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Monday, May 13

Senior Menu: Sloppy Joe on bun, oven roasted potatoes, ice cream sundae, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Oatmeal.
School Lunch: French bread pizza, green beans.
Northeast Conference Girls Golf at Fisher Grove Golf Course, Redfield, 10 a.m.
Northeast Conference Junior High Track Meet at Redfield, 10 a.m.
Varsity Track at Hamlin, 3 p.m.
School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.
The Pantry open at the Groton Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Baseball, Softball and T-Ball uniform pickup at City Hall, 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, May 14

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, au gratin potatoes, vegetable capri bend, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, fries.
Baseball, Softball and T-Ball uniform pickup at City Hall, 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
The Pantry at the Groton Community Center, hours 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
D.A.R.E. graduation, 2 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Council, 6 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

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

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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The 131st Annual Commencement Ceremony was held Sunday. The presentation of the scholarships and awards was announced with the diplomas being presented afterwards. The ceremony lasted 55 minutes.

MANHART

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

The Minnesota Vikings began their rookie minicamp this past week, offering fans their first glimpse of two players who could potentially become cornerstones of the franchise – J.J. McCarthy and Dallas Turner.

There is not a ton of information about how well Turner was looking during minicamp. The Vikings released a fancy video that showed him putting his helmet on, stretching, and going through some drills. That was about it. The biggest reason for the lack of information? The media had their sights set on number nine, the highest-drafted quarterback in Vikings' history.

Playing quarterback in the National Football League comes with a lot of scrutiny. Every moment that player is on the field, he will have cameras trained on him. Every step he takes, every pass he throws, and every word he says, will be evaluated and dissected. So it comes as no surprise that when McCarthy threw an interception on his first day, social media was abuzz. However, before we judge too harshly, it's important to understand the context.

Head coach Kevin O'Connell spoke to the media after the practice and offered us a glimpse into what goes on behind closed doors in the NFL. O'Connell told reporters that he encourages his players, especially young players, to be a little reckless in practice. He said it's important for rookies to take risks because it's the fastest way for them to learn how much different it is to play as a professional versus playing at the collegiate level. So when McCarthy threw an interception, it was all part of the process.

The Vikings' roster currently sits at 90 players, and while there will undoubtedly be some turnover at the bottom, we already have a good idea of what that roster will eventually look like when it is whittled down to 53. Taking a look, it's clear there are a few positions with huge question marks.

Left guard might be the biggest area of need for the Vikings heading into the 2024 season, especially since a rookie will more than likely be taking snaps at some point during the season. Understandably, the Vikings couldn't address every need in the draft due to the lack of premium picks, but what baffles me is why the team hasn't re-signed Dalton Risner. While he may not be an elite offensive lineman, he was more than serviceable after he signed mid-season last year.

Defensive tackle is another area that will need to be addressed before the season starts. The Vikings spent a lot of money to upgrade the defense this offseason, but very little attention was paid to the defensive line. Unfortunately for the Vikings, most of the starting-quality defensive linemen are already off the market. Maybe the Vikings can make a trade. Maybe one of the cheap offseason signings will take a huge step forward this year. Either way, as it sits now, it's a clear weakness.

Wide receiver might not seem like a huge need, considering the Vikings have the best WR in the NFL, a very good receiver who is entering his second season, and a top-five tight end. However, T.J. Hockenson is coming off a serious injury that could keep him out of the lineup to begin the season. The Vikings need to find a reliable third receiver who can pick up some slack until Hockenson gets back (and in case Jefferson or Addison miss any time). Luckily, unlike defensive line, there are some quality receivers still available in free agency, including Michael Thomas, Hutner Renfrow, Mecole Hardman, and Marquez Valdes-Scantling.

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There were a lot of people using the pickleball/tennis/basketball courts on a beautiful Sunday afternoon.



Now
HIRING!

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

Union County Fatal Motorcycle Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: Interstate 29, mile marker 46, one mile south of Beresford, SD

When: 5:42p.m. Saturday, May 11, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 66, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2004 Kawasaki VN750

Helmet Use: No

Union County, S.D.- A 66-year-old man died Saturday afternoon in a single-vehicle crash one mile south of Beresford, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2004 Kawasaki VN750 motorcycle was southbound on I-29 when for an unknown reason the driver drifted off the left side of the highway and into the median. The motorcycle crashed in the median, ejecting the driver. He was not wearing a helmet and sustained serious injuries. The driver was transported to a local hospital by ambulance where he died from his injuries. Speed and alcohol are not believed to be a factor in the crash and no other vehicles were involved.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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Telegraph, Telephone, Telemedicine

Technology has come a long way in the past 200 years. The telegraph was invented in 1837 and made rapid long range communication possible. Messages could be sent around the world through a series of connected wires. The telegraph had medical applications in the Civil War. It was used to order medical supplies and report information about injuries and casualties to medical teams. This was cutting edge technology at the time, but it now is considered an obsolete method of communication.

Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone in 1876.

By 1900 there were nearly 600,000 telephones in use. At the end of 1910 there were over 5.8 million active telephones. The telephone was seen as a tool to connect doctors and patients together over a distance. A report in The Lancet Journal from 1879 described how a doctor could use the telephone to listen to a baby's cough and diagnose croup.

In 1924 The Radio News Magazine predicted a two way video encounter with a "radio doctor" using a television-like device. In 1959 the University of Nebraska became the first place to use two-way video communications for telemedicine applications. This was done using closed circuit television to connect medical students at the main campus in Omaha with patients at the Norfolk State Hospital 112 miles away. However, Telemedicine as we know it today did not get its start until the 1970's.

Telemedicine can also be used to send radiology images remotely to radiologists who can be in a different state or even a different country. With the improvement of cellular technology, EKGs can be sent from the back of an ambulance to the hospital. So before a patient even sets foot inside the door of the hospital, the Emergency Room doctors and Cardiologists can be prepared. This can not only save time, but can save lives when someone is having a heart attack.

With the COVID 19 pandemic, there was an increased push to use telemedicine for virtual visits in the clinic setting. Telemedicine has also been used when patient transfer from smaller hospitals to larger tertiary care centers is not possible or when dangerous winter driving conditions make transfers unsafe. This technology helps bridge the gap in medical care between rural areas without specialists and urban medical centers.

The jump from telegraphs to telemedicine with virtual visits is a big one. I can only imagine what the next 200 years of technological advancements will bring to how we deliver health care. No matter how we interact, there will always be a doctor ready to connect and help you, stay healthy out there.

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



Jill Kruse, DO

EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: Why are conventional toothpaste tubes not eco-friendly? What better alternatives are out there?
-- Jackie V., Pittsburgh, PA

The impact of conventional toothpaste tubes is significant and largely negative. Typically made from non-biodegradable plastic and aluminum, they present significant challenges in recycling processes. The mixed material composition requires complex, costly separation techniques, making recycling inefficient and often nonviable. According to Forbes, some 1.5 billion toothpaste tubes are discarded each year.

The production and disposal of these tubes involves substantial energy use and emissions. From the extraction and processing of raw materials to manufacturing and eventual disposal, the lifecycle of conventional toothpaste tubes is energy-intensive and ecologically damaging. After use, they are typically "discarded at a facility and will end up in the landfill" says Julie Smith of Aspire Colorado.

In response to these issues, there has been a rise in eco-friendly alternatives. Zero-waste toothpastes, which eschew traditional tubes, are becoming increasingly popular. These typically come in tablet or powder form and are packaged in biodegradable or recyclable materials. Toothpaste tablets are especially sustainable as they also reduce water usage, relying instead on saliva or water.

Other innovative solutions include toothpastes packaged in metal tubes, which are easier to recycle than plastic ones, and brands that use plant-based container materials. These efforts reflect growing consumer demand for sustainable products, reflecting a broader trend towards environmental responsibility.

Several brands have been leading the way in this shift towards sustainability. David's Natural Toothpaste offer toothpaste is packaged in metal tubes, and The Humble Co. uses plant-based materials for their biodegradable tubes. Both options present a significant reduction in waste compared to traditional plastic tubes. These products not only help to reduce environmental impacts and also cater to health-conscious consumer by avoiding harmful chemicals often found in conventional toothpastes.

However, transitioning to these eco-friendly alternatives is not without its challenges. Makers face significant hurdles in altering established production lines, sourcing materials that meet quality and safety standards and potentially incurring higher costs. Consumers may also be hesitant to switch to new formats, such as tablets or powders, or may be skeptic about their efficacy. Additionally, the initial cost of these alternatives can be higher, which may deter widespread adoption.

Regulation and industry standards play a crucial role in facilitating this transition. Governments can promote the use of sustainable packaging by implementing policies that encourage recycling, reduce the use of non-recyclable materials or provide incentives for companies to develop greener products. Specific regulations that mandate the use of recyclable materials in packaging can drive innovation in the industry, leading to more sustainable options becoming available and economically viable.



The production and disposal of toothpaste tubes involves substantial energy use and emissions. Credit: Pexels.com.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Initial test finds 'forever chemical' in Mount Rushmore drinking water at level exceeding new limit

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MAY 12, 2024 5:00 PM

A sample of Mount Rushmore National Memorial's drinking water had levels of a "forever chemical" exceeding new limits established by the federal government.

Perfluorooctane sulfonic acid, or PFOS, is a member of the synthetic chemical group known collectively as perfluorinated alkylated substances, or PFAS. The chemicals have been used in industry and consumer products since the 1940s and don't break down easily in the environment or in the human body. Research indicates PFAS exposure may be linked to negative developmental and reproductive effects, and an increased risk of some cancers.

A 2023 test of Mount Rushmore's drinking water showed a PFOS concentration of 9.8 parts per trillion, more than two times higher than the Environmental Protection Agency's new limit of 4 parts per trillion. The EPA finalized limits for several types of PFAS last month.

The result doesn't necessarily mean Mount Rushmore is out of compliance with the EPA's new rule, which will be implemented in phases. Current testing is preliminary. Tests won't count toward the new limits until 2027, and the EPA will use annual running averages to determine compliance. The EPA won't begin issuing violations until 2029.

The current sampling is part of a multi-year, nationwide testing effort by the EPA. The South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems is conducting a majority of the testing in the state.

In publicly available results published so far, Mount Rushmore is the only site in South Dakota to test above the new EPA limits for forever chemicals. Additional Mount Rushmore sampling results will be published in the coming weeks and months. Elsewhere in South Dakota, some of the chemicals have been detected at levels below the new EPA limits.

PFAS from firefighting foam was previously known to have contaminated groundwater at military installations in or near locations including Rapid City and Sioux Falls, leading to mitigation efforts in those areas.

In an emailed statement, Mount Rushmore National Memorial spokesman Earl Perez-Foust said the National Park Service is monitoring the results and considering any mitigation that may be necessary.

"This could include treatment or considering a new water source," Perez-Foust said. "Public health and safety is always our top priority."

Reverse osmosis, granular activated carbon, nanofiltration and other methods have been identified as methods of removing PFAS from drinking water, according to the EPA.

The exact source of the contamination at Mount Rushmore is unknown, said Galen Hoogestraat, a hydrologist for the U.S. Geological Survey's Dakota Water Science Center.

"In general, PFAS sources can come from anywhere humans are interacting with the environment: food wrappers, water-resistant clothing, common products and waste," Hoogestraat said.

For over a decade, Hoogestraat has studied perchlorate contamination in Mount Rushmore's groundwater and local streams from former fireworks displays at the memorial. He said the amount of perchlorate in the water has "dropped substantially" in the last decade.

Hoogestraat said the memorial provides water to over 2 million visitors every year from a "very small postage stamp of an area in the Black Hills," because the memorial is limited to using water from within

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the park boundaries.

That source is a fractured rock system that collects rain and groundwater, which makes it susceptible to contamination.

"There's very little soil on top of the rocks, so there's very little filtration of anything that comes from the surface — good or bad," Hoogestraat said.

That can create volatile test results, since concentrations of contaminants can vary based on the seasons and weather conditions.

