

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 1 of 120

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- That's Life by Tony Bender](#)
- [4- School Board Story](#)
- [6- GHS JV Baseball splits with W.I.N.](#)
- [9- 2024 Princess Prom Grand March](#)
- [39- Witte Exteriors Ad](#)
- [40- SD Search Light: Brookings facility using natural gas from cattle manure is first of several planned by utility](#)
- [41- SD Search Light: Federal solar power grants include \\$260 million for South Dakota tribes, rural areas](#)
- [42- SD Search Light: Noem dodges CNN questions on abortion exceptions and election certification](#)
- [43- SD Search Light: NY prosecutor ties Trump hush money payments to campaign as criminal trial kicks off](#)
- [44- SD Search Light: Public forum highlights potential property tax political storm](#)
- [46- Weather Pages](#)
- [50- Daily Devotional](#)
- [51- Subscription Form](#)
- [52- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [53- News from the Associated Press](#)

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.

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.

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



*“The best thing
one can do when
it's raining is to
let it rain.”*

HENRY WADSWORTH
LONGFELLOW

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.

Friday, April 26

Senior Menu: Taco salad, Mexican rice with beans, breadstick, cherry fluff.

School Breakfast: Bagel bits.

School Lunch: Lasagna, corn, tea buns.

Track at Webster, 1 p.m.

Saturday April 27

Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

High School Baseball: Varsity vs. Howard at 2 p.m. in Groton.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

© 2024 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 2 of 120

1440

In partnership with **smartasset**[™]

Israel's military intelligence chief announced his resignation yesterday over failing to prevent Hamas' Oct. 7 cross-border raid that left 1,200 people in Israel dead and more than 250 others taken hostage. Maj. Gen. Aharon Haliva is the first senior Israeli leader to resign over the attack.

US apparel retailer Express Inc., whose portfolio includes menswear brand Bonobos and lifestyle brand UpWest, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection yesterday. Express also announced it plans to shutter more than 100 of its roughly 530 stores nationwide. Closing

sales are expected to begin today.

Construction of a new passenger rail system linking the Los Angeles area to Las Vegas began yesterday. The Brightline West system, spanning 218 miles mostly along Interstate 15, is expected to be the nation's first true high-speed intercity rail network. The route is expected to take around 30,000 travelers per day between Rancho Cucamonga, California, and Las Vegas.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Cher, Jimmy Buffett, and Mary J. Blige headline 2024 class of 16 inductees into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

First round of NBA playoffs continue; see latest bracket ... and NHL Stanley Cup playoffs also underway.

Film Academy announces several changes to the 2025 Oscars, including changes to rules affecting best picture, animated feature, and original score categories.

Science & Technology

Meta to release its mixed reality operating system to third-party developers for use by other companies; Microsoft, Lenovo, and others expected to produce competing headsets using Meta's Horizon OS.

Memory study in worms reveals short-term information can be retained longer if the creatures are cooled below room temperature or given lithium; findings shed light on the neuroscience of forming and discarding memories.

CRISPR gene editing demonstrated in kissing bugs, a step toward combating the spread of Chagas disease; the potentially fatal illness affects roughly 8 million people, largely in rural Latin America.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.9%, Dow +0.7%, Nasdaq +1.1%) as shares rebound and investors look ahead to major corporate earnings results this week.

Supermarket chains Kroger and Albertsons to sell 166 more locations as they seek regulatory approval of their \$25B merger; the Federal Trade Commission sued to block Kroger's acquisition of Albertsons earlier this year. The FTC sues to block Tapestry Inc.'s \$8.5B purchase of Capri Holdings, owner of brands such as Versace and Michael Kors.

Goldman Sachs to sell automated investing business Marcus Invest, will transfer Marcus Invest clients and their assets to independent investment-advisory firm Betterment.

Politics & World Affairs

Opening arguments begin in former President Donald Trump's criminal trial in Manhattan over allegedly falsifying business records to cover up hush money payments to a former adult film star; first witness is called to the stand.

US Supreme Court agrees to hear case over whether the Biden administration can regulate "ghost guns," privately made firearms without serial numbers; regulations are in effect as litigation plays out, with high court to take up case in the fall.

Record-breaking flooding in China's most populous province, Guangdong, prompts evacuations of more than 110,000 residents; at least four people have died and 10 are missing.

That's Life by Tony Bender: Not a statistic

I empathized with Princess Kate when she was essentially forced to announce her cancer diagnosis. It came not too long after a similar announcement from King Charles III. It doesn't matter who you are, cancer is the great equalizer. One in two people will get a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime. We're living longer so cells have more time to mutate. Diagnoses are better; that's part of it. Chemicals, plastics, and preservatives probably aren't helping.

We'll beat it, though.

Anyone who's had a doctor look you in the eye with the bad news, gets it. If you're a private person, especially one with kids, first of all, you want to protect them as long as you can—at least until you have a clear medical path forward. The hope part.

"I'm not a statistic," I told my kids four years ago, after my diagnosis of esophageal cancer. We'd caught it relatively early. The cause? Acid reflux. Who knew?

I would've kept it private but there were factors that made it impossible. For one, it's impossible to go for treatment without running into someone you know. It's sadly eye-opening. "You, too, huh?" Word gets out.

The far braver individuals are open about their journey. Journey, they call it, and it is. It takes courage to be vulnerable.

The biggest reason I didn't want my diagnosis on the streets was I didn't want to be the focus of a death watch. I've heard people discuss others. "Oh, he doesn't look good. He won't be around long." It's not intentionally malicious, but it's negative, and negative energy I don't need.

I'm a great believer in positive energy. Prayers. I'm not a statistic. If the negativity was out there, positivity eclipsed it. In area churches, prayers were said for me. Pray for the heathen!

It was powerful medicine.

The plan was to do radiation and chemotherapy and then an esophagectomy. It's a major surgery involving a lot of tubes. When I woke up... well, I've seen less complicated plates of spaghetti.

I couldn't just disappear from the opinion pages for months without some kind of explanation, so I used the opportunity to explain what was happening and urged anyone with acid reflux to get it checked. Many people told me they did just that.

The good news is cancer treatment has evolved in leaps and bounds since I lost my father to colon cancer 31 years ago. I was fortunate. I happened to fall into a 6-week window during which I was eligible for newly-approved immunotherapy. It worked.

Still... "You're going to have setbacks," my first oncologist told me. Fair enough. Better to go in with your eyes wide open and a certain amount of pragmatism. Hurdles, I call them.

I've had two reoccurrences. In each case, a barrage of chemo, radiation, and other treatments beat it back. And positive thinking. I go into treatments thinking one thing: "Good, we're killing cancer cells."

It's a balancing act. Kill the cancer cells without killing you. In both cases, treatment knocked me out for months. The last reoccurrence was in July. Three tiny spots, but we hit it hard. The last two scans, plus a colonoscopy and an endoscopy showed, in medical nomenclature, "no evidence of cancer." There are no sweeter words.

In the beginning, I was anxious about tests. As if not knowing would make it go away. Now, I embrace them because if there's a hurdle there, I want to know. And take it on.

The side effects can be relatively mild or they can be debilitating. In my case, the last round has been challenging, so I've been AWOL quite a bit. And incommunicado. During my esophagectomy, the surgeons damaged a nerve and paralyzed a vocal cord.

Normally, I can work with it, but the very treatments that have kept my scans clean, irritate my throat, so many days, I just can't talk. So, if I don't pick up, that's why. Hurdles.

I was chided by a friend for not providing updates. "I don't want people to worry," I said. After all, I don't dwell on it. "But, people care," she reminded me. That's fair. So there you go, friends. The update. I remain optimistic. As I write this, I feel great. To my friends fighting the fight, well, we're in the same boat, paddling like hell, and I'm pulling for you.

The reality is, everyone, from the day we're born, we're all buying time. And as time goes on, we become more aware.

Think positive. And remember, we're not statistics.

Groton Area plans to improve elementary attendance

A new plan seeks to improve school attendance.

The Groton Area School Board approved a school success action plan at Monday's meeting. The plan has been in the works since the first semester.

Groton Area Elementary School was identified for "targeted support and improvement" based on data from the 2022-2023 school year. That support is geared toward improving attendance for Hispanic/Latino and English learner students at the elementary school.

The action plan would create a professional development plan for teachers, push the administration to share district-wide goals with those teachers, allow the teachers to implement meaningful learning experience and work toward student achievement and attendance improvement.

"Essentially, if we can get the teachers' some relative teaching strategies and training, hopefully the students will be more motivated," said elementary Principal Brett Schwan.

The district is looking at changes to faculty in-service teacher development to help accomplish those goals, including working with teacher education faculty at Northern State University. The theme for that professional development is "Why don't students like school?"

Additional training in February 2025 will focus on utilizing technology in the classroom to capture students' interests.

A hop, step and jump to new pits?

Assistant Track Coach Lynette Grieve, who was at Monday's meeting to present a physical education program overview, told the board there are issues with areas at the track.

"Our long- and triple-jump pits are in the pits," she said. "They are the worst in our conference."

Students from other schools don't even want to jump into those pits, she said. And there are problems with the sand in the pits as well.

Some students and staff have found things such as nails and broken glass in the pits in the last few years, she said. Those items were brought in in the gravel used to fill the pits.

This year, Grieve and volunteer assistant track coach Carla Tracy have brought in bags of sand from S&S Lumber to top off the pits in order to avoid that.

The pits need a barrier on the sides to keep the sand from going into the grass, Grieve said. It would be a band-aid for now, but something needs to be done about them.

- The school board approved the second reading of changes to the middle/high school student handbook. Some changes include removing outdated information and banning drinks other than water in the hallways and classrooms. The handbook is for the 2024-2025 school year.

- The district is seeking bids for another phase of roof replacement. The roof on the northeast portion of the elementary school is the last section that needs to be replaced after other portions were worked on through the last three years, said Superintendent Joe Schwan. Sealed bids will be opened at 2 p.m. Monday, May 13 ahead of the school board's meeting that night.

- Music, art and health teachers presented an overview of their programs to the board.

- o K-12 Vocal Music Teacher Tanner Pietz told the board there is a lot of talent within the classes and groups he teaches. His focus since starting in December has been building the foundations of music and choral singing. Pietz said the district could consider adding an alternate class to fill the fine arts credit at the high school, as well as having grades in high school band, choir and other arts classes apply to a student's grade point average.

- o Instrumental Music Teacher Desiree Yeigh told the school board that the fifth grade band and middle school band have grown since last year. The fifth grade band had 26 students during the 2022-2023 school year, but has since grown to 33 students for the 2023-2024 school year. The middle school band grew from 33 in the 2022-2023 school year to 49 in the 2023-2024 school year. The high school

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 5 of 120

band dropped from the 2022-2023 total of 35 students down to the 2023-2024 total of 27 students. Part of the drop was because of a large group having graduated in 2023. However, the high school band will have close to 40 next year. Many individuals and ensembles have earned excellent and superior ratings at regional competitions. Yeigh also told the board that it has been difficult to schedule individual lessons because of the large number of students playing instruments. She asked the board to consider finding a part-time lesson teacher. She also told the board she is concerned about the future of the show choir due to a decline in the number of students. Yeigh floated the idea of partnering with Langford for that program.

o Art Teacher Janene Harry reviewed changes and progress made in the arts program. A special-needs art class was added this year, and the district is looking at making it a continuing venture. In addition, middle school and high school arts students made Christmas cards for regional nursing homes. Students made close to 100 cards, each with messages from students. Staff at those facilities told Harry that residents really appreciated it, and for some residents, it was the only card they got during the holiday. There are two more chances for people to see the students' art work, during the middle school spring concert on April 25 and the high school spring concert and award night on May 2.

o K-12 Physical Education/Health Teacher Kyle Gerlach told the school board he is going back over lessons from earlier in the school year to see how well elementary students are retaining the information. For health classes, he has spent significant time covering emotional and mental health. Gerlach has been working with K-12 School Counselor Emily Neely to address suicide prevention and bullying with ninth graders, and has been utilizing lessons and videos to review topics such as emotions and tobacco/alcohol abuse. Gerlach added he is somewhat limited at the elementary school because of space. The middle/high school classes will also need updated textbooks that address issues such as vaping, cyber bullying and more.

o Physical Education Teacher Lynette Grieve told the board she works with junior kindergarteners, kindergarteners, first graders and second graders on balance, exercise, flexibility, agility, muscle strength and more. She works on two- to three-week units that cover things like kickball, Frisbee, soccer, team dodgeball, corner kick ball, amoeba tag and more. She added it's amazing how many students don't know what a somersault is.

o Athletic Director Alexa Schuring discussed what has been going on since she took over the director position at the beginning of the school year. There were 43 football players, 10 boys golfers, 17 boys soccer players, 18 girls soccer players, ten cross country runners, 51 volleyball players, 12 cheerleaders, 38 girl basketball players, 32 boys basketball players, 27 wrestlers, 38 female track athletes, 27 male track athletes and eight girl golfers. "I am very proud of what our athletes and coaches have accomplished," she said. That includes showings at state championship tournaments, the first Groton Area Spirit of Su Award winner and the Spirit of Six winners. Schuring added that she's gone back to having athletic award nights, including one in the fall and one earlier this month for winter sports. That way, she said, all the athletes can be recognized. "Overall I love my position," she said. "Some days it's a lot, but overall I'm very grateful."

• The school board approved the agreement negotiated with the Groton Teachers Association and issued teacher contracts. Signed contracts are due back to the district by Friday, May 3.

• The school board approved a canvass of votes for the district opt-out election held April 9. More than 2,500 voters are registered within the district boundaries, and 842 votes were cast for the opt-out election.

- Elizabeth Varin

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 6 of 120

Groton Area Tigers JV Come Up Short Against W.I.N. Jr Varsity

Groton Area Tigers JV could not keep pace with W.I.N. Jr Varsity 7-4 on Monday.

W.I.N. Jr Varsity jumped out to the lead in the top of the fourth inning after Tristan Gosch singled, scoring one run, Alec Mikkelsen drew a walk, scoring one run, and Jacob Schmidt tripled, scoring three runs.

Mac Heinz earned the win for W.I.N. Jr Varsity. They gave up one hit and zero runs over three innings, striking out seven and walking four. Alex Abeln took the loss for Groton Area Tigers JV. The starting pitcher went three and two-thirds innings, giving up four runs on seven hits, striking out three and walking four.

Isaiah Scepaniak went 1-for-2 at the plate as the outfielder led the team with two runs batted in. Nick Groeblichhoff went 2-for-2 at the plate to lead Groton Area Tigers JV in hits. Groton Area Tigers JV had a strong eye at the plate, amassing six walks for the game. Groton

Area Tigers JV ran wild on the base paths, accumulating four stolen bases for the game.

W.I.N. Jr Varsity amassed 12 hits in the game.

Schmidt, TJ Wiedebush, Lincoln Kroll, and Gosch each collected two hits for W.I.N. Jr Varsity. Schmidt led W.I.N. Jr Varsity with three runs batted in. The infielder went 2-for-4 on the day. Braydon Kroll led W.I.N. Jr Varsity with three walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, collecting nine walks for the game.

Groton Area Tigers JV Surge Past W.I.N. Jr Varsity Thanks To Big Second Inning

Groton Area Tigers JV scored six runs in the second inning, which helped them defeat W.I.N. Jr Varsity 8-1 on Monday. Lincoln Krause singled, scoring one run, Karsten Fliehs drew a walk, scoring one run, Jarrett Erdmann doubled, scoring two runs, and Isaiah Scepaniak singled, scoring two runs.

Groton Area Tigers JV got on the board in the bottom of the first inning after Fliehs singled, and Braden Fliehs walked, each scoring one run.

TC Schuster earned the win for Groton Area Tigers JV. They surrendered six hits and one run (zero earned) over five innings, striking out seven and walking two. Lincoln Kroll took the loss for W.I.N. Jr Varsity. The lefty went one and one-third innings, allowing seven runs on two hits, striking out three and walking seven.

Krause, Fliehs, Scepaniak, and Erdmann each collected one hit for Groton Area Tigers JV. Scepaniak and Erdmann each drove in two runs for Groton Area Tigers JV. Alex Abeln led Groton Area Tigers JV with two walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating eight walks for the game.

Mac Heinz led W.I.N. Jr Varsity with one run batted in. The infielder went 1-for-2 on the day. Leadoff hitter Kroll led W.I.N. Jr Varsity with two hits in three at bats.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 7 of 120

W.I.N. Jr Varsity 7 - 4 Groton Area Tigers JV

📍 Home 📅 Monday April 22, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
W..N	0	0	0	5	2	0	0	7	12	4
GRTN	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	5	2

BATTING

W.I.N. Jr Varsity	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Kroll (CF, P)	2	1	0	0	3	0
J Schmidt (3B)	4	0	2	3	0	2
L Fischbach (SS,...	2	0	1	0	2	1
Joe (LF)	2	0	1	0	1	0
M Heinz (P, 3B)	3	1	1	0	1	1
L Kroll (1B)	4	2	2	0	0	0
T Wiedebush (RF)	4	0	2	0	0	1
B Halvorson (C)	3	1	0	0	1	1
T Gosch (2B)	3	1	2	1	0	0
A Mikkelsen	3	1	1	0	1	2
Totals	30	7	12	4	9	8

3B: J Schmidt, **TB:** Joe, L Kroll 2, L Fischbach, M Heinz, T Wiedebush 2, T Gosch 2, J Schmidt 4, A Mikkelsen, **HBP:** Joe, T Gosch, **SB:** J Schmidt, B Kroll, **LOB:** 13

PITCHING

W.I.N. Jr Vars	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
M Heinz	3.0	1	0	0	4	7	0
L Fischbach	2.2	3	4	0	1	6	0
B Kroll	1.1	1	0	0	1	2	0
Totals	7.0	5	4	0	6	15	0

W: M Heinz, **P-S:** L Fischbach 48-32, M Heinz 61-28, B Kroll 21-11, **WP:** L Fischbach 3, M Heinz, **BF:** L Fischbach 14, M Heinz 14, B Kroll 6

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
A Abeln (P, SS)	4	0	1	0	0	3
L Krause (C)	3	0	0	0	1	2
K Flihs (1B, P)	3	1	1	0	1	1
J Erdmann (CF)	4	0	0	0	0	1
N Groeblinghoff (...	2	1	2	1	1	0
E Kroll (SS, 3B)	3	1	0	1	0	2
T Schuster (2B)	2	1	0	0	1	1
B Flihs (RF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
I Scepaniak (RF,...	2	0	1	2	0	1
G Englund	0	0	0	0	0	0
G Kroll (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
K Oswald (LF, RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
J Bisbee	2	0	0	0	1	1
Totals	28	4	5	4	6	15

TB: I Scepaniak, K Flihs, N Groeblinghoff 2, A Abeln, **SB:** E Kroll, K Flihs, N Groeblinghoff, T Schuster, **LOB:** 9

Groton Area 1	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Abeln	3.2	7	4	4	4	3	0
N Groebling...	0.1	3	3	3	3	0	0
K Flihs	3.0	2	0	0	2	5	0
Totals	7.0	12	7	7	9	8	0

L: A Abeln, **P-S:** K Flihs 46-27, N Groeblinghoff 29-11, A Abeln 60-35, **HBP:** K Flihs, A Abeln, **BF:** K Flihs 14, N Groeblinghoff 7, A Abeln 20

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 8 of 120

W.I.N. Jr Varsity 1 - 8 Groton Area Tigers JV

📍 Home 📅 Monday April 22, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
W..N	0	1	0	0	0	1	6	3
GRTN	2	6	0	0	X	8	4	3

BATTING

W.I.N. Jr Varsity	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Kroll (P)	3	0	2	0	0	0
J Schmidt (3B)	2	0	0	0	1	1
L Fischbach (C)	4	0	1	0	0	0
Joe (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	2
T Gosch (LF)	3	0	0	0	0	1
A Mikkelsen (SS)	3	1	1	0	0	0
M Heinz (2B)	2	0	1	1	1	1
B Kroll (CF, P)	1	0	1	0	0	0
T Wiedebush (1B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
B Halvorson	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	22	1	6	1	2	7

2B: A Mikkelsen, **TB:** L Fischbach, A Mikkelsen 2, L Kroll 2, B Kroll, M Heinz, **CS:** L Kroll, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

W.I.N. Jr Vars	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
L Kroll	1.1	2	7	7	7	3	0
B Kroll	2.2	2	1	1	1	6	0
Totals	4.0	4	8	8	8	9	0

L: L Kroll, **P-S:** L Kroll 62-26, B Kroll 42-27, **BF:** L Kroll 13, B Kroll 12

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
A Abeln (SS)	1	2	0	0	2	1
L Krause (CF)	3	1	1	1	0	1
K Flihs (C)	2	2	1	1	1	0
J Erdmann (DH)	3	1	1	2	0	1
B Flihs	2	0	0	0	1	2
E Kroll (3B)	0	0	0	0	1	0
G Englund (3B)	0	0	0	0	1	0
I Scepaniak (1B)	2	0	1	2	0	1
J Bisbee (LF)	1	1	0	0	1	1
G Kroll (RF)	1	1	0	0	1	0
N Scepaniak (2B)	2	0	0	0	0	2
Totals	17	8	4	6	8	9

2B: J Erdmann, **TB:** L Krause, I Scepaniak, J Erdmann 2, K Flihs, **SB:** E Kroll, K Flihs, A Abeln, **LOB:** 5

Groton Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
T Schuster	5.0	6	1	0	2	7	0
Totals	5.0	6	1	0	2	7	0

W: T Schuster, **P-S:** T Schuster 85-49, **BF:** T Schuster 24

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 9 of 120

2024 Princess Prom Grand March



Calli Wilkinson escorted by Trent Kurtz.



Avery escorted by Cody Roettele.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 10 of 120



**Elizabeth and Kinley escorted by
Lance Haskell.**



**Collyns, Maci and Brelle escorted by
Michael Dunbar.**

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 11 of 120



Regan escorted by Jon Lemke.



**Mya, Emme and Taylor escorted by
Trey Fliehs.**

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 12 of 120



Harper escorted by Jayme Boerger.



Ava escorted by Ian Rose.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 13 of 120



Parker escorted by Quintin Biermann.



Destry and Miakoda escorted by Tyler Neigel.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 14 of 120



Shealee and Sophia escorted by Grant Gilchrist.



Kaylee escorted by John Sippel.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 15 of 120



Hadlee escorted by Blake Ronning.



Railey escorted by Tony Mulder.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 16 of 120



Ella escorted by Brandon Clocksene.



Rayna Loeschke escorted by Gene Loeschke.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 17 of 120



Harper escorted by Justin Cleveland.



Eva and Ruby escorted by Brad Henderson.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 18 of 120



Raven escorted by Brian Bahr.



Jerney escorted by Jade Weig.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 19 of 120



Layla escorted by Mike Feist.



**Lennox and Lexie escorted by
Spencer Locke.**

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 20 of 120



Cora escorted by Kevin Kotzer.



Maya and River escorted by Taylor Anderson.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 21 of 120



Alli and Andi escorted by Jeremy Iverson.



Claire, Blake and Charli escorted by Andy Erickson.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 22 of 120



Annie and Harper escorted by Kris Harry.



Kylie and Gracie escorted by Adam Borg.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 23 of 120



Kate escorted by Amanda Tarpein.



Hazel escorted by Jason Hill.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 24 of 120



Lyza and Libby escorted by Gene Johnson.



Kayleigh escorted by Chris Raba.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 25 of 120



Haley escorted by Seth Erickson.



Ary escorted by Greyson Cutler.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 26 of 120



Tori Schuster escorted by Tom Schuster.



Kennedy and Jade escorted by Brock Ball.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 27 of 120



Molly escorted by Travis Swisher.



Jaeden and Kaelee escorted by Justin Morehouse.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 28 of 120



Alandra and Amara escorted by Wes Graff.



Avery and Liv escorted by Logan Huber.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 29 of 120



Emersyn, Wrenley, Hazel and Preslee escorted by Heath Giedt.



Jozie escorted by Randy Lord.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 30 of 120



Aubrie escorted by Trent Traphagen.



Collins escorted by Richard Traphagen.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 31 of 120



Faith and Paisley escorted by Matthew Johnson.



Macee and Harley escorted by Derick Furman.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 32 of 120



**Alexandra June escorted by
Austin Joseph Clark.**



Ellie escorted by Jake Lasse.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 33 of 120



Ivy escorted by Chuck Cole.



Karter Merkel escorted by Jordan Bethke.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 34 of 120



Sawyer escorted by Andrew Kappes.



Jorie escorted by Chad Locken.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 35 of 120



Ruby escorted by Jeremy Dosch.



River escorted by Keith Wipf.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 36 of 120



Sunny and Nova escorted by Dan Washenburger.



Reagen and Madison escorted by Jeff Harry.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 37 of 120



Taylor escorted by Mark Thompson.



Willow and Aspen escorted by Joshua Cowan.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 38 of 120



Andi escorted by Cole Kampa.



Atley Florey escorted by Nathan Wiede.

Storm Damage To Your Roof?



WITTE 
EXTERIORS LLC

Specializing in Asphalt and Wood Shingles

Call for an estimate

Zack Witte ~ 605-695-7874

Webster, SD

No Contracts!



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Brookings facility using natural gas from cattle manure is first of several planned by utility

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - APRIL 22, 2024 6:31 PM

BROOKINGS — A new facility sending renewable natural gas made from dairy cattle manure to local energy customers could be the first of several such plants, a utility company said Monday while celebrating Earth Day.

Natural gas is mostly methane. It's typically extracted by fracking and drilling into shale formations, and used to heat homes or to fuel power plants that generate electricity.

Turning dairy cow waste into pipeline-grade natural gas begins with collecting manure. The manure is transported to the dairies' on-site tanks where the absence of oxygen facilitates the breakdown of the waste by microbes.

As the manure decomposes, it emits biogas. The biogas is captured and processed to remove moisture and carbon dioxide. Sulfur is also removed and turned into fertilizer for farm fields.

The processed biogas, comparable to natural gas, is shipped by truck to the utility company's new injection site on the north edge of Brookings, to be injected into the local natural gas supply.

The utility company, NorthWestern Energy, provides electricity or natural gas to about 775,300 customers in South Dakota, Montana and Nebraska. A ceremonial valve turning was held Monday at the company's injection site, which provides enough natural gas for about 10,000 residential customers annually in the immediate region, according to NorthWestern Energy CEO Brian Bird.

"We're planning to add about five more of these projects by 2025, allowing us to serve about two-thirds of our South Dakota customers," he said.

The project is part of NorthWestern's goal to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. The company contributed about \$1 million to the project, a company spokesman said, while other partners funded other costs. The entire project, from the manure tanks and processing facilities to transportation and injection, cost about \$150 million. The spokesman said the cost to produce renewable natural gas from cattle manure is the same as traditional production.

South Dakota Public Utilities Commissioner Chris Nelson attended the event. He called the project a "win, win, win" for the state.

"It's a win for the dairy farmers because they have another product to sell, it's a win for consumers because it's another source of natural gas that doesn't have to be shipped into South Dakota," he said, "and it's a win for the environment because that methane is no longer going up into the environment."

Burning natural gas for energy results in fewer emissions of nearly all types of air pollutants and carbon dioxide emissions than burning coal or petroleum products, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. When uncaptured methane is released into the atmosphere, it's more than 28 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping atmospheric heat.

Nelson said NorthWestern's South Dakota service territory is along the Interstate 29 corridor, a region that has seen growth in the dairy industry. As of January, the total count of dairy cows in South Dakota was 208,000, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"That's one of the reasons they're on the leading edge of this," Nelson said.

Federal solar power grants include \$260 million for South Dakota tribes, rural areas

State government turned down opportunity to apply for Solar for All funding

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 22, 2024 5:52 PM

Tribal and rural areas in and around South Dakota are set to benefit from about \$260 million in federal grants for solar energy projects.

A five-state, 14-tribe coalition was awarded \$135.6 million for solar projects, the Environmental Protection Agency announced Monday. A Washington, D.C.-based "green bank," meanwhile, pulled in another \$125 million for tribal and rural projects across North and South Dakota.

The news about the EPA's Solar for All program came on Earth Day.

The money comes from the \$27 billion Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, created through the Biden administration's Infrastructure Reinvestment and Jobs Act of 2021 and administered by EPA. The Solar for All program represents \$7 billion of the \$27 billion.

The state of South Dakota didn't apply for any of the funding on the government level, making it one of six states to have skipped the opportunity.

A spokesperson for Gov. Kristi Noem told South Dakota Searchlight in December that most of the state's energy – north of 80% – is already renewable. Noem called the program "wasteful spending" and said Biden-backed programs represent "the single largest cause of the inflation crisis."

President Joe Biden appeared Monday in Vermont to herald his administration's green investments and its creation of programs like the American Climate Corps, a workforce-training initiative focused on conservation.

Solar for All, Biden said, is "a big deal" that will put solar panels on the rooftops of people who'd otherwise be unable to afford them.

"This program means that 900,000 households – 900,000 – will have solar on their rooftops for the first time, and soon," Biden said. "Millions of families will save over \$400 a year on utility bills."

Tribal coalition collects \$135.6 million

The Northern Plains Tribal Coalition is led by the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nations in North Dakota and includes the South Dakota-based Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate and the Flandreau Santee, Standing Rock, Oglala and Rosebud Sioux tribes.

That coalition's grant funding will be managed by Indigenized Energy, a nonprofit firm founded by Standing Rock member Cody Two Bears in the wake of 2015-16's Dakota Access Pipeline protests. Two Bears said Monday that the group will work with tribes to not only install solar energy, but to operate and maintain the systems when the grant money dries up.

The lack of interest and input from North and South Dakota on the Solar for All grants wasn't surprising to Two Bears, he said. The grant award for the tribal coalition signals that tribes have an opportunity to act as leaders in the climate sphere, regardless of what state governments do – or don't – when grants for action are made available by the federal government.

Two Bears sees solar energy as a path to job creation and skills training, as well as an opportunity to bolster sovereignty and independence.

"It just gives us the opportunity in these tribal communities to lead the way in renewables, to show what is possible," Two Bears said.

In the absence of state government leadership on climate in parts of the West and Midwest, Two Bears said, "we definitely need more examples of how renewable energy can be really impactful to our economies."

Garret Renville, chair of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, said the coalition's work shows how intergovernmental collaboration can serve a wider population.

Every tribal nation has different energy needs, geographies, landscapes and cultures, Renville said, but "through this collaboration, we will work side-by-side with tribes to develop solar projects that meet the

distinct needs of each and every one.”

“As tribal leaders, it is our responsibility to prioritize the health and well being of our people and planet,” he said.

