

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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.

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

“Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.”

-PAUL BOESE



## Sunday, May 5

High School Baseball at Bryant: O-R/R/A at 2 p.m., Hamlin at 4 p.m.  
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m., senior milestones and Faith Forever scholarships; choir singing; Last Day of Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's 9 a.m. (Graduate Recognition), at Zion, 11 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship with communion: At Conde, 8:30 a.m.; and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.; Missions Taco Bar, 11:30 a.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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## US Congressman Indicted

US Rep. Henry Cuellar (D, TX-28) and his wife have been indicted on federal bribery and conspiracy charges in connection with benefiting an oil and gas company owned by the government of Azerbaijan and a bank in Mexico. The indictment was returned by a grand jury Tuesday and unsealed by the Department of Justice Friday.

The 68-year-old Cuellar and his wife, Imelda, are accused of accepting nearly \$600K between December 2014 and at least November 2021. The payments were allegedly laundered through front companies and intermediaries before ending up in shell companies owned by Imelda, the DOJ said. In exchange for the money, Cuellar allegedly agreed to influence US foreign policy in favor of Azerbaijan and influence legislative activity in favor of the bank in Mexico, among other promises. Cuellar maintains he and his wife are innocent. See all charges here.

The indictment comes more than two years after Cuellar's home and office in Laredo, Texas, were raided by FBI agents as part of an investigation into ties between Azerbaijan and US businessmen. Cuellar currently seeks his 11th term as a congressman.

Heavy rains in Houston area cause flooding, trigger evacuations.

Officials of Harris County, where Houston is located, have ordered residents who live along the East Fork of the San Jacinto River to evacuate due to ongoing flooding and heavy rainfall. More than 9 inches of rain have fallen in the area since Thursday. The river was expected to rise to 77 feet above sea level Friday; the river is typically 45 to 50 feet above sea level. See photos and videos here.

## US job growth slows in April, economy adds 175,000 jobs.

The nonfarm payroll growth for April is below the 240,000 jobs economists had expected and down from 315,000 in March. The unemployment rate rose to 3.9%. Average hourly earnings rose 0.2% month-over-month and 3.9% year-over-year, both below economist estimates. Analysts say the data show the labor market is cooling, potentially paving the way for interest rate cuts in late summer.

## Canadian police arrest three suspects in killing of Sikh activist.

The three men face charges of first-degree murder for allegedly being involved in last year's killing of Sikh Canadian Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was shot outside a Sikh cultural center in British Columbia. Canadian officials previously accused India of being linked to the alleged assassination, which India denies. Nijjar was involved in a movement to establish an independent Sikh homeland in India. See our previous write-up here.

## President Joe Biden presents Medal of Freedom to 19 recipients.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the nation's highest honor given to civilians. This year's recipients include NASA astronaut Ellen Ochoa, who was the first Hispanic woman in space; Olympic swimmer Katie Ledecky, who is the most decorated women's swimmer; and actress Michelle Yeoh, who in 2023 became the first Asian to win an Academy Award for best actress. See the full list here.

## Trump's former senior aide Hope Hicks testifies in hush money trial.

Friday concluded the 11th day of former President Donald Trump's criminal trial in Manhattan. Hick's testimony revolved around the Trump campaign's response to allegations about Trump and women, including a 2016 Wall Street Journal article on a hush money deal involving former Playboy model Karen McDougal.

## China successfully launches mission to the far side of the moon.

China, which aims to put astronauts on the moon by 2030, launched its Chang'e-6 lunar probe (named after a Chinese mythical moon goddess) Friday to collect samples from the moon's less-explored region. The 53-day mission, if successful, would make China the first nation in the world to retrieve samples from the side of the moon that faces away from Earth.

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## Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Kayla P. from Seattle, Washington.

"At my sister's graduation recently, there were no assigned seats. My family had a very large party and was trying to sit together. I found myself the lone seat-saver in a sea of thousands trying to also secure their spots. I was on the phone with my mom, trying to get everyone to find me ASAP, and a man sitting with his family in the seats behind me must've seen how stressed I was. He offered to help save the seats with me, even spreading his jacket out to ensure we kept as many as possible. I struggle with anxiety in social situations, and this complete stranger stepped in to help alleviate some of that in a moment of need. I'm truly grateful."



## Wynella Abeln retires from cutting hair after doing it for half a century

Wynella Abeln has been cutting hair for half a century, but on May 2, she officially retired from the salon business.

Wynella started her career by going to Stewarts School of Hairstyling in Aberdeen and graduating in June 1974. She immediately began to work at Koffler's Beauty Salon in Groton two days a week.

Wynella worked at Koffler's for five years and purchased that business in April of 1979. She did not have to move the equipment very far as it was right across the street. Abeln's Beauty Shop was open Tuesday through Friday. In June of that year her son was born and Phyllis Koffler worked a week for her.

As the years went by she decided to take a part time job at Dakota Beauty Supply in Aberdeen on Mondays and Wednesdays while continuing in her salon at home three days a week. After five years in Aberdeen she decided to quit, as her three children preferred she was home. At the same time she had been approached by the Groton nursing home administrator about doing hair at the nursing home. She accepted that position on October 1, 1997. Wynella was there until March 2020 and because of Covid rules she was no longer allowed because hair was not considered an essential service. She then resigned in July 2020 after 22 ½ years at the nursing home.

As some of her clients got older and were unable to stay at home by themselves they moved to an independent living center in Groton. There they received more assistance with their everyday tasks, so she followed them there.

In September of 1985, Wynella decided to get a tanning bed. She went to the bank in Groton for a loan, but they turned her down, citing it was too risky of business. She borrowed the money from her father-in-law and paid the loan off for the tanning bed in nine months.

Back in the day, students were able to leave the school building during their study hall. "I had people tanning from nine in the morning until nine at night." She saw a decline in business once the school closed campus, but she kept the tanning bed active until 2015.

Wynella said her clients have been extremely loyal and stayed with her when her family went through some difficult times, when she could only work every other week for five months, but they all returned. Wynella said "They are the ones that made her business a success and she is dearly indebted to them all."

She had worked on clients from nine months old to one hundred years old. Wynella said, "If young



**Wynella Abeln gives Jay Waage his final haircut at the Abeln Beauty Shop.** (Courtesy Photo)

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children did not want to behave you just have to send the mom back to the car and 9 out of 10 times they will sit still.”

Five Groton hair stylists would attend conventions each year to keep up with the new styles and products. Wynella, being the youngest, would car pool with Bev Sombke, Bev McGannon, Darlene Fisher and Phyllis Koffler. The conventions would usually be held in Sioux Falls, Fargo or Minneapolis.

Wynella cited a funny incident with one of her clients. “The funniest thing that happened was one of her clients came in and said something fell in my hair as I was walking up the walk. She looked and a bird had pooped in her hair,” she said. “Good thing it was when she was coming and not leaving!”

Jay Waage was the longest customer of Wynella, starting when he was in junior high and was the final hair cut that Wynella gave on May 2. “He used to come from the chicken barns south of Groton to get his hair cut. I told him I was a farm girl and didn’t mind.” Jay moved away for a while, but Wynella said, “Every time he came home, he called to get a hair cut. We would work something out.” Of the 45 years that Wynella had her own salon, Jay was a customer for 44 years. “I also have had lots of customers for 30 years,” she said.

Wynella said, “The hardest thing about closing the doors after so many years of business is not seeing her clients, as they become family. There has been a lot of laughter and good times in the shop that I will not forget. God Bless you All.”

Neal and Wynella have three children and four grandsons.



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## Groton girls win team title at Sisseton Track Meet

The Groton Area girls track team easily took first place at the Sisseton Track Meet held Thursday, taking first in five events. Those taking first were Faith Traphagen in the 800m run, McKenna Tietz in the 300m hurdles, Emma Kutter in the shot put and the girls 400m relay and the girls 3200m relay teams. One relay team scratched.

Groton won the team title with 116 points followed by Border West with 78, Milbank 76, Aberdeen Roncalli 76, Webster Area 73, Warner 57, Britton-Hecla 54, Great Plains Lutheran 53.5, Hitchcock-Tulare 45, Frederick Area 41, Tri-State 31, Sisseton 25, Waubay/Summit 20, Wilmot 15, Hankinson 10 and Langford Area 4.5.

In the boys division, Keegen Tracy took first in the 200m dash. Three relay teams either scratched or were disqualified.

Aberdeen Roncalli won the team title with 120 points followed by Great Plains Lutheran with 100, Frederick Area 80, Milbank 65.33, Warner 63, Hitchcock-Tulare 55.5, Sisseton 50.5, Border West 48, Wilmot 43.33, Groton Area 34, Tri-State 28, Hankinson 28, Waubay/Summit 24.33, Webster Area 21 and Britton-Hecla 17.

### Boy's Division

**200 Meters:** 1. Keegen Tracy, 23.67

**400 Meters:** 10. Gage Sippel, 58.46; 20. Logan Warrington, 1:04.81

**800 Meters:** 9. Jayden Schwan, 2:34.68; 16. Garrett Schultz, 2:43.89

**1600 Meters:** 18. Jayden Schwan, 6:02.98; 19. Garrett Schultz, 6:18.85

**300m Hurdles:** 8. Tristin McGannon, 50.62

**4x800 Relay:** 3. Tristin McGannon, Gage Sippel, Jayden Schwan, Garrett Schultz, 9:56.24

**Shot Put:** 2. Logan Ringgenberg, 42' 7.5; 9. Holden Sippel, 36' 11; 17. Karter Moody, 34' 0.5; 26. Ashton Holmes, 29' 3.75

**Discus:** 4. Holden Sippel, 119' 5; 5. Logan Ringgenberg, 115' 0; 19. Karter Moody, 90' 7; 34. Ashton Holmes, 73' 1

**Javelin:** 14. Ashton Holmes, 87' 10; 17. Colby Dunker, 87' 2; 25. Karter Moody, 72' 0; 28. Drew Thurston, 68' 8

**Triple Jump:** 16. Tristin McGannon, 31' 4.5

### Girl's Division

**100 Meters:** 12. Kayla Lehr, 14.49; 13. Elizabeth Flihs, 14.51

**200 Meters:** 3. Rylee Dunker, 29.17; 8. Elizabeth Flihs, 30.86; 13. Kayla Lehr, 31.28

**400 Meters:** 3. Ashlynn Warrington, 1:08.94

**800 Meters:** 1. Faith Traphagen, 2:34.06; 2. Ryelle Gilbert, 2:39.75; 3. Ashlynn Warrington, 2:41.11

**1600 Meters:** 2. Ryelle Gilbert, 5:57.89

**100m Hurdles:** 2. McKenna Tietz, 17.81; 13. Talli Wright, 19.90; 15. Teagan Hanten, 20.16; 17. Hannah Sandness, 20.68

**300m Hurdles:** 1. McKenna Tietz, 52.53; 3. Emerlee Jones, 54.75; 8. Talli Wright, 56.24; 9. Teagan Hanten, 56.54

**4x100 Relay:** 1. Rylee Dunker, Kella Tracy, McKenna Tietz, Laila Roberts, 53.66

**4x200 Relay:** 2. Rylee Dunker, Laila Roberts, Jerica Locke, Kella Tracy, 1:54.60

**4x800 Relay:** 1. Faith Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, Kella Tracy, Taryn Traphagen, 10:33.04

**SMR 1600m:** 2. Rylee Dunker, Jerica Locke, Taryn Traphagen, Laila Roberts, 4:35.96

**Shot Put:** 1. Emma Kutter, 33' 0; 21. Faith Flihs, 25' 8.25; 26. Avery Crank, 24' 10.5; 36. Ashley Johnson, 22' 6

**Discus:** 15. Faith Flihs, 73' 7; 16. Avery Crank, 71' 2; 29. Emma Kutter, 59' 11; 33. Ashley Johnson, 58' 10

**Javelin:** 13. Avery Crank, 66' 6; 15. Emma Kutter, 66' 0; 22. Ashley Johnson, 55' 3; 25. Faith Flihs, 51' 4

**High Jump:** 10. Emerlee Jones, 4' 4

**Long Jump:** 28. Teagan Hanten, 11' 5

**Triple Jump:** 16. Emerlee Jones, 28' 6.5; 24. Teagan Hanten, 27' 6.25

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## GFP Holds May Commission Meeting

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Park (GFP) Commission held their May meeting May 2-3 at the Event Barn in Custer State Park.

### Wildlife Proposals

#### Landowner Own Land Prairie Antlerless Elk Hunting License

During the 2024 South Dakota Legislative session, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 173, an act to provide a landowner own land elk license for antlerless elk in the prairie elk season.

The Commission continued discussion to create such a license within the Prairie Elk Season with the following qualifications:

An applicant must own/lease a minimum of 240 acres within an elk unit.

Members of the qualifying landowner-operators family including grandparents, parents, spouse, children, children's spouse, or grandchildren who live on the ranch or in the closest community and have an active role in the ranch operation also qualify.

Only one qualifying applicant per ranch unit per year may purchase a landowner own land license.

A qualifying applicant for a ranch unit may not purchase a landowner own land elk license if any qualifying member of the ranch unit holds an elk license in the prairie elk hunting season.

A ranch unit is described as all private property owned and leased for agricultural purposes by written agreement by and individual qualifying landowner in the state; and,

A ranch unit may not be subdivided for the purposes of qualifying for more than one landowner own land elk license.

#### Raccoon Hunting Season

The Commission continued discussions to allow nonresidents to use dogs, statewide, as an aid in the taking of a raccoon within the specified nonresident raccoon season structure.

#### Elk Raffle License

The Commission proposed to do away with language restricting someone who had previously held a Custer State Park elk license from winning this raffle.

#### Antelope Hunting Season

The Commission proposed the 2024 and 2025 Firearms Antelope Hunting Seasons for the following dates:

Sept 28-Oct. 13, 2024

Oct 4 – Oct 19, 2025.

The proposal allows an individual that applies for a "special antelope" license to apply for an antelope license in the second lottery drawing instead of the third drawing as previously allowed.

The proposal also had minor unit boundary adjustments for Butte County and the Stanley and Jones County portions of the Ft. Pierre National Grasslands.

The proposal also specifies that the mentored youth antelope licenses are only valid on private land that is not leased by the Department for public hunting access.

License numbers for the 2024 and 2025 seasons will be proposed at the June and July meetings.

### Parks Proposals

#### License Entrance Fees

Senate Bill 55 was introduced by the Department during the 2024 Legislative Session and was passed and signed by the Governor. The new law amended SDCL 41-17-13 to eliminate the option to purchase a discounted second annual park entrance license through the stub/coupon method and eliminated the ability to buy multiple discounted annuals through common vehicle registration.

The Commission proposed to eliminate the stub/coupon method of discounted park entrance licenses and multiple discounted annual process using vehicle registrations.

The proposal would formalize the availability of a double license option (one full price license and one-half price license when purchased together). There are no limits on how many double licenses may be purchased.

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## **Wildlife Finalizations**

### **Small Game Hunting Seasons**

The Commission voted to extend the quail, partridge, and grouse seasons to Jan 31, aligning these seasons closing date with the close of the pheasant season.

The Commission removed the word "common" in the snipe season hunting rules, allowing for the take of all species of snipe.

The Commission extended the tree squirrel and cottontail rabbit hunting seasons to run from Sept. 1 - March 31 on publicly accessible land.

### **Custer State Park Coyote Hunting Season**

The Commission extended the Custer State Park Coyote Hunting Season to start November 1 and continue through April 30.

The Commission action will also allow coyote hunting throughout the day and night.

### **Custer State Park Bison Hunting Seasons**

The Commission voted to allow the use of archery equipment during the Custer State Park trophy and non-trophy bison harvest season.

The Commission also decreased the allowable hunting days for trophy bison from three to two. Hunters typically fill their tags within two days, and this change will allow increased opportunity for scheduling hunts.

The Commission increased the number of trophy bison licenses available from eight license to 10 and non-trophy bison licenses from 15 to 20, resulting in a total of 11 trophy bison licenses, including the one license available through the Hunt for Habitat raffle.

## **Public Comment Opportunity and Upcoming Meeting**

To hear the discussion on any of the topics on the agenda, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive.

To see these documents in their entirety, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information](https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information).

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the Commission, public comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. CT, June 2.

The next Regular Commission Meeting will be held on June 6-7, 2024, starting at 1 pm CST at the NFAA Easton Yankton Archery Center in Yankton, SD.



## The Life of Richard Anderson



Funeral services for Richard Anderson, 88, of Claremont will be at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, May 14, 2024, at First Presbyterian Church in Groton. Rev. Terry Kenny will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton, under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held at the funeral chapel on Monday, May 13th from 5-7 p.m., with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Richard passed away on April 30, 2024, at Bethesda Home of Aberdeen.

Richard was born on June 28, 1935, in Britton, SD, to Raymond and Bessie (Peterson) Anderson. He attended country grade school and graduated from Claremont High School in 1953. Richie was a farmer from birth and followed his passion for his entire lifetime. He was united in marriage with Dona Mae Cooper on August 1, 1954, in Groton, and together, they were blessed with a daughter, Vickie.

Rich was a member of First Presbyterian Church in Groton. He was a collector of many things, including farm equipment, John Deere tractors, and farm toys. Rich was active in the James Valley Tractor Club and the James Valley Thrashing Association. In his earlier years, he was an avid bowler in both Claremont and Groton. Rich and Dona enjoyed traveling; they took their niece and nephew on two trips each year, creating many wonderful, lasting memories.

Celebrating his life is his daughter, Vickie (Charles) Windham of Belle Fourche, SD; his brother-in-law, Dale (Helen) Cooper of Sun City West, AZ, and their children: Mike Cooper and Bill (Ruth) Cooper, and their grandchildren: Sarah (Brian) Wiles, Kyle (Diana) Duncan, Jenny (Alex) Koons, and Michael (Carly) Cooper; brother-in-law, Glenn (Wendy) Cooper of Groton, SD, and their children: Bonnie Cooper and Charlie (Kelly) Cooper, and their grandchildren: MacKenzie (Matt) Gable and Ava Cooper.

Preceding him in death were his parents; his wife in 2008; and his siblings, Miles, Alan, and Loretta.

Casketbearers will be Mike Cooper, Bill Cooper, Charlie Cooper, John Anderson, Mike Frey, and Larry Peterson.

Condolences may be directed to Vickie Windham, 11067 Wagon Box Dr., Belle Fourche, SD 57717.

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## Jackrabbits Forensics records historic season



**Jackrabbits Forensics claimed a 20th-place finish in the field of 60 teams at the American Forensic Association National Speech Tournament in April. Sam Pappas is picture on the far left.** (Courtesy Photo SDSU)

Westwick, director of the School of Communication and Journalism. "I am excited about the program's future and know that they will find continued success under Dr. Andrea Carlile's leadership."

Carlile, director of forensics and assistant professor of communication studies in the School of Communication and Journalism, said everyone's performance and hard work contributed to Jackrabbits Forensics' 20th-place finish in the field of 60 teams at nationals.

"It really was a culmination of everyone's efforts. What it really reflects is all our preliminary rounds were really strong. Everyone was earning firsts, seconds and thirds, and that's what it takes to earn team points," she said.

Twelve members, having qualified for a team-record 33 individual events, participated in the national tournament, held April 5-8 at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Those participants included Jacob Ramp, Meara McIntyre, Abby Gilk, Hannah Dayaget, Kara Vetch, Rachael Guler, Sam Pappas, Emma Arneson, Taylor Sutton, Raegan Modlin, Grace Kleinschmit and Courtnie Forcier.

"That hard work they put in really paid off toward that team sweepstakes award," Carlile said. "We just needed one team to break the top 20. Those who are returning (likely eight to nine students) are very motivated and excited about the opportunities they have, where they see their potential as individuals and a team."

Arneson was also elected as one of two national student representatives for the American Forensics Association National Speech Tournament.

Earlier in the semester, 11 students traveled to Dublin, Ireland, March 8-14 to compete in the International Forensics Association contest, which hosted more than 40 schools.

BROOKINGS, S.D. (05/03/2024)-- Jackrabbits Forensics has just wrapped up a historic season, with several "firsts" achieved by one of South Dakota State University's longest-running cocurricular teams.

The group competed in its first international tournament this year, and for the second year in a row, it sent South Dakota's only two representatives to the annual tournament of the nation's oldest competitive collegiate speaking association. Groton Area alumni Sam Pappas is a member of the team.

But the icing on the cake for the team was its first-ever top-20 finish at the American Forensic Association National Speech Tournament, the culmination of months of hard work and years of building a foundation for SDSU's competitive speech and debate team.

"I couldn't be more proud of our Jackrabbits Forensics team and their success this year," said Joshua

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"It was a totally new environment, so we didn't know what to expect. We were really thrilled to have semifinalists at that tournament, two of which were first-year students. It's always great to get that exposure in a high-stakes tournament elimination round experience," Carlile said.

The five semifinalists included: Ramp, extemporaneous speaking; McIntyre, impromptu speaking; Gilk, after-dinner speaking; Dayaget, informative speaking and fourth place in prose interpretation; and Vetch, after-dinner speaking and seventh place in impromptu speaking.

And in their last competition of the season, two team members, Guler and Vetch, competed at the 150th annual Interstate Oratorical Association National Tournament, held April 26-28 at the University of Illinois Chicago. SDSU has sent at least one South Dakota representative to the nation's oldest public speaking contest for at least the past 30 years.

Guler finished as a semifinalist this year, and Vetch was a semifinalist the previous year. The event is only for persuasive speaking, and their orations are published afterward.

Guler, a junior from Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, who has been on the team for the past three years, called this most recent season remarkable.

"From getting to compete over in Dublin to taking 20th in the nation, my team and I set these goals at the beginning of the season and worked hard to achieve them," Guler said. "I think the highlight of my season was getting to compete at the 150th Interstate Oratory competition and being a semifinalist at that tournament. I can't express how proud I am of all that my teammates and I achieved this year, and I look forward to next season."

Carlile attributes the team's successful year to a little bit of "magic" that made everyone click, and getting the right people in the right room. She also cited "the grid," where every student going to nationals had to perform all their events for every single team member and coach, totaling over 400 performance repetitions in a two-week period.

Jackrabbits Forensics also moved to an upgraded team room in Pugsley Center this year, which served as a place to accommodate all members for team meetings, practice rounds or just hanging out.

"It was a culmination of their energy and excitement, their willingness to put in the work, and their willingness to believe it was possible, to believe in themselves. Sometimes you've just got to take that leap of faith to be great," Carlile said.



