

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, May 2

Senior Menu: Breaded pork cutlet, creamy noodles, tomato spoon salad, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Sloppy joes, baked beans.

Girls golf at Lee Park Golf Course, Aberdeen, 10 a.m.

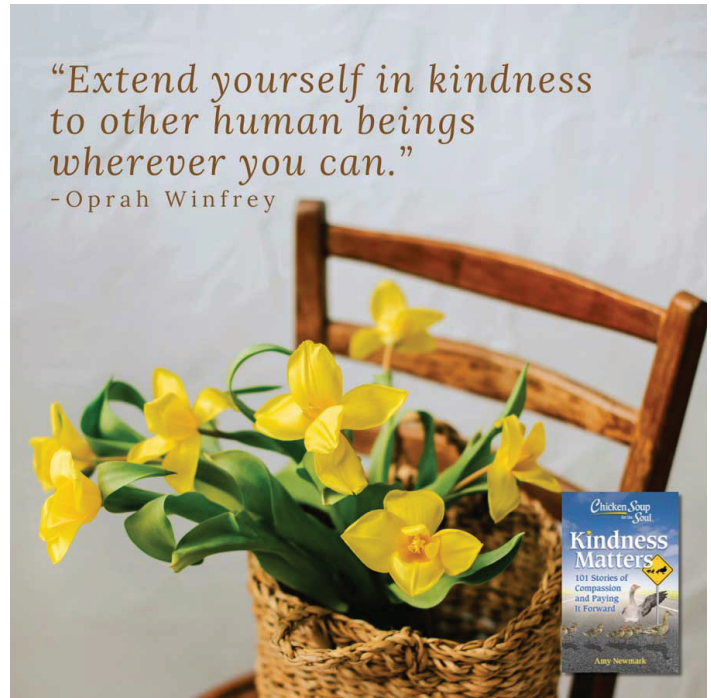
Junior High Track meet at Aberdeen Roncalli 2 p.m.

High School Spring Concert 7 p.m. **(Will be livestreamed on GDILIVE.COM)**

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Weber Landscaping Greenhouse opens for the season, 10 a.m.

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



"Extend yourself in kindness to other human beings wherever you can."

-Oprah Winfrey

Friday, May 3

Senior Menu: Tator tot hot dish, green beans, acini depepi fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

Track at Sisseton, 1 p.m.

Doubles Bowling Tournament, 7 p.m.

Saturday, May 4

Doubles Bowling Tournament, Noon and 3:30 p.m.

Citywide Rummage Sale, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store extended hours, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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

Sunday, May 5

High School Baseball at Bryant: O-R/R/A at 2 p.m., Hamlin at 4 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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1440

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The University of California, Los Angeles, canceled classes yesterday after brawls broke out between opposing groups of protesters on campus. According to reports, counter-protesters attacked pro-Palestinian protesters with sticks and poles late Tuesday night, with someone throwing fireworks into the camp. Clashes continued for hours before police intervened, with people using pepper spray, throwing chairs, and beating someone to the ground. It is not clear how many people were injured or arrested.

The legislative body of the United Methodist Church voted to repeal a 40-year ban on the ordination of gay clergy yesterday, one of several rule changes around sexuality adopted at their General Conference. The church is the second-largest Protestant Christian denomination in the US with roughly 5 million members, with another 5 million located abroad, primarily in Africa.

The Federal Reserve left interest rates unchanged yesterday after a Commerce Department report last week showed consumer prices rose 2.7% year-over-year in March, above the central bank's 2% target.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Harvey Weinstein to face retrial this fall after a New York appeals court overturned his 2020 rape conviction last week.

Paul Auster, novelist best known for his "The New York Trilogy" series, dies at 77. Brian McCardie, actor known for roles in "Line of Duty" and "Rob Roy," dies at 59.

TV producer Dan Schneider files defamation lawsuit against "Quiet on Set" docuseries producers for implying he sexually abused children on the set of various children's TV shows.

Science & Technology

Endurance exercise has noticeable impact on nearly all bodily tissues and roughly 35,000 biological molecules, even organs not associated with exercise; study is part of effort mapping exercise-related health benefits at the cellular level.

Intel engineers demonstrate ability to read single electron qubits—the unit of information in quantum computers—in silicon; marks a key step toward high-throughput manufacturing of quantum computing devices.

Neuroscientists map brain circuit believed to play a critical role in human consciousness; network spans at least five regions of the brain.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq -0.3%) as investors weigh latest round of economic data.

Exxon Mobil Corp. reportedly reaches agreement with Federal Trade Commission over the oil giant's nearly \$60B acquisition of Pioneer Natural Resources; deal bars Pioneer's former chief executive officer from joining Exxon's board.

Johnson & Johnson proposes paying \$6.5B over 25 years to settle thousands of current and future US lawsuits that claim its baby powder and other talc-based products caused ovarian cancer.

Politics & World Affairs

Arizona state lawmakers pass law repealing Civil War-era law banning nearly all abortions; Gov. Katie Hobbs (D) to sign. Florida law banning most abortions at six weeks of gestation takes effect.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R, GA-14) announces plan to force a floor vote next week to oust House Speaker Mike Johnson (R, LA-4); Democrats have announced intention to side with Republicans to defeat the vote.

Saudi women's rights activist Manahel al-Otaibi sentenced to 11 years in prison for online posts calling to loosen dress code and male guardianship laws.

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**620 West Third Avenue
Groton
Hours: M-F 10-6
Sat 10-4 ~ Sun 12-4**

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High School Baseball

Groton Area Tigers Varsity Secure Win Against Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks

Groton Area Tigers Varsity defeated Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks 5-2 on Wednesday.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity opened the scoring in the first after Bradin Althoff singled, scoring one run.

Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks took the lead in the bottom of the fourth. Christopher Moberg singled, scoring two runs, to give Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks the advantage, 2-1.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity captured the lead, 4-2, in the top of the fifth after Karsten Flihs singled, Brevin Flihs tripled, and Dillon Abeln singled, each scoring one run.

Abeln earned the win for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. The righty allowed nine hits and two runs (one earned) over seven innings, striking out seven and walking none. Moberg took the loss for Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks. The lefty went five innings, giving up four runs on seven hits, striking out one and walking one.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity accumulated 1 hits in the game. Althoff, Flihs, and Abeln each collected two hits for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. Flihs, Althoff, Flihs, and Abeln each drove in one run for Groton Area Tigers Varsity.

Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks piled up nine hits in the game. Moberg, Tate Steffensen, and Kameron Hauck each collected two hits for Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks. Moberg led Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks with two runs batted in. The left-handed hitter went 2-for-3 on the day. Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks ran wild on the base paths, tallying four stolen b a s e s for the game. Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks turned one double play in the game.



**Now
HIRING!**

Dairy Queen in Groton is hiring! If you're looking for a fun job with lots of variety, look no further! We're looking for energetic, smiling people – we provide free meals, uniforms, competitive wages, fun atmosphere and flexible scheduling. Part-time – day, evening, week-end shifts available. We will work with your schedule. Stop in today and pick up an application.

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Groton Area Tigers Varsity 5 - 2 Sioux Valley Varsity Cossacks

📍 Away 📅 Wednesday May 01, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	5	11	1
SXVL	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	9	1

BATTING

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Flihs (SS)	3	2	1	1	1	1
D Abeln (P)	4	0	2	1	0	0
B Althoff (1B)	3	0	2	1	1	0
C Dunker (LF)	4	0	1	0	0	2
L Ringgenberg (CF)	4	0	0	0	0	0
G Englund (3B)	3	1	1	0	0	1
C Simon (RF)	3	0	1	0	0	1
K Flihs (C)	3	1	2	1	0	0
B Imrie (2B)	3	1	1	0	0	0
CR: J Erdmann	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	30	5	11	4	2	5

2B: G Englund, **3B:** B Flihs, **TB:** B Althoff 2, C Simon, B Flihs 3, B Imrie, D Abeln 2, G Englund 2, C Dunker, K Flihs 2, **SB:** B Flihs, **LOB:** 6

Sioux Valley Varsity	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
T Steffensen (CF)	4	0	2	0	0	1
K Hauck (RF)	4	0	2	0	0	0
J Opitz (SS)	3	0	0	0	0	0
B Danzeisen (C)	3	1	0	0	0	0
L Loban (DH)	3	1	1	0	0	2
C Moberg (P, 1B)	3	0	2	2	0	0
A Gunderson (P)	1	0	0	0	0	1
E Axtell (LF)	3	0	1	0	0	1
B Milton (1B)	2	0	0	0	0	1
B Teske (3B)	3	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	29	2	9	2	0	7

2B: B Teske, **TB:** E Axtell, L Loban, T Steffensen 2, K Hauck 2, C Moberg 2, B Teske 2, **CS:** T Steffensen, K Hauck, **SB:** E Axtell, L Loban, T Steffensen, B Danzeisen, **LOB:** 6

PITCHING

Groton Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
D Abeln	7.0	9	2	1	0	7	0
Totals	7.0	9	2	1	0	7	0

W: D Abeln, **P-S:** D Abeln 95-71, **BF:** D Abeln 29

Sioux Valley	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
C Moberg	5.0	7	4	4	1	1	0
A Gunderson	2.0	4	1	1	1	4	0
Totals	7.0	11	5	5	2	5	0

L: A Gunderson, **P-S:** A Gunderson 39-24, C Moberg 71-48, **BF:** A Gunderson 11, C Moberg 21

High School Baseball

Pitching Impressive As Groton Area Tigers JV Beat W.I.N. Jr Varsity

Both teams were strong on the bump on Wednesday, but Groton Area Tigers JV defeated W.I.N. Jr Varsity 2-1. Alex Abeln started the game for Groton Area Tigers JV and recorded 18 outs.

Groton Area Tigers JV were the first to get on the board in the first when Abeln doubled, scoring one run.

Groton Area Tigers JV added one run in the third. Abeln singled, making the score 2-0.

Abeln earned the win for Groton Area Tigers JV. They surrendered three hits and one run (zero earned) over six innings, striking out nine and walking two. Logan Fischbach took the loss for W.I.N. Jr Varsity. The right-handed pitcher went five innings, giving up two runs on six hits, striking out six and walking one. TC Schuster collected the save.

Lincoln Krause and Abeln were a force together in the lineup, as they each collected two hits for Groton Area Tigers JV while hitting back-to-back. Abeln went 2-for-3 at the plate as they led the team with two runs batted in. Groton Area Tigers JV turned one double play in the game.

#14 and # 9 each collected two hits for W.I.N. Jr Varsity. Joe went 1-for-1 at the plate as they led the team with one run batted in.

Groton Area Tigers JV Loses Despite Out Hitting W.I.N. Jr Varsity

Groton Area Tigers JV fell 2-0 to W.I.N. Jr Varsity on Wednesday despite out-hitting them three to two. Nick Groeblichhof, Gavin Kroll, and Alex Abeln each collected one hit for Groton Area Tigers JV.

W.I.N. Jr Varsity took an early lead in the first inning when Lincoln Kroll doubled, scoring two runs.

Braydon Kroll earned the win for W.I.N. Jr Varsity. They gave up three hits and zero runs over four innings, striking out seven and walking one. Ethan Kroll took the loss for Groton Area Tigers JV. The starting pitcher went three and one-third innings, allowing two runs on two hits, striking out one and walking nine.

Groton Area Tigers JV were sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. TC Schuster had the most chances in the field with four.

Kroll and Joe each collected one hit for W.I.N. Jr Varsity. Kroll went 1-for-2 at the plate as they led the team with two runs batted in.

W.I.N. Jr Varsity had patience at the plate, piling up nine walks for the game. TJ Wiedebush, Lincoln Buisker, and Kyle Olson led the team with two bases on balls each.

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W.I.N. Jr Varsity 1 - 2 Groton Area Tigers JV

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

BATTING

W.I.N. Jr Varsity	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Kroll (CF)	3	0	0	0	0	2
L Fischbach (P, SS)	3	1	0	0	0	0
#14 (SS, P)	3	1	2	0	0	1
Joe (LF)	1	0	1	1	2	0
M Heinz (3B)	3	0	0	0	0	1
L Kroll (RF, 1B)	3	0	0	0	0	0
#9 (C)	2	0	2	0	1	0
T Wiedebush (1B)	2	0	0	0	0	2
B Halvorson (2B)	3	0	0	0	0	2
K Olson (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
L Buisker	2	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	27	1	5	1	3	10

2B: Joe, **3B:** #14, **TB:** Joe 2, #9 2, #14 4, **HBP:** T Wiedebush, **SB:** #9, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

W.I.N. Jr Varsity	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
L Fischbach	5.0	6	2	2	1	6	0
#14	1.0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Totals	6.0	6	2	2	1	8	0

L: L Fischbach, **P-S:** L Fischbach 71-49, #14 15-11, **BF:** L Fischbach 22, #14 3

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause (C)	3	2	2	0	0	0
A Abeln (P, SS)	3	0	2	2	0	0
E Kroll (CF)	3	0	1	0	0	1
N Groeblichhoff (...)	3	0	0	0	0	1
I Scepaniak (3B)	2	0	0	0	1	2
T Schuster (SS, P)	3	0	0	0	0	1
B Flihs (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	0
G Kroll (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
J Bisbee (2B)	2	0	0	0	0	1
K Oswald (LF)	2	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	24	2	6	2	1	8

2B: E Kroll, L Krause, A Abeln, **TB:** E Kroll 2, L Krause 3, A Abeln 3, K Oswald, **CS:** B Flihs, **LOB:** 5

Groton Area Tigers	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Abeln	6.0	3	1	0	2	9	0
T Schuster	1.0	2	1	1	1	1	0
Totals	7.0	5	1	1	3	10	0

W: A Abeln, **P-S:** T Schuster 21-14, A Abeln 94-61, **WP:** A Abeln, **HBP:** T Schuster, **BF:** T Schuster 7, A Abeln 24

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W.I.N. Jr Varsity **2 - 0** Groton Area Tigers JV

📍 Home 📅 Wednesday May 01, 2024

	1	2	3	4	R	H	E
W..N	2	0	0	0	2	2	2
GRTN	0	0	0	0	0	3	0

BATTING

W.I.N. Jr Varsity	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Kroll (P)	2	0	0	0	0	0
L Buisker (C)	0	1	0	0	2	0
#14	2	0	0	0	0	0
Joe (LF)	1	1	1	0	1	0
L Fischbach (CF)	1	0	0	0	1	0
L Kroll	2	0	1	2	0	0
M Heinz (3B)	1	0	0	0	1	0
T Wiedebush (1B)	0	0	0	0	2	0
K Olson (RF)	0	0	0	0	2	0
B Halvorson (2B)	2	0	0	0	0	1
#9 (SS)	2	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	13	2	2	2	9	1

2B: L Kroll, **TB:** L Kroll 2, Joe, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

W.I.N. Jr Vars	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
B Kroll	4.0	3	0	0	1	7	0
Totals	4.0	3	0	0	1	7	0

W: B Kroll, **P-S:** B Kroll 64-43, **BF:** B Kroll 18

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause (C)	2	0	0	0	0	0
A Abeln (CF)	1	0	1	0	0	0
E Kroll (P, 1B)	2	0	0	0	0	2
N Groeblinghoff (...)	1	0	1	0	1	0
T Schuster (SS)	2	0	0	0	0	0
B Flihs (1B, P)	1	0	0	0	0	0
G Kroll (LF)	2	0	1	0	0	1
S Wood (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	2
N Scepaniak (2B)	2	0	0	0	0	2
Totals	15	0	3	0	1	7

2B: N Groeblinghoff, **TB:** A Abeln, G Kroll, N Groeblinghoff 2, **SAC:** A Abeln, B Flihs, **LOB:** 6

Groton Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
E Kroll	3.1	2	2	2	9	1	0
B Flihs	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	4.0	2	2	2	9	1	0

L: E Kroll, **P-S:** E Kroll 71-27, B Flihs 8-6, **BF:** E Kroll 20, B Flihs 2

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Second ballot question submitted to Secretary of State

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson’s office received petitions this afternoon for an initiated amendment establishing a right to abortion in the state constitution. If validated and certified, the ballot question will appear on the general election ballot on November 5, 2024. The deadline to submit ballot question petitions to the Secretary of State is Tuesday, May 7, at 5:00 p.m. central time.

Petitions will be reviewed by the Secretary of State’s office in the order in which they were received. Below is a chart indicating the order of submission:

2024 Ballot Question Petitions Received							
Receipt Order	Sponsor Name(s)	Ballot Measure Type	Title of Measure	Date Received	Time Received	Sponsor's Estimated Petition Sheets	Sponsor's Estimated Signatures
1	Rick Weiland	Initiated Measure	An initiated measure prohibiting taxes on anything sold for human consumption.	04/24/2024	3:37 PM	2,889	25,000
2	Rick Weiland	Constitutional Amendment	An initiated amendment establishing a right to abortion in the state constitution.	05/01/2024	4:07 AM	6,191	55,000
ESTIMATED TOTAL SUBMITTED							80,000

In order to qualify to be placed on the 2024 general election ballot, an Initiated Measure requires 17,508 valid signatures and a Constitutional Amendment requires 35,017 valid signatures. As outlined in South Dakota Codified Law 2-1-16 and 2-1-17, the Secretary of State’s office will now conduct a random sampling of the petition signatures to determine the validity.

Ballot measures submitted to the Secretary of State’s office previously had a deadline for submission which was one year out from the general election. After a law change in 2023, ballot measure petitions have until the first Tuesday in May to file.

Individuals who wish to have their name withdrawn from a ballot measure petition must submit written notification to the Secretary of State’s office any time before the petition from which the individual is submitting is filed and certified for placement on the general election ballot.

April 22 Senior Citizens Meeting

April 22 Groton Seniors met at noon for their pot luck dinner. Twelve members and two visitors Dale Kurt and Eunice Sister from Eureka, SD were present. Vice President Ruby Donovan opened the meeting with allegiance to the flag. The table player was said. Bingo was played after dinner. Cards were played after Bingo. Darlene Fischer won black out. Door prizes Pat Larson, Darlene Fischer, Bruce Shilhank. After cards Eunice McColister's birthday was celebrated with cake and ice cream Bev Sombke made the cake. Birthday song was sung.

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Groton Chamber of Commerce May Meeting

May 1, 2024 ~ 12pm City Hall

- Individuals present: Hannah Gruenwald, Katelyn Nehlich, Douglas Heinrich, Ashley Bentz, April Abeln, and Carol Kutter
- Minutes from the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Kutter and seconded by Nehlich. All members present voted aye.
- Treasurer's report was given. Dacotah Bank checking account balance is \$40,278.50. \$2,124.80 is in the Bucks account. Scholarship checks have been cut and cleared. Some Chamber Bucks have been purchased recently. The report was approved by Abeln and seconded by Kutter. All members present voted aye.
- Forever 605 promotional items were discussed and a thank you was received from the Reporter and Farmer for our ad in the Glacial Lakes Guide.
- Nehlich made an email motion to approve advertising the 2024 GHS Seniors with Hub City Radio. Heinrich seconded the motion, with all members present via email voting aye.
- Abeln made an email motion to donate \$100 to Princess Prom. Nehlich seconded the motion, with all members present via email voting aye.
- Shirt fundraising was discussed with Family Crisis, Main Street garbages, or flags being options for the proceeds. Abeln will reach out to BK Custom T's for 3 designs.
- Chamber Scholarship Meet & Greet will be held May 9th from 1:30-2:30pm in the GHS library.
- The POET Community Impact Grant was discussed for \$4,000 and is due May 24, 2024.
- Gruenwald suggested ordering more tumblers from Ryan with Aberdeen Awards as our supply is limited. Abeln will ask for 3 designs to view at the next meeting.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Heinrich to publish ½ page ads in the Aberdeen Magazine for July/August, September/October, and November/December. All members present voted aye.
- Abeln will ask for more details on an upcoming Rib Fest event before any donations are made.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Heinrich to donate \$400 to the Transit Fundraiser. All members present voted aye.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Nehlich to donate \$400 to Summer Fest. All members present voted aye.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Kutter to have a prize drawing and Chamber table at the Summer Downtown Sip & Shop event. All members present voted aye.
- We are still waiting to set up new business welcomes with MGGQ Sunsets and Baked with Grace.
- Motion by Kutter and seconded by Heinrich to advertise the 2024 GHS Seniors with Dakota Broadcasting. All members present voted aye.

• Next Meeting: June 5th, 2024, at City Hall at 12:00pm

Upcoming events

- 05/03/2024 Jungle Doubles Bowling Tournament 7pm
- 05/04/2024 Jungle Doubles Bowling Tournament 12pm & 3:30pm
- 05/04/2024 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/07/2024 Baseball, Softball and T-ball Parent Meeting at the Community Center 7:30pm
- 05/13-14/2024 Baseball, Softball, and T-ball Uniform Pickup at City Hall 1-6pm
- 05/23-07/25/2024 Wage Memorial Library Story Time 10am-11am Thursdays
- 05/27/2024 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 05/30/2024 JVT Lunch & Annual Meeting - 11:30 am - Groton HS Arena
- 06/08/2024 Inaugural Groton Day of Baseball/Softball
- 06/14/2024 SDSU Alumni & Friends Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Shotgun Start
- 06/22/2024 Groton Triathlon 9am-5pm
- 06/24/2024 JVT Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-6pm



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Noem blames 'fake news' for backlash against her killing a dog and goat

BY: SETH TUPPER - MAY 1, 2024 11:02 PM

Who's to blame for the outrage about South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's fatal shootings of a dog and goat? "Fake news," according to her.

Noem, a Republican, appeared Wednesday night on Fox News with anchor Sean Hannity for her first interview since the story broke last week. In his introduction, Hannity said Noem "is being attacked by both Republicans and Democrats, dog lovers and goat lovers."

Noem replied, "Well, Sean, you know how the fake news works. They leave out some or most of the facts of a story. They put the worst spin on it, and that's what's happened in this case."

In fact, what happened is that Noem chose to disclose the dog and goat story in her book "No Going Back," which is scheduled to publish next week. The Guardian obtained an early copy and published a news story last Friday under the headline, "Trump VP contender Kristi Noem writes of killing dog – and goat – in new book."

South Dakota Searchlight has since reviewed the relevant sections of the book and found them to be accurately described by The Guardian.

Noem wrote that she had a 14-month-old wirehair pointer years ago named Cricket, which had come from another family that struggled with the dog's aggressive personality. The dog went "out of her mind with excitement" during a pheasant hunt with Noem, and later killed a neighbor's chickens and "whipped around to bite" Noem when she intervened.

So Noem took the dog to a gravel pit and fatally shot it.

"Walking back up to the yard," Noem wrote, "I spotted our billy goat."

The "demon goat" often chased and knocked down Noem's children, and it had a "wretched smell." So Noem "dragged" the goat to the gravel pit and "tied him to a post." The goat jumped when she shot, "and I needed one more shell to finish the job," she wrote. But she didn't have one, so she hurried back to her pickup, grabbed another shell, went back to the gravel pit, and "put him down."

Noem wrote that her home was under construction at the time, and the construction crew witnessed her shooting spree "with looks of shock and amazement on their faces."

During her interview with Hannity, Noem retold the stories about the dog and goat, and defended her decision to shoot them.

"And the reason it's in the book is because this book is filled with tough, challenging decisions that I have had to make throughout my life," Noem said. "And I hope that people understand from this that what the point of the story is, is that most politicians will run from the truth. They will shy away and hide from making tough decisions. I don't do either of those."

Noem said state law allows for the killing of dangerous dogs such as Cricket. She did not address the legality of shooting the goat.

She described the backlash as a continuation of criticism directed at her during the COVID-19 pandemic, when she avoided strict lockdowns.

"It's an unfortunate situation, but one that I hope people understand that they need to hear the truth and not what the media has been spinning," Noem said. "The media, continuously, through the fake news,

does not always tell the truth, and they spin the story. They did the same thing to me during COVID and they're doing it again here. I hope people buy the book and read the truth."

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

Group submits abortion-rights ballot petitions as opponents pledge legal challenge

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 1, 2024 3:04 PM

SIOUX FALLS — The group leading the effort to put abortion rights on South Dakota's November ballot said Wednesday it was turning in far more petition signatures than required, while an opposition group said it will challenge the legitimacy of the petitions.

The ballot-question committee proposing the measure, Dakotans for Health, held a press conference attended by about 50 people Wednesday morning at a Sioux Falls library before driving the petitions to the Capitol in Pierre. The deadline to submit the petitions is next Tuesday.

Meanwhile, about 20 anti-abortion activists associated with the Life Defense Fund protested outside the library. The Life Defense Fund is a ballot-question committee organized to oppose the abortion-rights measure.

After the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 decision that overturned Roe v. Wade, a trigger law that the South Dakota Legislature had adopted in 2005 immediately banned abortions in the state except when necessary to "preserve the life of the pregnant female."

"As a result, we've been living in a state with the most restrictive abortion ban in the country," said Rick Weiland, chairman of Dakotans for Health.

He said the group collected about 55,000 signatures, well ahead of the 35,017 needed from registered voters to put the measure on the Nov. 5 ballot.

The ballot measure would amend the state constitution to legalize all abortions during the first trimester of pregnancy. It would allow regulations on abortion during the second trimester, but only in ways that are "reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman." In the third trimester, it would allow regulations up to a ban on abortions, with exceptions for the "life or health of the pregnant woman."

During the press conference, Weiland referenced Republican Gov. Kristi Noem's Freedom Works Here workforce recruitment campaign and said "it really doesn't work for women."

"Freedom doesn't work for a woman who has been raped, becomes pregnant, and is told it is illegal to choose an abortion," he said. "Freedom doesn't work when there is someone's daughter who is a victim of incest and is forced to carry her pregnancy to term."

Opponents allege 'deception'

The Legislature passed a law in March allowing petition signers to withdraw their signatures after the fact, and anti-abortion activists are conducting a coordinated signature-withdrawal effort.

The Secretary of State's Office said it does not have a count on the number of withdrawal requests received so far. The office stores the requests until a court challenge is filed against the validity of the petitions, in which case the withdrawal requests would become part of the challenge.

Leslee Unruh, Life Defense Fund co-chair, was one of the people protesting outside during the press conference. She said her volunteers have witnessed "lies and deception" from petition circulators.

"And people being told that they're signing a food tax petition, and really, it ended up being the abortion petition," she said. "And we have hundreds of hours' worth of video. We can't wait to get to court."

In addition to the abortion-rights petitions, Dakotans for Health also circulated petitions for a measure that would repeal state sales taxes on groceries.

It's unclear when the Life Defense Fund intends to file its legal challenge, but fellow Life Defense Fund Co-Chair and state Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, said it will happen soon.

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During the press conference, Weiland called the move “a desperate charge” by anti-abortion activists. Sioux Falls resident Tiffany Campbell has gathered thousands of signatures to put the amendment on the ballot. She shared that when she was pregnant with twins, due to complications, her pregnancy was guaranteed to end with the death of at least one of her twin boys, if not both. Aborting one of the fetuses saved the life of the other.

Today, “I would not be able to make that decision,” Campbell said.

She told South Dakota Searchlight that neither she nor any of her fellow petition circulators engaged in the “lies and deception” that the Life Defense Fund is alleging.

In addition to the potential legal challenge from the Life Defense Fund, the petitions also must clear a check by the Secretary of State’s Office to verify enough of the signatures are from registered South Dakota voters.

SD’s place in national debate

Some regional abortion-rights groups do not support the ballot measure, including Planned Parenthood North Central States and the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota. The groups have alleged there are problems in the language of the measure resulting from a rushed process to draft it without sufficient input from interested people and groups.

Weiland said he hopes those groups will reconsider as the ballot measure moves forward.

If the measure makes the ballot, it will not be the first time South Dakotans have voted on abortion rights. South Dakota voters rejected abortion bans in 2006 and 2008.

The 2006 ballot measure would have banned abortions except to “preserve the life of the pregnant woman,” and the 2008 ballot measure would have banned abortions with the same exception plus additional exceptions for rape and incest.

According to KFF Health News, there are efforts underway to put constitutional amendments regarding abortion on the 2024 ballot in at least 13 states: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania and South Dakota.

Since the Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, six states – California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Vermont and Ohio — have voted on abortion-related constitutional amendments, and the side favoring access to abortion prevailed in each state.

The abortion measure is just one of many questions that could appear on South Dakota’s November ballot. Several other citizen-initiated petitions are circulating, including a measure to switch the state from political-party primary elections to open primaries. The Legislature has already exercised its right to place two measures on the ballot: one would replace references to male officeholders in the state constitution with neutral language, and the other would ask voters to lift a prohibition against work requirements for Medicaid expansion enrollees.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Tax refund programs open to senior citizens and people with disabilities

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 1, 2024 12:00 PM

South Dakota senior citizens and people with disabilities have until July 1 to apply for sales or property tax refunds under the state’s Tax Refund Program, according to the Department of Revenue.

Eligible people may be refunded a portion of the sales or property taxes they paid from the previous year. Sales tax refund applicants must have been a South Dakota resident during all of 2023. They also must

have been 65 years old on or before Jan. 1, 2023, or disabled at any time during 2023. And they must live alone and have a yearly income of \$16,038 or less, or live in a household whose members' combined income is \$21,692 or less.

Property tax refund applicants must have been 65 years old on or before Jan. 1, 2023, or disabled at any time during 2023. And they must live alone and have a yearly income of \$16,038 or less, or live in a household whose members' combined income is \$21,692 or less. Additionally, they must have owned the house they are now living in for at least three years, or have been a resident of South Dakota for five years or more.

Applicants can apply for both refunds, but they can only receive one of the refunds. The Tax Refund Office will calculate the refund for each tax, and the applicant will receive whichever is greater.

An online application is available at <https://sddor.seamlessdocs.com/f/2050>. Or, download the application from the department's website and mail it to the Tax Refund Office, 445 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501-3185.

Those who qualified in 2023 will receive an application in the mail.

For additional information on the tax refund program, contact the Department of Revenue at 1-800-829-9188 (Option 1).

U.S. House splits on GOP-led Alaska and mining industry bills aimed at Biden agenda

SD Republican Dusty Johnson supports both measures

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MAY 1, 2024 9:23 PM

The U.S. House passed a bill Wednesday to counter an Interior Department order canceling oil and gas leases in a section of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, taking aim at the Biden administration's conservation agenda that Republicans say weighs environmental concerns too heavily at the expense of economic opportunity.

But the Republican majority also suffered a setback on the House floor. Democrats, with the help of six conservative Republicans, killed a separate bill seen as benefiting the mining industry because it would have made it easier for companies to develop sites that lack a documented mineral deposit.

The votes marked the second straight day the Republican-led chamber focused on messaging bills on public lands and natural resources issues, emphasizing an election-year theme that President Joe Biden's energy and conservation policies are out of touch with rural voters.

"How much of our land do we have to lock up and say, 'You can't have access, you can't manage it, you can't produce energy off of it, you can't mine on it,'" House Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman said. "And it seems like as time goes on, the answer is, 'We want to lock all of it up.'"