Fred Fox, representing the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nations, said the grants will allow for the installation of rooftop solar on 8,500 homes, with priorities for veterans, tribal elders and families with children.

“That works out to roughly 300 residents of each tribe,” Fox said.

More funding for the Dakotas

The other group awarded one of the 60 Solar for All grants is called the Coalition for Green Capital, a “green bank” nonprofit that uses public dollars to spur private investment in renewable energy through financing.

Green banks, according to the coalition’s website, “care about deploying clean energy rather than maximizing profit.”

That group was awarded \$125 million to work on rooftop solar projects in the rural and tribal areas of both Dakotas.

The Washington, D.C.-based coalition will use the funds to “facilitate grant, tax, and low interest lending to develop solar units for multi-family dwellings,” according to the listing of Solar for All awardees, with priority given to low-income and disadvantaged communities.

It’s the second major federal award of 2024 for the coalition, which was founded in 2009 by Clinton-era Federal Communications Commission Chair Reed Hundt.

On April 4, the EPA announced a \$5 billion award for the group, meant to help shepherd local and regional organizations that aim to start their own “green bank.” That award came from a different pot of federal climate money, the National Clean Investment Fund.

In its press release on the newly awarded grant, the coalition says it has more than \$30 billion of demand for its award funds and believes that private-sector investors are prepared “to add more than twice that to the projects jump-started by public capital.”

Noem dodges CNN questions on abortion exceptions and election certification

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - APRIL 22, 2024 3:16 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem appeared Sunday on CNN and declined to say whether she supports additional abortion-ban exceptions or whether she would have certified the results of the 2020 election.

The only exception in South Dakota’s abortion ban is for the “life of the pregnant female.” CNN “State of the Union” co-host Dana Bash asked if there should be exceptions for victims of rape and incest.

Noem did not give a definitive answer but said, “I just don’t believe a tragedy should perpetuate another tragedy,” and added that she will focus on “walking alongside” prospective mothers in crisis situations.

“I’ll continue to do that and love mothers and families through these situations,” she said.

Noem also said “every state’s going to look different,” echoing recent comments by former President Donald Trump, who is considering Noem as a running mate in the 2024 presidential race. Earlier this month, Trump declined to support a national abortion ban and said the issue should be left to the states.

Trump also said he supports exceptions to abortion bans in cases of rape, incest and to protect the life of the mother.

On CNN, Noem said South Dakota’s abortion ban “was passed decades before I ever became governor.” In fact, lawmakers passed South Dakota’s trigger ban in 2005, 13 years before Noem became governor and two years before her time as a legislator. The ban immediately took effect in 2022 when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a prior precedent establishing a constitutional right to an abortion.

Regarding the 2020 election, Bash asked Noem if she would have certified the results as then-Vice

President Mike Pence did on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump supporters violently attempted to stop the certification.

Noem gave a lengthy response but never answered the question.

"Talking in hypotheticals is not something that I do," Noem said, in part. "I deal with the reality of what I'm dealing with today and every single day. And what I'm going to do from now until we get to November is continue to go across this country and talk to people about Donald Trump."

NY prosecutor ties Trump hush money payments to campaign as criminal trial kicks off

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - APRIL 22, 2024 1:27 PM

WASHINGTON — Oral arguments in former President Donald Trump's historic case in New York began Monday in a Manhattan courtroom where jurors will be tasked with deciding whether deceptive hush money payments to hide an affair amount to a criminal conviction.

The first-ever criminal trial of an ex-U.S. president centers on Trump's alleged falsified business records to cover up a \$130,000 payment to adult film star Stormy Daniels, with whom he denies he had a sexual relationship.

Assistant District Attorney Matthew Colangelo told jurors Monday that Trump's payments to Daniels in 2016, which he reimbursed to his former lawyer Michael Cohen as legal expenses, were meant to "influence the presidential election," according to reporters at the courthouse.

"This case is about a criminal conspiracy and fraud. The defendant, Donald Trump, orchestrated a criminal scheme to corrupt the 2016 presidential election, then he covered up that conspiracy by lying in his New York business records over, and over, and over again," Colangelo argued, according to journalists present.

The New York court does not permit audio or video recording but will provide daily transcripts on its website.

Calling him 'President Trump'

Defense attorney Todd Blanche argued for Trump, whom he said will be referred to as "President Trump" throughout the trial "out of respect" and because he "earned" the title.

Blanche told the jurors "President Trump is innocent. President Trump did not commit any crimes. The Manhattan district attorney should never have brought this case."

Claiming that Trump was unaware of the nuances of the payments, Blanche argued, "You'll learn that President Trump had nothing to do with any of the 34 pieces of paper ... except he signed the checks."

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg charged Trump with 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in the first degree for each reimbursement payment to Cohen.

Blanche also told the jurors to dismiss the prosecution's election interference theory: "I have a spoiler alert: there's nothing wrong with trying to influence an election, it's called democracy," he said, according to reporters in the courthouse.

Trump raised his fist and did not take questions as he left the courtroom for a brief recess after opening statements, according to reporters.

National Enquirer exec called

The prosecution called David Pecker, former chairman of the tabloid National Enquirer's parent company, as its first witness Monday. Pecker was involved in the scheme with Cohen to identify and purchase, nicknamed "catch and kill," damaging stories about Trump ahead of the 2016 election.

The prosecution is also expected to call Cohen, who has already served prison time in relation to the payments, and Hope Hicks, a former Trump campaign press secretary.

The trial could last for longer than a month, possibly two, keeping the presumed 2024 Republican presidential nominee off the campaign trail four days a week.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 44 of 120

The New York proceeding also overlaps with Trump's immunity arguments scheduled for Thursday before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The former president claims he enjoys absolute criminal immunity for his actions while in office, including immunity from special counsel Jack Smith's charges that he allegedly schemed to subvert the 2020 presidential election results, culminating in a violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

New York Judge Juan Merchan denied Trump's request to attend the Supreme Court arguments, saying he must be present at his Manhattan trial, according to media reports.

In early morning posts to his social media platform Truth Social, Trump blamed President Joe Biden — despite the case being at the state level — and repeated his refrain that the trial is politically motivated. He wrote, partially in all caps, that he will now be "STUCK in a courtroom, and not be allowed to campaign for President of the United States!"

Public forum highlights potential property tax political storm

Some attendees propose a shift to higher sales taxes

BY: SETH TUPPER - APRIL 22, 2024 6:00 AM

RAPID CITY — Some frustrated taxpayers attended a public forum Saturday to tell state officials they're taking the wrong approach to taxation.

Several of the roughly 100 attendees said legislators and Gov. Kristi Noem should raise the sales tax rate instead of reducing it, and use the money to replace some of the local government revenue currently supplied by property taxes.

"I don't think there's any other way around getting our property taxes taken care of unless we raise the sales tax," said audience member Beth Paulson, of Custer.

One of the panelists, Donald Olstad, a Hot Springs businessman and former school board member, estimated that a several-percentage-point increase in the sales tax rate could wholly replace property taxes.

"And that would be a great debate," Olstad said.

But elected officials and some political activists are moving in the opposite direction.

Gov. Kristi Noem started a push for lower sales taxes during her reelection campaign in 2022, when she promised to exempt groceries from the state sales tax.

Legislators rejected that proposal in 2023 and instead adopted their own proposal to reduce the state sales tax rate from 4.5% to 4.2%. The reduction is scheduled to expire in 2027, unless legislators make it permanent.

Meanwhile, a Democratic-led citizen group is circulating petitions to put a measure on the Nov. 4 general election ballot that would remove state sales taxes from grocery purchases.

Sales, tourism taxes discussed

Some forum attendees suggested increasing the state tourism tax. That's a 1.5% tax on hotels, campgrounds and some other tourism-related activities.

Beyond the state sales tax and tourism tax, cities can impose up to an additional 2% sales tax, plus another 1% entertainment tax on items such as alcohol, restaurants, hotels and events.

Sales tax revenue goes to cities and the state. Property taxes go primarily to counties and schools.

State Rep. Trish Ladner, R-Hot Springs, is trying to convince her fellow legislators to do something about rising property taxes. She introduced property tax relief bills each of the last two legislative sessions in Pierre, with limited success.

She also organized the forum Saturday in a lecture hall on the South Dakota Mines university campus. When discussion turned to raising the sales tax rate in order to reduce or stabilize property taxes, Ladner said it's an idea worth considering.

"The thing about sales tax, too, is that the tourists would help pay for it. I like that," Ladner said. "I'm just saying we need to be open to alternative methods."

Ladner and Olstad were panelists at the forum. Other panelists were Matt Krogman, a Brookings real

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 45 of 120

estate agent and lobbyist for the South Dakota Association of Realtors; Rep. Mike Derby, R-Rapid City; Rep. Dennis Krull, R-Hill City; and Pennington County Commissioner Ron Rossknecht. The moderator was Garth Wadsworth, of the Elevate Rapid City economic development group.

Homeowner taxes up 47% since '17

Though the two-hour event was civil, many audience members vented their displeasure with property taxes. Statistics from the state Department of Revenue show the property tax burden has fallen increasingly on homeowners and commercial property owners in recent years.

The trend was exacerbated after 2017. Since then, property tax payments have gone up 47% for owner-occupied homes and 36% for commercial property, while rising 3% for agricultural property.

One factor in the trends was a change from market to productivity-based valuations for agricultural land. The implementation period for the change concluded in 2019, after the Legislature adopted it in 2009. At the time, lawmakers were concerned that surging prices for farm and ranch land were unfairly inflating tax valuations.

Another factor was the COVID-19 pandemic, when South Dakota experienced an influx of remote workers and other homebuyers fleeing pandemic restrictions in other states. According to research by the Dakota Institute, high demand for houses helped push the average list price in the state 36% higher from 2020 to 2023, even after accounting for inflation.

Because tax valuations for houses are tied to the market, some South Dakota homeowners have experienced several years of double-digit valuation increases. And those steep valuation increases have driven their property taxes higher.

Olstad said Gov. Noem's focus on attracting new residents to the state has been a factor in that.

"This probably doesn't sound right, but I think we should 'close the gate,'" Olstad said. "I'm not in favor of the governor inviting everybody."

Other ideas for property tax relief

Raising the sales tax or tourism tax rate wasn't the only idea floated during the forum.

Multiple attendees encouraged Ladner to reintroduce a failed bill she sponsored during the last legislative session.

The bill would revert property valuations back to their 2020 levels for single-family, owner-occupied homes purchased before then. Excess taxes paid in the intervening years would not be refunded, but future tax increases would be capped at 3%.

One person suggested repealing some of the dozens of sales tax exemptions in state law and capturing the extra revenue for property tax relief.

Some sales tax exemptions are broad, such as the one for items purchased to be resold. Those include packaging for products and items that will become an ingredient or component of another product.

Other exemptions are narrow, such as an exemption for services performed by rodeo promoters, stock contractors, announcers, judges and clowns.

Rep. Derby encouraged greater participation in existing property tax relief programs, which he said are underutilized. Those include help for disabled veterans, senior citizens and people with paraplegia. Applications are available from county directors of equalization or county treasurers.

There was broad agreement at the forum among panelists and attendees that a failure to rein in property tax increases for homeowners could have negative economic consequences for the state.

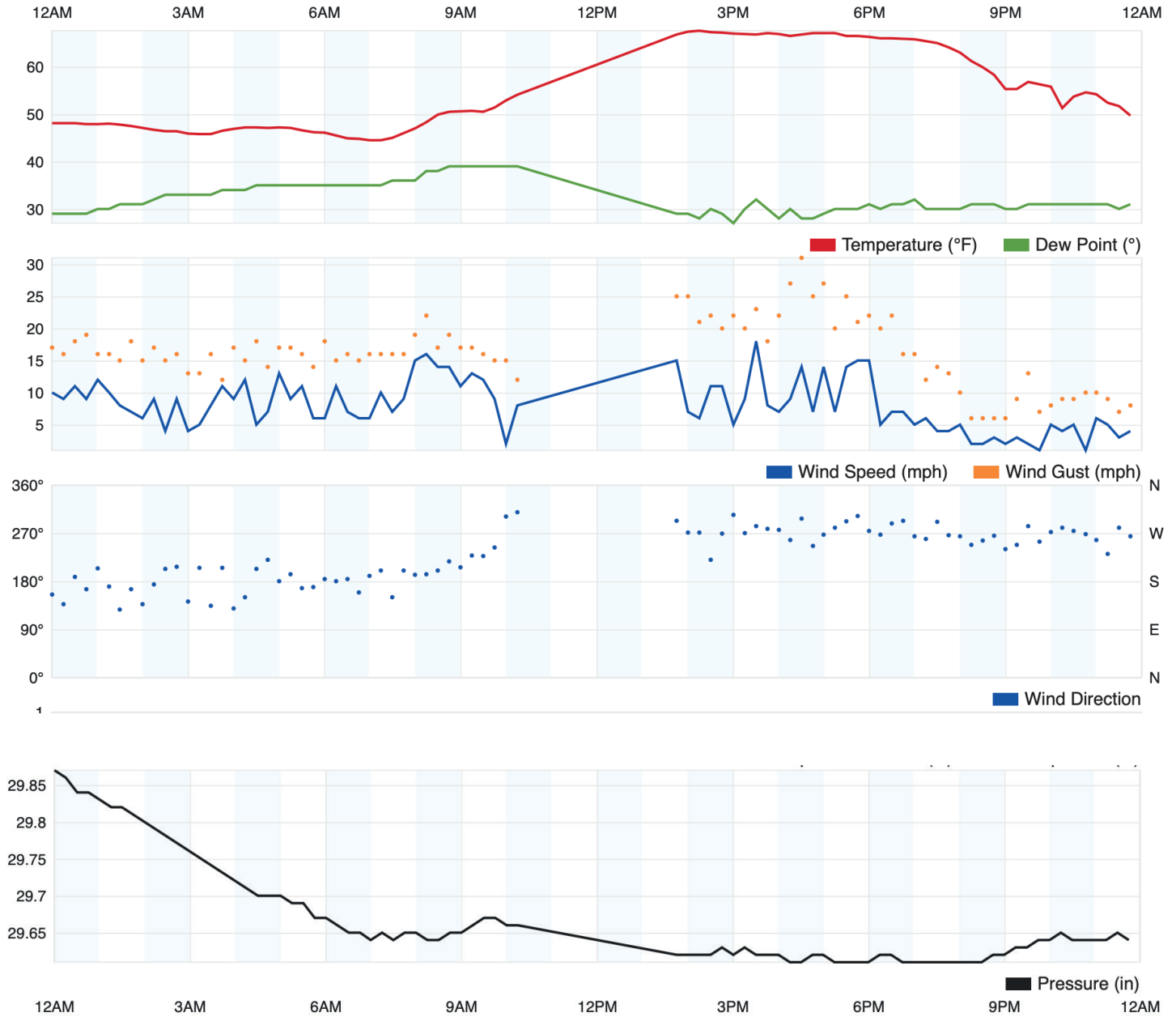
Krogman, the real estate agent and lobbyist, cited examples of three properties in Brookings that he said experienced year-over-year tax valuation increases from \$343,000 to \$473,000, from \$333,000 to \$445,000, and from \$322,000 to \$432,000.

"I'm just afraid if we can't figure something out, the opportunity of owning a house is going to become more and more difficult," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 46 of 120

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 47 of 120

Today



Mostly Sunny and Breezy

High: 60 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 31 °F

Wednesday



Increasing Clouds

High: 65 °F

Wednesday Night



Mostly Cloudy then Partly Cloudy and Breezy

Low: 47 °F

Thursday



Mostly Sunny and Breezy then Slight Chance Showers and Windy

High: 72 °F



Dry Through the Midweek

April 23, 2024
3:27 AM

Rain and Thunderstorms For the End of the Week into Weekend

Today

- Clouds/Sun
- Highs: 55 to 62°
- 15-30 mph sustained northerly winds, decreasing later in the day

Tonight

- Mostly Clear
- Lows: 32 to 37°

Wednesday

- Clouds/Sun
- Highs: 61 to 68°



Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

	4/25 Thu		4/26 Fri			4/27 Sat			4/28 Sun			Maximum				
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm					
Aberdeen	5	20	40	60	80	85	85	75	60	50	35	40	50	50	50	86
Britton	10	15	40	65	80	85	85	80	70	55	40	45	55	55	55	86
Brookings	5	20	40	70	80	90	90	75	60	30	20	35	45	50	50	90
Chamberlain	20	25	40	65	80	85	85	60	35	25	25	35	40	40	40	87
Clark	10	25	50	70	80	90	90	80	60	45	40	45	50	55	55	90
Eagle Butte	10	25	55	65	70	85	85	65	55	45	40	45	45	40	35	83
Ellendale	10	15	35	65	80	85	85	75	70	50	35	45	50	50	50	85
Eureka	5	20	45	65	75	85	85	70	65	50	40	45	45	45	45	85
Gettysburg	10	25	45	60	75	85	85	70	55	50	45	45	45	45	40	87
Huron	10	25	40	65	80	90	90	65	45	25	20	35	40	40	40	88
Kennebec	25	25	40	70	80	90	90	60	40	40	35	45	45	45	35	92
McIntosh	5	25	65	65	80	80	80	60	50	45	35	40	40	40	35	79
Milbank	10	15	35	65	80	90	90	85	65	45	30	40	55	55	55	88
Miller	10	30	45	70	80	90	90	75	50	50	40	45	50	50	50	92
Mobridge	5	20	50	60	70	85	85	65	55	45	40	45	45	45	40	83
Murdo	30	30	45	70	80	90	90	65	50	50	50	50	50	45	35	91
Pierre	20	20	40	60	80	90	90	65	45	45	40	45	45	40	30	88
Redfield	5	25	45	65	75	90	90	75	55	45	40	40	45	50	50	89
Sisseton	10	15	40	65	80	85	85	85	70	55	35	40	55	60	60	87
Watertown	10	20	45	70	80	90	90	85	65	45	35	40	50	55	55	90
Webster	10	20	50	70	80	90	90	85	65	50	40	45	50	60	60	89
Wheaton	10	15	30	55	75	85	85	85	65	55	35	35	50	55	55	85

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Breezy and dry today with sustained winds of 15-30 mph out of the north before diminishing through the day. Dry and quite weather expected tonight and Wednesday before rain showers and thunderstorms move into the area starting Thursday evening through the weekend.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 48 of 120

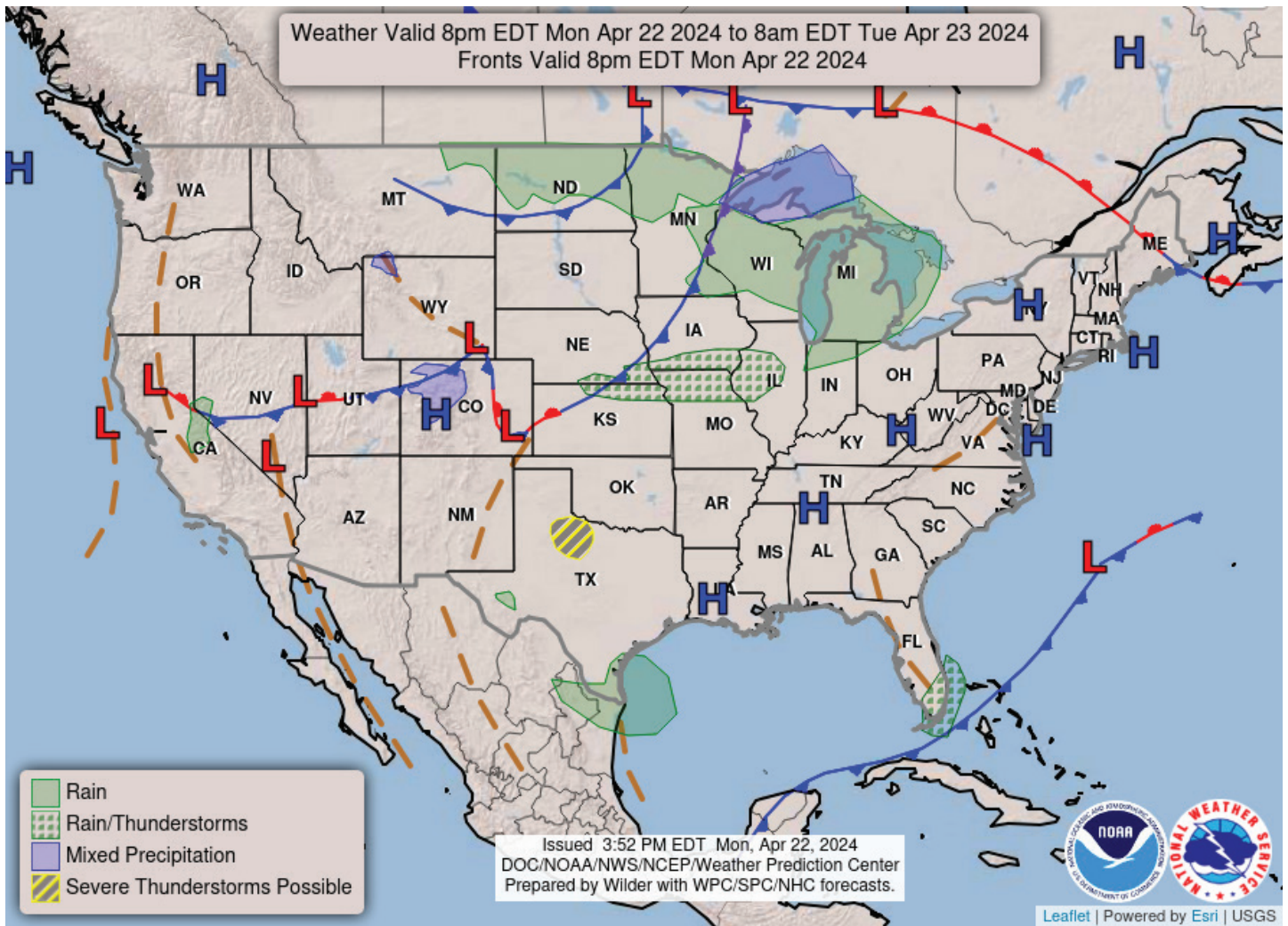
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 68 °F at 2:13 PM
Low Temp: 44 °F at 6:58 AM
Wind: 31 mph at 4:30 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 00 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 2009
Record Low: 14 in 1956
Average High: 61
Average Low: 34
Average Precip in April.: 1.27
Precip to date in April: 2.34
Average Precip to date: 3.33
Precip Year to Date: 3.29
Sunset Tonight: 8:30:56 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:28:34 am



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 49 of 120

Today in Weather History

April 23, 2002: High winds of 35 to 50 mph gusting to over 70 mph occurred across much of central and northeast South Dakota. The high winds caused some spotty damage to property and trees. With the dry conditions, dust was stirred up by the winds and caused reduced visibilities at many locations. The highest wind gust was 72 mph at Onida.

1885 - The city of Denver, CO, was in the midst of a storm which produced 23 inches of snow in 24 hours, and at Idaho Springs CO produced 32 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1910 - The temperature at the Civic Center in Los Angeles, CA, hit 100 degrees to establish an April record for the city. (The Weather Channel)

1948: A three block long section was devastated at the edge of Ionia, Iowa in Chickasaw County by an estimated F4 tornado. Six homes and a church were leveled, and nine other homes were severely damaged. Two deaths occurred in the collapse of the Huffman Implement Store. Overall, the tornado killed five people, injured 25, and caused \$250,000 in damages. An F2 tornado touched down initially 5 miles northeast of Rochester. Barns, silos, windmills, and machinery were destroyed on four farms as this tornado tracked north.

1961: Severe weather struck the south suburbs of Chicago, IL. Joliet, IL reported an inch of hail with some hailstones the size of golf balls. Heavy rain from these storms also resulted in some flooding. A tornado struck the town of Peotone resulting in damage to nearly every building with damage also reported in Lorenzo and Wilton Center, IL. Estimated damage was \$9 million with about 30,000 structures affected.

1983 - A mini-blizzard produced sixteen inches of snow at Laramie, WY, including a foot of snow in just eight hours during the night. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Atlantic Coast Region produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 67 mph at Anderson SC. The high winds destroyed two planes at the airport, and the large hail damaged fifty other planes, and severely damaged twenty-three greenhouses. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - An intense winter-like storm brought thunderstorms to southern California, and produced snow in some of the higher elevations. Nine girls at Tustin CA were injured when lightning struck the tree under which their softball team had taken shelter from the rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989: Salina Kansas was the hot spot in the nation with a high of 105 degrees. The high of 105 degrees established an April record for the state of Kansas.

1999: On Friday, April 23, 1999, a horrific hailstorm moved southeast from Pennsylvania across Garrett County, Maryland and into the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia. It had weakened some as it crossed Garrett County and the Allegheny Front, but as it passed east of Keyser, West Virginia, hail began to increase in size once again. By the time it reached Capon Bridge in eastern Hampshire County, West Virginia, the size of the hail had grown from golf balls to baseballs. As it moved into Frederick County, VA, the hail storm continued to grow dropping golf ball size hail in a swath now reaching from the north of Winchester, south to Stephen City (about 10 miles). Hailstones grew to the size of Grapefruit (4 inches in diameter) east of Winchester. The storm continued east through Clarke County, southern Loudoun, and northern Fauquier doing considerable damage to Middleburg, then across Fairfax County hitting Centreville, Chantilly, Fairfax, Burke, Springfield, and Lorton with golf ball size to baseball size hail. It crossed the Potomac River and weakened slightly. It moved across northern Charles, clipped southern Prince Georges and then into Calvert County with 1 inch to 1.5-inch diameter hail and onto the Chesapeake Bay continuing southeast to the ocean. The damage left behind was incredible. In Northern Virginia alone, it amounted to over \$50 million in losses to public and private properties. Some communities saw a third of the homes with siding and roof damage. Some required total replacement. Windows were broken, cars dented, and windshields smashed. Piles of shredded plant debris were left on the ground in the storm path. In about 6 hours of time, this one thunderstorm, moving at about 50 mph, did \$75 million in damage. There have been other severe hail storms to hit this area before, but none to cause this much damage to property.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 50 of 120

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

SAFEKEEPING

A new mother was bathing her infant while a small child who lived next door carefully watched. In the arms of the child was a small, soiled, well-worn doll. A leg was missing, the face was badly scratched, the hair was ruffled and the dress was worn and torn.

"How long have you had your baby?" asked the young neighbor.

"Four months," came the proud reply.

"My," replied the child. "You've sure kept her nice!"

Parents have a godly responsibility to keep their children "nice." They are a gift from God and are to be raised in God-fearing, God-centered and God-honoring homes.

Christian parents, first and foremost are to live love – a love that reflects the sacrificial love of God that demonstrates at all times His care and compassion for children.

Christian parents must also be as available to their children as God is to His children. Even as we need God's companionship, our children need us to be as near as He is when we call on Him in prayer.

Prayer: We pray, Heavenly Father, for parents to honor You by honoring the children You give them by raising them with loving care and discipline. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. Ephesians 6:4



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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 51 of 120

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month \$15.98
- 3 Months..... \$26.63
- 6 Months..... \$31.95
- 9 Months..... \$42.60
- 12 Months..... \$53.25

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 52 of 120



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.19.24

19 30 34 46 58 3

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$202,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 26 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.22.24

19 28 33 38 52 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,100,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 41 Mins 41 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.22.24

33 36 39 40 47 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 56 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.20.24

3 4 8 25 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$66,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 56 Mins 41 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.22.24

11 15 25 32 39 23

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 25 Mins 41 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.22.24

12 16 33 39 52 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$129,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 25 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

At least 5 people have died while crossing English Channel, hours after UK approved deportation bill

PARIS (AP) — At least 5 people have died while crossing the English Channel, according to French media, hours after the U.K. approved the migrant deportation bill.

The Voix du Nord newspaper said the bodies were discovered at the Wimereaux beach in northern France on Tuesday. The rescue operation is ongoing and helicopters and boats have been deployed, according to the regional newspaper.

About 100 migrants have been rescued and placed aboard a French navy ship. They will be taken to the port of Boulogne, the paper said.

This came only hours after British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's latest effort to send some migrants on a one-way ticket to Rwanda finally won approval from Parliament. The U.K. government plans to deport some of those who enter the country illegally as a deterrent to migrants who risk their lives in leaky, inflatable boats in hopes that they will be able to claim asylum once they reach Britain.

Human rights groups have described the legislation as inhumane and cruel. Both the United Nations refugee agency and the Council of Europe called on the U.K. Tuesday to rethink its plans for fears they could damage international cooperation on tackling the global migrant crisis.

Migrants trying to cross the busy English Channel face drownings and sinking among other deadly incidents, often aboard crowded boats.

An estimated 30,000 people made the crossing in 2023, according to U.K. government figures.

Modi accused of hate speech for calling Muslims 'infiltrators' at a rally days into India's election

By KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's main opposition party accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of using hate speech after he called Muslims "infiltrators" — some of his most incendiary rhetoric to date about the minority faith in a campaign rally days after the country began its weeklong general election.

At the rally on Sunday in the western state of Rajasthan, Modi said that when the Congress party was in government, "they said Muslims have the first right over the country's resources." If it returns to power, the party "will gather all your wealth and distribute it among those who have more children," he said as the crowd applauded.

"They will distribute it among infiltrators," he continued, saying, "Do you think your hard-earned money should be given to infiltrators?"

Abhishek Manu Singhvi, a spokesperson for Congress, called the prime minister's remarks "deeply, deeply objectionable" and said the party on Monday had sought action from the Election Commission of India, which oversees the six-week voting period. The first votes were cast Friday.

The remarks sparked fierce criticism for peddling anti-Muslim tropes, and for breaking election rules which bar candidates from engaging in any activity that aggravates religious tensions. The Election Commission of India's model code of conduct forbids candidates to "appeal to caste or communal feelings" to secure votes.

Asaduddin Owaidi, a Muslim lawmaker and president of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen party, said on Sunday: "Modi today called Muslims infiltrators and people with many children. Since 2002 till this day, the only Modi guarantee has been to abuse Muslims and get votes."

Critics of Modi — an avowed Hindu nationalist — say India's tradition of diversity and secularism has come under attack since his party won power in 2014 and returned for a second term in 2019. They accuse Modi's BJP of fostering religious intolerance and sometimes even violence. The party denies the accusation

and say their policies benefit all Indians.

But rights groups say that attacks against minorities has become more brazen under Modi. Muslims have been lynched by Hindu mobs over allegations of eating beef or smuggling cows, an animal considered holy to Hindus. Muslim businesses have been boycotted, their homes and businesses have been bulldozed and places of worship set on fire. Some open calls have been made for their genocide.

Modi's remarks on Sunday were based on a 2006 statement by then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of the Congress party. Singh said that India's lower-castes, tribes, women and, "in particular the Muslim minority" were empowered to share in the country's development equally.