**Eleven Jackrabbits Forensics members traveled to Dublin, Ireland, March 8-14 to compete in the International Forensics Association contest. Sam Pappas is pictured on the far right.**

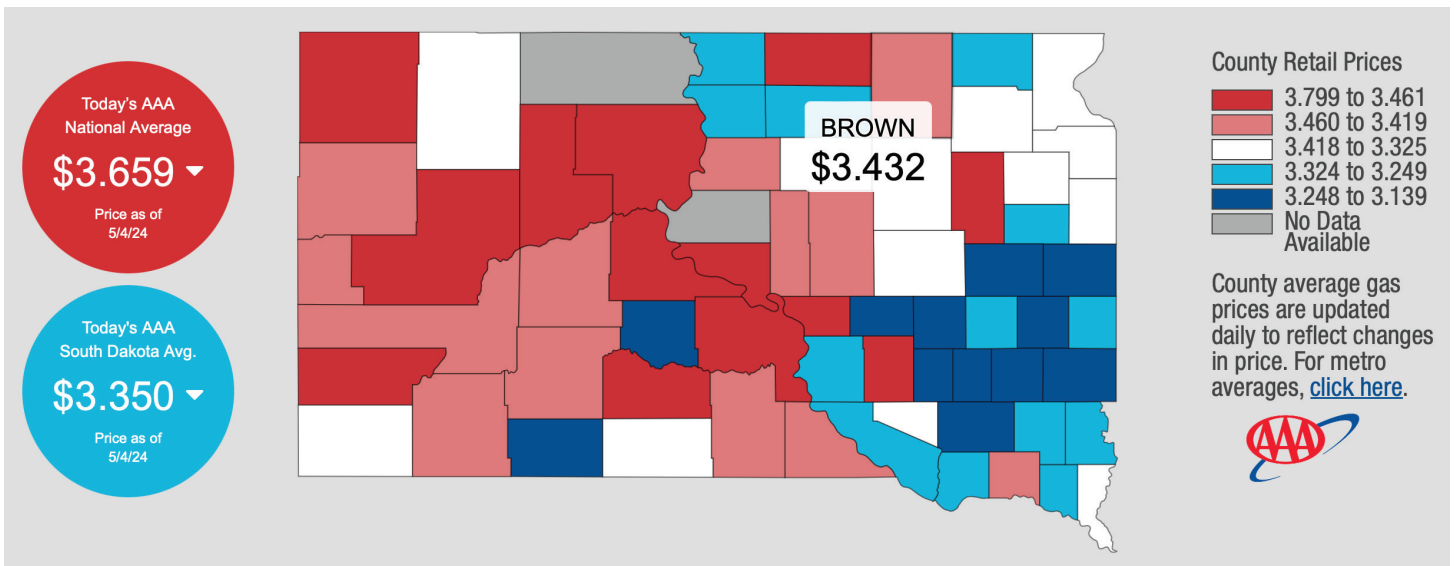
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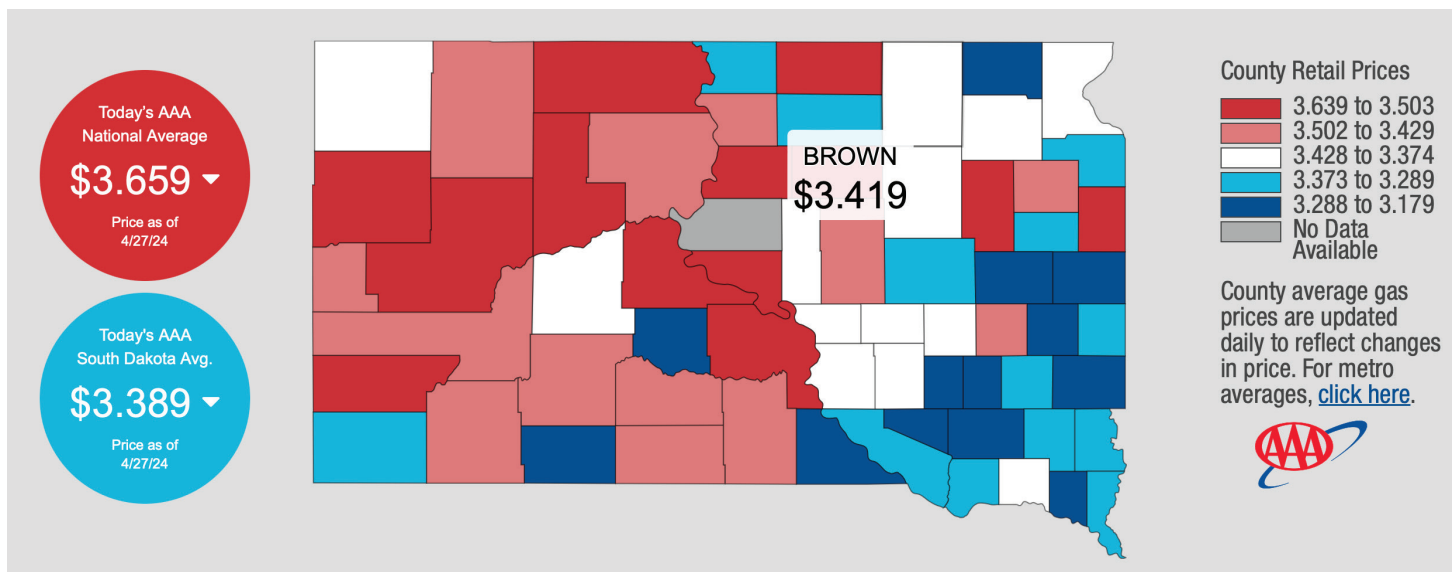
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.350	\$3.525	\$3.935	\$3.639
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.367	\$3.522	\$3.956	\$3.647
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.389	\$3.531	\$3.968	\$3.679
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.316	\$3.454	\$3.876	\$3.692
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.492	\$3.644	\$4.102	\$3.886

### This Week



### Last Week



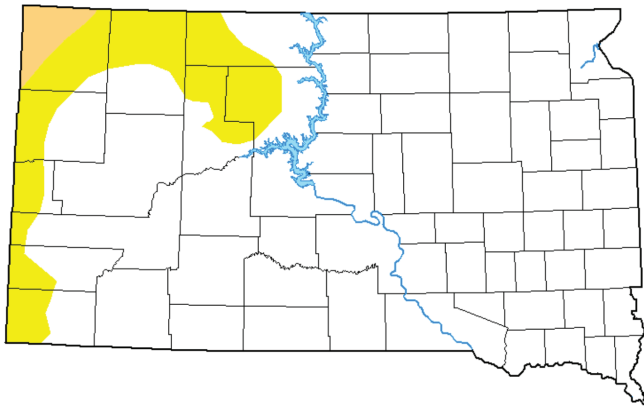
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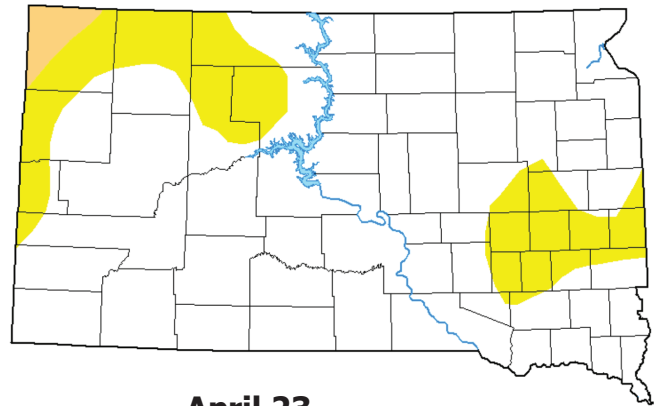
## Drought Classification

- None
- D0 (Abnormally Dry)
- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)
- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)
- No Data

## Drought Monitor



April 30



April 23

Moderate to heavy precipitation fell across much of the High Plains region this week, excluding central and southwest Kansas and northeast Wyoming and southeast Colorado. Mostly warmer-than-normal temperatures occurred in Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming and the western Dakotas, while elsewhere, temperatures were mostly within a couple degrees of normal. While the storms responsible for the rain brought damaging hail and tornadoes in parts of the region, the rainfall helped to alleviate drought conditions in many areas. Eastern Kansas and Nebraska saw improvements in some areas, with parts of southeast Kansas seeing two-category improvements in the areas of heaviest rainfall. Meanwhile, in tandem with severe drought expansion in northwest Oklahoma, severe drought conditions expanded in central and southwest Kansas after another mostly dry week. Flash drought conditions in this region have led to dust storms and very poor wheat conditions.

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## Holmes has perfect score in second week of Trap League

Ashton Holmes had a perfect score in the second week of the High School Trap Team League action.

According to Tom Mahan, "All of these scores were shot in very windy and wet conditions at times. The kids are doing great and are showing steady improvement every week."

Turner Thompson, Cadence Fesit and Wesley Morehouse all scored a 49 out of 50 and Jaeger Kampa and Payton Mitchell had a score of 48.

Athlete Name	Rd1	Rd2	Total
HOLMES, ASHTON	25	25	50
THOMPSON, TURNER	24	25	49
FEIST, CADENCE	25	24	49
MOREHOUSE, WESLEY	24	25	49
KAMPA, JAEGER	23	25	48
MITCHELL, PAYTON	24	24	48
STANGE, TYTON	21	22	43
KAMPA, TRISTAN	23	20	43
THOMPSON, TARYN	23	19	42
FLIEHS, FAITH	22	19	41
SCEPANIAK, ISAIAH	22	19	41
POWERS-DINGER, MICHAEL	22	18	40
SMITH, TREY	20	20	40
SPERRY, OWEN	19	20	39
MITCHELL, PAISLEY	20	18	38
HANSON, LAYNE	16	21	37
FROST, CHARLIE	21	14	35
KOTZER, ADELIN	18	17	35
SCEPANIAK, NOAH	16	15	31
LEICHT, TUCKER	15	13	28
SPERRY, ASHLYN	15	12	27
PIGORS, GENTRY	16	10	26
HOLMES, SYDNEY	10	15	25
KUTTER, IAN	7	16	23
RUDEBUSCH, JACLYN	4	2	6
WAMBACH, BRYSON	0	0	0

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## Life Defense Fund to challenge legality of abortion amendment petition

The following statement can be attributed to Jon Hansen and Leslee Unruh, Co-Chairs of Life Defense Fund, in response to the submission of the Abortion Amendment Petition:

Despite clear warnings from the Attorney General, thousands of signatures were collected by Rick Weiland's organization in violation of South Dakota law.

If you signed this petition, did they tell you the Abortion Amendment would legalize late-term abortion after the baby is viable outside the womb and up to birth? Did they tell you the Abortion Amendment endangers women by banning safety standards for most abortions? Did they tell you the Abortion Amendment takes away parents' right to know when their minor daughter is seeking an abortion?

In response to the unlawful and misleading actions of Rick Weiland and his paid petition circulators, Life Defense Fund will challenge the legitimacy of the Abortion Amendment petition in court.

Background: Life Defense Fund has collected evidence showing that Rick Weiland's paid Abortion Amendment petition circulators failed to distribute the required circulator handout information to petition signers, failed to personally witness petition signatures, and even told citizens to sign the Abortion Amendment petition twice-all serious violations of South Dakota petition law. Moreover-Life Defense Fund has documented numerous instances where members of the public, upon asking to sign the petition to repeal the tax on groceries, were handed the Abortion Amendment petition to sign instead.

A copy of the letter from AG Marty Jackley to Rick Weiland admonishing Rick Weiland over these violations- and also for misleading the public about the extent of the Abortion Amendment-can be found on the Attorney General's website here:

<https://atg.sd.gov/docs/Letters%20from%20AG%20Jackley%20to%20Sponsor%20R.%20Weiland%20to%20Dakotans%20for%20Health.pdf>





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Noem in political freefall as book inaccuracies emerge following backlash against animal killings

BY: SETH TUPPER AND JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 3, 2024 5:39 PM

South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem was in political freefall Friday as embarrassing revelations continued to emerge from the scrutiny of advance copies of her memoir, which doesn't officially publish until Tuesday.

Noem was already reeling from near-universal backlash against her disclosure in the book that she shot and killed a dog named Cricket and a billy goat years ago — the dog for its failures on a hunting excursion and its attacks on a neighbor's chickens, and the goat for chasing after Noem's children and smelling bad.

Thursday and Friday, news emerged from outlets including Politico and The Dakota Scout of inaccuracies in Noem's book, the title of which — "No Going Back" — is now ripe with irony. The most glaring inaccuracy is Noem's recounting of a meeting with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un during her time in Congress — a meeting that never happened.

"I remember when I met with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un," Noem wrote. "I'm sure he underestimated me, having no clue about my experience staring down little tyrants (I'd been a children's pastor, after all)."

The Dakota Scout published a story Thursday casting doubt on the meeting. Noem's spokesman, Ian Fury, eventually said the anecdote was one of "two small errors" in the book that were the fault of others.

"This has been communicated to the ghostwriter and editor," Fury said, according to the Scout. "Kim Jong Un was included in a list of world leaders and shouldn't have been."

Yet there seems to be no way Noem could've been unaware of the errors. She's been promoting the book for weeks, there is no other writer credited in the book besides her, and she's already voiced an audio version of the book.

The Scout also questioned Noem's anecdote in the book about canceling a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron over Noem's dislike of his comments about the Israeli-Hamas war. The French president's office released a statement that Macron had never extended a "direct invitation" to Noem for a meeting, the Scout reported, but the office left open the possibility that the two could have been scheduled to attend the same event.

Politico reported on a story Noem related in the book about a 2021 conversation with former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley. Noem wrote that Haley, who would go on to unsuccessfully seek the Republican presidential nomination, "threatened" Noem politically. A spokesperson for Haley told Politico that Haley had called to encourage Noem, and "how she would twist that into a threat is just plain weird."

Politico also reported that a Colorado county Republican group canceled a Saturday fundraiser Noem was scheduled to headline, after the group received death threats and information about a planned protest



Gov. Kristi Noem speaks at the Calvin Coolidge Foundation conference at the Library of Congress on Feb. 17, 2023, in Washington, D.C. (Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

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related to Noem's treatment of animals.

Reacting to the cascade of negative news, political science professor Jon Schaff of Northern State University in Aberdeen said Noem's short-term national ambitions "have been weakened, considerably." Until recently, Noem had been widely considered to be a potential running mate for the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump.

But Schaff said it's too early to tell what it all means for Noem long-term. He said she is popular in South Dakota, and it would be naive to count her out in future races, such as a U.S. Senate race in the eventuality of a retirement by Sen. John Thune or Sen. Mike Rounds. Thune is 63 years old, Rounds is 69 and Noem is 52.

"Rounds and Thune won't be there forever," Schaff said.

Meanwhile, Dan Ahlers, executive director of the South Dakota Democratic Party, said the negative news is unlikely to end Noem's career, given that past scandals have not seemed to hurt her. Those scandals have included published allegations of an affair with former Trump adviser Corey Lewandowski, accusations of misusing the state airplane, and allegedly intervening to help her daughter earn a real estate appraiser's license.

"These things don't end any of these Republican politicians' careers anymore," Ahlers said. "They end up raising more money and smelling like roses."

Noem went on "Hannity" on Fox News on Wednesday and blamed "fake news" for the fallout from the dog and goat stories. This weekend, she's scheduled to attend a Trump campaign donor retreat in Florida, according to Politico. Sunday, she's scheduled to appear on "Face the Nation" on CBS.

"We'll get into the controversies surrounding her upcoming memoir," said a Friday tweet from the show.

*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.*

## Rule change allows tribes to access state housing funds, but it comes too late for grants

**Loan money all that remains in infrastructure program**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MAY 3, 2024 11:32 AM**

A state board endorsed a rule change this week that would let Native American tribes access state housing infrastructure funding, but the change comes so late in the process that all the grants are already awarded and only loans remain.

The Housing Infrastructure Financing Program is a \$200 million pool of state and federal money designed to ease the burden of high inflation for homebuilders in a state with a high need for workforce housing. Lawmakers created the program in 2023, after legal wrangling held up the funds the previous year. It covers up to one-third of the cost of a development's roads, sewer lines, street lights and other costs associated with building new neighborhoods.

The board of the South Dakota Housing Development Authority will hold a public comment session about the rule change on May 31. After that, it will be presented to the Legislature's Rules Review Committee on June 10.

The infrastructure program requires a "political subdivision of the state" to take over ownership and maintenance of infrastructure after a project's completion. Without the rule change, developers cannot hand off completed roads and other infrastructure to tribal governments, as they are not political subdivisions of the state. Legislators passed a bill last winter allowing for the rule change and said the exclusion of tribes from the original law was unintentional.

One housing project in Indian Country was able to take advantage of the program last year, but only because developers were able to partner with the Oglala Lakota School District, the only state-supported public school on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

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The board has awarded nearly \$115 million to help pay for infrastructure at 74 housing projects across the state, including an approved loan of \$1.43 million on Thursday to support the Bunk House subdivision in Belle Fourche.

That project, developed by Van Acker Development Inc., will include 43 lots for single family homes and one for multifamily buildings, for a total of 90 units. The total project cost is \$4.3 million.

With a sizable amount of money left to award, South Dakota Housing Director Chas Olson told board members he imagines there will be some interest from tribally affiliated organizations in what's left. However, the remaining money available through the program is loan-based.

"Considering that the grant funds at this point have all been exhausted, it will be true debt," Olson said. "So, you never know how that's going to look for different tribes and what their debt capacity is. It remains to be seen."

In an interview on Friday, Olson said the loan funding hasn't been as popular with developers.

"So far, it's been pretty slow to go out," Olson said. "A lot of the demand for the loan funding is just kind of waiting to see how some of these other projects turn out."

Olson said he's had conversations with developers who might want the loan funding, with \$80 million remaining in the program. He expects interest in loans to grow, particularly if interest rates stay high. The loans offered through the program have 2% interest rates, far lower than the 7% to 8% rates currently offered for traditional loans.

Sioux Falls Republican Rep. Tyler Tordsen, a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, worked in the Legislature to pass the bill that allowed for the rule change. He doesn't know if there will be as much of "an appetite" for the loan piece of the funding compared to the race for grant money in 2023.

He added that the approval and summer timeline will allow interested tribally affiliated organizations to apply and work on projects in the fall.

"I'm pleased that tribes going forward are going to have this opportunity, if it makes sense for them and their communities, with the right projects, guidelines and pieces in place," Tordsen told South Dakota Searchlight.

*Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.*



**Teacher homes on the Pine Ridge Reservation.**

(John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

## South Dakota courts launch live interpreter pilot project in clerks' offices

Officials hope to make it easier for non-English speakers to navigate court system

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MAY 3, 2024 6:00 AM

Non-English speaking South Dakotans in five counties are now able to talk with an interpreter over a video conferencing software when they're seeking guidance and help from clerks at the courthouse.

The South Dakota Unified Judicial System provides free access to interpreters — whether in-person or virtually — inside the courtroom. The technology upgrade is part of a pilot program using the software to make it easier to navigate language barriers outside of the courtroom. In addition to the video interpreter, the program offers live AI-written interpreter services and translation services.

While the court system tracks how many times an interpreter was needed inside a courtroom — 3,570 in 2023 — there's a "gap in the data" regarding how often interpreters are needed outside the courtroom but still within the court system, said Greg Sattizahn, UJS court administrator.

"To meaningfully participate in someone's court case, they have to have an understanding of what's happening," Sattizahn said, "whether that's the rights read by the judge, witness testimony or having the ability to confer with your lawyer and talk



**Samuel Uwizeyimana (left) and Rachel Scaprotta (right), both employees with the Minnehaha County Clerk of Courts, have a conversation in Spanish and English to demonstrate how a live interpreter service through Certified Languages International works. The device is part of a pilot program to improve language access in the state court system.** (Makenzie Huber/South

Dakota Searchlight)

strategy or respond. It's important for them to meaningfully participate, so language access levels the playing field for those who aren't proficient in English."

In the past, and in the remaining 61 South Dakota counties, clerks have used an interpreter service over the phone, which can sometimes be awkward to pass the phone back and forth between the clerk and client.

"When you think of clerk of courts, they have people coming in speaking all kinds of languages and in all sorts of situations," Sattizahn said. "That's not something they can prepare a script for, so you have to be ready to adapt."

An iPad was delivered to each of the five counties earlier this spring: Minnehaha, Brookings, Aurora, Yankton and Beadle counties. The pilot costs about \$750 for each iPad along with a \$40 monthly data plan for each unit. Over a five-month period, the total cost of the pilot is about \$4,750.

If expanded statewide, such a program would have additional one-time costs of over \$40,000 for iPads and cost the state over \$2,500 monthly for the data plan. The video conferencing system costs \$2 per minute, which is used through the court system's existing contract with Certified Languages International.

Minnehaha, which includes Sioux Falls, and Beadle, which includes Huron, are two counties that have experienced the most language barrier problems, Sattizahn said. In Huron, meat-processing jobs have attracted immigrants from southeast Asia, Mexico and Central and South America.

About 7% of South Dakotans — roughly 62,800 people — speak a language other than English. Over 17,700 people in South Dakota speak English less than "very well," according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The pilot will run through the summer, though it could last longer if rural counties want more time to test interactions. The decision to expand will be based on the quality of interactions rather than how often

it was used.

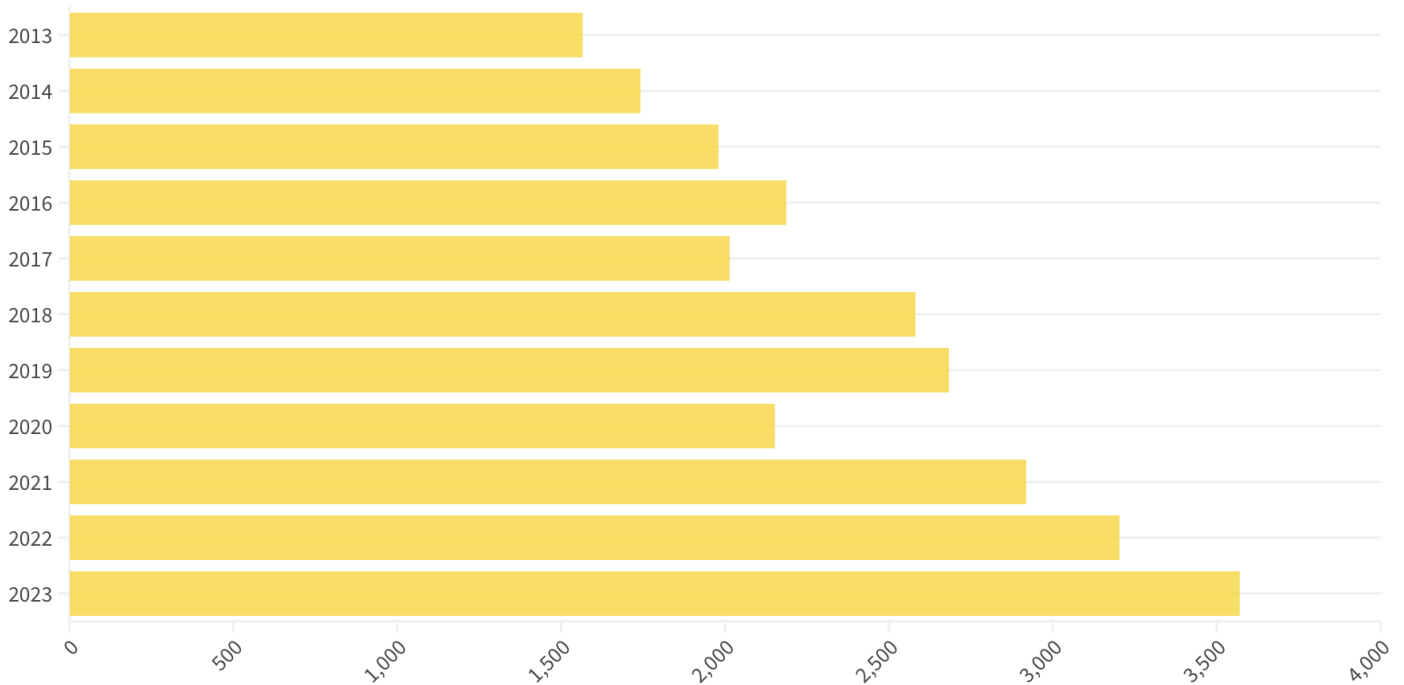
"With the challenges of geography and our ability to recruit interpreters, technology is probably where we need to look for as many solutions as we can," Sattizahn said. "Technology offers us the most potential."

*Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.*

## South Dakota interpreter requests



Requests and use of interpreters in South Dakota courts increased 128% between fiscal years 2013 and 2023. The South Dakota Unified Judicial System expects interpreter requests to increase further by the end of fiscal year 2024.

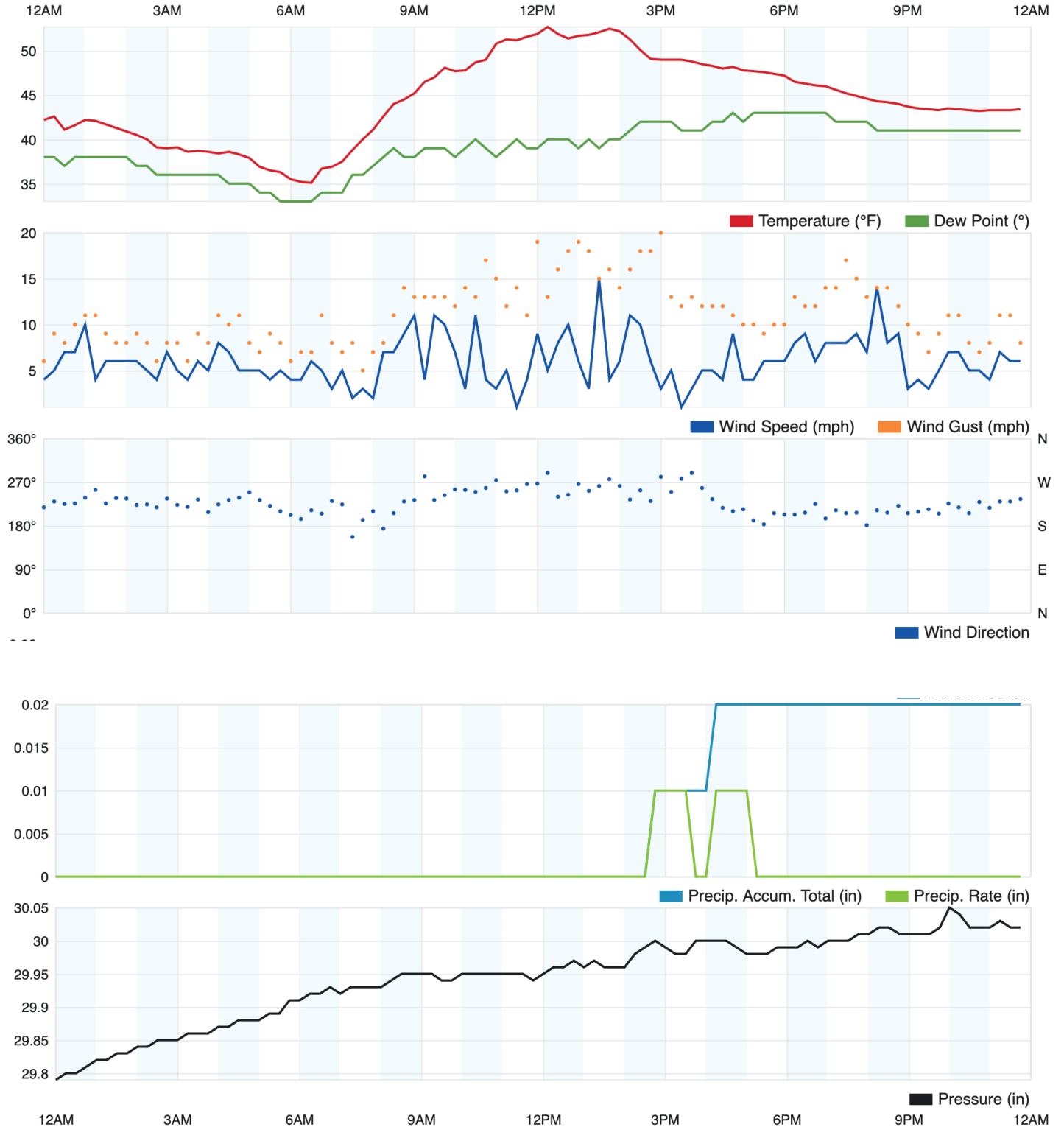


Source: South Dakota Unified Judicial System

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 61 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 36 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 68 °F

Sunny

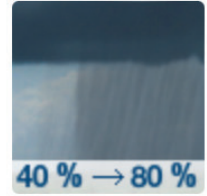
Sunday Night



Low: 51 °F

Mostly Clear then Mostly Cloudy and Breezy

Monday



High: 69 °F

Windy. Chance Showers then Showers

## Into Next Week

Today



Highs: 58-62°  
Lows: 37-41°

Sunday



Highs: 65-70°  
Lows: 48-53°

Windy

Monday



Highs: 65-72°  
Lows: 43-53°

Some storms possible

Windy

Tuesday



Highs: 60-68°F  
Lows: 41-48°

Windy

Wednesday



Highs: 57-65°  
Lows: 42-46°

Chance of rain continues

Dry and average temperatures are expected through the weekend. Gusts of 40+ mph are possible both Sunday and Monday. A large system moves into the region Monday bringing a chance for some storms.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 53 °F at 12:16 PM

Low Temp: 35 °F at 6:32 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 12:33 PM

Precip: : 0.02

Day length: 14 hours, 31 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 98 in 1926

Record Low: 20 in 2005

Average High: 66

Average Low: 39

Average Precip in May.: 0.44

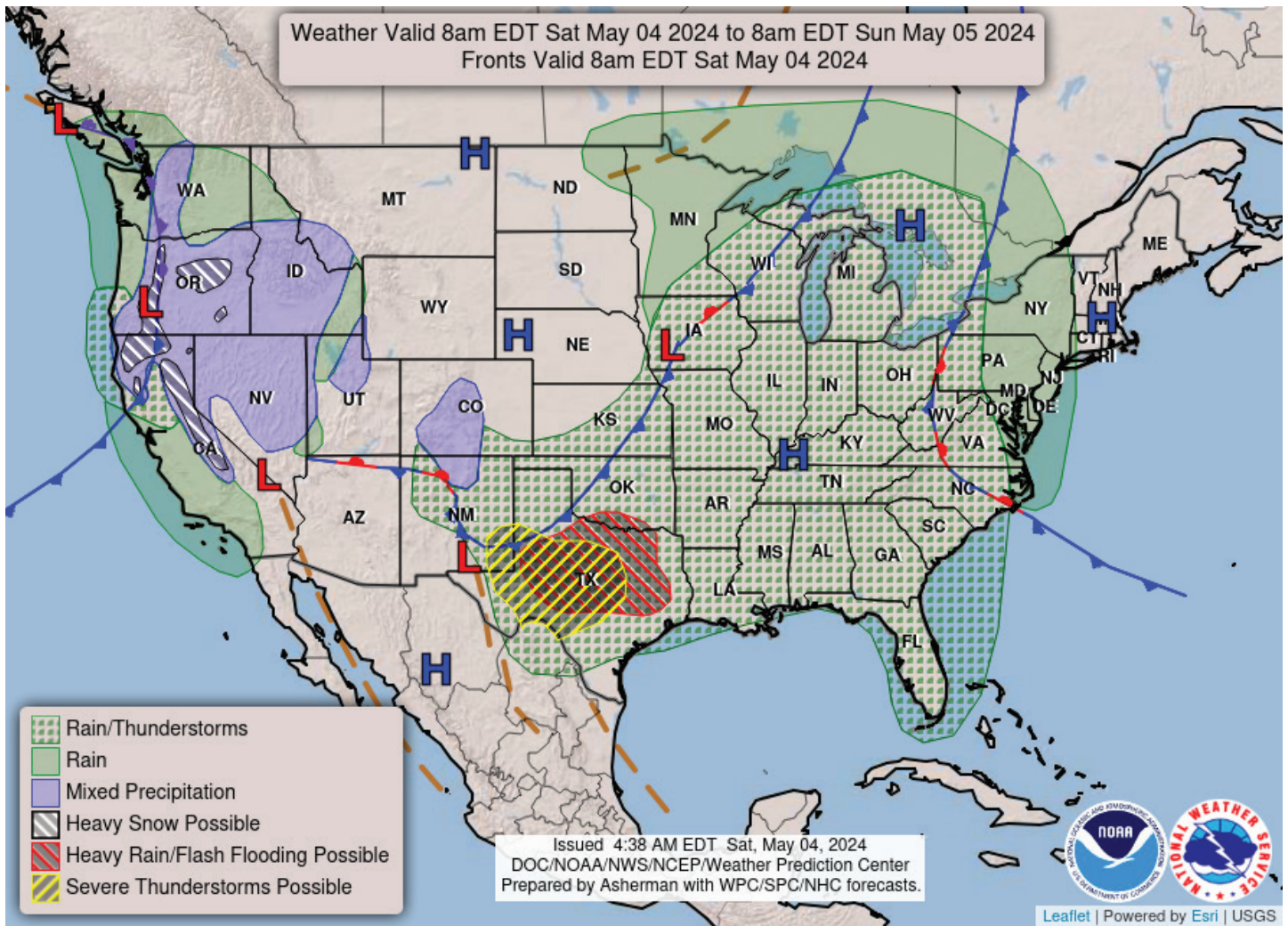
Precip to date in May: 0.18

Average Precip to date: 4.41

Precip Year to Date: 4.71

Sunset Tonight: 8:44:57 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:11:52 am





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## Today in Weather History

1774: Snow was reported in the Williamsburg Gazette to have fallen in Dumfries, Virginia. George Washington's weather diary logged at Mount Vernon that it was a cold day with spits of snow and a hard wind from the northwest. Thomas Jefferson near Charlottesville recorded that the Blue Ridge Mountains was covered with snow. The late snow and frost killed most of the fruit crop in the northern part of the state. It also snowed north across Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York.

1812 - A storm produced snow from Philadelphia to Maine. A foot of snow fell near Keene NH, and in Massachusetts, nine inches fell at Waltham, located near Boston. (David Ludlum)

1917 - A late season snowstorm in northwest Texas produced up to eight inches of snow in Potter County and Armstrong County. (David Ludlum)

1922 - Austin, TX, was hit twice by tornadoes which struck within thirty minutes of each other. Twelve persons were killed in the tornadoes. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - A tornado 500 yards in width struck Pleasant Hill, MO, severely damaging the high school and grade school. Only minor injuries were reported among the more than 1000 teachers and students due to excellent warnings and prior tornado drills. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the southeastern U.S., with South Carolina hardest hit. Thunderstorm winds toppled trees seventy feet high in Spartanburg County SC, and knocked homes off their foundations near Bishopville SC. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced large hail in North Carolina, but brought welcome rains to much of the rest of the eastern U.S. Residents of New England finally saw sunshine after about a week of clouds and rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the Southern Plains Region and the Lower Mississippi Valley. Thunderstorms spawned fifteen tornadoes, and there were 340 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Hail three inches in diameter, and 9.39 inches of rain, resulted in more than 130 million dollars damage at Monroe LA. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 100 mph at Epps LA and Fort Worth TX. A thunderstorm north of Mineral Wells TX produced high winds which unroofed a nightclub, turning it into a "topless club." (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Lower Ohio Valley to Virginia and the Carolinas. A tornado at Augusta Springs VA killed two people and injured ten others, and another tornado caused 1.7 million dollars damage at Colonial Heights VA. Temperatures soared into the 90s in northern California. The high of 98 degrees in downtown Sacramento was their hottest reading of record for so early in the season. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003: The week of May 4th through the 10th was one of the busiest weeks for tornadoes in U.S. history. On this date through the 5th, the deadliest outbreak of severe weather since May 1999 produced 84 tornadoes, large hail and damaging winds across eight states. Several thunderstorms became tornadic with a total of five distinct tornado touchdowns in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Two of the tornadoes received a rating of F4, two a rating of F2, and the last was rated an F1. Total damage exceeded 144 million dollars. Several of the tornadoes tracked long distances ranging from 15 to 80 miles. More than 3000 homes and businesses were destroyed. At least 38 people were killed in Kansas, Missouri, and Tennessee.

2007: A devastating EF5 twister demolishes nearly every structure in Greensburg around 9:30 pm (CDT) and kills ten. The mammoth wedge tornado cuts a swath 1.7 miles (2.7 km) wide and 22 miles (35 km) long across the Kansas landscape. It is the worst single tornado to touch down in the US in eight years.

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### DADDY, DID GOD DIE?

Climbing up in her father's lap, little Nancy asked, "Daddy, did God die?"

Stunned, he responded quickly, "No, of course not! Why on earth would you ask?"

"Well," she replied timidly, "you never seem to talk to Him anymore and I was just wondering."

We find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke two passages of Scripture that are called "The Lord's Prayer." Both of them contain a phrase stating that we are to go to God each day for our "daily bread" - our nourishment.

Praying for our bread each day means that we are acknowledging Him not only as the Creator, but as our Sustainer and Provider. It is important for us who acknowledge Him as our Lord to also recognize that He alone is the One who meets our every need.

When we allow "gaps" in our prayer life, we begin to think that we are self-sufficient and can go through life without Him. But it is a misconception to think that we can provide for any of our needs on our own. We must always remember that every heartbeat, every breath, every movement, every sensation is a gift from God. Without His grace and goodness, we would be without everything that we have.

When we pause, ask for and give thanks for our daily bread, let's also remember that He gives so much more than the bread we eat. Everything is from "above."

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for being so generous in meeting all of our needs. May we always be aware of Your grace, mercy, love and presence in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Give us today the food we need. Matthew 6:11



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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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.03.24

6 13 15 53 56 11

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$306,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[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 DRAW: 16 Hrs 29 Mins 57  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.03.24

15 19 32 34 36 7

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 44 Mins 57  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

3 13 14 22 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$80,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 44 Mins 57  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

6 15 19 42 45 16

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 13 Mins 58  
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 DRAW: 17 Hrs 13 Mins 58  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **Marijuana backers eye proposed federal regulatory change as an aid to legalizing pot in more states**

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

As the U.S. government moves toward reclassifying marijuana as a less dangerous drug, there may be little immediate impact in the dozen states that have not already legalized cannabis for widespread medical or recreational use by adults.

But advocates for marijuana legalization hope a federal regulatory shift could eventually change the minds — and votes — of some state policymakers who have been reluctant to embrace weed.

“It is very common for a state legislator to tell me, ‘Well, I might be able to support this, but ... I’m not going to vote for something that’s illegal under federal law,’” said Matthew Schweich, executive director of the Marijuana Policy Project, which advocates for cannabis legalization.

Although a proposal to reclassify marijuana would not make it legal, “it is a historic and meaningful change at the federal level that I think is going to give many state lawmakers a little less hesitation to support a bill,” Schweich added.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has proposed to shift marijuana from a “Schedule I” drug, which includes heroin and LSD, to a less tightly regulated “Schedule III” drug, which includes ketamine and some anabolic steroids. Federal rules allow for some medical uses of Schedule III drugs. But the proposed change faces a lengthy regulatory process, which may not be complete until after the presidential election.

In the meantime, the proposed federal change could add fresh arguments for supporters of ballot measures seeking to legalize marijuana. Florida voters will decide on a constitutional amendment allowing recreational cannabis this November. Public votes could also be held in several other states, including South Dakota, where supporters plan to submit signatures Tuesday for a third attempt at legalizing recreational marijuana.

Following two previous failed attempts, a Nebraska group is gathering signatures to get two measures onto this year’s ballot: one to legalize medical marijuana and another to allow private companies to grow and sell it.

In North Dakota, criminal defense attorney Mark Friese is a former police officer who is backing a marijuana legalization ballot initiative. He said the proposed federal reclassification could immensely help this year’s initiative campaign. North Dakota voters rejected legalization measures in 2018 and 2022 but approved medical marijuana in 2016.

“The bottom line is the move is going to allow intelligent, informed discussion about cannabis legislation instead of succumbing to the historical objection that marijuana is a dangerous drug like LSD or black tar heroin,” Friese said.

Others aren’t so sure the reclassification will make a difference.

Jackee Winters, chairperson of an Idaho group backing a ballot initiative to legalize medical marijuana, said it’s tough to get would-be supporters to sign their petition.

“People are literally afraid to sign anything in Idaho that has to do with marijuana,” she said. “They’re afraid the cops will be coming to their house.”

The proposed federal change may have little affect in 24 states that already legalized recreational marijuana for adults, or in an additional 14 states that allow medical marijuana. But advocates hope it could sway opinions in a dozen other states that either outlaw cannabis entirely or have limited access to products with low levels of THC, the chemical that makes people high.

Georgia has allowed patients with certain illnesses and physician approval to consume low-THC cannabis products since 2015. But until last year, there was no legal way to buy them. Eight dispensaries are now selling the products.

The Georgia Board of Pharmacy last year also issued licenses for low-THC products to 23 independent

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pharmacies, but the federal DEA in November warned pharmacies that dispensing medical marijuana violated federal law.

Dawn Randolph, executive director of the Georgia Pharmacy Association, said a federal reclassification of marijuana could open the way for pharmacists to treat marijuana products "like every other prescription medication."

In other states, such as Tennessee, elected leaders remain hesitant to back either medical or recreational marijuana. Tennessee Senate Speaker Randy McNally, a Republican, previously said he wouldn't support changing state law until the federal government reclassifies marijuana.

But after reports about the DEA's recommended reclassification, McNally still held off on supporting any push to legalize medical marijuana.

Removing marijuana as a Schedule I drug "would only start the conversation in my mind. It would not end it. There would still be many issues to resolve if the downgrade to Schedule III happens as proposed," he said Thursday.

A proposal to legalize medical marijuana died in a Kansas Senate committee without a vote this year, and an attempt to force debate in the full Senate failed by a wide margin. The strongest and most influential opposition came from law enforcement officials, who raised concerns that any legalization could invite organized crime and make it difficult to assess whether people are driving under the influence.

Kansas Bureau of Investigation Director Tony Mattivi considers the DEA effort to reschedule marijuana "misguided and politicized," KBI spokesperson Melissa Underwood said.

The head of the South Carolina state police force also has opposed efforts to legalize medical marijuana, saying it opens the door to other drug use. A legalization bill backed by Republican state Sen. Tom Davis passed the Senate this year but has stalled in a House committee.

"It's difficult to rewire a lot of people who have been conditioned to think of marijuana in a certain way," said Davis, who vowed to push a medical marijuana bill again next year if reelected.

Although not fully embracing medical marijuana, Iowa and Texas both have laws allowing limited access to some cannabis products with low levels of THC. Some Texas cities have passed ordinances allowing small amounts of marijuana. But a similar effort in Lubbock, home to Texas Tech University, was derided in a Facebook post by Republican state Rep. Dustin Burrows as part of "nationwide effort by the left to undermine public safety."

In Wyoming, a decade of pro-marijuana efforts through ballot initiatives and legislation has gotten nowhere. Gov. Mark Gordon, a Republican, has been ambivalent about legalizing medical marijuana and opposes legal recreational pot. The GOP-led Legislature didn't even debate the latest bill to decriminalize marijuana and legalize medical marijuana.

Yet one organizer, who helped unsuccessful petition efforts in 2022 and 2023, hopes federal reclassification of marijuana nudges more lawmakers to support legalization.

"Resistance will be a lot less palpable," legalization advocate Apollo Pazell said.

## South Dakota Gov. Noem admits error of describing meeting North Korea's Kim Jong Un in new book

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is releasing a new book called "No Going Back," but on Friday her office said she would actually be going back to correct some errors — including a false claim that she once met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The Republican governor's new book was part of an overt effort to be selected as a running mate for Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, but it has already faced bipartisan backlash for a story of how she once shot her hunting dog. Then, after scrutiny of her descriptions of meetings with international leaders, her spokesperson Ian Fury said in a statement that it was an error to include Kim in a list of world leaders who Noem has met — and the publisher would correct any future editions of the book.

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Noem's political prospects were already falling amid widespread disgust for how she recounted killing her 14-month-old wirehaired pointer named Cricket after it had shown aggressive behavior and killed her neighbor's chickens.

In her soon-to-be-released book, "No Going Back: The Truth on What's Wrong with Politics and How We Move America Forward," Noem also describes instances where she has stood up to international leaders — anecdotes that would have bolstered her foreign policy experience — but those were swiftly called into question. She writes about canceling a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron.

After The Dakota Scout first reported Noem's descriptions of the meetings, Fury said that the book "has two small errors. This has been communicated to the ghostwriter and editor."

In addition to the meeting with Kim, Fury said Noem also mistook the dates in which she spoke with former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley.

"The book has not been released yet, and all future editions will be corrected," Fury added.

In a section of the book about meeting with international leaders, Noem writes: "Through my tenure on the House Armed Services Committee, I had the chance to travel to many countries to meet with world leaders — some who wanted our help, and some who didn't.

"I remember when I met with the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un," she writes. "I'm sure he underestimated me, having no clue about my experience staring down little tyrants (I'd been a children's pastor after all)."

The description of such a meeting was quickly challenged and described as implausible by experts on U.S.-North Korea relations. When Noem was a member of the House Armed Services Committee from 2013 to 2015, relations between the two countries were tense and a congressional delegation meeting with Kim would have generated considerable awareness, said Syd Seiler, a former U.S. intelligence officer who spent decades working on the relationship with North Korea.

"Nothing like this happened," he said, adding that he was working at the White House and State Department during that time period and was not notified of a congressional meeting with Kim.

Noem did join an international congressional trip, known as a codel, to Japan, South Korea and China in 2014.

In the book, Noem also writes that she was "slated to meet with" Macron in November last year while she was in Paris for a conference of European conservative leaders, but canceled when he made comments that she considered "pro-Hamas."

However, Macron's office told The Associated Press that no "direct invitation" had been made for Noem to meet the French president, though it did not rule out that she may have been invited to a Paris event that he was also scheduled to attend.

Fury said, "The governor was invited to sit in President Macron's box for the Armistice Day Parade at Arc de Triomphe. Following his anti-Israel comments, she chose to cancel."

Meanwhile, Noem is trying to fend off the backlash for writing about shooting her dog as well as a goat.

"Don't believe the #fakenews media's twisted spin," she posted on the social platform X this week. "I had a choice between the safety of my children and an animal who had a history of attacking people & killing livestock."

Her spokesperson, Fury, also cast scrutiny of the errors in Noem's book as biased, saying, "The media will, of course, try and make these tiny issues huge."

Still, members of Congress have poked fun at Noem, with Reps. Jared Moskowitz, a Democrat from Florida; Susan Wild, a Democrat from Pennsylvania; and Nancy Mace, a Republican from South Carolina; launching a Congressional Dog Lovers Caucus this week.

Moskowitz said on X that one of the group's rules was "you cannot kill a puppy."

## Drone footage shows Ukrainian village battered to ruins as residents flee Russian advance

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Ukrainian village of Ocheretyne has been battered by fighting, drone footage obtained by The Associated Press shows. The village has been a target for Russian forces in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

Russian troops have been advancing in the area, pounding Kyiv's depleted, ammunition-deprived forces with artillery, drones and bombs. Ukraine's military has acknowledged the Russians have gained a "foothold" in Ocheretyne, which had a population of about 3,000 before the war, but says that fighting continues.

Residents have scrambled to flee the village, among them a 98-year-old woman who walked almost 10 kilometers (6 miles) alone last week, wearing a pair of slippers and supported by a cane, until she reached Ukrainian front lines.

Not a single person is seen in the footage, and no building in Ocheretyne appears to have been left untouched by the fighting. Most houses, apartment blocks and other buildings look damaged beyond repair, and many houses have been pummeled into piles of wood and bricks. A factory on the outskirts has also been badly damaged.