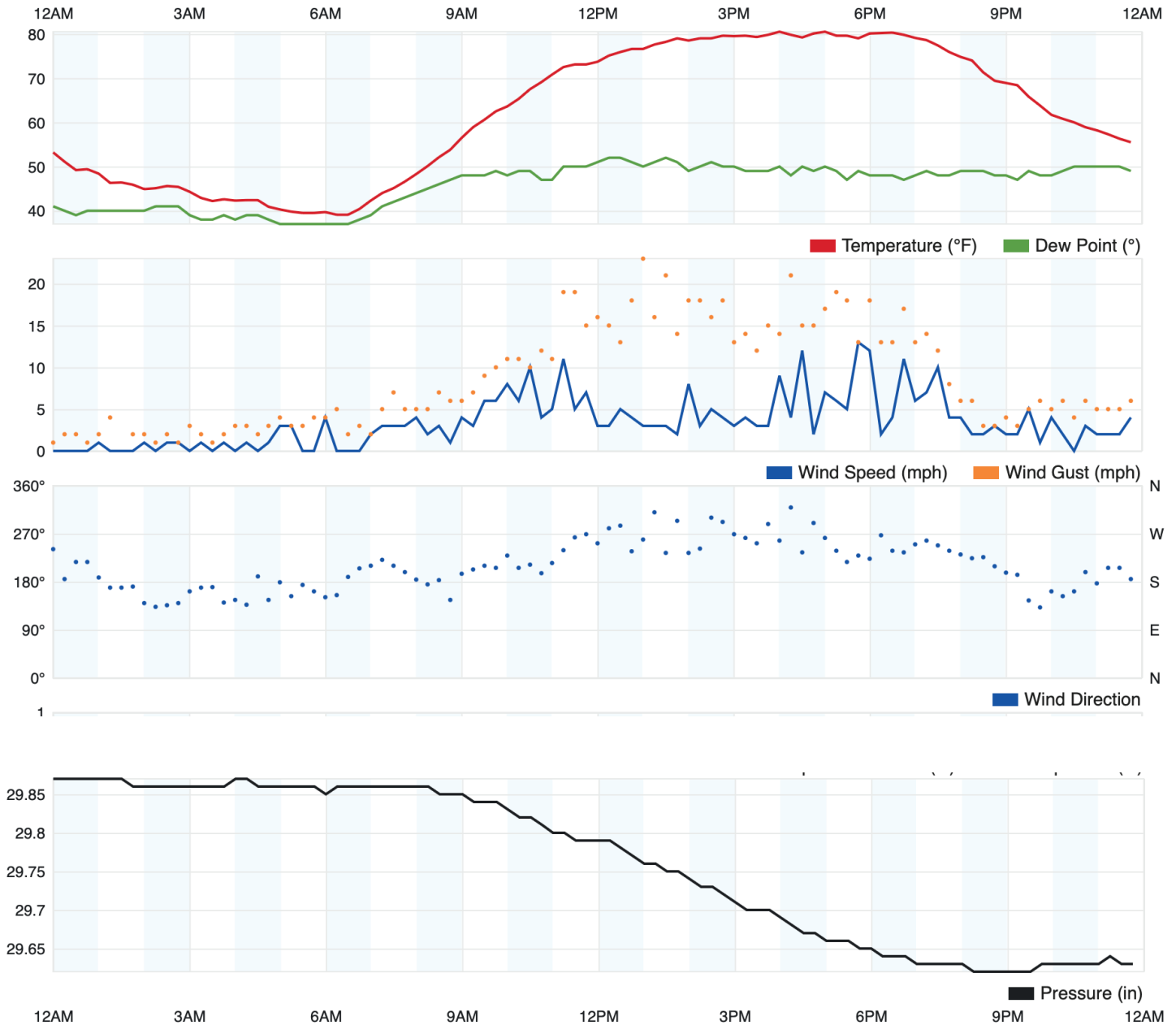
"There needs to be more sampling done to assess the variability around this," Hoogestraat said, "and wrap our arms around the trends of this: Is this a long-term, persistent thing, or will this be variable over time?"

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.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 78 °F

Sunny then
Areas Smoke

Tonight



Low: 44 °F

Partly Cloudy

Monday



High: 71 °F

Sunny

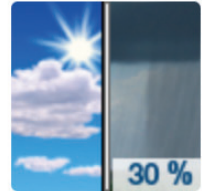
Monday Night



Low: 44 °F

Mostly Clear

Tuesday



High: 73 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Chance
Showers

Unsettled Weather this Week

Today



Highs:
66 to 76°

Dry
Some
Smoke

Tuesday



Highs:
69 to 77°

Rainfall
Chance
20-70%

Wednesday



Highs:
64 to 70°

Rainfall
Chance
20-60%

Thursday



Highs:
68 to 75°

Rainfall
Chance
20-35

Friday



Highs:
72 to 77°

Rainfall
Chance
20-35

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Today will feature dry conditions with patchy to areas of smoke. The weather pattern become more active with showers and thunderstorms possible for the rest of the work week.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 76 °F at 3:20 PM

Low Temp: 50 °F at 6:19 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 11:59 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 54 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 97 in 1932

Record Low: 24 in 1899

Average High: 69

Average Low: 43

Average Precip in May.: 1.43

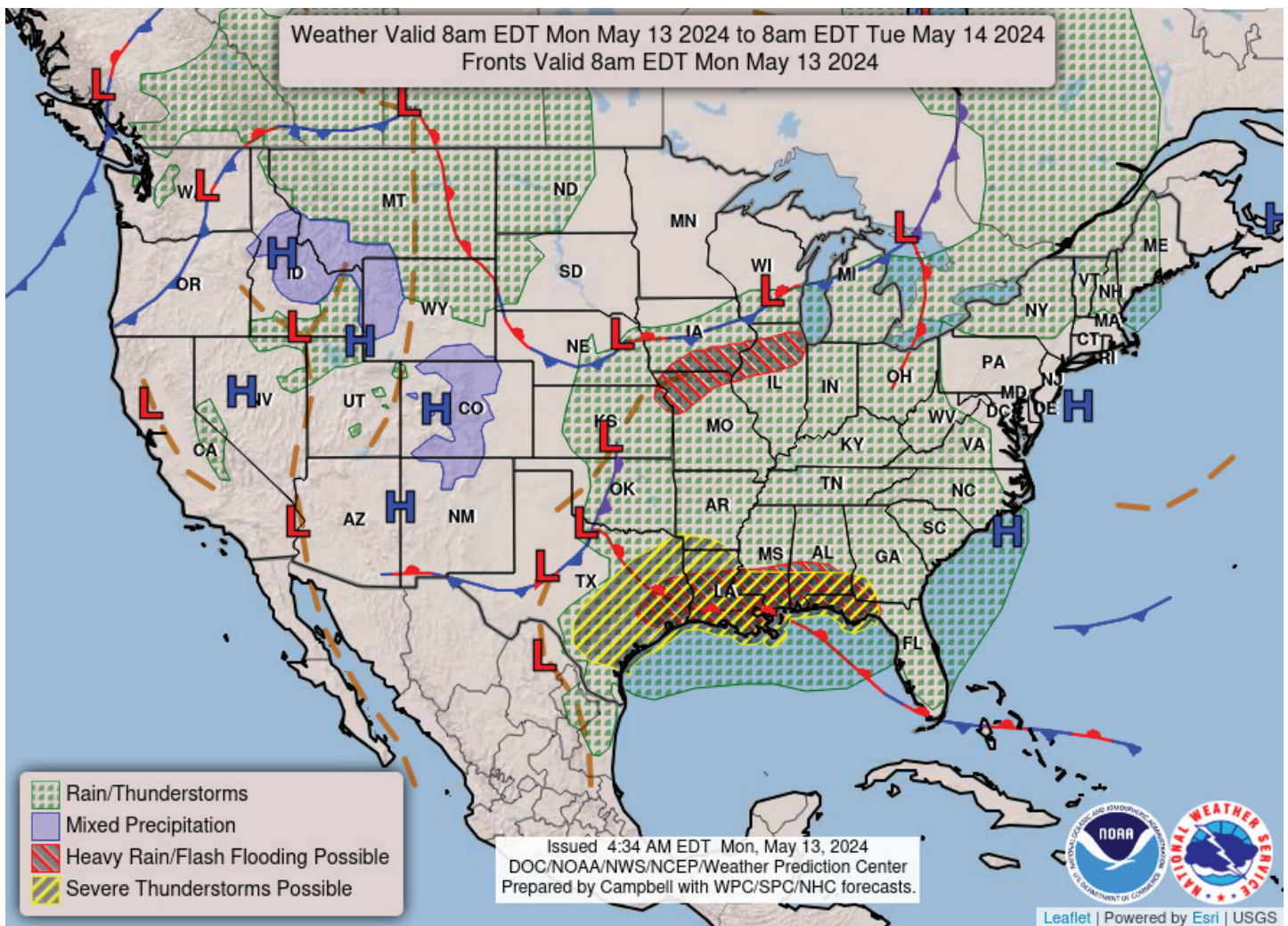
Precip to date in May: 0.68

Average Precip to date: 5.40

Precip Year to Date: 5.21

Sunset Tonight: 8:55:58 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:00:21 am



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Today in Weather History

May 13, 2005: Runoff from heavy rain resulted in minor flooding along the White River from south of Belvidere to Oacoma, affecting mainly agricultural land along the river. The river rose over its banks and flooded U.S. Highway 83 south of Murdo for a short time. No property damage was reported.

1980: An F3 tornado ripped directly through the center of Kalamazoo, Michigan, killing five people, injuring 79, leaving 1,200 homeless and causing \$50 million in damage. The tornado passed directly over the American Bank, where a barograph reported a pressure drop of 0.59 inches.

1930 - A man was killed when caught in an open field during a hailstorm northwest of Lubbock TX. It was the first, and perhaps the only, authentic death by hail in U.S. weather records. (David Ludlum)

1981 - A tornado 450 yards in width destroyed ninety percent of Emberson TX. People did not see a tornado, but rather a wall of debris. Homes were leveled, a man in a bathtub was hurled a quarter of a mile, and a 1500 pound recreational vehicle was hurled 500 yards. Miraculously no deaths occurred in the tornado. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front brought an end to the early season warm spell in the north central U.S., but not before the temperature at Sioux City IA soared to a record warm 95 degrees. Strong southwesterly winds ahead of the cold front gusted to 52 mph at Marais MI. Evening thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail at Rockford MN, and wind gusts to 75 mph at Belmond IA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Strong winds along a cold front ushering cold air into the northwestern U.S. gusted to 69 mph at Myton UT. Temperatures warmed into the 80s ahead of the cold front, as far north as Montana. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather in the Southern Plains Region during the afternoon and night. A thunderstorm at Killeen TX produced wind gusts to 95 mph damaging 200 helicopters at Fort Hood causing nearly 500 million dollars damage. Another thunderstorm produced softball size hail at Hodges TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front spawned ten tornadoes from eastern Wyoming to northern Kansas, including seven in western Nebraska. Thunderstorms forming ahead of a cold front in the eastern U.S. spawned five tornadoes from northeastern North Carolina to southern Pennsylvania. Thunderstorms over southeast Louisiana deluged the New Orleans area with four to eight inches of rain between 7 AM and Noon. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: This outbreak produced tornadoes extending from the Mississippi River near Burlington, Iowa, to the west of Bloomington, Illinois. Two violent tornadoes, each ranked at F4 intensity, were reported. The first tornado traveled 60 miles from near Fort Madison, Iowa, to the southeast of Galesburg, Illinois producing over \$10 million damage. The town of Raritan, Illinois was hit the hardest. The second violent tornado traveled 7 miles across Fulton County from Ipava to Lewistown, Illinois producing \$6 million damage. Another strong tornado took a 25-mile path across parts of Fulton, Mason, and Tazewell Counties. The storms also produced softball-size hail south and northwest of Macomb in Illinois. Five men were injured in Lawrence County, Indiana when lightning struck one of them and traveled to the other four. There were 184 reports of severe weather, including over three dozen tornadoes.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

HOW TO RECOGNIZE OUR VALUE

At the end of each season in each major sport, someone is recognized as being the most valuable player. In 1942, the Most Valuable Player of the Year Award in the American League was given to a player who made the most errors, hit into more double plays than anyone else and also struck out more than any other player. His name was Joe Gordon. He was also named into the baseball players Hall of Fame.

We can learn much from Joe Gordon. Even though he failed in some categories more than other players he did not allow his failures to be final. He did not give up nor refuse to do his best. He persisted through his problems and kept struggling to be successful. And he was! Rather than giving up he stood up, faced his problems and focused on his goal: to be his best and do his best.

Paul said, "Work with enthusiasm (and) remember that God will reward each one of us for the good we do..." This word of encouragement is a point well worth pondering.

There are times, for the Christian, that we work hard and do our best to be faithful in the tasks that God brings our way. We serve without notice and with little recognition. It seems as though no one cares because no one comments. But God does indeed care and one day He will make a comment: Well done, good and faithful servant.