"They must have the first claim on resources," Singh had said. A day later, his office clarified that Singh was referring to all of the disadvantaged groups.

Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party are expected to win, according to most surveys. The results come out on June 4.

The Congress party's president, Mallikarjun Kharge, described Modi's comments as "hate speech." "In the history of India, no prime minister has lowered the dignity of his post as much as Modi has," Kharge wrote on social media platform X.

In its petition to the election commission, the party said that Modi and the BJP have repeatedly used religion, religious symbols and sentiments in their election campaign with impunity. "These actions have been further bolstered by the commission's inaction in penalising the prime minister and the BJP for their blatant violations of electoral laws," it said.

The commission's code of conduct is not legally binding on its own, but it can issue notices and suspend campaigners for a certain amount of time over violations.

"We decline comment," a spokesperson for the commission told the Press Trust of India news agency on Monday.

In his speech, Modi also referred to a Hindu nationalist myth that Muslims were overtaking the Hindu population by having more children. Hindus comprise 80% of India's 1.4 billion population, while the country's 200 million Muslims make up 14%. Official data shows that fertility rates among Muslims have dropped the fastest among religious groups in recent decades, from 4.4 in 1992-93 to 2.3 between 2019-21, just a bit higher than Hindus at 1.94.

Modi's BJP has previously referred to Muslims as infiltrators and cast them as illegal migrants who crossed into India from Bangladesh and Pakistan. Several states run by the BJP have also made laws that restrict interfaith marriage, citing the myth of "love jihad," an unproven conspiracy theory that claims Muslim men use marriage to convert Hindu women.

Through it all, Modi has maintained a conspicuous silence, which critics say has emboldened some of his most extreme supporters and enabled more hate speech against Muslims.

The Latest | Tent compound rises in Khan Younis as Israel prepares for Rafah offensive

By The Associated Press undefined

Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press appear to show a new compound of tents being built near Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip as the Israeli military continues to signal it plans an offensive targeting the city of Rafah.

The tent construction is near Khan Younis, which has been targeted by repeated Israeli military operations over recent weeks. Israel has said it plans to evacuate civilians from Rafah during an anticipated offensive on the southern city, where hundreds of thousands of people have taken refuge during the war, now in its seventh month, but the military said it was involved in the tent construction.

On Monday, a failed rocket strike was launched at a base housing U.S.-led coalition forces at Rumalyn, Syria, marking the first time since Feb. 4 that Iranian-backed militias have attacked a U.S. facility in Iraq or Syria, a U.S. defense official said. No personnel were injured in the attack, and no group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 55 of 120

The conflict 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, around 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:

- Satellite photos suggest Iran air defense radar struck during apparent Israeli attack on Isfahan
- Review of U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees found Israel did not express concern about staff
- Israel's chief of military intelligence resigns, citing failure to prevent Oct. 7 attacks

Here is the latest:

GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY REPORTS 32 DEAD

The Gaza Health Ministry said Tuesday the bodies of 32 people killed by Israeli strikes have been brought to local hospitals over the past 24 hours. Hospitals also received 59 wounded, it said in its daily report.

That brings the overall Palestinian death toll from the Israel-Hamas war to at least 34,183, the ministry said. Another 77,143 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 around two thirds of those killed.

The Israeli military says it has killed 13,000 militants, without providing evidence to back up the claim.

APPARENT ISRAELI STRIKE HITS CAR IN LEBANON, KILLING AT LEAST 1

BEIRUT — An apparent Israeli airstrike on a car in southern Lebanon killed at least one person Tuesday, officials said.

State media and witnesses said the strike happened in the area of Adloun, between the coastal cities of Sidon and Tyre, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of the border with Israel.

It was not immediately clear who was killed.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and allied groups have been clashing with Israeli forces along the border for more than six months against the backdrop of Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military on Tuesday's strike. Israel has regularly carried out targeted killings of Hezbollah and Hamas members in Lebanon, sometimes in areas far from the border.

SATELLITE IMAGES SHOW TENT COMPOUND UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN KHAN YOUNIS

JERUSALEM — Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press appear to show a new compound of tents being built near Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip as the Israeli military continues to signal it plans an offensive targeting the city of Rafah.

Images from Planet Labs PBC analyzed by the AP show the tent compound starting to be fully under construction on April 16 just west of Khan Younis. Images taken Sunday show the tent compound in the time since has grown.

The Israeli military said Tuesday that it was not involved in the tent construction near Khan Younis. The Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz, without attributing the information, said that Egypt was constructing the tent compound ahead of a possible Rafah offensive.

The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment Tuesday about the tents. However, their construction comes as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has threatened "additional painful blows" targeting Hamas over the breakdown of talks over trying to free the remaining hostages held in the Gaza Strip.

That could include the long-threatened attack on Rafah, where half of the Gaza Strip's 2.3 million people have fled amid the war. The U.S., Israel's main ally, has repeatedly said any military operation needs to protect civilians.

Netanyahu has said he would order the military to evacuate civilians from Rafah for the offensive, but it is not clear where they could go.

Trump could avoid trial this year on 2020 election charges.

Is the hush money case a worthy proxy?

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump faces serious charges in two separate cases over whether he attempted to subvert the Constitution by overturning the results of a fair election and illegally remain in power.

Yet it's a New York case centered on payments to silence an adult film actress that might provide the only legal reckoning this year on whether he tried to undermine a pillar of American democracy.

Trump is charged in the so-called hush money case with trying to falsify business records, but it was hard to tell that as the trial opened Monday.

Lead prosecutor Matthew Colangelo wasted little time during opening statements tying the case to Trump's campaigning during his first run for the presidency. He said the payments made to Stormy Daniels amounted to "a criminal scheme to corrupt the 2016 presidential election."

Whether the jury accepts that connection will be pivotal for Trump's fate. The presumptive nominee faces charges related to falsifying business records that would typically be misdemeanors unless the alleged act could be tied to another crime. Prosecutors were able to charge them as felonies because they allege that the false records were part of an effort to cover up state and federal election law violations — though that's still not the type of direct election interference that Trump is charged with elsewhere.

Trump himself has referred to the New York trial and the three other criminal cases against him as a form of election interference, suggesting without evidence that they're part of a Democratic plan to undermine his campaign to return to the White House.

"I'm here instead of being able to be in Pennsylvania and Georgia and lots of other places campaigning, and it's very unfair," he told reporters before Monday's court session.

While the charges are felonies, the New York case is seen as the least consequential against the former president. In the two election cases, Trump is accused of more direct involvement in trying to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

He faces a four-count federal indictment in Washington, D.C., in connection with his actions in the run-up to the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol by his supporters on Jan. 6, 2021. He and others were charged in Georgia with violating the state's anti-racketeering law by scheming to illegally overturn his 2020 loss to Joe Biden. He has pleaded not guilty to all the charges against him in those cases and a fourth charging him with mishandling classified documents.

All the other cases are tied up in appeals that are expected to delay any trials until after the November election. If that happens, the New York case will stand as the only legal test during the campaign of whether Trump attempted to illegally manipulate an election — and the case isn't even about the election results he tried to overthrow.

On Monday, Trump's attorney quickly moved to undercut the idea that a case in which the charges center on record-keeping could seriously be considered an effort to illegally undermine an election.

"I have a spoiler alert: There's nothing wrong with trying to influence an election. It's called democracy," said his attorney, Todd Blanche. "They put something sinister on this idea, as if it's a crime. You'll learn it's not."

Some legal experts monitoring the cases against Trump said they were skeptical of connecting the payments to a form of "election interference." Doing so also runs the risk of diminishing the gravity of the other charges in the public mind.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 57 of 120

Richard Painter, a University of Minnesota Law School professor and former associate White House counsel during the George W. Bush administration, said he believed the facts of the case met the evidence needed to determine whether a felony had been committed that violated campaign law, but added, "The election interference part, I have a little bit of trouble on this."

Richard Hasen, a UCLA law school professor, said the New York case does not compare to the other election-related charges Trump faces.

"We can draw a fairly bright line between attempting to change vote totals to flip a presidential election and failing to disclose embarrassing information on a government form," he wrote in a recent Los Angeles Times column.

In an email, Hasen said New York prosecutors were calling the case election interference "because that boosts what may be the only case heard before the election."

Some said prosecutors' decision to characterize the New York case as election interference seemed to be a strategy designed to raise its visibility.

"When (Manhattan District Attorney) Alvin Bragg calls it an election interference case, that's more of a public relations strategy," said Paul Butler, a Georgetown University law professor and former federal prosecutor. "I think there was concern that people were looking at the other prosecutions and they weren't discussing the Manhattan case."

Declaring the case a hush money trial made it seem less important than the others and "so they've styled it ... as a case about election interference. But again, what he's charged with is falsifying business records."

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

The key question in the prosecution's argument is why were the business records falsified, said Chris Edelson, an American University assistant professor of government. Their allegation is that "Trump was preventing voters from making an informed decision in the election."

It's an argument he believes prosecutors can make. "I think that the prosecutors will have to explain this to the jury. I don't think it's impossible to do," he said.

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

"Candidates want to suppress bad news about them. But there's a difference between trying to limit people knowing about that information and about breaking the law to keep them from finding out," said Andrew Warren, a former state attorney in Florida who was suspended by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis and is running for his old office while his court battle continues.

Warren said he believes the case has always been about more than the payments. If it is accepted as a hush money case, "Trump wins," he said. "If there was intent to deceive the voters, the prosecution wins."

Pro-Palestinian protests sweep US college campuses following mass arrests at Columbia

By NICK PERRY, MICHELLE L. PRICE and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Columbia canceled in-person classes, dozens of protesters were arrested at New York University and Yale, and the gates to Harvard Yard were closed to the public Monday as some of the most prestigious U.S. universities sought to defuse campus tensions over Israel's war with Hamas.

More than 100 pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had camped out on Columbia's green were arrested last week, and similar encampments have sprouted up at universities around the country as schools struggle with where to draw the line between allowing free expression while maintaining safe and inclusive campuses.

At New York University, an encampment set up by students swelled to hundreds of protesters throughout the day Monday. The school said it warned the crowd to leave, then called in the police after the scene became disorderly and the university said it learned of reports of "intimidating chants and several antise-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 58 of 120

mitic incidents." Shortly after 8:30 p.m., officers began making arrests.

"It's a really outrageous crackdown by the university to allow the police to arrest students on our own campus," said New York University law student Byul Yoon.

"Antisemitism is never ok. That's absolutely not what we stand for and that's why there are so many Jewish comrades that are here with us today," Yoon said

The protests have pitted students against one another, with pro-Palestinian students demanding that their schools condemn Israel's assault on Gaza and divest from companies that sell weapons to Israel. Some Jewish students, meanwhile, say much of the criticism of Israel has veered into antisemitism and made them feel unsafe, and they point out that Hamas is still holding hostages taken during the group's Oct. 7 invasion.

Tensions remained high Monday at Columbia, where the campus gates were locked to anyone without a school ID and where protests broke out both on campus and outside.

U.S. Rep. Kathy Manning, a Democrat from North Carolina who was visiting Columbia with three other Jewish members of Congress, told reporters after meeting with students from the Jewish Law Students Association that there was "an enormous encampment of people" who had taken up about a third of the green.

"We saw signs indicating that Israel should be destroyed," she said after leaving the Morningside Heights campus. Columbia announced Monday that courses at the Morningside campus will offer virtual options for students when possible, citing safety as their top priority.

A woman inside the campus gates led about two dozen protesters on the street outside in a chant of, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!" — a charged phrase that can mean vastly different things to different groups. A small group of pro-Israel counter demonstrators protested nearby.

University President Minouche Shafik said in a message to the school community Monday that she was "deeply saddened" by what was happening on campus.

"To deescalate the rancor and give us all a chance to consider next steps, I am announcing that all classes will be held virtually on Monday," Shafik wrote, noting that students who don't live on campus should stay away.

Protests have roiled many college campuses since Hamas' deadly attack on southern Israel, when militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took roughly 250 hostages. During the ensuing war, Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the local health ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and non-combatants but says at least two-thirds of the dead are children and women.

On Sunday, Elie Buechler, a rabbi for the Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative at Columbia, sent a WhatsApp message to nearly 300 Jewish students recommending they go home until it's safer for them on campus.

The latest developments came ahead of the Monday evening start of the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Nicholas Baum, a 19-year-old Jewish freshman who lives in a Jewish theological seminary building two blocks from Columbia's campus, said protesters over the weekend were "calling for Hamas to blow away Tel Aviv and Israel." He said some of the protesters shouting antisemitic slurs were not students.

"Jews are scared at Columbia. It's as simple as that," he said. "There's been so much vilification of Zionism, and it has spilled over into the vilification of Judaism."

The protest encampment sprung up at Columbia on Wednesday, the same day that Shafik faced bruising criticism at a congressional hearing from Republicans who said she hadn't done enough to fight antisemitism. Two other Ivy League presidents resigned months ago following widely criticized testimony they gave to the same committee.

In her statement Monday, Shafik said the Middle East conflict is terrible and that she understands that many are experiencing deep moral distress.

"But we cannot have one group dictate terms and attempt to disrupt important milestones like graduation to advance their point of view," Shafik wrote.

Over the coming days, a working group of deans, school administrators and faculty will try to find a

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 59 of 120

resolution to the university crisis, noted Shafik, who didn't say when in-person classes would resume.

U.S. House Republicans from New York urged Shafik to resign, saying in a letter Monday that she had failed to provide a safe learning environment in recent days as "anarchy has engulfed the campus."

In Massachusetts, a sign said Harvard Yard was closed to the public Monday. It said structures, including tents and tables, were only allowed into the yard with prior permission. "Students violating these policies are subject to disciplinary action," the sign said. Security guards were checking people for school IDs.

The same day, the Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee said the university's administration suspended their group. In the suspension notice provided by the student organization, the university wrote that the group's April 19 demonstration had violated school policy, and that the organization failed to attend required trainings after they were previously put on probation.

The Palestine Solidarity Committee said in a statement that they were suspended over technicalities and that the university hadn't provided written clarification on the university's policies when asked.

"Harvard has shown us time and again that Palestine remains the exception to free speech," the group wrote in a statement.

Harvard did not respond to an email request for comment.

At Yale, police officers arrested about 45 protesters and charged them with misdemeanor trespassing, said Officer Christian Bruckhart, a New Haven police spokesperson. All were being released on promises to appear in court later, he said.

Protesters set up tents on Beinecke Plaza on Friday and demonstrated over the weekend, calling on Yale to end any investments in defense companies that do business with Israel.

In a statement to the campus community on Sunday, Yale President Peter Salovey said university officials had spoken to the student protesters multiple times about the school's policies and guidelines, including those regarding speech and allowing access to campus spaces.

School officials said they gave protesters until the end of the weekend to leave Beinecke Plaza. They said they again warned protesters Monday morning and told them that they could face arrest and discipline, including suspension, before police moved in.

A large group of demonstrators regathered after Monday's arrests at Yale and blocked a street near campus, Bruckhart said. There were no reports of any violence or injuries.

Prahlad Iyengar, an MIT graduate student studying electrical engineering, was among about two dozen students who set up a tent encampment on the school's Cambridge, Massachusetts, campus Sunday evening. They are calling for a cease-fire and are protesting what they describe as MIT's "complicity in the ongoing genocide in Gaza," he said.

"MIT has not even called for a cease-fire, and that's a demand we have for sure," Iyengar said.

From pop to politics, what to know as Sweden prepares for the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — It's springtime in Europe — time for the annual blossoming of spectacle and sound known as the Eurovision Song Contest.

Taking place in May in Malmö, Sweden, the 68th annual competition will see acts from 37 countries vie for the continent's pop crown in a feel-good extravaganza that strives — not always successfully — to banish international strife and division. And you don't have to be in Europe to watch, or to help pick the winner.

Here's a guide to all things Eurovision.

WHAT IS EUROVISION?

On one level, it's simple: Eurovision is an international pop music competition in which acts from countries across Europe, and a few beyond it, compete in a live televised contest to be crowned Eurovision champion.

But it's also much more -- a celebration of diversity, national pride and the joyous power of pop. And glitter. So much glitter.

Launched in 1956 to foster unity after World War II, Eurovision has become a campy, feel-good celebra-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 60 of 120

tion of pop music with an audience of hundreds of millions around the world. It has grown from seven countries to almost 40, including non-European nations such as Israel and Australia.

It's now known for songs that range from anthemic to extremely silly, often with elaborate costumes and spectacular staging.

Paul Jordan, an expert on the contest who is known as "Dr. Eurovision," said the contest "is almost indescribable in terms of its scale, in terms of its craziness — but I would liken it to probably the musical version of the Olympic Games."

WHEN AND WHERE IS EUROVISION HAPPENING?

This year's contest will be held in Malmö in southern Sweden, with two semifinals on May 7 and 9 followed by a grand final on May 11. Traditionally the competition is hosted by the previous year's winner, and Sweden triumphed in 2023 with "Tattoo," a power ballad by pop diva Loreen.

The Nordic nation is a Eurovision powerhouse that has won the contest seven times, a number equaled only by Ireland.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of a Eurovision's most iconic moment, ABBA's victory in the 1974 contest with "Waterloo." The win propelled the band toward superstardom and helped jump-start Sweden's music industry.

Fans are hoping for an appearance by the Swedish supergroup in Malmö, though the band members have played down those suggestions.

ARE THERE POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES AMID THE POP?

Eurovision's motto is "united by music" and organizer the European Broadcasting Union strives to keep political divisions out of the competition, though it doesn't always succeed.

Russia has been banned since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Last year's contest was held in the English city of Liverpool because the 2022 winner, Ukraine, was at war.

This year, pro-Palestinian activists and some musicians have urged organizers to drop Israel from the event over its conduct in its war against Hamas, which has killed more than 33,000 people in Gaza, according to its Health Ministry.

Israel has not been suspended, but it was ordered to change the lyrics of its competing song, originally titled "October Rain," an apparent reference to Hamas' cross-border Oct. 7 attack that killed some 1,200 Israelis. Renamed "Hurricane," the power ballad will be performed by 20-year-old singer Eden Golan.

With feelings running high, organizers issued a statement saying they "firmly oppose any form of online abuse, hate speech, or harassment directed at our artists or any individuals associated with the contest."

Jordan said Eurovision organizers have sometimes been accused of inconsistency in setting the contest's boundaries.

"You're not allowed political entries ...and yet Finland 2013 has a song about equal marriage," he said. "You had other songs about world peace -- technically they're political too. So what is the division between politics and non-politics is quite a blurred line."

Pro-Palestinian groups plan demonstrations in downtown Malmo during Eurovision week that they hope will draw thousands of protesters from Sweden and neighboring countries.

Malmö district police chief Petra Stenkula said security would be "rigorous," with Swedish police reinforced by officers from Denmark and Norway.

WHO AND HOW TO WATCH EUROVISION

Eurovision's complex voting system, which awards points from juries of music industry professionals as well as viewers across Europe, makes winners notoriously hard to predict.

Jordan said there used to be a "typical" Eurovision sound -- a three-minute pop song in English with a key change — but the contest is now much more diverse. Many acts perform in their national languages and some draw on folk traditions and instruments, though slick production and electro beats still predominate.

Winners have ranged from Canadian chanteuse Celine Dion, who competed for Switzerland in 1988, to fright mask-wearing Finnish metalheads Lordi in 2006, bearded Austrian drag performer Conchita Wurst in 2014, Italian rock band Måneskin in 2021 and Ukrainian folk-rap group Kalush Orchestra in 2022.

Bookmakers' favorites this year include nonbinary Swiss singer Nemo's powerhouse song "The Code"

and Croatian singer-songwriter Baby Lasagna's earwormy electro number "Rim Tim Tagi Dim."

Other entries to watch include the Netherlands' Joost Klein with pop-rap song "Europapa," "La Noia" by Italian TikTok star Angelina Mango and "Teresa & Maria" by the Ukrainian duo of rapper alyona alyona and vlogger Jerry Heil.

Spain's entry, "Zorra" by the duo Nebulossa, has drawn controversy because its title can be translated as an anti-female slur.

The U.K., which has not won since 1997, is pinning its hopes on Olly Alexander's vertiginous pop song "Dizzy." Host country Sweden is represented by identical twins Marcus & Martinus -- who, confusingly enough, hail from Norway -- with the confidently titled "Unforgettable." Eurovision voters will be the judge of that.

The competition will be aired by national broadcasters in participating nations, on streaming service Peacock in the United States and on the Eurovision YouTube channel. Viewers in the U.S. and other non-participating countries can vote online or using the Eurovision app; viewers in participating countries can also vote by phone or text message.

What to know about the Supreme Court case about immunity for former President Trump

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court has scheduled a special session to hear arguments over whether former President Donald Trump can be prosecuted over his efforts to undo his 2020 election loss to President Joe Biden.

The case, to be argued Thursday, stems from Trump's attempts to have charges against him dismissed. Lower courts have found he cannot claim for actions that, prosecutors say, illegally sought to interfere with the election results.

Trump has been charged in federal court in Washington with conspiring to overturn the 2020 election, one of four criminal cases he is facing. A trial has begun in New York over hush money payments to a porn star to cover up an alleged sexual encounter.

The Supreme Court is moving faster than usual in taking up the case, though not as quickly as special counsel Jack Smith wanted, raising questions about whether there will be time to hold a trial before the November election, if the justices agree with lower courts that Trump can be prosecuted.

The justices ruled earlier this term in another case that arose from Trump's actions following the election, culminating in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. The court unanimously held that states could not invoke a provision of the 14th Amendment known as the insurrection clause to prevent Trump from appearing on presidential ballots.

Here are some things to know:

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

When the justices agreed on Feb. 28 to hear the case, they put the issue this way: "Whether and if so to what extent does a former President enjoy presidential immunity from criminal prosecution for conduct alleged to involve official acts during his tenure in office."

That's a question the Supreme Court has never had to answer. Never before has a former president faced criminal charges so the court hasn't had occasion to take up the question of whether the president's unique role means he should be shielded from prosecution, even after he has left office.

Both sides point to the absence of previous prosecutions to undergird their arguments. Trump's lawyers told the court that presidents would lose their independence and be unable to function in office if they knew their actions in office could lead to criminal charges once their terms were over. Smith's team wrote that the lack of previous criminal charges "underscores the unprecedented nature" of what Trump is accused of.

NIXON'S GHOST

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 62 of 120

Richard Nixon resigned the presidency in disgrace nearly 50 years ago rather than face impeachment by the House of Representatives and removal from office by the Senate in the Watergate scandal.

Both Trump's lawyers and Smith's team are invoking Nixon at the Supreme Court.

Trump's team cites *Nixon v. Fitzgerald*, a 1982 case in which the Supreme Court held by a 5-4 vote that former presidents cannot be sued in civil cases for their actions while in office. The case grew out of the firing of a civilian Air Force analyst who testified before Congress about cost overruns in the production of the C-5A transport plane.

"In view of the special nature of the President's constitutional office and functions, we think it appropriate to recognize absolute Presidential immunity from damages liability for acts within the 'outer perimeter' of his official responsibility," Justice Lewis Powell wrote for the court.

But that decision recognized a difference between civil lawsuits and "the far weightier" enforcement of federal criminal laws, Smith's team told the court. They also invoked the high court decision that forced Nixon to turn over incriminating White House tapes for use in the prosecutions of his top aides.

And prosecutors also pointed to President Gerald Ford's pardon of Nixon, and Nixon's acceptance of it, as resting "on the understanding that the former President faced potential criminal liability."

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

The subtext of the immunity fight is about timing. Trump has sought to push back the trial until after the election, when, if he were to regain the presidency, he could order the Justice Department to drop the case. Prosecutors have been pressing for a quick decision from the Supreme Court so that the clock can restart on trial preparations. It could take three months once the court acts before a trial actually starts.

If the court hands down its decision in late June, which would be the typical timeframe for a case argued so late in the court's term, there might not be enough time to start the trial before the election.

WHO ARE THE LAWYERS?

Trump is represented by D. John Sauer, a former Rhodes Scholar and Supreme Court clerk to Justice Antonin Scalia. While serving as Missouri's solicitor general, Sauer won the only Supreme Court case he has argued until now, a 5-4 decision in an execution case. Sauer also filed legal briefs asking the Supreme Court to repudiate Biden's victory in 2020.

In addition to working for Scalia early in his legal career, Sauer also served as a law clerk to Michael Luttig when he was a Republican-appointed judge on the Richmond, Virginia-based federal appeals court. Luttig joined with other former government officials on a brief urging the Supreme Court to allow the prosecution to proceed. Luttig also advised Vice President Mike Pence not to succumb to pressure from Trump to reject some electoral votes, part of Trump's last-ditch plan to remain in office.

The justices are quite familiar with Sauer's opponent, Michael Dreeben. As a longtime Justice Department official, Dreeben argued more than 100 cases at the court, many of them related to criminal law. Dreeben was part of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election and joined Smith's team last year after a stint in private practice.

In Dreeben's very first Supreme Court case 35 years ago, he faced off against Chief Justice John Roberts, then a lawyer in private practice.

FULL BENCH

Of the nine justices hearing the case, three were nominated by Trump — Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. But it's the presence of a justice confirmed decades before Trump's presidency, Justice Clarence Thomas, that's generated the most controversy.

Thomas's wife, Ginni Thomas, urged the reversal of the 2020 election results and then attended the rally that preceded the Capitol riot. That has prompted calls for the justice to step aside from several court cases involving Trump and Jan. 6.

But Thomas has ignored the calls, taking part in the unanimous court decision that found states cannot kick Trump off the ballot as well as last week's arguments over whether prosecutors can use a particular obstruction charge against Capitol riot defendants. Trump faces the same charge in special counsel Jack Smith's prosecution in Washington.

Aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan heads to Senate for final approval after months of delay

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate is returning to Washington on Tuesday to vote on \$95 billion in war aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, taking the final steps in Congress to send the legislation to President Joe Biden's desk after months of delays and contentious internal debate over how involved the United States should be abroad.

The \$61 billion for Ukraine comes as the war-torn country desperately needs new firepower and as Russian President Vladimir Putin has stepped up his attacks. Soldiers have struggled to hold the front lines as Russia has seized the momentum on the battlefield and forced Ukraine to cede significant territory.

Biden told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday the U.S. will soon send badly needed air defense weaponry. The House approved the package Saturday in a series of four votes, sending it back to the Senate for final approval.

"The President has assured me that the package will be approved quickly and that it will be powerful, strengthening our air defense as well as long-range and artillery capabilities," Zelenskyy said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

The legislation also would send \$26 billion in wartime assistance to Israel and humanitarian relief to citizens of Gaza, and \$8 billion to counter China in Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific. In an effort to gain more votes, Republicans in the House majority also added a bill to the package that could ban the social media app TikTok in the U.S. if its Chinese owners do not sell their stake within a year. The foreign aid portion of the bill is similar to what the Senate passed in February with some minor changes and additions, including the TikTok bill and a stipulation that \$9 billion of the economic assistance to Ukraine is in the form of "forgivable loans."

The package has had broad congressional support since Biden first requested the money last summer. But congressional leaders had to navigate strong opposition from a growing number of conservatives who question U.S. involvement in foreign wars and argue that Congress should be focused instead on the surge of migration at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The growing fault line in the GOP between those conservatives who are skeptical of the aid and the more traditional, "Reagan-era" Republicans who strongly support it may prove to be career-defining for the two top Republican leaders. Senate GOP Leader Mitch McConnell, who has made the Ukraine aid a top priority, said last month that he would step down from leadership after becoming increasingly distanced from many in his conference on the issue and others. House Speaker Mike Johnson, who put the bills on the floor after praying for guidance, faces threats of an ouster after a majority of Republicans voted against them.

McConnell has made clear that stopping Putin is important enough for him to stake his political capital.

"The national security of the United States depends on the willingness of its leaders to build, sustain, and exercise hard power," McConnell said after House passage Saturday, adding, "I make no apology for taking these linked threats seriously or for urging the Biden administration and my colleagues in Congress to do the same."

Johnson said after House passage that "we did our work here, and I think history will judge it well."

The Senate could pass the aid package, now combined back into one bill, as soon as Tuesday afternoon if senators are able to agree on the timing for a vote. If Republicans who oppose the legislation decide to protest and draw out the process, final votes would likely be Wednesday.

The legislation was first passed by the Senate in February on a sweeping 70-29 vote, and it could get even more votes this time after the House added in the loan provisions. The idea for a loan started with former President Donald Trump, who had been opposed to the aid.

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, a longtime GOP hawk who voted against it in February because it wasn't paired with legislation to stem migration at the border, praised Johnson after the vote and indicated he will vote for it this time. "The idea that the United States will be safer if we pull the plug on our friends

and allies overseas is wrong," he said on X.

The revised House package also included several Republican priorities that were acceptable to Democrats to get the bill passed. 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 could eventually ban TikTok in the U.S. if the owner, ByteDance Ltd., doesn't sell. That bill has wide bipartisan support in the House and Senate.

Opponents in the Senate, like the House, are likely to include some left-wing senators who are opposed to aiding Israel as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has bombarded Gaza and killed thousands of civilians. Vermont Sens. Bernie Sanders, an independent, and Peter Welch, a Democrat, both voted against the package in February.

"This bill provides Netanyahu \$10 billion more in unrestricted military aid for his horrific war against the Palestinian people," Sanders said on X just before that vote. "That is unconscionable."

Starbucks takes on the federal labor agency before the US Supreme Court

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

After Starbucks fired seven workers who were trying to unionize their Tennessee store, a U.S. government agency obtained a court order forcing the company to rehire them. Now, Starbucks wants the Supreme Court to curb the government's power in such cases.

On Tuesday, justices are scheduled to hear Starbucks' case against the National Labor Relations Board, the federal agency that protects the right of employees to organize. If the court sides with Starbucks, it could make it tougher for the NLRB to step in when it alleges corporate interference in unionization efforts.

The hearing comes even as the animosity between Starbucks and Workers United, the union organizing its workers, has begun to fade. The two sides announced in February that they would restart talks with the aim of reaching contract agreements this year. Starbucks and union representatives planned to meet Tuesday for their first bargaining session in nearly a year.

Workers at 420 company-owned U.S. Starbucks stores have voted to unionize since late 2021, but none of those stores has secured a labor agreement with Starbucks.

The case before the Supreme Court began in February 2022, when Starbucks fired seven employees who were leading a unionization effort in Memphis, Tennessee. Starbucks argued the employees had violated policy by reopening the store after closing time and inviting non-employees — including a television news crew — to come inside.

The National Labor Relations Board determined the firings constituted an illegal interference with workers' right to organize. The agency found that Starbucks had routinely allowed off-duty employees and non-employees to remain in the store after hours to make drinks or collect belongings.