Westerman, of Arkansas, and other Republicans argued that environmental and labor standards are higher in the U.S. and blocking domestic mining and fossil fuel development only pushes the industry to countries with worse standards.

Democrats said Republican lawmakers appeared to be working to help industry instead of focusing on the climate crisis.

Last year was the hottest on record and saw natural disasters proliferate, but House Republicans were uninterested in addressing the crisis, Rep. Jared Huffman, a California Democrat, said.

"It's as if Republicans were sitting in the front row with the popcorn in their hands, leaning over to ask their oil and gas buddies what they needed," Huffman said.

Alaska vote

The House approved, 214-199, a bill authored by Minnesota Republican Pete Stauber to reverse an Interior Department order canceling oil and gas leases in a section of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

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South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson voted in favor.

Democrats Sanford Bishop of Georgia, Henry Cuellar and Vicente Gonzalez of Texas, Jared Golden of Maine and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington also voted in favor. Pennsylvania Republican Brian Fitzpatrick voted against.

Alaska Democrat Mary Peltola, who was an original cosponsor of the bill and was the only Democrat on the House Natural Resources Committee to vote in favor at the committee level, voted present on the floor. Virginia Republican Morgan Griffith also voted present.

Peltola took to the House floor ahead of the vote Wednesday.

She remained in support of the bill's aims to promote an all-of-the-above energy approach and bring down Alaskans' substantial energy costs, she said, but added the measure had insufficient protections for the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area and Alaska Natives' fishing rights.

"Alaskans face many challenges and threats to our unique ways of life," she said. "We're on the brink of being forced to import natural gas from a foreign country and our fishermen are in the midst of an economic free fall coupled with depleted fish stocks. Unfortunately, the way this bill was written pits energy development against fisheries and for that reason I will be voting present today."

Republicans argued that the bill was needed to counteract the Biden administration's moves to discourage energy development in deference to environmental and climate concerns.

Biden has paused some liquified natural gas exports and came into office promising to stop oil and gas development on federal lands, Westerman said. Oil and gas leasing on federal lands resumed after a federal court order.

"Let's just call it what it is," Texas Republican August Pfluger said. "It's not a big secret that the Biden administration hates American energy."

Democrats said the measure, like other bills the Republican-led chamber considered this week, was meant to appease the powerful energy lobby.

The bill "has no chance of becoming law," Florida Democrat Kathy Castor said.

"But it does provide a glimpse of the GOP's alliance with polluters over the best interests of the American people," she said. "Whether we're talking about the Arctic Refuge, or my beautiful part of the country along the Gulf of Mexico, Republicans simply are aiming to sell out America's public lands and waters to their friends in big oil and the NRA."

Mining debate

Democrats also argued that a separate mining bill was a favor to industry.

But that bill, authored by Nevada Republican Mark Amodei, died on the House floor on a 210-206 vote to recommit the bill to committee.

South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson supported the bill. Six Republicans, Andy Biggs and Eli Crane of Arizona, Dan Bishop of North Carolina, Bob Good of Virginia, and Matt Gaetz and Anna Paulina Luna of Florida voted with all Democrats to block the bill.

The bill, one of the few Natural Resources Committee bills considered on the floor this week that did not specifically respond to Biden administration action, would have clarified that mining companies did not have to document a mineral deposit before developing roads and other infrastructure.

During floor debate, Republicans argued the bill was needed to clarify a 2022 federal appeals court decision that blocked approvals for mining support facilities at an Arizona copper mine.

The bill would respond to the ruling by removing a provision in an 1872 federal mining law that mining companies must show a mineral deposit is present before building roads and other support facilities at a potential site.

"The decision limited the ability of the Forest Service to approve necessary mining support facilities and activity, which is necessary for mining operations," Stauber said Wednesday. The decision "put virtually every new domestic mining project in jeopardy."

Democrats said the bill would give too much power to — and provide too little accountability for — min-

ing companies that already work in a favorable regulatory environment.

New Mexico Democrat Melanie Stansbury said mining companies operate under an 1872 law that provides nearly unfettered access to lands that other extractive industries "could only dream of."

Congress should be adding environmental protections to the 19th-century law, but the bill considered Wednesday would only weaken existing protections, she said.

"This bill removes the one frail safeguard that we have," she said. "Under this bill, any American — or frankly any American subsidiary of a foreign company, including those that are located in adversarial countries — can put four stakes in the ground and on open public lands pay less than \$10 an acre per year to have exclusive rights to that land, forever. Forever. This bill would create a free-for-all on our public lands."

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

U.S. House approves definition of antisemitism as campus protests continue

SD Republican Dusty Johnson votes yes

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 1, 2024 5:13 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans Wednesday passed a bill, with heavy support from Democrats, that would define antisemitism for the Department of Education, amid nationwide college campus protests in which students are calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

The 320-91 vote would codify the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – with which all schools that receive federal funding are required to comply. South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson voted yes.

But some Democrats raised concerns that the language is too broad and could chill freedom of speech at schools.

"Speech that is critical of Israel alone does not constitute unlawful discrimination," the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Jerry Nadler of New York, said during debate of the bill, H.R. 6090.

Republicans have slammed the leaders of higher education institutions that are the sites of protests, calling for them to resign and to send in law enforcement to crack down on the students protesting.

House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana is also rolling out a Congress-wide effort to address the protests, such as tougher oversight of university presidents and pulling funding.

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York in a Wednesday press conference did not commit to putting the House bill on the Senate floor.

"We haven't seen what the House is sending us yet," he said.

Lawmakers have focused on Columbia University in New York, where students set up a "Gaza Solidarity Encampment."

Students are demanding that the university cut financial ties, such as endowments, with companies that do business with Israel or those that make weapons used in the war in Gaza. More than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

The New York Police Department was deployed on the campus early Wednesday by Columbia University President Minouche Shafik, who authorized the NYPD to sweep the campus after students took over one of the buildings that has a history of student activism, Hamilton Hall, according to the Columbia Spectator.

However, students occupying the building have drawn criticism from Democrats as well.

"Smashing windows with hammers and taking over university buildings is not free speech — it is lawlessness, and those who did it should promptly face the consequences that are not merely a slap on the wrist," Schumer said on the Senate floor Tuesday.

More than 300 students were arrested by the NYPD, according to The Associated Press.

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Cotton calls for protection of Jewish students

Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton held a press conference Wednesday, where he was joined by several Senate Republicans in urging university presidents to crack down on the encampments and to protect Jewish students.

Cotton called for the State Department to pull the visas of international students who have participated in the protests and for the Department of Education to withhold federal funding to those schools where protests are taking place.

"They have a right if they want to go out and make fools of themselves, and protest on behalf of Hamas, but they don't have the right to build little Gazas in violation of the laws," Cotton said, referring to protesters and encampments.

Cotton was joined by Sens. Rick Scott of Florida, James Lankford of Oklahoma, John Kennedy of Louisiana, Deb Fischer of Nebraska, Joni Ernst of Iowa and Roger Marshall of Kansas.

Lankford said that the protesters have crossed a line and have made Jewish students feel unsafe.

"Every university and every student has the right to be able to speak their mind, to be able to test out new ideas — it's the nature of being on a college campus to be able to speak out and be able to think through different things," Lankford said.

"We're a nation that prides ourself on the right to speak out, but we're also a nation that says, 'You cannot go and intimidate someone else in the process.'"

Kennedy and Marshall said policies on diversity, inclusion and equity resulted in the protests on college campuses.

Kennedy said he blamed some of the faculty members at those higher education institutions for the protests.

"There are members of the faculty at some of these universities who believe in diversity, equity, inclusion," he said.

Ernst said the universities need "to put an end to this."

"If they don't, they should kiss their federal funding goodbye," she said.

Argument against bill

Nadler was the sole Democrat to speak out against the bill during Wednesday's floor debate.

He argued that the language is too broad and would curtail freedom of speech.

"While there is much in the bill I agree with, its core provision would put a thumb on the scale in favor of one particular definition of antisemitism to the exclusion of all others to be used when the Department of Education assesses claims of antisemitism on campus," Nadler said.

He took issue with some of the examples the definition provides that can be considered antisemitic, such as criticism of the state of Israel.

That definition would be: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

GOP Rep. Tom McClintock of California said the bill was needed because there has been a spike in antisemitism since Oct. 7, the start of the Hamas-Israel war, when Hamas staged an attack against Israeli civilians.

"You cannot fight antisemitism if you cannot define it," he said.

Republican Rep. Mike Lawler of New York, who sponsored the bill, said without a clear definition of antisemitism, the Department of Education and college administrations are having trouble discerning what is considered antisemitic.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not protect students from discrimination based only on religion. If a student does bring up a complaint, the civil rights division in the Department of Education refers those complaints to the Department of Justice, according to the Department of Education.

Nadler argued that the bill would threaten freedom of speech, "while doing nothing to combat antisemi-

tism.”

The chair of the Education and Workforce Committee, Rep. Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, said the definition is needed to “ensure the safety of Jewish students.”

Foxx has held several hearings throughout the year where she and Republicans on the committee grilled the leaders of universities about the pro-Palestinian protests on their campuses. Another is set for May 23 for the heads of Yale, UCLA and the University of Michigan.

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

Marjorie Taylor Greene to force vote next week on ousting U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 1, 2024 12:08 PM

WASHINGTON — Two U.S. House Republicans, aggrieved by Speaker Mike Johnson’s bipartisanship amid divided government, said Wednesday they plan to force a vote next week on removing him from the leadership office — despite the extremely long odds of success.

Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and Kentucky Rep. Thomas Massie held a press conference just steps from the Capitol, calling for lawmakers and Johnson to use the weekend to think through how they want to vote on the so-called motion to vacate.

She also rebuked Democrats for their plans to support Johnson’s speakership, implying it would be problematic for them when voters decide on whether to reelect lawmakers in November.

“I can’t wait to see Democrats go out and support a Republican speaker. And have to go home to their primaries and have to run for Congress again, having supported a Republican speaker, a Christian conservative,” Greene said. “I think that’ll play well. I’m excited about it.”

“I also can’t wait to see my Republican Conference show their cards and show who we are because voters deserve it,” she added. “Have the Republican Party finally learned their lesson, have they finally heard the message from voters back at home?”

Congress, which is split between Republican control of the House and Democratic control of the Senate, has passed too many bipartisan bills during Johnson’s six months in leadership, Greene said.

That includes the government funding packages approved in March; a reauthorization of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act; and the military and humanitarian assistance package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan approved in April.

Massie rejected the bipartisan legislation as well, pointing to two posters staff had set up at the press conference showing Johnson and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York holding the gavel and hugging.

The two leaders, Massie contended, should be “archrivals,” not working together to advance bipartisan legislation through Congress.

“This is about who holds that gavel,” Massie said. “Right now, they are both holding that gavel. They are sharing power about procedures, about what bills will come to the floor, about how long we will debate those bills and which committees are comprised of which members.”

Johnson: ‘This motion is wrong’

Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, released a written statement after the press conference saying the motion to vacate is not the right path forward.

“This motion is wrong for the Republican Conference, wrong for the institution, and wrong for the country,” Johnson wrote.

House Democratic Leaders released a statement Tuesday saying the party would support Johnson during a floor vote, likely dooming efforts to oust him from the speaker’s office given the slim GOP majority.

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Arizona GOP Rep. Paul Gosar supports removing Johnson from the leadership post as well, but was unable to attend the press conference Wednesday due to a scheduling conflict, according to Greene.

Many of the Republican Party's other far-right members, including Freedom Caucus Chairman Bob Good of Virginia, have said the best time to have internal debates about House leadership is after the November elections.

Greene said during the Wednesday press conference that the vote will give all Americans the chance to see which lawmakers support Johnson remaining speaker and which want to remove him from leadership.

"This vote will be called next week and I just want to urge all our colleagues to prepare for it," Greene said. "It's the right thing to do for America. It's time to clean house and get our conference in order and get ready to support President Trump's agenda, God willing he wins in November."

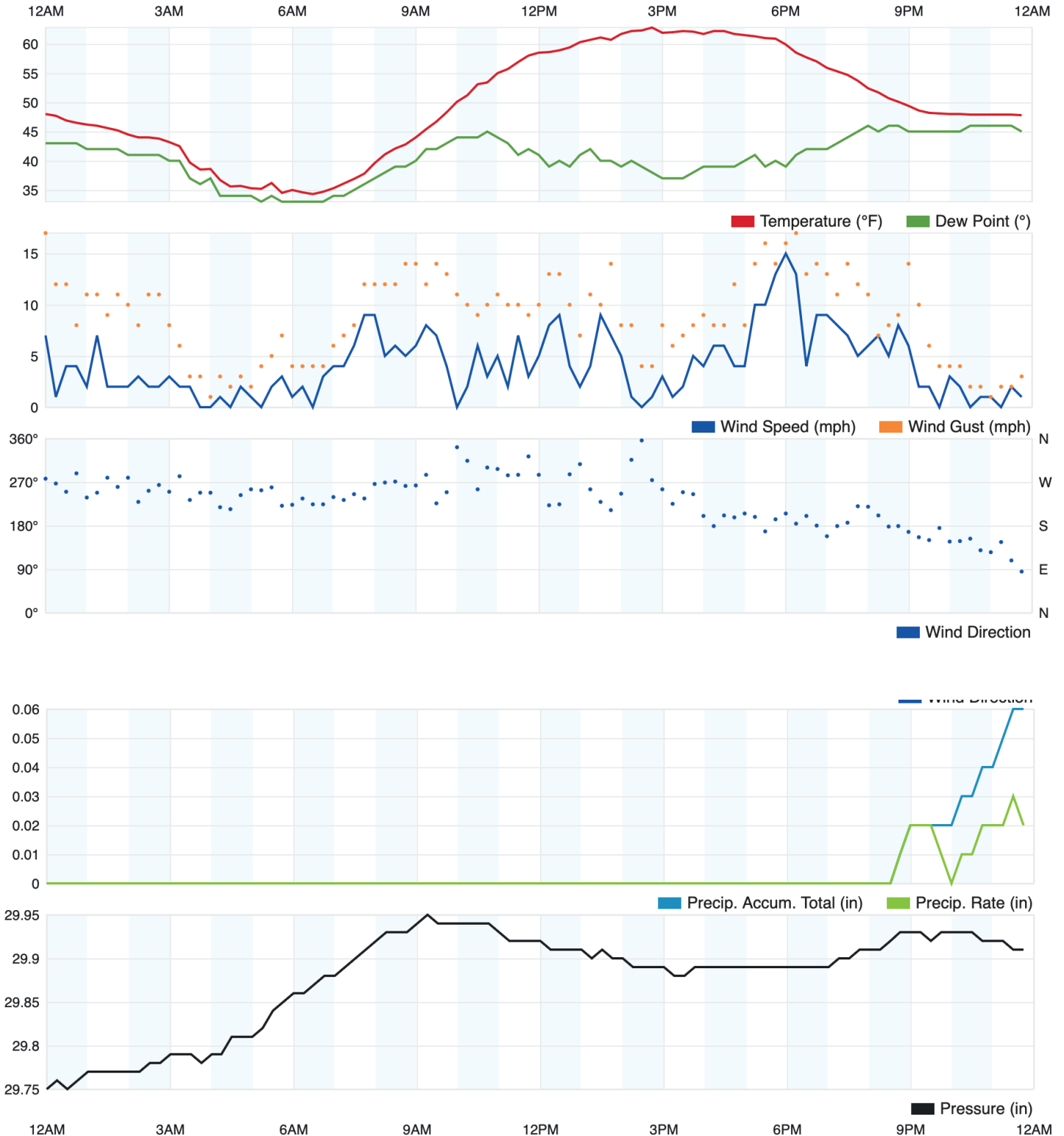
Trump has publicly expressed support for Johnson remaining speaker in the last month, saying during a joint appearance at Mar-a-Lago that Johnson is "doing a very good job" and then, following the foreign aid vote, that "he's a very good person."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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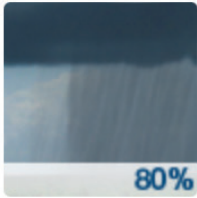
Thursday

Thursday
Night

Friday

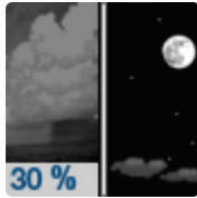
Friday Night

Saturday



High: 57 °F

Showers



Low: 36 °F

Chance
Showers then
Mostly Clear



High: 59 °F

Sunny then
Chance
Showers



Low: 35 °F

Slight Chance
Showers



High: 62 °F

Sunny





Periods of Rain to End the Week

www.weather.gov/abr
May 1, 2024 2:22 PM

Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
 30-60%	 20-50%		
North of US-14	At night SE of Pierre & Aberdeen		SE Gusts 25-40 mph
55-62°	57-64°	60-65°	68-75°

We'll continue to experience periods of rain for the rest of the work week, but the weekend is looking warmer with plenty of sunshine.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 63 °F at 2:43 PM

Low Temp: 34 °F at 6:26 AM

Wind: 17 mph at 6:03 PM

Precip: : 0.06

Day length: 14 hours, 26 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1955

Record Low: 20 in 1909

Average High: 65

Average Low: 38

Average Precip in May.: 0.22

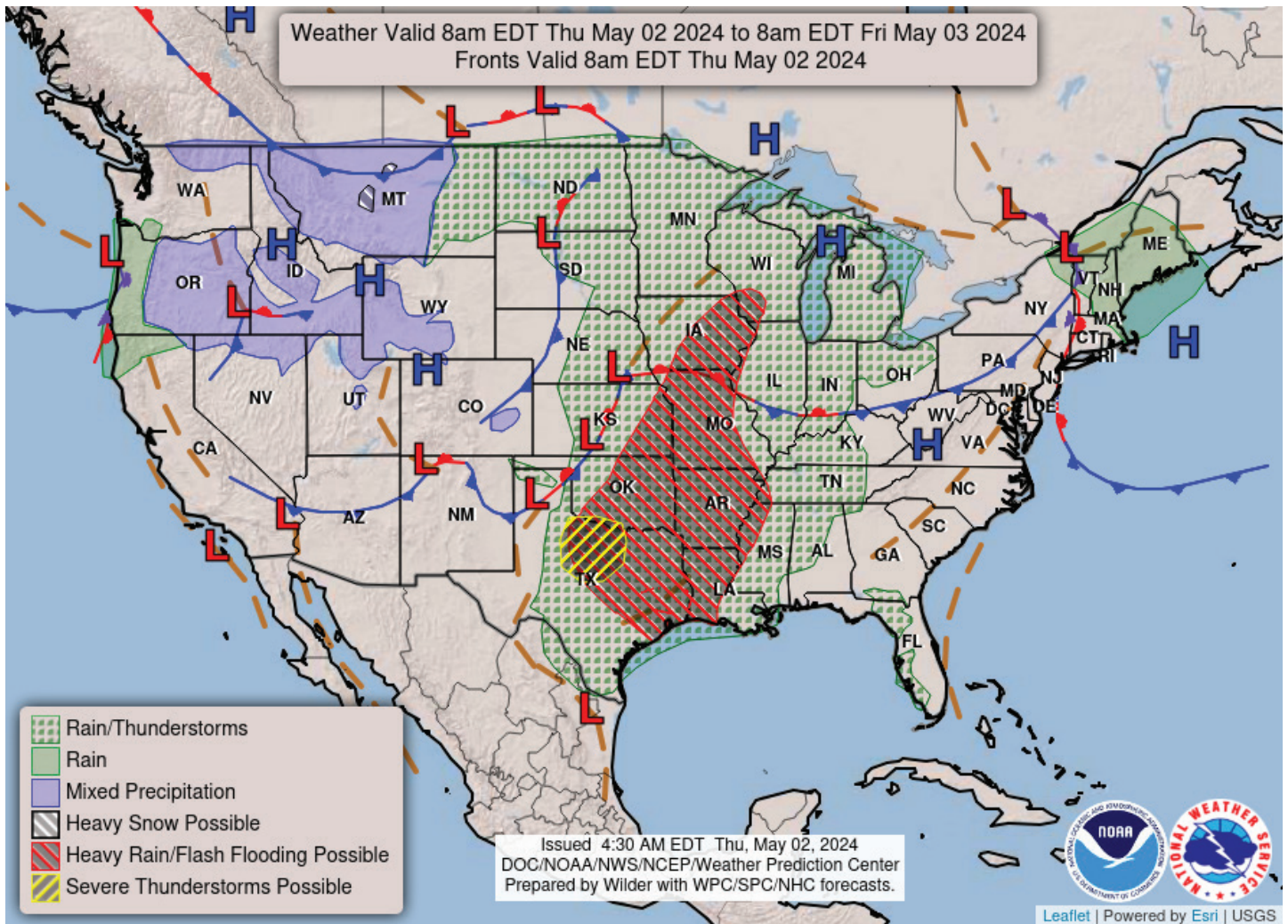
Precip to date in May: 0.06

Average Precip to date: 4.19

Precip Year to Date: 4.59

Sunset Tonight: 8:42:26 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:14:42 am



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Today in Weather History

May 2, 1984: High winds picked up a trailer home northwest of the Pierre Airport and hurled it through the air, smashing it to the ground 50 yards away. The upper sections of a home were damaged by the airborne trailer. Several branches and shed roofs were also damaged nearby.

May 2, 2008: A two-day blizzard dropped two to four feet of snow across the northern Black Hills and in Harding and Butte counties. Six to 14 inches of snow fell along the eastern foothills and in western Perkins and Meade counties.

1762: A tornado struck Port Royal Island, South Carolina. It left a path 400 yards wide, tore up trees by the roots, and carried away houses and bridges.

1899 - A storm buried Havre, MT, under 24.8 inches of snow, an all-time record for that location. The water equivalent of 2.48 inches was a record 24 hour total for the month of May. (The Weather Channel)

1920 - A swarm of tornadoes in Rogers, Mayes and Cherokee Counties in Oklahoma killed 64 persons. (David Ludlum)

1929: Virginia's worst tornado disaster occurred on this day. Six tornadoes, two of which were west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, killed 22 people. One tornado killed twelve children and a teacher at Rye Cove, in Scott County. The storms destroyed four schools.

1983: Severe thunderstorms produced 21 tornadoes across the northeastern states of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. One tornado even occurred in Ontario, Canada. Of the 21 tornadoes in the United States, nine were rated F3, and six were rated F2. The tornadoes caused five deaths.

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley produced golf ball size hail in northern Louisiana, and wind gusts to 77 mph at Lake Providence LA. Thunderstorms in Arkansas produced 4.20 inches of rain at Arkadelphia and 4.00 inches at Bismarck. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful storm produced snow and high winds in the Central Rockies and the Central High Plains Region. Snowfall totals in Colorado ranged up to 12 inches at Strasburg, and winds in southeastern Colorado gusted to 87 mph at Lamar. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in eastern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from northeastern Texas to western Arkansas during the evening and early nighttime hours. Thunderstorms spawned a tornado which injured thirteen persons at Paris TX, and produced baseball size hail at Rio Vista TX. Thunderstorm rains of four to seven inches caused flash flooding in west central Arkansas, southern and eastern Oklahoma, and northern Texas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010: May began with two days of historical rainfall over much of Middle Tennessee, with massive swath stretching along the I-40 corridor from Benton County to Davidson County. Some areas received nearly 20 inches of rain during this 2-day period, the highest of which was 19.41 inches reported by a CoCoRaHS observer in Camden, TN. Numerous rainfall records were broken at the Nashville International Airport, including the most rain received in a 6 hour period, highest calendar day rainfall, and wettest month, along with several others. Incredibly, the Nashville Airport experienced its wettest and third wettest days in history on back to back days. Many area rivers exceeded their record crest levels, including the Harpeth River near Kingston Springs, which rose to 13.8 feet above the previous record. The Cumberland River at Nashville reached its highest level since flood control was implemented in the late 1960s, flooding parts of downtown Nashville. Waters from the Cumberland reached as far inland as 2nd Avenue, flooding many downtown businesses. Forty-nine Tennessee counties were declared disaster areas with damage estimates of between \$2 and \$3 billion statewide. Many Nashville landmarks received damage from floodwaters, including Gaylord Opryland Hotel and the Grand Ole Opry. Other popular Nashville landmarks affected by the floods include LP Field, Bridgestone Arena, the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the Schermerhorn Symphony Center, which received damage to the basement and its contents, including two Steinway grand pianos and the console of the Martin Foundation Concert Organ. Over \$300 million in Federal Disaster Assistance was approved for the people of Tennessee.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

YOUR BEST YEAR EVER!

God's Word is the very best guide available if we want to know what we can do to make 2024 our best year yet. Here's the plan:

Experience God's Pardon. As we begin our journey into another year, God provides us with an opportunity to "begin again." We read in John's lovely little letter, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all of our sins." Others talk of being free from the past, but only God makes it possible and allows us a clean slate.

Enjoy God's Presence. He encourages us with His words, "Fear not, for I am with you!" With His Spirit to empower us, His angels to protect us, His Word to guide us and His arms around us, we have all that we need to face every challenge knowing that the victory can be ours if we take Him at His Word.

Engage God's Power. He promises that "I – the Creator and Sustainer of the universe – will strengthen you!" For every sickness He will give us His healing. For every problem He will give us His solution. For every question He will give us His answer. For every doubt He will increase our faith. And in the darkest hour He will provide us with His light.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we stand before You and the days to come in faith believing that You will honor Your words of hope and help as we trust in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10



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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.30.24

10 18 27 37 61 5

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$284,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 14
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

14 19 24 26 40 7

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,150,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 29
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

2 9 19 21 46 13

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 44 Mins 27
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

3 13 14 22 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$80,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 44
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

6 15 19 42 45 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 13
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

1 11 19 21 68 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$203,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 13
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Abortion is still consuming US politics and courts 2 years after a Supreme Court draft was leaked

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Two years after a leaked draft of a U.S. Supreme Court opinion signaled that the nation's abortion landscape was about to shift dramatically, the issue is still consuming the nation's courts, legislatures and political campaigns — and changing the course of lives.

On Wednesday, a ban on abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy, often before women realize they're pregnant, took effect in Florida, echoing laws in two other states. In Arizona, meanwhile, lawmakers voted to repeal a total ban on abortion dating back to 1864, decades before Arizona became a state. Also this week, the Kansas Legislature increased funding for anti-abortion centers, while advocates in South Dakota submitted the required number of signatures for a ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution.

The status of abortion in states across the country has changed constantly, with lawmakers passing measures and courts ruling on challenges to them. Currently, 14 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. Most Democratic-led states, meanwhile, have taken steps to preserve or expand access.

"Some of it's exactly what we knew would happen," said David Cohen, a professor at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law at Drexel University who studies abortion policy, "and others have been big surprises that have put, frankly, the anti-abortion movement on their heels."

Although more than 20 states have begun enforcing abortion bans of varying degrees since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, studies have found that the number of monthly abortions nationally is about the same — or higher — than it was before the ruling. Asked to weigh in on the emotional debate, voters have supported the position favored by abortion rights advocates on all seven statewide ballot measures since then.

The Supreme Court's decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case was released officially on June 24, 2022, upending nearly 50 years of abortion being legal nationwide. But the world caught a glimpse of it about six weeks earlier, on May 2, after a news outlet published a leaked draft.

"With the *Dobbs* decision, the will of the people is now able to be adhered to," said Stephen Billy, vice president of state affairs for Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. He said abortion rights supporters have amplified uncertainty in laws — especially over whether abortion is allowed in medical emergencies: "They've tried to sow political division just to advance their policy agenda," he said.

At the time Politico published the leaked draft, Amanda Zurawski was undergoing fertility treatment and was about two weeks away from learning she was finally pregnant.

The Austin, Texas, woman had always supported abortion rights, and was mad that the right to abortion was on the verge of disappearing. But she didn't expect a direct impact in her life.

That changed months later when she was denied an abortion despite a premature rupture of membranes, which can lead to dangerous internal bleeding. Days later, she was diagnosed with sepsis, a life-threatening reaction to infection. Her daughter, Willow, was ultimately aborted, but Zurawski nearly died in the process because of the delay.

She emerged from the experience an activist.

"I thought I would be a new mom with a newborn," she said in an interview. "Instead, I was in Tallahassee, Florida, meeting the vice president."

Zurawski has been a plaintiff in a court challenge seeking to clarify Texas abortion law and has spoken about her experience before Congress and across the country. She recently left her tech job to spend the next several months supporting abortion rights and President Joe Biden's reelection campaign.

"I'm definitely somebody who wants to fight for justice," she said. "This is not the path that I would

have guessed.”

Zurawski’s widely publicized experience is a reflection of the central role abortion has assumed on the political stage during this highly charged election year.

In Arizona, one of a handful of battleground states that will decide the next president, the state Supreme Court issued a ruling last month saying that a near-total abortion ban passed in 1864 could be enforced now that *Roe v. Wade* had been overturned. That decision ultimately led to the repeal proposal that passed the state House last week and the Senate on Wednesday after vitriolic debate. Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, is expected to sign the repeal.

Florida, Maryland and New York will have measures on the ballot in November to protect abortion access. “Women are going to be put into an impossible situation of not having access to health care, whether it is in an emergency situation or just family planning,” said Nikki Fried, chair of the Florida Democratic Party. “Floridians are going to have the opportunity to take control back.”

Susan B. Anthony’s Billy said his group was focused on defeating the ballot questions in Florida and other states where passing them would roll back bans in place now.

Arizona is one of at least eight states with a push for a similar measure. A few states also have pushes for measures to enshrine bans in the state constitution.

The issue is also weighing heavily in the presidential election.

President Joe Biden has been blasting his likely opponent, former President Donald Trump, for appointing the Supreme Court justices who swayed the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Vice President Kamala Harris traveled to Florida on Wednesday to decry the six-week ban passed in the nation’s third most-populous state.

Trump, who said in April that he believes abortion laws should be decided by states, went further this week, telling *Time* magazine that states should also be able to prosecute women who seek abortions. Proposals to do that have not picked up steam in any state legislatures so far.

An abortion rights initiative in South Dakota receives enough signatures to make the ballot

By JACK DURA Associated Press

Supporters of a South Dakota abortion rights initiative submitted far more signatures than required Wednesday to make the ballot this fall. But its outcome is unclear in the conservative state, where Republican lawmakers strongly oppose the measure and a major abortion rights advocate doesn’t support it.

The effort echoes similar actions in seven other states where voters have approved abortion rights measures, including four — California, Michigan, Ohio and Vermont — that put abortion rights in their constitution. Abortion rights measures also might appear on several other state ballots this year.

The signatures were submitted on the same day the Arizona Legislature approved a repeal of a long-dormant ban on nearly all abortions, and as a ban on most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, before many women even know they are pregnant, went into effect in Florida.