Prayer: Lord, for all who are weary in well doing and continue to serve You faithfully, we ask that someone somewhere will recognize the good they have done. In Your Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. Ephesians 6:7-8



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

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Winning Numbers

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.10.24

13 22 26 32 65 18

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$363,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 33
DRAW: Mins 54 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.11.24

15 16 27 50 51 3

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,350,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 48 Mins 54
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.12.24

8 14 26 29 47 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 17 Hrs 3 Mins 54
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.11.24

7 20 23 28 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$96,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 3
DRAW: Mins 54 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.11.24

21 24 32 39 55 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 32 Mins 55
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.11.24

3 6 39 49 67 21

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$47,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 32 Mins 55
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

News from the Associated Press

India's mammoth election is more than halfway done as millions begin voting in fourth round

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

SAMASTIPUR, India (AP) — Millions of Indians across 96 constituencies began casting their ballots on Monday as the country's gigantic, six-week-long election edges past its halfway mark. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third straight term with an eye on winning a supermajority in Parliament.

Monday's polling in the fourth round of multi-phase national elections across nine states and one union territory will be pivotal for Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, as it includes some of its strongholds in states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Crucial seats in Maharashtra and Bihar states, where the BJP governs in alliances with regional parties, are also up for grabs in this phase.

In Bihar's Samastipur city, hundreds of voters lined up at a polling station that opened at 7 a.m. amid tight security arrangements. Voters said they were concerned about rising food prices, lack of employment and economic development in the state.

Most polls predict a win for Modi and his BJP, which is up against a broad opposition alliance led by the Indian National Congress and powerful regional parties.

The staggered election will run until June 1 and nearly 970 million voters, more than 10% of the world's population, will elect 543 members to the lower house of Parliament for five years. The votes are scheduled to be counted on June 4.

Monday will also see the end of polling in the country's five southern states, a region that has mostly rejected Modi's BJP since it first came to power in 2014 but where winning more seats is crucial for the party's campaign goal of securing a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Kashmir's largest city, Srinagar, will also vote Monday in the first polls since Modi's government stripped the disputed region of its semi-autonomy and took direct control of it in 2019. Despite hailing the move as a success that would bring economic development and peace to the restive region, the BJP is not contesting the polls in the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley, where anti-India sentiment runs deep, for the first time since 1996.

Instead, two regional parties — the National Conference and the People's Democratic Party — are the main contenders for the three seats in the valley and both are opposed to the BJP.

Opposition parties say the BJP's decision not to contest the election is in contrast to its claims and that poll results may contradict the government's narrative of success in Kashmir, which is now run by unelected government officials and bureaucrats.

Waheed-Ur-Rehman Para, a leader of the People's Democratic Party who is seeking to represent Srinagar, said the election there was about "a referendum against the government's decisions and policies that were implemented without any public consent."

While Modi began his campaign with a focus on India's development in his 10 years in power, he has since doubled down on the BJP's Hindu nationalism pitch in recent weeks.

In campaign rallies, Modi has called Muslims "infiltrators" and accused the main opposition Congress Party of scheming to redistribute wealth from the country's Hindus to Muslims, who comprise 14% of the country's more than 1.4 billion people.

Nikhilesh Mishra, a 42-year-old bank employee in Samastipur, said: "Raking up issues of Hindus versus Muslims will take us nowhere."

He said Modi's BJP-led alliance in Bihar, which secured an overwhelming majority in the 2019 election, had failed to bring development to the state, which is among the poorest in India.

Mishra said rising inflation and unemployment are driving young people to migrate to other states, draining it of its talent. "We want development. ... This time, we want change in the government," he said.

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Meanwhile, Modi appeared confident of BJP's chances in Bihar, telling the New Delhi Television channel on Sunday that his alliance will fare better than it did in the 2019 elections, when it lost one seat.

"We may not even lose one this time," he said.

Some analysts say the change in tone comes as the BJP hopes to consolidate votes among the majority Hindu population, who make up 80% of voters, and to distract voters from larger issues, like unemployment, corruption and inflation.

Despite India being one of the world's fastest-growing economies, many people continue to face economic distress, which has been a key focus in the opposition's campaign.

Illness took away her voice. AI created a replica she carries in her phone

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — The voice Alexis "Lexi" Bogan had before last summer was exuberant.

She loved to belt out Taylor Swift and Zach Bryan ballads in the car. She laughed all the time — even while corralling misbehaving preschoolers or debating politics with friends over a backyard fire pit. In high school, she was a soprano in the chorus.

Then that voice was gone.

Doctors in August removed a life-threatening tumor lodged near the back of her brain. When the breathing tube came out a month later, Bogan had trouble swallowing and strained to say "hi" to her parents. Months of rehabilitation aided her recovery, but her speech is still impaired. Friends, strangers and her own family members struggle to understand what she is trying to tell them.

In April, the 21-year-old got her old voice back. Not the real one, but a voice clone generated by artificial intelligence that she can summon from a phone app. Trained on a 15-second time capsule of her teenage voice — sourced from a cooking demonstration video she recorded for a high school project — her synthetic but remarkably real-sounding AI voice can now say almost anything she wants.

She types a few words or sentences into her phone and the app instantly reads it aloud.

"Hi, can I please get a grande iced brown sugar oat milk shaken espresso," said Bogan's AI voice as she held the phone out her car's window at a Starbucks drive-thru.

Experts have warned that rapidly improving AI voice-cloning technology can amplify phone scams, disrupt democratic elections and violate the dignity of people — living or dead — who never consented to having their voice recreated to say things they never spoke.

It's been used to produce deepfake robocalls to New Hampshire voters mimicking President Joe Biden. In Maryland, authorities recently charged a high school athletic director with using AI to generate a fake audio clip of the school's principal making racist remarks.

But Bogan and a team of doctors at Rhode Island's Lifespan hospital group believe they've found a use that justifies the risks. Bogan is one of the first people — the only one with her condition — who have been able to recreate a lost voice with OpenAI's new Voice Engine. Some other AI providers, such as the startup ElevenLabs, have tested similar technology for people with speech impediments and loss — including a lawyer who now uses her voice clone in the courtroom.

"We're hoping Lexi's a trailblazer as the technology develops," said Dr. Rohaid Ali, a neurosurgery resident at Brown University's medical school and Rhode Island Hospital. Millions of people with debilitating strokes, throat cancer or neurodegenerative diseases could benefit, he said.

"We should be conscious of the risks, but we can't forget about the patient and the social good," said Dr. Fatima Mirza, another resident working on the pilot. "We're able to help give Lexi back her true voice and she's able to speak in terms that are the most true to herself."

Mirza and Ali, who are married, caught the attention of ChatGPT-maker OpenAI because of their previous research project at Lifespan using the AI chatbot to simplify medical consent forms for patients. The San Francisco company reached out while on the hunt earlier this year for promising medical applications for its new AI voice generator.

Bogan was still slowly recovering from surgery. The illness started last summer with headaches, blurry

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vision and a droopy face, alarming doctors at Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence. They discovered a vascular tumor the size of a golf ball pressing on her brain stem and entangled in blood vessels and cranial nerves.

"It was a battle to get control of the bleeding and get the tumor out," said pediatric neurosurgeon Dr. Konstantina Svokos.

The 10-hour length of the surgery coupled with the tumor's location and severity damaged Bogan's tongue muscles and vocal cords, impeding her ability to eat and talk, Svokos said.

"It's almost like a part of my identity was taken when I lost my voice," Bogan said.

The feeding tube came out this year. Speech therapy continues, enabling her to speak intelligibly in a quiet room but with no sign she will recover the full lucidity of her natural voice.

"At some point, I was starting to forget what I sounded like," Bogan said. "I've been getting so used to how I sound now."

Whenever the phone rang at the family's home in the Providence suburb of North Smithfield, she would push it over to her mother to take her calls. She felt she was burdening her friends whenever they went to a noisy restaurant. Her dad, who has hearing loss, struggled to understand her.

Back at the hospital, doctors were looking for a pilot patient to experiment with OpenAI's technology.

"The first person that came to Dr. Svokos' mind was Lexi," Ali said. "We reached out to Lexi to see if she would be interested, not knowing what her response would be. She was game to try it out and see how it would work."

Bogan had to go back a few years to find a suitable recording of her voice to "train" the AI system on how she spoke. It was a video in which she explained how to make a pasta salad.

Her doctors intentionally fed the AI system just a 15-second clip. Cooking sounds make other parts of the video imperfect. It was also all that OpenAI needed — an improvement over previous technology requiring much lengthier samples.

They also knew that getting something useful out of 15 seconds could be vital for any future patients who have no trace of their voice on the internet. A brief voicemail left for a relative might have to suffice.

When they tested it for the first time, everyone was stunned by the quality of the voice clone. Occasional glitches — a mispronounced word, a missing intonation — were mostly imperceptible. In April, doctors equipped Bogan with a custom-built phone app that only she can use.

"I get so emotional every time I hear her voice," said her mother, Pamela Bogan, tears in her eyes.

"I think it's awesome that I can have that sound again," added Lexi Bogan, saying it helped "boost my confidence to somewhat where it was before all this happened."

She now uses the app about 40 times a day and sends feedback she hopes will help future patients. One of her first experiments was to speak to the kids at the preschool where she works as a teaching assistant. She typed in "ha ha ha ha" expecting a robotic response. To her surprise, it sounded like her old laugh.

She's used it at Target and Marshall's to ask where to find items. It's helped her reconnect with her dad. And it's made it easier for her to order fast food.

Bogan's doctors have started cloning the voices of other willing Rhode Island patients and hope to bring the technology to hospitals around the world. OpenAI said it is treading cautiously in expanding the use of Voice Engine, which is not yet publicly available.

A number of smaller AI startups already sell voice-cloning services to entertainment studios or make them more widely available. Most voice-generation vendors say they prohibit impersonation or abuse, but they vary in how they enforce their terms of use.

"We want to make sure that everyone whose voice is used in the service is consenting on an ongoing basis," said Jeff Harris, OpenAI's lead on the product. "We want to make sure that it's not used in political contexts. So we've taken an approach of being very limited in who we're giving the technology to."

Harris said OpenAI's next step involves developing a secure "voice authentication" tool so that users can replicate only their own voice. That might be "limiting for a patient like Lexi, who had sudden loss of her speech capabilities," he said. "So we do think that we'll need to have high-trust relationships, especially

with medical providers, to give a little bit more unfettered access to the technology.”

Bogan has impressed her doctors with her focus on thinking about how the technology could help others with similar or more severe speech impediments.

“Part of what she has done throughout this entire process is think about ways to tweak and change this,” Mirza said. “She’s been a great inspiration for us.”

While for now she must fiddle with her phone to get the voice engine to talk, Bogan imagines an AI voice engine that improves upon older remedies for speech recovery — such as the robotic-sounding electrolarynx or a voice prosthesis — in melding with the human body or translating words in real time.

She’s less sure about what will happen as she grows older and her AI voice continues to sound like she did as a teenager. Maybe the technology could “age” her AI voice, she said.

For now, “even though I don’t have my voice fully back, I have something that helps me find my voice again,” she said.

Ukraine’s Zelenskyy says his army is locked in ‘fierce’ border battles amid a Russian assault

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian troops are locked in intense battles with the advancing Russian army in two border areas, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, while the death toll from a Russian apartment building collapse blamed on Ukrainian shelling rose to 15.

Zelenskyy said “fierce battles” are taking place near the border in eastern and northeastern Ukraine as outgunned and outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers try to push back a significant Russian ground offensive.

“Defensive battles are ongoing, fierce battles, on a large part of our border area,” Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address Sunday.

The Kremlin’s forces are aiming to exploit Ukrainian weaknesses before a big batch of new military aid for Kyiv from the U.S. and European partners arrives on the battlefield in the coming weeks and months, analysts say. That makes this period a window of opportunity for Moscow and one of the most dangerous for Kyiv in the two-year war, they say.

The new Russian push in the northeastern Kharkiv region, along with the ongoing drive into the eastern Donetsk region, come after months when the about 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line barely budged. In the meantime, both sides have used long-range strikes in what largely became a war of attrition.

The Kharkiv incursion may be an attempt to create a “buffer zone” to protect Belgorod, an adjacent Russian border region battered by Ukrainian attacks.

Russian emergency services on Monday finished clearing the rubble in the region’s capital city of Belgorod, where a section of a residential building collapsed following what authorities said was Ukrainian shelling.

Fifteen bodies were pulled from the rubble, Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said, and 27 other people were wounded.

Another three people in the city of Belgorod were killed by shelling late Sunday, he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as defense minister in a Cabinet shakeup. Shoigu was widely seen as a key figure in Putin’s decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine in February 2022. Russia had expected the operation to quickly overwhelm Ukraine’s army and for Ukrainians to broadly welcome Russian troops.