The NLRB asked a federal district court to intervene and require Starbucks to rehire the workers while the case wound its way through the agency's administrative proceedings. A district court judge agreed with the NLRB and issued a temporary injunction ordering Starbucks to rehire the workers in August 2022. After the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld that ruling, Starbucks appealed to the Supreme Court.

Five of the seven workers are still employed at the Memphis store, while the other two remain involved with the organizing effort, according to Workers United. The Memphis store voted to unionize in June 2022.

Starbucks said the Supreme Court should intervene because federal appeals courts don't agree on the standards the NLRB must meet when it requests a temporary injunction against a company. Starbucks says temporary injunctions can be a major burden for companies, since the NLRB's administrative process can take years.

Since 1947, the National Labor Relations Act — the law that governs the agency — has allowed courts to grant temporary injunctions requested by the NLRB if it finds them "just and proper." In its review of what transpired at the Starbucks store in Memphis, the Sixth Circuit required the NLRB to establish two things: that it had reasonable cause to believe unfair labor practices occurred and that a restraining order

would be a "just and proper" solution.

But other federal appeals courts have required the NLRB to meet a four-factor test when seeking restraining orders, including showing it was likely to prevail in the administrative case and employees would suffer irreparable harm without an injunction.

Starbucks has asked the Supreme Court to establish the four-factor test as the standard all courts must follow when considering NLRB injunction cases.

"This court's intervention is urgently needed," Starbucks wrote in an October court filing. "National employers like Starbucks must defend themselves against years-long injunctions under materially different tests depending on where alleged unfair labor practices occur or where employers reside."

The NLRB says it already considers its likelihood of success before taking a case to court, making whether courts apply two factors or four largely irrelevant. The agency notes that it rarely asks courts for temporary injunctions; in its 2023 fiscal year, it received 19,869 charges of unfair labor practices and authorized the filing of 14 cases seeking temporary injunctions.

"The two-part inquiry undertaken by the Sixth Circuit and other courts ... subjects board petitions to meaningful scrutiny, and does not call for courts merely to 'rubber-stamp' agency requests," the NLRB argued in a filing last month.

Global plastic pollution treaty talks hit critical stage in Canada

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

Thousands of negotiators and observers representing most of the world's nations are gathering in the Canadian city of Ottawa this week to craft a treaty to stop the rapidly escalating problem of plastic pollution.

Each day, the equivalent of 2,000 garbage trucks full of plastic are dumped into the world's oceans, rivers and lakes, according to the United Nations Environment Programme. People are increasingly breathing, eating and drinking tiny plastic particles.

Negotiators must streamline the existing treaty draft and decide its scope: whether it will focus on human health and the environment, limit the actual production of plastic, restrict some chemicals used in plastics, or any combination of the above. These are elements that a self-named "high ambition coalition" of countries want to see.

Alternatively, the agreement could have a more limited scope and focus on plastic waste and greater recycling, as some of the plastic-producing and oil and gas exporters want.

In March 2022, 175 nations agreed to make the first legally-binding treaty on plastics pollution, including in the oceans, by the end of 2024. It's an extremely short timeline for negotiations, meant to match the urgency of the problem. This is the fourth of five meetings of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for Plastics.

It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fix something everyone knows needs to be fixed because plastic in the environment is not natural, said Inger Andersen, UNEP's executive director.

"People globally are disgusted by what they see. The straw in the turtle's nose, the whale full of fishing gear. I mean, this is not the world we want to be in," she said in an interview.

Andersen rejected the idea it's an "anti-plastic" process because plastic has many uses that help the world. But, she said, the treaty should eliminate unnecessary single-use and short-lived plastic products that often are buried, burned or dumped.

Plastic production continues to ramp up globally and is projected to double or triple by 2050 if nothing changes.

Researchers at the federal Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory published a report last week examining the climate impact.

If production grows conservatively, greenhouse gas emissions emitted from the process would more than double, they concluded. That could use 21% to 26% of the remaining so-called global carbon budget, which is how much carbon emissions can still be produced between now and 2050 while staying at or below the international goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since the 1850s.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 66 of 120

Most plastic is made from fossil fuels. Negotiators at the United Nations climate talks known as COP28 agreed last December the world must transition away from planet-warming fossil fuels and triple the use of renewable energy.

But as pressure to reduce fossil fuels has increased, oil and gas companies have been looking more to the plastics side of their business as a lifeboat, a market that could grow.

The largest challenge for the negotiations is that major oil and gas producing countries do not want a treaty that limits their ability to extract and export fossil fuels to make plastic, said Björn Beeler, international coordinator for the International Pollutants Elimination Network. IPEN wants a treaty that places global controls on hazardous chemicals in plastics and ends the rapid growth of plastic production.

"Production is at the center of everything, it's the reason why this is moving slow. And it's going to get supercharged," he said. "It's not about oceans. It's more about oil."

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon is leading a congressional delegation to Ottawa to advocate for a strong treaty. The U.S. government position, so far, is that nations should take voluntary steps to end plastic pollution, but that is not enough to drive change, Merkley said.

"The underlying reason why the U.S. is not ambitious is we are a fossil gas country," he said.

ExxonMobil is increasing plastic production. It's a useful, valuable material that improves the quality of lives around the world, and should replace other materials that emit more greenhouse gases, said Karen McKee, president of ExxonMobil Product Solutions Company and president of the International Council of Chemical Associations.

"That doesn't mean that we're not concerned about plastic waste in the environment. We do need to work on that issue," she said. "But I would separate the production of plastic from the need to manage end-of-use plastic and to improve circularity."

ExxonMobil broke down more than 45 million pounds of plastic waste last year at its massive complex in Baytown, Texas, through a process known as chemical recycling, McKee said. It plans to add the capability to many of its other manufacturing sites globally.

Chris Jahn, president and CEO of the American Chemistry Council, the industry trade association, agreed with McKee. The focus should be on eliminating plastic pollution, without eliminating the benefits of plastic, he said.

When the treaty talks began in Uruguay in December 2022, factions quickly came into focus. Some countries pressed for global mandates, some for voluntary national solutions and others for both. Progress was slow during Paris talks in May 2023 and in Nairobi in November.

But there's still enough time to advance an ambitious treaty, said Alexis Jackson, who will lead a delegation from The Nature Conservancy in Ottawa. The Nature Conservancy, Greenpeace and other environmental advocates believe the treaty must reduce the amount of plastic that is produced and used in order to end plastic pollution.

"We're more than halfway through the process now so we have an undeniably large amount of work to do," Jackson said. "But, I think that we can make change happen even when it's difficult."

Andersen, at the United Nations, also is optimistic there will be a meaningful treaty this fall at the final meeting in South Korea.

"Everybody wants this treaty," she said. "There is a global demand for this, for a solution."

America's child care crisis is holding back moms without college degrees

By MORIAH BALINGIT and SHARON LURYE of The Associated Press and DANIEL BEEKMAN of The Seattle Times undefined

AUBURN, Wash. (AP) — After a series of lower-paying jobs, Nicole Slempp finally landed one she loved. She was a secretary for Washington's child services department, a job that came with her own cubicle, and she had a knack for working with families in difficult situations.

Slempp expected to return to work after having her son in August. But then she and her husband started looking for child care — and doing the math. The best option would cost about \$2,000 a month, with a

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 67 of 120

long wait list, and even the least expensive option around \$1,600, still eating up most of Slemp's salary. Her husband earns about \$35 an hour at a hose distribution company. Between them, they earned too much to qualify for government help.

"I really didn't want to quit my job," says Slemp, 33, who lives in a Seattle suburb. But, she says, she felt like she had no choice.

The dilemma is common in the United States, where high-quality child care programs are prohibitively expensive, government assistance is limited, and daycare openings are sometimes hard to find at all. In 2022, more than 1 in 10 young children had a parent who had to quit, turn down or drastically change a job in the previous year because of child care problems. And that burden falls most on mothers, who shoulder more child-rearing responsibilities and are far more likely to leave a job to care for kids.

Even so, women's participation in the workforce has recovered from the pandemic, reaching historic highs in December 2023. But that masks a lingering crisis among women like Slemp who lack a college degree: The gap in employment rates between mothers who have a four-year degree and those who don't has only grown.

For mothers without college degrees, a day without work is often a day without pay. They are less likely to have paid leave. And when they face an interruption in child care arrangements, an adult in the family is far more likely to take unpaid time off or to be forced to leave a job altogether, according to an analysis of Census survey data by The Associated Press in partnership with the Education Reporting Collaborative.

In interviews, mothers across the country shared how the seemingly endless search for child care, and its expense, left them feeling defeated. It pushed them off career tracks, robbed them of a sense of purpose, and put them in financial distress.

Women like Slemp challenge the image of the stay-at-home mom as an affluent woman with a high-earning partner, said Jessica Calarco, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"The stay-at-home moms in this country are disproportionately mothers who've been pushed out of the workforce because they don't make enough to make it work financially to pay for child care," Calarco said.

Her own research indicates three-quarters of stay-at-home moms live in households with incomes less than \$50,000, and half have household incomes of less than \$25,000.

Still, the high cost of child care has upended the careers of even those with college degrees.

When Jane Roberts gave birth in November, she and her husband, both teachers, quickly realized sending baby Dennis to day care was out of the question. It was too costly, and they worried about finding a quality provider in their hometown of Pocatello, Idaho.

The school district has no paid medical or parental leave, so Roberts exhausted her sick leave and personal days to stay home with Dennis. In March, she returned to work and husband Mike took leave. By the end of the school year, they'll have missed out on a combined nine weeks of pay. To make ends meet, they've borrowed money against Jane's life insurance policy.

In the fall, Roberts won't return to teaching. The decision was wrenching. "I've devoted my entire adult life to this profession," she said.

For low- and middle-income women who do find child care, the expense can become overwhelming. The Department of Health and Human Services has defined "affordable" child care as an arrangement that costs no more than 7% of a household budget. But a Labor Department study found fewer than 50 American counties where a family earning the median household income could obtain child care at an "affordable" price.

There's also a connection between the cost of child care and the number of mothers working: a 10% increase in the median price of child care was associated with a 1% drop in the maternal workforce, the Labor Department found.

In Birmingham, Alabama, single mother Adriane Burnett takes home about \$2,800 a month as a customer service representative for a manufacturing company. She spends more than a third of that on care for her 3-year-old.

In October, that child aged out of a program that qualified the family of three for child care subsidies. So she took on more work, delivering food for DoorDash and Uber Eats. To make the deliveries possible,

her 14-year-old has to babysit.

Even so, Burnett had to file for bankruptcy and forfeit her car because she was behind on payments. She is borrowing her father's car to continue her delivery gigs. The financial stress and guilt over missing time with her kids have affected her health, Burnett said. She has had panic attacks and has fainted at work.

"My kids need me," Burnett said, "but I also have to work."

Even for parents who can afford child care, searching for it — and paying for it — consumes reams of time and energy.

When Daizha Rioland was five months pregnant with her first child, she posted in a Facebook group for Dallas moms that she was looking for child care. Several warned she was already behind if she wasn't on any wait lists. Rioland, who has a bachelor's degree and works in communications for a nonprofit, wanted a racially diverse program with a strong curriculum.

While her daughter remained on wait lists, Rioland's parents stepped in to care for her. Finally, her daughter reached the top of a waiting list — at 18 months old. The tuition was so high she could only attend part-time. Rioland got her second daughter on waiting lists long before she was born, and she now attends a center Rioland trusts.

"I've grown up in Dallas. I see what happens when you're not afforded the luxury of high-quality education," said Rioland, who is Black. "For my daughters, that's not going to be the case."

Slemp still sometimes wonders how she ended up staying at home with her son — time she cherishes but also finds disorienting. She thought she was doing well. After stints at a water park and a call center, her state job seemed like a step toward financial stability. How could it be so hard to maintain her career, when everything seemed to be going right?

"Our country is doing nothing to try to help fill that gap," Slemp said. As a parent, "we're supposed to keep the population going, and they're not giving us a chance to provide for our kids to be able to do that."

With graduation near, colleges seek to balance safety and students' right to protest Gaza war

By JOCELYN GECKER and STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — The University of Michigan is informing students of the rules for upcoming graduation ceremonies: Banners and flags are not allowed. Protests are OK but in designated areas away from the cap-and-gown festivities.

The University of Southern California canceled a planned speech by the school's Muslim valedictorian. At Columbia University, where 100 students were arrested last week following protests, officials temporarily canceled in-person classes Monday as they work to find a resolution to the crisis.

This is commencement season 2024, punctuated by the tension and volatility that has roiled college campuses since Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. Militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took roughly 250 hostages. In response, Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the local health ministry.

Since the war began, colleges and universities have struggled to balance campus safety with free speech rights amid intense student debate and protests. Many schools that tolerated protests and other disruptions for months are now doling out more heavy-handed discipline. A series of recent campus crackdowns on student protesters have included suspensions and, in some cases, expulsions.

Columbia University President Minouche Shafik said the Middle East conflict is terrible and she understands many are experiencing deep moral distress.

"But we cannot have one group dictate terms and attempt to disrupt important milestones like graduation to advance their point of view," she wrote in a note addressed to the school community Monday.

The new measures have done little to stop protests. As recently as Monday, pro-Palestinian demonstrators set up encampments on campuses around the country, including at Columbia, the University of Michigan, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Yale University, where several dozen protesters were arrested after officials said they defied warnings to leave.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 69 of 120

While the majority of protests across college campuses have been peaceful, some have turned aggressive. Some Jewish students say much of the criticism of Israel has veered into antisemitism and made them feel unsafe.

Protesters are asking universities to take a number of actions, such as calling for a cease-fire in the war, or divesting from defense companies that do business with Israel.

"The weapons being made in this country are being sent to Israel and being used in the war on Gaza, and so obviously we have to make those connections," said Craig Birckhead-Morton, a Yale senior who was arrested Monday after refusing to leave a protest encampment. "We have to highlight the difficulties the Palestinian people are going through."

At MIT, protesters also have asked the university to stop what they say is funding from the Ministry of Defense in Israel to university projects with military objectives.

"We believe that we have a platform that students in other universities don't have because of our unique ties to the Israeli military," said Shara Bhuiyan, a 21-year-old senior studying electrical engineering and computer science.

The intense emotions on both sides have created a climate that has unsettled both Jewish and Muslim students. More than half of such students, and a fifth of all college students, reported feeling unsafe on campus because of their stances on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to a report published in March by the University of Chicago Project on Security and Threats.

Earlier this month, the Anti-Defamation League sent an open letter to college and university presidents urging them to "take clear decisive action" to ensure graduation ceremonies run smoothly and safely.

"We remain deeply concerned regarding the possibility of substantial disruptions during commencement ceremonies," Shira Goodman, the ADL's senior director of advocacy, said in an emailed statement.

On Thursday, Shafik, the Columbia president, summoned New York City police to clear a pro-Palestinian tent camp from the university's campus after student protesters had ignored repeated demands to leave — what she described as an "extraordinary step" to keep the campus safe.

All 100 or so students arrested were charged with trespassing and then several were suspended — but as of Monday, a large protest encampment was once again set up on the campus's main lawn, the very place where graduating students and families are set to gather next month.

The arrests came a day after Shafik pledged during a congressional hearing on antisemitism to balance students' safety with their right to free speech. Following similar testimony last year, the presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania — answering accusations that universities were failing to protect Jewish students — resigned.

Several other college campuses around the country kicked off the new year with revised protest rules. In January, American University banned indoor protests. Harvard started the spring semester with guidance effectively limiting protests to outdoor areas.

The University of Michigan drafted a proposed "Disruptive Activity Policy" earlier this month. Violations of the policy, which has not yet been implemented, could result in suspension or expulsion of students and termination of university staff.

The proposal came in response to a raucous March 24 protest that halted the school's annual honors convocation, a 100-year-old tradition preceding the May 4 graduation. Protesters interrupted a speech by university President Santa J. Ono with shouts of, "You're funding genocide!" and unfurled banners that said: "Free Palestine," forcing an abrupt end to the ceremony.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan said in a letter to Ono that the policy "is vague and overbroad, and risks chilling a substantial amount of free speech and expression."

But in a letter to the campus, Ono remarked that "while protest is valued and protected, disruptions are not."

"One group's right to protest does not supersede the right of others to participate in a joyous event," he wrote.

At Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, more than two dozen anti-Israel demonstrators stormed the uni-

versity president's office in late March, refusing to leave for hours. Three of the students were expelled, including freshman Jack Petocz.

"It's a very scary moment," said Petocz, 19, who is appealing the decision. "It's about the crackdown on free speech on campuses but it's also about campuses becoming police states."

Last Monday, the University of Southern California cited "substantial risks relating to security and disruption at the commencement" when it announced it would break from tradition and not allow valedictorian Asna Tabassum, a first-generation South Asian American Muslim, to deliver a speech at the May 10 commencement.

The decision sparked outrage and several days of protests on campus, prompting another unexpected shake-up days later: the cancellation of a keynote speaker for the first time since 1942.

The events at USC have raised concern that other schools will bow to pressure and erode free speech, said Edward Ahmed Mitchell, a civil rights attorney and national deputy director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

"I am worried that schools might decline to select a qualified visibly Muslim student who advocates for Palestine, to avoid what happened at USC," he said. "Schools are going to do more harm than good if they try to censor and silence commencement speakers, and especially students who have received the honor of speaking at their graduation ceremonies."

'Catch-and-kill' to be described to jurors as testimony resumes in hush money trial of Donald Trump

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A longtime tabloid publisher was expected Tuesday to tell jurors about his efforts to help Donald Trump stifle unflattering stories during the 2016 campaign as testimony resumes in the historic hush money trial of the former president.

David Pecker, the former National Enquirer publisher who prosecutors say worked with Trump and Trump's lawyer, Michael Cohen, on a so-called "catch-and-kill" strategy to buy up and then spike negative stories during the campaign, testified briefly Monday and will be back on the stand Tuesday in the Manhattan trial.

Also Tuesday, prosecutors are expected to tell a judge that Trump should be held in contempt over a series of posts on his Truth Social platform that they say violated an earlier gag order barring him from attacking witnesses in the case. Trump's lawyers deny that he broke the order.

Pecker's testimony followed opening statements in which prosecutors alleged that Trump had sought to illegally influence the 2016 race by preventing damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public, including by approving hush money payments to a porn actor who alleged an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier. Trump has denied that.

"This was a planned, long-running conspiracy to influence the 2016 election, to help Donald Trump get elected through illegal expenditures to silence people who had something bad to say about his behavior," prosecutor Matthew Colangelo said. "It was election fraud, pure and simple."

A defense lawyer countered by attacking the integrity of the onetime Trump confidant who's now the government's star witness.

"President Trump is innocent. President Trump did not commit any crimes. The Manhattan district attorney's office should not have brought this case," attorney Todd Blanche said.

The opening statements offered the 12-person jury — and the voting public — radically divergent roadmaps for a case that will unfold against the backdrop of a closely contested White House race in which Trump is not only the presumptive Republican nominee but also a criminal defendant facing the prospect of a felony conviction and prison.

The case is the first criminal trial of a former American president and the first of four prosecutions of Trump to reach a jury. Befitting that history, prosecutors sought from the outset to elevate the gravity of the case, which they said was chiefly about election interference as reflected by the hush money payments to a porn actor who said she had a sexual encounter with Trump.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 71 of 120

"The defendant, Donald Trump, orchestrated a criminal scheme to corrupt the 2016 presidential election. Then he covered up that criminal conspiracy by lying in his New York business records over and over and over again," Colangelo said.

Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records — a charge punishable by up to four years in prison — 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 pardon himself if found guilty. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

The case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg revisits a years-old chapter from Trump's biography when his celebrity past collided with his political ambitions and, prosecutors say, he scrambled to stifle stories that he feared could torpedo his campaign.

The opening statements served as an introduction to the colorful cast of characters that feature prominently in that tawdry saga, including Stormy Daniels, the porn actor who says she received the hush money; Cohen, the lawyer who prosecutors say paid her; and Pecker, who prosecutors say agreed to function as the campaign's "eyes and ears."

In his opening statement, Colangelo outlined a comprehensive effort by Trump and allies to prevent three separate stories — two from women alleging prior sexual encounters — from surfacing during the 2016 presidential campaign. That undertaking was especially urgent following the emergence late in the race of a 2005 "Access Hollywood" recording in which Trump could be heard boasting about grabbing women sexually without their permission.

"The impact of that tape on the campaign was immediate and explosive," Colangelo said.

Within days of the "Access Hollywood" tape becoming public, Colangelo told jurors that The National Enquirer alerted Cohen that Daniels was agitating to go public with her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump in 2006.

"At Trump's direction, Cohen negotiated a deal to buy Ms. Daniels' story to prevent American voters from hearing that story before Election Day," Colangelo told jurors.

But, the prosecutor noted, "Neither Trump nor the Trump Organization could just write a check to Cohen with a memo line that said 'reimbursement for porn star payoff.'" So, he added, "they agreed to cook the books and make it look like the payment was actually income, payment for services rendered."

Those alleged falsified records form the backbone of the 34-count indictment against Trump. Trump has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels.

Blanche, the defense lawyer, sought to preemptively undermine the credibility of Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges related to his role in the hush money scheme, as someone with an "obsession" with Trump who cannot be trusted. He said Trump had done nothing illegal when his company recorded the checks to Cohen as legal expenses and said it was not against the law for a candidate to try to influence an election.

Blanche challenged the notion that Trump agreed to the Daniels payout to safeguard his campaign, characterizing the transaction instead as an attempt to squelch a "sinister" effort to embarrass Trump and his loved ones.

"President Trump fought back, like he always does, and like he's entitled to do, to protect his family, his reputation and his brand, and that is not a crime," Blanche told jurors.

The efforts to suppress the stories are what's known in the tabloid industry as "catch-and-kill" — catching a potentially damaging story by buying the rights to it and then killing it through agreements that prevent the paid person from telling the story to anyone else.

Besides the payment to Daniels, Colangelo also described arrangements to pay a former Playboy model \$150,000 to suppress claims of a nearly yearlong affair with the married Trump. Colangelo said Trump "desperately did not want this information about Karen McDougal to become public because he was worried about its effect on the election."

He said jurors would hear a recording Cohen made in September 2016 of himself briefing Trump on the plan to buy McDougal's story. The recording was made public in July 2018. Colangelo told jurors they will hear Trump in his own voice saying: "What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?"

Pecker is relevant to the case because prosecutors say he met with Trump and Cohen at Trump Tower in August 2015 and agreed to help Trump's campaign identify negative stories about him.

He described the tabloid's use of "checkbook journalism," a practice that entails paying a source for a story.

"I gave a number to the editors that they could not spend more than \$10,000" on a story without getting his approval, he said.

Haiti health system nears collapse as medicine dwindles, gangs attack hospitals and ports stay shut

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — On a recent morning at a hospital in the heart of gang territory in Haiti's capital, a woman began convulsing before her body went limp as a doctor and two nurses raced to save her.

They stuck electrodes to her chest and flipped on an oxygen machine while keeping their eyes on a computer screen that reflected a dangerously low oxygen level of 84%.

No one knew what was wrong with her.

Even more worrisome, the Doctors Without Borders hospital in the Cite Soleil slum was running low on key medicine to treat convulsions.

"The medication she really needs, we barely have," said Dr. Rachel Lavigne, a physician with the medical aid group.

It's a familiar scene repeated daily at hospitals and clinics across Port-au-Prince, where life-saving medication and equipment is dwindling or altogether absent as brutal gangs tighten their grip on the capital and beyond. They have blocked roads, forced the closure of the main international airport in early March and paralyzed operations at the country's largest seaport, where containers filled with key supplies remain stuck.

"Everything is crashing," Lavigne said.

Haiti's health system has long been fragile, but it's now nearing total collapse after gangs launched coordinated attacks on Feb. 29, targeting critical infrastructure in the capital and beyond.

The violence has forced several medical institutions and dialysis centers to close, including Haiti's largest public hospital. Located in downtown Port-au-Prince, the Hospital of the State University of Haiti was supposed to reopen on April 1 after closing when the attack began, but gangs have infiltrated it.

One of the few institutions still operating is Peace University Hospital, located south of the shuttered airport. From Feb. 29 to April 15, the hospital treated some 200 patients with gunshot wounds, and its beds remain full.

"We urgently need fuel because we operate using generators. Otherwise we run the risk of closing our doors," hospital director Dr. Paul Junior Fontilus said in a statement.

More than 2,500 people were killed or wounded across Haiti from January to March, a more than 50% increase compared with the same period last year, according to a recent U.N. report.

Even if a hospital is open, sometimes there is little or no medical staff because gang violence erupts daily in Port-au-Prince, forcing doctors and nurses to stay at home or turn around if they encounter blocked roads manned by heavily armed men.

The spiraling chaos has left a growing number of patients with cancer, AIDS and other serious illnesses with little to no recourse, with gangs also looting and setting fire to pharmacies in the capital's downtown area.

Doctors Without Borders itself has run out of many medications used to treat diabetes and high blood pressure, and asthma inhalers that help prevent deadly attacks are nowhere to be found in the capital, Lavigne said.

At the Doctors Without Borders hospital, medical staff recently tried to save a boy with a severe asthma attack by giving him oxygen, she said. That didn't work, and neither did another type of medication. Finally, they ended up injecting him with adrenaline, which is used in emergencies to treat anaphylactic shock.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 73 of 120

"We improvise and we do our best for the people here," Lavigne said.

People's health is worsening because the daily medication they need for their chronic conditions is not available, warned Doctors Without Borders project coordinator Jacob Burns.

"It becomes acute and then they run out of options," he said. "For certain people, there are very, very few options right now."

Despite the pressing need for medical care, the Doctors Without Borders hospital in Cite Soleil has been forced to cut the number of outpatients it treats daily from 150 to 50, Burns said, though all emergencies are attended to.

Scores of people line up outside the hospital each day and risk being shot by gang members who control the area as they await medical care.

Everyone is allowed to enter the hospital compound, but medical staff set up a triage to determine which 50 people will be seen. Those with less urgent needs are asked to return another day, Burns said.

On Friday morning, 51-year-old Jean Marc Baptiste shuffled into the emergency room with a bloody bandage on his right hand. He said police in an armored vehicle shot him the previous day as he was collecting wood to sell as kindling in an area controlled by gangs.

Once inside, nurses removed the bandage to reveal a gaping wound in his thumb as he cried out in pain. Lavigne told him he needed a plastic surgeon, which the hospital does not have, and ordered X-rays to ensure there was no fracture.

On average, the Cite Soleil hospital sees three wounded people a day, but sometimes it's up to 14 now, staff said.

Recently, five people wounded by bullets arrived at the hospital after spending all night inside a public bus that couldn't move because of heavy gunfire, Burns said.

"Cite Soleil was long the epicenter of violence," he said. "And now violence is so widespread that it's become a problem for everyone."

Trump called this visa 'very bad' for Americans. Truth Social applied for one

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The social media company founded by former President Donald Trump applied for a business visa program that he sought to restrict during his administration and which many of his allies want him to curtail in a potential second term.

Trump Media & Technology Group, the company behind Truth Social, filed an application in June 2022 for an H-1B visa for a worker at a \$65,000 annual salary, the lowest wage category allowed under the program. Federal immigration data shows the company was approved for a visa a few months later. The company says it did not hire the worker.

Filing for the visa sets the image of Trump the candidate, who has proposed a protectionist agenda for companies to "hire American," in conflict with Trump the businessman, who has said his companies will use every tool at their disposal. Records show the investment firm started by Trump's son-in-law and White House adviser, Jared Kushner, also filed an application and was approved to hire a foreigner as an associate under the same visa program.

Trump Media & Technology Group said in a statement the application "was made under prior management," even though the current CEO, former House Intelligence Committee chairman and longtime Trump ally Devin Nunes, was already leading the company at the time the application was first filed with the U.S. Department of Labor.

"The company has never hired — and has no plans to hire — an H-1B visa program worker. When current management learned of this application, which was made under prior management, it swiftly terminated the process in November 2022," the company said in a statement.

An H-1B visa petition can cost companies about \$5,000 per employee. Companies can withdraw petitions even after being approved. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services records data doesn't note when

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 74 of 120

visas are revoked. But a spokeswoman for the Labor Department, which also tracks H-1B applications, said they had no records of Truth Social requesting a withdrawal.

A COMMON TOOL FOR TECH COMPANIES

Tech companies commonly hire employees using the H-1B program. Trump never hid the fact he used the visas before he became president, using them mostly to bring in foreign models and a few workers for his hotels and resorts, per a review of petitions filed since 2009.

But with exceptions to renew existing applications, his companies appeared to have no longer petitioned for H-1B visas until Truth Social was created.

Data from the Labor Department shows that an application was filed by Trump Media & Technology Group for an employee to earn \$65,000. It lists as the employer Will Wilkerson, a company co-founder and former senior vice president of operations, and an Atlanta address as the job's location.

Wilkerson filed a whistleblower complaint in August 2022 with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, alleging securities violations by the company. He was fired, according to The Washington Post, and is cooperating with federal authorities. His lawyers said he would not comment.

'I SHOULDN'T BE ALLOWED TO USE IT'

Trump frequently talks about the arrivals of migrants who cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally, but his policy proposals while in the White House also included curbs on legal immigration such as family-based visas and the visa lottery program.

In a 2016 primary debate, Trump spoke about the H-1B visa program and said it was "very bad" and "unfair" for U.S. workers.

"First of all, I think and I know the H-1B very well. And it's something that I frankly use and I shouldn't be allowed to use it. We shouldn't have it," he said. "Second of all, I think it's very important to say, well, I'm a businessman and I have to do what I have to do."

Three months after taking office, Trump issued his "Buy American and Hire American" executive order, which directed Cabinet members to suggest reforms to ensure that H-1B visas were awarded to the highest-paid or most-skilled applicants to protect American workers. He has previously said the program was used by tech companies to get foreign workers for lower pay.

During his administration, a study by the nonpartisan National Foundation for American Policy found the government was scrutinizing cases more by launching requests for more information from companies filing to hire foreign workers and denying more petitions.

The "Project 2025" handbook, compiled by allies preparing for Trump's potential transition to power, says the H-1B program should be transformed "into an elite mechanism exclusively to bring in the 'best and brightest' at the highest wages while simultaneously ensuring that U.S. workers are not being disadvantaged by the program."

Companies in the professional, scientific and technical services fields account for more than 60% of the total visas granted, said Nicolas Morales, an economist at the research department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond who specializes in labor and migration. Morales said he has found the visa program has been beneficial for small companies to stay in business.

"Winning the H-1B lottery actually helps them. It increases their chances of survival," he said. "In the next five years, they are more likely to stay active, particularly small companies that are very dependent on skilled labor."