Dakotans for Health co-founder Rick Weiland said backers of the ballot initiative gathered more than 55,000 signatures to submit to Secretary of State Monae Johnson, easily exceeding the 35,017 valid signatures needed to make the November general election. Johnson’s office has until Aug. 13 to validate the constitutional initiative. A group opposing the measure said it’s already planning a legal challenge to the petition alleging the signatures weren’t gathered correctly.

South Dakota outlaws all abortions, except to save the life of the mother, under a trigger law that took effect after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022.

“The abortion law in South Dakota right now is the most restrictive law in the land. It’s practically identical to the 1864 abortion ban in Arizona,” said Weiland, referring to the law Arizona legislators voted to repeal Wednesday. “Women that get raped, victims of incest, women carrying nonviable or problem pregnancies have zero options.”

Weiland said the ballot measure is based on *Roe v. Wade*, which had established a nationwide right to abortion. It would bar the state from regulating “a pregnant woman’s abortion decision and its effectua-

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tion" in the first trimester, but allow second-trimester regulations "only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman," such as licensing requirements for providers and facility requirements for safety and hygiene.

The initiative would allow the state to regulate or prohibit abortion in the third trimester, "except when abortion is necessary, in the medical judgment of the woman's physician, to preserve the life or health of the pregnant woman."

"Our Roe framework allows for abortion in the first two trimesters," Weiland said.

The American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota doesn't support the measure.

"In particular, it does not have the strongest legal standard by which a court must evaluate restrictions on abortion, and thereby runs the risk of establishing a right to abortion in name only which could impede future efforts to ensure every South Dakotan has meaningful access to abortion without medically unnecessary restrictions," executive director Libby Skarin said in a written statement.

Planned Parenthood North Central States, the former sole abortion provider in South Dakota, hasn't said whether the organization would support the measure. In a joint statement with the ACLU of South Dakota, the two said groups said, "We are heartened by the enthusiasm South Dakotans have shown for securing abortion rights in our state."

Weiland said he's hopeful once the measure is on the ballot, "another conversation will occur with some of these organizations." He cited his group's hard work to get the measure this far, and said measure backers are "optimistic that we're going to have the resources we need to be able to get the message out."

Republican opponents, meanwhile, are promising to fight the initiative. Earlier this year, the GOP-led Legislature passed a resolution formally opposing it, along with a bill for a petition signature withdrawal process. The backer of the latter bill was Republican state Rep. Jon Hansen, a co-chair of Life Defense Fund, the group promising to challenge the ballot initiative.

Hansen called the measure extreme during a forum last month.

"If the proponents of this abortion amendment wanted to just legalize rape and incest exceptions, they could have done that, but they didn't do that," Hansen said at the time. "Instead, what they wrote is an amendment that legalizes abortion past the point of viability, past the point where the baby could just be born outside the womb and up until the point of birth."

Hansen also asserted that the measure would not allow "basic health and safety standards for mothers" in the first trimester.

Weiland has repeatedly disputed Hansen's claims, and called Life Defense Fund's planned court challenge "just a desperate charge on their part."

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. April 30, 2024.

Editorial: Tourism Continues To Show Strength

Tourism once again demonstrated its value to South Dakota last year, and the local economy also benefited, which was no surprise.

A story in Tuesday's Press & Dakotan reported that South Dakota's southeast tourism district enjoyed a banner 2023, generating more revenue (\$1.959 billion) than the much more promoted and higher profile Black Hills region (\$1.915 billion).

While a majority of the southeast region's revenue is generated in Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County, Yankton County produces its share. It saw \$97.2 million in revenue last year, a robust 11% increase from 2022.

Those numbers tell a very familiar story — but the importance never gets old and should not be overlooked.

Tourism is certainly a sturdy component of the state's economy. Last year's total tourism revenue reached \$4.96 billion, up nearly 5% from 2022.

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More importantly, it was up 21% from 2019 pre-pandemic levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as burdensome as it was, was revelatory in terms of understanding the draw of tourism. In an extraordinary climate that saw so many areas shutting down and people isolating, the Yankton district enjoyed record-setting years amid the pandemic as people embraced camping as a means of getting away (which was badly needed in the suffocating depths of the pandemic) while still exercising a measure of isolation and distancing.

The lesson to be remembered is that tourism continues to produce for this state in general and for specific areas. The industry has shown a level of resiliency that might be deemed spectacular.

It thrives when the overall economy is up and when it is down.

When fuel prices are low, it draws people from across the country; when fuel prices are high, it becomes an ideal vacation spot for local residents who don't want to travel far.

It does good business in rainy years and in dry years.

And there is always room for more. Sioux Falls has emerged as a dynamic tourist destination thanks to such additions as the Sanford Premier Center and the Pentagon facility. Thus, it could be noted that the tourism components here today are the building blocks of what may come next. It suggests that investing in tourism can produce healthy returns down the line.

South Dakota's glowing 2023 tourism numbers do tell a familiar tale, but it's a great story that continues to grow and prosper. And it will do so as long as we keep that considerable potential in mind.

END

Hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters remain on UCLA campus despite police ordering them to leave

By KRYSTA FAURIA, ETHAN SWOPE, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and JOSEPH B. FREDERICK Associated Press LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters Thursday remained behind barricades on the UCLA campus despite police orders to leave as officers were poised to move in on their fortified encampment that was ringed by an even larger crowd, including supporters who locked arms and curious onlookers.

Shortly before 2 a.m., police briefly made their way into the perimeter of the encampment only to retreat after being outnumbered by scores of protesters who yelled "shame on you!" Some in the crowd tossed water bottles and other objects as dozens of officers ran back.

Later the crowd chanted "we're not leaving. You don't scare us."

The huge numbers of police began arriving late in the afternoon Wednesday and issued the dispersal order. Empty buses were parked near the University of California, Los Angeles, to take away protesters who don't comply with the order.

The tense standoff came one night after violence instigated by counter-protesters erupted in the same place.

The law enforcement presence and continued warnings stood in contrast to the scene that unfolded the night before, when counter-demonstrators attacked the pro-Palestinian encampment, throwing traffic cones, releasing pepper spray and tearing down barriers. Fighting continued for several hours before police stepped in, though no arrests were made. At least 15 protesters suffered injuries, and the tepid response by authorities drew criticism from political leaders as well as Muslim students and advocacy groups.

By Wednesday afternoon a small city sprang up inside the reenforced encampment, now full of hundreds of people and tents on the campus quad. Some protesters said Muslim prayers as the sun set over the campus, while others chanted "we're not leaving" or passed out goggles and surgical masks. They wore helmets and headscarves, and discussed the best ways to handle pepper spray or tear gas as someone sang over a megaphone.

A few constructed homemade shields out of plywood in case they clashed with police forming skirmish lines elsewhere on the campus. "For rubber bullets, who wants a shield?" a protester called out.

Outside the encampment, a crowd of students, alumni and neighbors gathered on campus steps, joining

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in pro-Palestinian chants. A group of students holding signs and wearing T-shirts in support of Israel and Jewish people demonstrated nearby.

The crowd continued to grow as the night wore on as more and more officers poured onto campus.

Ray Wiliani, who lives nearby, said he came to UCLA on Wednesday evening to support the pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

"We need to take a stand for it," he said. "Enough is enough."

Elsewhere, police in New Hampshire said they made 90 arrests and took down tents at Dartmouth College and officers in Oregon came onto the campus at Portland State University as school officials sought to end the occupation of the library that started Monday.

The chaotic scenes at UCLA came just hours after New York police burst into a building occupied by anti-war protesters at Columbia University on Tuesday night, breaking up a demonstration that had paralyzed the school.

An Associated Press tally counted at least 38 times since April 18 where arrests were made at campus protests across the U.S. More than 1,600 people have been arrested at 30 schools.

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block said in a statement that "a group of instigators" perpetrated the previous night's attack, but he did not provide details about the crowd or why the administration and school police did not act sooner.

"However one feels about the encampment, this attack on our students, faculty and community members was utterly unacceptable," he said. "It has shaken our campus to its core."

Block promised a review of the night's events after California Gov. Gavin Newsom denounced the delays.

The head of the University of California system, Michael Drake, ordered an "independent review of the university's planning, its actions and the response by law enforcement."

"The community needs to feel the police are protecting them, not enabling others to harm them," Rebecca Husaini, chief of staff for the Muslim Public Affairs Council, said in a news conference on the Los Angeles campus Wednesday.

Speakers disputed the university's account that 15 people were injured and one hospitalized, saying the number of people taken to the hospital was higher. One student described needing to go to the hospital after being hit in the head by an object wielded by counter-protesters.

Several students who spoke during the news conference said they had to rely on each other, not the police, for support as they were attacked, and that many in the pro-Palestinian encampment remained peaceful and did not engage with counter-protesters. UCLA canceled classes Wednesday.

Tent encampments of protesters calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies they say support the war in Gaza have spread across campuses nationwide in a student movement unlike any other this century. The ensuing police crackdowns echoed actions decades ago against a much larger protest movement protesting the Vietnam War.

In Madison, a scrum broke out early Wednesday after police with shields removed all but one tent and shoved protesters. Four officers were injured, including a state trooper who was hit in the head with a skateboard, authorities said. Four were charged with battering law enforcement.

This is all playing out in an election year in the U.S., raising questions about whether young voters — who are critical for Democrats — will back President Joe Biden's reelection effort, given his staunch support of Israel.

In rare instances, university officials and protest leaders struck agreements to restrict the disruption to campus life and upcoming commencement ceremonies.

At Brown University in Rhode Island, administrators agreed to consider a vote to divest from Israel in October — apparently the first U.S. college to agree to such a demand.

The nationwide campus demonstrations began at Columbia on April 17 to protest Israel's offensive in Gaza, which followed Hamas launching a deadly attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7. Militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took roughly 250 hostages. Vowing to stamp out Hamas, Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the Health Ministry there.

Israel and its supporters have branded the university protests antisemitic, while Israel's critics say it uses those allegations to silence opposition. Although some protesters have been caught on camera making antisemitic remarks or violent threats, organizers of the protests, some of whom are Jewish, say it is a peaceful movement aimed at defending Palestinian rights and protesting the war.

Meanwhile, protest encampments elsewhere were cleared by the police, resulting in arrests, or closed up voluntarily at schools across the U.S., including The City College of New York, Fordham University in New York, Portland State in Oregon, Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona and Tulane University in New Orleans.

The Latest | It would take until 2040 to rebuild all homes destroyed so far in Gaza, UN report says

By The Associated Press undefined

If the Israel-Hamas war stopped today, it would still take until 2040 to rebuild all the homes that have been destroyed in nearly seven months of Israel's bombardment and ground offensives in the territory, according to United Nations estimates released Thursday.

The United States has pressured Israel to increase aid deliveries during the war, and on Wednesday, Israel reopened a border crossing with hard-hit northern Gaza Strip for the first time since it was damaged at the start of the war.

Meanwhile, on his seventh visit since the latest war between Israel and Hamas broke out in October, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed for a cease-fire deal. The proposed truce would free hostages held by Hamas in exchange for a halt to the fighting and the delivery of much needed food, medicine and water into Gaza. Palestinian prisoners are also expected to be released as part of the deal.

On Oct. 7, Palestinian militants launched an unprecedented attack into southern Israel, killing around 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducting around 250 hostages. Israel says militants still hold around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

The death toll in Gaza is more than 34,500 Palestinians, according to local health officials, as the territory faces a humanitarian catastrophe. The war has driven around 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million from their homes, caused vast destruction in several towns and cities and pushed northern Gaza to the brink of famine.

Currently:

- Nonstop Mideast coverage of the Israel-Hamas war pauses for protests and police action at U.S. schools.
- Colombia's president says the country will break diplomatic relations with Israel over the war in Gaza.
- The Biden administration is weighing measures to help Palestinians bring family from the region.
- Blinken presses Hamas to seal cease-fire with Israel, saying "the time is now" for a deal.

Follow AP's coverage of the war at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

HEALTH MINISTRY ADDS 28 PEOPLE TO THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR DEATH TOLL IN GAZA

BEIRUT — The Gaza Health Ministry said Thursday the bodies of 28 people killed by Israeli strikes were brought to local hospitals over the past 24 hours. Hospitals also received 51 wounded, it said in its daily report.

That brings the overall Palestinian death toll from the Israel-Hamas war to at least 34,596, the ministry said, and 77,816 wounded. The Health Ministry does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its tallies, but says that women and children make up around two-thirds of those killed.

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

FIGHTING IN GAZA HAS DESTROYED OVER 370,000 HOMES AND WILL TAKE UNTIL AT LEAST 2040 TO REPAIR, UN REPORT SAYS

AMMAN, Jordan — If the war in Gaza stopped today, it would still take until 2040 to rebuild all the homes that have been destroyed in nearly seven months of Israel's bombardment and ground offensives in the

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territory, according to United Nations estimates released Thursday.

"Every additional day that this war continues is exacting huge and compounding costs to Gazans and all Palestinians" said United Nations Development Programme Administrator Achim Steiner.

At least 370,000 housing units in Gaza have been damaged, including 79,000 destroyed completely, according to the new report by the UNDP and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, which details how Israel's assault, launched after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, has devastated the economy of the Palestinian territories, and how the impact will increase the longer the conflict goes on.

After previous Israel-Hamas conflicts, housing was rebuilt at a rate of 992 units year. Even if Israel allows a five-fold increase of construction material to enter Gaza, it would take until 2040 to rebuild the destroyed houses, without repairing the damaged ones, the report said.

In Gaza, the Israeli offensive has virtually shut down the economy, which contracted 81% in the last quarter of 2023. The report said the "productive basis of the economy has been destroyed," with sectors experienced losses of more than 90%.

Gaza, home to some 2.3 million Palestinians, has been under blockade by Israel and Egypt since Hamas' 2007 takeover, putting tight controls on what enters and exits the territory. Even before the war, it faced "hyper-unemployment" of 45%, reaching nearly 63% among younger workers. Since the war began, it lost some 201,000 jobs.

The war has also impacted the West Bank, where for months Israel has imposed restrictions on movement. In 2024, the entire Palestinian economy — including both Gaza and the West Bank — has so far contracted 25.8%, and if the war continues the loss will reach 29% by July, equivalent to \$7.6 billion, the report said.

HAMAS PRAISES COLOMBIA'S DECISION TO BREAK RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

BEIRUT — The militant Palestinian group Hamas praised Columbia's announcement that it would break relations with Israel, saying such a move is a recognition of the suffering of Palestinian people.

In its statement Thursday, Hamas called on other leaders of Latin America to cut their countries' diplomatic relations with Israel, which it described as "a rogue and Fascist entity that is continuing its crimes against our people."

Historically, Colombia was one of Israel's closest partners in Latin America. But relations between the two nations cooled since Gustavo Petro was elected as Colombia's first leftist president in 2022.

Petro announced his government would break diplomatic relations with Israel effective Thursday, describing Israel's siege of Gaza as "genocide." He previously suspended purchases of weapons from Israel and compared that country's actions in Gaza to those of Nazi Germany. Hamas said it valued Petro's stance highly.

Weeks after the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel that sparked the current war in Gaza and killed some 1,200 people, Petro recalled Colombia's ambassador to Israel as he criticized the country's military offensive.

What is at stake in UK local voting ahead of a looming general election

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Millions of voters in England and Wales will cast their ballots on Thursday in an array of local elections that will be the last big test before a U.K. general election that all indicators show will see the Conservative Party ousted from power after 14 years.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will hope he can point to successes, notably in a couple of key mayoral races, to douse talk that the Conservative Party will change leader again before the United Kingdom's main election, which could take place as soon as next month.

On the other hand, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer will hope Thursday's local elections confirm what opinion polls have shown for two years — that Labour is on course for power for the first time since 2010.

"The national context going into these local elections is very good for Labour and very bad for the Con-

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servatives," said Rob Ford, professor of politics at the University of Manchester.

As is often the case in British local elections, the run-up is about expectation management, so any out-performance can be painted as a success.

That's certainly the case with the Conservatives, who are widely predicted to lose around half of the 1,000 seats they are contesting. They have pointed out, for example, that the equivalent elections were held in 2021 when the government of then Prime Minister Boris Johnson was riding high following the rollout of the coronavirus vaccines.

Thursday's elections are important in themselves — voters decide who will run many aspects of their daily lives, such as garbage collection, the state of the roads and local crime prevention measures in the coming years.

But with a general election looming, they will be viewed through a national prism.

Here are five things to know:

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Voters in England and Wales will go to the polls for local, mayoral, and police and crime commissioner elections.

The voting is the final test of public opinion before the general election, which has to take place by January 2025 but which Sunak, who has the power to decide on the date, has indicated will be in the second half of 2024.

As well as a number of mayoral votes, including in London where Sadiq Khan is expected to win a third term, there are more than 100 elections to local councils and nearly 40 for local police and crime commissioners.

There's also a special parliamentary election in Blackpool South, a long-time Labour seat that went Conservative in the last election in 2019, when Johnson won a big victory. The results will be announced in coming days. London's mayoral result isn't due until Saturday.

No elections are taking place in Scotland or Northern Ireland, the other constituent nations of the U.K.

WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR SUNAK?

Potentially his job. Sunak replaced Liz Truss, who quit after 45 days following a budget of unfunded tax cuts that roiled financial markets and sent borrowing costs for homeowners surging.

Sunak, who warned about the economic implications of Truss' plan, was supposed to be a steady hand after taking the top job in October 2022. If opinion polls are right, he's not improved the Conservatives' ratings, which had even prior to Truss, been battered by the circus surrounding Johnson, who was ousted over a series of ethics scandals.

With the Conservatives seemingly headed for one of their biggest-ever electoral defeats, there's mounting speculation Sunak may face a leadership battle if Thursday's elections are really bad.

Key to his survival could be the mayoral elections in the West Midlands and Tees Valley in the northeast of England. Should Conservative mayors Andy Street and Ben Houchen hold on, he may win some respite from restive lawmakers in his party. Should both lose, he may face trouble.

IS LABOUR HEADED FOR POWER?

In historical terms, Labour has a mountain to climb if it's going to form the next government.

It's performance in 2019 was its worst since 1935. Starmer has tried to bring the party back to the center of British politics after the five-year leadership of veteran left-winger Jeremy Corbyn.

Starmer's cautious approach has clearly worked if opinion polls are anything to go by. But it's fair to say that enthusiasm levels are far lower than those that heralded the arrival of Tony Blair ahead of the 1997 general election.

That may be partly due to the more challenging economic backdrop, but Starmer, formerly a human rights lawyer, lacks the razzmatazz of his predecessor. Even so, Starmer will hope Labour notches up big wins in areas it lost under Corbyn, in the north of England and in the Midlands.

One point of concern is how many traditionally Labour supporters in Muslim communities fail to vote in protest at the party's stance over the conflict in Gaza.

ARE VOTERS BEING TACTICAL?

One of the contributing factors to Blair's landslide victory in 1997 came from so-called tactical voting, whereby some voters put aside their preferred political party and back whoever they think is most likely to defeat the Conservative candidate.

Tactical voting has reemerged in recent years and could become key in the general election. It usually involves voters sympathetic to Labour in parts of the country, such as southwest England, backing the much-smaller Liberal Democrats and Liberal Democrat supporters loaning votes to Labour in the Midlands and the north of England.

Conservative lawmakers across the U.K., even in supposedly safe seats, will be hugely concerned if voters think more tactically.

PINCER FROM THE RIGHT?

The Conservatives don't just face a challenge from the left. Reform UK is trying to outflank it from the right.

Though it is standing in a few seats, Conservatives will worry that support for the party will see Labour and others come through the middle.

Reform UK, which claims to be tougher on issues such as immigration and on Brexit, has said it won't stand aside to give incumbent Conservative lawmakers an easier chance at the general election, as its former incarnation, The Brexit Party, did in 2019. The Blackpool South special election will be particularly interesting on that front.

As India votes, misinformation surges on social media: 'The whole country is paying the price'

By DAVID KLEPPER and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Bollywood stars seldom weigh in on politics, so videos showing two celebrities criticizing Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi — and endorsing his main opposition, the Congress party — were bound to go viral.

But the clips of A-list actors Aamir Khan and Ranveer Singh were fake, AI-generated videos that were yet another example of the false or misleading claims swirling online with the goal of influencing India's election. Both actors filed complaints with police but such actions do little to stanch the flow of such misinformation.

Claims circulating online in India recently have misstated details about casting a ballot, claimed without evidence that the election will be rigged, and called for violence against India's Muslims.

Researchers who track misinformation and hate speech in India say tech companies' poor enforcement of their own policies has created perfect conditions for harmful content that could distort public opinion, spur violence and leave millions of voters wondering what to believe.

"A non-discerning user or regular user has no idea whether it's someone, an individual sharing his or her thoughts on the other end, or is it a bot?" Rekha Singh, a 49-year-old voter, told The Associated Press. Singh said she worries that social media algorithms distort voters' view of reality. "So you are biased without even realizing it," she said.

In a year crowded with big elections, the sprawling vote in India stands out. The world's most populous country boasts dozens of languages, the greatest number of WhatsApp users as well as the largest number of YouTube subscribers. Nearly 1 billion voters are eligible to cast a ballot in the election, which runs into June.

Tech companies like Google and Meta, the owner of Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, say they are working to combat deceptive or hateful content while helping voters find reliable sources. But researchers who have long tracked disinformation in India say their promises ring hollow after years of failed enforcement and "cookie-cutter" approaches that fail to account for India's linguistic, religious, geographic and cultural diversity.

Given India's size and its importance for social media companies, you might expect more of a focus, say

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disinformation researchers who focus on India.

"The platforms are earning money off of this. They are benefiting from it, and the whole country is paying the price," said Ritumbra Manuvie a law professor at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Manuvie is a leader of The London Story, an Indian diaspora group which last month organized a protest outside Meta's London offices.

Research by the group and another organization, India Civil Watch International, found that Meta allowed political advertisements and posts that contained anti-Muslim hate speech, Hindu nationalist narratives, misogynistic posts about female candidates as well as ads encouraging violence against political opponents.

The ads were seen more than 65 million times over 90 days earlier this year. Together they cost more than \$1 million.

Meta defends its work on global elections and disputed the findings of the research on India, noting that it has expanded its work with independent fact-checking organizations ahead of the election, and has employees around the world ready to act in case its platforms are misused to spread misinformation. Nick Clegg, Meta's president of global affairs, said of India's election: "It's a huge, huge test for us."

"We have months and months and months of preparation in India," he told The Associated Press during a recent interview. "We have teams working around the clock. We have fact checkers in multiple languages operating in India. We have a 24-hour escalation system."

YouTube is another problematic site for disinformation in India, experts say. To test how well that video-sharing platform was doing in enforcing its own rules, researchers at the nonprofits Global Witness and Access Now created 48 fake ads in English, Hindi and Telugu with false voting information or calls for violence. One claimed India raised its voting age to 21, though it remains 18, while another said women could vote by text message, though they cannot. A third called for the use of force at polling places.

When Global Witness submitted the ads to YouTube for approval, the response was disappointing, said Henry Peck, an investigator at Global Witness.

"YouTube didn't act on any of them," Peck said, and instead approved the ads for publication.

Google, YouTube's owner, criticized the research and noted that it has multiple procedures in place to catch ads that violate its rules. Global Witness removed the ads before they could be spotted and blocked, the company said.

"Our policies explicitly prohibit ads making demonstrably false claims that could undermine participation or trust in an election, which we enforce in several Indian languages," Google said in a statement. The company also noted its partnerships with fact-checking groups.

AI is this year's newest threat, as advances in programs make it easier than ever to create lifelike images, video or audio. AI deepfakes are popping up in elections across the world, from Moldova to Bangladesh.

Senthil Nayagam, founder of an AI startup called Muonium AI, believes there is growing demand for deepfakes, especially of politicians. In the run up to the election, he had several inquiries on making political videos using AI. "There's a market for this, no doubt," he said.

Some of the fakes Nayagam produces feature dead politicians and are not meant to be taken seriously, but other deepfakes circulating online could potentially fool voters. It's a danger Modi himself has highlighted.

"We need to educate people about artificial intelligence and deepfakes, how it works, what it can do," Modi said.

India's Information and Technology Ministry has directed social media companies to remove disinformation, especially deepfakes. But experts say a lack of clear regulation or law focused on AI and deepfakes makes it harder to squash, leaving it to voters to determine what is true and what is fiction.

For first-time voter Ankita Jasra, 18, these uncertainties can make it hard to know what to believe.

"If I don't know what is being said is true, I don't think I can trust in the people that are governing my country," she said.

Student journalists are put to the test, and sometimes face danger, in covering protests on campus

By DAVID BAUDER and CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Ordered by police to leave the scene of a UCLA campus protest after violence broke out, Catherine Hamilton and three colleagues from the Daily Bruin suddenly found themselves surrounded by demonstrators who beat, kicked and sprayed them with a noxious chemical.

On American campuses awash in anger this spring, student journalists are in the center of it all, sometimes uncomfortably so. They're immersed in the story in ways journalists for major media organizations often can't be. And they face dual challenges — as members of the media and students at the institutions they are covering.

Across the country from University of California, Los Angeles late Tuesday, a student-run radio station broadcast live as police cleared a building taken by protesters on the Columbia University campus, while other student journalists were confined to dorms and threatened with arrests.

Hamilton's attackers wore masks. But she recognized the voice of one as a counter-demonstrator sympathetic to Israel's cause because of prior reporting when some of them filmed her working and harassed her by name. She checked out of a hospital Wednesday after learning that injuries to her arms and chest were bruises.

"While it was terrifying and, honestly, will take a lot of mental processing, the experience confirmed for me the importance of student journalists because we know our campus better than any outside reporter would," said Hamilton, 21. "It has not deterred me from wanting to continue this coverage."

COVERAGE THAT IS UP CLOSE — AND PERSONAL

Fear and anger were obvious in the voices of students narrating the action on Columbia's WKCR radio on Tuesday. The station's website briefly went down because so many people were listening to an audio stream, and its announcers recommended people tune in to FM radio instead.

Even though he wore a badge identifying him as a member of the press, police ordered Chris Mandell and other reporters for the Columbia Daily Spectator into a dormitory. When he tried to open the door, Mandell said he was told he'd be arrested if he did it again.

Mandell has been covering the demonstrations and the planning for months. While he considers it a learning experience, he said "it has been breaking my heart" to see the police presence on campus and how the story has been covered by outside journalists.

The Daily Spectator has been on the story every step of the way and hasn't hesitated to confront Columbia University's leadership in print. In an editorial late last month, the students sharply condemned university President Minouche Shafik and said administrators have been uncommunicative except for "ominous late-night emails."

"This is your legacy," the Spectator wrote — "a president more focused on the brand of your university than the safety of your students and their demands for justice."

At campuses across the country, around-the-clock reporting from protests and student disciplinary hearings have meant overnight vigils at encampments blurring into morning classes, homework and final projects crammed in between interviews.

Student-run news websites at Yale and the University of Texas-Austin cover the action with innovative live blogs. The Daily Trojan's print editions have stopped for the semester at the University of Southern California, but Editor-in-Chief Anjali Patel tries to keep a reporter and photographer available at all hours to feed its website, post news on X and Instagram and do live streams. All during final exam season.

"We are still students at the end of the day," Patel said.

At Columbia, whose journalism school is considered one of the country's finest, Dean Jelani Cobb wrote a memo Wednesday to the population of budding journalists who are his students: "You are a part of history now. Your perseverance during a confusing and challenging moment cannot be understated. You told the stories the global public deserved to hear. You helped the school to meet its mission."

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LEARNING SKILLS OF THE PROFESSION IN REAL TIME

The protest movement has become a training ground for students grappling with complicated editorial decisions for some of the first times in their careers. They confront the awkwardness of reporting on their peers and the challenge not to get swept up in emotion.

"This is a moment in our campus' history," said Arianna Smith, editor-in-chief of The Lantern at Ohio State University. "Being able to contribute to its coverage is a privilege we don't take lightly. We're under a lot of pressure to get it right, to be accurate, so that's what we're striving to do."

Over three dozen Ohio State University students and demonstrators face misdemeanor charges after a Thursday night crackdown by the university on protests about investments in Israel.

Lantern staff members are having meetings about balancing the experiences of pro-Palestinian protesters and Jewish students or counter-protesters, Smith said. They debate whether to publish the names of students who face discipline, compare language choices to other news organizations and reflect on what viewpoints are missing from stories. Editors instruct reporters to keep opinions to themselves.

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's newspaper, The Daily Tar Heel, student journalists are also making difficult decisions about anonymous sourcing. Managing Editor Liv Reilly said photographers are being mindful not to take photos that show faces of people who fear being arrested.

Josie Stewart, managing editor for content at Ohio State's Lantern, said she recognizes classmates on both sides of the protest. The newspaper's coverage is discussed in her classes, and friends are regularly asking her about it.

"It's definitely difficult," she said. "Every journalist has to balance ethical concerns, but it is more difficult when you're staring someone in the face in class."

Sometimes Reilly feels the instinct to say hello to classmates involved in the protest, but stops. She's worried about saying their names out loud if they fear being identified, and is mindful of the boundaries between classmate and reporter. She makes sure to identify herself as a reporter, but "people's demeanors sometimes change when you say you're with the media."

Annika Sunkara, social media editor for The Huntington News at Boston's Northeastern University, said it has been emotional talking to fellow students, some in tears, about their experiences with law enforcement. Around 100 people were arrested there Saturday morning when police broke up pro-Palestinian encampments on the campus.

But as national news outlets descend on campuses nationwide, student journalists say their connection to their campuses is their greatest asset. They've built relationships with student groups, faculty and administrators. They follow many of their peers, now turned protest leaders, on social media.

"We're the ones on the ground seeing what's happening with our own eyes," Stewart said. "We have a different level of access, of trust on our campus and of understanding."

Some universities, including UCLA, have also seen scattered protests and student organizing since October. The Daily Bruin has been there "at every step," Hamilton said, so the staff "understand the demands of the students, the different perspectives on campus, the stakeholders in a way other news outlets can't."

Wearing a Daily Tar Heel hoodie, Reilly watched national news reporters stand in front of cameras for live shots before heading home one recent evening. She sat down with water bottles and blankets, ready for a 14-hour shift.

"This is a monumental piece of history for my generation and my peers," she said. "And it's been hard to navigate, to make the right editorial calls, to stay as neutral as possible while also not causing harm to any community. But we are here and we're learning, and we're ready to keep covering."

Arizona governor set to sign repeal of near-total abortion ban from 1864

By ANITA SNOW and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona is waving goodbye to a Civil War-era ban of nearly all abortions as a repeal bill reaches the desk of Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs.

Hobbs says the repeal, scheduled for signing on Thursday, is just the beginning of a fight to protect

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reproductive healthcare in Arizona. But the repeal may not take effect until 90 days after the end of the legislative session, in June or July. Abortion rights advocates hope a court will step in to prevent that outcome.

The effort to repeal the ban won final legislative approval Wednesday in a 16-14 vote of the Senate, as two GOP lawmakers joined with Democrats.