The footage also shows smoke billowing from several houses, and fires burning in at least two buildings.

Elsewhere, Russia has in recent weeks stepped up attacks on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, in an attempt to pummel the region's energy infrastructure and terrorize its 1.3 million residents.

Four people were wounded and a two-story civilian building was damaged and set ablaze overnight after Russian forces struck Kharkiv, in northeastern Ukraine, with exploding drones, regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said Saturday.

The four, including a 13-year-old, were hurt by falling debris, he said on the Telegram messaging app.

Russian state agency RIA reported Saturday reported that Moscow's forces struck a drone warehouse in Kharkiv that had been used by Ukrainian troops overnight, citing Sergei Lebedev, described as a coordinator of local pro-Moscow guerrillas. His comments could not be independently verified.

Syniehubov said Russia also bombed Kharkiv on Friday, damaging residential buildings and sparking a fire. An 82-year-old woman died and two men were wounded.

Ukraine's military said Russia launched a total of 13 Shahed drones at the Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions of eastern Ukraine overnight, all of which were shot down by Ukrainian air defenses.

Ukraine's energy ministry on Saturday said the overnight strikes damaged an electrical substation in the Dnipropetrovsk region, briefly depriving households and businesses of power.

According to Serhii Lysak, the province's governor, falling drone debris damaged unspecified "critical infrastructure" and three private houses, one of which caught on fire. Two residents, a man and a woman, were rushed to hospital.

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed early on Saturday that its forces overnight shot down four U.S.-provided long-range ATACMS missiles over the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014. The ministry did not provide further details.

Ukraine has recently begun using the missiles, provided secretly by the United States, to hit Russian-held areas, including a military airfield in Crimea and in another area east of the occupied city of Berdyansk, U.S. officials said last week.

Long sought by Ukrainian leaders, the new missiles give Ukraine nearly double the striking distance — up to 300 kilometers (190 miles) — than it had with the mid-range version of the weapons it received from the U.S. last October.

A Ukrainian drone also damaged telecommunications infrastructure on the outskirts of Belgorod, a Russian city some 50 kilometers (31 miles) from the Ukrainian border, according to the local governor. Vyacheslav Gladkov did not say what the site was used for.



## Mexican officials say 3 bodies recovered in Baja California during search for 3 missing foreigners

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican authorities said Friday that three bodies were recovered in an area of Baja California near where two Australians and an American went missing last weekend during an apparent camping and surfing trip.

The state prosecutors office did not say whether the bodies were those of the three foreigners, but said the bodies were discovered during the search for the missing men. It also announced that three people who were being questioned in the case of the missing men had been arrested and charged.

“Three bodies were found south of the city of Ensenada, and they were recovered in coordination with other authorities during a specialized operation because they were found in a zone of difficult access,” the office said in a statement.

“This was done as part of the search for two Australians and one American reported missing,” the office said.

The site where the bodies were discovered near the township of Santo Tomás was near the remote seaside area where the missing men’s tents and truck were found Thursday on a remote stretch of coast.

The men — identified by family members as brothers Jake and Callum Robinson from Australia and American Jack Carter Rhoad — went missing Saturday. They did not show up at their planned accommodations over the weekend.

The U.S. State Department said: “We are aware of those reports (of bodies) and are closely monitoring the situation. At this time we have no further comment.”

Baja California prosecutors had said Thursday that they were questioning three people in the case. On Friday, the office said the three had been arrested and charged with a crime equivalent to kidnapping. It was unclear if they might face more charges.

María Elena Andrade Ramírez, the chief state prosecutor, said evidence found along with the abandoned tents was linked to the three people being questioned about the missing foreigners

“A working team (of investigators) is at the site where they were last seen, where tents and other evidence was found that could be linked to these three people we have under investigation,” Andrade Ramírez said Thursday. “There is a lot of important information that we can’t make public.”

While drug cartels are active in the area, she said, “all lines of investigation are open at this time. We cannot rule anything out until we find them.”

On Wednesday, the missing Australians’ mother, Debra Robinson, posted on a local community Facebook page an appeal for help in finding her sons. Robinson said Callum and Jake had not been heard from since April 27. They had booked accommodations in the nearby city of Rosarito.

Robinson said one of her sons, Callum, was diabetic. She also mentioned that the American who was with them was named Jack Carter Rhoad, but the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City did not immediately confirm that. The U.S. State Department said it was aware of reports a U.S. citizen missing in Baja, but gave no further details.

Andrade Ramírez said her office was in contact with Australian and U.S. officials. But she suggested he time that had passed might make it harder to find the missing trio.

“Unfortunately, it wasn’t until the last few days that they were reported missing. So, that meant that important hours or time was lost,” she said.

In 2015, two Australian surfers, Adam Coleman and Dean Lucas, were killed in western Sinaloa state, across the Gulf of California — also known as the Sea of Cortez — from the Baja peninsula. Authorities said they were victims of highway bandits. Three suspects were arrested in that case.

## The UN warns Sudan's warring parties that Darfur risks starvation and death if aid isn't allowed in

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United Nations food agency warned Sudan's warring parties Friday that there is a serious risk of widespread starvation and death in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan if they don't allow humanitarian aid into the vast western region.

Leni Kinzli, the World Food Program's regional spokesperson, said at least 1.7 million people in Darfur were experiencing emergency levels of hunger in December, and the number "is expected to be much higher today."

"Our calls for humanitarian access to conflict hotspots in Sudan have never been more critical," she told a virtual U.N. press conference from Nairobi.

Sudan plunged into chaos in mid-April 2023, when long-simmering tensions between its military led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces commanded by Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, broke out into street battles in the capital, Khartoum. Fighting has spread to other parts of the country, especially urban areas and the Darfur region.

The paramilitary forces, known as the RSF, have gained control of most of Darfur and are besieging El Fasher, the only capital in Darfur they don't hold, where some 500,000 civilians had taken refuge.

Kinzli said WFP's partners on the ground report that the situation in El Fasher is "extremely dire" and it's difficult for civilians wanting to flee the reported RSF bombings and shelling to leave.

She said the violence in El Fasher and surrounding North Darfur is exacerbating the critical humanitarian needs in the entire Darfur region, where crop production for staple cereals like wheat, sorghum and millet is 78% less than the five-year average.

On top of the impact of escalating violence, Kinzli said, "WFP is concerned that hunger will increase dramatically as the lean season between harvests sets in and people run out of food." She said a farmer in El Fasher recently told her that her family had already run out of food stocks and is living day-to-day, an indication that the "lean season," which usually starts in May, started earlier.

Kinzli said she received photos earlier Friday from colleagues on the ground of severely malnourished children in a camp for displaced people in Central Darfur, as well as older people "who have nothing left but skin and bones."

"Recent reports from our partners indicate that 20 children have died in recent weeks of malnutrition in that IDP camp," she said.

"People are resorting to consuming grass and peanut shells," Kinzli said. "And if assistance doesn't reach them soon, we risk witnessing widespread starvation and death in Darfur and across other conflict-affected areas in Sudan."

Kinzli called for "a concerted diplomatic effort by the international community to push the warring parties to provide access and safety guarantees" for humanitarian staff and convoys.

"One year of this devastating conflict in Sudan has created an unprecedented hunger catastrophe and threatens to ignite the world's largest hunger crisis," she warned. "With almost 28 million people facing food insecurity across Sudan, South Sudan and Chad, the conflict is spilling over and exacerbating the challenges that we've already been facing over the last year."

In March, Sudanese authorities revoked WFP's permission to deliver aid from neighboring Chad to West Darfur and Central Darfur from the town of Adre, saying that crossing had been used to transfer weapons to the RSF. Kinzli said restrictions from Sudanese authorities in Port Sudan are also preventing WFP from transporting aid via Adre.

Sudanese authorities approved the delivery of aid from the Chadian town of Tina to North Darfur, but Kinzli said WFP can no longer use that route for security reasons because it goes directly into besieged El Fasher.

On Thursday, gunmen in South Darfur killed two drivers for the International Committee of the Red Cross and injured three ICRC staff members. On Friday, U.N. humanitarian chief Martin Griffith called the killing

of aid works "unconscionable."

Kinzli said the fighting "and endless bureaucratic hurdles" have prevented WFP from delivering aid to over 700,000 people in Darfur ahead of the rainy season when many roads become impassable.

"WFP currently has 8,000 tons of food supplies ready to move in Chad, ready to transport, but is unable to do so because of these constraints," she said.

"WFP urgently requires unrestricted access and security guarantees to deliver assistance," she said. "And we must be able to use the Adre border crossing, and move assistance across front lines from Port Sudan in the east to Darfur so we can reach people in this desperate region."

## Houston braces for flooding to worsen in wake of storms

By JUAN A. LOZANO and LEKAN OYEKANMI Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston area was under threat of worsening flood conditions Saturday, a day after heavy storms slammed the region and authorities warned those in low-lying areas to evacuate ahead of an expected "catastrophic" surge of water.

A flood watch remained in effect through Sunday afternoon as forecasters predicted additional rainfall Saturday night, bringing another 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7.6 centimeters) of water to the soaked region and the likelihood of major flooding.

Friday's storms forced numerous high-water rescues, including some from the rooftops of flooded homes. Officials redoubled urgent instructions for residents in low-lying areas to evacuate, warning the worst was still to come.

"This threat is ongoing and it's going to get worse. It is not your typical river flood," said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the top elected official in the nation's third-largest county.

She described the predicted surge of water as "catastrophic" and said several hundred structures were at risk of flooding. There had already been at least two dozen water rescues in the county, in addition to getting 30 pets to safety. Schools in the path of the flooding canceled classes and roads jammed as authorities closed highways taking on water.

For weeks, drenching rains in Texas and parts of Louisiana have filled reservoirs and saturated the ground. Floodwaters partially submerged cars and roads this week across parts of southeastern Texas, north of Houston, where high waters reached the roofs of some homes.

More than 11 inches (28 centimeters) of rain fell during a 24 hour period that ended Friday morning in the northern Houston suburb of Spring, according to the National Weather Service.

In the rural community of Shepherd, Gilroy Fernandes said he and his spouse had about an hour to evacuate after a mandatory order. Their home is on stilts near the Trinity River, and they felt relief when the water began to recede on Thursday.

Then the danger grew while they slept.

"Next thing you know, overnight they started releasing more water from the dam at Livingston. And so that caused the level of the river to shoot up by almost 5 or 6 feet overnight," Fernandes said. Neighbors who left an hour later got stuck in traffic because of flooding.

In Montgomery County, Judge Mark Keough said there had been more high-water rescues than he was able to count.

"We estimate we've had a couple hundred rescues from homes, from houses, from vehicles," Keough said.

In Polk County, located about 100 miles (160 kilometers) northeast of Houston, officials have done over 100 water rescues in the past few days, said Polk County Emergency Management Coordinator Courtney Comstock.

She said homes below Lake Livingston Dam and along the Trinity River have flooded.

"It'll be when things subside before we can do our damage assessment," Comstock said.

Authorities in Houston had not reported any deaths or injuries. The city of more than 2 million people is one of the most flood-prone metro areas in the country and has long experience dealing with devastating weather.

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Hurricane Harvey in 2017 dumped historic rainfall on the area, flooding thousands of homes and resulting in more than 60,000 rescues by government rescue personnel across Harris County.

Of particular concern was an area along the San Jacinto River in the northeastern part of Harris County, which was expected to continue rising as more rain falls and officials release extra water from an already full reservoir. Judge Hidalgo on Thursday issued a mandatory evacuation order for those living along portions of the river.

Most of Houston's city limits were not heavily impacted by the weather, except for the northeastern neighborhood of Kingwood. Officials said the area had about four months of rain in about a week's time. Houston Mayor John Whitmire said rising flood waters from the San Jacinto River were expected to impact Kingwood late Friday and Saturday.

Shelters have opened across the region, including nine by the American Red Cross.

The weather service reported the river was above 69 feet (21 meters) around noon Friday and expected to crest at 78 feet (23.7 meters) Friday night. The river is expected to fall below flood stage of 58 feet (17.6 meters) Tuesday afternoon, according to the weather service.

The greater Houston area covers about 10,000 square miles — a footprint slightly bigger than New Jersey. It is crisscrossed by about 1,700 miles (2,736 kilometers) of channels, creeks and bayous that drain into the Gulf of Mexico, about 50 miles (about 80 kilometers) to the southeast from downtown.

The city's system of bayous and reservoirs was built to drain heavy rains. But engineering initially designed nearly 100 years ago has struggled to keep up with the city's growth and bigger storms.

## Israel has briefed US on plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians ahead of potential Rafah operation

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israel this week briefed Biden administration officials on a plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians ahead of a potential operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah aimed at rooting out Hamas militants, according to U.S. officials familiar with the talks.

The officials, who were not authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity to speak about the sensitive exchange, said that the plan detailed by the Israelis did not change the U.S. administration's view that moving forward with an operation in Rafah would put too many innocent Palestinian civilians at risk.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to carry out a military operation in Rafah despite warnings from President Joe Biden and other western officials that doing so would result in more civilian deaths and worsen an already dire humanitarian crisis.

The Biden administration has said there could be consequences for Israel should it move forward with the operation without a credible plan to safeguard civilians.

"Absent such a plan, we can't support a major military operation going into Rafah because the damage it would do is beyond what's acceptable," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said late Friday at the Sedona Forum, an event in Arizona hosted by the McCain Institute.

Some 1.5 million Palestinians have sheltered in the southern Gaza city as the territory has been ravaged by the war that began on Oct. 7 after Hamas militants attacked Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages.

The United Nations humanitarian aid agency on Friday said that hundreds of thousands of people would be "at imminent risk of death" if Israel moves forward with the Rafah assault. The border city is a critical entry point for humanitarian aid and is filled with displaced Palestinians, many in densely packed tent camps.

The officials added that the evacuation plan that the Israelis briefed was not finalized and both sides agreed to keep discussing the matter.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Friday that no "comprehensive" plan for a potential Rafah operation has been revealed by the Israelis to the White House. The operation, however, has been discussed during recent calls between Biden and Netanyahu as well as during recent virtual talks with top Israeli and U.S. national security officials.

"We want to make sure that those conversations continue because it is important to protect those Palestinian lives — those innocent lives," Jean-Pierre said.

The revelation of Israel's continued push to carry out a Rafah operation came as CIA director William Burns arrived Friday in Egypt, where negotiators are trying to seal a cease-fire accord between Israel and Hamas.

Hamas is considering the latest proposal for a cease-fire and hostage release put forward by U.S., Egyptian and Qatari mediators, who are looking to avert the Rafah operation.

They have publicly pressed Hamas to accept the terms of the deal that would lead to an extended cease-fire and an exchange of Israeli hostages taken captive on Oct. 7 and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Hamas has said it will send a delegation to Cairo in the coming days for further discussions on the offer, though it has not specified when.

Israel, and its allies, have sought to increase pressure on Hamas on the hostage negotiation. Signaling that Israel continues to move forward with its planning for a Rafah operation could be a tactic to nudge the militants to finalize the deal.

Netanyahu said earlier this week that Israeli forces would enter Rafah, which Israel says is Hamas' last stronghold, regardless of whether a truce-for-hostages deal is struck. His comments appeared to be meant to appease his nationalist governing partners, and it was not clear whether they would have any bearing on any emerging deal with Hamas.

Blinken visited the region, including Israel, this week and called the latest proposal "extraordinarily generous" and said "the time to act is now."

In Arizona on Friday, Blinken repeated remarks he made earlier this week that "the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a cease-fire is Hamas."

## **The Kentucky Derby is turning 150 years old. It's survived world wars and controversies of all kinds**

By BETH HARRIS AP Racing Writer

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — As a record crowd cheered, American Pharoah rallied from behind and took aim at his remaining two rivals in the stretch. The bay colt and jockey Victor Espinoza surged to the lead with a furlong to go and thundered across the finish line a length ahead in the 2015 Kentucky Derby.

"There's nothing like winning the Kentucky Derby," recalled Espinoza, a three-time winner. "To me it's the most important thing in horse racing."

America's longest continuously held sporting event turns 150 years old this Saturday. By age, it's got the Westminster dog show beat by two years. The Derby has survived two world wars, the Depression and pandemics, including COVID-19 in 2020, when it ran in virtual silence without the usual crowd of 150,000.

The first Saturday in May is Derby Day with all its accompanying pageantry, including fancy hats, fans dressed in their Sunday best, mint juleps served in souvenir glasses, the crowd singing "My Old Kentucky Home" and the hand-sewn garland of red roses for the winner. The Derby was the second-most watched sporting event of 2023 behind the Super Bowl.

"I've heard a lot of people say it's on their bucket list to attend and the one horse race that they watch every year," said trainer Todd Pletcher, a two-time Derby winner who has this year's early favorite in Fierceness.

One chance only

Part of what makes the Derby unique is horses have just one chance to run in it since only 3-year-olds are eligible. It's also the only race in America with a 20-horse field. Since 2013, horses have to accumulate points in qualifying races to earn their way in. Previously, money won in graded stakes races decided the field.

"It's very tough to keep them on the path to get to the Derby, get into the Derby and then, hopefully, it all goes well, and you get a good, clean trip," said trainer Brad Cox, a Louisville native who will saddle

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Catching Freedom, Encino and Just a Touch on Saturday.

Louisvillians take pride in their city's tradition that dates to 1875, whipping up at-home versions of such high-calorie delicacies as Benedictine dip (grated cucumber, cream cheese, sour cream and mayo), Derby pie (chocolate chips and nuts) and cocktails if they're not going to the track.

Diversity struggles

Thirteen of the 15 jockeys in the first Derby were Black, including Oliver Lewis, who rode Aristides to victory in front of 10,000 cheering fans in 1875.

Black riders won 15 of the first 28 Derbies, and then there were none from 1920-2000. As Jim Crow laws were introduced, segregation spread throughout the nation, including horse racing where it was nearly impossible for Black riders to get licensed.

The last Black jockey in the race was Kendrick Carmouche in 2021.

Black trainers also dominated the Derby's early years, winning seven of the first 17 from 1875-1891. On Saturday, Larry Demeritte will be just the second since 1951 and 17th overall when he saddles long shot West Saratoga.

Protestors demanding racial justice and an end to police brutality demonstrated outside Churchill Downs in 2020 and 2021 after Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black EMT, was killed by police in a botched drug raid at her Louisville home.

Women have been a sporadic presence in the Derby, too. Only six have ridden in the race, the last being Rosie Napravnik in 2014. Seven women have trained Derby runners, with Vicki Oliver last doing so in 2021.

"It's an incredibly hard race just to get into, let alone win," Cox said.

Horse safety

Cox was declared the 2021 winner, nine months after the race when Medina Spirit was disqualified for a failed drug test — only the second such DQ in race history — and Mandaloun was elevated to first.

"We're all trying to win this race to experience the thrill of victory," Cox said, "and we've yet to do that."

The Derby's image took a major hit last year when 12 horses died at Churchill Downs in the weeks surrounding the race. An independent investigation cleared the track of any fault, and no singular cause was found. The track continued training, but moved the remainder of its spring racing meet to western Kentucky.

The trainer who owns a record-tying six victories isn't in Louisville for the third straight year. Bob Baffert has been banned by Churchill Downs Inc. ever since Medina Spirit's failed drug test upended the 2021 results.

Baffert fought his original two-year suspension in court, but lost a year ago. Last summer, the track said it was extending the suspension through 2024. It cited "continued concerns regarding the threat to the safety and integrity of racing he poses."

Sparkling showcase

Churchill Downs Inc., the track's publicly traded parent company with shareholders to satisfy, has spent \$500 million renovating and modernizing over the last decade. Its newest showpiece is the \$200 million paddock, where fans who don't mind dropping up to \$12,000 can dine and watch the horses being saddled before the races.

In its 150th year, the Derby's purse has been boosted to a record \$5 million, with \$3.1 million going to the winning owner.

Despite all the changes with the race, the track and the intrusion of current events over the years, the first Saturday in May endures.

"The one thing that continues is you got 20 of the best 3-year-olds from around the world," said trainer Doug O'Neill, a two-time Derby winner.

"It seems like the one mainstay that we can really rely on," Pletcher said.

## Bystander livestreams during Charlotte standoff show an ever-growing appetite for social media video

By ERIK VERDUZCO and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Saing Chhoeun was locked out of his Charlotte, North Carolina, home on Monday as law enforcement with high-powered rifles descended into his yard and garage, using a car as a shield as they were met with a shower of gunfire from the direction of his neighbor's house.

As bullets flew just feet away, Chhoeun took out his phone and started live-streaming the standoff between officials and a man wanted for possession of a firearm by an ex-felon and fleeing to elude.

By the end of the ordeal, five people including four officers and the shooter were dead and more injured in the deadliest single-day incident for U.S. law enforcement since 2016.

The deadly shootout also illustrated how smartphone-wielding bystanders don't always run for cover when bullets start to fly. Increasingly, they look to livestream their perspective of the attack. Experts say the reaction reflects the new role that bystanders play in the age of smartphones.

"It's become sort of a social norm," said Karen North, a digital social media professor at the University of Southern California Annenberg.

Humans always have had trouble defining the responsibilities of a bystander in a crisis situation, North said. It's not always safe to intervene, as with the situation in Charlotte, and people can feel helpless when they're doing nothing. Social media has provided a third option.

The "new responsibility of the bystander" in the digital era is to take a record of what happened on their phones, she said.

"It used to be, 'If you see something, say something,'" North said. "Now, it's, 'If you see something, start recording.'"

Chhoeun had been about to leave for work when U.S. marshals blocked his driveway and he was forced to huddle for safety in his garage, his keys in the ignition of his truck. He crouched by the door knocking for his son to let him in with one hand and recording with the other.

Chhoeun said he never would have risked his life to shoot a video if he hadn't been locked outside. But since he was, he thought: "I might just live it, you know, get everybody the world to see also that I've witnessed that. I didn't see that coming."

Rissa Reign, a youth coordinator who lives in the neighborhood, said she was cleaning her house when she heard gunfire and walked out to find out what was happening.

She began recording when she heard sirens, thinking she would share the video to Charlit, a Facebook group with 62,000 members where residents post about news and events. She had no idea how serious the situation had become until a SWAT vehicle pulled up behind her.

"Once we were out there, it was, 'Oh, no. This is an active situation,'" she said. "And the next thing you know, you're in the middle of something way bigger than what you thought."

Reign saw livestreaming as a way to keep the community informed, she said.

"Seeing that really puts things in perspective and lets you know that is really real, not just reading it or hearing about it in the news," she said of the live stream video. "When you really see it, you can, you know, you know that it's real."

Mary Angela Bock, a media professor at the University of Texas at Austin, said there are many reasons why someone might pull out their phone in a situation like the one in Charlotte. There are always going to be people who try to shoot videos because of a human attraction to violence or to catch someone in an embarrassing situation.

"There are also good reasons for good people to respectfully, from a safe distance, record police activity, or any kind of government activity for the sake of citizenship: to bear witness on behalf of other citizens, to bear witness on behalf of the community," she said. "We're all in this together."

Bock, who studies people who film law enforcement, said police leaders often will say to her that they support the idea of respectfully distanced citizen video because it creates more evidence. But that is

sometimes easier said than done on the ground during a crisis situation.

"Police officers will often talk about how, and this is true, video doesn't always show the whole story. Video has to start and stop. Somebody might not have been there in the beginning, somebody might not see the whole thing. One perspective is not the whole perspective," she said.