The applications require companies to attest they will provide the foreign workers the same benefits offered to U.S. workers and pay more than what they pay others with similar experience and qualifications or more than the typical wage for that type of occupation. Companies also have to provide a notice of the filing to the workers by posting a notice in two locations at the place of employment.

Much of the criticism regarding the H-1B program is about companies offering salaries in the lower wage categories to foreign workers. The application filed by Kushner's investment firm to hire a foreign employee appears to satisfy that complaint.

The Labor Department certified a document where Kushner's investment firm specified it would pay this

employee a \$200,000 salary, which falls under the highest wage level for the H-1B visas typically reserved for those who are experts in their field and have senior responsibilities. Recent data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services shows the company was approved for a visa.

Kushner has not joined the Trump campaign and has been pursuing his own business interests applying for tourism projects in the Balkans.

Satellite photos suggest Iran air defense radar struck in Isfahan during apparent Israeli attack

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Satellite photos taken Monday suggest an apparent Israeli retaliatory strike targeting Iran's central city of Isfahan hit a radar system for a Russian-made air defense battery, contradicting repeated denials by officials in Tehran of any damage in the assault.

The strike on an S-300 radar in what appears to have been a very limited strike by the Israelis would represent far more damage done than in the massive drone-and-missile attack Iran unleashed against Israel on April 13. That may be why Iranian officials up to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have been trying to dismiss discussing what the attack actually did on Iranian soil.

Analysts believe both Iran and Israel, regional archrivals locked in a shadow war for years, now are trying to dial back tensions following a series of escalatory attacks between them as the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip still rages and inflames the wider region. But a strike on the most advanced air defense system Iran possesses and uses to protect its nuclear sites sends a message, experts say.

"This strike shows Israel has the ability to penetrate Iran's air defense systems," said Nicole Grajewski, a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment's nuclear policy program who wrote a forthcoming book on Russia and Iran. "The precision of it was quite remarkable."

The satellite images by Planet Labs PBC taken Monday morning near Isfahan's dual-use airport and air base, some 320 kilometers (200 miles) south of Tehran, showed an area nearby that served as a deployment point for the air defense system. Burn marks sit around what analysts including Chris Biggers, a consultant former government imagery analyst, previously had identified as a "flap-lid" radar system used for the S-300.

Less-detailed satellite images taken after Friday showed similar burn marks around the area, though it wasn't clear what was at the site. Biggers said other components of the missile system appeared to have been removed from the site — even though they provide defensive cover for Iran's underground Natanz nuclear enrichment facility.

"That's a powerful statement, given the system, the location, and how they use it," Biggers wrote.

On Friday, air defenses opened fire and Iran grounded commercial flights across much of the country. Officials in the aftermath sought to downplay the attack, trying to describe it as just a series of small drones flying through the sky.

"What happened ... was not a strike," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian claimed in an interview with NBC News. "They were more like toys that our children play with — not drones."

In the attack's aftermath, however, Iraqis found what appeared to be remnants of surface-to-air missiles south of Baghdad. That, coupled with a suspected Israeli strike on a radar station in Syria the same day, suggests Israeli fighter jets flew over Syria into Iraq, then fired so-called "standoff missiles" into Iran for the Isfahan attack. Small, shorter-range drones may have been launched as well — Israel has been able to launch sabotage attacks and other missions inside of Iran.

Still, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani repeated Tehran's denial Monday.

"Relevant authorities have announced that this harassment attack has caused no damage whatsoever and Iran's defensive system have carried out their duties," Kanaani told journalists at a briefing. "Therefore in our opinion this issue is not worthy of addressing."

The S-300 and their years-delayed delivery to Iran show the challenge Tehran faces in getting any foreign-made advance weapon systems into the country. Russia and Iran initially struck a \$800 million

deal in 2007, but Moscow suspended their delivery three years later because of strong objections from the United States and Israel.

After Iran reached its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, Russia unfroze the deal and is believed to have given Iran four sets of an export variant of the S-300.

The relationship between Iran and Russia has deepened in recent years. Moscow relies heavily on Iran's bomb-carrying Shahed drones to target sites across Ukraine as part of its war on the country. Those same drones featured in the Islamic Republic's attack on Israel.

Tehran meanwhile has made repeated comments over recent years about trying to obtain Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets from Russia to improve its decades-old fighter fleet. In September, a Russian-made YAK-130 combat trainer aircraft entered service in Iran. That model can be used to train pilots for the Su-35.

Russia now has the S-400, but the S-300 which has a range of up to 200 kilometers (125 miles) and the capability to track down and strike multiple targets simultaneously, remains one of the most-potent air defense weapons in the world. The batteries can be used to shoot down missiles as well as aircraft.

Iran likely needs Russian assistance to repair the damaged radar — and will seek newer weapons as well as time goes on, Grajewski said.

"Iran wants new weapons from Russia all the time — to try to show that it's not so isolated," she said.

UK Parliament approves Rwanda deportation bill, ending weeks of legislative stalemate

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's latest effort to send some migrants to Rwanda finally won approval from Parliament early Tuesday, hours after he pledged deportation flights would begin in July.

The parliamentary logjam that had stalled the legislation for two months was finally broken just after midnight when the unelected House of Lords "recognized the primacy" of the elected House of Commons and dropped the last of its proposed amendments, clearing the way for the bill to become law.

Earlier in the day, Sunak held a rare morning press conference to demand that the Lords stop blocking his key proposal for ending the tide of migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats, promising that both houses of Parliament would remain in session until it was approved.

The legislative stalemate was just the latest hurdle to delay implementation of a plan that has been repeatedly blocked by a series of court rulings and opposition from human rights activists who say it is illegal and inhumane. Migrant advocates have vowed to continue the fight against it.

"For almost two years, our opponents have used every trick in the book to block fights and keep the boats coming," Sunak told reporters Monday morning in London. "But enough is enough. No more prevarication, no more delay."

The government plans to deport to Rwanda some of those who enter the United Kingdom illegally as a deterrent to migrants who risk their lives in leaky, inflatable boats in hopes that they will be able to claim asylum once they reach Britain.

Despite Parliament's approval of the legislation, further court challenges may still delay the deportation flights, said Tim Bale, a politics professor at Queen Mary University of London.

"I don't think it is necessarily home and dry," he said. "We will see some attempts to block deportations legally."

Sunak has staked his political future to the deportation flights, making a pledge to "stop the boats" a key part of his pitch to voters as opinion polls show that his Conservative Party trails far behind the Labour Party ahead of a general election later this year. Next week's local elections are seen as a barometer for how the parties will fare in the general election.

The debate in Britain comes as countries throughout Western Europe and North America look for ways to slow the rising number of migrants as war, climate change and political oppression force people from their homes.

Small boat crossings are a potent political issue in Britain, where they are seen as evidence of the gov-

ernment's failure to control immigration.

The number of migrants arriving in Britain on small boats soared to 45,774 in 2022 from just 299 four years earlier as people seeking refuge pay criminal gangs thousands of pounds (dollars) to ferry them across the channel.

Last year, small boat arrivals dropped to 29,437 as the government cracked down on people smugglers and reached an agreement to return Albanians to their home country.

"I think the most important takeaway is quite how desperate the government clearly is to get this piece of legislation through on the grounds that it will enable it to at least make a down payment on its promise to stop the boats," Bale said.

While Sunak acknowledged that he wouldn't meet his original deadline of getting the first deportation flights in the air this spring, he blamed the delays on continued resistance from the opposition Labour Party.

On Monday, Sunak said the first flights would take off in 10-12 weeks but refused to provide details about how many people would be deported or exactly when the flights would occur because he said that information could help opponents continue to try to frustrate the policy.

In preparation for the bill's approval, the government has already chartered planes for the deportation flights, increased detention space, hired more immigration caseworkers and freed up court space to handle appeals, Sunak said.

He also suggested the government was prepared to ignore the European Court of Human Rights if it sought to block the deportations.

"We are ready, plans are in place, and these flights will go come what may," Sunak said. "No foreign court will stop us from getting flights off."

The current legislation, known as the Safety of Rwanda Bill, is a response to a U.K. Supreme Court decision that blocked the deportation flights because the government couldn't guarantee the safety of migrants sent to Rwanda. After signing a new treaty with Rwanda to beef up protections for migrants, the government proposed the new legislation declaring Rwanda to be a safe country.

The bill has been stalled in the idiosyncrasies of the British legislative system. The House of Lords is charged with scrutinizing and offering amendments to measures approved by the House of Commons, but it doesn't have the power to block legislation outright.

As a result, the Rwanda bill bounced back and forth between the two houses of Parliament, with the Lords repeatedly offering amendments only for them to be rejected by the Commons, which then sent the legislation back to the upper house.

Critics of the government's policy refused to be drawn on their next move. James Wilson, the director of Detention Action, which campaigns against human rights abuses in the immigration system, urged the public to look past the political stalemate and remember what is at stake.

"Ultimately, the most important points here are not the ins and outs of Parliament, and the things that are happening there," he told The Associated Press. "In the end, this is about people. This is about people's lives."

North Korean leader Kim leads rocket drills that simulate a nuclear counterattack against enemies

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised salvo launches of the country's "super-large" multiple rocket launchers that simulated a nuclear counterattack against enemy targets, state media said Tuesday, adding to tests and threats that have raised tensions in the region.

The report by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency came a day after the South Korean and Japanese militaries detected the North firing what they suspected were multiple short-range ballistic missiles from a region near its capital, Pyongyang, toward its eastern seas.

Analysts say North Korea's large-sized artillery rockets blur the boundary between artillery systems and ballistic missiles because they can create their own thrust and are guided during delivery. The North has

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 78 of 120

described some of these systems, including the 600mm multiple rocket launchers that were tested Monday, as capable of delivering tactical nuclear warheads.

KCNA said Monday's launches represented the first demonstration of the country's nuclear-weapons management and control system called "Haekbangashoe," or "nuclear trigger." The report described the drill as aimed at demonstrating the strength and diverse attack means of North Korea's nuclear forces amid deepening tensions with the United States and South Korea, which it portrayed as "warmongers" raising tensions in the region with their combined military exercises.

State media photos showed at least four rockets being fired from launch vehicles as Kim watched from an observation post. It said the rockets flew 352 kilometers (218 miles) before accurately hitting an island target and that the drill verified the reliability of the "system of command, management, control and operation of the whole nuclear force."

KCNA said Kim expressed satisfaction, saying that the multiple rocket launchers were as accurate as a "sniper's rifle."

He said the drill was crucial for "preparing our nuclear force to be able to rapidly and correctly carry out their important mission of deterring a war and taking the initiative in a war in any time and any sudden situation." The comments reflected North Korea's escalatory nuclear doctrine, which authorizes the military to launch preemptive nuclear strikes against enemies if it perceives the leadership as under threat.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the weapons from Monday's launches flew about 300 kilometers (185 miles) before crashing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The ranges suggested the weapons would likely target sites in South Korea. The latest launches came as South and the United States have been conducting a two-week combined aerial exercise that continues through Friday aimed at sharpening their response capabilities against North Korean threats.

When asked about the North Korean claims, Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said it remains unclear whether the North perfected the designs for small, battlefield nuclear weapons that could fit on its rockets. He insisted the North was likely exaggerating the accuracy of its multiple rocket launcher systems and that South Korea would be able to detect and intercept such weapons, without elaborating on specific missile defense capabilities.

Lee said it was possible that the North used the drill to test the multiple rocket launchers it potentially plans to export to Russia as the countries expand their military cooperation in the face of separate, intensifying confrontations with the United States. The U.S. and South Korea have accused North Korea of transferring artillery shells, missiles and other munitions to Russia to help extend its warfighting in Ukraine.

North Korea in recent months has maintained an accelerated pace in weapons testing as it continues to expand its military capabilities while diplomacy with the United States and South Korea remained stalled. Outside officials and analysts say Kim's goal is to eventually pressure the United States into accepting the idea of the North as a nuclear power and negotiating economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

In response to North Korea's evolving nuclear threats, the United States and South Korea have been strengthening their bilateral military drills and trilateral exercises with Japan. The countries are also sharpening their nuclear deterrence strategies built around strategic U.S. assets.

In past years, North Korea has test-fired nuclear-capable missiles designed to strike sites in South Korea, Japan and the mainland U.S. Many experts say North Korea already possesses nuclear missiles that can reach all of South Korea and Japan, but it has yet to develop functioning intercontinental ballistic missiles that can travel to the continental U.S.

The latest launches came days after North Korea announced Saturday it tested a "super-large" cruise missile warhead and a new anti-aircraft missile in a western coastal area earlier last week. In early April, North Korea also test-launched what it called a solid-fuel intermediate-range missile with hypersonic warhead capabilities, a weapon that experts say is meant to attack remote targets in the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam and beyond.

In Vietnam, farmers reduce methane emissions by changing how they grow rice

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

LONG AN, Vietnam (AP) — There is one thing that distinguishes 60-year-old Vo Van Van's rice fields from a mosaic of thousands of other emerald fields across Long An province in southern Vietnam's Mekong Delta: It isn't entirely flooded.

That and the giant drone, its wingspan similar to that of an eagle, chuffing high above as it rains organic fertilizer onto the knee-high rice seedlings billowing below.

Using less water and using a drone to fertilize are new techniques that Van is trying and Vietnam hopes will help solve a paradox at the heart of growing rice: The finicky crop isn't just vulnerable to climate change but also contributes uniquely to it.

Rice must be grown separately from other crops and seedlings have to be individually planted in flooded fields; backbreaking, dirty work requiring a lot of labor and water that generates a lot of methane, a potent planet-warming gas that can trap more than 80-times more heat in the atmosphere in the short term than carbon dioxide.

It's a problem unique to growing rice, as inundated fields stop oxygen from entering the soil, creating the conditions for methane-producing bacteria. Rice paddies contribute 8% of all human-made methane in the atmosphere, according to a 2023 Food and Agriculture Organization report.

Vietnam is the world's third-largest rice exporter, and the staple importance to Vietnamese culture is palpable in the Mekong Delta. The fertile patchwork of green fields crisscrossed by silvery waterways has helped stave off famine since the Vietnam War ended in 1975. Rice isn't just the mainstay of most meals, it is considered a gift from the gods and continues to be venerated.

It is molded into noodles and sheets and fermented into wine. In busy markets, motorcyclists lug 10-kilogram (22-pound) bags to their homes. Barges haul mountains of the grain up and down the Mekong River. Rice kernels are then dried and hulled by machines before they're packed for sale in factories, lined from floor to ceiling with sacks of rice.

Van has been working with one of Vietnam's largest rice exporters, the Loc Troi Group, for the past two years and is using a different method of irrigation known as alternate wetting and drying, or AWD. This requires less water than traditional farming since his paddy fields aren't continuously submerged. They also produce less methane.

Using the drone to fertilize the crops saves on labor costs. With climate shocks pushing a migration to cities, Van said that it's harder to find people to work the farms. It also ensures precise amounts of fertilizers are applied. Too much fertilizer causes the soil to release Earth-warming nitrogen gases.

Once crops are harvested, Van no longer burns the rice stubble — a major cause of air pollution in Vietnam and in its neighbors, as well as Thailand and India. Instead, it's collected by the Loc Troi Group for sale to other companies that use it as livestock feed and for growing straw mushrooms, a popular addition to stir-fries.

Van benefits in various ways. His costs are down while his farm yield is the same. Using organic fertilizer enables him to sell to European markets where customers are willing to pay a premium for organic rice. Best of all, he has time to tend to his own garden.

"I am growing jackfruit and coconut," he said.

Loc Troi Group CEO Nguyen Duy Thuan said that those methods enable farmers to use 40% less rice seed and 30% less water. Costs for pesticides, fertilizer and labor also are lower. Thuan said Loc Troi — which exports to more than 40 countries including in Europe, Africa, the United States and Japan — is working with farmers to expand acreage using its methods from the current 100 hectares to 300,000 hectares.

That's a long way from Vietnam's own target of growing "high quality, low emission rice" on 1 million hectares of farmland, an area more than six times the size of London, by 2030. Vietnamese officials estimate that would reduce production costs by a fifth and increase farmers' profits by more than \$600 million, according to the state media outlet Vietnam News.

Vietnam recognized early on that it had to reconfigure its rice sector. It was the largest rice exporter, ahead of both India and Thailand, to sign a 2021 pledge to reduce methane emissions at the annual United Nations climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland.

Each year, the industry suffers losses of over \$400 million, according to recent research by Vietnam's Water Resources Science Institute. This is worrying, not just for the country but for the world.

The Mekong Delta, where 90% of Vietnam's exported rice is farmed, is one of the world's regions most vulnerable to climate change. A U.N. climate change report in 2022 warned of heavier flooding in the wet season and droughts in the dry season. Scores of dams built upstream in China and Laos have reduced the river's flow and the amount of sediment that it carries downriver to the sea. The sea level is rising and turning the river's lower reaches salty. And unsustainable levels of groundwater pumping and sand mining for construction have added to the problems.

Changing centuries-old forms of rice farming is expensive, and even though methane is a more potent cause of global warming than carbon dioxide, it only receives 2% of climate financing, Ajay Banga, the World Bank's president, told the U.N. climate summit in Dubai last year.

Combating methane emissions is the "one rare, clear area" where low-cost, effective and replicable solutions exist, Banga said. The World Bank is supporting Vietnam's efforts and has begun helping the Indonesian government to expand climate resilient farming as a part of more than a dozen projects to reduce methane worldwide.

The hope is that more countries will follow, though there is no "one-size-fits-all," said Lewis H. Ziska, a professor of environmental health sciences at Columbia University. "The one commonality is that water is needed," he said, adding that different methods of planting and irrigation can help manage water better.

Growing more genetically diverse rice varieties would also help because some are more resilient to excess heat or require less water, while others might even emit less methane, he said.

Nguyen Van Nhut, director of the rice export company Hoang Minh Nhat, said its suppliers are using varieties of rice that can thrive even when the water is briny and the heat is extreme.

Now, the business is adapting to the unseasonal rains that make it harder to dry the rice, adding to risks from mold or insect damage. Typically, rice is dried in the sun immediately after harvest, but Nhut said his company has drying facilities in their packaging factory and also will install machinery to dry the grains closer to the fields.

"We don't know which month is the rainy season, like we did before," he said.

Arizona judge declares mistrial in the case of a rancher accused of fatally shooting a migrant

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — An Arizona judge declared a mistrial Monday in the case of a rancher accused of fatally shooting a Mexican man on his property near the U.S.-Mexico border.

The decision came after jurors failed to reach a unanimous decision after more than two full days of deliberation in trial of George Alan Kelly, 75, who was charged with second-degree murder in the Jan. 30, 2023, shooting of Gabriel Cuen-Buitimea.

"Based upon the jury's inability to reach a verdict on any count," Superior Court Judge Thomas Fink said, "This case is in mistrial."

The Santa Cruz County Attorney's Office can still decide whether to retry Kelly for any charge, or drop the case all together.

A status hearing was scheduled for next Monday afternoon, when prosecutors could inform the judge if they plan to refile the case. Prosecutors did not immediately respond to emailed requests for additional comment.

Kelly was charged with second-degree murder in killing of Cuen-Buitimea, 48, who lived just south of the border in Nogales, Mexico.

Prosecutors said Kelly recklessly fired nine shots from an AK-47 rifle toward a group of men, including

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 81 of 120

Cuen-Buitimea, about 100 yards (90 meters) away on his cattle ranch. Kelly has said he fired warning shots in the air, but he didn't shoot directly at anyone.

Court officials took jurors to Kelly's ranch as well as a section of the border. Fink denied news media requests to tag along.

After Monday's ruling, Consul General Marcos Moreno Baez of the Mexican consulate in Nogales, Arizona, said he would wait with Cuen-Buitimea's two adult daughters on Monday evening to meet with prosecutors from Santa Cruz County Attorney's Office to learn about the implications of a mistrial.

"Mexico will continue to follow the case and continue to accompany the family, which wants justice," said Moreno. "We hope for a very fair outcome."

Kelly's defense attorney Brenna Larkin did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment after the ruling was issued. Larkin had asked Fink to have jurors keep deliberating another day.

Kelly had earlier rejected an agreement with prosecutors that would have reduced the charge to one count of negligent homicide if he pleaded guilty.

Kelly was also charged with aggravated assault that day against another person in the group of about eight people, including a man from Honduras who was living in Mexico and who testified during the trial that he had gone into the U.S. that day seeking work.

The other migrants weren't injured and they all made it back to Mexico.

Cuen-Buitimea lived just south of the border in Nogales, Mexico. He had previously entered the U.S. illegally several times and was deported, most recently in 2016, court records show.

The nearly monthlong trial coincided with a presidential election year that has drawn widespread interest in border security.

Fink had told jurors that if they could not reach a verdict on the second-degree murder charge, they could try for a unanimous decision on a lesser charge of reckless manslaughter or negligent homicide. A second-degree murder conviction would have brought a minimum prison sentence of 10 years.

The jury got the case Thursday afternoon, deliberated briefly that day and then all of Friday and Monday.

Jury: BNSF Railway contributed to 2 deaths in Montana town where asbestos sickened thousands

By AMY BETH HANSON and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — A federal jury on Monday said BNSF Railway contributed to the deaths of two people who were exposed to asbestos decades ago when tainted mining material was shipped through a Montana town where thousands have been sickened.

The jury awarded \$4 million each in compensatory damages to the estates of the two plaintiffs, who died in 2020. Jurors said asbestos-contaminated vermiculite that spilled in the rail yard in the town of Libby, Montana was a substantial factor in the plaintiffs' illnesses and deaths.

Family members of the two victims hugged their attorneys after the verdict was announced. An attorney for the plaintiffs said the ruling brought some accountability, but one family member told The Associated Press that no amount of money would replace her lost sister.

"I'd rather have her than all the money in the world," Judith Hemphill said of her sister, Joyce Walder.

The vermiculite from Libby has high concentrations of naturally-occurring asbestos and was used in insulation and for other commercial purposes in homes and businesses across the U.S.

After being mined from a mountaintop outside town, it was loaded onto rail cars that sometimes spilled the material in the Libby rail yard. Residents have described piles of vermiculite being stored in the yard and dust from the facility blowing through downtown Libby.

The jury did not find that BNSF acted intentionally or with indifference so no punitive damages were awarded. Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc. acquired BNSF in 2010, two decades after the W.R. Grace & Co. vermiculite mine near Libby shut down and stopped shipping the contaminated mineral.

The estates of the two victims argued that the railroad knew the asbestos-tainted vermiculite was dangerous and failed to clean it up. Both lived near the rail yard decades ago and died from mesothelioma,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 82 of 120

a rare lung cancer linked to asbestos exposure.

The pollution in Libby has been cleaned up, largely at public expense. W.R. Grace, which played a central role in the town's tragedy, filed for bankruptcy in 2001 and paid \$1.8 billion into an asbestos trust fund to settle future cases.

Yet the long timeframe over which asbestos-related diseases develop means people previously exposed are likely to continue getting sick for years to come, health officials say.

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

"This is good news. This is the first community exposure case that will hold the railroad accountable for what they've done," said Mark Lanier, an attorney for Walder and Hemphill's estates.

The railroad was considering whether to appeal, said a BNSF spokesperson, who referred to it as a "very sad case."

"They (the jury) had the difficult task of evaluating conduct that occurred more than 50 years ago, before BNSF ever existed," said Kendall Sloan, the railroad's director of external communications.

BNSF attorney Chad Knight told jurors last week the railroad's employees didn't know the vermiculite was filled with hazardous microscopic asbestos fibers.

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

The railroad's experts also suggested during the trial that the plaintiffs could have been exposed to asbestos elsewhere.

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

U.S. District Judge Brian Morris had instructed the jury it could only find the railroad negligent based on its actions in the Libby Railyard, not for hauling the vermiculite.

Former Libby resident Bill Johnston, who followed the trial, said he was glad the victims' estates got a substantial award.

Johnston, 67, recalled playing in piles of vermiculite at the rail yard as a child and helping his father add piles of the material to their home garden, where it was used as a soil amendment. He, his two siblings and their parents have all been diagnosed with asbestos-related diseases, Johnston said Monday.

"They didn't do anything intentionally to cause this harm to their body. Other people knew about it and didn't care," he said of Libby asbestos victims. "What's that worth? It's hard to put a value on that. But when you say you're going to die prematurely or the life you have left is going to be tethered to an oxygen bottle, there should be some value that makes their life easier in the end."

BNSF was formed in 1995 from the merger of Burlington Northern railroad, which operated in Libby for decades, and the Santa Fe Pacific Corporation.

Looming over the proceedings was W.R. Grace, which operated the mountaintop vermiculite mine 7 miles (11 kilometers) outside of Libby until it closed in 1990. Morris referred to the chemical company as "the elephant in the room" during the BNSF trial and reminded jurors repeatedly that the case was about the railroad's conduct, not W.R. Grace's separate liability.

Federal prosecutors in 2005 indicted W. R. Grace and executives from the company on criminal charges over the contamination in Libby. A jury acquitted them following a 2009 trial.

The Environmental Protection Agency descended on Libby after 1999 news reports of illnesses and deaths among mine workers and their families. In 2009 the agency declared in Libby the nation's first ever public health emergency under the federal Superfund cleanup program.

A second trial against the railroad over the death of a Libby resident is scheduled for May in federal court in Missoula.

With homelessness on the rise, the Supreme Court weighs bans on sleeping outdoors

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court wrestled with major questions about the growing issue of homelessness on Monday as it considered whether cities can punish people for sleeping outside when shelter space is lacking.

It's the most significant case before the high court in decades on the issue, and comes as record numbers of people are without a permanent place to live in the United States.

The case started in the rural Oregon town of Grants Pass, which began fining people \$295 for sleeping outside as the cost of housing escalated and tents sprung up in the city's public parks. The San Francisco-based U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the law under its holding that banning camping in places without enough shelter beds amounts to cruel and unusual punishment.

The justices appeared to be leaning toward a narrow ruling in the case after hearing arguments that showed the stark terms of the debate over homelessness in Western states like California, which is home to one-third of the country's homeless population.

Sleeping is a biological necessity, and people may be forced to do it outside if they can't get housing or there's no space in shelters, Justice Sonia Sotomayor said.

"Where do we put them if every city, every village, every town lacks compassion and passes a law identical to this? Where are they supposed to sleep? Are they supposed to kill themselves, not sleeping?" she said.

Solving homelessness is a complicated issue, said Justice Brett Kavanaugh. He questioned whether ticketing people for camping helps if there aren't enough shelter beds to hold everyone, but also raised concerns about federal courts "micromanaging" policy.

Other conservative justices asked how far Eighth Amendment legal protections should extend as cities struggle with managing homeless encampments that can be dangerous and unsanitary.

"How about if there are no public bathroom facilities, do people have an Eighth Amendment right to defecate and urinate outdoors?" said Justice Neil Gorsuch.

Other public-health laws cover that situation, Justice Department attorney Edwin Kneedler said. He argued people shouldn't be punished just for sleeping outside, but said the ruling striking down the Grants Pass law should be tossed out because the court didn't do enough to determine if people are "involuntarily homeless."

Gorsuch and other justices also raised the possibility that other aspects of state or federal law could help sort through the issue, potentially without setting sweeping new legal precedent.

The question is an urgent one in the West, where a cross-section of Democratic and Republican officials contend that the 9th Circuit's rulings on camping bans make it difficult for them to manage encampments. The appeals court has jurisdiction over nine states in the West.

Advocacy groups, on the other hand, argued that allowing cities to punish people who need a place to sleep will criminalize homelessness and ultimately make the crisis worse as the cost of housing increases.

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside the Supreme Court Monday morning to advocate for more affordable housing, holding silver thermal blankets and signs like "housing not handcuffs."

Homelessness in the United States grew a dramatic 12% last year to its highest reported level, as soaring rents and a decline in coronavirus pandemic assistance combined to put housing out of reach for more people.

More than 650,000 people are estimated to be homeless, the most since the country began using the yearly point-in-time survey in 2007. Nearly half of them sleep outside. Older adults, LGBTQ+ people and people of color are disproportionately affected, advocates said.

In Oregon, a lack of mental health and addiction resources has also helped fuel the crisis. The state has some of the highest rates of homelessness and drug addiction in the nation, and ranks near the bottom in access to treatment, federal data shows.

The court is expected to decide the case by the end of June.

Trump tried to 'corrupt' the 2016 election, prosecutor alleges as hush money trial gets underway

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump tried to illegally influence the 2016 presidential election by preventing damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public, a prosecutor told jurors Monday at the start of the former president's historic hush money trial.

"This was a planned, coordinated, long-running conspiracy to influence the 2016 election — to help Donald Trump get elected through illegal expenditures to silence people who had something bad to say about his behavior, using doctored corporate records and bank forms to conceal those payments along the way," prosecutor Matthew Colangelo said. "It was election fraud, pure and simple."

A defense lawyer countered by assailing the case as baseless and attacking the integrity of the onetime Trump confidant who's now the government's star witness.

"President Trump is innocent. President Trump did not commit any crimes. The Manhattan district attorney's office should never have brought this case," attorney Todd Blanche said.

The opening statements offered the 12-person jury — and the voting public — radically divergent roadmaps for a case that will unfold against the backdrop of a closely contested White House race in which Trump is not only the presumptive Republican nominee but also a criminal defendant facing the prospect of a felony conviction and prison.

It is the first criminal trial of a former American president and the first of four prosecutions of Trump to reach a jury. Befitting that history, prosecutors sought from the outset to elevate the gravity of the case, which they said was chiefly about election interference as reflected by the hush money payments to a porn actor who said she had a sexual encounter with Trump.

"The defendant, Donald Trump, orchestrated a criminal scheme to corrupt the 2016 presidential election. Then he covered up that criminal conspiracy by lying in his New York business records over and over and over again," Colangelo said.

The trial, which could last up to two months, will require Trump to spend his days in a courtroom rather than on the campaign trail, a reality he complained about Monday when he lamented to reporters after leaving the courtroom: "I'm the leading candidate ... and this is what they're trying to take me off the trail for. Checks being paid to a lawyer."

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. In the weeks ahead, the case will test the jury's ability to judge him impartially but also Trump's ability to comply with courtroom protocol, including a gag order barring him from attacking witnesses, jurors, trial prosecutors and some others.

Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records — a charge punishable by up to four years in prison — 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 pardon himself if found guilty. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

The case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg revisits a years-old chapter from Trump's biography when his celebrity past collided with his political ambitions and, prosecutors say, he scrambled to stifle stories that he feared could torpedo his campaign.