The vote extended for hours as senators described their motivations in personal, emotional and even biblical terms — including graphic descriptions of abortion procedures and amplified audio recordings of a fetal heartbeat, along with warnings against the dangers of “legislating religious beliefs.”

At the same time Wednesday, supporters of a South Dakota abortion rights initiative submitted far more signatures than required to make the ballot this fall, while in Florida a ban took effect against most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, before many women even know they are pregnant.

Democratic Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes, an opponent of the near-total abortion ban, has said the earliest the dormant abortion-ban law could be enforced is June 27, though she has asked the state’s highest court to block enforcement until sometime in late July. But the anti-abortion group defending the ban, Alliance Defending Freedom, maintains county prosecutors can begin enforcing it once the Supreme Court’s decision becomes final, which hasn’t yet occurred.

The near-total ban, which predates Arizona’s statehood, permits abortions only to save the patient’s life and provides no exceptions for survivors of rape or incest. In a ruling last month, the Arizona Supreme Court suggested doctors could be prosecuted under the law first approved in 1864, which carries a sentence of two to five years in prison for anyone who assists in an abortion.

A repeal means that a 2022 statute banning the procedure after 15 weeks of pregnancy would become Arizona’s prevailing abortion law.

Physician Ronald Yunis, a Phoenix-based obstetrician gynecologist who also provides abortions, called the repeal a positive development for women who might otherwise leave Arizona for medical care.

“This is good for ensuring that ensuring that women won’t have to travel to other states just to get the health care they need,” Yunis said. “I was not too concerned because I have a lot of confidence in our governor and attorney general. I’m certain they will continue finding ways to protect women.”

Arizona is one of a handful of battleground states that will decide the next president. Former President Donald Trump, who has warned that the issue could lead to Republican losses, has avoided endorsing a national abortion ban but said he’s proud to have appointed the Supreme Court justices who allowed states to outlaw it.

President Joe Biden’s campaign team believes anger over the fall of *Roe v. Wade* gives them a political advantage in battleground states like Arizona, while the issue has divided Republican leaders.

Abortion-ban advocates in the Senate on Wednesday gallery jeered and interrupted state Republican state Sen. Shawna Bolick as she explained her vote in favor of repeal, joining with Democrats. Bolick is married to state Supreme Court Justice Clint Bolick, who voted in April to allow a 1864 law on abortion to be enforced again. He confronts a retention election in November.

The 19th century law had been blocked since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision guaranteed the constitutional right to an abortion nationwide.

After *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in June 2022, then-Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, a Republican, persuaded a state judge that the 1864 ban could be enforced. Still, the law hasn’t actually been enforced while the case was making its way through the courts.

Planned Parenthood Arizona filed a motion Wednesday afternoon that asks the state Supreme Court to prevent a pause in abortion services until the Legislature’s repeal takes effect.

Advocates are collecting signatures for a ballot measure allowing abortions until a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions — to save the parent’s life, or to protect her physical or mental health.

Republican lawmakers, in turn, are considering putting one or more competing abortion proposals on the November ballot.

Faceless people, invisible hands: New Army video aims to lure recruits for psychological operations

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

FORT LIBERTY, N.C. (AP) — The video is unsettling, with haunting images of faceless people, fire and soldiers. The voiceover is a cascade of recognizable historical voices as the screen pulses cryptic messages touting the power of words, ideas and “invisible hands.”

Hints of its origin are tucked into frames as they flash by: PSYWAR. The Army’s psychological warfare soldiers are using their brand of mental combat to bring in what the service needs: recruits. And if you find the video intriguing, you may be the Army’s target audience as it works to enlist soldiers to join its Special Operations Command.

Released in the early morning hours Thursday, the video is the second provocative recruiting ad that, in itself, exemplifies the kind of work the psyop soldiers do to influence public opinion and wage the war of words overseas. Called “Ghost in the Machine 2,” it is coming out two years after the inaugural video was quietly posted on the unit’s YouTube site and generated a firestorm of online chatter.

“It’s a recruiting video,” said the Army major who created it, speaking with The Associated Press before the release. “Someone who watches it and thinks, wow, that was effective, how was it constructed — that’s the kind of creative mindset we’re looking for.”

The soldier, a member of the 8th Psychological Operations Group based at Fort Liberty, North Carolina, also made the first video. He asked that his name not be used to protect his identity, as is common among special forces troops.

Psyop units are used for an array of missions that can range from simple leaflet drops to more sophisticated propaganda and messaging aimed at deceiving the enemy or shaping opinion on foreign soil. It’s illegal for the U.S. military to conduct psychological operations on Americans.

Army Special Operations Command leaders and special forces recruiters hope that a new stream of chatter inspired by the video will help bring in recruits to an often unseen and little known job.

“From a tactical level, the psyop mission is extremely hard to show and tell,” said Lt. Col. Steve Crowe, commander of the Special Forces Recruiting Battalion. And it’s the job in Army special forces that recruiters say is the hardest to fill.

Across the military, the armed services have been struggling to meet enlistment goals, with most falling far short of their targets in recent years. The Army, which is the largest service, has had the most trouble, missing its goal by about 15,000 soldiers for the past two years. But most of the services say things are improving this year.

The Army’s Special Operations recruiters who recruit from already-serving soldiers say they are making about 75% of their overall goal, which is between 3,000 and 4,000. Of that, they have to bring in about 650 active-duty soldiers to psychological operations per year.

Officials blame the nation’s low unemployment, increased competition from corporate businesses, which can pay more and offer similar benefits, and a sluggish return from several years of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions that prevented recruiters from visiting schools and attending other public events.

Recruiting struggles in Army Special Operations Command have mirrored those of the larger Army. The recruiters said they are responsible for bringing in several types of special forces — the most well-known are the Green Berets and Delta Force, but there are also Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, known as the Knight Stalkers.

The Army has said it intends to trim the number of psyop soldiers, but still has struggled to fill the ranks.

Perhaps the most celebrated psyop was in World War II, when the so-called U.S. Ghost Army outwitted the Germans using inflatable tanks, radio trickery, costumes and impersonations. In what was dubbed Operation Viersen, the soldiers used the inflatables, sound trucks and phony headquarters to draw German units away from the point on the Rhine River where the 9th Army was actually crossing. Several of the last surviving members of the unit were recently awarded the Congressional Gold Medal at a ceremony

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in Washington.

These days, psyop activities are often classified. But one of the last U.S. service members to die in Afghanistan — killed by a suicide bomber at Abbey Gate during the chaotic evacuation in 2021 — was a psyop soldier: Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss, 23, of Corryton, Tennessee. His task that day was largely crowd control and influence, by using a bullhorn to communicate with the frantic throngs of Afghans and get them moving in the right direction.

A more recent example would be assistance to Ukraine. U.S. psychological operations soldiers have advised and assisted Ukrainian troops in their efforts to counter Russian disinformation campaigns since 2014. After the Russian invasion in February 2022, Ukrainian forces used a range of tactics — including leaflets and social media — to entice Russian troops to surrender and tell them how and where to give themselves up.

About half of the psychological operations troops are young people who join when they enlist. The rest are recruited from within the Army's existing ranks. The command's recruiters focus on the internal audience, which has its own challenges.

A growing hurdle, according to Crowe and Army Maj. Jim Maicke, executive officer of the Special Forces recruiting battalion, is that these days regular soldiers across the Army have less interaction with special operations forces than they did during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

In those conflicts, soldiers often worked side-by-side with commandos, or were deployed at the same bases and had a better view of what they did.

"Business was generally pretty good. And the reason, we believe, was all the interaction that was happening between special operations and conventional forces," said Crowe, adding that soldiers "got to see behind the curtain, how we operate. We don't have that anymore."

It's particularly difficult for psyops soldiers, whose work is often less visible than that of the more celebrated Army commandos and not always understood.

"We're all nerds for sure," said the Army major who created the ad. "But we're all nerds in different ways." Usually, those who are drawn to the job are "planners," he said. "They're writers, they're great thinkers. They're idea people."

Often, he said, they are creative, such as artists and illustrators, but others are tech experts who can bring those ideas to life in videos or online messaging.

The new "Ghost in the Machine" video is aimed at that audience.

Recruiters say the first video was successful.

"I think what he does with 'Ghost in the Machine' is it tells you what psychological operations is, and shows you it, without telling you in words," said Crowe. "You watch the video and you're like, okay, this is how I'll influence and change behavior."

On a recent recruiting trip to the Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina, the recruiters brought a psyop officer and a civil affairs officer along to speak with the cadets.

"We had a very limited amount of time to engage about 450 cadets," said Maicke, a graduate of the college. "And the psyop officer chose to give a brief introduction and then immediately turn on the 'Ghost in the Machine' video. He ended with, 'if anyone has any questions about this, I'm right over here,' and business was booming."

In fact, about six months after the first video was released, the command began surveying soldiers who applied for the psyop mission and got into the assessment and selection course. More than 51% said the video had a medium to high level of influence on their decision to try out for the job, recruiters said.

That, said the Army major, is the goal of the second video, which ends with a crescendo of music, shots of marching military troops with their arms raised in surrender, and a question streaming across the screen: "Do you believe in the power of words and ideas. Will You. We Believe." The final frames say PSYWAR and show the website: goarmysof.com.

A highway collapse in China kills 36 people and sends more than 20 cars down a steep slope

BEIJING (AP) — A section of a highway collapsed after heavy rains in a mountainous area in southern China, sending cars tumbling down a slope and leaving at least 36 people dead, authorities said Thursday.

The Meizhou city government said that 23 vehicles have been found after a 17.9-meter (58.7-foot) long section of the highway gave way about 2 a.m. on Wednesday. Thirty other people had injuries, none of them life-threatening, a government statement said.

The search effort was complicated by steady rain, gravel and soil coming down at the site, posing some risk to the workers, a fire department official told Chinese media.

Rescue teams divided the area into 10 grids and searched with dogs and life-detecting devices, the report said. Excavators and cranes were also brought in to help.

The collapse left a barren scar down a steep slope in an otherwise verdant green forested area. Witnesses told local media they heard a loud noise and saw a wide hole open up behind them after driving past the section just before it collapsed.

Video and photos in local media showed smoke and fire at the scene, with a highway guardrail leaning down into the flames. A pile of blackened cars could be seen on the slope leading down from the highway.

A photo later showed a construction crane lowering a mangled car to the road surface, near three other similarly wrecked vehicles. All appeared to have been burned out.

Over 56 centimeters (22 inches) of rain has fallen in the past four weeks in the county where the roadway collapsed, more than four times as much as last year. Some villages in Meizhou flooded in early April, and the city had seen heavy rain in recent days.

Parts of Guangdong province have seen record rains and flooding in the past two weeks, as well as hail. A tornado killed five people in Guangzhou, the provincial capital, last weekend.

Heavy rain and flooding pose a special risk to mountain roadways and highway bridges because of erosion, debris flows and landslides. China has massively expanded its infrastructure in recent years, adding more than 1 million highway bridges, the world's largest network of high speed trains and scores of new airports.

In the rush to build, flaws in design and construction methods have frequently come to light, while regular inspections and maintenance are sometimes given short shrift. Dozens have died in recent years in tunnel collapses and floods, including 14 who drowned in subway trains in the central city of Zhengzhou during massive flooding that killed around 300 people.

Subsequent reports said the system had not been prevented with adequate and other equipment and that officials failed to suspend service as they should have under government directives.

China's overseas projects such as roads and dams under the Belt and Road Initiative have also been criticized for design problems and poor quality, potentially posing a challenge to its efforts to build its influence in the developing world.

Biden keeps quiet as Gaza protesters and police clash on college campuses

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is staying mum about student protests and police crackdowns as Republicans try to turn campus unrest over the war in Gaza into a campaign cudgel against Democrats.

Tension at colleges and universities has been building for days as some demonstrators refuse to remove encampments and administrators turn to law enforcement to clear them by force, leading to clashes that have seized attention from politicians and the media.

But Biden's last public comment came more than a week ago, when he condemned "antisemitic protests" and "those who don't understand what's going on with the Palestinians."

The White House, which has been peppered with questions by reporters, has gone only slightly further than the president. On Wednesday, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden is "monitoring the situation closely," and she said some demonstrations had stepped over a line that separated free speech from

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unlawful behavior.

"Forcibly taking over a building," such as what happened at Columbia University in New York, "is not peaceful," she said. "It's just not."

Biden has never been much for protesting. His career in elected office began as a county official when he was only 28 years old, and he's always espoused the political importance of compromise over zealotry.

As college campuses convulsed with anger over the Vietnam War in 1968, Biden was in law school at Syracuse University.

"I'm not big on flak jackets and tie-dyed shirts," he said years later. "You know, that's not me."

Despite the White House's criticism and Biden's refusal to heed protesters' demands to cut off U.S. support for Israel, Republicans blame Democrats for the disorder and have used it as a backdrop for press conferences.

"We need the president of the United States to speak to the issue and say this is wrong," House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said on Tuesday. "What's happening on college campuses right now is wrong."

Johnson visited Columbia with other members of his caucus last week. House Republicans sparred with protesters while speaking to the media at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday.

Former President Donald Trump, his party's presumptive nominee, also criticized Biden in an interview with Sean Hannity on Fox News.

"Biden has to do something," he said. "Biden is supposed to be the voice of our country, and it's certainly not much of a voice. It's a voice that nobody's heard."

He repeated his criticisms on Wednesday during a campaign event in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

"The radical extremists and far-left agitators are terrorizing college campuses, as you possibly noticed," Trump said. "And Biden's nowhere to be found. He hasn't said anything."

Kate Berner, who served as deputy communications director for Biden's campaign in 2020, said Republicans already tried the same tactic four years ago during protests over George Floyd's murder by a police officer.

"People rejected that," she said. "They saw that it was just fearmongering. They saw that it wasn't based in reality."

Apart from condemning antisemitism, the White House has been reluctant to directly engage on the issue.

Jean-Pierre repeatedly deflected questions during a briefing on Monday.

Asked whether protesters should be disciplined by their schools, she said "universities and colleges make their own decisions" and "we're not going to weigh in from here."

Pressed on whether police should be called in, she said "that's up to the colleges and universities."

When quizzed about administrators rescheduling graduation ceremonies, she said "that is a decision that they have to decide" and "that is on them."

Biden will make his own visit to a college campus on May 19 when he's scheduled to deliver the commencement address at Morehouse University in Atlanta.

Pregnancy-related deaths have fallen to pre-pandemic levels, new US data says

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. pregnancy-related deaths have fallen back to pre-pandemic levels, new government data suggests.

About 680 women died last year during pregnancy or shortly after childbirth, according to provisional CDC data. That's down from 817 deaths in 2022 and 1,205 in 2021, when it was the highest level in more than 50 years.

COVID-19 seems to be the main explanation for the improvement, said Donna Hoyert, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention maternal mortality researcher.

The coronavirus can be particularly dangerous to pregnant women. And, in the worst days of the pandemic, burned out physicians may have added to the risk by ignoring pregnant women's worries, experts say.

Fewer death certificates are mentioning COVID-19 as a contributor to pregnancy-related deaths. The count was over 400 in 2021 but fewer than 10 last year, Hoyert said.

The agency on Thursday released a report detailing the final maternal mortality data for 2022. It also recently released provisional data for 2023. Those numbers are expected to change after further analysis — the final 2022 number was 11% higher than the provisional one. Still, 2023 is expected to end up down from 2022, Hoyert said.

The CDC counts women who die while pregnant, during childbirth and up to 42 days after birth from conditions considered related to pregnancy. Excessive bleeding, blood vessel blockages and infections are leading causes.

There were about 19 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births in 2023, according to the provisional data. That's in line with rates seen in 2018 and 2019.

But racial disparities remain: The death rate in Black moms is more than two-and-a-half times higher than that of white and Hispanic mothers.

"In the last five years we've really not improved on lowering the maternal death rate in our country, so there's still a lot of work to do," said Ashley Stoneburner, the March of Dimes' director of applied research and analytics.

The advocacy organization this week kicked off an education campaign to get more pregnant women to consider taking low-dose aspirin if they are at risk of preeclampsia — a high blood pressure disorder that can harm both the mother and baby.

There are other efforts that may be helping to lower deaths and lingering health problems related to pregnancy, including stepped-up efforts to fight infections and address blood loss, said Dr. Laura Riley, a New York City-based obstetrician who handles high-risk pregnancies.

But there's a risk that those kinds of improvements are being offset by a number of factors that may reduce the ability of women to get medical care before, during and after a birth, she said. Experts say the list includes the closure of rural hospitals and a 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision that did away with the federally established right to abortion — and contributed to physician burnout by causing doctors to feel constrained about providing care during pregnancy-related medical emergencies.

"I think there's good news. We're making strides in certain areas," said Riley, head OB-GYN at Weill Cornell Medicine. "But the bad news and scary news is ... there are these other political and social forces that make this (reducing maternal deaths) difficult."

At time of rising antisemitism, Holocaust survivors take on denial and hate in new digital campaign

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

DUESSELDORF, Germany (AP) — Herbert Rubinstein was 5 years old when he and his mother were taken from the Jewish ghetto of Chernivtsi and put on a cramped cattle wagon waiting to take them to their deaths. It was 1941, and Romanians collaborating with Germany's Nazis were rounding up tens of thousands of Jews from his hometown in what is now southwestern Ukraine.

"It was nothing but a miracle that we survived," Rubinstein told The Associated Press during a recent interview at his apartment in the western German city of Duesseldorf.

The 88-year-old Holocaust survivor is participating in a new digital campaign called #CancelHate. It was launched Thursday by the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, also referred to as the Claims Conference.

It features videos of survivors from around the globe reading Holocaust denial posts from different social media platforms. Each post illustrates how denial and distortion can not only rewrite history but perpetuate antisemitic tropes and spread hate.

"I could never have imagined a day when Holocaust survivors would be confronting such a tremendous wave of Holocaust denial and distortion, but sadly, that day is here," said Greg Schneider, executive vice president of the Claims Conference.

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"We all saw what unchecked hatred led to — words of hate and antisemitism led to deportations, gas chambers and crematoria," Schneider added. "Those who read these depraved posts are putting aside their own discomfort and trauma to ensure that current and future generations understand that unchecked hatred has no place in society."

The Claims Conference's new digital campaign comes at a time when antisemitic incidents, triggered by Hamas' deadly attack on Israel on Oct. 7 and Israel's ensuing military campaign in Gaza, have increased from Europe to the U.S. and beyond, to levels not seen in decades, according to major Jewish organizations.

Hamas and other militants abducted around 250 people in the attack and killed around 1,200, mostly civilians. They are still believed to be holding around 100 hostages and the remains of some 30 others. The war has ground on with little end in sight: Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed over 34,000 Palestinians, displaced around 80% of the population and pushed hundreds of thousands of people to the brink of famine.

The war has inflamed tensions around the world and triggered pro-Palestinian protests, including at college campuses in the U.S. and elsewhere. Israel and its supporters have branded the protests as antisemitic, while critics of Israel say it uses such allegations to silence opponents.

The launch of the Claims Conference campaign also comes days before Yom HaShoah — Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day — next Monday.

In one of the videos, Rubinstein reads out a hate post — only to juxtapose it with his personal testimony about his family's suffering during the Holocaust.

"We have all been cheated, lied to, and exploited. The Holocaust did not happen the way it is written in our history books," he reads and then says: "That is a lie. The Holocaust happened. Unfortunately, way too many members of my family died in the Holocaust."

Rubinstein then continues to talk about his own persecution as a Jewish child during the Holocaust.

While forced into the ghetto of Cernivtsi, his family managed to obtain forged Polish identity documents, which were the only reason he and his mother were taken off the cattle train in 1941.

They fled and hid in several eastern European countries until the war ended in 1945. After that, they briefly went back to his hometown, only to find out that his father, who had been forced into the Soviet Red Army during the war, had been killed. They moved on to Amsterdam, where his mother married again, and eventually settled in Duesseldorf.

"I lived through the Holocaust. Six million were murdered. Hate and Holocaust denial have returned to our society today. I am very, very sad about this and I am fighting it with all my might," Rubinstein says at the end of the video. "Words matter. Our words are our power. Cancel hate. Stop the hate."

Even at his old age, Rubinstein, who calls himself an optimist, says he will continue fighting antisemitism every single day. And he has a message, especially for the young generation of Jews.

"Don't panic," Rubinstein says. "The good will win. You just have to do something about it."

Abortion is still consuming US politics and courts 2 years after a Supreme Court draft was leaked

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Two years after a leaked draft of a U.S. Supreme Court opinion signaled that the nation's abortion landscape was about to shift dramatically, the issue is still consuming the nation's courts, legislatures and political campaigns — and changing the course of lives.

On Wednesday, a ban on abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy, often before women realize they're pregnant, took effect in Florida, echoing laws in two other states. In Arizona, meanwhile, lawmakers voted to repeal a total ban on abortion dating back to 1864, decades before Arizona became a state. Also this week, the Kansas Legislature increased funding for anti-abortion centers, while advocates in South Dakota submitted the required number of signatures for a ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution.

The status of abortion in states across the country has changed constantly, with lawmakers passing

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measures and courts ruling on challenges to them. Currently, 14 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. Most Democratic-led states, meanwhile, have taken steps to preserve or expand access.

"Some of it's exactly what we knew would happen," said David Cohen, a professor at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law at Drexel University who studies abortion policy, "and others have been big surprises that have put, frankly, the anti-abortion movement on their heels."

Although more than 20 states have begun enforcing abortion bans of varying degrees since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, studies have found that the number of monthly abortions nationally is about the same — or higher — than it was before the ruling. Asked to weigh in on the emotional debate, voters have supported the position favored by abortion rights advocates on all seven statewide ballot measures since then.

The Supreme Court's decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case was released officially on June 24, 2022, upending nearly 50 years of abortion being legal nationwide. But the world caught a glimpse of it about six weeks earlier, on May 2, after a news outlet published a leaked draft.

"With the *Dobbs* decision, the will of the people is now able to be adhered to," said Stephen Billy, vice president of state affairs for Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. He said abortion rights supporters have amplified uncertainty in laws — especially over whether abortion is allowed in medical emergencies: "They've tried to sow political division just to advance their policy agenda," he said.

At the time Politico published the leaked draft, Amanda Zurawski was undergoing fertility treatment and was about two weeks away from learning she was finally pregnant.

The Austin, Texas, woman had always supported abortion rights, and was mad that the right to abortion was on the verge of disappearing. But she didn't expect a direct impact in her life.

That changed months later when she was denied an abortion despite a premature rupture of membranes, which can lead to dangerous internal bleeding. Days later, she was diagnosed with sepsis, a life-threatening reaction to infection. Her daughter, Willow, was ultimately aborted, but Zurawski nearly died in the process because of the delay.

She emerged from the experience an activist.

"I thought I would be a new mom with a newborn," she said in an interview. "Instead, I was in Tallahassee, Florida, meeting the vice president."

Zurawski has been a plaintiff in a court challenge seeking to clarify Texas abortion law and has spoken about her experience before Congress and across the country. She recently left her tech job to spend the next several months supporting abortion rights and President Joe Biden's reelection campaign.

"I'm definitely somebody who wants to fight for justice," she said. "This is not the path that I would have guessed."

Zurawski's widely publicized experience is a reflection of the central role abortion has assumed on the political stage during this highly charged election year.

In Arizona, one of a handful of battleground states that will decide the next president, the state Supreme Court issued a ruling last month saying that a near-total abortion ban passed in 1864 could be enforced now that *Roe v. Wade* had been overturned. That decision ultimately led to the repeal proposal that passed the state House last week and the Senate on Wednesday after vitriolic debate. Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, is expected to sign the repeal.

Florida, Maryland and New York will have measures on the ballot in November to protect abortion access.

"Women are going to be put into an impossible situation of not having access to health care, whether it is in an emergency situation or just family planning," said Nikki Fried, chair of the Florida Democratic Party. "Floridians are going to have the opportunity to take control back."

Susan B. Anthony's Billy said his group was focused on defeating the ballot questions in Florida and other states where passing them would roll back bans in place now.

Arizona is one of at least eight states with a push for a similar measure. A few states also have pushes for measures to enshrine bans in the state constitution.

The issue is also weighing heavily in the presidential election.

President Joe Biden has been blasting his likely opponent, former President Donald Trump, for appointing the Supreme Court justices who swayed the Roe v. Wade decision. Vice President Kamala Harris traveled to Florida on Wednesday to decry the six-week ban passed in the nation's third most-populous state.

Trump, who said in April that he believes abortion laws should be decided by states, went further this week, telling Time magazine that states should also be able to prosecute women who seek abortions. Proposals to do that have not picked up steam in any state legislatures so far.

Hakeem Jeffries isn't speaker yet, but the Democrat may be the most powerful person in Congress

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Without wielding the gavel or holding a formal job laid out in the Constitution, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries might very well be the most powerful person in Congress right now.

The minority leader of the House Democrats, it was Jeffries who provided the votes needed to keep the government running despite opposition from House Republicans to prevent a federal shutdown.

Jeffries who made sure Democrats delivered the tally to send \$95 billion foreign aid to Ukraine and other U.S. allies.

And Jeffries who, with the full force of House Democratic leadership behind him, decided this week his party would help Speaker Mike Johnson stay on the job rather than be ousted by far-right Republicans led by Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene.

"How powerful is Jeffries right now?" said Jeffery Jenkins, a public policy professor at the University of Southern California who has written extensively about Congress. "That's significant power."

The decision by Jeffries and the House Democratic leadership team to lend their votes to stop Johnson's ouster provides a powerful inflection point in what has been a long political season of dysfunction, stalemate and chaos in Congress.

By declaring enough is enough, that it's time to "turn the page" on the Republican tumult, the Democratic leader is flexing his power in a very public and timely way, an attempt to show lawmakers, and anyone else watching in dismay at the broken Congress, that there can be an alternative approach to governing.

"From the very beginning of this Congress, House Republicans have visited chaos, dysfunction and extremism on the American people," Jeffries said Wednesday at the Capitol.

Jeffries said that with House Republicans "unwilling or unable" to get "the extreme MAGA Republicans under control, "it's going to take a bipartisan coalition and partnership to accomplish that objective. We need more common sense in Washington, D.C., and less chaos."

In the House, the minority leader is often seen as the speaker-in-waiting, the highest-ranking official of the party that's out of power, biding their time in hopes of regaining the majority — and with it, the speaker's gavel — in the next election. Elected by their own party, it's a job without much formal underpinning.

But in Jeffries' case, the minority leader position has come with enormous power, filling the political void left by the actual speaker, Johnson, who commands a fragile, thread-thin Republican majority and is constantly under threat from far-right provocateurs that the GOP speaker cannot fully control.

"He's operating as a shadow speaker on all the important votes," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

While Johnson still marshals the powerful tools of the speaker's office, a job outlined in the Constitution and second in the line of succession to the presidency, the Republican-led House has churned through a tumultuous session of infighting and upheaval that has left their goals and priorities stalled out.

In a fit of displeasure just months into their majority, far-right Republicans ousted the previous speaker, the now-retired Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., last fall in a never-before-seen act of party revolt. He declined to specifically ask the Democrats for help.

Johnson faces the same threat of removal, but Jeffries sees in Johnson a more honest broker and potential partner he is willing to at least temporarily prop up — even though Johnson, too, has not overtly asked for

any assist from across the aisle. A vote on Greene's motion to vacate the speaker is expected next week.

As Johnson sidles up to Donald Trump, receiving the presumed Republican presidential nominee's nod of support, it is Jeffries who holds what Democratic Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the speaker emerita, has referred to as "currency of the realm" — votes — that are required in the House to get any agenda over the finish line.

Pelosi said in an interview that Jeffries as the minority leader has "always had leverage" because of the slim House majority.

"But it's a question of him showing that he's willing to use it," she said.

Jeffries has been "masterful," she said, at securing Democratic priorities, notably humanitarian assistance in the foreign aid package that Republicans initially opposed.

But Pelosi disagreed with the idea that Democrats lending support to Johnson at this juncture creates some sort of new coalition era of U.S. politics.

"Our House functions because we're willing to be bipartisan in making it function," she said. "He's not necessarily saving Speaker Johnson — he's upholding the dignity of the institution."

Jeffries is a quietly confident operator, positioning himself, and his party, as purveyors of democratic norms amid the Republican thunderclap of Trump-era disruption.

The first Black American to lead a political party in Congress, Jeffries is already a historic figure, whose stature will only rise further if he is elected as the first to wield the gavel as House speaker.

Born in Brooklyn, Jeffries, 53, rose steadily through the ranks in New York state politics and then on the national stage, a charismatic next-generation leader, first elected to Congress in 2012 from the district parts of which were once represented by another historic lawmaker, Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to Congress.

A former corporate lawyer, Jeffries is also known for his sharp oratory, drawing on his upbringing in the historically Black Cornerstone Baptist Church, a spiritual home for many grandchildren and great-grandchildren of enslaved African Americans who fled to Brooklyn from the American South. But he also infuses his speeches and remarks with a modern sensibility and cadence, bridging generations.

Last year, when Republicans could not muster the votes on a procedural step for a budget and debt deal, it was Jeffries who stood intently at his desk in the House chamber, and lifted his voting card to signal to Democrats it was time to step up and deliver.

Repeatedly, Jeffries has ensured the Democratic votes to prevent a federal government shutdown. And last month, when Johnson faced an all-out hard-right Republican revolt over the Ukraine aid, Jeffries again stepped in, assuring Democrats had more votes than Republicans to see it to passage.

Ahead of the November election, the two parties are in a fight for political survival to control the narrowly divided House, and Jeffries would most certainly face his own challenges leading Democrats if they were to gain the majority, splintered over many key issues.

But Jeffries and Johnson have both been in a cross-country sprint, raising money and enthusiasm for their own party candidates ahead of November — the Republican speaker trying to keep his job, the Democratic leader waiting to take it on.

No safety in retreat: Ukrainian soldiers say rear defensive lines barely exist amid Russian advance

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KHARKIV, Ukraine (AP) — During pitched battles with far better-armed Russian forces, Ukrainian soldier Batyar's unit has few options.

Devastating Russian aerial glide bombs that can drop up to 1.5 tons of explosives out of range of most of Ukraine's air defenses are gnawing away at his men's positions in a new tactic.

Yet, to retreat carries no promise of safety — the rear defensive lines meant to give them cover barely exist, he said.

Lack of ammunition is forcing the outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers to pull back, one village after another, including three surrendered Sunday, as intense fighting roils the countryside surrounding Avdiivka nearly

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three months after the strategic city fell to Russia.

"It's necessary to increase the pace of building fortifications ... so that when we retreat, we will retreat to a prepared position," said Batyar, a unit commander who gave only his military call sign in line with brigade protocols. "These fortifications are not enough."

Facing an outcry after Avdiivka's fall, Ukraine is rushing to build concrete-fortified trenches, foxholes, firing positions and other barricades on the front lines. But relentless Russian shelling, lack of equipment and crippling bureaucracy plague construction across the vast 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front, even as a new Russian offensive looms, according to a dozen Ukrainian soldiers, government officials and construction company directors interviewed by The Associated Press.