Zelenskyy said fighting in the Donetsk area is “no less intense” than in Kharkiv. He said the Kremlin aimed to “spread our forces thin” by opening a second active front in Kharkiv.

He described the area around Pokrovsk region, just inside the Ukrainian border in Donetsk, as “the most difficult.”

Pokrovsk was a town of around 60,000 people before the war and was until recently a two-hour drive from the front line. Now it is less than half that.

The capture of the Donetsk city of Avdiivka in February opened a door for the Kremlin’s troops to push westward, deeper into Donetsk. Russia illegally annexed Donetsk and three other regions in 2022 shortly

after it invaded Ukraine, and taking control of all of Donetsk is one of the Kremlin's main war goals.

Trump trial arrives at a pivotal moment: Star witness Michael Cohen is poised to take the stand

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — The star prosecution witness in Donald Trump's hush money trial is set to take the stand Monday with testimony that could help shape the outcome of the first criminal case against an American president.

Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, is by far the Manhattan district attorney's most important witness in the case and his expected appearance signals that the trial is entering its final stretch. Prosecutors say they may wrap up their presentation of evidence by the end of the week.

Cohen is expected to testify about his role in arranging hush money payments on Trump's behalf during his first presidential campaign, including to porn actor Stormy Daniels, who told jurors last week that the \$130,000 that she received in 2016 was meant to prevent her from going public about a sexual encounter she says she had with Trump in a hotel suite a decade earlier.

He also matters because the reimbursements he received form the basis of the charges — 34 felony counts of falsifying business records — against Trump. Prosecutors say the reimbursements were logged as legal expenses to conceal the payments' true purpose.

Defense lawyers have teed up a bruising cross-examination of Cohen, telling jurors during opening statements that the fixer-turned-foe is an "admitted liar" with an "obsession to get President Trump."

The testimony of a witness with such intimate knowledge of Trump's activities could heighten the legal exposure of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee if jurors deem him sufficiently credible. But politically, prosecutors' reliance on a witness with such a checkered past — Cohen pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the payments and to lying to Congress — could be a boon for Trump as he fundraises off his legal woes and paints the case as the product of a tainted criminal justice system.

Either way, his role as star prosecution witness further cements the disintegration of a mutually beneficial relationship that was once so close that Cohen famously said he'd "take a bullet for Trump." After Cohen's home and office were raided by the FBI in 2018, Trump showered him with affection on social media, praising him as a "fine person with a wonderful family" and predicting — incorrectly — that Cohen would not "flip."

Months later, Cohen did exactly that, pleading guilty that August to federal campaign-finance charges in which he implicated Trump. By that point, the relationship was irrevocably broken, with Trump posting on the social media platform then known as Twitter: "If anyone is looking for a good lawyer, I would strongly suggest that you don't retain the services of Michael Cohen!"

Cohen later admitted lying to Congress about a Moscow real estate project that he had pursued on Trump's behalf during the heat of the 2016 Republican campaign. He said he lied to be consistent with Trump's "political messaging."

Prosecutors are expected to elicit detailed testimony from Cohen about his past crimes in hopes of blunting the impact of defense lawyers' questioning and showing that they're not trying to hide his misdeeds. But it's unclear how effective that will be, given that defense lawyers will be prepared to exploit all the challenges that accompany a witness like Cohen.

In addition to painting Cohen as untrustworthy, they're also expected to cast him as vindictive, vengeful and agenda-driven. Since their fallout, Cohen has emerged as a relentless and sometimes crude critic of Trump, appearing as recently as last week in a live Tik Tok wearing a shirt featuring a figure resembling Trump with his hands cuffed, behind bars. The judge on Friday urged prosecutors to tell him to refrain from making any more statements about the case or Trump.

"He has talked extensively about his desire to see President Trump go to prison," Trump attorney Todd Blanche said during opening statements. "He has talked extensively about his desire to see President

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Trump's family go to prison. He has talked extensively about President Trump getting convicted in this case."

No matter how his testimony unfolds, Cohen is indisputably central to the case, as evidenced by the fact that his name was mentioned in the jury's presence during opening statements more than 130 times — more than any other person.

Other witnesses, including former National Enquirer publisher David Pecker and former Trump adviser Hope Hicks, have testified at length about the role Cohen played in arranging to stifle stories that were feared to be harmful to Trump's 2016 candidacy. And jurors heard an audio recording of Trump and Cohen discussing a plan to purchase the rights to a story of a Playboy model, Karen McDougal, who has said she had an affair with Trump.

During a massive rally on Saturday in the southern New Jersey resort town of Wildwood, Trump revived his criticism of the case, wrongly blaming President Joe Biden for orchestrating the New York charges, calling the case a "Biden show trial."

That argument ignores the reality that the hush money case was filed by local prosecutors in Manhattan who do not work for the Justice Department or any other White House office. The Justice Department has said the White House has had no involvement in the two criminal cases against Trump brought by special counsel Jack Smith.

Thousands protest in Georgia over the weekend against 'Russia-style' law on foreign influence

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Georgia's parliament green-lit a final vote on a proposed law that critics see as a threat to media freedom and the country's aspirations to join the European Union on Monday, a day after police dispersed the latest protests against it.

The bill would require media and nongovernmental organizations and other nonprofits to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad.

The opposition denounces the bill as "the Russian law," because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, nonprofits and activists critical of the Kremlin.

The bill is nearly identical to one that the governing Georgian Dream party was pressured to withdraw last year after street protests. Renewed demonstrations have rocked Georgia for weeks, with demonstrators scuffling with police, who used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds.

The government says the bill is necessary to stem what it deems as harmful foreign influence over the country's politics and to prevent unspecified foreign actors from trying to destabilize it.

Huge crowds marched through Europe Square in the capital, Tbilisi, on Saturday, with demonstrators wrapped in Georgian and European Union flags and chanting "Georgia!" On Sunday, the protesters gathered in front of parliament for an overnight rally and tried to block entrances into the building, where a committee of lawmakers were expected to discuss the bill once again on Monday.

Police sought to disperse the demonstration, and by Monday morning, only hundreds remained near parliament. Georgia's Interior Ministry said 20 people were arrested in the morning, including three foreign citizens — two Americans and a Russian.

It took lawmakers less than a minute to give a green light to the third and final reading of the bill for Tuesday.

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, who is increasingly at odds with the governing party, has vowed to veto the law, but Georgian Dream has a majority sufficient to override a presidential veto.

The legislature approved a second reading of the bill earlier this month, after protests that drew tens of thousands of people.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has described the parliament's move as "a very concerning development" and warned that "final adoption of this legislation would negatively impact Georgia's progress on its EU path."

Sleepy far-flung towns in the Philippines will host US forces returning to counter China threats

BY JIM GOMEZ AND AARON FAVILA Associated Press

SANTA ANA, Philippines (AP) — The far-flung coastal town of Santa Ana in the northeastern tip of the Philippine mainland has long been known by tourists mostly for its beaches, waterfalls, fireflies and a few casinos.

But that's changing after the laid-back town of about 35,000 people, which still has no traffic light, became strategically important to America.

The United States and the Philippines, which are longtime treaty allies, have identified Santa Ana in northern Cagayan province as one of nine mostly rural areas where rotating batches of American forces could encamp indefinitely and store their weapons and equipment on local military bases under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement.

Thousands of U.S. forces withdrew from two huge Navy and Air Force bases in the Philippines in the early 1990s at the end of the Cold War, ending nearly a century of American military presence in the country. In recent years, Washington has been reinforcing an arc of military alliances in Asia to counter an increasingly assertive China, which it now regards as its greatest security challenge.

That dovetails with Philippine efforts to bolster its external defenses after an alarming spate of territorial hostilities with Beijing in the South China Sea that started last year. The high seas confrontations have injured several Filipino navy personnel, damaged their boats and strained diplomatic ties.

The remote town of Santa Ana is caught in the geo-political rivalry between Washington and Beijing because of its strategic location. It lies across a sea border from Taiwan, the self-governing island that China regards as a renegade province to be reclaimed by force if necessary. The U.S. has vowed to defend the territory.

Some villagers in Santa Ana have expressed apprehension over the prospect of living near U.S. forces. Their governor, Manuel Mamba, has vehemently opposed the looming U.S. military presence, saying it would turn Cagayan into a military target of China.

Other villagers say the Philippines needs the Americans as a crucial counterweight to China, which they say has been using its military might to threaten Manila's territorial interests in the South China Sea.

"There's no choice. If you compare the number of our forces with that of China, they have much, much more," Romeo Asuncion, a planning and economic development officer in Santa Ana, told The Associated Press. "If the Americans are here, they would protect us whatever happens."

There's also the prospect of economic benefits and aid from the U.S. military presence.

"If they donate a school that will be good," Asuncion said.

Rowena Castillo, a consultant to the town's mayor, expressed hope the wider attention on Santa Ana would boost tourism. She recently handed out brochures promoting the town's beach resorts, waterfalls, a historic lighthouse, a crocodile-shaped island and an area that teems with fireflies.

Some villagers acknowledged that even without the U.S. forces, the town would likely be affected in any major-power military showdown due to Santa Ana's relative proximity to Taiwan.

Authorities and village leaders recently met at the initiative of the local military to discuss contingency plans, including the possibility of setting up emergency shelters for refugees, in case tensions between China and Taiwan flare into an armed conflict, Marion Miranda, Santa Ana's disaster-mitigating officer, told The AP.

"One problem is where we could bring potential refugees and the budget for that," Miranda said.

In another rural Cagayan town southwest of Santa Ana called Lal-lo, part of the airport was designated as a possible encampment site for American forces.

Unlike the two massive military bases that American forces used to occupy, including a Navy base at Subic Bay that was about the size of Singapore and had a vibrant red-light district, the U.S. military is building a new presence in a much smaller area within Philippine camps.

During largescale combat drills called Balikatan — Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder" — that ended Fri-

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day, Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters carrying allied forces, their weapons and other supplies landed and took off at the Lal-lo airport and the navy camp in Santa Ana. A few journalists, including from The AP, were invited to witness the combat maneuvers.

"It's an important location. It's critical because it is an EDCA site so it's a very big deal to both the United States and to the Philippines," U.S. Marine Lt. Col. Matthew Schultz told journalists at Lal-lo airport.

"One of the challenges that we have in this airfield now is there is not a lot of parking space or taxiways or additional apron space in order to facilitate a lot of aircraft," Schultz said.

The EDCA accord, which was signed in 2014, had an initial term of 10 years and has been automatically extended with both sides in agreement, Ambassador to the U.S. Jose Manuel Romualdez said by telephone from Washington.

The agreement allows rotating batches of U.S. forces to stay rent-free at the military sites and store their defense equipment — except nuclear weapons — there.

The U.S. has allocated more than \$82 million for the construction of ammunition and fuel storage, an urban combat training facility, aircraft parking, runway repairs and warehouses for humanitarian response items in the first five EDCA sites.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. agreed to add four more EDCA sites where U.S. forces could stay, including the Philippine navy camp in Santa Ana and the Lal-lo airport, last year.

Marcos and other Philippine officials say the renewed U.S. military presence would bolster Philippine external defense and help Filipinos respond more rapidly to natural disasters and is not directed at any country.

China, however, has expressed alarm over the increased U.S. troop deployments in the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia and said the EDCA sites in the northern Philippines could serve as surveillance outposts and staging grounds for U.S. forces to contain Beijing.

Such a display of combat readiness by the U.S. and the Philippines, according to Romualdez, aims to prevent a major conflict by making Chinese leader Xi Jinping realize the cost of a wrong move.

"We're precisely doing all of these things as a deterrence," Romualdez said. "We're trying to tell Xi, when you wake up in the morning, you'll tell yourself, 'I'm not gonna do it.' Not today, not tomorrow and hopefully never."

Germany limits cash benefit payments for asylum-seekers. Critics say it's designed to curb migration

By FANNY BRODERSEN Associated Press

EICHSFELD, Germany (AP) — When Erdina Laca goes grocery shopping in Eichsfeld these days, she pulls out a special payment card that's for asylum-seekers only.

She no longer pays in cash for her apples, eggs and fish — like most of the Germans standing in line with her at the register.

Laca, 45, came from Albania with her husband and three children and applied for asylum in Germany last September. The family lives in the county of Eichsfeld in the eastern state of Thuringia and has been one of the first in the country to receive half of their government benefits in the form of cashless payments on a plastic card.