The opening statements served as an introduction to the colorful cast of characters that feature prominently in that tawdry saga, including Stormy Daniels, the porn actor who says she received the hush money; Michael Cohen, the lawyer who prosecutors say paid her; and David Pecker, the tabloid publisher who agreed to function as the campaign's "eyes and ears" and who served as the prosecution's first witness on Monday.

Pecker is due back on the stand Tuesday, when the court will also hear arguments on whether Trump violated Judge Juan Merchan's gag order with a series of Truth Social posts about witnesses over the last week.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 85 of 120

In his opening statement, Colangelo outlined a comprehensive effort by Trump and his allies to prevent three separate stories — two from women alleging prior sexual encounters — from surfacing during the 2016 presidential campaign. That undertaking was especially urgent following the emergence late in the race of a 2005 “Access Hollywood” recording in which Trump could be heard boasting about grabbing women sexually without their permission.

Colangelo recited Trump’s now-infamous remarks as Trump looked on, stone-faced.

“The impact of that tape on the campaign was immediate and explosive,” Colangelo said.

Within days of the “Access Hollywood” tape becoming public, Colangelo told jurors that the National Enquirer alerted Cohen that Stormy Daniels was agitating to go public with her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump in 2006.

“At Trump’s direction, Cohen negotiated a deal to buy Ms. Daniels’ story in order to prevent American voters from learning that information before Election Day,” Colangelo told jurors.

But, the prosecutor noted, “neither Trump nor the Trump Organization could just write a check to Cohen for \$130,000 with a memo line that said ‘reimbursement for porn star payoff.’” So, he added, “they agreed to cook the books and make it look like the payment was actually income, payment for services rendered.”

Those alleged falsified records form the backbone of the 34-count indictment against Trump. Trump has denied a sexual encounter with Daniels.

Blanche, the defense lawyer, sought to preemptively undermine the credibility of Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges related to his role in the hush money scheme, as someone with an “obsession” with Trump who cannot be trusted. He said Trump had done nothing illegal when his company recorded the checks to Cohen as legal expenses.

“There’s nothing wrong with trying to influence an election. It is called democracy,” not a crime, Blanche said.

Blanche challenged the notion that Trump agreed to the Daniels payout to safeguard his campaign. Instead, he characterized the transaction as an attempt to squelch a “sinister” effort to embarrass Trump and his loved ones.

“President Trump fought back, like he always does, and like he’s entitled to do, to protect his family, his reputation and his brand, and that is not a crime,” Blanche told jurors.

The efforts to suppress the stories are what’s known in the tabloid industry as “catch-and-kill” — catching a potentially damaging story by buying the rights to it and then killing it through agreements that prevent the paid person from telling the story to anyone else.

Besides the payment to Daniels, Colangelo also described other arrangements, including one that paid a former Playboy model \$150,000 to suppress claims of a nearly yearlong affair with the married Trump. Colangelo said Trump “desperately did not want this information about Karen McDougal to become public because he was worried about its effect on the election.”

He said jurors would hear a recording Cohen made in September 2016 of himself briefing Trump on the plan to buy McDougal’s story. The recording was made public in July 2018. Colangelo told jurors they will hear Trump in his own voice saying: “What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?”

Trump denies McDougal’s claims of an affair.

The first and only witness Monday was Pecker, the then-publisher of the National Enquirer and a long-time Trump friend who prosecutors say met with Trump and Cohen at Trump Tower in August 2015 and agreed to help Trump’s campaign identify negative stories about him.

Pecker described the tabloid’s use of “checkbook journalism,” a practice that entails paying a source for a story.

“I gave a number to the editors that they could not spend more than \$10,000” on a story without getting his approval, Pecker said Tuesday.

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

Key recommendations for strengthening the neutrality of the UN agency helping Palestinian refugees

The Associated Press undefined

An independent panel that reviewed the neutrality of the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees, after Israel alleged that a dozen of its employees in Gaza had participated in Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks, released its report on Monday.

Here are some of its key recommendations to strengthen the neutrality of the agency, known as UNRWA.

— UNRWA, established by the U.N. General Assembly in 1949, does not have an executive board but it does have an advisory body, which must put neutrality on its agenda at all meetings and create a working group on neutrality and integrity issues.

— UNRWA faces challenges due to increased politicization of its staff and must announce procedures to deal with future allegations of neutrality breaches, and identify and implement additional ways to screen staff early in the recruitment process.

— UNRWA should reinforce its regular sharing of digital staff lists with host countries and Israel by ensuring the inclusion of additional information, including ID numbers and jobs. In response, host countries and Israel must provide UNRWA with results of their screening and "any red flags."

— UNRWA's international staff in Gaza is less than 1% of its total staff and there needs to be more senior international staff in the field to provide oversight on neutrality issues.

— UNRWA's management and internal oversight reform efforts "are commendable and should be expanded," including by creating a centralized neutrality investigation unit.

— UNRWA must implement "a zero-tolerance policy" on school textbooks used in its schools spreading antisemitic views or promoting discrimination and incitement to hatred.

— The politicization of UNRWA staff unions is "one of the most sensitive neutrality issues" and the agency should request an independent body to vet every staff union representative on their neutrality.

— It is "imperative" for UNRWA to enhance its engagement with donor nations to promote trust and strengthen their partnership.

— The international community has a responsibility to help and support UNRWA in addressing neutrality issues.

Key takeaways from the opening statements in Donald Trump's hush money trial

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

NEW YORK (AP) — Monday's opening statements in the first criminal trial of a former American president provided a clear roadmap of how prosecutors will try to make the case that Donald Trump broke the law, and how the defense plans to fight the charges on multiple fronts.

Lawyers presented dueling narratives as jurors got their first glimpse into the prosecution accusing Trump of falsifying business records as part of a scheme to squelch negative stories about him during his 2016 presidential campaign.

Still to come are weeks of what's likely to be dramatic and embarrassing testimony about the presumptive Republican presidential nominee's personal life as he simultaneously campaigns to return to the White House in November.

Here's a look at some key takeaways from opening statements:

ELECTION FRAUD VS. 'BOOKKEEPING' CASE

Trump is charged with 34 counts of falsifying internal Trump Organization business records. But prosecutors made clear they do not want jurors to view this as a routine paper case. Prosecutor Matthew Colangelo said the heart of the case is a scheme to "corrupt" the 2016 election by silencing people who were about to come forward with embarrassing stories Trump feared would hurt his campaign.

"No politician wants bad press," Colangelo said. "But the evidence at trial will show that this was not

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 87 of 120

spin or communication strategy. This was a planned, coordinated, long-running conspiracy to influence the 2016 election, to help Donald Trump get elected through illegal expenditures to silence people who had something bad to say about his behavior." He added: "It was election fraud, pure and simple."

The business records charges stem from things like invoices and checks that were deemed legal expenses in Trump Organization records when prosecutors say they were really reimbursements to former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen for a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels. Daniels was threatening to go public with claims she had an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump. He says it never happened.

Prosecutors' characterizations appear designed to combat suggestions by some pundits that the case — perhaps the only one that will go to trial before the November election — isn't as serious as the other three prosecutions he's facing. Those cases accuse Trump of trying to overturn the 2020 election he lost to President Joe Biden and illegally retaining classified documents after he left the White House.

Trump, meanwhile, sought to downplay the accusations while leaving the courtroom on Monday, calling it all a "bookkeeping" case and "a very minor thing." But he, too, has said it's all about an election — the one this November. Trump has repeatedly claimed that the case is part of a sweeping Democratic attempt to harm his chances at reclaiming the presidency.

TRUMP'S DEFENSE COMES INTO VIEW

Trump's attorney used his opening statement to attack the case as baseless, saying the former president did nothing illegal.

The attorney, Todd Blanche, challenged prosecutors' claim that Trump agreed to pay Daniels to aid his campaign, saying Trump was trying to "protect his family, his reputation and his brand."

Blanche indicated the defense will argue that after all the very point of a presidential campaign is to try to influence an election.

"It's called democracy," Blanche told jurors. "They put something sinister on this idea, as if it was a crime. You'll learn it's not."

Blanche also portrayed the ledger entries at issue in the case as pro forma actions performed by a Trump Organization employee. Trump "had nothing to do with" the allegedly false business records, "except that he signed the checks, in the White House, while he was running the country," Blanche said. And he argued that the records' references to legal expenses weren't false, since Cohen was Trump's personal lawyer at the time.

PROSECUTORS AIM TO PUT TRUMP AT THE CENTER

The 34 counts in the indictment are related to the payment to Daniels. But prosecutors plan to introduce evidence about a payoff to another woman — former Playboy model Karen McDougal — who claimed a sexual encounter with Trump, as well as to a Trump Tower doorman who claimed to have a story about Trump having a child out of wedlock. Trump says they were all lies.

Prosecutors said they will show Trump was at the center of the scheme to silence the women, telling jurors they will hear Trump in his voice talking about the plan to pay McDougal. Cohen arranged for the publisher of the National Enquirer supermarket tabloid to pay McDougal \$150,000 but not print the story in a practice known as "catch-and-kill."

Colangelo told jurors that prosecutors will play for them a recording Cohen secretly made during a meeting with Trump weeks before the 2016 election. In the recording, which first became public in 2018, Trump is heard saying: "What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?"

Trump "desperately did not want this information about Karen McDougal to become public because he was worried about its effect on the election," Colangelo said.

COHEN'S CREDIBILITY IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The defense's opening statement previewed what will be a key strategy of the defense: trying to discredit Cohen, a Trump loyalist turned critic and expected star witness for the prosecution. Cohen pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the hush money payments in 2018 and served prison time.

Whether jurors believe Cohen, who says he arranged the payments to the women at Trump's direction,

could make or break the case for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office.

Trump's lawyer highlighted Cohen's criminal record, describing him as a serial liar who turned against Trump after he was not given a job in the administration and found himself in legal trouble. Blanche said Cohen's "entire financial livelihood depends on President Trump's destruction," noting he hosts podcasts and has written books bashing his ex-boss.

"He has a goal and an obsession with getting Trump," Blanche said. "I submit to you that he cannot be trusted."

Anticipating the defense attacks on Cohen, the prosecution promised to be upfront about the "mistakes" the former Trump attorney has made. But Colangelo said "you can credit Michael Cohen's testimony" despite his past.

"I suspect the defense will go to great lengths to get you to reject his testimony precisely because it is so damning," the prosecutor said.

BUT UP FIRST: DAVID PECKER

Former National Enquirer publisher David Pecker is the first witness for prosecutors, who say that Trump's alleged scheme to conceal potentially damaging information from voters began with a 2015 Trump Tower meeting among the then-candidate, Pecker and Cohen. Pecker took the witness stand Monday before court broke for the day and his testimony is expected to continue Tuesday.

At the meeting, Pecker — a longtime Trump friend — agreed to aid Trump's campaign by running favorable pieces about him, smearing his opponents, scouting unflattering stories about him and flagging them to Cohen for "catch-and-kill" deals. Those included the claims made by Daniels, McDougal and the former Trump Tower doorman, Dino Sajudin, prosecutors say. Trump says all were false.

Pecker will likely be asked about all the alleged efforts made by the Enquirer's then-owner, American Media Inc., on Trump's behalf. Federal prosecutors agreed in 2018 not to prosecute American Media in exchange for its cooperation in a campaign finance investigation that led to Cohen's guilty plea, and the Federal Election Commission fined the company \$187,500, calling the McDougal deal a "prohibited corporate in-kind contribution."

Pecker's brief turn on the stand Monday was mainly just about his background and other basic facts, though he did say the Enquirer practiced "checkbook journalism" — paying for stories — and that he had the final say on any story about a famous person.

'THE DEFENDANT' OR 'PRESIDENT TRUMP'?

The prosecutor referred to Trump during his opening statement as "the defendant." Trump's lawyer took a different tack, calling him "President Trump."

"We will call him President Trump, out of respect for the office that he held," Blanche said. At the same time, Trump's lawyer sought to portray Trump as an everyman, describing him as a husband, father and fellow New Yorker.

"He's, in some ways, larger than life. But he's also here in this courtroom, doing what any of us would do: defending himself," Blanche said.

Trump sat quietly while listening to opening statements, occasionally passing notes to his lawyers and whispering in their ears. But outside of the courtroom, he continued his pattern of trying to capitalize politically on the case that will require him to spend his days in a courtroom rather than on the campaign trail.

"This is what they're trying to take me off the trail for. Checks being paid to a lawyer," Trump said.

Review of UN agency helping Palestinian refugees found Israel did not express concern about staff

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — An independent review of the neutrality of the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees found that Israel never expressed concern about anyone on the staff lists it has received annually since 2011. The review was carried out after Israel alleged that a dozen employees of the agency known as UNRWA had participated in Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 89 of 120

In a wide-ranging 48-page report released Monday, the independent panel said UNRWA has “robust” procedures to uphold the U.N. principle of neutrality, but it cited serious gaps in implementation, including staff publicly expressing political views, textbooks used in schools the agency runs with “problematic content” and staff unions disrupting operations. It makes 50 recommendations to improve UNRWA’s neutrality.

From 2017 to 2022, the report said, the annual number of allegations of neutrality being breached at UNRWA ranged from seven to 55. But between January 2022 and February 2024, U.N. investigators received 151 allegations, most related to social media posts “made public by external sources,” it said.

In a key section on the neutrality of staff, the panel, which was led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, said UNRWA shares lists of staff with host countries for its 32,000 staff, including about 13,000 in Gaza. But it said Israeli officials never expressed concern and informed panel members it did not consider the list “a screening or vetting process” but rather a procedure to register diplomats.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry informed the panel that until March 2024 the staff lists did not include Palestinian identification numbers, the report said.

Apparently based on those numbers, “Israel made public claims that a significant number of UNRWA employees are members of terrorist organizations,” the panel said. “However, Israel has yet to provide supporting evidence of this” to the refugee agency.

Colonna stressed that U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed the independent review panel to review UNRWA’s neutrality — not to investigate Israeli allegations that 12 UNRWA staffers participated in the Oct. 7 attacks. Guterres ordered the U.N. internal watchdog, the Office of Internal Oversight Services, known as OIOS, to conduct a separate investigation into those Israeli allegations.

“It is a separate mission. And it is not in our mandate,” Colonna said. She also said it is not surprising that Israel did not provide evidence of its allegations to the refugee agency “because it doesn’t owe this evidence during the investigation to UNRWA but to the OIOS.”

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters Monday the U.N. hopes to have an update from OIOS “in the coming days.” He said its investigators have been in contact with Israeli security services.

Israel’s allegations led to the suspension of contributions to UNRWA by the United States and more than a dozen other countries. That amounted to a pause in funding worth about \$450 million, according to Monday’s report, but a number of countries have resumed contributions.

Israel’s Foreign Ministry on Monday called on donor countries to avoid sending money to the organization. “The Colonna report ignores the severity of the problem, and offers cosmetic solutions that do not deal with the enormous scope of Hamas’ infiltration of UNRWA,” ministry spokesperson Oren Marmorstein said. “This is not what a genuine and thorough review looks like. This is what an effort to avoid the problem and not address it head on looks like.”

Colonna urged the Israeli government not to discount the independent review. “Of course you will find it is insufficient, but please take it on board. Whatever we recommend, if implemented, will bring good,” she said.

The report stresses the critical importance of UNRWA, calling it “irreplaceable and indispensable to Palestinians’ human and economic development” in the absence of a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and “pivotal in providing life-saving humanitarian aid and essential social services, particularly in health and education, to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank.”

Dujarric welcomed this commitment to UNRWA and said the report “lays out clear recommendations, which the secretary-general accepts.” The U.N. hopes to see the return of donors as well as new donors following the report’s release, he said.

Among the recommendations are steps to tackle politicization of UNRWA staff and its staff unions. The report recommends that staff lists with ID numbers be provided to host countries, which would then tell UNRWA the results of their screening and “any red flags.”

The report also calls for stronger oversight of UNRWA’s leadership and operations, “zero-tolerance” of antisemitism or discrimination in textbooks used in its schools, and greater international involvement in supporting the agency as it addresses neutrality issues.

UNRWA’s Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini said safeguarding the agency’s neutrality is critical to

its work and it is developing a plan to implement the report's recommendations.

With Israel calling for the breakup of the agency, Lazzarini told the U.N. Security Council last week that dismantling UNRWA would deepen Gaza's humanitarian crisis and speed up the onset of famine.

International experts have warned of imminent famine in northern Gaza and said half the territory's 2.3 million people could be pushed to the brink of starvation if the Israeli-Hamas war intensifies.

The review was conducted over nine weeks by Colonna and three Scandinavian research organizations: the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden, the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights. Colonna said the group spoke with more than 200 people, including UNRWA staff in Gaza, and had direct contacts with representatives of 47 countries and organizations.

Indigenous groups gathering in Brazil's capital to protest president's land grant decisions

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Thousands of Indigenous people began gathering in Brazil's capital on Monday for what was expected to become a protest against President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's unfulfilled promises to create reserves and expel illegal miners and land-grabbers from their territories.

Holding Lula's government to account appeared to be the focus of this year's 20th Free Land Camp, an annual weeklong encampment of Indigenous people in Brasilia.

Last week, Lula created two new reserves, far from the six his government had promised for April. During the announcement, he acknowledged that "some of our friends" would be frustrated. He added that the delay in naming other reserves was at the behest of state governors and that it was necessary to find new areas for about 800 non-Indigenous peoples who would eventually be displaced upon defining the new reserves.

"Enough of lawful genocide! Our rights cannot be negotiated, and no one can take Indigenous rights out of the Constitution," read an open letter from the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, the country's main Indigenous organization, published Monday. The letter was addressed to the legislative, judicial and executive branches of the government.

At least 251 territories have pending claims for recognition before the federal government, according to non-profit Socio-Environmental Institute.

"We are very disappointed with this government. We know it has many enemies, and the Congress is one common enemy," Alessandra Korap, an Indigenous leader of the Munduruku tribe, told The Associated Press. "But we didn't expect it to demarcate only two lands this year."

Lula took office in 2023 pledging to resume granting lands to Indigenous peoples, a stark contrast to his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro, who kept his promise not to create a single centimeter of additional Indigenous land. However, Indigenous demands face mounting opposition from the powerful agribusiness sector, which has the support of hundreds of seats in Congress and several governors across the country.

Protest organizers said about 8,000 people have so far come to Brasilia this year. They've set up hundreds of tents on the main esplanade. Some endured a three-day long bus trip. Activities in the camp include traditional dances, the selling of handicrafts, debates and political demonstrations.

Many more protesters were expected to come throughout the week.

Biden marks Earth Day by going after GOP, announcing \$7 billion in federal solar power grants

By ALEXA ST. JOHN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

TRIANGLE, Virginia (AP) — President Joe Biden marked Earth Day by announcing \$7 billion in federal grants for residential solar projects serving 900,000-plus households in low- and middle-income communities — while criticizing Republicans who want to gut his policies to address climate change.

Seeking reelection in November, Biden said, "Despite the overwhelming devastation in red and blue

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 91 of 120

states, there are still those who deny the climate is in crisis.”

He took specific aim at supporters of former President Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” movement.

“My MAGA Republican friends don’t seem to think it’s a crisis,” Biden said Monday during a visit to Virginia’s Prince William Forest Park, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) southwest Washington. “They actually want to repeal the Inflation Reduction Act, which provides the funding for the vast majority of these projects, and roll back protections for clean air and clean water.”

The president also used the trip to announce that nearly 2,000 corps positions are being offered across 36 states as part of his New Deal-style American Climate Corps green jobs training program, including jobs offered in partnership with the North American Building Trades Unions.

Biden used executive action last year to create the American Climate Corps modeled on Roosevelt’s New Deal.

“You’ll get paid to fight climate change,” he said Monday.

Biden made the announcements in a shady spot in Prince William Forest Park, which was established in 1936 as a summer camp for underprivileged youth from Washington. That was part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps to help create jobs during the Great Depression.

The solar grants are being awarded by the Environmental Protection Agency, which unveiled the 60 recipients. 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.

Biden’s 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 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.

After his speech, Biden was asked by reporters about protests against Israel’s handling of the war and replied, “I condemn the antisemitic protests.” But he also added, “I also condemn those who don’t understand what’s going on with the Palestinians.”

The White House issued a statement over the weekend denouncing “harassment and calls for violence against Jews.” Protests on college campuses, including those of Columbia and Yale Universities, prompted scores of arrests.

Biden’s campaign is hoping that his climate efforts can energize young voters ahead of November. Senior administration officials said young Americans are keenly invested in the Biden climate agenda and want to help enact it and that the Climate Corps is a way to do so.

Solar energy is gaining traction as a key renewable energy source that could reduce the nation’s reliance on fossil fuels. 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.

“Broad community-based solar is our brightest hope for protecting people and our climate from the scourge of fossil fuels,” said Jean Su, director of the Energy Justice program at the Center for Biological Diversity. “These targeted investments mean low-income families get clean energy that is affordable, resilient and protects our ecosystems. It’s great to see President Biden jumpstart this landmark program.”

The president 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.

The new 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 affected by climate change.

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.

Sens. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Ed Markey of Oregon spoke at Monday's event along with New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, all leading voices in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Ocasio Cortez referenced "peaceful protests" elsewhere while arguing, "It was the power of young people who have made today possible."

When red-hot isn't enough: New government heat risk tool sets magenta as most dangerous level

BY SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Forget about red hot. A new color-coded heat warning system relies on magenta to alert Americans to the most dangerous conditions they may see this summer.

The National Weather Service and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday — Earth Day — presented a new online heat risk system that combines meteorological and medical risk factors with a seven-day forecast that's simplified and color-coded for a warming world of worsening heat waves.

"For the first time we'll be able to know how hot is too hot for health and not just for today but for coming weeks," Dr. Ari Bernstein, director of the National Center for Environmental Health, said at a joint news conference by government health and weather agencies.

Magenta is the worst and deadliest of five heat threat categories, hitting everybody with what the agencies are calling "rare and/or long-duration extreme heat with little to no overnight relief." It's a step higher than red, considered a major risk, which hurts anyone without adequate cooling and hydration and has impacts reverberating through the health care system and some industries. Red is used when a day falls within the top 5% hottest in a particular location for a particular date; when other factors come into play, the alert level may bump even higher to magenta, weather service officials said.

On the other hand, pale green is little to no risk. Yellow is minor risk, mostly to the very young, old, sick and pregnant. Orange is moderate risk, mostly hurting people who are sensitive to heat, especially those without cooling, such as the homeless.

The five categories rest on strict science-set numerical thresholds, like the Saffir Simpson hurricane scale that is familiar for its Category 1 through 5 terminology, though the heat version is specific to location, said National Weather Service Director Ken Graham. The thresholds were calculated using local weather data, local climatology that shows what people are used to at certain locations at each time of year, and localized health and medical data for when heat illnesses and deaths show up in the area, he said.

"Heat is a threat to our health," CDC Director Dr. Mandy Cohen said. She said last year more than 120,000 people were taken to the emergency room in the United States because of heat. Last year was one of the deadliest years in decades for heat, according to government records.

Heat is by far the No. 1 weather cause of death in the United States, said National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief Rick Spinrad, citing CDC data of 1,200 deaths per year. Last year was the hottest year on record globally.

Both the weather service and CDC will put versions of the tool on their websites. Enter a ZIP code on

the CDC dashboard to get more focus on health risks and air quality and zoom in on the weather service map online for more detailed forecasts and explanations. Both versions include heat risk for the next seven days and there is a Spanish edition. The CDC site is <https://www.cdc.gov/heatrisk> and the weather service version is <https://www.wpc.ncep.noaa.gov/heatrisk/>

There are numerous other meteorological indexes for heat, Graham said. Those include the heat index, which factors in humidity; wet bulb globe temperature, which is aimed at outdoors heat stress in the sun; and universal thermal climate index, which brings in radiation and other urban heat factors.

"This is a way to simplify that," Graham said. "You've got to be able to simplify the stuff so that people actually want to look at it first of all and most importantly understand it."

A version of the heat risk map has been in use in California and other parts of the West for about a decade, he said.

Health officials Cohen and Bernstein said even as heat gets worse with climate change, society can try to reduce deaths by better warnings and better planning. Doctors should talk with people before the summer begins about what vulnerable people should do in advance before heat waves, they said. For example, some heart medications interact with outdoor heat and people shouldn't stop taking their medications, but they could take other precautions, as can teenagers with asthma, said Bernstein, a pediatrician by training.

Those precautions will be needed soon, Graham said.

The Weather Service's seasonal forecast for May and June shows likely above-average temperatures for much of the United States, Graham said. "So as summer approaches, it's going to be as hot as ever and even more so if we get above average."

"Heat waves are getting hotter, longer, more frequent and you're getting less relief at night," Graham said, citing numerous studies in the past decade. "So it's becoming increasingly serious."

Report urges fixes to online child exploitation CyberTipline before AI makes it worse

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writers

A tipline set up 26 years ago to combat online child exploitation has not lived up to its potential and needs technological and other improvements to help law enforcement go after abusers and rescue victims, a new report from the Stanford Internet Observatory has found.

The fixes to what the researchers describe as an "enormously valuable" service must also come urgently as new artificial intelligence technology threatens to worsen its problems.

"Almost certainly in the years to come, the CyberTipline will just be flooded with highly realistic-looking AI content, which is going to make it even harder for law enforcement to identify real children who need to be rescued," said researcher Shelby Grossman, an author of the report.

The service was established by Congress as the main line of defense for children who are exploited online. By law, tech companies — must report any child sexual abuse material they find on their platforms to the system, which is operated by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. After it receives the reports, NCMEC attempts to find the people who sent or received the material — as well as the victims, if possible. These reports are then sent to law enforcement.

While the sheer amount of CyberTipline reports is overwhelming law enforcement, researchers say volume is just one of several problems core to the system. For instance, many of the reports sent by tech companies lack important details, such as enough information about an offender's identity, the report said. This makes it hard for law enforcement to know which reports to prioritize.

"There are significant issues with the entire system right now and those cracks are going to become chasms in a world in which AI is generating brand-new CSAM," said Alex Stamos, using the initials for child sexual abuse materials. Stamos is a Stanford lecturer and cybersecurity expert.

The system is behind technologically and plagued by a constant challenge among government and non-profit tech platforms: the lack of highly skilled engineers, who can get paid far higher salaries in the tech industry. Sometimes those employees are even poached by the same companies that send in the reports.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 94 of 120

Then there are legal constraints. According to the report, court decisions have led the staff at NCMEC to stop vetting some files (for instance, if they are not publicly available) before sending them to law enforcement. Many law enforcement officials believe they need a search warrant to access such images, slowing down the process. At times, multiple warrants or subpoenas are needed to identify the same offender.

It's also easy for the system to get distracted. The report reveals that NCMEC recently hit a milestone of a million reports in a single day due to a meme that was spreading on multiple platforms -- which some people thought was funny and others were sharing out of outrage.

"That day actually led them to make some changes," Stamos said. "It took them weeks to get through that backlog" by making it easier to cluster those images together.

The CyberTipline received more than 36 million reports in 2023, nearly all from online platforms. Facebook, Instagram and Google were the companies that sent in the highest number of reports. The overall number has been dramatically increasing. They come from big companies like Google, Amazon, and Meta as well as smaller ones.

Nearly half of the tips sent last year were actionable, meaning NCMEC and law enforcement could follow up.

Hundreds of reports concerned the same offender, and many included multiple images or videos. Around 92% of the reports filed in 2023 involved countries outside the U.S., a large shift from 2008 when the majority involved victims or offenders inside the U.S.

Some are false alarms. "It drives law enforcement nuts when they get these reports that they perceive are definitely adults," Grossman told reporters. "But the system incentivizes platforms to be very conservative or to report potentially borderline content, because if it's found to have been CSAM and they knew about it and they didn't report it, they could receive fines."

One relatively easy fix proposed in the report would improve how tech platforms label what they are reporting to distinguish between widely shared memes and something that deserves closer investigation.

The Stanford researchers interviewed 66 people involved with the CyberTipLine, ranging from law enforcement to NCMEC staff to online platform employees.

The NCMEC said it looked forward to "exploring the recommendations internally and with key stakeholders."

"Over the years, the complexity of reports and the severity of the crimes against children continue to evolve. Therefore, leveraging emerging technological solutions into the entire CyberTipline process leads to more children being safeguarded and offenders being held accountable," it said in a statement.

Among the report's other findings:

— The CyberTipline reporting form doesn't have a dedicated field for submitting chat-related material, such as sextortion messaging. The FBI recently warned of a "huge increase" in sextortion cases targeting children — including financial sextortion, where someone threatens to release compromising images unless the victim pays.

— Police detectives told Stanford researchers they are having a hard time persuading their higher-ups to prioritize these crimes even after they present them with detailed written descriptions to emphasize their gravity. "They wince when they read it and they don't really want to think about this," Grossman said.

— Many law enforcement officials said they were not able to fully investigate all reports due to time and resource constraints. A single detective may be responsible for 2,000 reports a year.

— Outside the U.S., especially in poorer countries, the challenges around child exploitation reports are especially severe. Law enforcement agencies might not have reliable internet connections, "decent computers" or even gas for cars to execute search warrants.

— Pending legislation passed by the U.S. Senate in December would require online platforms to report child sex trafficking and online enticement to the CyberTipline and give law enforcement more time to investigate child sexual exploitation. Currently, the tipline doesn't offer straightforward ways to report suspected sex trafficking.

While some advocates have proposed more intrusive surveillance laws to catch abusers, Stamos, the former chief security officer at Facebook and Yahoo, said they should try simpler fixes first.

"There's no need to violate the privacy of users if you want to put more pedophiles in jail. They're sitting right there," Stamos said. "The system does not work very well at taking the information that currently exists and then turning it into prosecutions."

The Latest | Lawyers in Trump hush money case paint competing portraits of him in opening statements

NEW YORK (AP) — In opening statements in Donald Trump's historic hush money trial, prosecutors said Monday that the former president "orchestrated a criminal scheme to corrupt" the 2016 presidential election.

Defense attorneys countered, calling Trump "innocent" and saying the Manhattan district attorney's office "should never have brought this case."

The commencement of the proceedings set the stage for weeks of unsavory and salacious testimony about Trump's personal life and placed his legal troubles at the center of his closely contested campaign against President Joe Biden.

A panel of New Yorkers — 12 jurors and six alternates — was sworn in last Friday after four days of jury selection and is hearing what is the first-ever criminal trial against a former U.S. commander-in-chief.

Trump is accused of falsifying internal business records as part of an alleged scheme to bury stories that he thought might hurt his presidential campaign in 2016.

At the heart of the allegations is a \$130,000 payment made to porn actor Stormy Daniels by Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, to prevent her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump from surfacing in the final days of the race.