The much awaited aid package passed by the U.S. Congress last month is expected to help Ukraine close the firepower gap. But until replenishments arrive, which could take weeks, Russia will continue to exploit Ukraine's weaknesses.

DIG AND FIGHT

Ukraine has allocated nearly 38 billion hryvnias (\$960 million) to build an extensive fortification network this year. Soldiers across the front line maintain that should have happened last year, when Ukraine had the upper hand in the fighting, not in the heat of battle now.

Besides trenches and other barricades, the layered system includes mines and anti-tank obstacles known as "dragon's teeth," normally built in advance of fighting. Russia's preparedness paid off during Kyiv's failed counteroffensive last summer: Ukraine's momentum was slowed in the Zaporizhzhia region by Moscow's extensive fortifications.

But Ukraine was slow to follow suit; it was not until this spring, when weather conditions improved, that any real progress was made. In March, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Ukraine was building 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) of fortifications across three lines of defense.

"There was an absence of responsibility. ... People didn't understand that fortifications can save your life if you do it in advance," said Oleksandr, a deputy infantry commander with the 47th brigade in the Avdiivka area who gave only his first name in line with military rules.

"Many people thought we ... wouldn't need to prepare such lines. They didn't expect a new Russian offensive."

Unlike Russia, Ukraine does not have the option of forcing thousands of prisoners to do the work. That means Ukrainian soldiers on the front lines must both fight and dig their own trenches.

"It's very hard to do both," Oleksandr said.

Building the second line, 2 to 5 kilometers behind the front line and within range of Russian artillery, is the responsibility of Ukraine's poorly-resourced engineering force. The third line, at a greater distance from battle, is constructed by companies under military contracts.

The reasons for Ukraine's lack of preparedness are rooted in the years after independence when it began downsizing its military because it couldn't afford to maintain the large force inherited from the Soviet Union. Its engineering regiments were dismantled until there were only a handful left. Equipment, including excavators and plows so direly needed now, were sold off.

"We entered the war with nothing," said a serviceman in Ukraine's engineering force, who spoke on condition of anonymity to talk openly about the lack of preparation. When he arrived to build fortifications in Ukraine's east in October, all his unit had were aging equipment from the 1960s and shovels, he said.

"Accordingly, that's the kind of trenches we made."

DISCONNECTED PITS

Ukraine's lack of adequate defensive lines has helped Russia make significant military gains, and constant enemy fire hinders building.

Five commanders in Avdiivka and Chasiv Yar, which have been under relentless Russian assault, said without well-prepared positions they were unable to gain a foothold in unfamiliar terrain and defend without suffering huge losses.

In Chasiv Yar, a strategic hilltop town in Donetsk, the lack of fortifications helped turn the tables in Russia's favor.

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In mid-March, Ukraine's 67th brigade was rotated in to hold positions roughly 3 kilometers from the town. "I would be hard-pressed to describe them as 'positions,'" said a Ukrainian serviceman who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the failings candidly.

He expected dugouts, a labyrinth of trenches and firing positions, but what he found were a series of pits, barely large enough to hide in during artillery barrages.

Under fire, "soldiers would climb out of pits and start digging in each other's direction so that there is at least some connection between them," he said. The soil was so sandy that whenever shells struck, the trenches they dug crumbled.

With nowhere to take cover and no means to match the Russian barrages, they retreated 2 kilometers back. Over 100 Ukrainian soldiers were killed or are missing, he said.

"We lost department commanders, platoon commanders, company commanders and sergeants," he said. "That is, we lost the entire skeleton of the brigade."

The unit's withdrawal in early April led to it being disbanded by Ukraine's General Staff. The brigade was blamed for the loss, but commanders said they never had the resources to succeed.

TIME, MONEY, PRESSURE

To rush building across the third line, construction companies were awarded contracts without the usual bidding process.

"There was no time," said Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov.

The move speeded things up but raised concerns of potential corruption — a worry Syniehubov asserted was overstated. "Believe me, we have so many checks-and-balances and government agencies overseeing the building, it is impossible to steal something," he said.

Finding companies willing to take the risk was another challenge. They faced layers of bureaucracy to get paid, while coming under enormous pressure to work fast.

A contractor in the Sumy region said he had to follow up with a half-dozen government officials to get funding.

"Not many people are willing to do this," said a construction company director in the Marinka area of the Donetsk region. All the fortifications he is contracted to build should have been erected in 2014, when Russia first invaded Ukraine, he said.

"This is all a big question for our leadership: Why didn't they purchase the equipment that military engineers needed to do their jobs? Why did they wait until they just gave it to us?" said the director, who like other company officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military contracts.

The owner of another company supplying concrete for front-line fortifications said some regional officials, under pressure to build them quickly, were inflating progress. "I saw the figures, and knowing what I know about the supplies, I know they can't be true," he said.

And then, there are the Russian attacks. Drones monitor building activity as far back as the third line and routinely attack workers.

In Kharkiv, at least four construction workers were killed in the last month, according to the governor. In addition, 10 pieces of equipment were destroyed.

"The enemy sees everything," he said.

Trump faces prospect of additional sanctions in hush money trial as key witness resumes testimony

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump faces the prospect of additional sanctions in his hush money trial as he returns to court Thursday for another contempt hearing followed by testimony from a lawyer who represented two women who have said they had sexual encounters with the former president.

The testimony from attorney Keith Davidson is seen as a vital building block for the prosecution's case that Trump and his allies schemed to bury unflattering stories in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. He is one of multiple key players expected to be called to the stand in advance of prosecutors' star

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witness, Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer.

Prosecutors are seeking \$1,000 fines for each of four comments by Trump that they say violated a judge's gag order barring him from attacking witnesses, jurors and others closely connected to the case. Such a penalty would be on top of a \$9,000 fine that Judge Juan M. Merchan imposed on Tuesday related to nine separate gag order violations that he found.

It was not immediately clear when Merchan might rule on the request for fresh sanctions, but the prospect of further punishment underscores the challenges Trump the presidential candidate is facing in adjusting to the role of criminal defendant subject to rigid courtroom protocol that he does not control. It also remains to be seen whether any rebuke from the court will lead Trump to adjust his behavior given the campaign trail benefit he believes he derives from painting the case as politically motivated.

During a one-day break from the trial on Wednesday, Trump kept up his condemnation of the case, though stopped short of comments that might run afoul of the gag order.

"There is no crime," he told supporters in Waukesha, Wisconsin. "I have a crooked judge, is a totally conflicted judge."

The trial, now in its second week of testimony, has exposed the underbelly of tabloid journalism practices and the protections, for a price, afforded to Trump during his successful run for president in 2016.

The case concerns hush money paid to squelch embarrassing stories, including from a porn actor and a former Playboy model, and reimbursements by Trump that prosecutors say were intentionally fraudulent and designed to conceal the true purpose of the payments and to interfere in the election.

The former publisher of the National Enquirer, David Pecker, testified last week that he offered to be the "eyes and ears" of the Trump campaign and described in detail his role in purchasing a sordid tale from a New York City doorman that was later determined to not be true as well as accusations of an extramarital affair with former Playboy model Karen McDougal.

The goal was to prevent the stories from getting out, a concern that was especially pointed in the aftermath of the disclosure of a 2005 "Access Hollywood" recording in which he was heard describing grabbing women without their permission.

A separate \$130,000 payment was made by Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, to porn actor Stormy Daniels, to prevent her claims of a 2006 sexual encounter with Trump from surfacing.

Trump's company then reimbursed Cohen and logged the payments to him as legal expenses, prosecutors have said in charging the former president with 34 felony counts of falsifying business records — a charge punishable by up to four years in prison.

Returning to the stand Thursday will be Keith Davidson, a lawyer who represented both Daniels and McDougal in their negotiations with the National Enquirer and Cohen.

He testified that he arranged a meeting at his Los Angeles office during the summer of 2016 to see whether the tabloid's parent company American Media, Inc. was interested in McDougal's story. At first, they demurred, saying she "lacked documentary evidence of the interaction," Davidson testified.

But the tabloid at Pecker's behest eventually bought the rights, and Davidson testified that he understood — and McDougal preferred — it would never be published. One reason for that, he said, is that there was an "unspoken affiliation" between Pecker and Trump and a desire by the company that owned the Enquirer to not publish stories that would hurt Trump.

The morning will begin with another gag order hearing. The four statements at issue were made by Trump before Merchan warned on Tuesday that additional violations could result in jail time.

They include comments to reporters and in interviews assailing Cohen's integrity.

Tension grows on UCLA campus as police order dispersal of large pro-Palestinian gathering

By KRYSTA FAURIA, ETHAN SWOPE, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and JOSEPH B. FREDERICK Associated Press
LOS ANGELES (AP) — Law enforcement on the UCLA campus donned riot gear Wednesday evening as they ordered the dispersal of over a thousand people who had gathered in support of a pro-Palestinian

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student encampment, warning over loudspeakers that anyone who refused to leave could face arrest.

A large crowd of students, alumni and neighbors gathered on campus steps outside the barricaded area of tents, sitting as they listened and applauded various speakers and joined in pro-Palestinian chants. Overheard television cameras showed students in the barricaded area passing out goggles and helmets, as well as setting up medical aid stations. A small group of students holding signs and wearing T-shirts in support of Israel and Jewish people gathered nearby.

The law enforcement presence and continued warnings stood in contrast to the scene that unfolded the night before, when counter-demonstrators attacked the pro-Palestinian encampment, throwing traffic cones, releasing pepper spray and tearing down barriers. Fighting continued for several hours before police stepped in, and no one was arrested. At least 15 protesters suffered injuries, and the tepid response by authorities drew criticism from political leaders as well as Muslim students and advocacy groups.

Ray Wiliani, who lives nearby, said he came to UCLA on Wednesday evening to support the pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

"We need to take a stand for it," he said. "Enough is enough."

Elsewhere, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, activists clashed with police officers who destroyed their tents early Wednesday, and police dismantled an encampment at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire just hours after pro-Palestinian demonstrators put up a handful of tents. Officers arrested multiple people, including at least one professor, according to local media reports.

The chaotic scenes unfolded early Wednesday after police burst into a building occupied by anti-war protesters at Columbia University on Tuesday night, breaking up a demonstration that had paralyzed the New York school.

An Associated Press tally counted at least 38 times since April 18 where arrests were made at campus protests across the U.S. More than 1,600 people have been arrested at 30 schools.

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block said in a statement that "a group of instigators" perpetrated the previous night's attack, but he did not provide details about the crowd or why the administration and school police did not act sooner.

"However one feels about the encampment, this attack on our students, faculty and community members was utterly unacceptable," he said. "It has shaken our campus to its core."

Block promised a review of the night's events after California Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Los Angeles mayor denounced the delays.

"The community needs to feel the police are protecting them, not enabling others to harm them," Rebecca Husaini, chief of staff for the Muslim Public Affairs Council, said in a news conference on the Los Angeles campus later Wednesday, where some Muslim students detailed the overnight events.

Speakers disputed the university's account that 15 people were injured and one hospitalized, saying the number of people taken to the hospital was higher. One student described needing to go to the hospital after being hit in the head by an object wielded by counter-protesters.

Several students who spoke during the news conference said they had to rely on each other, not the police, for support as they were attacked, and that many in the pro-Palestinian encampment remained peaceful and did not engage with counter-protesters. UCLA canceled classes Wednesday.

Tent encampments of protesters calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies they say support the war in Gaza have spread across campuses nationwide in a student movement unlike any other this century. The ensuing police crackdowns echoed actions decades ago against a much larger protest movement protesting the Vietnam War.

In Madison, a scum broke out early Wednesday after police with shields removed all but one tent and shoved protesters. Four officers were injured, including a state trooper who was hit in the head with a skateboard, authorities said. Four were charged with battering law enforcement.

This is all playing out in an election year in the U.S., raising questions about whether young voters — who are critical for Democrats — will back President Joe Biden's reelection effort, given his staunch support of Israel.

In rare instances, university officials and protest leaders struck agreements to restrict the disruption to

campus life and upcoming commencement ceremonies.

At Brown University in Rhode Island, administrators agreed to consider a vote to divest from Israel in October — apparently the first U.S. college to agree to such a demand.

The nationwide campus demonstrations began at Columbia on April 17 to protest Israel's offensive in Gaza after Hamas launched a deadly attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7. Militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took roughly 250 hostages. Vowing to stamp out Hamas, Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the Health Ministry there.

Israel and its supporters have branded the university protests antisemitic, while Israel's critics say it uses those allegations to silence opposition. Although some protesters have been caught on camera making antisemitic remarks or violent threats, organizers of the protests, some of whom are Jewish, say it is a peaceful movement aimed at defending Palestinian rights and protesting the war.

Late Tuesday, New York City police officers entered Columbia's campus and cleared an encampment, along with Hamilton Hall, where a stream of officers used a ladder to climb through a second-floor window, and police said protesters inside presented no substantial resistance.

The demonstrators had seized the Ivy League school building about 20 hours earlier, ramping up their presence on the campus from a tent encampment that had been there for nearly two weeks.

They encountered police clearing tents early on, as well as more than 100 arrests and threats of suspension unless they abandoned the encampment Monday. Instead, protesters took over Hamilton Hall early Tuesday.

New York City Mayor Eric Adams blamed "outside agitators" on Wednesday for leading the demonstrations and repeatedly cited the presence of a woman on Columbia's campus whose husband Adams said had been "convicted for terrorism." The woman, Nahla Al-Arian, wasn't on Columbia's campus this week and isn't among the protesters who were arrested.

Al-Arian, a retired elementary school teacher, told The Associated Press that Adams misstated both her role in the protests and the facts about her husband, Sami Al-Arian, a prominent Palestinian activist. Nahla Al-Arian said she did go to Columbia for one day on April 25 to see the protest encampment there but left after she got tired.

Meanwhile, protest encampments elsewhere were cleared by the police, resulting in arrests, or closed up voluntarily at schools across the U.S., including The City College of New York, Fordham University in New York, Portland State in Oregon, Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona and Tulane University in New Orleans.

Police killed student outside Wisconsin school after reports of someone with a weapon, official says

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MOUNT HOREB, Wis. (AP) — Police shot and killed a student outside a Wisconsin middle school Wednesday after receiving a report of someone with a weapon, the state's attorney general said in the first law enforcement briefing on gunshots that sent children fleeing and prompted an hourslong lockdown of local schools.

Authorities had previously said an active shooter who never got inside the building was "neutralized" outside Mount Horeb Middle School. State Attorney General Josh Kaul told reporters Wednesday evening no one else was harmed and that an investigation is ongoing.

"This incident took place outdoors. The subject in this case never gained entry," he said.

Authorities described the student as a juvenile male but didn't provide an age or indicate which of the Mount Horeb district's schools he attended.

Kaul declined to answer several questions about what happened once police responded, including whether the student had fired a weapon, what type of weapon he had, and whether he tried to get inside the school. Authorities said multiple Mount Horeb officers, wearing body cameras, had fired weapons but they did not say how many.

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Police remained on the scene hours afterward while students were kept locked down in buildings late into the afternoon before slowly being released to relatives.

For panicked kids and their terrified parents, it was an anxious, unsettling wait. Parents described children hiding in closets, afraid to communicate on cell phones, and one middle schooler said his class initially fled the school gym on in-line skates.

The district used Facebook posts throughout the day to give updates, with the earliest around 11:30 a.m. reporting all district schools were on lockdown. Authorities in Mount Horeb said the "alleged assailant" was the only person harmed, and witnesses described hearing gunshots and seeing dozens of children running.

Several hours later, school buses remained lined up for blocks outside the middle school and police tape surrounded the middle school, the nearby high school and playing fields between both buildings.

"An initial search of the middle school has not yielded additional suspects," a post around noon said. "As importantly, we have no reports of individuals being harmed, with the exception of the alleged assailant."

Earlier, the district posted without elaborating that "the threat has been neutralized outside of the building" in Mount Horeb, a small village about 25 miles (40 kilometers) west of the state capital of Madison.

Jeanne Keller said she heard about five gunshots while in her shop The Quilting Jeanne, just down the block from the middle school.

"It was maybe like pow-pow-pow-pow," Keller told The Associated Press by phone. "I thought it was fireworks. I went outside and saw all the children running ... I probably saw 200 children."

One middle schooler said his class was in the school gym practicing in-line skating when they heard gunshots.

Max Kelly, 12, said his teacher told the class to flee. He said they skated to a street, ditched their in-line skates and ran to a nearby convenience store and gas station and hid in a bathroom.

Kelly, shoeless, was reunited with his parents and sat on a hillside with them early Wednesday afternoon waiting for his younger siblings to be released from their own schools.

"I don't think anywhere is safe anymore," said his mother, 32-year-old Alison Kelly.

Police in Mount Horeb said they could not provide information in the immediate hours afterward. The Dane County Sheriff's office directed reporters to a staging area but also provided no updates.

Anxious parents spent hours thronging a bus depot waiting for their kids. Kaul said law enforcement had been concerned about the possibility of a continuing threat though he didn't provide more details. He said investigators sought to interview students as they were reunited with parents.

Shannon Hurd, 44, and her former husband, Nathian Hurd, 39, sat waiting for their 13-year-old son, Noah, who was still in the locked-down school.

Shannon Hurd said Noah texted her saying he loved her and she nearly fell down the stairs at her work as she rushed to the school.

"I just want my kid," she said. "They're supposed to be safe at school."

Stacy Smith, 42, was at the bank Wednesday when she saw police cars rush by and got a text warning of an active shooter.

She initially couldn't reach her two children — junior Abbi and seventh-grader Cole. Finally, she reached Abbi by phone but the girl whispered she was hiding in a closet and couldn't talk. She eventually connected with both and learned they were OK.

"Not here," she said in disbelief. "You hear about this everywhere else but not here."

Schools nationwide have sought ways to prevent mass shootings inside their walls, from physical security measures and active shooter drills to technology including detailed digital maps. Many also rely on teachers and administrators working to detect early signs of student mental health struggles.

Mount Horeb Area School District Superintendent Steve Salerno suggested that without recent security upgrades "this could have been a far worse tragedy." He said students immediately told school staff about seeing someone suspicious outside the building but did not elaborate.

"It's an experience that you just pray to God every day that you just don't ever have to enter into," Salerno told reporters.

The village is home to around 7,600 people and the central office of outdoor gear retailer Duluth Trading

Company. Mount Horeb markets itself as the “troll capital of the world,” a reference to carvings of trolls stationed throughout its downtown district.

More money is going to African climate startups, but a huge funding gap remains

By CARLOS MUREITHI Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — When Ademola Adesina founded a startup to provide solar and battery-based power subscription packages to individuals and businesses in Nigeria in 2015, it was a lot harder to raise money than it is today.

Climate tech was new in Africa, the continent was a fledgling destination for venture capital money, there were fewer funders to approach and less money was available, he said.

It took him a year of “running around and scouring” his networks to raise his first amount — just under \$1 million — from VC firms and other sources. “Everything was a learning experience,” he said.

But the ecosystem has since changed, and Adesina’s Rensource Energy has raised about \$30 million over the years, mostly from VC firms.

Funding for climate tech startups in Africa from the private sector is growing, with businesses raising more than \$3.4 billion since 2019. But there’s still a long way to go, with the continent requiring \$277 billion annually to meet its climate goals for 2030.

Experts say to unlock financing and fill this gap, African countries need to address risks like currency instability that they say reduce investor appetite, while investors need to expand their scope of interest to more climate sectors like flood protection, disaster management and heat management, and to use diverse funding methods.

Still, the investment numbers for the climate tech sector — which includes businesses in renewable energy, carbon removal, land restoration and water and waste management — are compelling: Last year, climate tech startups on the continent raised \$1.04 billion, a 9% increase from the previous year and triple what they raised in 2019, according to the funding database Africa: The Big Deal. That was despite a decline in the amount of money raised by all startups in total on the continent last year.

That matters because climate tech requires experimentation, and VC firms that provide money to nascent businesses are playing an essential role by giving climate tech startups risk capital, said Adesina. “In the climate space, a lot of things are uncertain,” he said.

The money raised by climate tech startups last year was more than a third of all funds raised by startups in Africa in 2023, placing climate tech second to fintech, a more mature sector.

Venture capital is typically given to businesses with substantial risk but great long-term growth potential. Startups use it to expand into new markets and to get products and services on the market.

Venture capitalists “can take risks that other people cannot take, because our business model is designed to have failures,” said Brian Odhiambo, a Lagos-based partner at Novastar Ventures, an Africa-focused investor. “Not everything has to succeed. But some will, and those that do will succeed in a massive way.”

That was the case for Adetayo Bamiduro, co-founder of Metro Africa Xpress, which makes electric two- and three-wheelers and electric vehicle infrastructure in Nigeria and has raised just under \$100 million since it was founded in 2015.

Adetayo said venture capitalists “are playing a catalytic role that is extremely essential.”

“We all know that in order to really decarbonize our economies, investments have to be made. And it’s not trivial investment,” he said.

The funds can also bridge the gap between traditional and non-traditional sectors, said Kidus Asfaw, co-founder and CEO of Kubik, a startup that turns difficult-to-recycle plastic waste into durable, low-carbon building material. His company, which operates in Kenya and Ethiopia, has raised around \$4.6 million since it was launched in 2021.

He cites waste management and construction as examples of traditional sectors that can connect with startups like his.

"There's so much innovation in these spaces that can transform them over time," he said. "VCs are accelerating that pathway to transforming them."

Besides venture capital, other investments by private equity firms, syndicates, venture builders, grant providers and other financial institutions are actively financing climate initiatives on the continent.

But private sector financing in general lags far behind that of public financing, which includes funds from governments, multilaterals and development finance institutions.

From 2019 to 2020, private sector financing represented only 14% of all of Africa's climate finance, according to a report by the Climate Policy Initiative, much lower than in regions such as East Asia and Pacific at 39%, and Latin America and the Caribbean at 49%.

The low contribution in Africa is attributed to the investors putting money in areas they're more familiar with, like renewable energy technology, with less funding coming in for more diverse initiatives, said Sandy Okoth, a capital market specialist for green finance at FSD Africa, one of the commissioners of the CPI study.

"The private sector feels this (renewable energy technology) is a more mature space," he said. "They understand the funding models."

Technology for adapting to climate change, on the other hand, is "more complex", he said.

One startup working in renewable energy is the Johannesburg-based Wetility, which last year secured funding of \$48 million — mostly from private equity — to expand its operations.

The startup provides solar panels for homes and businesses and a digital management system that allows users to remotely manage power usage, as it tries to solve the problems of energy access and reliability in southern Africa.

"Private sector financing in African climate is still rather low," said founder and CEO Vincent Maposa. "But there's visible growth. And I believe that over the next decade or so, you'll start to see those shifts."

Investors are also starting to understand the economic benefits of adapting to climate change and solutions as they have returns on investment, said Hetal Patel, Nairobi-based director of investments at Mercy Corps Ventures, an early-stage VC fund focused on startups building solutions for climate adaptation and financial resilience.

"We're starting to build a very strong business case for adaptation investors and make sure that private capital flows start coming in," he said.

Maëlis Carraro, managing partner at Catalyst Fund, a Nairobi-based VC fund and accelerator that funds climate adaptation solutions, urged more diverse funding, such as that which blends private and public sector funding. The role of public financing, she said, should be to de-risk the private sector and attract more private sector capital into financing climate initiatives.

"We're not gonna go far enough with just the public funding," she said. "We need the private sector and the public sector to work together to unlock more financing. And in particular looking beyond just a few industries where the innovation is writ large."

Federal Reserve says interest rates will stay at two-decade high until inflation further cools

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve on Wednesday emphasized that inflation has remained stubbornly high in recent months and said it doesn't plan to cut interest rates until it has "greater confidence" that price increases are slowing sustainably to its 2% target.

The Fed issued its decision in a statement after its latest meeting, at which it kept its key rate at a two-decade high of roughly 5.3%. Several hotter-than-expected reports on prices and economic growth have recently undercut the Fed's belief that inflation was steadily easing. The combination of high interest rates and persistent inflation has also emerged as a potential threat to President Joe Biden's re-election bid.

"In recent months," Chair Jerome Powell said at a news conference, "inflation has shown a lack of further progress toward our 2% objective."

"It is likely that gaining greater confidence," he added, "will take longer than previously expected."

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Powell did strike a note of optimism about inflation. Despite the recent setbacks, he said, "My expectation is that over the course of this year, we will see inflation move back down."

Wall Street traders initially cheered the prospect that the Fed will cut rates at some point this year as well as Powell's comment that the Fed isn't considering reverting to rate increases to attack inflation.

"I think it's unlikely that the next policy rate move will be a hike," he said.

Later, though, stock prices erased their gains and finished the day essentially unchanged from where they were before Powell's news conference.

Still, Powell sketched out a series of potential scenarios for the months ahead. He said that if hiring stayed strong and "inflation is moving sideways," that "would be a case in which it would be appropriate to hold off on rate cuts."

But if inflation continued to cool — or if unemployment rose unexpectedly — Powell said the Fed would likely be able to reduce its benchmark rate. Cuts would, over time, bring down the cost of mortgages, auto loans, and other consumer and business borrowing.

Those comments were "a signal that the (Fed) is a lot less confident that they know how policies are going to unfold over the course of this year," said Jonathan Pingle, an economist at UBS. "We were all sort of hoping for an update on the committee's path forward. And instead what we got was, 'We're really not confident enough to tell you what our path forward is going to be.'"

The central bank's overarching message Wednesday — that more evidence is needed that inflation is slowing to the Fed's target level before the policymakers would begin cutting rates — reflects an abrupt shift. As recently as their last meeting on March 20, the officials had projected three rate reductions in 2024, likely starting in June.

But given the persistence of elevated inflation, financial markets now expect just one rate cut this year, in November, according to futures prices tracked by CME FedWatch.

The Fed's warier outlook stems from three months of data that pointed to chronic inflation pressures and robust consumer spending. Inflation has cooled from a peak of 7.1%, according to the Fed's preferred measure, to 2.7%, as supply chains have eased and the cost of some goods has actually declined.

Average prices, though, remain well above their pre-pandemic levels, and the costs of services ranging from apartment rents and health care to restaurant meals and auto insurance continue to surge. With the presidential election six months away, many Americans have expressed discontent with the economy, notably over the pace of price increases.

On Wednesday, the Fed announced that it would slow the pace at which it's unwinding one of its biggest COVID-era policies: Its purchase of several trillion dollars in Treasury securities and mortgage-backed bonds, an effort to stabilize financial markets and keep longer-term rates low.

The Fed is now allowing \$95 billion of those securities to mature each month, without replacing them. Its holdings have fallen to about \$7.4 trillion, down from \$8.9 trillion in June 2022, when it began reducing them. On Wednesday, the Fed said it would, in June, reduce its holdings at a slower pace.

Instead of allowing \$60 billion in Treasuries to roll off each month, it will allow just \$25 billion. At the same time, it will continue letting \$35 billion in mortgage-backed bonds mature each month.

By cutting back its holdings, the Fed could contribute to keeping longer-term rates, including mortgage rates, higher than they would be otherwise. That's because as it reduces its bond holdings, other buyers will have to buy the securities instead, and rates might have to rise to attract the needed buyers.

The U.S. economy is healthier and hiring stronger than most economists thought it would be at this point. The unemployment rate has remained below 4% for more than two years, the longest such streak since the 1960s. And while economic growth reached just a 1.6% annual pace in the first three months of this year, consumer spending grew at a robust pace, a sign that the economy will keep expanding.

He also downplayed any concerns that the economy might be at risk of sliding into "stagflation" — a toxic combination of weak growth, high unemployment and elevated inflation that afflicted the United States during the 1970s.

"I was around for stagflation," Powell said, "and it was 10% unemployment, it was high-single-digit inflation. And very slow growth. Right now, we have 3% growth which is pretty solid growth, I would say, by

any measure. And we have inflation running under 3%. ...I don't see the 'stag' or the 'flation,' actually."

Appeals court rejects climate change lawsuit by young Oregon activists against US government

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A federal appeals court panel on Wednesday rejected a long-running lawsuit brought by young Oregon-based climate activists who argued that the U.S. government's role in climate change violated their constitutional rights.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals previously ordered the case dismissed in 2020, saying that the job of determining the nation's climate policies should fall to politicians, not judges. But U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken in Eugene, Oregon, instead allowed the activists to amend their lawsuit and last year ruled the case could go to trial.

Acting on a request from the Biden administration, a three-judge 9th Circuit panel issued an order Wednesday requiring Aiken to dismiss the case, and she did. Julia Olson, an attorney with Our Children's Trust, the nonprofit law firm representing the activists, said they were considering asking the 9th Circuit to rehear the matter with a larger slate of judges.

"I have been pleading for my government to hear our case since I was ten years old, and I am now nearly 19," one of the activists, Avery McRae, said in a news release issued by the law firm. "A functioning democracy would not make a child beg for their rights to be protected in the courts, just to be ignored nearly a decade later. I am fed up with the continuous attempts to squash this case and silence our voices."

The case — called Juliana v. United States after one of the plaintiffs, Kelsey Juliana — has been closely watched since it was filed in 2015. The 21 plaintiffs, who were between the ages of 8 and 18 at the time, said they have a constitutional right to a climate that sustains life. The U.S. government's actions encouraging a fossil fuel economy, despite scientific warnings about global warming, is unconstitutional, they argued.

The lawsuit was challenged repeatedly by the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations, whose lawyers argued the lawsuit sought to direct federal environmental and energy policies through the courts instead of through the political process. At one point in 2018, a trial was halted by U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts just days before it was to begin.

Another climate lawsuit brought by young people was successful: Early this year the Montana Supreme Court upheld a landmark decision requiring regulators to consider the effects of greenhouse gas emissions before issuing permits for fossil fuel development.

That case was also brought by Our Children's Trust, which has filed climate lawsuits in every state on behalf of young plaintiffs since 2010.

Arizona lawmakers vote to undo near-total abortion ban from 1864, with Gov. Hobbs expected to sign

By ANITA SNOW and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The Arizona Legislature approved a repeal of a long-dormant ban on nearly all abortions Wednesday, sending the bill to Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs, who is expected to sign it.

Two Republicans joined with Democrats in the Senate on the 16-14 vote in favor of repealing a Civil War-era ban on abortions that the state's highest court recently allowed to take effect. The ban on all abortions — which provides no exceptions for survivors of rape or incest, and only allows for procedures done to save a patient's life — would still be active until the fall.

Hobbs said in a statement that she looks forward to quickly signing the repeal, with a ceremony scheduled for Thursday.

"Arizona women should not have to live in a state where politicians make decisions that should be between a woman and her doctor," Hobbs said. "While this repeal is essential for protecting women's lives,

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it is just the beginning of our fight to protect reproductive healthcare.”