"With half the money that is on the card, I can buy groceries, and with the other half (in cash) I can buy in every shop whatever I need for me and my children," Laca said.

The new rule, which was passed by parliament last month, calls for asylum-seekers to receive their benefits on a card for use at local shops and to pay for services. They will only be able to withdraw limited amounts of cash and won't be able to transfer money outside Germany. The aim is to prevent migrants from sending money to family and friends abroad, or to smugglers.

Migrant advocates groups have criticized the new regulation as discriminatory — especially as it's being implemented in a country that's still much more cash-centric than many other European countries and where some businesses, especially restaurants, won't even accept card payments.

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They say people fleeing war and persecution won't be deterred from coming to Germany just because their benefits will no longer be paid out in cash only. Instead, they claim that the payment cards will single out migrants and may possibly add to them being ostracized further.

"It has to be said quite clearly that people are coming because of civil war and persecution — they won't be deterred by a payment card," said Wiebke Judith from Pro Asyl. "The aim here is to create an instrument of discrimination and to bully refugees."

Germany has been trying to clamp down on migration for months, and this latest measure comes just weeks before the European Union election on June 9.

Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany party, or AfD, has been successfully exploiting Germans' hardening attitudes toward migrants. AfD, which takes an anti-migration stance, is expected to make significant gains compared to the 10.3% that the party won during the last federal election in 2021.

Attitudes toward migration have hardened in Germany as large numbers of asylum-seekers have arrived, in addition to refugees from Ukraine, and local authorities have struggled to find accommodation.

The number of people applying for asylum in Germany last year rose to more than 350,000, an increase of just over 50% compared with the year before. The largest number of asylum-seekers came from Syria, followed by Turks and Afghans.

In January, lawmakers approved legislation intended to ease deportation of unsuccessful asylum-seekers. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has repeatedly said that authorities need to speed up deportations.

Germany, like several other European countries, has also started classifying some countries, such as Moldova and Georgia, as "safe countries of origin" — meaning asylum-seekers from there can be quickly rejected and deported faster than in the past.

Eichsfeld, where Luca and her family live while their asylum plea is being processed, was one of the first counties to introduce the plastic payment cards, which look similar to ATM or credit cards. The small town started handing them out to asylum-seekers in December.

The legislation gives local authorities latitude to decide on exemptions and on how much cash asylum-seekers can withdraw. Eichsfeld decided to pay out about 50% of the monthly benefits for asylum-seekers in cash, with the other half going on the payment cards.

While Luca doesn't have any problems with the changes, county officials say that some migrants don't like the new cards.

"We have a lot of nationalities who grew up with cash — they don't know how to pay by card," says Thomas Dreiling, who runs a local shelter for asylum-seekers. Still, he supports the new system because he thinks that having less cash available will be an incentive for migrants to look for work and thus get off government benefits.

Jihad Ammuri, a 20-year-old asylum-seeker from Damascus, Syria, said not all stores have been accepting his payment card and he's been turned away from some places.

Dreiling said that of the about 400 asylum-seekers who were slated to get the payment cards in December, more than 50 said "no" to the card and left Germany — most of them citizens from North Macedonia and Georgia. Another 40 people have found work in the meantime and no longer receive government welfare payments.

Campus protests over Israel-Hamas war scaled down during US commencement exercises

The Associated Press undefined

Protests over the Israel-Hamas war have spread across U.S. university and college campuses in recent weeks, leading to disruptions and arrests. Some demonstrations extended into weekend graduation celebrations, although they were muted in comparison to the encampments and rallies that have roiled campuses and resulted in nearly 2,900 arrests of students and other protesters.

Most of the commencement exercises took place as scheduled and remained largely peaceful. Here is

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a look at some of the ceremonies that included protests:

DUKE UNIVERSITY

Dozens of the 7,000 graduates at Duke University left their seats to protest pro-Israel speaker and comedian Jerry Seinfeld during the commencement in Durham, North Carolina, on Sunday.

Some waved the red, green, black and white Palestinian flag and chanted "Free Palestine" amid a mix of boos and cheers.

Seinfeld, whose decade-long namesake show became one of the most popular in U.S. television history, was there to receive an honorary doctorate from the university.

The stand-up comedian and actor has publicly supported Israel since it invaded Gaza to dismantle Hamas after the organization attacked the country and killed some 1,200 people in southern Israel on Oct. 7. The ensuing war has killed nearly 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

POMONA COLLEGE

Southern California's small Pomona College moved Sunday evening's commencement 30 miles (48 kilometers) to the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles after pro-Palestinian protesters set up an encampment last week on the campus' ceremony stage. A few dozen pro-Palestinian demonstrators tried to block access to the graduation event.

Anwar Mohamed, a Pomona senior, said the school repeatedly ignored calls to consider divesting its endowment funds from corporations tied to the war in Gaza.

"We've been time and time again ignored by the institution," Mohamed said outside the Shrine on Sunday. "So today we have to say, it's not business as usual."

EMERSON COLLEGE

Student protesters at Emerson College in Boston occasionally erupted into chants during Sunday's commencement ceremony, trying to disrupt the event.

Several speakers stopped briefly and then spoke louder while the chants died down and ended. Some graduates wore Palestinian keffiyeh scarves. Others took off their graduation gowns and dropped them on the stage after receiving their diplomas.

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Dozens of graduating students at Virginia Commonwealth University walked out Saturday during an address by Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

While some of the estimated 100 students and family members who left during the Republican governor's speech showed support for Palestinians, others held signs signaling opposition to Youngkin's policies on education, according to WRIC-TV.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

At the University of California, Berkeley, on Saturday, a small group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators waved flags and chanted during commencement and were escorted to the back of the stadium, according to the San Francisco Chronicle. There were no major counterprotests, but some attendees voiced frustration.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill splattered red paint on the steps of a building hours ahead of the school's commencement and chanted on campus while students wearing graduation gowns posed for photos, the News & Observer reported.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

A small group of demonstrators at the University of Wisconsin-Madison staged what appeared to be a silent protest during commencement at Camp Randall Stadium. A photo posted by the Wisconsin State Journal showed about six people walking through the rear of the stadium. Two carried a Palestinian flag.

Marc Lovicott, a spokesperson for campus police, said the group, which he believed included students because they were wearing caps and gowns, "was kind of guided out, but they left on their own." No arrests were made.

Pro-Palestinian protesters at the campus had agreed Friday to permanently dismantle their 2-week-old encampment and not disrupt graduation ceremonies in return for the opportunity to connect with "decision-makers" who control university investments by July 1.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

At the University of Texas at Austin, a student held up a Palestinian flag during Saturday's commencement ceremony and refused to leave the stage briefly before being escorted away by security.

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

In Boston, commencement ceremonies for Northeastern University were held peacefully in the rain on May 5 at Fenway Park.

Some students waved small Palestinian and Israeli flags, but those were dotted among flags from India, the U.S. and other nations. Undergraduate student speaker Rebecca Bamidele drew brief cheers when she called for peace in Gaza.

Police arrested about 100 protesters at Northeastern last month when they broke up an encampment on campus.

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

A 53-year-old woman fell from the stands to her death during the May 5 graduation ceremony for Ohio State University, university officials said. The woman's daughter was among those receiving a diploma.

The fall happened around midday near where the last graduates were filing into Ohio Stadium. The Columbus Dispatch reported the death was being investigated as an apparent suicide, citing coroner documents.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Police officers stood nearby as some graduates holding Palestinian flags and shouting pro-Palestinian messages protested during commencement at the University of Michigan on May 4. One banner said, "No universities left in Gaza."

The protests were located away from the stage and didn't stop the nearly two-hour event. Protesters have demanded Michigan cut financial ties with any companies connected to Israel. The university allowed protesters to set up an encampment in the middle of campus.

Small, well-built Chinese EV called the Seagull poses a big threat to the US auto industry

By TOM KRISHER and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

LIVONIA, Mich. (AP) — A tiny, low-priced electric car called the Seagull has American automakers and politicians trembling.

The car, launched last year by Chinese automaker BYD, sells for around \$12,000 in China, but drives well and is put together with craftsmanship that rivals U.S.-made electric vehicles that cost three times as much. A shorter-range version costs under \$10,000.

Tariffs on imported Chinese vehicles probably will keep the Seagull away from America's shores for now, and it likely would sell for more than 12 grand if imported.

But the rapid emergence of low-priced EVs from China could shake up the global auto industry in ways not seen since Japanese makers exploded on the scene during the oil crises of the 1970s. BYD, which stands for "Build Your Dreams," could be a nightmare for the U.S. auto industry.

"Any car company that's not paying attention to them as a competitor is going to be lost when they hit their market," said Sam Fiorani, a vice president at AutoForecast Solutions near Philadelphia. "BYD's entry into the U.S. market isn't an if. It's a when."

U.S. politicians and manufacturers already see Chinese EVs as a serious threat. The Biden administration on Tuesday is expected to announce 100% tariffs on electric vehicles imported from China, saying they pose a threat to U.S. jobs and national security.

The Alliance for American Manufacturing says in a paper that government subsidized Chinese EVs "could end up being an extinction-level event for the U.S. auto sector."

Earlier this year, Tesla CEO Elon Musk told industry analysts Chinese EVs are so good that without trade barriers, "they will pretty much demolish most other car companies in the world."

Outside of China, EVs are often pricey, aimed at a higher-income niche market. But Chinese brands that

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are not yet global household names are offering affordable options that will appeal to the masses — just as the U.S., European and many other governments are encouraging a shift away from gasoline-powered vehicles to fight climate change.

"The Western markets did not democratize EVs. They gentrified EVs," said Bill Russo, the founder of the Automobility Ltd. consultancy in Shanghai. "And when you gentrify, you limit the size of the market. China is all about democratizing EVs, and that's what will ultimately lead Chinese companies to be successful as they go global."

Inside a huge garage in an industrial area west of Detroit, a company called Caresoft Global tore apart and reassembled a bright green Seagull that its China office purchased and shipped to the U.S.

Company President Terry Woychowski, a former chief engineer on General Motors' big pickup trucks, said the car is a "clarion call" for the U.S. auto industry, which is years behind China in designing low-cost EVs.

After the teardown, Woychowski, who has been in the auto business for 45 years, said he was left wondering if U.S. automakers can adjust. "Things will have to change in some radical ways in order to be able to compete," he said.

There's no single miracle that explains how BYD can manufacture the Seagull for so little. Instead, Woychowski said the entire car, which can go 252 miles (405 kilometers) per charge, is "an exercise in efficiency."

Higher U.S. labor costs are a part of the equation. BYD can keep costs down because of its expertise in making batteries — largely for consumer products — that use lithium iron phosphate chemistry. They cost less but have lower range than most current lithium-ion batteries.

Americans are still learning how to make cheaper batteries, Woychowski said. Ford is building a lithium iron phosphate battery factory, using technology from China's CATL.

BYD makes many of its own parts, including electric motors, dashboards, bodies and even headlights. It also has the advantage of its huge scale — 3 million vehicles sold worldwide last year.

"By having that all in-house and vertically integrated, there's an incredible advantage that they have," Woychowski said.

BYD designs all aspects of its vehicles with cost and efficiency in mind. For instance, the Seagull has only one windshield wiper, eliminating one motor and one arm, saving on weight, cost and labor to install.

U.S. automakers don't often design vehicles this way and incur excess engineering costs, Woychowski said. Hoses, for instance, have to meet longstanding requirements in combustion engines for strength and ability to carry fluid under high pressure, many of which aren't needed for electric vehicles, he added.

The weight savings add up, allowing the Seagull to travel farther per charge on a smaller battery. For example, the Seagull that Caresoft tested weighs 2,734 pounds (1,240 kilograms), about 900 pounds less than a Chevrolet Bolt, a slightly larger electric vehicle made by GM.

So Detroit needs to quickly re-learn a lot of design and engineering to keep up while shedding practices from a century of building vehicles. The trick will be determining which procedures to keep for safety and quality, and which to jettison because they aren't needed, he said.

"You're going to have to come and be extremely serious about this, and you better park your paradigms at the door," Woychowski said. "Because you're going to have to do things differently."

Even with its minimalist design, the Seagull still has a quality feel. The doors close solidly. The gray synthetic leather seats have stitching that matches the body color, a feature usually found in more expensive cars. The Seagull "Flying Edition" tested by Caresoft has six air bags, rear disc brakes and electronic stability control.

A brief drive through some connected parking lots by a reporter showed that it runs quietly and handles curves and bumps as well as more costly electric vehicles.