"Which is why I advocate to people to respectfully record from a distance because the more perspectives, the better when we triangulate. When we have more than one view of a scene, we have a better idea of what happened," Bock said.

Numerous federal appeals courts have affirmed the right to record police work in public.

Stephen Dubovsky, professor emeritus of psychiatry at the State University of New York at Buffalo, said for someone in that situation, connecting with others through livestreaming might give them a sense of safety.

"You go out there and you might be at risk, but you're looking at it through your phone," he said. "You're looking at it through the video, you're one step detached from it."

In Chhoeun's video, two agents can be seen sheltering behind a vehicle. Another agent is shown by a fence in his yard, dropping to the ground as what appear to be bullets spray the area around him.

"It was so, so sad for law enforcement," he said. "I know they are not choosing to die on my backyard, but just do their job. And that's what happened to them, left their family behind."

## **Marijuana backers eye proposed federal regulatory change as an aid to legalizing pot in more states**

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

As the U.S. government moves toward reclassifying marijuana as a less dangerous drug, there may be little immediate impact in the dozen states that have not already legalized cannabis for widespread medical or recreational use by adults.

But advocates for marijuana legalization hope a federal regulatory shift could eventually change the minds — and votes — of some state policymakers who have been reluctant to embrace weed.

"It is very common for a state legislator to tell me, 'Well, I might be able to support this, but ... I'm not going to vote for something that's illegal under federal law,'" said Matthew Schweich, executive director of the Marijuana Policy Project, which advocates for cannabis legalization.

Although a proposal to reclassify marijuana would not make it legal, "it is a historic and meaningful change at the federal level that I think is going to give many state lawmakers a little less hesitation to support a bill," Schweich added.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has proposed to shift marijuana from a "Schedule I" drug, which includes heroin and LSD, to a less tightly regulated "Schedule III" drug, which includes ketamine and some anabolic steroids. Federal rules allow for some medical uses of Schedule III drugs. But the proposed change faces a lengthy regulatory process, which may not be complete until after the presidential election.

In the meantime, the proposed federal change could add fresh arguments for supporters of ballot measures seeking to legalize marijuana. Florida voters will decide on a constitutional amendment allowing recreational cannabis this November. Public votes could also be held in several other states, including South Dakota, where supporters plan to submit signatures Tuesday for a third attempt at legalizing recreational marijuana.

Following two previous failed attempts, a Nebraska group is gathering signatures to get two measures onto this year's ballot: one to legalize medical marijuana and another to allow private companies to grow and sell it.

In North Dakota, criminal defense attorney Mark Friese is a former police officer who is backing a marijuana legalization ballot initiative. He said the proposed federal reclassification could immensely help this year's initiative campaign. North Dakota voters rejected legalization measures in 2018 and 2022 but approved medical marijuana in 2016.

"The bottom line is the move is going to allow intelligent, informed discussion about cannabis legislation



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instead of succumbing to the historical objection that marijuana is a dangerous drug like LSD or black tar heroin," Friese said.

Others aren't so sure the reclassification will make a difference.

Jackee Winters, chairperson of an Idaho group backing a ballot initiative to legalize medical marijuana, said it's tough to get would-be supporters to sign their petition.

"People are literally afraid to sign anything in Idaho that has to do with marijuana," she said. "They're afraid the cops will be coming to their house."

The proposed federal change may have little affect in 24 states that already legalized recreational marijuana for adults, or in an additional 14 states that allow medical marijuana. But advocates hope it could sway opinions in a dozen other states that either outlaw cannabis entirely or have limited access to products with low levels of THC, the chemical that makes people high.

Georgia has allowed patients with certain illnesses and physician approval to consume low-THC cannabis products since 2015. But until last year, there was no legal way to buy them. Eight dispensaries are now selling the products.

The Georgia Board of Pharmacy last year also issued licenses for low-THC products to 23 independent pharmacies, but the federal DEA in November warned pharmacies that dispensing medical marijuana violated federal law.

Dawn Randolph, executive director of the Georgia Pharmacy Association, said a federal reclassification of marijuana could open the way for pharmacists to treat marijuana products "like every other prescription medication."

In other states, such as Tennessee, elected leaders remain hesitant to back either medical or recreational marijuana. Tennessee Senate Speaker Randy McNally, a Republican, previously said he wouldn't support changing state law until the federal government reclassifies marijuana.

But after reports about the DEA's recommended reclassification, McNally still held off on supporting any push to legalize medical marijuana.

Removing marijuana as a Schedule I drug "would only start the conversation in my mind. It would not end it. There would still be many issues to resolve if the downgrade to Schedule III happens as proposed," he said Thursday.

A proposal to legalize medical marijuana died in a Kansas Senate committee without a vote this year, and an attempt to force debate in the full Senate failed by a wide margin. The strongest and most influential opposition came from law enforcement officials, who raised concerns that any legalization could invite organized crime and make it difficult to assess whether people are driving under the influence.

Kansas Bureau of Investigation Director Tony Mattivi considers the DEA effort to reschedule marijuana "misguided and politicized," KBI spokesperson Melissa Underwood said.

The head of the South Carolina state police force also has opposed efforts to legalize medical marijuana, saying it opens the door to other drug use. A legalization bill backed by Republican state Sen. Tom Davis passed the Senate this year but has stalled in a House committee.

"It's difficult to rewire a lot of people who have been conditioned to think of marijuana in a certain way," said Davis, who vowed to push a medical marijuana bill again next year if reelected.

Although not fully embracing medical marijuana, Iowa and Texas both have laws allowing limited access to some cannabis products with low levels of THC. Some Texas cities have passed ordinances allowing small amounts of marijuana. But a similar effort in Lubbock, home to Texas Tech University, was derided in a Facebook post by Republican state Rep. Dustin Burrows as part of "nationwide effort by the left to undermine public safety."

In Wyoming, a decade of pro-marijuana efforts through ballot initiatives and legislation has gotten nowhere. Gov. Mark Gordon, a Republican, has been ambivalent about legalizing medical marijuana and opposes legal recreational pot. The GOP-led Legislature didn't even debate the latest bill to decriminalize marijuana and legalize medical marijuana.

Yet one organizer, who helped unsuccessful petition efforts in 2022 and 2023, hopes federal reclassifica-

tion of marijuana nudges more lawmakers to support legalization.

"Resistance will be a lot less palpable," legalization advocate Apollo Pazell said.

## **Biden and Trump offer worlds-apart contrasts on issues in 2024's rare contest between 2 presidents**

By SEUNG MIN KIM, JILL COLVIN and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden and Donald Trump are two presidents with unfinished business and an itch to get it done.

Their track records and plans on abortion, immigration, taxes, wars abroad — you name it — leave no doubt that the man voters choose in November will seek to shape the landscape of American life in ways wholly distinct from the other.

The choices, if the winner gets his way, are sharply defined. The onward march of regulation and incentives to restrain climate change, or a slow walk if not an about-face. Higher taxes on the super rich, or not. Abortion rights reaffirmed, or left to states to restrict or allow as each decides. Another attempt to legislate border security and orderly entry into the country, or massive deportations. A commitment to stand with Ukraine or let go.

At no time in living memory have two presidents, current and former, competed for the office. Not since Presidents Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, both Republicans, in 1912, and that didn't work out for either of them — Democrat Woodrow Wilson won that three-way race.

More than a century later, voters again get to judge two presidents on their records alongside their promises for the next four years. Here's where they stand on 10 of the top issues:

### **ABORTION**

**BIDEN:** The president has called for Congress to send him legislation that would codify in federal law the right to an abortion, which stood for nearly 50 years before being overturned by the Supreme Court. He has also criticized statewide bans on abortion in Republican states and says he will veto any potential nationwide ban should one come to his desk. In the absence of legislation, his administration has taken narrower actions, such as proposals that would protect women who travel to obtain abortions and limit how law enforcement collects medical records.

**TRUMP:** The former president often brags about appointing the Supreme Court justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending the constitutional right to an abortion. After dodging questions about when in pregnancy he believes the procedure should be restricted, Trump announced in April that decisions on access and cutoffs should be left to the states. He said he would not sign a national abortion ban into law. But he's declined to say whether he would try to limit access to the abortion pill mifepristone. He told *Time* magazine in recent interviews that it should also be left up to states to determine whether to prosecute women for abortions or to monitor their pregnancies.

### **CLIMATE/ENERGY**

**BIDEN:** In a second term, Biden could be expected to continue his focus on implementing the climate provisions of his Inflation Reduction Act, which provided nearly \$375 billion for things like financial incentives for electric cars and clean energy projects. Biden is also enlisting more than 20,000 young people in a national "Climate Corps," a Peace Corps-like program to promote conservation through tasks such as weatherizing homes and repairing wetlands. Biden wants to triple the group's size this decade. Despite all this, it's unlikely that the U.S. will be on track to meet Biden's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by half by 2030.

**TRUMP:** His mantra for one of his top priorities: "DRILL, BABY, DRILL." Trump, who in the past cast climate change as a "hoax" and harbors a particular disdain for wind power, says it's his goal for the U.S. to have the cheapest energy and electricity in the world. He'd increase oil drilling on public lands, offer tax breaks to oil, gas and coal producers, speed the approval of natural gas pipelines and roll back the Biden administration's aggressive efforts to get people to switch to electric cars, which he argues have

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a place but shouldn't be forced on consumers. He has also pledged to re-exit the Paris Climate Accords, end wind subsidies and eliminate regulations imposed and proposed by the Biden administration targeting energy-inefficient kinds of lightbulbs, stoves, dishwashers and shower heads.

## DEMOCRACY/RULE OF LAW

BIDEN: Protecting democracy has been the *raison d'être* behind Biden's decision to run for reelection. In a symbolic nod to the Revolutionary War, Biden delivered his first campaign speech of 2024 near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where he spoke of George Washington's decision to step down as the leader of the Continental Army after American independence was won. During the Jan. 5 speech, Biden said this year's presidential contest is "all about" whether U.S. democracy will survive and he regularly condemns Trump's denial that he lost the 2020 general election. Biden has called the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the Capitol a "day that we nearly lost America — lost it all."

TRUMP: The former president, who famously refused to accept his loss to Biden in 2020, has not committed to accepting the results this time. "If everything's honest, I'll gladly accept the results," Trump recently told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "If it's not, you have to fight for the right of the country." He has said he will pardon the Jan. 6 defendants jailed for assaulting police officers and other crimes during the attack on the Capitol. He vows to overhaul the Justice Department and FBI "from the ground up," aggrieved by the criminal charges the department has brought against him. He also promises to deploy the National Guard to cities such as Chicago that are struggling with violent crime, and in response to protests, and has also vowed to appoint a special prosecutor to go after Biden.

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

BIDEN: The Biden administration is already taking steps to make it harder for any mass firings of civil servants to occur. In April, the Office of Personnel Management issued a new rule that would ban federal workers from being reclassified as political appointees or other at-will employees, which makes them easier to dismiss. That was in response to Schedule F, a 2020 executive order from Trump that reclassified tens of thousands of federal workers so they could be fired more easily.

TRUMP: The former president vows an overhaul of the federal bureaucracy, which he has long blamed for stymying his first term agenda: "I will totally obliterate the deep state." He plans to reissue the Schedule F order stripping civil service protections. He'd then move to fire "rogue bureaucrats," including those who "weaponized our justice system," and the "warmongers and America-Last globalists in the Deep State, the Pentagon, the State Department, and the national security industrial complex." He's pledged to terminate the Education Department and wants to curtail the independence of regulatory agencies like the Federal Communications Commission.

## IMMIGRATION

BIDEN: The president continues to advocate for the comprehensive immigration bill he introduced on his first day in office, which would grant an eight-year pathway to citizenship for immigrants in the U.S. without legal status, with a faster track for young immigrants living in the country illegally who were brought here as children. That legislation went nowhere in Congress. This year, the president backed a Senate compromise that included tougher asylum standards and billions more in federal dollars to hire more border agents, immigration judges and asylum officers. That deal collapsed on Capitol Hill due to Trump's opposition. Biden is currently considering executive action on the border, particularly if the number of illegal crossings increases later this year.

TRUMP: The former president promises to mount the largest domestic deportation in U.S. history — an operation that could include detention camps and the National Guard. He'd bring back policies he put in place during his first term, like the Remain in Mexico program and Title 42, which placed curbs on migrants on public health grounds. And he'd revive and expand the travel ban that originally targeted citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries. After the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel, he pledged new "ideological screening" for immigrants to bar "dangerous lunatics, haters, bigots, and maniacs." He'd also try to deport people who are in the U.S. legally but harbor "jihadist sympathies." He'd seek to end birthright citizenship for people born in the U.S. whose parents are both in the country illegally.

## ISRAEL/GAZA

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**BIDEN:** The war in Gaza, far more so than other national security considerations, has defined Biden's foreign policy this year, with significant political implications. He has offered full-throated support for Israel since Hamas militants launched a surprise deadly assault on Oct. 7. But as the death toll in Gaza continues to climb, Biden has faced massive backlash at home. His administration is working to broker a temporary ceasefire that would release some hostages held by Hamas, which would also allow for more humanitarian aid to enter the war-torn region. Biden also calls for a two-state solution, which would have Israel existing alongside an independent Palestinian state.

**TRUMP:** The former president has expressed support for Israel's efforts to "destroy" Hamas but he's also been critical of some of Israel's tactics. He says the country must finish the job quickly and get back to peace. He has called for more aggressive responses to pro-Palestinian protests at college campuses and applauded police efforts to clear encampments. Trump also proposes to revoke the student visas of those who espouse antisemitic or anti-American views.

## LGBTQ ISSUES

**BIDEN:** The president and White House officials regularly denounce discrimination and attacks against the LGBTQ community. Shortly after he took office, Biden reversed an executive order from Trump that had largely banned transgender people from military service, and his Education Department completed a rule in April that says Title IX, the 1972 law that was passed to protect women's rights, also bars discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The new rule was silent on the issue of transgender athletes.

**TRUMP:** The former president has pledged to keep transgender men out of women's sports and says he will ask Congress to pass a bill establishing that "only two genders," as determined at birth, are recognized by the United States. He promises to "defeat the toxic poison of gender ideology." As part of his crackdown on gender-affirming care, he would declare that any health care provider that participates in the "chemical or physical mutilation of minor youth" no longer meets federal health and safety standards and won't get federal money. He'd take similarly punitive steps in schools against any teacher or school official who "suggests to a child that they could be trapped in the wrong body." Trump would support a national prohibition of hormonal or surgical intervention for transgender minors and bar transgendered people from military service.

## NATO/UKRAINE

**BIDEN:** The president has spent much of his time rebuilding alliances unraveled by Trump, particularly NATO, a critical bulwark against Russian aggression. Since the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Biden has pledged unceasing support to Kyiv and he made an unannounced visit there in February 2023 in a show of solidarity. His administration and Congress have sent tens of billions of dollars in military and other aid to Ukraine. The latest tranche of aid totaled \$61 billion in weapons, ammunition and other assistance and is expected to last through this year. Continued U.S. assistance is critical, Biden says, because he argues that Russian leader Vladimir Putin will not stop at invading Ukraine.

**TRUMP:** The former president has repeatedly taken issue with U.S. aid to Ukraine and says he will continue to "fundamentally reevaluate" the mission and purpose of the NATO alliance if he returns to office. He has claimed, without explanation, that he will be able to end the war before his inauguration by bringing both sides to the negotiating table. (His approach seems to hinge on Ukraine giving up at least some of its Russian-occupied territory in exchange for a cease-fire.) On NATO, he has assailed member nations for years for failing to hit agreed-upon military spending targets. Trump drew alarms this year when he said that, as president, he had warned leaders that he would not only refuse to defend nations that don't hit those targets, but "would encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to countries that are "delinquent."

## TARIFFS/TRADE

**BIDEN:** This is where Biden and his protectionist tendencies — in a continued appeal to working-class voters — have some similarities with Trump. Biden is calling for a tripling of tariffs on Chinese steel, a move that would shield U.S. producers from cheaper imports. The current tariff rate is 7.5% for both steel and aluminum but Biden wants that to go to 25%. Biden has also said he opposes the proposed acquisition of U.S. Steel by Japan's Nippon Steel, because it is "vital for it to remain an American steel company that

is domestically owned and operated.”

TRUMP: The former president wants a dramatic expansion of tariffs, proposing a levy of perhaps 10% on nearly all imported foreign goods. Penalties would increase if trade partners manipulate their currencies or engage in other unfair trading practices. He would also urge Congress to pass legislation giving the president authority to impose a reciprocal tariff on any country that imposes one on the U.S. Much of his trade agenda has focused on China. Trump has proposed phasing out Chinese imports of essential goods including electronics, steel and pharmaceuticals and wants to ban Chinese companies from owning U.S. infrastructure in sectors such as energy, technology and farmland. Whether higher tariffs come from a Biden administration or a Trump one, they are likely to raise prices for consumers who have already faced higher costs from inflation.

## TAXES

BIDEN: In his State of the Union address, Biden proposed raising the corporate tax rate to 28% and the corporate minimum tax to 21% as a matter of “fundamental fairness” that will bring in more money to invest in Americans. The current corporate rate is 21% and the corporate minimum, raised under the Inflation Reduction Act, is at 15% for companies making more than \$1 billion a year. Biden also wants to require billionaires to pay at least 25% of their income in taxes and to restore the child tax credit that was enacted under his 2021 COVID-19 relief package, but has since expired.

TRUMP: The former president has promised to extend the tax cuts he signed into law in 2017 and that are due to sunset at the end of 2025. That package cut the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21% and roughly doubled the standard deduction and child tax credit.

## **Congressman praises heckling of war protesters, including 1 who made monkey gestures at Black woman**

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Israel-Hamas war demonstrations at the University of Mississippi turned ugly this week when one counter-protester appeared to make monkey noises and gestures at a Black student in a raucous gathering that was endorsed by a far-right congressman from Georgia.

“Ole Miss taking care of business,” Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Collins wrote Friday on the social platform X with a link to the video showing the racist jeers.

The Associated Press left voicemail messages for Collins on Friday at his offices in Georgia and Washington and sent an email to his spokesperson, asking for an explanation of what Collins meant. There was no immediate response.

The taunting brought sharp criticism on and off campus.

“Students were calling for an end to genocide. They were met with racism,” James M. Thomas, a sociology professor at the University of Mississippi, wrote Friday on X.

The Rev. Cornell William Brooks, a former president and CEO of the NAACP and professor at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, wrote on X that a white man mocking a Black woman as a monkey “isn’t about ‘Stand With Israel’ or ‘Free Palestine.’ This is protest as performative racism.”

Collins was first elected to Congress in 2022 and made several social media posts criticizing campus protests.

Nobody was arrested during the demonstration Thursday at the University of Mississippi, where hecklers vastly outnumbered war protesters. According to a count by AP, more than 2,400 arrests have occurred on 46 U.S. university or college campuses since April 17 during demonstrations against the war.

The student newspaper, The Daily Mississippian, reported about 30 protesters on the Oxford campus billed themselves as UMiss for Palestine. Videos and photos from the event showed the protesters were in a grassy area near the main library, blocked off by barriers erected by campus security.

They chanted “Free, free Palestine,” and carried Palestinian flags and signs with slogans including, “Stop the Genocide” and “U.S. bombs take Palestine lives.”

Student journalist Stacey J. Spiehler shot video that showed campus police officers and the dean of

students standing between anti-war protesters and hecklers. After the Black woman protesting the war had what appeared to be a heated exchange of words with several white hecklers, one of the men made the monkey gestures and noises at her.

About 76% of the university's students were white and about 11% were Black in 2022-23, the most recent data available on the school's website.

University of Mississippi Chancellor Glenn Boyce said the school is committed to people expressing their views. He said some statements made on campus Thursday were "offensive and unacceptable."

In another statement Friday, Boyce said one "student conduct investigation" had been opened and university leaders were "working to determine whether more cases are warranted."

"To be clear, people who say horrible things to people because of who they are will not find shelter or comfort on this campus," he said.

Republican Gov. Tate Reeves reposted a video on X that showed counter-protesters on the campus singing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

"Warms my heart," Reeves wrote. "I love Mississippi!"

## Striking deals to end campus protests, some colleges invite discussion of their investments

By KATHLEEN FOODY, MIKE CATALINI, KAREN MATTHEWS and MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Anti-war demonstrations ceased this week at a small number of U.S. universities after school leaders struck deals with pro-Palestinian protesters, fending off possible disruptions of final exams and graduation ceremonies.

The agreements at schools including Brown, Northwestern and Rutgers stand out amid the chaotic scenes and 2,400-plus arrests on 46 campuses nationwide since April 17. Tent encampments and building takeovers have disrupted classes at some schools, including Columbia and UCLA.

Deals included commitments by universities to review their investments in Israel or hear calls to stop doing business with the longtime U.S. ally. Many protester demands have zeroed in on links to the Israeli military as the war grinds on in Gaza.

The agreements to even discuss divestment mark a major shift on an issue that has been controversial for years, with opponents of a long-running campaign to boycott Israel saying it veers into antisemitism. But while the colleges have made concessions around amnesty for protesters and funding for Middle Eastern studies, they have made no promises about changing their investments.

"I think for some universities, it might be just a delaying tactic to diffuse the protests," said Ralph Young, a history professor who studies American dissent at Temple University in Philadelphia. "The end of the semester is happening now. And maybe by the time the next semester begins, there is a cease-fire in Gaza."

Some university boards may never even vote on divesting from Israel, which can be a complicated process, Young said. And some state schools have said they lack the authority to do so.

But Young said dialogue is a better tactic than arrests, which can inflame protesters.

Talking "at least gives the protesters the feeling that they're getting somewhere," he said. "Whether they are getting somewhere or not is another question."

Protesters at the University of Vermont notched a victory when the administration announced Friday that their commencement speaker, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, would no longer be giving an address to graduates later this month. The protesters, who erected an encampment Sunday, had demanded Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield's speech be removed from the upcoming ceremony because of her role in the U.S. vetoes of multiple UN cease-fire resolutions.

Israel has called the protests antisemitic; its critics say the country uses such allegations to silence opposition. Although some protesters were caught on camera making antisemitic remarks or violent threats, protest organizers — some of whom are Jewish — have called it a peaceful movement to defend Palestinian rights and protest the war.

Administrators at the University of California, Riverside, announced an agreement Friday with protesters

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to close their campus encampment. The deal included the formation of a task force to explore removing Riverside's endowment from the broader UC system's management and investing those funds "in a manner that will be financially and ethically sound for the university with consideration to the companies involved in arms manufacturing and delivery."

The announcement marked an apparent split with the policy of the 10-campus UC system, which last week said it opposes "calls for boycott against and divestment from Israel."

"While the University affirms the right of our community members to express diverse viewpoints, a boycott of this sort impinges on the academic freedom of our students and faculty and the unfettered exchange of ideas on our campuses," the system said in a statement. "UC tuition and fees are the primary funding sources for the University's core operations. None of these funds are used for investment purposes."

Demonstrators at Rutgers University — where finals were paused due to the protests on its New Brunswick campus — similarly packed up their tents Thursday afternoon. The state university agreed to establish an Arab Cultural Center and to not retaliate against any students involved in the camp.

In a statement, Chancellor Francine Conway noted protesters' request for divestment from companies doing business with Israel and for Rutgers to cut ties with Tel Aviv University. She said the request is under review, but "such decisions fall outside of our administrative scope."