The revival of the 19th century law has put Republicans on the defensive in Arizona, one of a handful of battleground states that will decide the next president.

“Across the country, women are living in a state of chaos and cruelty caused by Donald Trump,” Vice President Kamala Harris said in a statement on Wednesday. “While Arizona Democrats have worked to clean up the devastating mess created by Trump and his extremist allies, the state’s existing ban, with no exception for rape or incest, remains in effect.”

If the repeal bill is signed, a 2022 statute banning the procedure after 15 weeks of pregnancy would become Arizona’s prevailing abortion law. Still, there would likely be a period when nearly all abortions would be outlawed, because the repeal won’t take effect until 90 days after the end of the legislative session, likely in June or July.

Within hours after the vote, efforts were already under way to prevent the older abortion ban from taking effect before the repeal becomes a reality.

“Without an emergency clause that would allow the repeal to take effect immediately, the people of Arizona may still be subjected to the near-total abortion ban for a period of time this year,” Arizona state Attorney General Kris Mayes said. “Rest assured, my office is exploring every option available to prevent this outrageous 160-year-old law from ever taking effect.”

Planned Parenthood Arizona announced it filed a motion Wednesday afternoon asking the state Supreme Court to prevent a pause in abortion services until the Legislature’s repeal takes effect.

The near-total ban on abortions predates Arizona’s statehood. In a ruling last month, the Arizona Supreme Court suggested doctors could be prosecuted under the 1864 law, which says that anyone who assists in an abortion can be sentenced to two to five years in prison. Then, last week, the repeal bill narrowly cleared the Arizona House.

Voting on the bill stretched more than an hour on Wednesday, amid impassioned speeches.

“This is about the Civil War-era ban that criminalizes doctors and makes virtually all abortions illegal,” said Democratic state Sen. Eva Burch. “We’re here to repeal a bad law. I don’t want us honoring laws about women written during a time when women were forbidden from voting because their voices were considered inferior to men.”

Burch made public on the Senate floor in March that she had a non-viable pregnancy and was going to have an abortion. She warned supporters of reproductive rights on Wednesday that they could not yet rest easy, even after the repeal is signed.

“They are going to use every tool in the toolbox to try to do whatever it is they can to interfere with the repeal of this ban,” she said.

There were numerous disruptions from people in Senate gallery, as Republican state Sen. Shawna Bolick explained her vote in favor of repeal, joining with Democrats.

Bolick appeared to argue that a repeal would guard against extreme ballot initiatives from abortion rights advocates. She is married to state Supreme Court Justice Clint Bolick, who voted to allow a 1864 law on abortion to be enforced again.

“I want to protect our state constitution from unlimited abortions,” the senator said. “I am here to protect more babies. I vote aye.”

Advocates on both sides of the abortion issue flocked to the Arizona Senate to vocalize their views.

A school-age girl knelt in prayer in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary, while a man with a megaphone shouted at passersby to repent.

Former President Donald Trump, who has warned that the issue could lead to Republican losses, has avoided endorsing a national abortion ban but said he’s proud to have appointed the Supreme Court justices who allowed states to outlaw it.

The Arizona law had been blocked since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wade decision guaranteed the constitutional right to an abortion nationwide.

When Roe v. Wade was overturned in June 2022 though, then-Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich,

a Republican, persuaded a state judge that the 1864 ban could again be enforced. Still, the law hasn't actually been enforced while the case was making its way through the courts. Mayes, who succeeded Brnovich, urged the state's high court against reviving the law.

Planned Parenthood officials have said they will reinforce networks that help patients travel out of state to access abortion in places like New Mexico and California.

Advocates are collecting signatures for a ballot measure allowing abortions until a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions — to save the parent's life, or to protect her physical or mental health.

Republican lawmakers, in turn, are considering putting one or more competing abortion proposals on the November ballot.

Columbia University student journalists had an up-close view for days of drama

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

Student journalists on the Columbia University campus knew what was coming long before police with riot shields arrived to begin arresting the pro-Palestinian protesters.

They had watched the situation spiral as the protesters stood their ground, refusing to abandon Hamilton Hall and using a pulley system to bring supplies into the building they had occupied.

The reporters, working for university and online U.S. and international publications, suspected negotiations with administrators were going nowhere when the protesters began donning COVID-era masks to hide their identities. Some began sleeping on the floor in journalism classrooms or offices out of fear of missing something.

But when a journalism professor began writing the phone number to call if they were arrested in permanent marker on their arms, that was the moment it became clear: They were capturing history.

The police operation Tuesday night that cleared out Hamilton Hall capped two weeks of drama over the protests at Columbia, which student journalists at the Ivy League school lived through as they were covering it.

Other media were being kept off campus, so these reporters were the only ones who could capture what was happening.

"I just woke up and I was like, I'm going to go and take some pictures," said Seyma Bayram, a Columbia journalism fellow focused on creating a longform investigative podcast unrelated to the protests.

The encampments were a visual feast. There were musical performances, students reading and helping each other write papers for their classes. She wanted to document it all.

By Monday, students were facing suspension if they didn't leave. Crowds marched around the encampment chanting. Students were given written notices from the administration, warning them to go. They ripped them up, dumped them in trash bins. Rumors were flying.

That night, Bayram was unwilling to go home, sleeping on her office floor.

"How," she wondered, "are they going to remove the students. They're not leaving."

By Tuesday, she was exhausted. The student reporters charged their cameras and other gear, and waited.

Many protesters were starting to leave, recalled Shayeza Walid, a graduate journalism student at Columbia, who covered the arrests for the news website Al-Monitor.

The sun was setting as they held hands and chanted, knowing they faced academic repercussions by remaining. Many had given up covering their faces by now, Walid said.

To her the chants sounded like a hymn and she saw the protesters, some clad in Palestinian keffiyehs, crying. She doubts she will ever forget it.

"It felt so both inspirational and devastating because these were the kids who were willing to get arrested," she recalled.

And then police started assembling outside, setting up barricades. Even on campus, Bayram could tell by the photos posted on social media that police action was imminent. And then the police were there.

"I don't know, it was just like all of a sudden there were just like police, ... riot gear everywhere," Bayram said.

The student journalists were walking backward, filming as they went, Bayram said.

She was pushed off campus. Police buses and officers were everywhere. Around her, people were being arrested.

"Those of us who are pushed out, like student reporters and faculty, I think we were just all horrified that no press was present outside of, or inside of, Hamilton Hall," Bayram said.

Walid recalled that the reporters paired up for safety. Her partner, an international student, had never seen so many police in one place. "And frankly, I hadn't either," Walid said.

She said the police also seemed shocked when they came into campus and saw how few students were left. "It was very evidently disproportionate from where we were standing," she said.

Before the arrests, protesters inside the campus used a megaphone to lead those protesting outside in chants, recalled Cecilia Blotto, a graduate journalism student, who has been publishing photos and video to Uptown Radio, a project of the university's journalism program.

"Columbia, you are a liar," she recalled them chanting, along with "Disclose, divest! We will not stop, we will not rest."

Then Blotto saw a police buses pull up, officers exiting with shields and zip ties. Then they played a recording saying that if the protesters didn't disperse they would be arrested.

"People were like being dragged out on the street, with like four cops holding a leg and an arm each. I saw some really, like, striking images of people, like, yelling shame at the cops, while they were dragging out students," Blotto said. She tried to film it all.

Emily Byrski, a graduate student who had a phone number written on her arm in case she was arrested, said the students weren't totally unprepared. There had been a training session.

Still, she said, there had been so many false alerts.

"It's like the boy who cried wolf. Like, there were two or three nights here where we were told, there was a rumor going around that the NYPD was coming, please come to campus," she recalled.

Byrski had knee surgery earlier in the year, so was unable to run as police descended. She limped along with her buddy.

"So we're sort of seeing this all happen from inside and trying to document it as the NYPD is grabbing people, like shoving them to the ground. It was pretty horrifying to see, like, right a foot away from me," Byrski said.

She said she has seen professors cry over the last week. She is pondering it all, uncertain what to make of it.

"I'm just sort of in shock," Byrski said. "I think we all kind of were in shock."

Nonstop Mideast coverage of Israel-Hamas war pauses for protests and police action at US schools

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — After weeks of nonstop coverage of destruction and death in the Gaza Strip, media across the wider Middle East have latched onto the demonstrations roiling American university campuses over the Israel-Hamas war.

For some, the protests and what they described as a heavy-handed police crackdown on them represent the double standards of life in the United States, which routinely calls on nations to respect dissent and free speech. However, across most of the Mideast, demonstrations of any kind remain illegal as many countries face warfare, economic challenges or other broad unrest.

The coverage included nearly breathless reporting from Iranian state television, which aired live video from the protests and police actions. Even soccer commentators brought it up during matches as one analyst later described it as "the death of liberal democracy."

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"The expansion of pro-Palestinian student protests to over 200 universities while full-fledged crackdown by police continues," one newscast began, offering arrest figures as well.

The Iranian coverage of student protests in the U.S. comes despite state TV largely ignoring the mass demonstrations surrounding the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, which resulted in over 500 people dead and 22,000 detained.

The hard-line Iranian newspaper Kayhan, which routinely calls for the destruction of both the U.S. and Israel, used the student protests in the U.S. to try to discredit a BBC report alleging Iranian security services sexually assaulted and killed a 16-year-old girl during the Amini demonstrations.

"At a time when consciences around the world are protesting the suppression of students in America and other Western countries, and while the global outcry against the Israeli regime's countless crimes is greater than ever, the BBC World Service, in a strange act of suicide, has published such a ridiculous report," the newspaper said.

In Israel, where the normally rambunctious free press has largely rallied behind the war in Gaza, the images from the U.S. protests have prompted widespread concerns that public opinion has turned against Israel. Many commentators have dismissed the protests as antisemitic, a charge the protest leaders reject.

Israel's public broadcaster Kan repeatedly aired images of the U.S. protests on Wednesday, and some have called on Israel to open its doors to Jewish academics and students who feel unsafe in the U.S.

"When antisemitic demonstrations calling for the destruction of Israel are raging on campuses around the world, the Council for Higher Education must make a decision to encourage academic institutions in Israel to proactively absorb Jewish students from abroad," wrote Peretz Lavie, a professor emeritus and former president at Technion — the Israel Institute of Technology.

In the Hebrew daily Yedioth Ahronoth, its Washington bureau chief Orly Azulai offered a different perspective.

"People in Israel fail to see the demonstrations correctly because they aren't always shown them correctly and because it is easier not to see," she wrote. "The same is true of the dead children in Gaza, the hunger, the shortage in medication and the destruction that overwhelmingly has left the Gaza Strip uninhabitable."

She added: "We must not allow the extremists on both sides to win. There isn't any other choice; we have to learn how to live together."

Meanwhile, weekly protests in Israel draw thousands demanding the release of the remaining hostages in the Gaza Strip and the resignation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In the Gaza Strip itself, some Palestinian protesters waved signs thanking individual American universities, while at least one man spray-painted his appreciation on the side of a tent.

In the hereditarily ruled United Arab Emirates, in which protests and political parties are illegal, one newspaper cartoon included an image of silhouetted university graduates marching into a police van, an American flag visible on its side. State media in neighboring Saudi Arabia broadly stayed away from the news, reporting instead on its own universities opening enrollment for the next academic year.

Pakistan's Dawn newspaper carried an opinion piece by lawyer Rafia Zakaria, suggesting the student protests "may succeed in ushering in a new era in U.S. foreign policy."

"For a long time, U.S. foreign policy prided itself on its ruthless realpolitik, whose architect Henry Kissinger died last November," she wrote in a piece published Wednesday. "Now a younger generation is calling into question the blatant hypocrisy that has been visible to the rest of the world for decades."

The demonstrations even made it to state-run television in Afghanistan, now overseen by the country's Taliban-controlled government.

"These protesters have made slogans against the attacks and genocide of the Zionist regime," the broadcaster Radio Television Afghanistan said.

Qatar's Al Jazeera news network, which has focused extensively on the Israel-Hamas war and has seen its correspondents wounded and killed in the Gaza Strip, quoted prominently in its website a warning from an American as saying: "Our democracy is in danger." Qatar as well is a hereditarily ruled sheikhdom.

The channel also provided context to the banner unfurled by demonstrators who seized Columbia University's Hamilton Hall that renamed the building "Hind Hall" — after 5-year-old Hind Rajab whose panicked

call to paramedics before her death in Gaza gained international attention.

Al Jazeera's English-language broadcaster went live from New York and North Carolina, showing the breadth of the student demonstrations.

"It was just devastation," said a Duke University protester identified as Abigail who spoke during a live report from the nearby University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "We were all being treated really horrifically by the police."

Wearing a black-and-white Palestinian keffiyeh scarf on air, Abigail added: "I want to speak directly to the people of Palestine, the people of Gaza if I may, and say just because this encampment was torn down yesterday doesn't mean this is over."

Trump calls judge 'crooked' after facing a warning of jail time if he violates a trial gag order

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON, MICHELLE L. PRICE and SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

FREELAND, Mich. (AP) — Donald Trump returned briefly to the campaign trail Wednesday and called the judge presiding over his hush money trial "crooked" a day after he was held in contempt of court and threatened with jail time for violating a gag order.

Trump's remarks at events in the battleground states of Wisconsin and Michigan were being closely watched after he received a \$9,000 fine for making public statements about people connected to the criminal case. In imposing the fine for posts on Trump's Truth Social account and campaign website, Judge Juan M. Merchan said that if Trump continued to violate his orders, he would "impose an incarceratory punishment."

"There is no crime. I have a crooked judge. He's a totally conflicted judge," Trump said speaking to supporters at an event in Waukesha, Wisconsin, claiming again that this and other cases against him are led by the White House to undermine his campaign.

The former president is trying to achieve a balancing act unprecedented in American history by running for a second term as the presumptive Republican nominee while also fighting felony charges in New York. Trump frequently goes after Merchan, prosecutors and potential witnesses at his rallies and on social media, attack lines that play well with his supporters but that have potentially put him in further legal jeopardy.

Later at a rally in Freeland, Michigan, he said he was being forced to spend days in a "kangaroo court room," and claimed without evidence the district attorney was taking orders from the Biden administration.

"I've got to do two of these things a day. You know why? Because I'm in New York all the time with the Biden trial," he said. "It's a fake trial. They do it to try and take your powers away, try and take your candidate away."

Even before the hush money trial got underway on April 15, Trump has held just a handful of public campaign events since becoming his party's presumptive nominee in March.

The gag order bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to his hush money case. Trump is still free to criticize the judge and the district attorney.

Trump insists he is merely exercising his free speech rights, but the offending posts from his Truth Social account and campaign website were taken down. Merchan is weighing other alleged gag-order violations and will hear arguments on Thursday.

Attendees agreed he is being unfairly prosecuted, contending the trial and gag order were designed to distract him .

"It's a trial looking for a crime," said Ray Hanson, of Hartford. Hanson said he expected Trump's lawyers would "keep him in line" so he doesn't violate the gag order, as much as he likely wants to talk about the trial.

Manhattan prosecutors have argued Trump and his associates took part in an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 presidential campaign by purchasing and then burying negative stories. He has pleaded not guilty.

Trump's visits to Wisconsin and Michigan mark his second trip to the swing states in just a month. For the previous rallies, the former president largely focused on immigration, referring to people who are in

the U.S. illegally and who are suspected of crimes as "animals."

Meanwhile, Democrats are hoping to remind voters ahead of these visits about Trump's position on abortion, which Trump has been openly concerned about being a political liability for him and Republicans.

Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan met on Wednesday with half a dozen women, including a family doctor, and warned that a second Trump term would threaten abortion rights even in her state, which enshrined those rights in its state constitution after the Supreme Court overturned national rights to the procedure.

Whitmer appeared with the women at a bookstore in Flint surrounded by signs that read "Stop Trump's Attacks on Health Care" and "Stop Trump's Abortion Ban." She told reporters not to believe Trump's contention in a Time Magazine interview that Republicans would never have enough votes in the U.S. Senate to pass a national abortion ban.

"We cannot trust anything that Donald Trump says when it comes to abortion. So no one should take any comfort in the fact that, yes, he wants an abortion ban, but he won't get it because he doesn't think we'll have 60 votes in the Senate. Baloney," she said.

Wisconsin and Michigan are among a handful of battleground states expected to decide the 2024 election.

For Trump to win both states, he must do well in suburban areas like the areas outside of Milwaukee and Saginaw, Michigan, where he visited Wednesday. He underperformed in suburban areas during this year's primary even as he dominated the Republican field overall.

Trump has repeatedly falsely said that the 2020 election was stolen from him. Trump's losses in battleground states in 2020 have withstood recounts, audits and reviews by the Justice Department and outside observers.

In an interview Wednesday with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Trump did not commit to accepting the results of the 2024 election.

"If everything's honest, I'll gladly accept the results. I don't change on that," Trump said. "If it's not, you have to fight for the right of the country."

Florida's 6-week abortion ban takes effect as doctors worry women will lose access to health care

By DAVID FISCHER and STEPHANY MATAT Associated Press

BOCA RATON, Fla. (AP) — Florida's ban on most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, before many women even know they are pregnant, went into effect Wednesday, and some doctors are concerned that women in the state will no longer have access to needed health care.

The start of the new ban also brought Vice President Kamala Harris to Jacksonville, where she said the abortion ban is a direct result of former President Donald Trump appointing three of the six U.S. Supreme Court justices who voted nearly two years ago to overturn the longstanding precedent that protected abortion access.

"And now, in states across our nation, extremists have proposed and passed laws that criminalize doctors, punish women," Harris said. "Laws that threaten doctors and nurses with prison time, even for life, simply for providing reproductive care. Laws that make no exception for rape or incest, even reviving laws from the 1800s."

Dr. Leah Roberts, a reproductive endocrinologist and fertility specialist with Boca Fertility in Boca Raton, said the anti-abortion laws being enacted by Florida and other red states are being vaguely written by people who don't understand medical science. The rules are affecting not just women who want therapeutic abortions, meaning procedures to terminate viable pregnancies because of personal choice, but also nonviable pregnancies for women who want to have babies.

"We're coming in between them and their doctors and preventing them from getting care until it's literally saving their lives, sometimes at the expense of their fertility," Roberts said.

The new ban has an exception for saving a woman's life, as well as in cases involving rape and incest. But Roberts said health care workers are still prevented from performing an abortion on a nonviable

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pregnancy that they know may become deadly — such as when the fetus is missing organs or implanted outside the uterus — until it actually becomes deadly.

“We’re being told that we have to wait until the mother is septic to be able to intervene,” Roberts said.

Besides the physical danger, there is also the psychological trauma of having to carry a fetus that the mother knows will never be a healthy baby, Roberts said.

“They’re feeling the kicks for months after they’re being told that they’re never going to have a live birth,” Roberts said. “And it’s just horrifying when you could take care of it at 20 weeks, and they could move on, and they could get pregnant with their next pregnancy and be able to hold their babies that much sooner.”

The Biden campaign quickly placed blame for the “extreme” six-week ban on former President Donald Trump.

“Trump is worried the voters will hold him accountable for the cruelty and chaos he created. He’s right. Trump ripped away the rights and freedom of women in America. This November, voters are going to teach him a valuable lesson: Don’t mess with the women of America,” President Joe Biden said in a statement about the new abortion ban.

During her Jacksonville speech, Harris said November’s election is about the fundamental freedom to make decisions about one’s own body and not have their government tell women what they are supposed to do.

“Because of Donald Trump, more than 20 states have abortion bans,” Harris said. “And today, this very day, at the stroke of midnight, another Trump abortion ban went into effect here in Florida. As of this morning, 4 million women in this state woke up with fewer reproductive freedoms than they had last night.”

Roberts said a huge issue with the ban is that the doctors who perform emergency abortions have to learn the procedures by performing therapeutic abortions. So if most abortions are banned, the next generation of doctors won’t be able to develop the skills needed to perform an emergency abortion.

Roberts said she is concerned the restrictions will also prompt veteran doctors to leave Florida, as they have in other states that have enacted abortion bans.

“We’re going to have less access to care for our general population, even if it’s just basic maternity care and normal OB-GYN care, because people are leaving,” Roberts said.

In addition, women are going to have to travel far from home to get abortions. Florida Access Network executive director Stephanie Pineiro said the organization, which helps provide funding for abortions, expects costs to increase dramatically. She estimates it will cost around \$3,000 for a woman to travel to another state for an abortion. The closest place after 12 weeks would be Virginia or Illinois, but before 12 weeks would be North Carolina.

“It’s very emotionally draining and challenging to deal with these types of barriers and have to leave your home,” Pineiro said.

The Florida Supreme Court, with five of its seven members appointed by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, ruled 6-1 last month to uphold the state’s ban on most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, which cleared the way for the six-week ban. The 15-week ban, signed by DeSantis in 2022, had been enforced while it was challenged in court. The six-week ban, passed by the Legislature a year later, was written so that it would not take effect until a month after the 2022 law was upheld.

Republican state Sen. Erin Grall, who sponsored the six-week ban, previously said bodily autonomy should not include abortions.

“We live in a time where the consequences of our actions are an afterthought and convenience has been substitution for responsibility,” Grall said, “and this is unacceptable when it comes to the protection of the most vulnerable.”

Voters may be able to enshrine abortion rights in Florida’s constitution after a separate state Supreme Court ruling allowed a proposed constitutional amendment to be on the November ballot. The proposal says, “no law shall prohibit, penalize, delay, or restrict abortion before viability or when necessary to protect the patient’s health, as determined by the patient’s healthcare provider.” It provides for one exception that is already in the state constitution: Parents must be notified before their minor children can get an abortion.

Florida Democrats hope young voters would vote to enshrine abortion rights, as a way to combat the 900,000 voter registration edge Republicans have over Democrats in the state. They hope moderate views

of the ballot initiative will turn out younger voters to vote Democrat when faced with the binary choice between a six-week abortion ban or protecting abortion until viability.

Jayden D'Onofrio, chairman of the Florida Future Leaders political action committee, said young Florida voters have a "real opportunity to shape the electoral landscape." Being that abortion rights have prevailed in elections nationwide, he thinks that Florida can engage young voters to register and vote for Democrats.

Nathan Mitchell, president of Florida Atlantic University College Republicans, said he would support a total abortion ban, and he hopes the amendment doesn't pass. Mitchell said he's seen most people want restrictions on abortion, usually for bans within 10 to 15 weeks of gestation.

Most Republican-controlled states have adopted bans or restrictions on abortions since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022. A survey of abortion providers conducted for the Society of Family Planning, which advocates for abortion access, found that Florida had the second-largest increase in the total number of abortions provided since the decision. The state's data shows that more than 7,700 women from other states received abortions in Florida in 2023.

Florida Democratic leaders are encouraging women to seek help from abortion funds and resources. On Tuesday, Senate Minority Leader Lauren Book encouraged women to access abortion travel funds and urged them to avoid "taking matters into your own hands."

A retired teacher saw inspiration in Columbia's protests. Eric Adams called her an outside agitator

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Before police officers poured into Columbia University on Tuesday night, arresting more than 100 people as they cleared an occupied school building and tent encampment, New York City Mayor Eric Adams said he received a piece of intelligence that shifted his thinking about the campus demonstrations over the war in Gaza.

"Outside agitators" working to "radicalize our children" were leading students into more extreme tactics, the mayor said. And one of them, Adams said repeatedly in media appearances Wednesday morning, was a woman whose husband was "convicted for terrorism."

But the woman referenced by the mayor wasn't on Columbia's campus this week, isn't among the protesters who were arrested and has not been accused of any crime.

Nahla Al-Arian, 63, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that Adams had misstated both her role in the protests and the facts about her husband, Sami Al-Arian, a former computer engineering professor and prominent Palestinian activist.

He was arrested in 2003 on charges of supporting the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group in the 1980s and 1990s, but a jury declined to convict him of any charges. The complicated case remained in legal limbo for years, even after he took a plea deal on a lesser charge that his family said he accepted to get out of jail and end their suffering. He was deported to Turkey in 2015, ending a case seen by some as an example of excessive government overreach.

A retired elementary school teacher, Nahla Al-Arian said she did go to Columbia — but not to teach anyone about civil disobedience.

"The whole thing is a distraction because they are very scared that the young Americans are aware for the first time of what's going on in Palestine," Nahla Al-Arian said. "They are the ones who influenced me. They are the ones who gave me hope that at last the Palestinian people can get some justice."

Law enforcement officials have long sought to discredit protests by invoking the specter of "outside agitators," dating back to the Civil Rights movement. Police officials in New York made similar claims during the demonstrations that erupted across the city after the death of George Floyd in 2020, at times labeling peaceful marches led by neighborhood activists as the work of violent outside extremists.

Nahla Al-Arian said she has lost dozens of relatives to Israeli airstrikes in recent months and wanted to see the encampment up close, so she stopped by briefly on April 25 while visiting New York City on an unrelated trip with her two daughters. She said she sat briefly on the lawn but did not speak directly with

any protesters, whom she described as "busy and beautiful."

"I sat and I felt happy to see those students fighting for justice for the oppressed people in Palestine," she recalled. "Then I was tired, so I left."

It was a photo of her kneeling alone beside a tent, taken by her daughter and shared on X by her husband, that quickly stoked allegations of a terrorism link to the protest.

The claim was parroted by right-wing social media accounts, including Libs of TikTok. One post that racked up over 1 million views on X erroneously said the woman might have been among protesters as police entered the campus. The post cited City Hall sources and has since been deleted.

But the claim spread widely, fueling a narrative — vehemently disputed by student organizers — that Columbia's pro-Palestinian movement has been co-opted by external forces.

In an appearance Wednesday on "CBS Mornings," Adams, a Democrat, said that the NYPD's intelligence division had identified people among the protesters "who were professionals, well-trained. One of them was married to someone that was arrested for terrorism." Pressed for details, he declined to name the woman, but suggested reporters could figure it out by looking at social media.

Speaking on MSNBC's "Morning Joe," Adams also said his suspicions about external influences on the students had been confirmed after police identified a woman in the protest "organization" whose "husband was arrested for and convicted for terrorism on a federal level." At a news conference later in the day, Adams suggested that Columbia students had been taught by outsiders how to barricade themselves to repel police attempts to remove them, saying, "These are all skills that are taught and learned."

Police declined to provide details about what groups may have been involved or to say how many of the 109 people arrested at Columbia Tuesday night were not connected to the university. Even before the students entered Hamilton Hall, police officials claimed, without providing evidence, that an outside group was helping to fund and organize the encampment.

Students at Columbia have been open about the fact that they count outside community members among their movement. But organizers maintain their actions have been led by students, some of whom said they had closely studied tactics used by those who took over several university buildings in 1968 to protest the Vietnam War and racism.

In a statement, the group behind the encampment, Columbia University Apartheid Divest, defended its right "to include people from outside the Ivy League or the ivory tower in this global movement."

"'Outside agitator' is a far right smear used to discredit coalition building and anti racism," the statement continued.

Laila Al-Arian, a journalist who joined her mother at the encampment on April 25, said the mayor's comments dredged up painful memories of her father's years-long legal battle, which included lengthy time spent in solitary confinement. Adams, she said, "was appealing to people's most base racist instincts" to treat Muslims as dangerous outsiders.

"My mother wanted to see this beautiful act of solidarity up close," she added. "For people to use my father to smear these students, who may not have even been alive when all of this was happening, is shameful in so many ways."

Blinken presses Hamas to seal cease-fire with Israel, says 'the time is now' for a deal

By MATTHEW LEE, SAMY MAGDY and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken hiked up pressure on Hamas on Wednesday to accept the latest proposal for a cease-fire with Israel, saying the "time is now" for an agreement that would free hostages and pause the nearly seven months of war in Gaza.

But a key sticking point appeared to remain — whether the deal would completely end Israel's offensive as Hamas has demanded.

Blinken met with Israeli leaders throughout the day on the last stop of his seventh visit to the region since the war erupted in October, trying to push through what has been an elusive deal between Israel

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and Hamas. The U.S. and fellow mediators Egypt and Qatar hope to avert an Israeli offensive into the southern Gaza town of Rafah, where some 1.4 million Palestinians are sheltering.

Throughout months of talks, Hamas has said the freeing of all the hostages it holds must bring a permanent halt to the war and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza.

The proposed deal now at the center of talks raises that possibility, according to leaked details that were confirmed by an Egyptian official and a Hamas official. But Hamas is seeking to strengthen the language to ensure a complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the entire Gaza Strip, the Egyptian official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the internal negotiations. The group said it is likely to give its response to the proposal on Thursday.

In public, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has staunchly rejected stopping the war before Hamas is destroyed. In a sign of the challenges in the negotiations, Netanyahu in his talks with Blinken on Wednesday repeated his vow to launch the offensive on Rafah, which he says is Hamas' last stronghold in Gaza.

Blinken said Israel has made "very important" compromises in cease-fire efforts and it is now up to Hamas to get the deal done.

"There's no time for further haggling. The deal is there," Blinken said, shortly before he was to leave Israel.

Earlier in the day, he said in talks with Israel's ceremonial President Isaac Herzog in Tel Aviv that Hamas would bear the blame for any failure to get a deal. "No delays, no excuses. The time is now," he said.

Blinken said the deal would also allow much needed food, medicine and water to get into Gaza, where the war has sparked a humanitarian crisis, pushed northern Gaza to the brink of famine and driven around 80% of the population of 2.3 million from their homes.

Blinken said there has been "meaningful progress" in efforts to increase the flow of aid. On Wednesday, Israel reopened its Erez crossing for deliveries into northern Gaza for the first time since it was damaged in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

Hanging over the cease-fire negotiations is the possibility of an Israeli attack on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's population has fled, cramming into vast tent camps and other shelters. On Tuesday, Netanyahu vowed to go ahead with the assault with or without a cease-fire deal.

"The operation in Rafah doesn't depend on anything. The prime minister made this clear to Secretary Blinken," Netanyahu's office said after the two met Wednesday. Hard-line members of Netanyahu's coalition, on whom he depends to keep his government in power, have railed against any deal that prevents a Rafah attack as a victory for Hamas.

The United States has staunchly supported Israel's campaign of bombardment and ground offensives in Gaza since Hamas' unprecedented attack on Oct. 7 into southern Israel. But the U.S. has grown increasingly critical of the staggering toll borne by Palestinian civilians and has been outspoken against a move on Rafah. American officials say they oppose a major offensive but that if Israel conducts one, it must first evacuate civilians.

In Rafah, Palestinians clung to hope that, after months of reported near-deals, this time a cease-fire would be sealed and avert an attack.

Salwa Abu Hatab, a woman who fled Khan Younis who is now in a tent camp, said she wants to go home.

"Do you think we like life in tents? We are tired and suffering," she said. "Every day they say there is a truce and negotiations, and in the end it fails. We hope they will succeed this time."

"If the invasion happens, we do not know where to go," said Enas Syam, a woman from Gaza City carrying her child in the camp. "There is no safe place left."