While the acceleration isn't head-snapping like other EVs, the Seagull is peppy and would have no problems entering a freeway in heavy traffic. Woychowski says its top speed is limited to 81 mph, (130 kilometers per hour).

BYD would have to modify its cars to meet U.S. safety standards, which are more stringent than in China. Woychowski says Caresoft hasn't done crash tests, but he estimated that would add \$2,000 to the Seagull's cost.

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BYD sells the Seagull, rebranded as the Dolphin Mini in some overseas markets, in four Latin American countries for about \$21,000, twice what it costs at home. The higher price includes transportation costs, but also reflects the higher profits possible in less cutthroat markets than China.

In Europe, BYD offers larger models such as the Seal, which starts at 46,990 euros (\$50,000), in France. The Chinese maker's top two overseas markets were Thailand and Brazil in the first two months of this year, according to the China Passenger Car Association.

BYD builds electric buses in California and told the AP last year that it is "still in the process" of deciding whether to sell autos in the U.S. It is weighing sites for a factory in Mexico, but that would be for the Mexican market, two company executives said in media interviews earlier this year.

The company isn't selling cars in the U.S., largely due to 27.5% tariffs on the sale price of Chinese vehicles when they arrive at ports. Donald Trump slapped on the bulk of the tariff, 25%, when he was president, and it was kept in place under Joe Biden. Trump contends that the rise of EVs backed by Biden will cost U.S. factory jobs, sending the work to China.

The Biden administration has backed legislation and policies to build a U.S. EV manufacturing base, and it hasn't ruled out further tariffs to keep the Chinese out. The administration also is investigating cars made in China that can gather sensitive information.

Some members of Congress are urging Biden to ban imports of Chinese vehicles, while others have proposed even steeper tariffs. This includes vehicles made in Mexico by Chinese companies that now would come in largely without tariffs.

Ford CEO Jim Farley has seen Caresoft's work on the Seagull and observed BYD's rapid growth across the globe, especially in Europe, where he used to run Ford's operations. He's moving to change his company. A small "skunkworks" team is designing a new, small EV from the ground up to keep costs down and quality high, he told analysts earlier this year.

Chinese makers, Farley said, sold almost no EVs in Europe two years ago, but now they have 10% of the electric vehicle market. It's likely they'll export around the globe and possibly sell in the U.S.

Ford is preparing to counter that. "Don't take anything for granted," Farley said. "This CEO doesn't."

Pro-Palestinian protests dwindle on campuses as some US college graduations marked by defiant acts

By MORIAH BALINGIT Associated Press

A tiny contingent of Duke University graduates opposed pro-Israel comedian Jerry Seinfeld speaking at their commencement in North Carolina Sunday, with about 30 of the 7,000 students leaving their seats and chanting "free Palestine" amid a mix of boos and cheers.

Some waved the red, green, black and white Palestinian flag. Seinfeld, whose namesake sitcom was one of the most popular in U.S. television history, was there to receive an honorary doctorate from the university.

The stand-up comic turned actor, who stars in the new Netflix movie "Unfrosted," has publicly supported Israel since it invaded Gaza to dismantle Hamas after the organization attacked the country and killed some 1,200 people in southern Israel on Oct. 7. The ensuing war has killed nearly 35,000 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants.

The small student protest Sunday at Duke's graduation in Durham, North Carolina, was emblematic of campus events across the U.S. Sunday after weeks of student protests resulted in nearly 2,900 arrests at 57 colleges and universities.

Students at campuses across the U.S. responded this spring by setting up encampments and calling for their schools to cut ties with Israel and businesses that support it. Students and others on campuses whom law enforcement authorities have identified as outside agitators have taken part in the protests from Columbia University in New York City to UCLA.

Police escorted graduates' families past a few dozen pro-Palestinian protesters who tried to block access

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to Sunday evening's commencement for Southern California's Pomona College.

After demonstrators set up an encampment last week on the campus' ceremony stage, the small liberal arts school moved the event 30 miles (48 kilometers) from Claremont to the Shrine Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles. Tickets were required to attend the event, which the school said would include additional security measures.

In April, police wearing riot gear arrested 19 protesters who had occupied the president's office at the college with about 1,700 undergraduates.

Demonstrator Anwar Mohmed, a 21-year-old Pomona senior, said the school has repeatedly ignored calls to consider divesting its endowment funds from corporations tied to Israel in the war in Gaza.

"We've been time and time again ignored by the institution," Mohmed said outside the Shrine on Sunday. "So today we have to say, it's not business as usual."

At the University of California, Berkeley, on Saturday, a small group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators waved flags and chanted during commencement and were escorted to the back of the stadium, according to the San Francisco Chronicle. There were no major counterprotests, but some attendees voiced frustration.

"I feel like they're ruining it for those of us who paid for tickets and came to show our pride for our graduates," said Annie Ramos, whose daughter is a student. "There's a time and a place, and this is not it." This weekend's commencement events remained largely peaceful.

At Emerson College in Boston, some students took off their graduation robes and left them on stage. Others emblazoned "free Palestine" on their mortar boards. One woman, staring at a camera broadcasting a livestream to the public, unzipped her robe to show a kaffiyeh, the black and white checkered scarf commonly worn by Palestinians, and flashed a watermelon painted on her hand. Both are symbols of solidarity with those living in the occupied territories.

Others displayed messages for a camera situated on stage, but the livestream quickly shifted to a different view, preventing them from being seen for long. Chants during some of the speeches were difficult to decipher.

Protests at Columbia University, where student uprisings inspired others at campuses across the country, led the school to cancel its main graduation ceremony in favor of smaller gatherings.

The University of Southern California told its valedictorian, who publicly backed Palestinians, that she could not deliver her keynote speech at its graduation ceremony because of security concerns. It later canceled its main graduation ceremony.

At DePaul University in Chicago, graduation is more than a month away. But as the academic year closes, school leaders said they had reached an "impasse" with the school's pro-Palestinian protesters, leaving the future of their encampment on the Chicago campus unclear.

The student-led DePaul Divestment Coalition, which is calling on the university to divest from economic interests tied to Israel, set up the encampment nearly two weeks ago. The group alleged university officials walked away from talks and tried to force students into signing an agreement, according to a student statement late Saturday.

Trump suggests Chinese migrants are in the US to build an 'army.' The migrants tell another story

By FU TING, ALI SWENSON and DIDI TANG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It was 7 a.m. on a recent Friday when Wang Gang, a 36-year-old Chinese immigrant, jostled for a day job in New York City's Flushing neighborhood.

When a potential employer pulled up near the street corner, Wang and dozens of other men swarmed around the car. They were hoping to be picked for work on a construction site, at a farm, as a mover — anything that would pay.

Wang had no luck, even as he waited for two more hours. It would be another day without a job since he crossed the southern U.S. border illegally in February.

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The daily struggle of Chinese immigrants in Flushing is a far cry from the picture former President Donald Trump and other Republicans have sought to paint of them as a coordinated group of “military-age” men who have come to the United States to build an “army” and attack America.

Since the start of the year, as the Chinese newcomers adjust to life in the U.S., Trump has alluded to “fighting age” or “military age” Chinese men at least six times and suggested at least twice that they were forming a migrant “army.” The talking point also appears in conservative media and on social platforms.

“They’re coming in from China — 31, 32,000 over the last few months — and they’re all military age and they mostly are men,” Trump said during a campaign rally last month. “And it sounds like to me, are they trying to build a little army in our country?”

Asian advocacy organizations say they worry the rhetoric could encourage further harassment and violence toward the Asian community, which saw more hate incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wang, who traveled several weeks from Wuhan, China, to Ecuador, to the southern U.S. border, said the idea that Chinese migrants were building a military “does not exist” among immigrants he has met.

“We came here to make money,” he said.

Immigrants in Flushing said they came to escape poverty and financial losses from China’s strict lockdown during the pandemic, or to escape the threat of imprisonment in a repressive society where they couldn’t speak or exercise their religion freely.

Since late 2022 — when China’s three-year COVID-19 lockdown began to lift — the U.S. has seen a sharp rise in the number of Chinese migrants. In 2023, U.S. authorities arrested more than 37,000 Chinese nationals at the U.S.-Mexico border, more than 10 times the previous year’s number. In December alone, border officials arrested 5,951 Chinese nationals on the southern border, a record monthly high, before the number trended down during the first three months of this year.

Most who have come are single adults, according to federal data. There are more men than women on the perilous route, which typically involves flying to South America and then making the long, arduous trek north to the U.S. border.

One reason men may come alone in higher numbers is the danger, said a 35-year-old Chinese man who only gave his family name of Yin because he was concerned about the safety of his wife and children, who remain in China for now.

“This trip is deadly. People die. The trip isn’t suitable for women — it’s not suitable for anyone,” said Yin.

Immigrants in Flushing said they came to America to escape China, not to fight on its behalf.

Thirty-six-year-old Chen Wang, from southeastern China, said he decided to come to the U.S. in late 2021 after he posted comments critical of the ruling party on Twitter. He was admonished by local police and feared that he could be imprisoned.

More than two years later, he is still unemployed and lives in a tent in the woods that he has made into a home. Chen described his fellow Chinese on the journey as simply people “chasing a better life.”

To be sure, U.S. intelligence leaders have grave concerns about the threat China’s authoritarian government poses to the country. There also have been crimes committed by Chinese immigrants, including the arrest in March of a Chinese national breaching a military base in California, but there has been no evidence that migrants from China are coming to the U.S. to fight Americans.

Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell last month called the Chinese nationals “economic migrants.”

China has said it strongly opposes illegal immigration. Its foreign ministry said Trump’s claims of a Chinese migrant army were “an egregious mismatch of the facts.” The Department of Homeland Security didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Steven Cheung, communications director for the Trump campaign, said letting so many Chinese migrants into the U.S. sets a “dangerous precedent” that nefarious actors could exploit.

“These individuals have not been vetted or screened, and we have no idea who they are affiliated with or what their intention is,” he said in an emailed statement.

Sapna Cheryan, a psychology professor at the University of Washington, said the claims about Chinese migrants — made without evidence — build on pervasive stereotypes that Asian people do not belong in the country.

These ideas have fueled violence against Asian Americans and could embolden people again, she said. Li Kai, also known as Khaled, a 44-year-old Muslim from a city close to Beijing, said he was worried about Trump's statements regarding illegal immigration and Muslims, but said he has no choice other than to stay. He was one of the few who made the trip with his family. He shares a bunk bed and sofa with his wife and two sons in a temporary home in Flushing where he has placed an American flag on the wall. When his sons are at school, he studies for a commercial driver's license. He hopes to find a job and start paying taxes. "Now that I have brought my family here, I want to have a stable life here," he said. "I would like to pay back."

Violence is traumatizing Haitian kids. Now the country's breaking a taboo on mental health services

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Students often throw up or wet themselves when gunfire erupts outside their school in northern Port-au-Prince.

When they do, school director Roseline Ceragui Louis finds there's only one way to try to calm the children and keep them safe: getting them to lie on the classroom floor while she sings softly.

"You can't work in that environment," she said. "It's catastrophic. They're traumatized."

Haiti's capital is under the onslaught of powerful gangs that control 80% of the city.

On Feb. 29, gangs launched coordinated attacks targeting key infrastructure. The attacks have left more than 2,500 people dead or wounded in the first three months of the year. Now, in a bid to help save Haiti's youngest generation, the country is undergoing a wider push to dispel a long-standing taboo on seeking therapy and talking about mental health.

GETTING HELP

At a recent training session in a relatively safe section of Port-au-Prince, parents learned games to put a smile on their children's faces. The parents are often so distraught and discouraged they don't have energy to care for the kids, said Yasmine Déroche, who trains adults to help children overcome trauma inflicted by persistent gang violence.

Gunmen have burned police stations, stormed Haiti's two biggest prisons to release more than 4,000 inmates and fired on the country's main international airport, which closed March 4 and hasn't reopened. The violence has also paralyzed Haiti's largest seaport.

Meanwhile, some 900 schools have closed, affecting some 200,000 children.

"We must fight against this social inequality so that all children, all young people, can have the same opportunities to go to school, to work, to earn a living," said Chrislie Luca, president of the nonprofit Hearts for Change Organization for Deprived Children of Haiti. "All of these are problems that have led us where we are today, with the country on the edge of the abyss."

EDGE OF THE ABYSS

UNICEF's Haiti representative said the violence has displaced more than 360,000 people, the majority women and children. In addition, at least one-third of the 10,000 victims of sexual violence last year were children, Bruno Maes said.

"Children are left to fend for themselves, without assistance, without enough protection," he said.