Protesters at Brown University in Rhode Island agreed to dismantle their encampment Tuesday. School officials said students could present arguments for divesting Brown's endowment from companies contributing to and profiting from the war in Gaza.

In addition, Brown President Christina Paxson will ask an advisory committee to make a recommendation on divestment by Sept. 30, which will be put before the school's governing corporation for a vote in October.

Northwestern's Deering Meadow in suburban Chicago also fell silent after an agreement Monday. The deal curbed protest activity in return for the reestablishment of an advisory committee on university investments and other commitments.

The arrangement drew dissent from both sides. Some pro-Palestinian protesters condemned it as a failure to stick to their original demands, while some supporters of Israel said it represented "cowardly" capitulation.

Seven of 18 members subsequently resigned from a university committee that advises the administration on addressing antisemitism, Islamophobia and expressions of hatred on campus, saying they couldn't continue to serve "with antisemitism so present at Northwestern in public view for the past week."

Michael Simon, the executive director of an organization for Jewish students, Northwestern Hillel, said he resigned after concluding that the committee could not achieve its goals.

Faculty at Pomona College in California voted in favor of divesting from companies they said are funding Israel's war in Gaza, a group of faculty and students said Friday.

The vote Thursday is not binding on the liberal arts school of nearly 1,800 students east of Los Angeles. But supporters said they hope it would encourage the board to stop investing in these companies and start disclosing where it makes its investments.

"This nonbinding faculty statement does not represent any official position of Pomona College," the school said in a statement. "We will continue to encourage further dialogue within in our community, including consideration of counterarguments."

Meanwhile, arrests of demonstrators continued elsewhere.

About a dozen protesters who refused police orders to leave an encampment at New York University were arrested early Friday, and about 30 more left voluntarily, NYU spokesperson John Beckman said. The school asked city police to intervene, he added.

NYPD officers also cleared an encampment at The New School in Greenwich Village on the request of school administrators. No arrests were announced.

Another 132 protesters were arrested when police broke up an encampment at the State University of New York at New Paltz starting late Thursday, authorities said.

And nine were arrested at the University of Tennessee, including seven students who Chancellor Donde

Plowman said would also be sanctioned under the school's code of conduct.

The movement began April 17 at Columbia, where student protesters built an encampment to call for an end to the Israel-Hamas war.

More than 100 people were arrested late Tuesday when police broke up the Columbia encampment. One officer accidentally discharged his gun inside Hamilton Hall during that operation, but no one was injured, the NYPD said late Thursday.

Over 34,000 Palestinians have been killed in the conflict in the Gaza Strip, according to the Health Ministry there. Israel launched its offensive after Oct. 7, when Hamas militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took roughly 250 hostages in an attack on southern Israel.

## Hope Hicks, ex-Trump adviser, recounts fear in 2016 campaign over impact of 'Access Hollywood' tape

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JAKE OFFENHARTZ, PHILIP MARCELO and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's 2016 campaign was seized with worry about the potential political damage from a tape that showed Trump bragging about grabbing women sexually without their permission, longtime Trump adviser Hope Hicks testified Friday at his hush money trial.

Hicks, a former White House official, was compelled to testify by Manhattan prosecutors, who are hoping her remarks bolster their argument that the uproar over the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape hastened Trump's then-lawyer to pay off porn actor Stormy Daniels to bury a negative story that could imperil his 2016 presidential bid.

Once one of Trump's closest confidants, Hicks provided a window into the chaotic fallout over the tape's release just days before a crucial debate with Democrat Hillary Clinton. It was recorded in 2005 but was not seen by the public until Oct. 7, 2016, about a month before Election Day. Hicks described being stunned and huddling with other Trump advisers after learning about the tape's existence from the Washington Post reporter who broke the story. Hicks forwarded the reporter's request to campaign leadership with the recommendation to "deny, deny, deny," she said.

"I had a good sense to believe this was going to be a massive story and that it was going to dominate the news cycle for the next several days," Hicks testified. "This was a damaging development."

She added: "This was just pulling us backwards in a way that was going to be hard to overcome."

Prosecutors called her to the witness stand to strengthen their case alleging Trump worked to prevent damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public as part of a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 presidential election. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg has sought to establish that link not just to secure a conviction but also to persuade the public of the significance of the case, which may be the only one of four Trump prosecutions to reach trial this year.

Hicks told jurors that Trump claimed he did not know anything about his then-attorney Michael Cohen paying \$130,000 to Daniels to prevent her from going public with claims of a sexual encounter with Trump. But, Hicks said, Trump eventually came to believe that burying Daniels' story was prudent, saying he thought "it would have been bad to have that story come out before the election."

At other points, Hicks' testimony appeared to help the defense's contention that the former president was trying to protect his reputation and family — not his campaign — by shielding them from embarrassing stories about his personal life. Trump has denied any wrongdoing in the case, which he has slammed as an effort to derail his campaign to reclaim the White House in November.

Under questioning by Trump's attorney, Hicks told jurors that he was worried about the effect of the "Access Hollywood" tape on his family. And when the Wall Street Journal published a story revealing ex-Playboy Model Karen McDougal's affair allegations right before the election, Hicks said Trump was concerned about his wife seeing the story and asked Hicks to make sure newspapers weren't delivered to their residence that morning.



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But when asked if Trump was also worried about the story's impact on the campaign, Hicks responded that everything they spoke about during that time was viewed through the lens of the campaign. Trump would often ask her, "How is it playing?" as a way of gauging how his appearances, speeches and policies were landing with voters, she said.

Hicks' proximity to Trump over the years has made her a figure of interest to congressional and criminal investigators alike, who have sought her testimony on multiple occasions on topics ranging from Russian election interference to Trump's election loss and the subsequent Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol.

She appeared reluctant to be in the courtroom, taking a deep breath as she stepped up to the microphone and acknowledging she was "really nervous." She later started crying on the witness stand, forcing the court to take a brief break, when Trump lawyer Emil Bove started to ask her to reflect on her time at the Trump Organization before he brought her onto his 2016 campaign.

Referring to her former boss as "Mr. Trump" and later "President Trump" when speaking about their time in the White House, she told the court she last communicated with him in the summer or fall of 2022. While no longer in Trump's inner circle, Hicks spoke about the former president in glowing terms as the prosecutor began questioning her about her background.

She recounted how the political firestorm that ensued after the release of the tape was so intense that it knocked an actual storm out of the headlines. Before the tape became public, the news was dominated by a Category 4 hurricane that was charging toward the East Coast.

"I don't think anybody remembers" where that hurricane hit, Hicks told jurors.

Hurricane Matthew, which hit Haiti and Cuba as a Category 4 storm, made landfall in South Carolina as a Category 1 hurricane on Oct. 8, 2016, the day after the "Access Hollywood" tape was made public.

Prosecutors have spent the week using detailed testimony about meetings, email exchanges, business transactions and bank accounts to build on the foundation of their case charging Trump with 34 counts of falsifying internal Trump Organization business records. They are setting the stage for pivotal testimony from Cohen, who paid Daniels for her silence before he went to prison for the hush money scheme.

Testimony will resume Monday. The trial could last another month or more, with important witnesses who have yet to be called, including Cohen and Daniels.

One of the most pivotal pieces of evidence disclosed to jurors this week was a recording of a meeting between Trump and Cohen before the 2016 election in which they discussed a plan to purchase the rights to McDougal's story from the National Enquirer so that it would never come out. The tabloid had previously bought McDougal's story to bury it on Trump's behalf.

At one point, Trump can be heard saying: "What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?"

In a victory for Trump just as court was ending for the week, Judge Juan M. Merchan denied a request by prosecutors to ask Trump, should he choose to testify, about being held in contempt of court for gag order violations in the case. Merchan said allowing it would be "so prejudicial it would be very, very difficult for the jury to look past that."

Trump this week paid his \$9,000 fine for violating the gag order that bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to the case.

His attorney, Todd Blanche, told the judge Friday they are appealing the finding that Trump violated the gag order. Blanche said that they took particular issue with penalties for what are known as reposts — instances where Trump shared someone else's post with his followers.

## **A senior UN official says northern Gaza is now in 'full-blown famine'**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A top U.N. official said Friday that hard-hit northern Gaza was now in "full-blown famine" after more than six months of war between Israel and Hamas and severe Israeli restrictions on food deliveries to the Palestinian territory.

Cindy McCain, the American director of the U.N. World Food Program, became the most prominent international official so far to declare that trapped civilians in the most cut-off part of Gaza had gone over

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the brink into famine.

"It's horror," McCain told NBC's "Meet the Press" in an interview to air Sunday. "There is famine — full-blown famine — in the north, and it's moving its way south."

She said a cease-fire and a greatly increased flow of aid through land and sea routes was essential to confronting the growing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, home to 2.3 million people.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which controls entrance into Gaza and says it is beginning to allow in more food and other humanitarian aid through land crossings.

The panel that serves as the internationally recognized monitor for food crises said in March that northern Gaza was on the brink of famine and likely to experience it in May. Since March, northern Gaza had not received anything like the aid needed to stave off famine, a U.S. Agency for International Development humanitarian official for Gaza told The Associated Press. The panel's next update will not come before this summer.

The USAID official said on-the-ground preparations for a new U.S.-led sea route were on track to bring in more food — including treatment for hundreds of thousands of starving children — by early or mid-May. That's when the American military expects to finish building a floating pier to receive the shipments.

Ramping up the delivery of aid on the planned U.S.-backed sea route will be gradual as aid groups test the distribution and security arrangements for relief workers, the USAID official said.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity, citing security concerns accompanying the official's work on conflicts. They were some of the agency's first comments on the status of preparations for the Biden administration's \$320 million Gaza pier project, for which USAID is helping coordinate on-the-ground security and distribution.

At a factory in rural Georgia on Friday, USAID Administrator Samantha Power pointed to the food crises in Gaza and other parts of the world as she announced a \$200 million investment aimed at increasing production of emergency nutritional paste for starving children under 5.

Power spoke to factory workers, peanut farmers and local dignitaries sitting among pallets of the paste at the Mana nonprofit in Fitzgerald. It is one of two factories in the U.S. that produces the nutritional food, which is used in clinical settings and made from ground peanuts, powdered milk, sugar and oil, ready to eat in plastic pouches resembling large ketchup packets.

"This effort, this vision meets the moment," Power said. "And it could not be more timely, more necessary or more important."

Under pressure from the U.S. and others, Israeli officials in recent weeks have begun slowly reopening some border crossings for relief shipments.

But aid coming through the sea route, once it's operational, still will serve only a fraction — half a million people — of those who need help in Gaza. Aid organizations including USAID stress that getting more aid through border crossings is essential to staving off famine.

Children under 5 are among the first to die when wars, droughts or other disasters curtail food. Hospital officials in northern Gaza reported the first deaths from hunger in early March and said most of the dead were children.

Power said the U.N. has called for 400 metric tons of the nutritional paste "in light of the severe hunger that is pervading across Gaza right now, and the severe, acute humanitarian crisis." USAID expects to provide a quarter of that, she said.

Globally, she said at the Georgia factory, the treatment made there "will save untold lives, millions of lives."

USAID is coordinating with the World Food Program and other humanitarian partners and governments on security and distribution for the pier project, while U.S. military forces finish building it. President Joe Biden, under pressure to do more to ease the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza as the U.S. provides military support for Israel, announced the project in early March.

U.S. Central Command said in a statement Friday that offshore assembly of the floating pier has been temporarily paused due to high winds and sea swells, which caused unsafe conditions for soldiers. The partially built pier and the military vessels involved have gone to Israel's Port of Ashdod, where the work

will continue.

A U.S. official said the high seas will delay the installation for several days, possibly until later next week. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss operation details, said the pause could last longer if the bad weather continues because military personnel and divers have to get into the water for the final installation.

The struggles this week with the first aid delivery through a newly reopened land corridor into north Gaza underscored the uncertainty about security and the danger still facing relief workers. Israeli settlers blocked the convoy before it crossed Wednesday. Once inside Gaza, the convoy was commandeered by Hamas militants, before U.N. officials reclaimed it.

In Gaza, the nutritional treatment for starving children is most urgently needed in the northern part of the Palestinian territory. Civilians have been cut off from most aid supplies, bombarded by Israeli airstrikes and driven into hiding by fighting.

Acute malnutrition rates there among children under 5 have surged from 1% before the war to 30% five months later, the USAID official said. The official called it the fastest such climb in hunger in recent history, more than in grave conflicts and food shortages in Somalia or South Sudan.

One of the few medical facilities still operating in northern Gaza, Kamal Adwan hospital, is besieged by parents bringing in thousands of children with malnutrition for treatment, the official said. Aid officials believe many more starving children remain unseen and in need, with families unable to bring them through fighting and checkpoints for care.

Saving the gravely malnourished children in particular requires both greatly increased deliveries of aid and sustained calm in fighting, the official said, so that aid workers can set up treatment facilities around the territory and families can safely bring children in for the sustained treatment needed.

## **An AI-controlled fighter jet took the Air Force leader for a historic ride. What that means for war**

By TARA COPP Associated Press

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. (AP) — With the midday sun blazing, an experimental orange and white F-16 fighter jet launched with a familiar roar that is a hallmark of U.S. airpower. But the aerial combat that followed was unlike any other: This F-16 was controlled by artificial intelligence, not a human pilot. And riding in the front seat was Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall.

AI marks one of the biggest advances in military aviation since the introduction of stealth in the early 1990s, and the Air Force has aggressively leaned in. Even though the technology is not fully developed, the service is planning for an AI-enabled fleet of more than 1,000 unmanned warplanes, the first of them operating by 2028.

It was fitting that the dogfight took place at Edwards Air Force Base, a vast desert facility where Chuck Yeager broke the speed of sound and the military has incubated its most secret aerospace advances. Inside classified simulators and buildings with layers of shielding against surveillance, a new test-pilot generation is training AI agents to fly in war. Kendall traveled here to see AI fly in real time and make a public statement of confidence in its future role in air combat.

"It's a security risk not to have it. At this point, we have to have it," Kendall said in an interview with The Associated Press after he landed. The AP, along with NBC, was granted permission to witness the secret flight on the condition that it would not be reported until it was complete because of operational security concerns.

The AI-controlled F-16, called Vista, flew Kendall in lightning-fast maneuvers at more than 550 miles an hour that put pressure on his body at five times the force of gravity. It went nearly nose to nose with a second human-piloted F-16 as both aircraft raced within 1,000 feet of each other, twisting and looping to try force their opponent into vulnerable positions.

At the end of the hourlong flight, Kendall climbed out of the cockpit grinning. He said he'd seen enough during his flight that he'd trust this still-learning AI with the ability to decide whether or not to launch

weapons in war.

There's a lot of opposition to that idea. Arms control experts and humanitarian groups are deeply concerned that AI one day might be able to autonomously drop bombs that kill people without further human consultation, and they are seeking greater restrictions on its use.

"There are widespread and serious concerns about ceding life-and-death decisions to sensors and software," the International Committee of the Red Cross has warned. Autonomous weapons "are an immediate cause of concern and demand an urgent, international political response."

Kendall said there will always be human oversight in the system when weapons are used.

The military's shift to AI-enabled planes is driven by security, cost and strategic capability. If the U.S. and China should end up in conflict, for example, today's Air Force fleet of expensive, manned fighters will be vulnerable because of gains on both sides in electronic warfare, space and air defense systems. China's air force is on pace to outnumber the U.S. and it is also amassing a fleet of flying unmanned weapons.

Future war scenarios envision swarms of American unmanned aircraft providing an advance attack on enemy defenses to give the U.S. the ability to penetrate an airspace without high risk to pilot lives. But the shift is also driven by money. The Air Force is still hampered by production delays and cost overruns in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which will cost an estimated of \$1.7 trillion.

Smaller and cheaper AI-controlled unmanned jets are the way ahead, Kendall said.

Vista's military operators say no other country in the world has an AI jet like it, where the software first learns on millions of data points in a simulator, then tests its conclusions during actual flights. That real-world performance data is then put back into the simulator where the AI then processes it to learn more.

China has AI, but there's no indication it has found a way to run tests outside a simulator. And, like a junior officer first learning tactics, some lessons can only be learned in the air, Vista's test pilots said.

Until you actually fly, "it's all guesswork," chief test pilot Bill Gray said. "And the longer it takes you to figure that out, the longer it takes before you have useful systems."

Vista flew its first AI-controlled dogfight in September 2023, and there have only been about two dozen similar flights since. But the programs are learning so quickly from each engagement that some AI versions getting tested on Vista are already beating human pilots in air-to-air combat.

The pilots at this base are aware that in some respects, they may be training their replacements or shaping a future construct where fewer of them are needed.

But they also say they would not want to be up in the sky against an adversary that has AI-controlled aircraft if the U.S. does not also have its own fleet.

"We have to keep running. And we have to run fast," Kendall said.

## Google, Justice Department make final arguments about whether search engine is a monopoly

By MATTHEW BARAKAT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Google's preeminence as an internet search engine is an illegal monopoly propped up by more than \$20 billion spent each year by the tech giant to lock out competition, Justice Department lawyers argued at the closings of a high-stakes antitrust lawsuit.

Google, on the other hand, maintains that its ubiquity flows from its excellence, and its ability to deliver results customers are looking for.

"It would be an unprecedented decision to punish a company for winning on the merits," Google's lawyer, John Schmiddlein, said late Friday afternoon in summation of the company's closing arguments.

Justice Department lawyer Ken Dintzer told the judge that "today must be the day" for him to step in and stop Google's monopolistic behavior, which he likened to the tactics used by Microsoft two decades ago that prompted a similar antitrust battle.

The U.S. government, a coalition of states and Google all made their closing arguments Friday in the 10-week lawsuit to U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta, who must now decide whether Google broke the law in maintaining a monopoly status as a search engine.

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Much of the case, the biggest antitrust trial in more than two decades, has revolved around how much Google derives its strength from contracts it has in place with companies like Apple to make Google the default search engine preloaded on cellphones and computers.

At trial, evidence showed that Google spends more than \$20 billion a year on such contracts. Justice Department lawyers have said the huge sum is indicative of how important it is for Google to make itself the default search engine and block competitors from getting a foothold.

Google responds that customers could easily click away to other search engines if they wanted, but that consumers invariably prefer Google. Companies like Apple testified at trial that they partner with Google because they consider its search engine to be superior.

Google also argues that the government defines the search engine market too narrowly. While it does hold a dominant position over other general search engines like Bing and Yahoo, Google says it faces much more intense competition when consumers make targeted searches. For instance, the tech giant says shoppers may be more likely to search for products on Amazon than Google, vacation planners may run their searches on AirBnB, and hungry diners may be more likely to search for a restaurant on Yelp.

And Google has said that social media companies like Facebook and TikTok also present fierce competition.

During Friday's arguments, Mehta questioned whether some of those other companies are really in the same market. He said social media companies can generate ad revenue by trying to present ads that seem to match a consumer's interest. But he said Google can place ads in front of consumers in direct response to queries they submit.

"It's only Google where we can see that directly declared intent," Mehta said.

Schmidlein responded that social media companies "have lots and lots of information about your interests that I would say is just as powerful."

The company has also argued that its market strength is tenuous as the internet continually remakes itself. Earlier in the trial, it noted that many experts once considered it irrefutable that Yahoo would always be dominant in search. Today, it said that younger tech consumers sometimes think of Google as "Grandpa Google."

Government lawyers also argued the tech company should be sanctioned for the "systemic destruction of documents" that they argue was done to purposefully hide evidence of monopolistic intent and practices.

Trial evidence showed that Google lawyers recommended employees ensure that their work chats were not saved because of their potential legal implications.

The government asked Mehta to impose a sanction that allows the judge to infer that all the deleted chats were unfavorable to Google regarding their anticompetitive intent.

Mehta said he was unsure whether he would grant the government's request but he was sharply critical of their document-retention practices and speculated that there ought to be some kind of sanction.

"Google's document retention policy leaves a lot to be desired," he said. "It's shocking to me, or surprising to me, that a company would leave it to its employees to decide when to preserve documents."

Google lawyer Colette Connor defended the company's practice of generally failing to preserve internal company chats. "Given the typical use of chats, it was reasonable," she said.

While Google's search services are free to consumers, the company generates revenue from searches by selling ads that accompany a user's search results.

Justice Department attorney David Dahlquist said during Friday's arguments that Google was able to increase its ad revenue through growth in the number of queries submitted until about 2015 when query growth slowed and they needed to make more money on each search.

The government argues that Google's search engine monopoly allows it to charge artificially higher prices to advertisers, which eventually carry over to consumers.

"Price increases should be bounded by competition," Dahlquist said. "It should be the market deciding what the price increases are."

Dahlquist said internal Google documents show that the company, unencumbered by any real competition, began tweaking its ad algorithms to sometimes provide worse search ad results to users if it would

increase revenue.

Google's lawyer, Schmidlein, said the record shows that its search ads have become more effective and more helpful to consumers over time, increasing from a 10% click rate to 30%.

Mehta has not yet said when he will rule, though there is an expectation that it may take several months.

If he finds that Google violated the law, he would then schedule a "remedies" phase of the trial to determine what should be done to bolster competition in the search-engine market. The government has not yet said what kind of remedy it would seek.

## **Ex-government employee charged with falsely accusing co-workers of joining Capitol riot**

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

A former government employee has been charged with repeatedly submitting fake tips to the FBI reporting that several of his co-workers in the intelligence community were part of a mob that attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, according to court filings unsealed Friday.

Miguel Eugenio Zapata, 37, was arrested in Chantilly, Virginia, on Thursday on a charge that he made false statements to law enforcement.

Zapata submitted at least seven anonymous tips to the FBI's website claiming that seven government employees and contractors were involved in the Capitol riot, according to an FBI task force officer's affidavit.

Court records don't identify which government agency employed Zapata, but the affidavit says the Chantilly resident previously worked with all seven people named in his false tips to the FBI. One of them had hired Zapata and served as his program manager.

"None of the seven government employees and contractors were in Washington, D.C., on January 6 or attacked the Capitol," the affidavit says.

The tips included similar language and were submitted from four IP addresses. The affidavit says Zapata used a company's "web anonymizer" service to submit the tips.

The unidentified company's logs showed that Zapata's user account accessed the FBI's tips site, conducted research on two of his targets, searched Google for the term "fbi mole," and accessed the website of an Office of Inspector General for an intelligence agency, the affidavit says.

The document doesn't identify a possible motive for making the false reports.

Zapata's first tip, submitted on Feb. 10, 2021, says a former co-worker was trying to overthrow the U.S. government, espouses conspiracy theories and retaliates against colleagues who don't share their political views, according to the affidavit.

Another tip that month accused an intelligence agency contractor of sharing classified information with far-right extremist groups, including the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, "to foment terror and incite violence." Zapata worked with that person from 2017 to 2019, the affidavit says.

The FBI confirmed that all seven people named in the tips were working in Virginia when a mob of Donald Trump supporters stormed the Capitol, disrupting the congressional certification of President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory.

An email seeking comment was sent to an attorney for Zapata.

After the Jan. 6 insurrection, the FBI received tens of thousands of tips from friends, relatives and co-workers of suspected rioters. More than 1,300 people have been charged with participating in the attack.

## **Heavy rains over Texas have led to water rescues, school cancellations and evacuation orders**

By JUAN A. LOZANO and LEKAN OYEKANMI Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Heavy storms slammed the Houston area again Friday, widening already dangerous flooding in Texas and leading to numerous high-water rescues, including some from the rooftops of flooded homes. Officials redoubled urgent instructions for residents in low-lying areas to evacuate, warning the

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worst was still to come.