Prosecutors say Trump obscured the true nature of such payments in internal business documents. Trump has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels, and his lawyers argue that the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses. He has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records.

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

Currently:

- Key players: Who's who at Donald Trump's hush money criminal trial
- The hush money case is just one of Trump's legal cases. See the others here
- Trump cancels rally because of weather, proving the difficulty of balancing a trial and campaign
- Trump was forced to listen silently as potential jurors offered their unvarnished assessments of him

Here's the latest:

JURY WILL NEED TO ASSESS EVIDENCE FAIRLY, EVEN AS TRUMP RAILS AGAINST THE SYSTEM

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

In the weeks ahead, the criminal case against him will test the jury's ability to judge him impartially but also Trump's ability to comply with courtroom protocol, including a gag order barring him from attacking witnesses.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records and faces up to 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 pardon himself if found guilty.

He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

TRUMP'S \$175M BOND IN CIVIL FRAUD JUDGMENT CASE SETTLED WITH CASH PROMISE

In a Manhattan civil court on Monday, state lawyers and an attorney for Donald Trump settled their differences over a \$175 million bond that Trump posted to block a large civil fraud judgment while he pursues appeals.

An attorney for the state said they wanted extra assurances because Trump had raised the money with help from a relatively small out-of-state insurance company.

As part of the deal struck Monday, lawyers for Trump and Knight Specialty Insurance Company agreed

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 96 of 120

to keep the \$175 million in a cash account that will gain interest but faces no downside risk.

The bond stops the state from potentially seizing Trump's assets to satisfy the more than \$454 million that he owes after Judge Arthur Engoron in February concluded that Trump and others had deceived banks and insurers by exaggerating his wealth on financial statements.

Trump railed against Engoron after his criminal trial wrapped for the day.

"He challenged the bonding company that maybe the bonding company was no good. Well, they're good. And they also have \$175 million of collateral — my collateral," he said.

HEARING ON PROSECUTORS' REQUEST TO SANCTION TRUMP OVER ONLINE POSTS TO BE HELD MONDAY

Before testimony resumes in Donald Trump's hush money trial on Tuesday, the judge will hold a hearing on prosecutors' request to hold the former president in contempt of court over social media posts he recently made.

Last week, the prosecution asked that Judge Juan M. Merchan sanction Trump and fine him at least \$3,000 for allegedly violating a gag order prohibiting him from attacking key witnesses in the case. Prosecutors said Trump did just that with nearly a dozen online posts, including at least three posted on Truth Social.

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

EVERYDAY PEOPLE GETTING AN UP CLOSE VIEW OF TRIAL FROM INSIDE

While courtroom access to Donald Trump's hush money trial was restricted to a handful of reporters during jury selection, the start of opening statements has given members of the public a chance to witness the first criminal trial of a former president up close.

Roughly a dozen members of the public were allowed into the proceedings on Monday. Some had lined up before dawn to get their chance at witnessing history. But not everyone.

"I was planning on going to work, then as I was walking by, I saw all the police," said Monroe Clinton, a programmer, who added that had not been following the trial closely. "I told my co-workers, 'Hey I just saw the Trump trial is happening.' The line was quite short, so I decided to go on in."

Andrew Giuliani, the son of former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and a former aide in the Trump administration, was seen waiting in line to get into the overflow room, a room adjacent to the main courtroom where the trial is being shown on monitors.

COURT ADJOURNS EARLY

Court has adjourned for the day in Donald Trump's hush money trial in New York.

Judge Juan M. Merchan had originally planned to adjourn at 2 p.m. because of Passover but agreed to adjourn early to accommodate an alternate juror's emergency dental appointment.

Merchan plans to adjourn court on Tuesday at 2 p.m. for the holiday.

TESTIMONY MARKED BY LIGHTHEARTED MOMENT

He's the first person ever to testify at a criminal trial of a former U.S. president, and David Pecker is doing so under subpoena, with his lawyer in the courtroom.

But the weighty occasion still had a lighthearted moment on Monday afternoon.

It came when a prosecutor asked Pecker to recite parts of phone numbers he'd had during the time period when the allegations in Donald Trump's hush money case took place — from 2015 to about 2017. It was a question that might have been asked in order to authenticate phone records later on.

But after Pecker rattled off the closing digits of four different cellphone and office phone numbers from memory, prosecutor Joshua Steinglass assured him, "This isn't a quiz."

Pecker responded with a cackling laugh.

NATIONAL ENQUIRER EMPLOYED 'CHECKBOOK JOURNALISM,' PECKER TESTIFIES

David Pecker, the former publisher of the National Enquirer, testified Monday in Donald Trump's hush money trial about the publication's use of "checkbook journalism," a practice that entails paying a source for a story.

Pecker said he "gave a number to the editors that they could not spend more than \$10,000" on a story

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 97 of 120

without getting his approval.

He went on to describe the publication's coverage meetings — in which he had final say over celebrity stories — and his editorial philosophy.

"The only thing that is important is the cover of a magazine," Pecker said.

DAVID PECKER TAKES THE STAND AS THE FIRST WITNESS

David Pecker, the National Enquirer's former publisher and a longtime friend of Donald Trump, was the first witness to take the stand in the former president's hush money trial on Monday.

Prosecutors say he met with Trump and Michael Cohen at Trump Tower in August 2015 and agreed to help the campaign identify negative stories about him.

Pecker took the stand just after noon, sporting a charcoal suit, yellow tie and glasses. The 72-year-old now consults, including for his old employer, the company formerly known as American Media Inc.

DEFENSE ASKS JURORS TO USE 'COMMON SENSE' IN FINAL REMARKS

Defense attorneys concluded their opening statements in Donald Trump's hush money trial by downplaying expected testimony from porn actor Stormy Daniels, as well as emphasizing that prosecutors have not charged him with conspiracy despite describing the allegations against him as such in their opening statements.

"There's nothing illegal about what you will hear happened among the National Enquirer, AMI, David Pecker and Donald Trump," Blanche said, adding: "It's not a scheme, unless a scheme means something that doesn't matter, that's not illegal."

Blanche concluded by urging jurors to pay attention to all of the testimony and to use common sense, observing, "We're all New Yorkers here."

"If you do that, there will be a very swift 'not guilty' verdict," Blanche said.

Court subsequently took a break and Trump left the courtroom without speaking to reporters in the hallway.

DEFENSE ZEROES IN ON KEY PROSECUTION WITNESS

One of Donald Trump's defense attorneys zeroed in during opening statements on the credibility of one of the prosecution's key witnesses: Michael Cohen.

Attorney Todd Blanche provided an extensive account Monday of Cohen's criminal record and his history of lying under oath. He said that Cohen turned against the former president only after he was not given a job in the administration and found himself in legal trouble.

Blanche accused Cohen of being "obsessed with President Trump," saying "his entire financial livelihood depends on President Trump's destruction."

"You cannot make a serious decision about President Trump relying on the words of Michael Cohen," Blanche said.

Anticipating the defense's likely attacks on their star witness, prosecutor Matthew Colangelo acknowledged Cohen's criminal record earlier in the day.

"I suspect the defense will go to great lengths to get you to reject his testimony precisely because it is so damning," Cohen said.

"We will be very upfront about it," he continued, adding that Cohen, "like other witnesses in this trial, has made mistakes."

"You can credit Michael Cohen's testimony despite those past mistakes," he added.

TRUMP HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH PAYMENTS, DEFENSE SAYS

Defense attorneys in Donald Trump's hush money case said Monday that he had nothing to do with payments that were made to prevent stories about his sex life from being made public near the end of the 2016 presidential election.

Todd Blanche portrayed the business ledger entries at issue in the case as pro forma actions performed by a Trump Organization functionary.

Trump "had nothing to do" with the invoice, the check being generated or the entry on the ledger,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 98 of 120

Blanche said.

While prosecutors allege Trump reimbursed Michael Cohen \$420,000 — more than double what Cohen paid to porn actor Stormy Daniels — because the cover-up was crucial to the campaign, Blanche said the excess payments are proof that Trump had nothing to do with the scheme.

"Ask yourself, would a frugal businessman, a man who pinches pennies, repay a \$130,000 debt to the tune of \$420,000?" Blanche asked.

"President Trump had nothing to do with any of the 34 pieces of paper, the 34 counts, except that he signed the checks, in the White House, while he was running the country."

Blanche took particular issue with the prosecution's insinuation that attempting to influence an election connotes illegality.

"I have a spoiler alert: There's nothing wrong with trying to influence an election. It's called democracy," Blanche said. "They put something sinister on this idea as if it's a crime. You'll learn it's not."

DEFENSE BEGINS ITS OPENING STATEMENTS

Following the prosecution's opening statements in Donald Trump's criminal hush money trial, the defense called the former president "innocent" and said the Manhattan district attorney's office "should never have brought this case."

"He's, in some ways, larger than life. But he's also here in this courtroom, doing what any of us would do: defending himself," Todd Blanche said as Trump looked on with interest. He went on to describe Trump as a former president but also an everyday person — a man, a husband, a father.

In the prosecution's openings, Trump was referred to as "the defendant." But his own lawyers are referring to him as "President Trump."

"We will call him President Trump, out of respect for the office that he held," Blanche said.

Other Trump lawyers have used the same language in previous legal cases.

PROSECUTORS SAY TRUMP PAID COHEN DOUBLE FOR HUSH MONEY SCHEME

After the 2016 election, Donald Trump invited David Pecker, then publisher of the National Enquirer, to Trump Tower to thank him for his contribution to the campaign, prosecutors said Monday. He also invited the publisher to the inauguration and later to the White House, where a dinner was held to honor Pecker and then-National Enquirer editor Dylan Howard.

But prosecutor Matthew Colangelo said Trump still had a few "loose ends" to tie up at the time, including reimbursing his then-lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen for the payments he had given to Stormy Daniels.

"Neither Trump nor the Trump Organization could just write a check to Cohen with a memo line that said 'reimbursement for porn star pay-off,'" Colangelo said. "So they agreed to cook the books and make it look like the payment was actually income, payment for services rendered."

Colangelo added that the evidence would show that while Trump is a "very frugal businessman," when it came to reimbursing Cohen, Trump paid him double.

"This might be the only time it ever happened," Colangelo said. Trump's willingness to part with so much cash showed how important it was to him to keep the hush money scheme under wraps, the prosecutor posited.

TRUMP DIRECTED COHEN TO MAKE A DEAL WITH STORMY DANIELS, PROSECUTORS SAY

Within days of the "Access Hollywood" tape involving Donald Trump becoming public, Colangelo told jurors, The National Enquirer alerted Trump's then-lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen that porn actor Stormy Daniels wanted to go public with her claims of a 2006 sexual encounter with Trump.

"At Trump's direction, Cohen negotiated a deal to buy Ms. Daniels' story to prevent American voters from hearing that story before Election Day," Colangelo told jurors, referring to the scheme as a "conspiracy" and "election fraud, pure and simple."

TRUMP SHOWS NO REACTION TO 'ACCESS HOLLYWOOD' TAPE TRANSCRIPT

Prosecutor Matthew Colangelo told jurors in Donald Trump's criminal hush money case that The Washington Post's publication of the 2005 "Access Hollywood" tape, where Trump was heard on a hot mic "bragging about sexual assaults," had an immediate and "explosive" impact on his presidential campaign.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 99 of 120

Colangelo told jurors that prominent Trump allies withdrew their endorsements and condemned his language. The prosecutor said evidence would show the Republican National Committee even considered whether it was possible to replace Trump with another candidate.

As Colangelo read aloud words from the tape, Trump showed no reaction.

PROSECUTION HONES IN ON 'CATCH-AND-KILL' OPERATION

Prosecutors in Donald Trump's criminal trial honed in on what they called a "catch-and-kill" operation at the center of the allegations in the hush money case.

The plan was hatched at Trump Tower shortly after the then-presidential candidate had announced his candidacy. During that meeting, prosecutors say that David Pecker, then-publisher of the National Enquirer, agreed to "help the defendant's campaign by working as the eyes and the ears of the campaign."

Speaking of arrangements made to pay former Playboy model Karen McDougal \$150,000 to suppress her claims of a nearly year-long affair with the married Trump, Colangelo said Trump "desperately did not want this information ... become public because he was worried about its effect on the election."

Colangelo told jurors they would hear a recording Cohen made in September 2016 of himself briefing Trump on the plan to buy McDougal's story. The recording was made public in July 2018. Colangelo told jurors they would hear Trump in his own voice, saying, "What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?"

TRUMP TRIED TO 'CORRUPT' 2016 ELECTION, PROSECUTORS ALLEGE IN OPENING STATEMENTS

Prosecutors in Donald Trump's hush money trial said in opening statements that the former president allegedly went to great lengths to "corrupt" the 2016 presidential election.

"The defendant, Donald Trump, orchestrated a criminal scheme to corrupt the 2016 presidential election. Then he covered up that criminal conspiracy by lying in his New York business records over and over and over again," prosecutor Matthew Colangelo told jurors.

Colangelo, senior counsel to the district attorney, told jurors that though the payments to Michael Cohen were labeled as legal fees pursuant to a retainer agreement, there was no retainer and there were no legal services. "The defendant falsified those business records because he wanted to conceal his and others' criminal conduct," he said.

All 18 jurors looked directly at the veteran prosecutor, who stood at a lectern in the middle of the courtroom about halfway between them and Trump.

JUDGE BARS PROSECUTORS FROM BRINGING UP 2 TRUMP LEGAL CASES

While prosecutors in Donald Trump's hush money trial will be allowed to question him in a limited manner — if he testifies — about his recent civil fraud and writer E. Jean Carroll's defamation lawsuit against him, the judge has barred them from bringing up two other legal cases.

One was the 2022 New York criminal tax fraud trial of Trump's business, the Trump Organization. The company was convicted by a jury. Trump wasn't charged in that case.

The other is the nearly \$1 million fine that a federal judge in Florida last year ordered Trump and one of his attorneys to pay. The judge levied the penalty after finding that Trump filed a "completely frivolous" lawsuit against his 2016 rival Hillary Clinton and others.

JURY ENTERS COURTROOM FOR TRIAL PROCEEDINGS

Members of the jury in Donald Trump's hush money case entered the courtroom just after 10 a.m. Monday. The former president turned in his seat and looked briefly in their direction before the judge began explaining the court proceedings.

"Good morning, jurors. We are about to proceed with the trial of the People of the State of New York v. Donald J. Trump," said Judge Juan M. Merchan.

Because the panel was selected over several days, this is the first time the full jury has been together. It's also the first time jurors are seeing the courtroom packed with reporters — a departure from last week when the gallery was full of prospective jurors and there were just a few reporters permitted inside.

PROSECUTORS CAN QUESTION TRUMP ABOUT OTHER CASES, JUDGE RULES

Prosecutors in Donald Trump's hush money case can cross-examine him about several of his recent legal setbacks if he chooses to testify, the judge ruled.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 100 of 120

Trump shook his head Monday morning as Judge Juan M. Merchan ruled that prosecutors could ask him about the outcome of his recent civil business fraud trial, in which another judge found that Trump, along with his business and key executives, fraudulently inflated his wealth on paperwork used to secure loans and insurance.

Merchan said prosecutors could challenge the former president's credibility by questioning him about six legal determinations in four cases, including his \$88.3 million in judgments for defaming writer E. Jean Carroll.

Strict limits will be placed on what prosecutors can question Trump about regarding those cases, including prohibiting them from eliciting the amounts of the monetary penalties imposed, said Merchan.

JUDGE TO ALLOW PROSECUTION TO INTRODUCE 'ACCESS HOLLYWOOD'

Judge Juan M. Merchan will allow the prosecution in Donald Trump's hush money case to introduce the notorious 'Access Hollywood' tape into evidence, but will not permit the showing of the actual video in court.

Trump's lawyers have objected to the use of a transcript. But Merchan said that in his view there is "no reason" why a transcript of the video, where Trump boasted about grabbing women's genitals without permission, "should not be admitted into evidence."

COURT TO END EARLY DUE TO PASSOVER, JUROR OBLIGATIONS

Donald Trump's hush money trial will adjourn earlier than expected on Monday to accommodate an alternate juror's emergency dental appointment in the afternoon.

Judge Juan M. Merchan had previously planned to adjourn the trial at 2 p.m. because of Passover, but will now adjourn the case at 12:30 p.m. He plans to end at 2 p.m. on Tuesday for the holiday.

JUROR WHO EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS ABOUT TRIAL WILL STAY ON

A juror who expressed reservations about continuing with Donald Trump's hush money trial ahead of opening statements will remain on the jury, according to the judge.

Judge Juan M. Merchan said his understanding was "that the juror was concerned about the media attention" to the case and wasn't "100% sure they wanted to be here today."

The juror showed up to court Monday and was questioned in the judge's robing room, out of the view of the press, he said.

TRUMP CASTS TRIAL AS 'UNFAIR'

Before heading into the courtroom Monday morning, Donald Trump addressed a camera in the hallway, once again saying that it's "unfair" he has to be there, rather than out campaigning.

He once again cast the trial as a "witch hunt" and a "shame" aimed at damaging his campaign.

"I'm here instead of being able to be in Pennsylvania and Georgia and lots of other places campaigning and it's very unfair," he said.

Trump also spoke at length about another hearing taking place at a nearby court, regarding the \$175 million bond he paid in his civil fraud case.

Once in the courtroom, the former president filled his cheeks with air and exhaled before sitting down.

Photographers quickly crowded around him, snapping photos ahead of the proceedings.

The gallery was packed with reporters, and the temperature in the courtroom was slightly warmer than on previous days, where the chill was a subject of much discussion.

WHY ISN'T TRUMP'S TRIAL TELEVISED?

New York state law regarding media coverage of court proceedings is one of the most restrictive in the country.

Regulations limiting media coverage in courtrooms date back nearly a century, when the spectacle of bright flashbulbs and camera operators standing on witness tables during the 1935 trial of the man accused of kidnapping and killing Charles Lindbergh's baby son horrified the legal community, according to a 2022 report by the New York-based Fund for Modern Courts.

Yet an interest in open government chipped away at these laws and — slowly, carefully — video cameras began to be permitted in courts across the country, often at the discretion of judges presiding in individual cases.

New York allowed them, too, on an experimental basis between 1987 and 1997, but they were shut down. THE TIMING OF THIS CASE LENDS TO ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The allegations at the heart of this case don't accuse Donald 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 election.

Appeals and legal wrangling have delayed the other three cases.

HERE'S WHO COULD BE CALLED TO TESTIFY

MICHAEL COHEN — Donald Trump's former lawyer and fixer. He was once a fierce Trump ally, but now he's a key prosecution witness against his former boss. Cohen worked for the Trump Organization from 2006 to 2017. He later went to federal prison after pleading guilty to campaign finance violations relating to the hush money arrangements and other, unrelated crimes.

STORMY DANIELS — The porn actor who received a \$130,000 payment from Cohen as part of his hush money efforts. Cohen paid Daniels to keep quiet about what she says was a sexual encounter with Trump years earlier. Trump denies having sex with Daniels.

KAREN MCDUGAL — A former Playboy model who said she had a 10-month affair with Trump in the mid-2000s. She was paid \$150,000 in 2016 by the parent company of the National Enquirer for the rights to her story about the alleged relationship. Trump denies having sex with McDougal.

DAVID PECKER — The National Enquirer's former publisher and a longtime Trump friend. Prosecutors say he met with Trump and Cohen at Trump Tower in August 2015 and agreed to help Trump's campaign identify negative stories about him.

HOPE HICKS — Trump's former White House communications director. Prosecutors say she spoke with Trump by phone during a frenzied effort to keep allegations of his marital infidelity out of the press after the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape leaked weeks before the 2016 election. In the tape, from 2005, Trump boasted about grabbing women without permission. Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records — a charge punishable by up to four years in prison — 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 pardon himself if found guilty. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

Israel's military intelligence chief resigns over failure to prevent Hamas attack on Oct. 7

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The head of Israeli military intelligence resigned on Monday because of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, becoming the first senior figure to step down over his role in the stunning failure to anticipate or quickly respond to the deadliest assault in Israel's history.

Maj. Gen. Aharon Haliva's decision could set the stage for more resignations among top Israeli security officials. Hamas militants blasted through Israel's border defenses on Oct. 7, rampaging through communities unchallenged for hours and killing 1,200 people, most of them civilians, while taking roughly 250 hostages into Gaza.

The 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 said he would remain in his position until a replacement is found. He said he had intended to resign immediately after Oct. 7, but stayed on through the initial part of the war and was resigning as the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 102 of 120

army's internal investigations gather pace.

His announcement came at the start of Passover, a major Jewish holiday, and as military operations in Gaza have slowed in recent weeks ahead of a possible offensive on the southern city of Rafah.

The timing of any resignations by security and military officials has been complicated by the ongoing war in Gaza and battles with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah along Israel's northern border. 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 and others had publicly said that they shouldered blame for not preventing the Oct. 7 assault.

Other leaders have stopped short, most notably Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He 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 refused to step down, even as a growing protest movement demands early elections.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid welcomed Haliva's resignation, saying it was "justified and dignified."

"It would be appropriate for Prime Minister Netanyahu to do the same," he wrote on the social media platform X.

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 resignation came as Jews around the world prepared to celebrate Passover, a weeklong holiday that begins Monday evening and marks the biblical exodus of Jews from slavery in Egypt. With roughly 130 people still held captive in Gaza, Passover is certain to take on a more somber hue this year: for many Israelis, it's hard to fathom a celebration of freedom when dozens of people are still being held hostage.

"As we gather around the Seder table to commemorate and celebrate our journey from slavery to freedom, our hearts are heavy with the plight of the 133 Israelis who remain in captivity," Netanyahu wrote on X. "Our resolve remains unyielding to see all hostages back with their families."

Hundreds of Israelis, including families of the hostages, held a protest Seder, or Passover feast, outside Netanyahu's private home in the coastal city of Caesarea. They blame his government for failing to return the hostages.

Hamas' 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 population to flee to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave. The war has sparked a humanitarian crisis that has drawn warnings of imminent famine.

On Monday, Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets into northern Israel, drawing retaliatory strikes. The Israeli military said 35 projectiles were launched at one of its bases, without causing any casualties. It said it struck the sources of the rocket fire.

Hezbollah said its attack was in response to recent Israeli strikes on towns and villages in southern Lebanon.

The two sides have traded fire on a near-daily basis along the border since the start of the war in Gaza.

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

Supreme Court will decide whether Trump is immune from federal prosecution. Here's what's next

By ERIC TUCKER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is hearing arguments this week with profound legal and political consequences: whether former President Donald Trump is immune from prosecution in a federal case charging him with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

In addition to establishing a potentially historic ruling about the scope of presidential power, the court's decision — whenever it comes — will undoubtedly go a long way in determining a trial date for Trump in one of the four criminal prosecutions that the presumptive Republican presidential nominee faces.

A quick decision in the Justice Department's favor could conceivably put the case on track for trial this fall. But if the court takes until late June to resolve the question, then the likelihood rises substantially that the November presidential election will happen without a jury ever being asked to decide whether Trump is criminally responsible for efforts to undo an election he lost in the weeks leading up to the violent Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol.

A look at what's ahead:

WHAT IS THE COURT DECIDING?

A straightforward but legally untested question: whether a former president is immune from federal prosecution for official acts.

Trump is the first ex-president to face criminal charges, making his appeal the first time in the country's history that the Supreme Court has had occasion to weigh in on this issue.

Though Justice Department policy prohibits the indictment of a sitting president, there's no bar against charging a former one. Special counsel Jack Smith's team says the Founding Fathers never intended for presidents to be above the law and that, in any event, the acts Trump is charged with — including participating in a scheme to enlist fake electors in battleground states won by President Joe Biden — aren't in any way part of a president's official duties.

Trump's lawyers, by contrast, say former presidents are entitled to absolute immunity. They warn of a potential floodgate of prosecutions against former presidents if they're not entitled to immunity and say the office cannot function if the commander-in-chief has to be worried about criminal charges. And they cite a previous Supreme Court ruling that presidents are immune from civil liability for official acts, saying the same analysis should apply in a criminal context.

HOW DID THIS ISSUE REACH THE COURT?

The Supreme Court will actually be the third set of judges to address the question in the last six months.

Trump's lawyers last October asked U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, the trial judge overseeing the case, to dismiss the indictment on presidential immunity grounds.

The judge squarely rejected Trump's claims of absolute immunity, saying in December that the office of the presidency does not confer a "lifelong 'get-out-of-jail-free' pass."

An appeals court in February held the same, with a three-judge panel saying that for the purposes of this case, "former President Trump has become citizen Trump, with all of the defenses of any other criminal defendant."

Trump appealed to the high court, which after several weeks, announced that it would consider "whether and if so to what extent does a former President enjoy presidential immunity from criminal prosecution for conduct alleged to involve official acts during his tenure in office."

WHAT ARE THE COURT'S OPTIONS?

The justices have multiple paths to decide the case. They'll probably meet in private a short time after arguments to take a preliminary vote on the outcome. Chief Justice John Roberts would be a prime candidate to take on the opinion for the court, assuming he is in the majority.

They could simply reject Trump's immunity claim outright, permitting the prosecution to move forward and returning the case to Chutkan to set a trial date.

They could also reverse the lower courts by declaring for the first time that former presidents may not

be prosecuted for conduct related to official acts during their time in office. Such a decision would stop the prosecution in its tracks.

There are other options, too, including ruling that former presidents do retain some immunity for their official actions but that, wherever that line is drawn, Trump's actions fall way beyond it.

Yet another possibility is that the court sends the case back to Chutkan with an assignment to decide whether the actions Trump is alleged to have taken to stay in power constitute official acts.

A court ruling in Trump's favor should have no bearing on the hush-money trial now underway in New York in part because that state-level case involves actions Trump took before he became president. And though Trump's lawyers have made the same immunity argument in a federal case in Florida charging him with hoarding classified documents, that case accuses Trump of illegally retaining the records and obstructing efforts to get them back after he left office — rather than during his presidency.

HOW WILL THE RULING BEAR ON A TRIAL DATE?

How quickly the court moves after arguments could depend on how much agreement there is among the justices. Unanimous opinions almost always take less time to write than those that sharply divide the court.

If the justices rule against Trump and in favor of the government, the case would be returned to Chutkan, who would then be empowered to restart the clock on trial preparations and set a trial date.

Any trial would still be several months away, in part because of Chutkan's decision last December to effectively freeze the case pending the outcome of Trump's appeal. She's also committed to giving prosecutors and defense lawyers time to get ready for trial if the case returns to her court.

That means that outstanding legal disputes that have been unresolved for months will again take center stage, not to mention new arguments and court fights that have yet to even surface but will also take up time on the calendar.

The trial is likely to take months, meaning it would likely threaten to run up against the election if it doesn't begin by August. Smith's team has said the government's case should take no longer than four to six weeks, but that doesn't include any defense Trump could put on. And jury selection alone could take weeks.

WHY DOES TRUMP WANT TO DELAY THE TRIAL?

The timing of the trial — and whether Trump will be forced to sit in a Washington courtroom in the weeks leading up to the election — carries enormous political ramifications.

If Trump secures the GOP nomination and defeats Biden in November, he could potentially try to order a new attorney general to dismiss the federal cases against him or he could even seek a pardon for himself — though that is a legally untested proposition.

Smith's team didn't mention the election in its filing urging the Supreme Court to reject Trump's effort to further delay the case. But prosecutors noted that the case has "unique national importance," adding that "delay in the resolution of these charges threatens to frustrate the public interest in a speedy and fair verdict."

Trump, meanwhile, has accused Smith of trying to rush the case to trial for political reasons. Trump's lawyers told the Supreme Court in their filing that holding the trial "at the height of election season will radically disrupt President Trump's ability to campaign against President Biden — which appears to be the whole point of the Special Counsel's persistent demands for expedition."

Children of Flint water crisis make change as young environmental and health activists

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

Their childhood memories are vivid: warnings against drinking or cooking with tap water, enduring long lines for cases of water, washing from buckets filled with heated, bottled water.

But the children of the Flint water crisis — set in motion April 25, 2014, when the city began drawing water from the Flint River — have turned their trauma into advocacy.

They know Flint still struggles: Its population has fallen by about 20,000 in the past decade, leaving

Flint Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 105 of 120

abandoned houses frequently targeted by arsonists. More than two-thirds of children live in poverty, and many struggle in school.

But young activists say they want to help make a difference, change how their city is perceived by outsiders — and defy expectations.

“One of the biggest issues about growing up in Flint is that people had already decided and predetermined who we were,” said 22-year-old Cruz Duhart, a member of the Flint Public Health Youth Academy.

“They had ideas about our IQ, about behavioral things, but they never really stopped to speak to us and how we thought about it and the type of traumas that we were going through.”

Sima Gutierrez collects water samples from residents’ homes and takes them to the Flint Community Water Lab, where more than 60 high school and college interns have provided free testing for thousands of residents since 2020.

She helps plan public awareness campaigns about topics like gun violence and how racism affects public health as a member of the Flint Public Health Youth Academy.

“I wanted to be surrounded by people who weren’t going to cover up the whole fact that people are still having problems ... to share my life (with) anybody else who’s going through what I’m going through,” said Sima, 16.

A decade ago, she complained about stomach pains when she drank water, but her mom believed it helped Sima’s body flush medication she took for an autoimmune disorder that was causing her hair to fall out in patches and leaving her skin splotchy.

Sima and three of her sisters were found to have elevated lead levels and have been diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder; Sima also has a learning difficulty, her mother said.

Residents had been assured the water was safe when many complained of skin rashes and discolored, smelly and foul-tasting water after the city disconnected from Detroit-supplied water to save money.

But a year and a half later, a water expert found high lead levels in the tap water, caused by the city’s failure to add anti-corrosion chemicals, which state environmental officials said was unnecessary. A physician also discovered that levels in kids’ blood had doubled.

The potent neurotoxin can damage children’s brains and nervous systems and affect learning, behavior, hearing and speech. There is no safe childhood exposure level, and problems can manifest years later.

Data collected over a decade now show that Flint children have higher rates of ADHD, behavioral and mental health problems and more difficulty learning than those assessed before the water crisis, said Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, the pediatrician who flagged rising lead levels in Flint kids’ blood. She said issues such as nutrition, poverty, unemployment and systemic inequalities also could be factors.

But Flint kids are resilient, she said, and have made important contributions to the city’s recovery. The Flint Youth Justice League, an advisory board to her Pediatric Public Health Initiative, for example, has offered advice on programs to reduce poverty and connect residents to public services.

“Our young people are amazing,” said Hanna-Attisha. “They are not okay with the status quo and they are demanding that we do better for them and for generations to come.”

Asia Donald remembers feeling helpless and bewildered when her little sister developed rashes and her mom boiled pot after pot of bottled water for baths.