More than 80 children were killed or wounded from January to March, a 55% increase over the last quarter of 2023 and "the most violent period for children in the country on record," said Save the Children, a U.S. nonprofit.

Luca said among those hurt were two boys struck in the head while walking to school and an 8-year-old girl playing inside her home when she was hit by a bullet that tore through her intestines, requiring emergency surgery.

"We are witnessing a lot of mental health issues," Maes said. "This violence is traumatizing."

Louis said her 10-year-old son would daily cry "You're going to die!" as she headed to school, and the

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violence did not allow the boy to eat, sleep or play.

Louis remained resolute, knowing she had to be strong for him and her students.

"My heart is destroyed, but my students see my smile every day," she said.

Still, many would fall asleep in class, unable to focus after sleepless nights punctuated by gunfire.

Others had more important things on their mind.

"It's hard to focus at school or focus on playing a game when the rest of your body is worried about whether your mom and dad are going to be alive when you get home from school," said Steve Gross, founder of the U.S. nonprofit Life is Good Playmaker Project.

Some students are increasingly drawn into gangs, toting heavy weapons as they charge drivers for safe passage through gang territory.

"The young children are traumatized and agitated," said Nixon Elmeus, a teacher whose school closed in January. He recalled how his best student stopped talking after an encounter with gangs. Other students become violent: "Ever since the war started, the children themselves have acted like they're part of a gang."

LEARNING TO COPE

Gèrye Jwa Playmakers, a Haitian partner nonprofit aimed at helping children, held a training session for teachers that Louis attended after gang violence forced her school to close in March. She learned which games were best to distract students from the violence outside school gates.

"How can I recapture these children?" she asked.

With hundreds of schools closed, online courses are for those who can afford Wi-Fi and a generator. Most Haitians live often in the dark due to chronic power outages.

With no school, high poverty and trauma such as having to sidestep mangled bodies on streets, kids have become easy prey. Between 30% to 50% of members of armed groups are now children, Maes noted.

"That's a very sad reality," he said.

A 24-year-old man who offered only his last name, Nornile, for safety reasons, said he was in a gang for five years.

He said he joined because the gang gave him money he needed and provided more food than his mother, a vendor, and his father, a mason, could offer him and his seven siblings.

At night, he would work as a security guard for the gang leader. During the day, he would run errands and buy him food, clothes, sandals and other goods. Nornile said felt proud the gang trusted him but thought about quitting when one of his three brothers was killed by gangs on June 16, 2022.

"Ghetto men don't fight for education or a hospital. They fight for territory," he said. "They only care about themselves."

Nornile left the gang two years after his brother died and began working for Luca's nonprofit.

"The reality of the gang is that the person can carry a weapon, but in his mind, that's not what he really wants," Nornile said.

PLAYING AGAIN

Jean Guerson Sanon, co-founder and executive director of Gèrye Jwa Playmakers, stressed the importance of parents interacting daily with children to boost their mental health.

"Sometimes, that's all we have," he said, noting that conversations about mental health remain largely taboo.

"If you go see a psychologist, it's because you're 'crazy,' and 'crazy' people are really discriminated against in Haiti," he said.

At the training on a recent Sunday, parents learned games for their children. One was mirroring the other person; another was pretending an inflatable ball was a piece of cheese that the child, pretending to be a mouse, had to steal.

By the end of the training, parents were giggling as they invented different dance moves in a large circle in yet another way to play with their kids.

When asked to draw what a safe space meant to them, several of them drew homes; some drew flowers; and one, Guirlaine Reveil, drew a man with a gun as she approached a police station — a real-life

scenario that occurred a couple years ago.

One parent, Celestin Roosevelt, said he tells his children, 2 and 3, that gunfire is not a bad thing, a lie he called necessary.

"You have to find a way to live in your own country," he said with an apologetic shrug.

At the end of the training, parents were given a copy of the presentation, crayons and an inflatable ball. Déroche, who runs the program, noted how parents feel so overwhelmed that they are disconnected from their children's needs.

"I know that the crisis we're living through right now will have consequences that will take I don't know how many years to sort out," she said.

More bodies found in Indonesia after flash floods killed dozens and submerged homes

By KASPARMAN PILIANG Associated Press

PADANG, Indonesia (AP) — Rescuers recovered more bodies Monday after monsoon rains triggered flash floods on Indonesia's Sumatra Island, bringing down torrents of cold lava and mud, leaving 41 people dead and another 17 missing.

The heavy rains, along with a landslide of mud and cold lava from Mount Marapi, caused a river to breach its banks.

The deluge tore through mountainside villages along four districts in West Sumatra province just before midnight Saturday. The floods swept away people and submerged nearly 200 houses and buildings, some severely damaged, said National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari.

Cold lava, also known as lahar, is a mixture of volcanic material and pebbles that flow down a volcano's slopes in the rain.

Rescuers on Monday recovered more bodies, mostly from villages that were worst hit in Agam and Tanah Datar districts, bringing the death toll to 41, said Ilham Wahab who heads the West Sumatra Disaster Mitigation Agency.

"Bad weather, damaged roads and access that blocked by thick mud and debris were hampering relief efforts," Wahab said.

He said at least 19 people were injured in the flash floods and rescuers are searching for 17 villagers reported missing.

Flash floods on Saturday night also caused main roads around the Anai Valley Waterfall area in Tanah Datar district to be blocked by mud, cutting off access to other cities, Padang Panjang Police Chief Kartyana Putra said on Sunday.

Videos released by the National Search and Rescue Agency showed roads that were transformed into murky brown rivers and villages covered by thick mud, rocks, and uprooted trees.

Heavy rains cause frequent landslides and flash floods in Indonesia, an archipelago nation of more than 17,000 islands where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near floodplains.

The disaster came just two months after heavy rains triggered flash floods and a landslide in West Sumatra, killing at least 26 people and leaving 11 others missing.

A surprise eruption of Mount Marapi late last year killed 23 climbers.

Marapi is known for sudden eruptions that are difficult to predict because the source is shallow and near the peak, and its eruptions aren't caused by a deep movement of magma, which sets off tremors that register on seismic monitors, according to Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation.

Marapi has been active since an eruption in January 2024 that caused no casualties. It is among more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia. The country is prone to seismic upheaval because of its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin.

Putin replaces Shoigu as Russia's defense minister as he starts his 5th term

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as defense minister in a Cabinet shakeup that comes as he begins his fifth term in office.

In line with Russian law, the entire Russian Cabinet resigned Tuesday following Putin's glittering inauguration in the Kremlin, and most members have been widely expected to keep their jobs, while Shoigu's fate had appeared uncertain.

Putin signed a decree on Sunday appointing Shoigu as secretary of Russia's Security Council, the Kremlin said. The appointment was announced shortly after Putin proposed Andrei Belousov to become the country's defense minister in place of Shoigu.

The announcement of Shoigu's new role came as 13 people were reported dead and 20 more wounded in Russia's border city of Belgorod, where a 10-story apartment building partially collapsed after what Russian officials said was Ukrainian shelling. Ukraine hasn't commented on the incident.

Belousov's candidacy will need to be approved by Russia's upper house in parliament, the Federation Council. It reported Sunday that Putin introduced proposals for other Cabinet positions as well but Shoigu is the only minister on that list who is being replaced. Several other new candidates for federal ministers were proposed Saturday by Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, reappointed by Putin on Friday.

Shoigu's deputy, Timur Ivanov, was arrested last month on bribery charges and was ordered to remain in custody pending an official investigation. The arrest of Ivanov was widely interpreted as an attack on Shoigu and a possible precursor of his dismissal, despite his close personal ties with Putin.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday that Putin had decided to give the defense minister role to a civilian because the ministry should be "open to innovation and cutting-edge ideas." He also said the increasing defense budget "must fit into the country's wider economy," and Belousov, who until recently served as the first deputy prime minister, is the right fit for the job.

Belousov, 65, held leading positions in the finances and economic department of the prime minister's office and the Ministry of Economic Development. In 2013, he was appointed an adviser to Putin and seven years later, in January 2020, he became first deputy prime minister.

Peskov assured that the reshuffle will not affect "the military aspect," which "has always been the prerogative of the Chief of General Staff," and Gen. Valery Gerasimov, who currently serves in this position, will continue his work.

Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, said in an online commentary that Shoigu's new appointment to Russia's Security Council showed that the Russian leader viewed the institution as "a reservoir" for his "former" key figures — people who he can't in any way let go, but doesn't have a place for."

Figures such as former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev have also been appointed to the security council. Medvedev has served as the body's deputy chairman since 2020.

Shoigu was appointed to the Security Council instead of Nikolai Patrushev, Putin's long-term ally. Peskov said Sunday that Patrushev is taking on another role, and promised to reveal details in the coming days.

Shoigu has been widely seen as a key figure in Putin's decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine. Russia had expected the operation to quickly overwhelm Ukraine's much smaller and less-equipped army and for Ukrainians to broadly welcome Russian troops.

Instead, the conflict galvanized Ukraine to mount an intense defense, dealing the Russian army humiliating blows, including the retreat from an attempt to take the capital, Kyiv, and a counteroffensive that drove Moscow's forces out of the Kharkiv region.

Before he was named defense minister in 2012, Shoigu spent more than 20 years directing markedly different work: In 1991, he was appointed head of the Russian Rescue Corps disaster-response agency, which eventually became the Ministry of Emergency Situations. He became highly visible in the post. The job also allowed him to be named a general even though he had no military service behind him as the

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rescue corps absorbed the militarized Civil Defense Troops.

Shoigu does not wield the same kind of power as Patrushev, who has long been the country's top security official. But the position he will take — the same position that Patrushev worked to transform from a minor bureaucratic role to a place of sizable influence — will still carry some authority, according to Mark Galeotti, head of the Mayak Intelligence consultancy.

High-level security materials intended for the president's eyes will still pass through the Security Council Secretariat, even with changes at the top. "You can't just institutionally turn around a bureaucracy and how it works overnight," he said.

Thousands of civilians have fled Russia's renewed ground offensive in Ukraine's northeast that has targeted towns and villages with a barrage of artillery and mortar shelling, officials said Sunday.

The intense battles have forced at least one Ukrainian unit to withdraw in the Kharkiv region, capitulating more land to Russian forces across less defended settlements in the so-called contested gray zone along the Russian border.

By Sunday afternoon, the town of Vovchansk, among the largest in the northeast with a prewar population of 17,000, emerged as a focal point in the battle.

Volodymyr Tymoshko, the head of the Kharkiv regional police, said that Russian forces were on the outskirts of the town and approaching from three directions.

An Associated Press team, positioned in a nearby village, saw plumes of smoke rising from the town as Russian forces hurled shells. Evacuation teams worked nonstop throughout the day to take residents, most of whom were older, out of harm's way.

At least 4,000 civilians have fled the Kharkiv region since Friday, when Moscow's forces launched the operation, Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said in a social media statement. Heavy fighting raged Sunday along the northeast front line, where Russian forces attacked 27 settlements in the past 24 hours, he said.

Analysts say the Russian push is designed to exploit ammunition shortages before promised Western supplies can reach the front line.

Ukrainian soldiers said the Kremlin is using the usual Russian tactic of launching a disproportionate amount of fire and infantry assaults to exhaust Ukrainian troops and firepower. By intensifying battles in what was previously a static patch of the front line, Russian forces threaten to pin down Ukrainian forces in the northeast, while carrying out intense battles farther south where Moscow is also gaining ground.

It comes after Russia stepped up attacks in March targeting energy infrastructure and settlements, which analysts predicted were a concerted effort to shape conditions for an offensive.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Sunday that its forces had captured four villages on the border along Ukraine's Kharkiv region, in addition to five villages reported to have been seized on Saturday. These areas were likely poorly fortified because of the dynamic fighting and constant heavy shelling, easing a Russian advance.

Ukraine's leadership hasn't confirmed Moscow's gains. But Tymoshko, the head of the Kharkiv regional police, said that Strilecha, Pylna and Borsivika were under Russian occupation, and it was from their direction they were bringing in infantry to stage attacks in other embattled villages of Hlyboke and Lukiantsi.

Pro-Palestinian protests dwindle on campuses as US college graduations are marked by defiant acts

By MORIAH BALINGIT Associated Press

A tiny contingent of Duke University graduates opposed pro-Israel comedian Jerry Seinfeld speaking at their commencement in North Carolina Sunday, with about 30 of the 7,000 students leaving their seats and chanting "free Palestine" amid a mix of boos and cheers.

Some waved the red, green, black and white Palestinian flag. Seinfeld, whose namesake sitcom was one of the most popular in U.S. television history, was there to receive an honorary doctorate from the university.