"This threat is ongoing and it's going to get worse. It is not your typical river flood," said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the top elected official in the nation's third-largest county.

She described the surge of water as "catastrophic" and said several hundred structures were at risk of flooding. There had already been at least two dozen water rescues in the county, in addition to getting 30 pets to safety. Schools in the path of the flooding canceled classes and roads jammed as authorities closed highways taking on water.

For weeks, drenching rains in Texas and parts of Louisiana have filled reservoirs and saturated the ground. Floodwaters partially submerged cars and roads this week across parts of southeastern Texas, north of Houston, where high waters reached the roofs of some homes.

More than 11 inches (28 centimeters) of rain fell during a 24 hour period that ended Friday morning in the northern Houston suburb of Spring, according to the National Weather Service, which has issued a flood warning until Tuesday for the region.

In the rural community of Shepherd, Gilroy Fernandes said he and his spouse had about an hour to evacuate after a mandatory order. Their home is on stilts near the Trinity River, and they felt relief when the water began to recede on Thursday.

Then the danger grew while they slept.

"Next thing you know, overnight they started releasing more water from the dam at Livingston. And so that caused the level of the river to shoot up by almost five or six feet overnight," Fernandes said. Neighbors who left an hour later got stuck in traffic because of flooding.

In Montgomery County, Judge Mark Keough said there had been more high-water rescues than he was able to count.

"We estimate we've had a couple hundred rescues from homes, from houses, from vehicles," Keough said.

In Polk County, located about 100 miles (160 kilometers) northeast of Houston, officials have done over 100 water rescues in the past few days, said Polk County Emergency Management Coordinator Courtney Comstock.

She said homes below Lake Livingston Dam and along the Trinity River have flooded.

"It'll be when things subside before we can do our damage assessment," Comstock said.

Authorities in Houston had not reported any deaths or injuries. The city of more than 2 million people is one of the most flood-prone metro areas in the country and has long experience dealing with devastating weather.

Hurricane Harvey in 2017 dumped historic rainfall on the area, flooding thousands of homes and resulting in more than 60,000 rescues by government rescue personnel across Harris County.

In Crosby, school officials said the driver of a school bus carrying 27 students stopped his vehicle just before driving into high water Friday. The students exited through a rear door and were taken to campuses on another bus. "I am proud of the quick action of our bus driver," Crosby school district Superintendent Paula Patterson said.

Of particular concern was an area along the San Jacinto River in the northeastern part of Harris County, which was expected to continue rising as more rain falls and officials release extra water from an already full reservoir. Judge Hidalgo on Thursday issued a mandatory evacuation order for those living along portions of the river.

In some areas along the river, "it's too late to evacuate preemptively & folks are being assisted off their rooftops," Hidalgo wrote Friday afternoon in a post on X. She said residents west or south of the area still had time to leave or "otherwise, prepare to stay in place for 2-3 days."

Most of Houston's city limits were not heavily impacted by the weather, except for the northeastern neighborhood of Kingwood. Officials said the area had about four months of rain in about a week's time. Houston Mayor John Whitmire said rising flood waters from the San Jacinto River were expected to impact Kingwood late Friday and Saturday.

"The water is coming this way. ... We have time to prepare. But a few hours from now it will be impass-

able," Whitmire said, speaking from a fire station in Kingwood.

Shelters have opened across the region, including nine by the American Red Cross.

The weather service reported the river was above 69 feet (21.03 meters) around noon Friday and expected to crest at 78 feet (23.77 meters) Friday night. The is expected to fall below flood stage of 58 feet (17.68 meters) Tuesday afternoon, according to the weather service.

In the city of Conroe, just north of Houston, rescuers drove boats into neighborhood subdivisions to rescue people and pets from their homes, then carrying them from the boats to higher ground. In nearby Livingston, neighborhoods were flooded, with water rising to the windshields of moving vans and above the bottom of windows of some buildings.

Storms over the past month in southeast Texas and parts of Louisiana have dumped more than 2 feet (61 centimeters) of rain in some areas, according to the National Weather Service.

The greater Houston area covers about 10,000 square miles — a footprint slightly bigger than New Jersey. It is crisscrossed by about 1,700 miles (2,736 kilometers) of channels, creeks and bayous that drain into the Gulf of Mexico, about 50 miles (about 80 kilometers) to the southeast from downtown.

The city's system of bayous and reservoirs was built to drain heavy rains. But engineering initially designed nearly 100 years ago has struggled to keep up with the city's growth and bigger storms.

## **United Methodist delegates repeal their church's ban on its clergy celebrating same-sex marriages**

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — United Methodist delegates on Friday repealed their church's longstanding ban on the celebrations of same-sex marriages or unions by its clergy and in its churches.

The action marked the final major reversal of a collection of LGBTQ bans and disapprovals that have been embedded throughout the laws and social teachings of the United Methodist Church over the previous half-century.

The 447-233 vote by the UMC's General Conference came one day after delegates overwhelmingly voted to repeal a 52-year-old declaration that the practice of homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching" and two days after they repealed the denomination's ban on LGBTQ clergy.

It's the UMC's first legislative gathering since 2019, one that featured its most progressive slate of delegates in memory following the departure of more than 7,600 mostly conservative congregations in the United States because it essentially stopped enforcing its bans on same-sex marriage and LGBTQ ordination.

The delegates voted to repeal a section in their Book of Discipline, or church law, that states: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

Clergy will neither be required nor prohibited from performing any marriage, according to existing law that the conference affirmed with minor revisions Friday.

On Thursday, delegates approved Revised Social Principles, or statements of the church's values. In addition to removing the language about homosexuality being "incompatible with Christian teaching," that revision also defined marriage as a covenant between two adults, without limiting it to heterosexual couples, as the previous version had done.

But while Social Principles are non-binding, the clause removed on Friday had the force of law.

Regional conferences outside the United States have the ability to set their own rules, however, so churches in Africa and elsewhere with more conservative views on sexuality could retain bans on same-sex marriage and LGBTQ clergy. A pending amendment to the church constitution would also enable the U.S. region to make such adaptations.

The change doesn't mandate or even explicitly affirm same-sex marriages. But it removes their prohibition. It takes effect Saturday following the close of General Conference.

The Rev. Rebecca Girrell of Vermont told fellow delegates that she regretted having initially declined a request to perform a same-sex marriage because of church rules. "I promised I would never betray my



heart or my call to offer ministry and grace to all persons again," she said.

Later, she said she did defy church rules and performed the same-sex wedding for two military servicemen before their deployment. "You will never convince me that that was wrong," she said.

But Samuel Cole from Liberia urged the conference not to approve the measure, saying it would not be accepted in other parts of the world and adding that only a man and a woman can produce children.

A temporary window opened in 2019 that enabled American churches to leave with their properties, normally held by the denomination, under more favorable than normal terms. While the conference voted against extending that window to international churches, the conference votes could still prompt departures of some international churches through different means — particularly in Africa, where conservative sexual values prevail and where same-sex activity is criminalized in some countries.

Separately, the General Conference on Friday removed language making it a chargeable offense for clergy to be a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" or perform same-sex marriages — similar to previous repeals but affecting a different part of church law. There was some debate because the measure also removed other chargeable offenses, such as being unfaithful in marriage, but proponents said there are other parts of the Book of Discipline that allow the church to discipline ministers for immorality.

## **Democratic US Rep. Henry Cuellar of Texas and his wife are indicted over ties to Azerbaijan**

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar of Texas and his wife were indicted on conspiracy and bribery charges and taken into custody Friday in connection with a U.S. Department of Justice probe into the couple's ties to the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan.

From 2014 to 2021, Cuellar, 68, and his wife accepted nearly \$600,000 in bribes from an Azerbaijan-controlled energy company and a bank in Mexico, and in exchange, Cuellar agreed to advance the interests of the country and the bank in the U.S., according to the indictment.

Among other things, Cuellar agreed to influence legislation favorable to Azerbaijan and deliver a pro-Azerbaijan speech on the floor of the U.S. House, the indictment states.

The Department of Justice said the couple surrendered to authorities on Friday and were taken into custody. They made an initial appearance before a federal judge in Houston and were each released on \$100,000 bond, the DOJ said.

The longtime congressman released a statement Friday saying he and his wife, Imelda Cuellar, 67, "are innocent of these allegations."

"Everything I have done in Congress has been to serve the people of South Texas," Cuellar said. "Before I took action, I proactively sought legal advice from the House Ethics Committee, who gave me more than one written opinion, along with an additional opinion from a national law firm.

"Furthermore, we requested a meeting with the Washington D.C. prosecutors to explain the facts and they refused to discuss the case with us or hear our side."

Neither Cuellar nor his attorney immediately responded to calls seeking comment on the matter.

In addition to bribery and conspiracy, the couple face charges including wire fraud conspiracy, acting as agents of foreign principals and money laundering. If convicted, they face up to decades in prison and forfeiture of any property linked to proceeds from the alleged scheme.

The payments to the couple initially went through a Texas-based shell company owned by Imelda Cuellar and two of the couple's children, according to the indictment. That company received payments from the Azerbaijan energy company of \$25,000 per month under a "sham contract," purportedly in exchange for unspecified strategic consulting and advising services.

"In reality, the contract was a sham used to disguise and legitimate the corrupt agreement between Henry Cuellar and the government of Azerbaijan," the indictment states.

Imelda Cuellar sent a falsified invoice to the Azerbaijan energy company's Washington, D.C., office under the agreement, stating her work was complete.

"In fact, Imelda Cuellar had performed little or no legitimate work under the contract," the indictment says. The indictment also alleges an Azerbaijani diplomat referred to Henry Cuellar in text messages as "el Jefe" or "boss," and also that a member of Cuellar's staff sent multiple emails to officials at the Department of State pressuring them to renew a U.S. passport for an Azerbaijani diplomat's daughter.

Cuellar was at one time the co-chair of the Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus.

The FBI searched the congressman's house in the border city of Laredo in 2022, and Cuellar's attorney at that time said Cuellar was not the target of that investigation. That search was part of a broader investigation related to Azerbaijan that saw FBI agents serve a raft of subpoenas and conduct interviews in Washington, D.C., and Texas, a person with direct knowledge of the probe previously told The Associated Press. The person was not authorized to discuss it publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Cuellar, one of the last anti-abortion Democrats in Congress, narrowly defeated progressive challenger Jessica Cisneros by fewer than 300 votes in a primary race in 2022.

## **The Lakers fire coach Darvin Ham after just 2 seasons in charge and 1st-round playoff exit**

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Los Angeles Lakers fired coach Darvin Ham on Friday after just two seasons in charge.

The Lakers announced on social media that they were dismissing Ham four days after their season ended with a first-round playoff loss to Denver in five games.

Ham led Los Angeles to the Western Conference finals less than a year ago in his first season as an NBA head coach. He had replaced Frank Vogel, who was fired by the Lakers exactly 18 months after winning the franchise's 17th championship in 2020.

Ham had two winning seasons and made two playoff appearances, but that's not enough with the championship-focused Lakers. With little time left to capitalize on the concurrent presence of Anthony Davis and 39-year-old LeBron James — who hasn't decided whether to return for his 22nd NBA season — the Lakers are resetting their coaching staff once again instead of blaming general manager Rob Pelinka for his roster construction.

"We greatly appreciate Darvin's efforts on behalf of the Lakers and recognize the many accomplishments achieved over the past two seasons, including last year's remarkable run to the Western Conference finals," Pelinka said in a statement. "We all want to thank Darvin for his dedication and positivity. While this was a difficult decision to make, it is the best course of action following a full review of the season. This organization will remain unwavering in its commitment to deliver championship-caliber basketball to Lakers fans around the world."

Ham presided over a disappointing year for the Lakers, who went 47-35 in the regular season and won the NBA's inaugural In-Season Tournament. The Lakers then beat New Orleans in a play-in game to move up to the seventh seed in the highly competitive Western Conference — but that meant they had to face Denver, which swept them out of the playoffs last season.

Los Angeles led the defending champion Nuggets for long stretches of their first-round series, but Nikola Jokic and his teammates eventually rolled into the second round with a series of comeback wins.

"Sitting in this seat, it's been a hell of a two years," Ham said after the game. "A lot of good things that got done, but ultimately, you want to win that ultimate prize."

The Lakers' failure stung because James and Davis were largely healthy all year long, with both superstars playing more games than they had managed in an NBA season since 2017-18 — 76 for Davis and 71 for James, the leading scorer in NBA history. D'Angelo Russell also had a strong regular season, setting the franchise record for 3-pointers.

That health and success only translated into a four-win improvement in the standings from last season, and Ham received much of the blame from fans and observers for his game management, slow tactical adjustments and a reluctance to change his player rotations and starting lineups, even when things

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weren't working.

The Lakers fell into a hole they couldn't escape when they went 3-10 during the holiday period immediately after the In-Season Tournament finale. Ham was widely criticized for his lineups and rotations during that poor stretch — among other decisions, he curiously benched Russell and Austin Reaves while giving extensive playing time to Taurean Prince and Cam Reddish.

That slump eventually prevented the Lakers from landing a top-6 seed in the West even though they finished the regular season on an impressive 28-14 surge.

The players publicly backed Ham, but signs of frustration were clear. After the Lakers blew a 20-point lead and lost to Denver in Game 2 last month, Davis said the Lakers "have stretches where we don't know what we're doing on both ends of the floor," a comment widely interpreted as a shot at Ham's coaching competence.

The Lakers only went 43-39 in their first season under Ham in 2022-23, but they capitalized on more favorable playoff matchups. After beating Minnesota in a play-in game, they won playoff series against Memphis and Golden State to reach the conference finals, where they were swept by Denver.

James, Davis and the Lakers have failed to win a playoff round in three of their four seasons since winning the 2020 championship in the Florida bubble.

Ham had two years left on his contract with the Lakers, who will be hiring their fourth head coach since James arrived in 2018. The new coach will be the Lakers' eighth in 14 seasons since Hall of Famer Phil Jackson's departure in 2011.

Ham had an eight-year playing career in the NBA as an athletic forward, winning a championship with Detroit in 2004. He got his first NBA assistant coaching job with the Lakers in 2011, and he was Mike Budenholzer's assistant in Atlanta and Milwaukee for nine seasons — winning a second championship ring with the Bucks in 2021 — before returning to the Lakers as their head coach.

James has a \$51.4 million player option for next season, and his decision hangs over every offseason move for the Lakers, who internally expect him to return.

Pelinka then must determine whether he can make the long-anticipated move for a third superstar through trades, or whether he believes the assertions by Rui Hachimura and other role players that the Lakers can become a contender with more continuity.

Russell has an \$18.7 million player option after the sharpshooting guard excelled in the regular season and flopped in the playoffs, infamously going scoreless in the Lakers' Game 3 loss to Denver. After Los Angeles was knocked out of the playoffs on Monday, the point guard said he has "a little leverage. I'll try to take advantage of it."

## **US employers scaled back hiring in April. How that could let the Fed cut interest rates**

By PAUL WISEMAN and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's employers pulled back on their hiring in April but still added a decent 175,000 jobs in a sign that persistently high interest rates may be starting to slow the robust U.S. job market.

Friday's government report showed that last month's hiring gain was down sharply from the blockbuster increase of 315,000 in March. And it was well below the 233,000 gain that economists had predicted for April.

Yet the moderation in the pace of hiring, along with a slowdown last month in wage growth, will likely be welcomed by the Federal Reserve, which has kept interest rates at a two-decade high to fight persistently elevated inflation. Hourly wages rose a less-than-expected 0.2% from March and 3.9% from a year earlier, the smallest annual gain since June 2021.

The Fed has been delaying any consideration of interest rate cuts until it gains more confidence that inflation is steadily slowing toward its 2% target. Rate cuts by the central bank would, over time, reduce the cost of mortgages, auto loans and other consumer and business borrowing.

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Stock prices jumped and bond yields fell Friday after the jobs report was released on hopes that rate cuts might now be more likely sometime in the coming months.

"A slowdown in payrolls to a decent pace to start the second quarter, coupled with a slowing in wage gains, will be welcome news to (the Fed's) policymakers," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics. "Current readings also support the view that rates cuts – and not hikes – are the base case scenario for the Fed this year."

The state of the economy is weighing on voters' minds as the November presidential campaign intensifies. Despite the strength of the job market, Americans remain generally exasperated by high prices, and many of them assign blame to President Joe Biden.

Even with the April hiring slowdown, last month's job growth amounted to a solid increase, though it was the lowest monthly gain since October. With the nation's households continuing their steady spending, many employers have had to keep hiring to meet their customer demand.

Though the unemployment rate ticked up from 3.8% to 3.9% in April, it was the 27th straight month in which the rate has remained below 4%, tying the longest such streak since the 1960s.

"Certainly a cooler jobs report than we've seen," said Michael Pugliese, senior economist at Wells Fargo. "But it's not like it was disastrous: 175,000 is still pretty strong, and unemployment below 4% is still pretty healthy." He expects hiring, which averaged a vigorous 242,000 from February through April, to continue to decelerate.

Last month's hiring was led by healthcare companies, which added 56,000 jobs. Warehouse and transportation companies added 22,000 and retailers 20,000. Government at all levels, which had been hiring aggressively, added just 8,000 jobs in April, the lowest monthly total since December 2022.

Local governments didn't add any jobs at all last month. Paul Ashworth of Capital Economics noted that state and local government revenue has recently slumped.

Temporary help jobs fell by more than 16,000. These positions are often seen as a potential indicator of where the job market is headed because companies sometimes try out temps before committing to full-time hires.

The share of the adult population that either has a job or is looking for one was unchanged at 62.7%, well below pre-pandemic levels.

America's job market has repeatedly proved more robust than almost anyone had predicted. When the Fed began aggressively raising rates two years ago to fight a punishing inflation surge, most economists expected the resulting jump in borrowing costs to cause a recession and drive unemployment to painfully high levels.

The Fed raised its benchmark rate 11 times from March 2022 to July 2023, taking it to the highest level since 2001. Inflation did steadily cool as it was supposed to — from a year-over-year peak of 9.1% in June 2022 to 3.5% in March.

Yet the resilient strength of the job market and the overall economy, fueled by steady consumer spending, has kept inflation persistently above the Fed's 2% target.

The job market has been showing other signs of eventually slowing. This week, for example, the government reported that job openings fell in March to 8.5 million, the fewest in more than three years. Still, that is a large number of vacancies: Before 2021, monthly job openings had never topped 8 million, a threshold they have now exceeded every month since March 2021.

On a month-over-month basis, consumer inflation hasn't declined since October. The 3.5% year-over-year inflation rate for March was still running well above the Fed's 2% target.

Steven Kramer, CEO of WorkJam, an online platform that helps businesses like retailers and hospitality companies manage their hourly workers' tasks and training, said that he is noticing that pressure to raise wages has eased. But he is seeing companies focusing more on offering flexibility in shifts for workers who are increasingly juggling multiple jobs to pay their bills in the face of still stubborn inflation. "They're allowing workers to swap a shift or pick up a shift," he said.

Onur Kutlubay, CEO of You Parcel, a Totowa, New Jersey-based company that provides shipping services

to small e-commerce businesses, said that it's still challenging to find skilled workers like forklift operators and supervisors, while unskilled workers are easier to find.

You Parcel has 43 workers across eight warehouse and storage facilities, most of them in New Jersey. Kutlubay said he's had to keep increasing wages for its highly skilled employees. In 2020, skilled workers started at \$16; now, hourly wages start at \$25. For unskilled workers, the starting wages are now \$16; in 2020, the figure was around \$11.

He noted people are preferring to work as Uber drivers or work for delivery companies such as DoorDash. "The jobs give them the opportunity to get some tips from customers," he said. "They tend to be more attractive to people. That keeps them away from regular jobs like the ones that we have."

## **Biden administration says 100,000 new migrants are expected to enroll in 'Obamacare' next year**

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Roughly 100,000 immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children are expected to enroll in the Affordable Care Act's health insurance next year under a directive the Biden administration released Friday.

The move took longer than promised to finalize and fell short of Democratic President Joe Biden's initial proposal to allow those migrants to sign up for Medicaid, the health insurance program that provides nearly free coverage for the nation's poorest people.

But it will allow thousands of people, known as "Dreamers," to access tax breaks when they sign up for coverage after the Affordable Care Act's marketplace enrollment opens Nov. 1, just days ahead of the presidential election.

"I'm proud of the contributions of Dreamers to our country and committed to providing Dreamers the support they need to succeed," Biden said in a statement Friday.

While it may help Biden boost his appeal at a crucial time among Latinos, a crucial voting bloc that he needs to turn out to win the election, the move prompted criticism among conservatives about the president's border and migrant policies.

The action opens the marketplace to any participant in the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, many of whom are Latino.

Xavier Becerra, the nation's top health official, said Thursday that many of those migrants have delayed getting care because they have not had coverage.

"They incur higher costs and debts when they do finally receive care," Becerra told reporters on a call. "Making Dreamers eligible to enroll in coverage will improve their health and well-being and strengthen the health and well-being of our nation and our economy."

The administration's action changes the definition of "lawfully present" so DACA participants can legally enroll in the marketplace exchange.

Then-President Barack Obama launched the DACA initiative to shield from deportation immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally by their parents as children and to allow them to work legally in the country. However, the "Dreamers" were still ineligible for government-subsidized health insurance programs because they did not meet the definition of having a "lawful presence" in the U.S.

The administration decided not to expand eligibility for Medicaid for those migrants after receiving more than 20,000 comments on the proposal, senior officials said Thursday. Those officials declined to explain why the rule, which was first proposed last April, took so long to finalize. The delay meant the migrants were unable to enroll in the marketplace for coverage this year.

At one point, there were as many as 800,000 people enrolled in DACA, though now that figure is roughly 580,000. The administration predicts only 100,000 will actually sign up because some may get coverage through their workplaces or other ways. Some may also be unable to afford coverage through the marketplace.

Other classes of immigrants, including asylum seekers and people with temporary protected status, are already eligible to purchase insurance through the marketplaces of the ACA, Obama's 2010 health care law, often called "Obamacare."

The president last year also unveiled a regulation that was aimed at fending off legal challenges to DACA; former President Donald Trump moved to end the policy, and it has bounced back and forth in federal court. Last fall, a federal judge said the current version can continue at least temporarily.

"President Biden and I will continue to do everything in our power to protect DACA, but it is only a temporary solution," Vice President Kamala Harris said in a statement. "Congress must act to ensure Dreamers have the permanent protections they deserve."

Trump's campaign spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt on Friday criticized the decision to allow DACA participants to access healthcare marketplaces, saying the Republican presidential candidate would "seal the border, stop the invasion, and expand economic opportunity for American citizens, not illegal aliens."

## Arizona governor's signing of abortion law repeal follows political fight by women lawmakers

By ANITA SNOW and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs' signing of the repeal of a Civil War-era ban on nearly all abortions was a stirring occasion for the women working to ensure that the 19th century law remains in the past.

Current and former state lawmakers, and reproductive rights advocates crowded into the 9th floor rotunda outside Hobbs' office Thursday afternoon, hugging and taking selfies to capture the moment. Some wept.

"It's a historic moment, and it's a place and time where thrilling moments all come together," Democratic Rep. Stephanie Stahl Hamilton said during the signing ceremony. "It's a time where we are doing away with what is in the past that doesn't fit the present."