Israeli airstrikes in Gaza continued. Late Tuesday, a strike hit a house in Rafah, killing at least two children, according to hospital authorities. An Associated Press journalist saw the children's bodies at Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital as their relatives mourned.

The Israel-Hamas war was sparked by the Oct. 7 raid into southern Israel in which militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Hamas is believed to still hold around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Since then, Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health

officials, and wreaked vast destruction.

Throughout his regional visit, with previous stops in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Blinken urged Hamas to accept the cease-fire proposal, calling it "extraordinarily generous" on Israel's part.

The proposal lays out three stages of six to seven weeks each, according to details first reported in the Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar, which is close to Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah militant group.

The first phase would bring a pause during which Hamas would release women and elderly civilians in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. In a series of timed steps, Israeli troops would withdraw from a coastal road in Gaza, then from central Gaza and displaced people would return north.

In the meantime, talks would start on restoring "a permanent calm," the Egyptian official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the internal negotiations.

The next stage would bring implementation of the calm, including Hamas' release of all remaining hostages — soldiers and civilians — and a withdrawal of Israeli forces out of Gaza. The Egyptian official said Hamas sees the language about the withdrawal as too vague and wants to specify a complete withdrawal to avoid different interpretations.

The last stage would see the release of bodies of dead hostages and the start of a five-year reconstruction plan. The plan says that Hamas would agree not to rebuild its military arsenal.

House passes bill to expand definition of antisemitism amid growing campus protests over Gaza war

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House passed legislation Wednesday that would establish a broader definition of antisemitism for the Department of Education to enforce anti-discrimination laws, the latest response from lawmakers to a nationwide student protest movement over the Israel-Hamas war.

The proposal, which passed 320-91 with some bipartisan support, would codify the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a federal anti-discrimination law that bars discrimination based on shared ancestry, ethnic characteristics or national origin. It now goes to the Senate where its fate is uncertain.

Action on the bill was just the latest reverberation in Congress from the protest movement that has swept university campuses. Republicans in Congress have denounced the protests and demanded action to stop them, thrusting university officials into the center of the charged political debate over Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza. More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed since the war was launched in October, after Hamas staged a deadly terrorist attack against Israeli civilians.

If passed by the Senate and signed into law, the bill would broaden the legal definition of antisemitism to include the "targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity." Critics say the move would have a chilling effect on free speech throughout college campuses.

"Speech that is critical of Israel alone does not constitute unlawful discrimination," Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., said during a hearing Tuesday. "By encompassing purely political speech about Israel into Title VI's ambit, the bill sweeps too broadly."

Advocates of the proposal say it would provide a much-needed, consistent framework for the Department of Education to police and investigate the rising cases of discrimination and harassment targeted toward Jewish students.

"It is long past time that Congress act to protect Jewish Americans from the scourge of antisemitism on campuses around the country," Rep. Russell Fry, R-S.C., said Tuesday.

The expanded definition of antisemitism was first adopted in 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, an intergovernmental group that includes the United States and European Union states, and has been embraced by the State Department under the past three presidential administrations, including Joe Biden's

Previous bipartisan efforts to codify it into law have failed. But the Oct. 7 terrorist attack by Hamas mili-

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tants in Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza have reignited efforts to target incidents of antisemitism on college campuses.

Separately, Speaker Mike Johnson announced Tuesday that several House committees will be tasked with a wide probe that ultimately threatens to withhold federal research grants and other government support for universities, placing another pressure point on campus administrators who are struggling to manage pro-Palestinian encampments, allegations of discrimination against Jewish students and questions of how they are integrating free speech and campus safety.

The House investigation follows several high-profile hearings that helped precipitate the resignations of presidents at Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania. And House Republicans promised more scrutiny, saying they were calling on the administrators of Yale, UCLA and the University of Michigan to testify next month.

The House Oversight Committee took it one step further Wednesday, sending a small delegation of Republican members to an encampment at nearby George Washington University in the District of Columbia. GOP lawmakers spent the short visit criticizing the protests and Mayor Muriel Bowser's refusal to send in the Metropolitan Police Department to disperse the demonstrators.

Bowser on Monday confirmed that the city and the district's police department had declined the university's request to intervene. "We did not have any violence to interrupt on the GW campus," Bowser said, adding that police chief Pamela Smith made the ultimate decision. "This is Washington, D.C., and we are, by design, a place where people come to address the government and their grievances with the government."

It all comes at a time when college campuses and the federal government are struggling to define exactly where political speech crosses into antisemitism. Dozens of U.S. universities and schools face civil rights investigations by the Education Department over allegations of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Among the questions campus leaders have struggled to answer is whether phrases like "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" should be considered under the definition of antisemitism.

The proposed definition faced strong opposition from several Democratic lawmakers, Jewish organizations as well as free speech advocates.

In a letter sent to lawmakers Friday, the American Civil Liberties Union urged members to vote against the legislation, saying federal law already prohibits antisemitic discrimination and harassment.

"H.R. 6090 is therefore not needed to protect against antisemitic discrimination; instead, it would likely chill free speech of students on college campuses by incorrectly equating criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism," the letter stated.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, president of the centrist pro-Israel group J Street, said his organization opposes the bipartisan proposal because he sees it as an "unserious" effort led by Republicans "to continually force votes that divide the Democratic caucus on an issue that shouldn't be turned into a political football."

This Texas veterinarian helped crack the mystery of bird flu in cows

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

The first calls that Dr. Barb Petersen received in early March were from dairy owners worried about crows, pigeons and other birds dying on their Texas farms. Then came word that barn cats — half of them on one farm — had died suddenly.

Within days, the Amarillo veterinarian was hearing about sick cows with unusual symptoms: high fevers, reluctance to eat and much less milk. Tests for typical illnesses came back negative.

Petersen, who monitors more than 40,000 cattle on a dozen farms in the Texas Panhandle, collected samples from cats and cows and sent them to Dr. Drew Magstadt, a friend from college who now works at the veterinary diagnostic laboratory at Iowa State University.

The samples tested positive for a bird flu virus never before seen in cattle. It was the first proof that the bird flu, known as Type A H5N1, could infect cows. As of Wednesday, 36 U.S. herds had confirmed infections, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department.

"It was just a surprise," recalled Petersen. "It was just a little bit of disbelief."

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At the same time, on almost every farm with sick animals, Petersen said she saw sick people, too.

"We were actively checking on humans," Petersen said. "I had people who never missed work, miss work."

So far, two people in the U.S. have been confirmed to be infected with H5N1, most recently a Texas dairy worker linked to the cattle outbreak, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About two dozen people have been tested and about 100 people have been monitored since the virus appeared in cows, Dr. Demetre Daskalakis, a CDC respiratory diseases official, told reporters Wednesday.

Daskalakis said CDC has seen no unusual flu trends in areas with infected cows, but some experts wonder if anecdotal reports of sick workers mean more than one person caught the virus from the animals.

Petersen said some workers had symptoms consistent with flu: fever and body aches, stuffy nose or congestion. Some had conjunctivitis, the eye inflammation detected in the Texas dairy worker diagnosed with bird flu.

Dr. Gregory Gray, an infectious disease epidemiologist at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, has been taking samples from livestock and people on two Texas farms. On farms with confirmed cattle infections, there have also been reports of mild illnesses among the workers, he said.

His research has been difficult. Many workers are reluctant to be tested. That may be because they have limited access to health care or fear divulging private health information.

Without confirmation, no one knows if the sick workers were infected with the bird flu virus or something unrelated, Gray said.

"They seem to be linked in time and space, so one would say it's biologically plausible," said Gray.

Some of the workers who fell ill sought treatment and were offered oseltamivir, an antiviral drug sold under the brand name Tamiflu, Petersen said.

Some farm workers who were exposed to infected animals or people were offered the medication, CDC spokesman Jason McDonald said. State health officials are responsible for evaluating and providing treatment, according to federal guidelines.

Health officials in Texas provided Tamiflu to the person known to be infected with H5N1 and household members, plus two people on a second dairy farm who tested negative but were exposed to infected animals, said Chris Van Deusen, a spokesman for the Texas Department of State Health Services. He said he wasn't sure if others had been offered the antiviral.

Farmers have been hesitant to allow health officials onto their land, said Dr. Kay Russo, a Colorado veterinarian who consulted about the outbreak with Petersen.

"This particular disease is looked at as a scarlet letter," Russo said. "It has this stigma associated with it right now."

Russo called for wider testing of cattle, people and milk.

"We do not know what we do not measure," she said. "Unfortunately, the horse left the barn and took off a lot faster than we were able to mobilize."

Gray worries that a recent federal order requiring testing of all lactating dairy cows moving between states could hinder cooperation even further. All labs that conduct tests must report positive results to the Agriculture Department. But many farmers may simply decide against testing, hoping to outlast the outbreak, he said.

The reluctance of workers and farmers to allow testing is "greatly hampering" understanding of how the virus spreads, how large the outbreak is now and how quickly it may grow, Gray said.

"It's a negative, very negative, effect," he said.

Petersen said she understands workers' and farmers' fears. She praised the farmers who had been willing to let her gather the first samples that confirmed the outbreak and reflected on what the results could mean.

"You immediately think about the cows, the people that care for them and the families that have these farms," she said. "You're thinking about the big picture, long term. Your mind starts to go down that entire path of concern."

Biden administration weighing measures to help Palestinians bring family from region

COLLEEN LONG ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is weighing measures to help Palestinians living in the United States who want to bring family from the war-torn region.

“We are constantly evaluating policy proposals to further support Palestinians who are family members of American citizens and may want to come to the United States,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Wednesday.

Jean-Pierre said discussions were underway but had no further details on how procedures might work. The new measures would help those who are legal permanent residents or U.S. citizens and who have family in the region.

It’s difficult right now for anyone to get out of the Gaza Strip as the Israel-Hamas war continues, and more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to local health officials, around two-thirds of them children and women.

The discussion comes as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has maintained that Israel will move forward with a major military operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah even as the Biden administration has warned that such action would be catastrophic.

An estimated 1.5 million people—more than half of Gaza—have taken shelter in Rafah as the war shows no signs of ending.

If the U.S. were to move forward with some sort of measure to help the families of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, it would likely require coordination with Egypt. Early in the war, hundreds of Americans — as well as other foreign nationals trapped in Gaza — were able to escape via the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, which opened the crossing with some trepidation.

Egypt as well as other Arab nations worry that an Israeli offensive could lead to a displacement of Palestinians into Sinai, a scenario it views as unacceptable.

For Palestinians already in the U.S., the Biden administration has already agreed to what’s known as “deferred enforced departure,” an authority used at a president’s discretion.

The directive signed by Biden last month effectively allows Palestinian immigrants who would otherwise have to leave the United States to stay without the threat of deportation for at least 18 months.

United Methodists repeal longstanding ban on LGBTQ clergy

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — United Methodist delegates repealed their church’s longstanding ban on LGBTQ clergy with no debate on Wednesday, removing a rule forbidding “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from being ordained or appointed as ministers.

Delegates voted 692-51 at their General Conference — the first such legislative gathering in five years. That overwhelming margin contrasts sharply with the decades of controversy around the issue. Past General Conferences of the United Methodist Church had steadily reinforced the ban and related penalties amid debate and protests, but many of the conservatives who had previously upheld the ban have left the denomination in recent years, and this General Conference has moved in a solidly progressive direction.

Applause broke out in parts of the convention hall Wednesday after the vote. A group of observers from LGBTQ advocacy groups embraced, some in tears. “Thanks be to God,” said one.

The change doesn’t mandate or even explicitly affirm LGBTQ clergy, but it means the church no longer forbids them. It’s possible that the change will mainly apply to U.S. churches, since United Methodist bodies in other countries, such as in Africa, have the right to impose the rules for their own regions. The measure takes effect immediately upon the conclusion of General Conference, scheduled for Friday.

The consensus was so overwhelming that it was rolled into a “consent calendar,” a package of normally non-controversial measures.

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"It seemed like such a simple vote, but it carried so much weight and power, as 50 years of restricting the Holy Spirit's call on people's lives has been lifted," said Bishop Karen Oliveto, the first openly lesbian bishop in the United Methodist Church.

"People can live fully into their call without fear," said Oliveto, of the Mountain Sky Episcopal Area, which includes Colorado, Montana, Utah and Wyoming. "The church we've loved has found a home for us."

Also approved was a measure that forbids district superintendents — or regional administrators — from penalizing clergy for either performing a same-sex wedding or for refraining from performing one. It also prohibits superintendents from forbidding a church from hosting a same-sex wedding or requiring it to.

That measure further removes scaffolding around the various LGBTQ bans that have been embedded in official church law and policy. On Tuesday, delegates began taking such steps.

Delegates are also expected to vote soon on whether to replace the denomination's official Social Principles with a new document that no longer calls the "practice of homosexuality ... incompatible with Christian teaching" and that now defines marriage as between "two people of faith" rather than between a man and a woman.

The changes are historic in a denomination that has debated LGBTQ issues for more than half a century at its General Conferences, which typically meet every four years.

About 100 LGBTQ people and allies gathered outside the Charlotte Convention Center after the vote — many with rainbow-colored scarves and umbrellas — to celebrate, pray and sing praise songs accompanied by a drum.

Angie Cox, an observer from Ohio, said she has gone before her conference's board of ordained ministry six times but was "told no just because of the prohibition on LGBTQ clergy." She said Wednesday's vote "means I might be able finally to live fully into my calling."

The vote follows the departure of more than 7,600 American congregations — one-quarter of all UMC congregations in the U.S. — reflecting conservative dismay over the denomination not enforcing its LGBTQ bans. The departures took place between 2019 and 2023 under a temporary window enabling congregations to keep their properties under relatively favorable terms.

The conference on Wednesday voted formally to close that window, over the pleas of conservatives who wanted it extended, particularly since the original window only applied to U.S. and not international churches.

"To limit its function to the United States (portion of the) United Methodist Church, that is a form of disfavor for the church in Africa," said the Rev. Jerry Kulah, a delegate from Liberia.

Dixie Brewster, a delegate from the Great Plains Conference covering Kansas and Nebraska, called for a path for her fellow conservatives to disaffiliate smoothly. "We want a place to go peacefully," she said. "We will not be disruptive. I do love all, I love my homosexual friends. I just view the Scriptures a different way."

But others said the disaffiliation process of recent years tore apart congregations and families.

"We cannot continue to center the voices of distrust," said delegate Lonnie Chafin from Northern Illinois.

Some pointed out there are other ways that congregations and entire conferences can still disaffiliate — noting that the General Conference last week approved the departure of some churches in the former Soviet Union — though others say this is overly burdensome.

This week's votes could prompt departures of some international churches, particularly in Africa, where more conservative sexual values prevail and where same-sex activity is criminalized in some countries.

The conference actions represent "a serious drift away from the truth," Kulah said in an interview. "The church is now buying into culture. The Bible has not changed, but the church has changed."

Last week, the conference endorsed a regionalization plan that essentially would allow the churches of the United States the same autonomy as other regions of the global church. That change — which still requires local ratification — could create a scenario where LGBTQ clergy and same-sex marriage are allowed in the United States but not in other regions.

The church's 1972 General Conference approved a statement in its non-binding Social Principles that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching" — a phrase omitted in a proposed revision to the

Social Principles that is also headed for a conference vote this week.

The now-repealed ban on clergy who are "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" was originally enacted in 1984, when the conference also voted to require "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness."

The denomination had until recently been the third largest in the United States, present in almost every county. But its 5.4 million U.S. membership in 2022 is expected to drop once the 2023 departures are factored in.

The denomination also counts 4.6 million members in other countries, mainly in Africa, though earlier estimates have been higher.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene vows to force a vote next week on ousting House Speaker Mike Johnson

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene said Wednesday she would call a vote next week on ousting House Speaker Mike Johnson, forcing her colleagues to choose sides in a difficult showdown after Democratic leaders announced they would provide the votes to save the Republican speaker's job.

Speaking outside the Capitol, Greene ranted against Republican Party leaders at the highest levels and pushed back against their public entreaties, including from Donald Trump, to avoid another messy political fight so close to the November election. With her was Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., one of the few lawmakers to join her effort.

"We need leaders in the House of Representatives that are going to get this done," said Greene, R-Ga., holding up a red "MAGA" hat from Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign movement.

"Mike Johnson is not capable of that job," she said.

In pressing ahead next week, she said that "every member of Congress needs to take that vote and let the chips fall where they may."

The standoff with Greene, one of Trump's most enthusiastic supporters, risks throwing Republican control of the House into a fresh round of chaos as rank-and-file lawmakers will have to choose between ousting Johnson, R-La., as speaker or joining with Democrats to keep him on the job.

Johnson, in his own statement, said Greene's move was "wrong for the Republican Conference, wrong for the institution, and wrong for the country."

Democrats see in Johnson a potential partner, a staunch conservative who nevertheless is willing to lead his Republican Party away from the far-right voices obstructing the routine business of governing, including funding the government and, more recently, supporting Ukraine and other U.S. allies overseas.

The Democratic leader, New York Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, and his team issued a joint statement this week saying it was time to "turn the page" on the GOP chaos, announcing that the Democrats would vote to table Greene's motion to vacate the speaker's office, essentially ensuring Johnson is not evicted from office — at least on this attempt.

"From the very beginning of the Congress, House Republicans have visited chaos, dysfunction and extremism on the American people," Jeffries said Wednesday.

"Marjorie Taylor Green is the star of the show. The show is called Republicans Gone Wild," he added. "It is undermining the well-being of the American people and preventing us from delivering real and meaningful results on the issues that matter."

Johnson's public opponents are few, at this point, and less than the eight that it took to oust now-former Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., last fall in the first ever removal of sitting speaker from the powerful office that is second in the line of succession to the president. Just one other Republican, Rep. Paul Gosar of Arizona, has joined Greene and Massie in their effort.

Greene and Massie said they were giving their colleagues the weekend to weigh their options before calling for the vote on her motion to vacate next week. Or, they said, Johnson could simply resign, point-

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ing to the example of a previous speaker, Republican John Boehner of Ohio, who stepped aside in 2015 when hard-liners threatened to oust him.

They listed a list of complaints against Johnson, including his leadership in securing the aid for Ukraine. "Are you going to embrace Hakeem Jeffries like Mike Johnson has?" said Massie, before a poster-photo of Jeffries handing Johnson the gavel when the Republican first became speaker last fall.

"They've got a weekend to think about it, but more importantly, Mike Johnson has a weekend to think about it."

The turmoil has gripped a House already essentially at a standstill. Johnson has been unable to command his razor-thin majority to work together on party priorities and has been forced into the arms of Democrats for the votes needed to approve most big bills — and now, to keep his job.

Johnson had been elected by Republicans as a last-ditch consensus candidate after McCarthy's ouster, but he courted the far-right's ire when he led passage of the \$95 billion foreign aid package for Ukraine and U.S. allies that they oppose.

Trump has given a nod of support to Johnson, who dashed to the former president's Mar-a-Lago club in Florida last month to shore up backing.

Other Republican leaders, including Trump's hand-picked head of the Republican National Committee, Michael Whatley, have urged House Republicans to hold off the removal effort before the fall election that will determine which party controls the White House and Congress.

In a private meeting Tuesday, Whatley urged House Republicans to unite around their shared priorities. He delivered the same message later in the day to Greene, telling her that trying to remove Johnson was not helpful, according to a person familiar with the conversations who was not authorized to discuss them publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said he was pleased the threat of ousting the speaker did not appear to be gaining traction.

"I am relieved, as I think all of America is, that the chaos in the House will be discontinued," said McConnell, R-Ky.

Asked if Johnson should resign, McConnell said: "No of course not. I support Speaker Johnson and I think he's done an good job under extremely difficult circumstances."

Many House Republicans describe Greene's effort as distracting from other priorities.

"We just need to rip off the Band-Aid, get it over and get it done and move on," said Rep. Andy Ogles, R-Tenn.

While the Democratic leaders have said they would provide the votes to table Greene's motion when it comes forward, essentially shelving it for now, it is not clear that all Democratic lawmakers would join that effort.

At their own private meeting this week, some Democrats objected to helping Johnson, particularly after he helped lead Trump's legal challenges to the 2020 presidential election won by Democrat Joe Biden. Party leaders have said their support for sidelining Greene's resolution is not the same as a vote for Johnson.

Jeffries said each lawmaker will chose his or her own position in what is often referred to as a vote of conscience and that any future efforts by Republicans to try to remove the speaker will be taken under consideration, one step at a time.

News organizations have trust issues as they gear up to cover another election, a poll finds

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Even as many Americans say they learn about the 2024 election campaign from national news outlets, a disquieting poll reveals some serious trust issues.

About half of Americans, 53%, say they are extremely or very concerned that news organizations will report inaccuracies or misinformation during the election. Some 42% express worry that news outlets will

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use generative artificial intelligence to create stories, according to a poll from the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The poll found 47% of Americans also expressing serious concern that news outlets would report information that has not been confirmed or verified, and 44% worry that accurate information will be presented in a way that favors one side or another.

Half of Americans say they get election news always or frequently from national news outlets, a percentage that is higher among older respondents, the poll found.

"The level of engagement is good," said Michael Bolden, CEO of the American Press Institute. "The thing that's most concerning is that they're not sure they can actually trust the information."

Years of suspicion about journalists, much of it sown by politicians, is partly responsible, he said. People are also less familiar with how journalism works. The poll found about half of respondents say they have at least a moderate amount of confidence in the information they receive from either national or local news outlets when it comes to the 2024 elections, though only about 1 in 10 say they have a great deal of confidence.

"There may have been a time when people knew a journalist because one lived on their block," Bolden said. "The way the industry has been decimated, that's much less likely."

Simply putting out the news often isn't good enough anymore, he said. There's a growing disconnect between news organizations and communities that the outlets need to address, by helping to let people know what journalists do and how people reporting news are their friends and neighbors, he said.

Outlets should lean into a convenor role, bringing people together for newsworthy events, he said.

About half of U.S. adults say they follow the news about presidential elections closely, with older adults being more engaged. About two-thirds of Americans age 60 or older say they keep a close eye on presidential election news, compared with roughly one-third of those under age 30.

The same trend is seen with local and state election news. While the poll found that 46% of Americans age 60 or older say they follow news about local and state elections closely, only 16% of people age 18 to 29 said the same thing.

"As they transition to becoming older people, will they begin to care?" Bolden asked. "If they don't begin to care, what will that mean for local and state communities?"

Young people, those under age 30, are about as likely to get election news from social media or friends or family as they are to get it from national or local news outlets, the poll found. Black and Latino adults are somewhat more likely to express "a great deal" of confidence in the reliability of social media as a source of election news than white Americans are.

That's both a warning sign, since there is a lot more misinformation to be found on social media, and an opportunity for traditional outlets to make more of their work available this way, Bolden said.

About 6 in 10 Democrats say they get election news from national outlets at least frequently. That's more than the 48% of Republicans or 34% of independents, according to the poll. Republicans are more likely than Democrats and independents to express concern about inaccurate information or misinformation in news coverage during the upcoming elections. About 6 in 10 Republicans are concerned about this, compared with about half of Democrats.

Besides inaccuracies, many also expressed serious concern about election news that focuses too much on division or controversies or concentrates on who may win or lose — the horserace aspect of political coverage — rather than issues or the character of candidates.

Most Americans say that for them to make informed decisions about the 2024 state and local elections, they want national and local news outlets to highlight candidates' values or their different positions on key social issues. In each case, about three-quarters of U.S. adults say they would like "a lot" or "some" coverage of these topics.

'A step back in time': America's Catholic Church sees an immense shift toward the old ways

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — It was the music that changed first. Or maybe that's just when many people at the pale brick Catholic church in the quiet Wisconsin neighborhood finally began to realize what was happening.

The choir director, a fixture at St. Maria Goretti for nearly 40 years, was suddenly gone. Contemporary hymns were replaced by music rooted in medieval Europe.

So much was changing. Sermons were focusing more on sin and confession. Priests were rarely seen without cassocks. Altar girls, for a time, were banned.

At the parish elementary school, students began hearing about abortion and hell.

"It was like a step back in time," said one former parishioner, still so dazed by the tumultuous changes that began in 2021 with a new pastor that he only spoke on condition of anonymity.

It's not just St. Maria Goretti.

Across the U.S., the Catholic Church is undergoing an immense shift. Generations of Catholics who embraced the modernizing tide sparked in the 1960s by Vatican II are increasingly giving way to religious conservatives who believe the church has been twisted by change, with the promise of salvation replaced by casual indifference to doctrine.

The shift, molded by plummeting church attendance, increasingly traditional priests and growing numbers of young Catholics searching for more orthodoxy, has reshaped parishes across the country, leaving them sometimes at odds with Pope Francis and much of the Catholic world.

The changes are not happening everywhere. There are still plenty of liberal parishes, plenty that see themselves as middle-of-the-road. Despite their growing influence, conservative Catholics remain a minority.

Yet the changes they have brought are impossible to miss.

The progressive priests who dominated the U.S. church in the years after Vatican II are now in their 70s and 80s. Many are retired. Some are dead. Younger priests, surveys show, are far more conservative.

At St. Maria Goretti, once steeped in the ethos of Vatican II, many parishioners saw the changes as a requiem.

"I don't want my daughter to be Catholic," said Christine Hammond, whose family left the parish when the new outlook spilled into the church's school and her daughter's classroom. "Not if this is the Roman Catholic Church that is coming."

But this is not a simple story. Because there are many who welcome this new, old church.

They often stand out in the pews, with the men in ties and the women sometimes with the lace head coverings that all but disappeared from American churches more than 50 years ago. Large families signal adherence to the church's contraception ban, which most Americans have casually ignored.

Many yearn for Masses that echo with medieval traditions – more Latin, more incense, more Gregorian chants.

"We want this ethereal experience that is different from everything else in our lives," said Ben Rouleau, who until recently led St. Maria Goretti's young adult group, which saw membership skyrocket even as the parish shrank amid the turmoil.

If this movement emerged from anywhere, it might be a now-demolished Denver football stadium.

Some 500,000 people descended on Denver in 1993 for the Catholic festival World Youth Day.

Pope John Paul II, who was beloved both for his kindness and his sternness, confronted an American church shaped by decades of progressive change.

The church had grown increasingly liberal since Vatican II. Confession was rarely mentioned, Latin largely abandoned. Catholic social teaching on poverty suffused churches.

On some issues, John Paul II agreed with liberal-minded Catholics, speaking against capital punishment and for workers' rights. He preached relentlessly about forgiveness.

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But he was uncompromising on dogma.

Catholics "are in danger of losing their faith," he said in Denver, decrying abortion, drug abuse, and what he called "sexual disorders."

Across the nation, fervent young Catholics listened.

Yet even today, surveys show most American Catholics are far from orthodox. Most support abortion rights. The vast majority use birth control.

But increasingly, those Catholics are not in church.

In 1970, more than half of America's Catholics said they went to Mass at least once a week. By 2022, that had fallen to 17%, according to CARA, a research center affiliated with Georgetown University. Among millennials, it's just 9%.

As a result, those who remain in the church have outsized influence.

On the national level, conservatives increasingly dominate the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference and the Catholic intellectual world. They include everyone from the philanthropist founder of Domino's Pizza to six of the nine U.S. Supreme Court justices.

Then there's the priesthood.

Young priests driven by liberal politics and progressive theology, so common in the 1960s and 70s, have all but vanished.

In churches from Minnesota to California, liberal parishioners have protested changes introduced by new conservative priests. Each can seem like one more skirmish in the cultural and political battles tearing at America.

Looming above the American divide is Pope Francis, who has pushed the global church to be inclusive, even as he stands firm on dogma.

The orthodox movement has watched him nervously, angered by his more liberal views on issues like gay relationships and divorce. Some reject him entirely.

And the pope worries about America.

The U.S. church has "a very strong reactionary attitude," he said last year.

St. Maria Goretti is a well-kept island of Catholicism tucked into one of America's most liberal cities.

In 2021, a new priest, the Rev. Scott Emerson, was named pastor.

Parishioners watched the changes - some pleased, some uneasily. Emerson's sermons are not all fire-and-brimstone. He speaks often about forgiveness and compassion. But his tone shocked many longtime parishioners.

Protection is needed, he said in a 2023 service, from "the spiritual corruption of worldly vices." He has warned against critics - "the atheists, journalists, politicians, the fallen-away Catholics" - he said were undermining the church.

But those critics, he says, will be proven wrong.

"How many have laughed at the church, announcing that she was passe, that her days were over and that they would bury her?" he said in a 2021 Mass.

"The church," he said, "has buried every one of her undertakers."

Experts fear 'catastrophic' college declines thanks to botched FAFSA rollout

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The last thing standing between Ashnaelle Bijoux and her college dream is the FAFSA form — a financial aid application that's supposed to help students go to college, but is blocking her instead. She has tried to submit it over and over. Every time, it fails to go through.

"I feel overwhelmed and stressed out," said Bijoux, 19. She came close to tears the last time she tried the form. "I feel like I'm being held back."

Normally a time of celebration for high school seniors, this spring has been marred by the federal government's botched rollout of the new FAFSA application. By May 1, students usually know where they're

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headed to college in the fall. This year, most still haven't received financial aid offers. Three months before the start of fall classes, many don't know where they're going to college, or how they're going to pay for it.

"We're asking them to make probably one of the biggest financial decisions — and decisions that will have the biggest implications on their lives going forward — without all of the information," said Justin Draeger, president and CEO of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.

The FAFSA, or Free Application for Federal Student Aid, went through a massive overhaul that was supposed to make it simpler and shorter. But a series of blunders by the Education Department made it harder than ever, delaying college decisions by months and raising fears that hundreds of thousands of students will forgo college entirely.

Across the United States, the number of students who have successfully submitted the FAFSA is down 29% from this time last year, and it's even worse at schools with more low-income students, according to the National College Attainment Network.

The group's CEO, Kim Cook, warned members of Congress this month about a potentially "catastrophic" drop in college enrollments that would make the decreases of the pandemic seem mild.

For Bijoux, of Norwich, Connecticut, the FAFSA problems threaten to undermine the promise of higher education.

To her, college is a chance to seize the opportunities that weren't available to her mother, who immigrated from Haiti to the U.S. as an adult. Bijoux hopes to become a therapist and set a positive example for her three younger brothers.

If her FAFSA goes through, she should be eligible for enough financial aid to help with the \$ 13,000-a-year tuition at Southern Connecticut State University. If not, she might go to a local community college, but even that would require loans if she can't complete the FAFSA.

"That's why it hurts, because it's like you work so hard to go somewhere and do something and make something of yourself," Bijoux said. "I thought I would start at a four-year (college) and then work hard continuously, like I've been doing basically my whole life. But that's not the case."

The updated FAFSA form has one section filled out by students and another by their parents. But when Bijoux finishes her part, nothing shows up on her mom's online account. She keeps trying, but nothing seems to change.

Similar problems have been reported across the country, along with numerous other bugs that the Education Department has scrambled to fix. Families who call for customer service have faced long wait times or say the call center hung up on them.

