exceed the monthly income limit. If he does, her insulin can jump to \$500-plus, she said.

"I've heard people talk about the price of insulin going down. I've not seen it," said Martinez, 42. "It

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should be uniform. There are a lot of people who don't have any way to afford it and it makes things very difficult."

Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., is sponsoring bipartisan legislation to make the \$35 insulin cap universal, even for people without health insurance. In the meantime, he said, what's been accomplished with Medicare recipients and drugmakers agreeing to reduce their prices is "literally saving lives and saving people money."

"This is good policy because it centers the people rather than the politics," Warnock said. He said that as he travels Georgia, a pivotal swing state in November, people say "thank you for doing this for me, or for someone in my family."

That includes people like Tommy Marshall, a 56-year-old financial services consultant in Atlanta, who has health insurance. He was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age 45 and injects fast-acting insulin several times daily. He paid about \$250 for four weeks to eight weeks worth of medication last November, but saw the price fall by half in February, after Novo Nordisk agreed to cut prices.

"If I was his political consultant, I'd be telling (Biden) to talk about it constantly," said Marshall, a lifelong Democrat and longtime public advocate for cutting insulin prices, including for the advocacy group Protect Our Care Georgia.

Marshall said the price caps "have meaningful emotional resonance" and could sway a close election but also conceded, "You're talking about 18- to 65-year-olds. I can just imagine there's probably two or three other issues that are in front of this one."

"Maybe someone sort of on-the-fence, he added "this could maybe sway them."

ONE OF BIDEN'S KEY ISSUES

Geoff Garin, a pollster for Biden's reelection campaign, said the insulin cap is one of the president's highest performing issues. He said the data was "clear, consistent and overwhelming."

Rich Fiesta, executive director of the Alliance for Retired Americans, which has endorsed Biden, called the insulin cap a strong issue for the president among older voters.

"For the persuadables — and there are some still out there, believe it or not — drug costs are a very important factor," said Fiesta, whose group has 4.4-million members and advocates for health and economic security for older people.

Trump's campaign did not respond to questions. But Theo Merkel, senior fellow at the conservative Paragon Health Institute, countered that the insulin price cut an example of "policies written to fit the talking points other than the other way around."

Merkel, who was a Trump White House adviser on health policy, said manufacturers that have long made insulin prefer caps on how much the insured pay because it gives them more leverage to secure higher prices from insurance companies.

The president's approval ratings on health care are among his highest on a range of issues, but still only 42% of U.S. adults approve of Biden's handling of health care while 55% disapprove, according to a February poll from The Associated Press and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

KFF found in its own poll in December that that 59% of U.S. adults trust the Democratic Party to do a better job addressing health care affordability issues compared to 39% for Republicans, even if only 26% of respondents in the same poll said they knew about the insulin price cap.

"In political terms, the Democrats and Biden have an advantage on health care," Altman said. "They're pressing it."

Today in History: April 22, 6-year-old Elian Gonzalez seized in Miami, returned to Cuban father

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 22, the 113th day of 2024. There are 253 days left in the year.

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On April 22, 2000, in a dramatic pre-dawn raid, armed immigration agents seized 6-year-old Elian Gonzalez, the Cuban boy at the center of a custody dispute, from his relatives' home in Miami; Elian was reunited with his father at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington.

In 1889, the Oklahoma Land Rush began at noon as thousands of homesteaders staked claims.

In 1915, the first full-scale use of deadly chemicals in warfare took place as German forces unleashed chlorine gas against Allied troops at the start of the Second Battle of Ypres (EE'-preh) in Belgium during World War I; thousands of soldiers are believed to have died.

In 1937, thousands of college students in New York City staged a "peace strike" opposing American entry into another possible world conflict.

In 1944, during World War II, U.S. forces began invading Japanese-held New Guinea with amphibious landings at Hollandia and Aitape.

In 1954, the publicly televised sessions of the Senate Army-McCarthy hearings began.

In 1970, millions of Americans concerned about the environment observed the first "Earth Day."

In 1993, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum was dedicated in Washington, D.C., to honor victims of Nazi extermination.

In 1994, Richard M. Nixon, the 37th president of the United States, died at a New York hospital four days after having a stroke; he was 81.

In 2004, Army Ranger Pat Tillman, who'd traded in a multi-million-dollar NFL contract to serve in Afghanistan, was killed by friendly fire; he was 27.

In 2005, Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee) pleaded guilty in a federal courtroom outside Washington, D.C., to conspiring with the Sept. 11 hijackers to kill Americans. (Moussaoui is serving a life prison sentence.)

In 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil platform, operated by BP, sank into the Gulf of Mexico two days after a massive explosion that killed 11 workers.

In 2012, the U.S. and Afghanistan reached a deal on a strategic partnership agreement ensuring that Americans would provide military and financial support to the Afghan people for at least a decade beyond 2014, the deadline for most foreign forces to withdraw.

In 2013, a seriously wounded Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv) was charged in his hospital room with bombing the Boston Marathon in a plot with his older brother, Tamerlan (TAM'-ehr-luhn), who died after a fierce gunbattle with police.

In 2016, leaders from 175 countries signed the Paris Agreement on climate change at the United Nations as the landmark deal took a key step toward entering into force years ahead of schedule.

In 2017, Erin Moran, the former child star who played Joanie Cunningham in the sitcoms "Happy Days" and "Joanie Loves Chachi," died in New Salisbury, Indiana; she was 56.

In 2022, hockey Hall of Famer Guy Lafleur, who helped the Montreal Canadiens win five Stanley Cup titles in the 1970s, died at age 70.

In 2023, Ken Potts, one of the last two remaining survivors of the USS Arizona battleship, which sank during the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, died. He was 102.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jack Nicholson is 87. Singer Mel Carter is 85. Author Janet Evanovich is 81. Country singer Cleve Francis is 79. Movie director John Waters is 78. Singer Peter Frampton is 74. Rock singer-musician Paul Carrack (Mike and the Mechanics; Squeeze) is 73. Actor Joseph Bottoms is 70. Actor Ryan Stiles is 65. Baseball manager Terry Francona is 65. Comedian and entertainment executive Byron Allen is 63. Actor Chris Makepeace is 60. Rock musician Fletcher Dragge (Pennywise) is 58. Actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan is 58. Actor Sheryl Lee is 57. Actor-talk show host Sherri Shepherd is 57. Country singer-musician Heath Wright (Ricochet) is 57. Country singer Kellie Coffey is 53. Actor Eric Mabius is 53. Actor Ingo Rademacher (RAH'-deh-mah-ker) is 53. Rock musician Shavo Odadjian (System of a Down) is 50. Rock singer-musician Daniel Johns (Silverchair) is 45. Actor Malcolm Barrett is 44. Actor Cassidy Freeman is 42. Actor Michelle Ryan is 40. Actor Zack Gottsagen is 39. Actor Amber Heard is 38. Singer-songwriter BC Jean (Alexander Jean) is 37. Drummer Tripp Howell (LANCO) is 35. Rapper/singer Machine Gun Kelly is 34.