Stahl and Sen. Anna Hernandez, also a Democrat, were the two current lawmakers chosen to speak at the ceremony for their efforts to ensure repeal of the long-dormant law that bans all abortions except those done to save a patient's life.

The effort won final legislative approval Wednesday in a 16-14 Senate vote, as two GOP lawmakers joined with Democrats during a session of some three hours where motivations for votes were described in personal, emotional and even biblical terms. There were graphic descriptions of abortion procedures and amplified audio of a fetal heartbeat, along with warnings against "legislating religious beliefs."

Abortion-ban advocates in the Senate gallery jeered state Republican state Sen. Shawna Bolick as she explained her vote in favor of repeal, then she was scolded by GOP colleagues. Bolick is married to state Supreme Court Justice Clint Bolick, who voted with the majority in April to reinstate the 1864 law. He faces a retention election in November.

The House previously approved the repeal, with three Republicans in that chamber breaking ranks.

Hobbs says the move is just the beginning of a fight to protect reproductive health care in Arizona. The repeal is set to take effect 90 days after legislative session ends, which typically is June or July once the budget is approved.

"This means everything to get this archaic, inhumane territorial law off the books," said Dr. Gabrielle Goodrick, founder of Phoenix-based Camelback Family Planning, which performs a third of abortions in Arizona.

A 2022 statute banning the procedure after 15 weeks of pregnancy then will become Arizona's prevailing abortion law.

Abortion rights advocates, led by Planned Parenthood Arizona, have filed a motion with the state Supreme Court to prevent the 1846 law from taking hold before the repeal does. If it's rejected, girls and women could see a pause in abortion services.

The 19th century law had been blocked in Arizona since 1973 with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade that guaranteed the constitutional right to an abortion nationwide. When the federal law

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was overturned in 2022, it left Arizona's in legal limbo.

The Arizona Supreme Court last month took the state back decades and reinstated the ban that provides no exceptions for survivors of rape or incest. The justices suggested doctors could be prosecuted for violating the law, with a maximum five-year prison sentence if convicted.

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. Democratic Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes is making a push to delay the enforcement of the ban until sometime in late July.

Meanwhile, abortion-rights advocates are collecting signatures to enshrine reproductive rights in Arizona's constitution. A proposed ballot measure would allow 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 are considering putting one or more competing abortion proposals before voters in November.

In other parts of the U.S. this week, 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 people even know they are pregnant.

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

For the Democratic women who led the effort on the repeal in Arizona, Thursday was celebratory moment but also showed there's more work to be done, they said.

In an interview before the signing ceremony, Stahl Hamilton talked about her early years on the Navajo Nation where her parents were school teachers and where federally funded clinics still limit abortion services.

She talked about a sister-in-law who she said struggled with two difficult pregnancies, one that resulted in a stillbirth and a nonviable one in which "they had to make the heartbreaking decision to terminate that pregnancy, because there was no brain development."

"And I imagine that had any of these laws been in place during the time when she was needing care, it really would have wreaked havoc," Stahl Hamilton said.

When the Civil War-era ban was passed, all the 27 lawmakers were men, America was at war over the right to own slaves and women couldn't vote, Hobbs said. Now, the Arizona Legislature is roughly evenly divided between men and women.

Hernandez became involved in politics after her younger brother, Alejandro, was killed in a police shooting in April 2019. She and her two other siblings have tattoos with his portrait on their left arms.

Her sister is a nurse in labor and delivery, and she has two nieces, aged 16 and 12, she said.

"In this moment, I think of them being able to grow up in the state that we love so much, having the rights that they have," she said.

Former Democratic state Rep. Athena Salman was so overcome with emotion Thursday that she could barely speak when she was called to the lectern at the signing ceremony. She proposed a repeal of the 19th century law in 2019, three years before Roe v. Wade was overturned.

Salman, who resigned in January to lead an abortion rights group, said she can't stop thinking about her daughters.

"Future generations will not have to live under the restrictions and the interference that we have had to experience," she said. \_\_\_\_

The Associated Press' women in the workforce and state government coverage receives financial support from Pivotal Ventures. AP is solely responsible for all content. Find AP's standards for working with philanthropies, a list of supporters and funded coverage areas at AP.org.

## Universities take steps to prevent pro-Palestinian protest disruptions of graduation ceremonies

By ED WHITE and ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — With student protests over the Israel-Hamas war disrupting campuses nationwide, several major universities are intent on ensuring that commencement ceremonies — joyous milestones for graduates, their families and friends — go off without a hitch this weekend.

It won't be easy. Colleges are hiring extra security, screening attendees at venues and emphasizing that significant disruptions by pro-Palestinian protesters won't be tolerated. At the same time, they're pledging to honor free-speech rights by designating protest zones.

"Milestone is a perfect word," said Ken Burdick of Tampa, Florida, describing his daughter's graduation Saturday at the University of Michigan. He hopes the big day goes untarnished.

"People can exercise their First Amendment rights without disrupting or creating fear," Burdick said of protesters.

Students booed and yelled "free Palestine" while the University of Utah president spoke Thursday night at commencement. Taylor Randall paused his speech to ask those who were protesting to leave or be removed. Outside the ceremony in Salt Lake City, a group of about 50 people were rallying. There was one arrest.

Here's how some schools are planning to balance things:

### UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

More than 8,000 graduates — and 63,000 spectators — are expected for Saturday's festivities inside Michigan Stadium, known as The Big House. There will be security screening, and disruptive protesters could be subject to removal. Public safety officers and staff who commonly monitor major events, such as fall football games, will be present. Author and historian Brad Meltzer is the featured speaker.

In March, an annual event recognizing students with high academic achievement ended early when pro-Palestinian protesters raised provocative signs and drowned out remarks by President Santa Ono, yelling, "You are funding genocide!" The university subsequently drafted a policy that could lead to student expulsions and staff dismissals for event disruptions, though it hasn't been finalized.

"It was painful for everyone who had gathered — and especially so for members of our Jewish community," Ono said two days later.

Protesters have erected dozens of tents on the Diag, a historic space for campus activism more than a mile away from the stadium. They're demanding that Michigan cut financial ties with companies connected to Israel. There has been no effort to break up the encampment and no arrests.

Drew Ruchim, a 22-year-old graduating with a degree in political science, said he has visited the camp to learn more. He believes some type of demonstration at the stadium seems inevitable.

"At the end of the day, it's just a graduation. I'm putting a bow on the end of my college career," said Ruchim, who is Jewish. "As long as it's peaceful — what can I possibly say?"

In a message about commencement, Laurie McCauley, Michigan's chief academic officer, told students and staff that the school respects free expression but "no one is entitled to disrupt university activities."

Blake Richards, 25, is earning a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. Richards plans to be at the football stadium Saturday after participating in a smaller ceremony Thursday for chemistry students.

"It could take away some great feelings, muddle them," Richards said of any disruptions. "But truth be told, I'm not bothered. I know others have different opinions; I'm just happy to be here."

### INDIANA UNIVERSITY

The Bloomington, Indiana, campus is designating protest zones outside Skjodt Assembly Hall and Memorial Stadium, where ceremonies will be held Friday for graduate students and Saturday for undergraduates. Nearly 10,000 students are eligible to attend.

A social media post circulating on Instagram urged protesters to wear "your keffiyeh along with your cap and gown" and walk out during Saturday's remarks by President Pamela Whitten.

Roughly 20 tents set up by protesters remained in place this week in an area known as Dunn Meadow, a



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mile from the stadium. Dozens of protesters have been arrested there recently, according to the Indiana Daily Student.

Maya Wasserman, a 22-year-old senior in management who is Jewish, said she and her family feel uncomfortable about the prospect of pro-Palestinian protests disrupting commencement. She expressed special concern for her mother and grandmother, who are Israeli.

"It's unfortunate because we want this event to be about graduating, not politics," Wasserman said.

At Dunn Meadow, students in lawn chairs or on blankets worked on their final assignments. Jessica Missey, a 20-year-old protester and senior, said she boycotted final exams; some professors, she said, simply canceled them. She has enjoyed the camaraderie at the encampment.

"Commencement is kind of just taking almost a little sidestep for me," said Missey.

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

A week after police arrested nearly 100 protesters at Northeastern University, the school is holding its commencement exercises Sunday at Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox, for the fourth consecutive year.

The venue will help security officials monitor the crowd and limit what people can bring. Signs, banners, balloons and full-size flags are prohibited in the stadium, along with most bags. Renata Nyul, vice president for communications, said public safety staffing will be strengthened.

All those entering Fenway will need to pass through metal detectors. About 50,000 graduates, family and friends are expected.

Northeastern is one of several universities in the Boston area that have had pro-Palestinian encampments. Some have let the protests continue, though Northeastern's camp was broken up.

"While we realize that issues in the world prompt passionate viewpoints, the focus this weekend should be on our graduates and their remarkable achievements," Nyul said.

## Larry Demeritte is just the second Black trainer since 1951 to saddle a horse for the Kentucky Derby

By BETH HARRIS AP Racing Writer

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — If Larry Demeritte is looking for a positive sign heading into his first Kentucky Derby as a trainer, it's right where his horse is assigned.

Long-shot West Saratoga is staying in Barn 42 at Churchill Downs, the same location where Seattle Slew was before he won the 1977 Derby and went on to sweep the Triple Crown. It was the first Derby that Demeritte attended.

Now, he is the second Black trainer since 1951 to be saddling a horse in the big race, which has its 150th running on Saturday. The other, Hank Allen, finished sixth with Northern Wolf in 1989.

Black trainers dominated the Derby's early years, winning seven of the first 17 from 1875-1891.

"We're so grateful to be here and enjoying every single minute," Demeritte said.

Everything is meaningful to the 74-year-old from the Bahamas since he was diagnosed with cancer in 1996 and underwent chemotherapy. His father was a trainer in the islands and Demeritte still carries the accent of his home country, where he was leading trainer for two years.

"My motto is, 'I don't buy cheap horses. I buy good horses cheap,'" he said, smiling.

The costliest horse in the 20-horse Derby field is morning-line second choice Sierra Leone, purchased for \$2.3 million. Purchased for just \$11,000, West Saratoga is the pride of Demeritte's 11-horse stable at The Thoroughbred Center in nearby Lexington. The colt has earned \$460,140.

"He's getting better with every start," he said. "I've been around a lot of good horses and this horse really matches up to a lot of them."

It's the first Derby for West Saratoga owner Harry Veruchi.

"I bought my first horse in 1982, and two weeks later he won at Centennial Race Track in Littleton, Colorado," Veruchi said. "I thought, this is easy. And now, to be here, who would have thought it? I don't know anybody who has been in the Kentucky Derby or even anybody who has won a graded stake."

West Saratoga is named for the street in Littleton where Veruchi grew up. It's located six blocks from the Centennial track, which closed in 1983.

The only one with any Derby experience in their group is jockey Jesus Castanon. He finished fourth aboard Shackleford in 2011. They set the pace and led at the eighth pole only to be overtaken by eventual winner Animal Kingdom.

"I thought I was going to win it," Castanon said. "In my mind, I was going crazy."

Demeritte has run horses on the Derby undercard in past years.

"I've been practicing," he said with a smile. "I used to pray to get to the Derby. I feel like I am blessed with this horse."

Demeritte has his eyes on the sky for Saturday, when the forecast calls for a 43% chance of rain. The gray colt has never run on a wet track, but his sire did. Exaggerator was runner-up in the 2016 Derby and went on to win the Preakness and the Haskell. Both of those races were run on sloppy tracks.

"This is truly amazing how we got to this position with this horse," Demeritte said. "I'm hopeful people will see our story and become interested in this sport because this horse is proving anyone with a dream can make it to the Derby stage."

## Colombia breaks diplomatic ties with Israel but its military relies on key Israeli-built equipment

By ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Colombia has become the latest Latin American country to announce that it will break diplomatic relations with Israel over its military campaign in Gaza, but the repercussions for the South American nation could be broader than for other countries because of longstanding bilateral agreements over security matters.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro on Wednesday described Israel's actions in Gaza as "genocide," and announced his government would end diplomatic relations with Israel effective Thursday. But he didn't address how his decision could affect Colombia's military, which uses Israeli-built warplanes and machine guns to fight drug cartels and rebel groups, and a free trade agreement between both countries that went into effect in 2020.

Also in the region, Bolivia and Belize have also severed diplomatic relations with Israel over the Israel-Hamas war.

Here's a look at Colombia's close Israel ties and fallout:

### WHY IS SECURITY COOPERATION BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND ISRAEL IMPORTANT?

Colombia and Israel have signed dozens of agreements on wide-ranging issues, including education and trade, since they established diplomatic relations in 1957. But nothing links them closer than military contracts.

Colombia's fighter jets are all Israeli-built. The more than 20 Kfir Israeli-made fighter jets were used by its air force in numerous attacks on remote guerrilla camps that debilitated the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. The attacks helped push the rebel group into peace talks that resulted in its disarmament in 2016.

But the fleet, purchased in the late 1980s, is aging and requires maintenance, which can only be carried out by an Israeli firm. Manufacturers in France, Sweden and the United States have approached Colombia's government with replacement options, but the spending priorities of Petro's administration are elsewhere.

Colombia's military also uses Galil rifles, which were designed in Israel and for which Colombia acquired the rights to manufacture and sell. Israel also assists the South American country with its cybersecurity needs.

### WILL PETRO'S ANNOUNCEMENT AFFECT COLOMBIA'S MILITARY-RELATED CONTRACTS WITH ISRAEL?

It remains unclear.

Colombia's Foreign Ministry said Thursday in a statement that "all communications related to this announcement will be made through established official channels and will not be public." The ministry didn't

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immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press, while the Israeli Embassy in Bogota declined to address the issue.

However, a day before Petro announced his decision, Colombian Defense Minister Iván Velásquez told lawmakers that no new contracts will be signed with Israel, though existing ones will be fulfilled, including those for maintenance for the Kfir fighters and one for missile systems.

Velásquez said the government has established a "transition" committee that would seek to "diversify" suppliers to avoid depending on Israel. He added that one of the possibilities under consideration is the development of a rifle by the Colombian military industry to replace the Galil.

Security cooperation has been at the center of tensions between the two countries. Israel said in October that it would halt security exports to Colombia after Petro refused to condemn Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel that triggered the war and compared Israel's actions in Gaza to those of Nazi Germany. In February, Petro announced the suspension of arms purchases from Israel.

For retired Gen. Guillermo León, former commander of the Colombian air force, the country's military capabilities will be affected if Petro's administration breaks its contract obligations or even if it complies with them but refuses to sign new ones.

"At the end of the year, maintenance and spare parts run out, and from then on, the fleet would rapidly enter a condition where we would no longer have the means to sustain it," he told the AP. "This year, three aircraft were withdrawn from service due to compliance with their useful life cycle."

WHAT IS THE TRADE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES?

A free trade agreement between Colombia and Israel went into effect in August 2020. Israel now buys 1% of Colombia's total exports, which include coal, coffee and flowers.

According to Colombia's Ministry of Commerce, exports to Israel last year totaled \$499 million, which represents a drop of 53% from 2022.

Colombia's imports from Israel include electrical equipment, plastics and fertilizers.

Neither government has explained whether the diplomatic feud will affect the trade agreement.

## Hamas is sending a delegation to Egypt for further cease-fire talks in the latest sign of progress

By BASSEM MROUE, LEE KEATH and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hamas said Thursday that it was sending a delegation to Egypt for further cease-fire talks, in a new sign of progress in attempts by international mediators to hammer out an agreement between Israel and the militant group to end the war in Gaza.

After months of stop-and-start negotiations, the cease-fire efforts appear to have reached a critical stage, with Egyptian and American mediators reporting signs of compromise in recent days. But chances for the deal remain entangled with the key question of whether Israel will accept an end to the war without reaching its stated goal of destroying Hamas.

The stakes in the cease-fire negotiations were made clear in a new U.N. report that said if the Israel-Hamas war stops today, it will still take until 2040 to rebuild all the homes that have been destroyed by nearly seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground offensives in Gaza. It warned that the impact of the damage to the economy will set back development for generations and will only get worse with every month fighting continues.

The proposal that U.S. and Egyptian mediators have put to Hamas — apparently with Israel's acceptance — sets out a three-stage process that would bring an immediate six-week cease-fire and partial release of Israeli hostages, but also negotiations over a "permanent calm" that includes some sort of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, according to an Egyptian official. Hamas is seeking guarantees for a full Israeli withdrawal and complete end to the war.

Hamas officials have sent mixed signals about the proposal in recent days. But on Thursday, its supreme leader, Ismail Haniyeh, said in a statement that he had spoken to Egypt's intelligence chief and "stressed the positive spirit of the movement in studying the cease-fire proposal."

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The statement said that Hamas negotiators would travel to Cairo "to complete the ongoing discussions with the aim of working forward for an agreement." Haniyeh said he had also spoken to the prime minister of Qatar, another key mediator in the process.

The brokers are hopeful that the deal will bring an end to a conflict that has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, caused widespread destruction and plunged the territory into a humanitarian crisis. They also hope a deal will avert an Israeli attack on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have sought shelter after fleeing battle zones elsewhere in the territory.

If Israel does agree to end the war in return for a full hostage release, it would be a major turnaround. Since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack stunned Israel, its leaders have vowed not to stop their bombardment and ground offensives until the militant group is destroyed. They also say Israel must keep a military presence in Gaza and security control after the war to ensure Hamas doesn't rebuild.

Publicly at least, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to insist that is the only acceptable endgame.

He has vowed that even if a cease-fire is reached, Israel will eventually attack Rafah, which he says is Hamas' last stronghold in Gaza. He repeated his determination to do so in talks Wednesday with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Israel on a regional tour to push the deal through.

The agreement's immediate fate hinges on whether Hamas will accept uncertainty over the final phases to bring the initial six-week pause in fighting — and at least postpone what it is feared would be a devastating assault on Rafah.

Egypt has been privately assuring Hamas that the deal will mean a total end to the war. But the Egyptian official said Hamas says the text's language is too vague and wants it to specify a complete Israeli pullout from all of Gaza. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to talk about the internal deliberations.

On Wednesday evening, however, the news looked less positive as Osama Hamdan, a top Hamas official, expressed skepticism, saying the group's initial position was "negative." Speaking to Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV, he said that talks were still ongoing but would stop if Israel invades Rafah.

Blinken hiked up pressure on Hamas to accept, saying Israel had made "very important" compromises. "There's no time for further haggling. The deal is there," Blinken said Wednesday before leaving for the U.S.

An Israeli airstrike, meanwhile, killed at least five people, including a child, in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza. The bodies were seen and counted by Associated Press journalists at a hospital.

The war broke out on Oct. 7 when Hamas militants broke into southern Israel and killed over 1,200 people, mostly Israelis, taking around 250 others hostage, some released during a cease-fire on November.

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 wreaked vast destruction and brought a humanitarian disaster, with several hundred thousand Palestinians in northern Gaza facing imminent famine, according to the U.N. More than 80% of the population has been driven from their homes.

The "productive basis of the economy has been destroyed" and poverty is rising sharply among Palestinians, according to the report released Thursday by the United Nations Development Program and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

It said that in 2024, the entire Palestinian economy — including both Gaza and the West Bank — has so far contracted 25.8%. If the war continues, the loss will reach a "staggering" 29% by July, it said. The West Bank economy has been hit by Israel's decision to cancel the work permits for tens of thousands of laborers who depended on jobs inside Israel.

"These new figures warn that the suffering in Gaza will not end when the war does," UNDP administrator Achim Steiner said. He warned of a "serious development crisis that jeopardizes the future of generations to come."

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## Today in History: May 4

### Four killed during anti-war protest at Kent State University

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, May 4, the 125th day of 2024. There are 241 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire during an anti-war protest at Kent State University, killing four students and wounding nine others.

On this date:

In 1776, Rhode Island declared its freedom from England, two months before the Declaration of Independence was adopted.

In 1886, at Haymarket Square in Chicago, a labor demonstration for an 8-hour work day turned into a deadly riot when a bomb exploded.

In 1904, the United States took over construction of the Panama Canal from the French.

In 1932, mobster Al Capone, convicted of income-tax evasion, entered the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. (Capone was later transferred to Alcatraz Island.)

In 1942, the Battle of the Coral Sea, the first naval clash fought entirely with carrier aircraft, began in the Pacific during World War II. (The outcome was considered a tactical victory for Japan, but ultimately a strategic one for the Allies.)

In 1945, during World War II, German forces in the Netherlands, Denmark and northwest Germany agreed to surrender.

In 1961, the first group of "Freedom Riders" left Washington, D.C., to challenge racial segregation on interstate buses and in bus terminals.

In 1998, Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski (kah-ZIHN'-skee) was given four life sentences plus 30 years by a federal judge in Sacramento, California, under a plea agreement that spared him the death penalty.

In 2001, Bonny Lee Bakley, wife of actor Robert Blake, was shot to death as she sat in a car near a restaurant in Los Angeles. (Blake, accused of Bakley's murder, was acquitted in a criminal trial but found liable by a civil jury and ordered to pay damages.)

In 2006, a federal judge sentenced Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee) to life in prison for his role in the 9/11 attacks, telling the convicted terrorist, "You will die with a whimper."

In 2011, President Barack Obama said he had decided not to release death photos of Osama bin Laden because their graphic nature could incite violence and create national security risks. Officials told The Associated Press that the Navy SEALs who'd stormed bin Laden's compound in Pakistan shot and killed him after they saw him appear to lunge for a weapon.

In 2012, Adam Yauch the gravelly-voiced rapper who helped make The Beastie Boys one of the seminal groups in hip-hop, died in New York at age 47.

In 2013, a limousine taking nine women to a bachelorette party erupted in flames on the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge over San Francisco Bay, killing five of the passengers, including the bride-to-be.

In 2018, the Connecticut Supreme Court overturned the murder conviction of Kennedy cousin Michael Skakel in the 1975 bludgeoning death of a girl in Greenwich, finding that Skakel's trial attorney had failed to present evidence of an alibi.

In 2020, former Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula died at 90; he'd won more games than any other NFL coach.

In 2022, comedian Dave Chappelle was tackled during a performance at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. Security guards chased and overpowered the attacker.

In 2023, former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio and three other members of the far-right extremist group were convicted of a plot to attack the U.S. Capitol in a desperate bid to keep Donald Trump in power after the Republican lost the 2020 presidential election.

Today's Birthdays: Katherine Jackson, matriarch of the Jackson musical family, is 94. Jazz musician Ron Carter is 87. Pulitzer Prize-winning political commentator George Will is 83. Pop singer Peggy Santiglia (The

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Angels) is 80. Actor Richard Jenkins is 77. Country singer Stella Parton is 75. Actor-turned-clergyman Hilly Hicks is 74. Singer Jackie Jackson (The Jacksons) is 73. Singer-actor Pia Zadora is 72. R&B singer Oleta Adams is 71. Violinist Soozie Tyrell (Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band) is 67. Country singer Randy Travis is 65. Actor Mary McDonough is 63. Comedian Ana Gasteyer is 57. Actor Will Arnett is 54. Rock musician Mike Dirnt (Green Day) is 52. Contemporary Christian singer Chris Tomlin is 52. TV personality and fashion designer Kimora Lee Simmons is 49. Sports reporter Erin Andrews is 46. Singer Lance Bass ('N Sync) is 45. Actor Ruth Negga is 43. Rapper/singer Jidenna is 39. Actor Alexander Gould is 30. Country singer RaeLynn is 30. Actor Amara (uh-MAH'-ruh) Miller is 24. Actor Brooklynn Prince (Film: "The Florida Project") is 14.