But a couple years later, she was guiding kids from Newark, New Jersey, as they experienced their own water crisis. Over Zoom meetings, the kids from Flint explained parts per billion, how to test water for lead and how they’d coped with fears.

“They felt the exact same way that I felt when I was ... going through it,” said Asia, 20, one of 18 interns at the Flint Public Health Youth Academy.

They’re paid a monthly stipend to run the academy — writing grants, creating budgets, analyzing data, running meetings and creating public awareness campaigns. They have a biweekly talk show on YouTube, where they’ve discussed everything from mental health to COVID.

Dr. Kent Key, a public health researcher with the Michigan State University College of Human Medicine

in Flint, started the academy after studying health disparities in African American communities as part of his doctoral dissertation.

"I felt like everyone had written Flint youth off," he said. "I did not want (the water crisis) to be a sentence of doom and gloom ... I wanted it to be a catapult to launch the next generation of public health professionals."

One of the academy's frequent partners is Young, Gifted & Green.

Flint resident Dionna Brown, national director of the organization's youth environmental justice program, plans a two-week summer environmental justice camp in Flint every year. Teens learn about policy, climate justice, sustainability and housing disparities.

Brown became interested in advocacy during a class on environmental inequality at Howard University. Now she plans to become an environmental justice attorney.

"I tell people all the time: I'm a child of the Flint water crisis," said Brown, who was 14 when it began. "I love my city. And we put the world on notice that you cannot just poison a city and we'll forget about it."

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."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 107 of 120

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 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 China CDC researchers from Beijing arrived on Jan. 1 to collect samples at the market, it had been ordered shut and was already being disinfected, 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.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 108 of 120

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.

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," Chinese leader 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 LeDuc, 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.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 109 of 120

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.

Liang ruled in favor of shutting the Wuhan market at the beginning of the outbreak, according to a Chinese media interview with a top China CDC official that was later deleted. Significantly, it was Liang who 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 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 COVID-19 wasn't the result of a lab accident there. 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 was infuriating to Chinese officials when WHO chief Tedros said 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 collected 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."

European nations with Patriot missiles hesitate to give the air defense systems to Ukraine

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union countries possessing Patriot air defense systems gave no clear signal on Monday whether they might be willing to supply them to Ukraine, which is desperately seeking at least seven of the missile batteries to help fend off Russian air attacks.

Russia's air force is vastly more powerful than Ukraine's, but sophisticated missile systems provided by Kyiv's Western partners can pose a major threat as the Kremlin's forces slowly push forward along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line in the war.

Only Germany has come forward with a single Patriot missile battery in answer to Ukraine's latest request.

At a meeting of EU foreign and defense ministers, Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot said the Netherlands is "looking at every kind of possibility at the moment" and is offering financial support to a German initiative to help Ukraine bolster its air defenses and to buy more drones.

Asked why the Netherlands is reluctant to send some of its Patriot systems, Slot said: "We are looking again if we can deplete our store of what we still have, but that will be difficult."

Last week, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that the military organization "has mapped out existing capabilities across the alliance and there are systems that can be made available to Ukraine." He did not name the countries that possess Patriots.

The Patriot is a guided missile system that can target aircraft, cruise missiles and shorter-range ballistic missiles. Each battery consists of a truck-mounted launching system with eight launchers that can hold up to four missile interceptors each, a ground radar, a control station and a generator.

A key advantage of the U.S.-made systems, apart from their effectiveness, is that Ukrainian troops are already trained to use them.

But Patriots take a long time to make — as long as two years, some estimates suggest — so countries are reluctant to give them up and leave themselves exposed. Germany had 12, but it is now supplying three to Ukraine. Poland, which borders Ukraine, has two and needs them for its own defenses.

Asked whether his country would provide any, Swedish Defense Minister Pål Jonson said: "I don't exclude that possibility, but right now we're focused on financial contributions." He said Sweden would send other

systems that could “relieve some of the pressure” on the need for Patriots.

Jonson also noted that more U.S. deliveries of air defense systems might come after the U.S. House of Representatives passed a package over the weekend of \$61 billion in support, including \$13.8 billion for Ukraine to buy weapons.

Questioned about whether Spain might step up with Patriots, Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said that his country “will make its decisions based on the power it has in its hands to support Ukraine.”

“I don’t think we’re helping anyone if we hear all the time what it is that’s being given, when it’s being given and how it’s getting in,” he said at the meeting in Luxembourg.

Reporters repeatedly asked EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who chaired the talks, why countries appear so reluctant to step forward. Many in Europe feel that Russian President Vladimir Putin will not stop at invading Ukraine should he win the war there.

Borrell said that the EU itself does not own Patriot missile systems. “The Patriots are in the capitals, and it’s up to them to take the decisions,” he said. “Now everything has been said, and a lot of things have to be done.”

NATO keeps track of the stocks of weapons held by its 32 member countries to ensure that they are able to execute the organization’s defense plans in times of need.

But Stoltenberg said on Friday that if dropping below the guidelines is “the only way NATO allies are able to provide Ukraine with the weapons they need to defend themselves, well, that’s a risk we have to take.”

Beyond providing new Patriot batteries, Stoltenberg said that it’s also important for countries to ensure that the batteries they do send are well maintained and have spare parts and plenty of interceptor missiles.

In a separate development at Monday’s meeting, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis expressed concern about possible Russian sabotage against facilities in Europe being used to train Ukrainian troops.

Two German-Russian men were arrested in Germany last week on suspicion of espionage, one of them accused of agreeing to carry out attacks on potential targets including U.S. military facilities, prosecutors said. The U.S. has a number of military bases in Germany.

“We are witnessing very similar events in our region, not just in Lithuania but also in Latvia and Estonia as well,” Landsbergis told reporters.

“There seems to be a coordinated action against the European countries that is coming from Russia,” he said. “We have to find a way to deal with the threat ... because Russia is fighting not just against Ukraine but the West as well.”

Imagine Dragons’ Dan Reynolds talks new album

‘Loom’ — ‘Heavy concepts but playful at the same time’

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The ambiguity of Imagine Dragons’ next album starts from the cover.

Two figures stand in the distance separated by a dawning sun. Or is it setting? Lead singer and songwriter Dan Reynolds, who dreamed it up, sees it both ways.

“You can’t really tell if it’s a sunset or a sunrise, and then there are two people kind of separated standing in front of it. That really kind of sums it up thematically when I listen to it,” he tells The Associated Press.

“Is the beginning of something new, or is this the end of something? And the sunset and the sunrise always kind of feels that way to me. It could be either/or.”

From the paranoid, slightly demented hip-hop-rock opening song “Wake Up” — with Reynolds singing: “Everybody’s coming for you/Wake up!” — to the strummy, swaying “Take Me to the Beach,” it’s clear the nine-track album called “Loom” isn’t one thing. The album comes out June 28.

It’s the first album since Reynolds’ divorce from musician Aja Volkman and there are songs about moving on — the sunny flirtatious “Nice to Meet Ya” — but also looking behind, like the bittersweet “In Your Corner” — “You turned your back/And now we’re here” — and “Don’t Forget Me,” with the lyrics “Guess we got lost in the light.”

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 112 of 120

"I just start creating and whatever comes out is what it is. That's how I've been since I was 12. I try not to overthink it," says Reynolds. "It's just an honest output sonically, lyrically of how I'm feeling in the moment."

For the driving, anthemic "Kid," Reynolds says he came into the studio with his life a little chaotic. He just spoke words that he was feeling over a drum loop: "You got to get yourself together, kid/You got to get it together." Then the band started building. The song, inspired by the '90s music he loves, like by Gorillaz, became an exhortation for America, so adding a choir made sense.

"We had a lot of fun creating that one in the studio. I love the juxtaposition of things that are kind of tongue-in-cheek, but also maybe dark," he says. "Heavy concepts, but playful at the same time."

"Loom" was recorded in a new way for Imagine Dragons, which includes guitarist Wayne Sermon, bassist Ben McKee and drummer Daniel Platzman. For one thing, the band abandoned their usual preference for multiple producers in favor of just one — the Swedish duo of Mattman & Robin.

Another change was approaching it fresh. "We usually go into the record having a bunch of demos that we've already just self-produced and done on our own," Reynolds says. "But this one we had a bunch of demos and we just scrapped everything and went in with a clean slate."

"Loom" comes two years after "Mercury," a brooding, raw confessional double album that dealt with heartache, tragedy and Reynolds' struggles with sobriety.

"Eyes Closed," the new album's first single, signals a change, with a big stormy banger and the chest-pounding lyrics: "I'm back from the dead, from the back of my head/Been gone and facin' horrors that should never be said."

Reynolds says he was going for a blustery, arrogant vibe but revealing a vulnerable core. "It really was about being something that on the outside looks put together and strong," he says, "but on the inside it's on the verge of maybe shattering."

The title of the album — "Loom" — has multiple meanings. "Just because something is looming doesn't necessarily mean it's bad. It could be good," he says. "I also love the idea of the double meaning of it, kind of being a tapestry."

The Dragons will tour across North America in support of "Loom," kicking off June 30 in Camden, New Jersey, at Freedom Mortgage Pavilion and hitting such cities as Dallas, Seattle; Toronto; West Palm Beach, Florida; Denver; Charlotte, North Carolina; Phoenix; Salt Lake City; and concluding on Oct. 22 at the Hollywood Bowl.

Reynolds says touring is deep within Imagine Dragons' DNA and speaks about playing live as if it were a massive therapeutic effort, which their shows often become.

"It's just a lot of people in a room together realizing they're not alone in their feelings," he says. "I don't necessarily need them to feel happy or sad or anything. I just want them to look around them and see that other people are also feeling something and feeling, 'I'm not alone in that.'"

Songs from "Loom" will make the setlist, of course. Reynolds considers it one of the band's most up-tempo collections, even though there are ballads and slow moments.

"A lot of the record is kind of trying to come to terms with just accepting. Things are looming and incoming, for better or for worse, and there's just really nothing you could do other than accept it," he says. "I still haven't learned to do that, but we will."

Prehistoric lake sturgeon is not endangered, US says despite calls from conservationists

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Lake sturgeon don't need Endangered Species Act protections, federal wildlife officials announced Monday, saying that stocking programs have helped the prehistoric fish return to areas where they had vanished.

The decision ends the Arizona-based Center of Biological Diversity's petition filed in May 2018 asking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list lake sturgeon as endangered or threatened. Such listings would

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 113 of 120

make harvesting the fish illegal, but without them, popular sturgeon harvest seasons in states such as Wisconsin and Michigan can continue.

The center argued that overharvesting and deteriorating habitat have "severely depleted" the species. Dams block access to spawning and rearing habitat and water pollution and diversions have done "irreparable harm," the center said.

"This is a disappointing decision because though some populations are well managed, overall the lake sturgeon has suffered a drastic decline," said Tierra Curry, a senior scientist at the center. "Endangered Species Act protection would bring a comprehensive recovery plan and ongoing funding to restore these iconic fish across their former range."

Chuck Traxler, the wildlife service's Midwest deputy regional director, said stocking has helped grow adult lake sturgeon populations and increase spawning, agency officials said. Putting the creatures on the list would be like going to the emergency room, and the rebounding species doesn't need that level of protection, said

"It doesn't mean everything is good right now," he said. "It means keep up the good work."

Populations aren't at historical highs, the agency acknowledged in a December assessment, but stocking returned them to the Red River of the North between Minnesota and North Dakota, the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, portions of the Mississippi River and the Coosa River.

Dam removals and habitat restoration efforts also have helped, the agency has said, citing work in 2015 to retrofit a dam on Wisconsin's Menominee River to allow spawning sturgeon to travel upstream and the removal of the Brecksville Dam on Ohio's Cuyahoga River in 2020.

The agency also pointed to reef restoration work in the corridor connecting Lake Huron and Lake Erie that has created a place for sturgeon to lay eggs and noted that nine of 43 toxic spots along Great Lakes shorelines have been cleaned up.

The assessment also noted the adaptable species should be able to withstand warmer water due to climate change.

Lake sturgeon are ancient North American freshwater fish. They're essentially living fossils, first appearing about 136 million years ago when dinosaurs ruled the planet. They resemble torpedoes, with dorsal ridges and snouts. They can grow up to 7 feet (2 meters) long and weigh up to 300 pounds (136 kilograms). Males typically live about 50 years. Females can live anywhere between 80 and 150 years.

They're found in the upper and lower Mississippi River basin as well as the Great Lakes. Commercial anglers considered lake sturgeon a nuisance because they tore their nets, leading to widespread overharvesting in the 1800s that continued into the 20th century.

Lake sturgeon can't reproduce fast enough to replace the losses. It takes up to three decades before they reach spawning age, and even then they don't spawn annually. And many don't survive the trip back to their birth waters to spawn. The wildlife service has compared lake sturgeon losses to the mass destruction of the American buffalo.

Twenty states have outlawed sturgeon harvesting. Fourteen of those states have listed lake sturgeon as threatened or endangered. Volunteers and Wisconsin natural resources officials have been guarding spawning sturgeon from poachers on the Wolf River for 30 years.

Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin still hold hook-and-line lake sturgeon fishing seasons. Michigan and Wisconsin hold sturgeon spearing seasons each winter as well where anglers drill holes through lake ice and impale sturgeon as they swim past.

The Wisconsin natural resources department reported 432 sturgeon were taken in February, down from 1,405 in 2023. Warm weather and poor ice conditions led to the diminished return, according to the department. Michigan officials set the total harvest limit at just six sturgeon but ended up canceling due to warm weather and unsafe ice conditions.

Those states' seasons are so tightly regulated that the harvests don't impact the species overall, said Lori Nordstrom, the wildlife service's Midwest assistant regional director of ecological services.

Michigan and Wisconsin, for example, allow an angler to take only one sturgeon per year. Minnesota

anglers must release any sturgeon they catch in inland waters. Wisconsin regulations are designed to keep the harvest rate below 5%, with all tag fees going to the state's sturgeon conservation program, according to the wildlife service.

Leaders of Sturgeon for Tomorrow, a nonprofit organization that works to rehabilitate sturgeon in Wisconsin and Michigan and supports harvesting the fish, praised the wildlife service's decision Monday. They said the ruling enables the states to continue managing sturgeon and allows harvesting to continue, which in turn helps researchers learn more about the ancient creatures.

"We're very happy with it," said Jim Patt, president of the Southwest Chapter of Sturgeon for Tomorrow, one of five chapters along the Lake Winnebago system, which hosts Wisconsin's spearing season. "This is a big thing. We can keep our research going and keep our population strong and continue what we've been doing."

The US is expected to block aid to an Israeli military unit. What is Leahy law that it would cite?

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israel expects its top ally, the United States, to announce as soon as Monday that it's blocking military aid to an Israeli army unit over gross human rights abuses in the Israeli-occupied West Bank before the war in Gaza began six months ago.

The move would mark the first time in the decades-long partnership between the two countries that a U.S. administration has invoked a landmark 27-year-old congressional act known as the Leahy law against an Israeli military unit.

It comes as the U.S.-Israeli relationship is under growing strain over civilian deaths and suffering in Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

Here's a look at the Leahy law and how it could be invoked:

WHAT IS THE LEAHY LAW?

Former Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy championed legislation that became the Leahy law in the 1990s, saying the U.S. needed a tool to block American military aid and training to foreign security units guilty of extrajudicial killings, rapes, torture and other flagrant human rights abuses.

One of the first targets of the 1997 law was typical of the kind of renegade units that Congress had in mind: a Colombian army unit accused of knowingly killing thousands of civilians in part to get bonuses that were then being offered for killing militants.

Other U.S. laws are supposed to deal with other circumstances in which abuses would obligate blocking military support. Those include a February 2023 order by President Joe Biden dictating that "no arms transfer will be authorized" when the U.S. finds that more likely than not a foreign power would use them to commit serious violations of the laws of war or human rights or other crimes, including "serious acts of violence against children."

HOW DOES THE LEAHY LAW WORK?

The law requires an automatic cutoff of aid to a military unit if the State Department finds credible evidence that it has committed gross abuses. A second Leahy law says the same for Defense Department training of foreign militaries.

Rights groups long have accused U.S. administrations, including Biden's, of shirking rigorous investigations of allegations of Israeli military killings and other abuses against Palestinians to avoid invoking such laws aimed at conditioning military aid to lawful behavior by foreign forces.

Israel says its security forces investigate abuses and its courts hold offenders accountable.

HOW OFTEN IS THE LEAHY LAW INVOKED?

Regularly when it comes to U.S. security assistance to countries in the former Soviet Union and in Central and South America and Africa. Not often when it comes to strategically vital U.S. allies.

In 2022, for instance, the U.S. found sufficient evidence of abuses to trigger the Leahy law for police

and other forces in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico and the Caribbean nation of Saint Lucia.

The administration also has the option of notifying Congress of Leahy law incidents in classified settings to avoid embarrassing key partners.

Administration veterans vouch that no U.S. government has previously invoked it against Israel, says Sarah Elaine Harrison, a former Defense Department attorney who worked on Leahy law issues and now is a senior analyst with the International Crisis Group.

WHAT CAN ISRAEL DO ABOUT THE CUTOFF?

Harrison points to a 2021 treaty in which Israel stipulated it wouldn't share U.S. military aid with any unit that the U.S. had deemed credibly guilty of gross human rights abuses.

U.S. law points to one way out for an offender: A secretary of state can waive the Leahy law if he or she determines the government involved is taking effective steps to bring the offenders in the targeted unit to justice.

The U.S. still sends billions of dollars of funding and arms to Israel, including a new \$26 billion package to support Israel's defense and provide relief for the growing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. The Senate is expected to pass that this week and Biden says he will sign.

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, when Moscow commemorates World War II Victory Day. 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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 116 of 120

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 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 Yuri Fedorenko, commander of the Achilles battalion 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."

Mexico's likely next president has a Jewish origin. Is that relevant in a deeply Catholic country?

By MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — By mid-2024, Claudia Sheinbaum will most likely become Mexico's first female president. She would also be its first leader with a Jewish background in a country that's home to nearly 100 million Catholics.

On June 2, voters will choose a new president, 628 congressmen and thousands of local positions — Mexico's largest election ever, according to the National Electoral Institute.

Sheinbaum, a former mayor of Mexico City and the governing party's candidate, has kept a comfortable lead in all polls against opposition candidates Xóchitl Gálvez and Jorge Álvarez Máynez.

What role has religion played in the ongoing campaign that will elect the successor to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador? The answers are nuanced.

Does Sheinbaum identify herself as Jewish?

The 61-year-old candidate has approached the question with caution: While she is of Jewish ancestry, she is not religiously observant.

Her four grandparents were Jews who immigrated from Lithuania and Bulgaria. She was born in Mexico City and her parents did not raise her under any religion. According to her campaign team, Sheinbaum considers herself a woman of faith, but she is not religiously affiliated.

Being Jewish can be an identity, but not necessarily a religious one, said Tessy Schlosser, director of the Jewish Documentation and Research Center of Mexico.

And Jewish identity is multifaceted, Schlosser said. It can be aligned with history, society, spirituality, geography and ideology. Even within the same Jewish community, for example, there may be conflicting views on Zionism or genealogy.

"For some, if you are born to a Jewish mother, you are Jewish," Schlosser said. "For others, if you are born to a father. For others, if you have a grandfather. So, even in terms of lineage or racialization there are many debates."

How big is the Mexican Jewish community and what is its relationship with Sheinbaum?

The first Jews arrived in Mexico in 1519, along with the Spanish colonization. The community began to grow substantially by the early 20th century, as thousands of Jews fled from the Ottoman Empire to escape instability and antisemitism.

To date, the Mexican Jewish community is formed by Ashkenazi Jews, from Central and Eastern Europe, and Sephardic Jews, mainly from Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain and Syria.

According to Renee Dayan — director of Tribuna Israelita, which serves as a link to the Central Committee of Mexico's Jewish community — there are now about 50,000 Jews in the country. The majority are settled in Mexico City and its surroundings, with small communities in the cities of Monterrey, Guadalajara, Tijuana, Cancún, San Miguel de Allende and Los Cabos.

As a general practice, the Jewish community maintains relationships with a broad range of local authorities and does not endorse any particular candidate or party, Dayan said. However, it is open to meeting with politicians who wish to discuss their proposals and recently met with Sheinbaum, Gálvez and Álvarez

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 118 of 120

Máynez.

While welcoming the dialogue with Sheinbaum, members of the Jewish community do not consider her to be part of their ranks, in part because Sheinbaum herself has rejected any such connection.

"Claudia has actively tried to say: 'This is not me,'" Schlosser said. "It must be respected when a person does not want to be identified in one way or another."

More broadly, Schlosser said, Mexico's political world does not extend any special benefits to high-ranking politicians who represent social or religious diversity.

Has Sheinbaum's Jewish identity had any impact in the electoral process?

In mid-2023, former Mexican president Vicente Fox wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that Sheinbaum was "Jewish and foreigner at the same time."

That comment — denounced as "antisemitic, racist and xenophobic" — was not isolated. Fox was responding to criticism made by another user who said that Sheinbaum was "fake" for using a rosary when she was Jewish.

Similarly, Jewish publicist Carlos Alazraki said in an interview that Sheinbaum was a "phony" for wearing a skirt with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe with the sole purpose of pleasing the Catholic electorate.

This is not the first time that Sheinbaum has faced criticism. Since the official campaigns kicked off in March, Sheinbaum and Gálvez have been questioned and second-guessed in a country where sexist prejudices still debate whether a woman is prepared to rule the second largest economy in Latin America.

So, what role does religion play ahead of June elections?

Although Sheinbaum has repeatedly said that she does not practice any religion, she proudly publicized a meeting she held in February with Pope Francis and has indeed worn Catholic symbols at her rallies.

Mexico is a secular state with a robust legal framework that establishes the government's separation from the church, but the Catholic presence in the country is vast.

According to the latest official report (2020), 98 million of 126 million Mexicans are Catholics. They are followed by 14 million Protestants, mostly evangelicals, and then comes the Jewish community. More than 10 million people say they have no religion and 3 million identify as believers without religious affiliation.

The relationship between the Catholic Church and López Obrador has cooled since 2022, when several bishops raised alarms about the increasing levels of violence in the country. It is not clear whether the gap would be reduced with Sheinbaum as president, but during her campaign she has agreed to meet with Catholic leaders and reluctantly signed a national commitment to peace.

"We are in a moment in which we can see politicians seeking validation from religious authorities," said Pauline Capdevielle, academic from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. "We saw this before the official start of the campaigns, when the two candidates presented themselves before the pope."

Religion's role in the current elections was apparent when thousands of people supported the presidential aspirations of Eduardo Verástegui, a right-wing activist and film producer who — although his campaign faltered — echoed the voices of conservatives rejecting abortion and LGBTQ+ rights.

"When Verástegui's candidacy failed, I thought that the religious issue was not going to have so much relevance in the campaign, but little by little we have seen that it did, particularly when the Catholic Church began its program in favor of peace," Capdevielle said.

López Obrador and Sheinbaum have claimed that the number of homicides dropped during the current administration. But Catholic leaders, during nationwide forums that the church held in 2023, have echoed the fears spread among thousands of average citizens who shared how violence broke their lives.

Organized crime has long controlled swaths of Mexico through violence and corruption. It has diversified beyond drug trafficking in recent years, extorting businesses big and small for protection payments. Under López Obrador's "hugs, not bullets" policy, the government has avoided direct confrontation with the cartels, allowing them to essentially take control of a dozen or more mid-sized cities.

And though addressing violence is unavoidable, Capdevielle said, the Catholic Church's actions during the campaign could also be seen as an attempt to try to recover part of the public standing it lost during López Obrador's six-year term.

Whether the candidates are trying to capitalize on religion to seek votes may be debatable, but Shein-

baum, Gálvez and Álvarez Máynez have been careful not to lose votes by going against a largely conservative population.

None of them, for instance, has openly addressed abortion and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. "They are playing with ambiguities," Capdevielle said. "They leave aside the most ideological topics and are very careful with these issues because we have seen that, in Mexico, that can have an electoral cost."

Caitlin Clark's early play in WNBA will be her tryout for a roster spot on US Olympic women's team

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (AP) — Caitlin Clark's early play in WNBA will serve as her tryout for a spot on the U.S. Olympic women's basketball team.

The women's roster for the Paris Games won't be determined before June 1. Unable to attend the U.S. training camp this month, Clark will have the start of her WNBA career to show the U.S. women's basketball selection committee whether she deserves a spot on the team.

Selection committee chair Jennifer Rizzotti said she'll be watching.

"You always want to introduce new players into the pool whether it's for now or the future," Rizzotti told The Associated Press. "We stick to our principles of talent, obviously, positional fit, loyalty and experience. It's got to be a combination of an entire body of work. It's still not going to be fair to some people."

Clark was invited to attend the U.S. training camp in Cleveland, but it was held during the Final Four when she was still competing for a national championship with Iowa. Attending the camp wasn't mandatory to make the team, but it certainly would have helped the NCAA Division I all-time scoring leader show the selection committee she could hold her own against some of the best players in the world. The camp in Cleveland was the last one the U.S. had before announcing its roster.

The team will get together in Phoenix for a few days in July right before the Olympics, including playing an exhibition All-Star game against WNBA players.

The U.S. men's basketball Olympic roster was announced last week.

The American women, who are trying for an eighth consecutive Olympic gold medal, have a talented group of guards in the pool. The list includes five-time Olympian Diana Taurasi as well as Chelsea Gray, Ariel Atkins and Jewell Loyd, who all played on the Tokyo Games team in 2021. Kelsey Plum, who owns an Olympic gold medal in 3x3, and Sabrina Ionescu are also in the pool.

"Thinking about Diana and Chelsea Gray and when their careers are done, you want to make sure you're in a position with these upcoming guards with Sabrina, Kelsey and Caitlin that you feel good that our future is set," Rizzotti said during 3x3 training camp last weekend.

Rizzotti will get a first-hand look at Clark when the No. 1 pick in the draft opens her WNBA career at the Connecticut Sun on May 14. Rizzotti is the president of the Sun.

If Clark makes the team, she wouldn't be the first WNBA rookie to be on an Olympic squad. Breanna Stewart was the last one to do it, making the team in 2016. The difference was that Stewart had been part of the national team since she was a sophomore in college, playing on the 2014 World Cup squad.

While Clark has no senior national team experience, she has played on junior USA teams. She won gold medals at the 2019 and 2021 FIBA U19 World Cups and the 2017 FIBA U16 Americas Championship.

There were reports Clark potentially could've been part of the 3x3 team. but Clark has said her focus is playing on the 5-on-5 team.

"It's where I want to be," Clark told the AP last week. "Three-on-three is really cool, I've just never done it. But 5-on-5 is the goal and the dream. To play with the best in the world and against the best in the world, you can't script it better than that."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 302 ~ 120 of 120

Today in History: April 23, first YouTube clip is uploaded

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, April 23, the 114th day of 2024. There are 252 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 23, 2005, the recently created video-sharing website YouTube uploaded its first clip, "Me at the Zoo," which showed YouTube co-founder Jawed Karim standing in front of an elephant enclosure at the San Diego Zoo.

On this date:

In 1616 (Old Style calendar), William Shakespeare died in Stratford-upon-Avon on what has traditionally been regarded as the 52nd anniversary of his birth in 1564.

In 1898, Spain declared war on the United States, which responded in kind two days later.

In 1940, about 200 people died in the Rhythm Night Club Fire in Natchez, Mississippi.

In 1954, Hank Aaron of the Milwaukee Braves hit the first of his 755 major-league home runs in a game against the St. Louis Cardinals. (The Braves won, 7-5.)

In 1969, Sirhan Sirhan was sentenced to death for assassinating New York Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. (The sentence was later reduced to life imprisonment.)

In 1971, hundreds of Vietnam War veterans opposed to the conflict protested by tossing their medals and ribbons over a wire fence in front of the U.S. Capitol.

In 1988, a federal ban on smoking during domestic airline flights of two hours or less went into effect.

In 1992, McDonald's opened its first fast-food restaurant in the Chinese capital of Beijing.

In 1993, labor leader Cesar Chavez died in San Luis, Arizona, at age 66.

In 1998, James Earl Ray, who confessed to assassinating the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and then insisted he'd been framed, died at a Nashville, Tennessee, hospital at age 70.

In 2007, Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first freely elected president, died in Moscow at age 76.

In 2013, France legalized same-sex marriage after a wrenching national debate that exposed deep conservatism in the nation's heartland and triggered huge demonstrations.

In 2018, a man plowed a rental van into crowds of pedestrians in Toronto, killing 10 people and leaving 16 others hurt; (Alek Minassian was later convicted of 10 counts of murder and sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2020, at a White House briefing, President Donald Trump noted that researchers were looking at the effects of disinfectants on the coronavirus, and wondered aloud whether they could be injected into people.

In 2021, U.S. health officials lifted an 11-day pause on COVID-19 vaccinations using Johnson & Johnson's single-dose shot, after scientific advisers decided its benefits outweighed a rare risk of blood clot.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Alan Oppenheimer is 94. Actor Lee Majors is 85. Irish nationalist Bernadette Devlin McAliskey is 77. Actor Blair Brown is 77. Writer-director Paul Brickman is 75. Actor Joyce DeWitt is 75. Actor James Russo is 71. Filmmaker-author Michael Moore is 70. Actor Judy Davis is 69. Actor Valerie Bertinelli is 64. Actor Craig Sheffer is 64. Actor-comedian-talk show host George Lopez is 63. U.S. Olympic gold medal skier Donna Weinbrecht is 59. Actor Melina Kanakaredes (kah-nah-kah-REE'-deez) is 57. Rock musician Stan Frazier (Sugar Ray) is 56. Actor Scott Bairstow (BEHR'-stow) is 54. Actor-writer John Lutz is 51. Actor Barry Watson is 50. Rock musicians Aaron and Bryce Dessner (The National) are 48. Professional wrestler/actor John Cena is 47. Actor-writer-comedian John Oliver is 47. Actor Kal Penn is 47. Retired MLB All-Star Andruw Jones is 47. Actor Jaime King is 45. Pop singer Taio (TY'-oh) Cruz is 41. Actor Aaron Hill is 41. Actor Jesse Lee Soffer is 40. Actor Rachel Skarsten is 39. Rock musician Anthony LaMarca (The War on Drugs) is 37. Singer-songwriter John Fullbright is 36. Actor Dev Patel is 34. Actor Matthew Underwood is 34. Model Gigi Hadid is 29. Rock musicians Jake and Josh Kiszka (Greta Van Fleet) are 28. Actor Charlie Rowe (TV: "Salvation") is 28. Retired tennis player Ashleigh Barty is 28. U.S. Olympic gold medal snowboarder Chloe Kim is 24.