It "drains all the momentum" from families working to send their children to college, especially those navigating the process for the first time, said Anne Zinn, a counselor at Norwich Free Academy, where Bijoux goes to school.

"I can only say so many times, 'Just be patient, just be patient,' before they throw their hands up and they're like, 'Why am I doing this? I'm just gonna go get a job,'" she said.

The rollout has attracted bipartisan criticism in Congress, and it's being investigated at the request of Republicans. Last week, Richard Cordray, the federal student loan chief who oversaw the FAFSA update, announced he's stepping down at the end of June.

For colleges, too, the delays pose a major threat.

Enrollment decreases like those being projected now could put many small colleges out of business, or necessitate deep cuts in staff. Some colleges are pushing for emergency relief just to stay afloat, said Angel Pérez, CEO of the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

"If they don't get checks from the federal government to basically get them through next year, they will not survive," Pérez said.

The FAFSA has been the linchpin of student financial aid for decades. It's used to determine eligibility for the federal Pell grant, a scholarship for low-income students, and it's required to receive federal student loans. Colleges and states also use FAFSA to distribute their own scholarships.

FAFSA had long been maligned for being tedious, difficult and intimidating to families without college experience. Congress passed legislation in 2020 meant to simplify the form. The Education Department

was ordered to reduce the number of questions from more than 100 to about 40, and change the formula to expand aid to more students.

Problems started piling up as soon as the new form went online in December, already months overdue.

The first applications were incorrectly processed using an outdated calculation for inflation. Later, a federal contractor miscalculated a different formula on more than 200,000 applications. Each mistake added to delays, leaving students waiting longer to hear anything about financial aid.

Even more worrisome is a misstep that blocked students from finishing the form if they have a parent without a Social Security number. Advocates say the system locked out hundreds of thousands of students who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents but whose parents are not.

The Education Department on Tuesday said it's giving those parents a new way to enter their tax information manually. But as recently as this week, some students said they were still blocked from submitting the form.

Federal education officials say they're addressing lingering bugs but making progress. More than 8 million student applications have now been processed and sent to colleges, the agency said, and new applications are being processed within three days.

Still, the wait is far from over. It usually takes weeks for schools to prepare financial aid offers. Some colleges have extended decision deadlines to give students more time to weigh their options. But some stuck to May 1, forcing students to choose a college — and make a nonrefundable payment to hold their spot — without knowing all their scholarship options.

In West Virginia, Gov. Jim Justice on Tuesday declared a state of emergency that allows students to receive state scholarships without having their FAFSA processed by the federal government. West Virginia has the lowest number of college graduates in the nation, and the state's high school FAFSA completion rates are currently down nearly 40%, said Justice, a Republican.

"Really and truly, a lot of kids are sitting on the sidelines ... wondering, 'Am I going to be able to go to college?'" he said during a news briefing.

In Baltimore, Camryn Carter is waiting to find out if he'll get a full ride to the University of Maryland or face tens of thousands of dollars in student loans.

A top student and captain of his baseball and wrestling teams, Carter sees college as a step up in life. He thinks back to the times in the grocery store line when he had to put items back on the shelf because his mom couldn't afford the bill. A college degree would give him the stability he didn't always have, the 18-year-old said.

But when he looks at tuition, it's intimidating. Along with Maryland, he's also considering McDaniel College, a private school in Maryland. If he enrolls there, he expects to borrow almost \$30,000 a year.

"I try to make the best decisions now so I can have a good future," he said. "I'm a little nervous that things won't work out. But I'm faithful."

Expanding clergy sexual abuse probe targets New Orleans Catholic church leaders

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Authorities have expanded an investigation of clergy sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in New Orleans to include senior church officials suspected of shielding predatory priests for decades and failing to report their crimes to law enforcement.

Louisiana State Police carried out a sweeping search warrant last week at the Archdiocese of New Orleans, seeking a long-secreted cache of church records and communications between local church leaders and the Vatican about the church's handling of clergy sexual abuse.

The search signaled a new phase of the investigation that will seek to determine what particular church leaders, including Archbishop Gregory Aymond and his predecessors, knew about claims that the warrant describes as "ignored and in many cases covered up."

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"The Archdiocese of New Orleans has been openly discussing the topic of sex abuse for over 20 years," Bill Kearney, an archdiocese spokesman, said in a statement. "In keeping with this, we also are committed to working with law enforcement in these endeavors."

The warrant contained several new details about the sex-trafficking investigation, including claims that some victims were sexually assaulted in a seminary swimming pool after being ordered to "skinny dip." Separately, the warrant says, predatory priests developed a system of sharing victims by giving them "gifts" that they were instructed to pass on to clergymen at other schools or churches.

"It was said that the 'gift' was a form of signaling to another priest that the person was a target for sexual abuse," state police investigator Scott Rodrigue wrote in an affidavit in support of the warrant.

The warrant sought an exhaustive range of personnel records, "files contained in any and all safes" and documents showing the extent to which the archdiocese continued supporting clergymen even after they were added to the so-called credibly accused list of suspected predators.

The warrant also confirmed a parallel FBI examination of clergy sexual abuse reported by The Associated Press nearly two years ago. That investigation has examined whether priests took children across state lines to molest them.

"No one and no institution is above the law, especially when we are talking about protecting children from the horrors of child sexual abuse," said Kathryn Robb, executive director of Child USA Advocacy, a nonprofit that advocates on behalf of child sexual abuse accusers. "This warrant is the necessary muscle of the criminal system to protect children."

Many of the most explosive church records surfaced in a flood of sexual abuse lawsuits that drove the archdiocese to seek Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection four years ago. The documents chronicle years of abuse claims, interviews with accused clergy and a pattern of church leaders transferring problem priests, but they have been shielded under a sweeping confidentiality order in the bankruptcy case that has long hampered the state and federal investigations.

"We have been forced, against our own professional obligations, to keep them secret," said attorneys Richard Trahan, Soren Gisleson and John Denenea, who represent the accusers.

The Vatican did not respond to a request for comment Wednesday and rarely weighs in on developments in local clergy abuse cases. But for decades, the message from Rome to local church leaders was to keep clergy abuse files in the secret archives.

To date, the Vatican still has not required abuse cases to be reported to police around the world, though it now says local church leaders should comply with whatever civil reporting laws are in place. In addition, as the clergy abuse scandal has continued to cause a credibility crisis for the Catholic hierarchy worldwide, Pope Francis in 2019 removed the top-level secrecy that covered abuse cases, known as the pontifical secret.

Prior to that, local church leaders regularly invoked the pontifical secret as a reason to resist criminal subpoenas. In theory, the removal of the secret removed any official barrier to such cooperation.

In New Orleans, the search could deepen the legal peril for church leaders, exposing them to potential state court prosecutions even as the U.S. Justice Department has struggled to identify federally prosecutable crimes related to clergy sexual abuse.

Last year, an Orleans Parish grand jury indicted Lawrence Hecker, a now-92-year-old disgraced priest, on charges accusing him of sexually assaulting a teenage boy in 1975 — an extraordinary prosecution that prompted the broader search of the archdiocese last week.

Hecker has pleaded not guilty to counts of rape, kidnapping, aggravated crime against nature and theft. He is accused of choking the teen unconscious under the guise of performing a wrestling move and sexually assaulting him.

The archdiocese failed to report Hecker's admissions to law enforcement while permitting him to work around children until he quietly left the ministry in 2002. Church officials reassigned Hecker even after he was sent to a psychiatric facility in Pennsylvania and "diagnosed as a pedophile," the warrant says.

"Hecker was not the only member of the archdiocese sent to receive psychiatric testing based on allegations of child sexual abuse," Rodrigue wrote in the warrant.

The age of the Hecker case presents legal and evidentiary hurdles for prosecutors, who also face the political sensitivity of prosecuting a longtime clergyman in heavily Catholic New Orleans. Many predator priests have escaped criminal consequences in Louisiana for those reasons, making the scope of last week's search even more notable.

One high-profile exception came in 2019 in the case of George F. Brignac, a longtime deacon and school-teacher charged with sexually assaulting a then-altar boy in the 1970s. Brignac died in 2020 while awaiting trial at the age of 85. He had pleaded not guilty.

Litigation involving Brignac turned up thousands of still-secret emails documenting behind-the-scenes public relations work that New Orleans Saints executives did for the archdiocese in 2018 and 2019 to contain fallout from clergy abuse scandals.

Rollout of transgender bathroom law sows confusion among Utah public school families

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah public schools have been rushing to prepare students and teachers as the state starts cracking down Wednesday on any school found not enforcing new bathroom restrictions for transgender people.

Residents and visitors are required under state law to use bathrooms and changing rooms in government-owned buildings that correspond with their sex assigned at birth. Although the law took effect when Republican Gov. Spencer Cox signed it Jan. 30, it was not widely enforced before a key compliance mechanism began this week. Schools and government agencies now face steep fines of up to \$10,000 per day for each violation.

The rollout has been roiled in confusion for Utah families amid a patchwork of plans that differ across districts. Their experiences are mirrored in many of the other 10 Republican-led states with similar restroom restrictions. Enforcement of one of those laws — in Idaho — has been put on hold by a court.

Utah state Rep. Kera Birkeland, a Morgan Republican and the bill's primary sponsor, has argued it's a necessary safeguard against people who might claim they're transgender to infiltrate a gendered space. She pitched the law as a safety measure to protect the privacy of women and girls without citing evidence of threats or assaults by trans people against them. Trans residents say she has used a hypothetical to justify exclusion.

Legislators left it up to each school district to decide how it will communicate the changes. Some have held classroom presentations. Others have sent home fact sheets or met privately with families who might be affected.

Despite their different approaches, the state's largest school districts say they share a common goal: make affected individuals feel safe while handling any issues in-house.

Principals in the Granite, Alpine, Davis and Salt Lake City school districts have been trained to address bathroom concerns on an individual basis, with discretion and empathy for LGBTQ+ students, spokespeople for the districts said.

The law requires schools to create "privacy plans" for those who do not feel comfortable using group bathrooms, but Graham Beeton, 11, said such accommodations can be isolating. The Salt Lake City fifth grader, who uses he/they pronouns, said he feels loved by his classmates and does not understand why the government cares which bathroom he uses.

"It hurts me," Beeton said. "I might be uncomfortable going into that restroom, so I want to go into a different one, but the law doesn't say that I can."

Trans people in Utah may only use facilities that align with their gender identity if they've legally changed the gender on their birth certificate and undergone certain gender-affirming surgeries, which are rarely performed on minors.

Draped in an LGBTQ+ pride flag with rainbows painted on his cheeks, Beeton beckoned his classmates

to a block party held just across the street from Bonneville Elementary School on Monday afternoon. With teachers in all Salt Lake City schools set to present about the bathroom law, his mom and many other parents pulled their kids out early and threw a party in support of affected students and staff.

Among them was Mia Norman, an emergency room technician and the mother of twins, who said she did not understand how the law could realistically be enforced on children. She worried kids and their parents might be encouraged to snitch on school administrators and vulnerable students.

Norman and other parents said the rollout this week has led to tough conversations with their kids about how politics can impact their lives at a young age.

Fourth grade students Lila and Sophia left the presentation confused about why the law existed and worried that it might make some of their peers feel bad about themselves. They were told to approach a teacher with any questions about which bathroom they should use and to report instances of bullying, according to a copy of the presentation obtained by The Associated Press.

"There shouldn't be a law in place to tell people who they can be or to stop feeling how they want to feel," said 10-year-old Lila Hathaway.

Bree Taylor-Lof, a transgender teacher, left school on the verge of tears Monday after having to present to students about a policy that affected them personally. They fought to keep their emotions in check while fielding questions from confused fifth graders who did not understand why the law had been passed.

Realizing that the restrictions would affect their teacher, many of the kids gave Taylor-Lof hugs and handwritten cards on their way out the door.

"Our youth today have a keen sense for justice and inclusion and looking out for each other," Taylor-Lof said. "That was clear in the concern that they expressed about their fellow peers, and for me."

Student protests take over some campuses.

At others, attention is elsewhere

By STEVE LeBLANC and NICK PERRY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Boston College students held a protest rally against the Israel-Hamas war last week.

Bullhorns were banned, lest the noise disturb studying for finals. Tents weren't allowed. Students who'd been arrested at other Boston campus protests were barred. After an allotted hour, the students went quietly back to their rooms.

A student protest movement has washed over the country since police first tried to end an encampment at Columbia University in New York nearly two weeks ago. But while there have been fiery rhetoric and tumultuous arrests on high-profile campuses from New York to Los Angeles, millions of students across the country have continued with their daily routines of working their way through school, socializing and studying for exams.

The protests are demonstrating wide differences among Americans in 2024, even for groups that have tended to unite during divisive times such as the 1960s.

Take Boston, the city most identified with American higher education and a lens onto the diversity of student bodies' reactions to the Israel-Hamas war.

Students have set up encampments on at least five campuses, including Northeastern University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. But calm has prevailed elsewhere in Boston.

"It's just not the vibe at this school," said Emmett Carrier, a junior studying biology at Boston College, a Jesuit institution with an enrollment of 15,000. "I don't think they're as committed to it here as they are at other schools."

Boston College faculty and students had addressed the Israel-Hamas war in class discussions, through a faculty vigil and at a rally last week, "all of which were civil and respectful," Boston College spokesperson Jack Dunn wrote in an email.

"It's an atmosphere where students are very polite," said Brinton Lykes, a professor of community psychology. "They will discuss things, debate things intellectually, but they are shockingly rule-bound."

Juliana Parisi, a sophomore who attended the rally, said she thinks a lot of students who want to protest are afraid of the repercussions but also believes many students don't want to get engaged.

"I do think that there is a good amount of apathy on campus," she said.

It's worth remembering that most campuses don't have encampments, said Robert Cohen, a professor at New York University who has studied the history of U.S. student protests. Even at those that do, the number of students involved is often not enough to fill even a single large lecture hall, he noted.

A day before the Boston College rally last week, Lykes helped organize a faculty vigil where speakers talked about grieving those who had died in the conflict and the history of events in the Middle East. She said there were uniformed and plainclothes police at the event. She got requests to check university identification and to make people leave backpacks outside and found some of the demands ridiculous, she said.

At Boston University, a sprawling urban campus not far from Fenway Park with a student enrollment of more than 35,500, students have avoided encampments but set out chairs to represent Israeli hostages and held die-ins to bring attention to those killed in Gaza. On Wednesday, many students at the school were hunkered down over laptops in study halls and cafeterias gearing up for the end of the school year and looming finals.

"We have our finals coming up next week," said Matt Przekop, a junior studying engineering. "People, if they were passionate, they wouldn't really let this bar them from protesting."

Brandon Colin O'Byrne, a freshmen who is also studying engineering, said students debate the issue but aren't sitting in tents on campus.

"We have the school involved, we have students involved, we have individual groups involved," he said. "We also have tension" between Jewish and Palestinian students, but it generates productive debates, he added.

A protest at Emerson College in downtown Boston ended when police forcibly removed protesters, arresting more than 100. Another protest at Northeastern was also broken up by police, who detained more than 100 protesters who had created a tent encampment on campus.

Other local universities have allowed protests and tent encampments, including MIT, Harvard and Tufts University, although officials at some of the schools cautioned that the protests can't go on indefinitely. At Harvard, school officials opted to lock the gates to Harvard Yard — where protesters set up camp — to all but those with school IDs.

One thing that has remained consistent over decades of student protests, Cohen said, is that they are unpopular with the public. But the campus movement is raising public awareness of the Israel-Hamas war.

Cohen said he believes the protests will likely simmer down over the summer, as students return home. They could easily kick off again as the U.S. election season progresses, he said.

Northwestern University's deal with student protesters offers example of successful negotiations

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — For five days, the shouts of student protesters and supporters rang out from Northwestern University's Deering Meadow as they joined demonstrations against the Israel-Hamas war unfolding on college campuses nationwide.

But the meadow on the suburban Chicago campus fell silent hours after student organizers and the school announced an agreement late Monday to curb protest activity in return for the reestablishment of an advisory committee on university investments and other commitments.

By Tuesday, only two unoccupied tents remained, surrounded by abandoned folding chairs, cases of bottled water and other supplies.

By quickly defusing the protests in Evanston and avoiding the longer standoffs that happened on other campuses, the agreement at Northwestern offered an example of successful negotiations between anti-war demonstrators and administrators. Brown University announced a similar deal on Tuesday, while administrators at Johns Hopkins University focused talks on limiting student protests to daytime hours.

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Still, the arrangement drew dissent from both sides.

Some who are protesting the war in Gaza condemned the Northwestern agreement as a failure to stick to the original demands of student organizers. Some supporters of Israel said the deal represented “cowardly” capitulation to protesters.

The deal lets protests continue through June 1 but bars all tents except one for aid supplies. The pact also prevents people without ties to Northwestern from participating and requires school permission to use loudspeakers or similar devices, according to copies made public by the school and the student organizers.

University administrations across the country have used a variety of strategies in response to the protests. In some places, police have arrested dozens of people. Elsewhere campus leaders have sought to negotiate over protest strategies while allowing them to continue.

Northwestern said the terms include penalties for students who fail to comply, including suspension.

“This agreement represents a sustainable and de-escalated path forward, and enhances the safety of all members of the Northwestern community while providing space for free expression that complies with University rules and policies,” said a statement from President Michael Schill, Provost Kathleen Hagerty and Vice President for Student Affairs Susan Davis.

The American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League Midwest criticized the university, arguing that the deal “succumbed to the demands of a mob” and did little to make Jewish students on campus feel more secure.

The pro-Palestinian tent encampments began sweeping across the country after a crackdown at Columbia University when police arrested more than 100 protesters on April 18. On Tuesday night, Columbia called police back again to clear protesters who had occupied a campus building.

Around the country, protest organizers at U.S. universities say they are building a peaceful movement aimed at defending Palestinian rights and protesting the war. One of several groups that planned the anti-war protests at Northwestern was Jewish Voice for Peace.

In Instagram posts about the deal, protest organizers said the reestablishment of the advisory committee is a first step toward divestment — an original demand that the school stop investing in all companies profiting from the war.

University representatives did not reply to messages seeking more information on the advisory committee’s role or the history of a similar body at Northwestern. The agreement said the committee would include students, faculty and staff.

The protest organizers also noted Northwestern’s commitment to build a house for Muslim student activities and to raise money for scholarships going to Palestinian undergraduates.

But the organizers seemed to anticipate disappointment. They said they view the deal as just a beginning and that they will continue to pressure administrators.

“We have seen incredible momentum grow in support of our movement in these past few days and will not let it go to waste,” a post on the NU Divestment Coalition’s Instagram account read. “We consider this to be a prime moment to take stock, recharge, plan, and build power. But we have much work ahead of us and we will not stop now.”

Eden Melles, a graduate student among the Northwestern protest organizers, said Tuesday that reestablishing the advisory committee is “huge,” but she also understands criticism of the agreement.

“I know that a lot of students and people, community members, are disappointed in this agreement,” Melles said. “But I just want to say that there’s things in this agreement that I think a lot of Palestinian, Arab, Muslim students have been fighting for for a long time. But this agreement by no means, you know, suggests that this movement is dying or that we’re stopping.”

She said organizers on each campus have to make their own decisions when negotiating with administrators, not follow an exact model created by another school.

Brown University on Tuesday became the second school to announce a deal aiming to end student protests.

Administrators and student organizers of the protest on the Providence, Rhode Island, campus said President Christina Paxson had committed to an October vote by the school’s governing board on the

students' divestment proposal. Protest organizers removed their tents Tuesday.

In Baltimore, leaders of Johns Hopkins University announced Tuesday that they had reached an agreement with student protesters who started setting up an encampment Monday evening. After several hours of discussion, they said, students agreed to clear the encampment and resume protesting only during daytime hours.

"Our conversations were frank and constructive," university President Ron Daniels and Provost Ray Jayawardhana wrote in a message to the school community. "We are immensely relieved at this peaceful and productive resolution."

But protesters with the group Hopkins Justice Collective released statements saying their demonstration continued through the night and wouldn't end "until demands are met."

"We are not letting Johns Hopkins shut down our encampment," they wrote in a social media post. "We are still here."

Nearly 50 years later, Asian American and Pacific Islander month features revelry and racial justice

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

It has been almost 50 years since the U.S. government established that Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders and their accomplishments should be recognized annually across the nation.

What started as just one week in May has evolved over the decades into a monthlong tribute of events in cities big and small. The nature of celebrations also evolved. Asian American and Pacific Islander or Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month is not just about showcasing festive fare like food and fashion, but hard subjects like grief and social justice. The rise of anti-Asian hate during the pandemic only heightened that effort.

"I think the visibility and the level that the increased participation of organizations in Asian Pacific Heritage Month activities is also an indication of the increasing voice of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in civic life more generally," said Karen Umemoto, director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. "And also an indication of the spaces that we've come to collectively enter to be able to create those."

Indeed, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebrations are not relegated just to ethnic enclaves or culturally-specific venues. Across the U.S. this year, events are planned at public libraries, parks and museums either highlighting a specific Asian culture or a myriad of them.

HOW DID AAPI HERITAGE MONTH START?

Many credit the observance's origin to Jeanie Jew, a co-founder of the congressional Asian-Pacific staff caucus. In 1977, the Chinese American shared a moving story with New York Republican Rep. Frank Horton about how her grandfather had helped build the transcontinental railroad in the 1800s and then was killed amid anti-Asian unrest.

Jew believed Asians should appreciate their heritage and "Americans must know about the contributions and histories of the Asian-Pacific American experience," Horton said in 1992, according to congressional archives. At that time, Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month had already been instituted. Yet, Asian Americans were described as the fastest growing racial group.

Horton and California Democratic Rep. Norm Mineta proposed President Jimmy Carter issue a proclamation that the first week of May be "Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week." Hawaii Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga, both Democrats, brought up a similar bill in the Senate.

WHY IS IT IN MAY?

May was chosen because of two significant events. The first Japanese immigrants to the U.S. arrived on May 7, 1843. Then on May 19, 1869, the final spike for the transcontinental railroad track, in which Chinese laborers played a crucial role, was embedded.

Umemoto recalls hearing talk of Asian Pacific Heritage Week as a college student. But it wasn't something that was mainstream.

"I think it was more of a kind of cultural celebration in the early days," she said. "And so a lot of student

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groups, I remember as doing programming around the different histories, cultural traditions and issues in the community.”

In May 1990, President George H.W. Bush expanded the designation to the entire month. In 2009, President Barack Obama changed the name to Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Now, President Joe Biden’s administration refers to it as Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

“As artists and journalists, doctors and engineers, business and community leaders, and so much more, AA and NHPI peoples have shaped the very fabric of our Nation and opened up new possibilities for all of us,” Biden said in an official Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders Heritage Month proclamation issued on Tuesday.

The White House will hold a celebration in Washington on May 13 to commemorate 25 years since the inception of the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.

HOW HAS IT GROWN IN SIGNIFICANCE?

Asian American and Pacific Islander advocacy groups have long used the month as a platform to bring resources to underserved communities and educate the public. But, the one-two punch of COVID-19 and assaults on Asian people in the U.S. really gave some a new appreciation for the heritage month’s purpose.

Pre-pandemic, Amber Reed, of Montclair, New Jersey, didn’t really think about Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. A Korean-American adoptee who grew up one of few Asian children in rural Michigan, she said she didn’t feel a strong connection to her Asian ancestry. That changed after the March 2021 Atlanta spa shootings that left eight dead, including six Asian women.

“Certainly it jolted me out of thinking that my family could be safe and that we could just sort of muddle through without sort of reckoning with some of the very vicious currents of racism in our culture,” Reed said. “And I take no pride in having needed that moment to wake me up.”

In response to the shootings, Reed and around 50 others started the nonprofit AAPI New Jersey — originally AAPI Montclair. Their advocacy began with surveys of local schools and other institutions’ recognition of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

The group then quickly organized the Lantern Festival for Justice and Remembrance for May. The Chinese tradition of lighting lanterns became a vehicle to honor victims of hate or injustice, Reed said. The event is now in its fourth year.

“I think one thing Asian cultures do so well is provide these rituals, including for collective grief,” said Reed, who still finds it surreal that the group continues to grow.

WHAT EVENTS MARK THE MONTH?

The variety of subjects and cultures feted during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month has flourished. There are events happening this month that include more narrow topics, such as a panel on the Asian American Church in Pasadena, California. There’s an Asian Comedy Fest in New York City. And in Wisconsin, the state will celebrate May 14 as Hmong-Lao Veterans Day, which was signed into law in 2021. Thousands of Hmong-Lao soldiers fought alongside U.S. forces during the Vietnam war. Many Hmong and Laotian families resettled in Wisconsin.

These heritage month celebrations are helping to erode the notion that the whole population is a monolith, Umemoto said.

“I think it’s important for people to visibly see from a wide range of groups that fall under the category Asian American and Pacific Islanders. There are over 70 different ethnic and national groups and over 100 languages spoken within those communities,” Umemoto said. “And they’re very different.”

The UN's nuclear watchdog chief will visit Iran next week as concerns rise about uranium enrichment

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog will travel to Iran next week as Tehran's nuclear program enriches uranium a step away from weapons-grade levels and international oversight remains limited, officials said Wednesday.

Rafael Mariano Grossi's visit will coincide with a nuclear energy conference Iran will hold in the central city of Isfahan, which hosts sensitive enrichment sites and was targeted in an apparent Israeli attack on April 19. It also coincides with wider regional tensions in the Mideast inflamed by the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, including attacks on shipping by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

The director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency will visit Iran on May 6 and 7, the Vienna-based agency said. It did not elaborate on his schedule or his meetings.

Iranian state television has described the conference in Isfahan as an "international conference on nuclear sciences and techniques." The broadcaster quoted Mohammed Eslami, the head of Iran's civilian nuclear program, as saying on Wednesday that Grossi will attend the conference and meet with him and other officials.

"I am sure that the ambiguities will be resolved and we can strengthen our relations with the agency within the framework of safeguards and" the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Eslami said.

Tensions have only grown between Iran and the IAEA since then-President Donald Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. Since then, Iran has abandoned all limits the deal put on its program and now has enough enriched uranium for "several" nuclear bombs if it chose to build them, Grossi has warned.

IAEA surveillance cameras have been disrupted, while Iran has barred some of the agency's most experienced inspectors. Iranian officials have increasingly threatened they could pursue atomic weapons, particularly after launching an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel last month.

Iran has always denied seeking nuclear weapons, saying its atomic program is for purely civilian purposes. However, U.S. intelligence agencies and the IAEA say Iran had an organized military nuclear program up until 2003.

The latest American intelligence community assessment says Iran "is not currently undertaking the key nuclear weapons-development activities necessary to produce a testable nuclear device."

Today in History: May 2, Nelson Mandela claims victory in first democratic South Africa elections

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 2, the 123rd day of 2024. There are 243 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 2, 1994, Nelson Mandela claimed victory in the wake of South Africa's first democratic elections; President F.W. de Klerk acknowledged defeat.

On this date:

In 1863, during the Civil War, Confederate Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson was accidentally wounded by his own men at Chancellorsville, Virginia; he died eight days later.

In 1890, the Oklahoma Territory was organized.

In 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Buck v. Bell*, upheld 8-1 a Virginia law allowing the forced sterilization of people to promote the "health of the patient and the welfare of society."

In 1932, Jack Benny's first radio show, sponsored by Canada Dry, made its debut on the NBC Blue Network.

In 1941, General Mills began shipping its new cereal, "Cheerioats," to six test markets. (The cereal was

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later renamed "Cheerios.")

In 1970, jockey Diane Crump became the first woman to ride in the Kentucky Derby; she finished in 15th place aboard Fathom.

In 1972, a fire at the Sunshine silver mine in Kellogg, Idaho, claimed the lives of 91 workers who succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. Longtime FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover died in Washington at age 77.

In 1997, Tony Blair, whose new Labour Party crushed John Major's long-reigning Conservatives in a national election, became at age 43 Britain's youngest prime minister in 185 years.

In 2005, Pfc. Lynndie England, the young woman pictured in some of the most notorious Abu Ghraib photos, pleaded guilty at Fort Hood, Texas, to mistreating prisoners. (A judge later threw out the plea agreement; England was then convicted in a court-martial and received a three-year sentence, of which she served half.)

In 2010, record rains and flash floods in Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee caused more than 30 deaths and submerged the Grand Ole Opry House stage.

In 2011, al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, who'd been killed hours earlier in a raid by elite American forces at his Pakistan compound, was buried at sea.

In 2012, former NFL star Junior Seau (SAY'-ow) was found shot to death at his home in Oceanside, California, a suicide.

In 2013, Jeff Hanneman, a founding member of heavy metal band Slayer, died in Hemet, California at age 49.

In 2017, Michael Slager, a white former police officer whose killing of Walter Scott, an unarmed Black man running from a traffic stop, was captured on cellphone video, pleaded guilty to federal civil rights charges in Charleston, South Carolina. (Slager was sentenced to 20 years in prison.)

In 2018, attorney Rudy Giuliani said President Donald Trump had reimbursed his personal lawyer for \$130,000 in hush money paid to a porn actress days before the 2016 presidential election, comments that appeared to contradict Trump's past claims that he didn't know the source of the money.

In 2022, a draft was leaked of a Supreme Court ruling throwing out the landmark Roe v. Wade abortion rights ruling that had stood for a half century. The court cautioned that the draft was not final. (The decision would be released in essentially the same form on June 24.)

In 2023, the Biden administration said it would send 1,500 active-duty troops to the U.S.-Mexico border ahead of an expected migrant surge following the end of coronavirus pandemic-era restrictions.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Engelbert Humperdinck is 88. Actor-activist Bianca Jagger is 79. Country singer R.C. Bannon is 79. Actor David Suchet (SOO'-shay) is 78. Singer-songwriter Larry Gatlin is 76. Rock singer Lou Gramm (Foreigner) is 74. Actor Christine Baranski is 72. Singer Angela Bofill is 70. Fashion designer Donatella Versace is 69. Actor Brian Tochi is 65. Movie director Stephen Daldry is 64. Actor Elizabeth Berkley is 62. Country singer Ty Herndon is 62. Actor Mitzi Kapture is 62. Commentator Mika Brzezinski is 57. Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb is 56. Rock musician Todd Sucherman (Styx) is 55. Wrestler-turned-actor Dwayne Johnson (AKA The Rock) is 52. Former soccer player David Beckham is 49. Rock singer Jeff Gutt (goot) (Stone Temple Pilots) is 48. Actor Jenna Von Oy is 47. Actor Kumail Nanjiani is 46. Actor Ellie Kemper is 44. Actor Robert Buckley is 43. Actor Gaius (GY'-ehs) Charles is 41. Pop singer Lily Allen is 39. Olympic gold medal figure skater Sarah Hughes is 39. Actor Thomas McDonnell is 38. Actor Kay Panabaker is 34. NBA All-Star Paul George is 34. Princess Charlotte of Cambridge is 9.