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The stand-up comic turned actor, who stars in the new Netflix movie "Unfrosted," has publicly supported Israel since it invaded Gaza to dismantle Hamas after the organization attacked the country and killed some 1,200 people in southern Israel on Oct. 7. The ensuing war has killed nearly 35,000 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants.

The small student protest Sunday at Duke's graduation in Durham, North Carolina, was emblematic of campus events across the U.S. Sunday after weeks of student protests resulted in nearly 2,900 arrests at 57 colleges and universities.

Students at campuses across the U.S. responded this spring by setting up encampments and calling for their schools to cut ties with Israel and businesses that support it. Students and others on campuses whom law enforcement authorities have identified as outside agitators have taken part in the protests from Columbia University in New York City to UCLA.

Police escorted graduates' families past a few dozen pro-Palestinian protesters who tried to block access to Sunday evening's commencement for Southern California's Pomona College. After demonstrators set up an encampment last week on the campus' ceremony stage, the small liberal arts school moved the event 30 miles (48 km) from Claremont to the Shrine Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles. Tickets were required to attend the event, which the school said would include additional security measures.

In April, police wearing riot gear arrested 19 protesters who had occupied the president's office at the college with about 1,700 undergraduates.

Demonstrator Anwar Mohamed, a 21-year-old Pomona senior, said the school has repeatedly ignored calls to consider divesting its endowment funds from corporations tied to Israel in the war in Gaza.

"We've been time and time again ignored by the institution," Mohamed said outside the Shrine on Sunday. "So today we have to say, it's not business as usual."

At the University of California, Berkeley, on Saturday, a small group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators waved flags and chanted during commencement and were escorted to the back of the stadium, according to the San Francisco Chronicle. There were no major counterprotests, but some attendees voiced frustration.

"I feel like they're ruining it for those of us who paid for tickets and came to show our pride for our graduates," said Annie Ramos, whose daughter is a student. "There's a time and a place, and this is not it." This weekend's commencement events remained largely peaceful.

At Emerson College in Boston, some students took off their graduation robes and left them on stage. Others emblazoned "free Palestine" on their mortar boards. One woman, staring at a camera broadcasting a livestream to the public, unzipped her robe to show a kaffiyeh, the black and white checkered scarf commonly worn by Palestinians, and flashed a watermelon painted on her hand. Both are symbols of solidarity with those living in the occupied territories.

Others displayed messages for a camera situated on stage, but the livestream quickly shifted to a different view, preventing them from being seen for long. Chants during some of the speeches were difficult to decipher.

Protests at Columbia University, where student uprisings inspired others at campuses across the country, led the school to cancel its main graduation ceremony in favor of smaller gatherings.

The University of Southern California told its valedictorian, who publicly backed Palestinians, that she could not deliver her keynote speech at its graduation ceremony because of security concerns. It later canceled its main graduation ceremony.

At DePaul University in Chicago, graduation is more than a month away. But as the academic year closes, school leaders said they had reached an "impasse" with the school's pro-Palestinian protesters, leaving the future of their encampment on the Chicago campus unclear.

The student-led DePaul Divestment Coalition, which is calling on the university to divest from economic interests tied to Israel, set up the encampment nearly two weeks ago. The group alleged university officials walked away from talks and tried to force students into signing an agreement, according to a student statement late Saturday.

Israel moves deeper into Rafah and fights Hamas militants regrouping in northern Gaza

By WAFAA SHURAF, JOSEPH KRAUSS and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The exodus of Palestinians from Gaza's last refuge accelerated Sunday as Israeli forces pushed deeper into the southern city of Rafah. Israel also pounded the territory's devastated north, where some Hamas militants have regrouped in areas the military said it had cleared months ago.

Rafah is considered Hamas' last stronghold. Some 300,000 of the more than 1 million civilians sheltering there have fled the city following evacuation orders from Israel, which says it must invade to dismantle Hamas and return scores of hostages taken from Israel in the Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war.

Neighboring Egypt issued its strongest objection yet to the Rafah offensive, saying it intends to formally join South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice alleging Israel is committing genocide in Gaza — an accusation Israel rejects. The foreign ministry statement cited "the worsening severity and scope of the Israeli attacks against Palestinian civilians."

United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement that he cannot see how a full-scale invasion of Rafah can be reconciled with international humanitarian law.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated opposition to a major military assault on Rafah, and told CBS that Israel would "be left holding the bag on an enduring insurgency" without an exit from Gaza and postwar governance plan.

Gaza has been left without a functioning government, leading to a breakdown in public order and allowing Hamas' armed wing to reconstitute itself even in the hardest-hit areas. On Sunday, Hamas touted attacks against Israeli soldiers in Rafah and near Gaza City.

Israel has yet to offer a detailed plan for postwar governance in Gaza, saying only that it will maintain open-ended security control over the enclave of about 2.3 million Palestinians.

Internationally mediated talks over a cease-fire and hostage release appeared to be at a standstill.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a Memorial Day speech vowed to continue fighting until victory in memory of those killed in the war. But in Tel Aviv, hundreds of protesters stood outside military headquarters and raised candles during a minute-long siren marking the day's start, demanding an immediate cease-fire deal to return the hostages.

Netanyahu has rejected postwar plans proposed by the United States for the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to govern Gaza with support from Arab and Muslim countries. Those plans depend on progress toward the creation of a Palestinian state, which Israel's government opposes.

The Oct. 7 attack killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took another 250 hostage. Militants still hold about 100 captives and the remains of more than 30.

Israel's offensive has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures. Israel says it has killed over 13,000 militants, without providing evidence.

HEAVY BOMBARDMENT IN THE NORTH

Palestinians reported heavy Israeli bombardment overnight in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp and other areas in northern Gaza, which has been largely isolated by Israeli forces for months. U.N. officials say there is a "full-blown famine" there.

Residents said Israeli warplanes and artillery also struck the Zeitoun area east of Gaza City, where troops have battled militants for over a week. They have called on tens of thousands of people to relocate to nearby areas.

"It was a very difficult night," said Abdel-Kareem Radwan, a 48-year-old from Jabaliya. He said they could hear intense and constant bombing since midday Saturday. "This is madness."

First responders with the Palestinian Civil Defense said they were unable to respond to multiple calls for help from both areas, as well as from Rafah.

In central Gaza, staff at the Al Aqsa hospital in Deir al-Balah said an Israeli strike killed four people.

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Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top Israeli military spokesman, said forces were also operating in the northern towns of Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun, which were heavily bombed in the war's opening days.

Hamas' military wing said it shelled Israeli special forces east of Jabaliya and fired mortar shells at troops and vehicles entering the Rafah border crossing area.

"Hamas' regime cannot be toppled without preparing an alternative to that regime," columnist Ben Caspit wrote in Israel's Maariv daily, channeling the growing frustration felt by many Israelis more than seven months into the war. "The only people who can govern Gaza after the war are Gazans, with a lot of support and help from the outside."

CIVILIANS FLEE IN THE SOUTH

Rafah had been sheltering 1.3 million Palestinians, most of whom had fled fighting elsewhere. But Israel has now evacuated the eastern third of the city.

Most people are heading to the heavily damaged nearby city of Khan Younis or Muwasi, a coastal tent camp where some 450,000 people are already living in squalid conditions.

The U.N. has warned that a planned full-scale invasion would further cripple humanitarian operations and cause a surge in civilian deaths. The main aid entry points near Rafah are already affected. Israeli troops have captured the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing, forcing it to shut down.

A senior Egyptian official told The Associated Press that Cairo has lodged protests with Israel, the United States and European governments, saying the offensive has put its decades-old peace treaty with Israel — a cornerstone of regional stability — at high risk. The official was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

U.S. President Joe Biden has said he won't provide offensive weapons to Israel for Rafah, and his administration says there is "reasonable" evidence that Israel had breached international law protecting civilians.

Israel rejects those allegations, saying it tries to avoid harming civilians. It blames Hamas for the high toll because the militants fight in dense, residential areas.

In the West Bank, where deadly violence has increased since the war began, the Palestinian Health Ministry said a man was shot dead by Israeli forces in Balata refugee camp in Nablus. The army said its forces responded with live fire after being shot at by militants in the camp.

A combustible Cannes is set to unfurl with 'Furiosa,' 'Megalopolis' and a #MeToo reckoning

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

The Cannes Film Festival rarely passes without cacophony but this year's edition may be more raucous and uneasy than any edition in recent memory.

When the red carpet is rolled out from the Palais des Festivals on Tuesday, the 77th Cannes will unfurl against a backdrop of war, protest, potential strikes and quickening #MeToo upheaval in France, which for years largely resisted the movement.

Festival workers are threatening to strike. The Israel-Hamas war, acutely felt in France, home to Europe's largest Jewish and Arab communities, is sure to spark protests. Russia's war in Ukraine remains on the minds of many. Add in the kinds of anxieties that can be expected to percolate at Cannes — the ever-uncertain future of cinema, the rise of artificial intelligence — and this year's festival shouldn't lack for drama.

Being prepared for anything has long been a useful attitude in Cannes. Befitting such tumultuous times, the film lineup is full of intrigue, curiosity and question marks.

The Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, just days before his latest film, "The Seed of the Sacred Fig," is to debut in competition in Cannes, was sentenced to eight years in prison by the Islamic Revolutionary Court. The film remains on Cannes' schedule.

Arguably the most feverishly awaited entry is Francis Ford Coppola's self-financed opus "Megalopolis." Coppola, is himself no stranger to high-drama at Cannes. An unfinished cut of "Apocalypse Now" won him (in a tie) his second Palme d'Or more than four decades ago.

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Even the upcoming U.S. presidential election won't be far off. Premiering in competition is Ali Abbasi's "The Apprentice," starring Sebastian Stan as a young Donald Trump. There will also be new films from Kevin Costner, Paolo Sorrentino, Sean Baker, Yorgos Lanthimos and Andrea Arnold. And for a potentially powder keg Cannes there's also the firebomb of "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga." The film, a rolling apocalyptic dystopia, returns director George Miller to the festival he first became hooked on as a juror.

"I got addicted to it simply because it's like film camp," says Miller, who became enraptured to the global gathering of cinema at Cannes and the pristine film presentations. "It's kind of optimal cinema, really. The moment that they said, 'OK, we're happy to show this film here,' I jumped at it."

Cannes' official opener on Tuesday is "The Second Act," a French comedy by Quentin Dupieux, starring Léa Seydoux, Louis Garrel and Vincent Lindon. During the opening ceremony, Meryl Streep will be awarded an honorary Palme d'Or. At the closing ceremony, George Lucas will get one, too.

But the spotlight at the start may fall on Judith Godrèche. The French director and actor earlier this year said the filmmakers Benoît Jacquot and Jacques Doillon sexually assaulted her when she was a teenager, allegations that rocked French cinema. Jacquot and Doillon have denied the allegations.

Though much of the French film industry has previously been reluctant to embrace the #MeToo movement, Godrèche has stoked a wider response. She's spoken passionately about the need for changes at the Cesars, France's equivalent of the Oscars, and before a French Senate commission.

In that same period, Godrèche also made the short film "Moi Aussi" during a Paris gathering of hundreds who wrote her with their own stories of sexual abuse. On Wednesday, it opens Cannes' Un Certain Regard section.

"I hope that I'm heard in the sense that I'm not interested in being some sort of representation of someone who just wants to go after everyone in this industry," Godrèche said ahead of the festival. "I'm just fighting for some sort of change. It is called a revolution."

It's the latest chapter in how #MeToo has reverberated at the world's largest film gathering, following an 82-woman protest on the steps of the Palais in 2018 and a gender parity pledge in 2019. Cannes has often come under criticism for not inviting more female filmmakers into competition, but the festival is putting its full support behind Godrèche while girding for the possibility of more #MeToo revelations during the festival.

"For me, having these faces, these people — everyone in this movie — gives them this place to be celebrated," said Godrèche. "There's this thing about this place that has so much history. In a way, it mystifies movies forever. Once your film was in Cannes, it was in Cannes."

Some of the filmmakers coming to the festival this year are already firmly lodged in Cannes lore. Paul Schrader was at the festival almost 50 years ago for Martin Scorsese's "Taxi Driver," which he wrote. After a famously divisive response, it won the Palme in 1976.

"It was a different place. It was much more collegial and lower key," said Schrader during a break from packing his bags. "I remember quite well sitting on the terrasse at the Carlton with Marty and Sergio Leone and (Rainer Werner) Fassbender came by with his boyfriend and joined us. We were all talking and the sun was going down. I was thinking, 'This is the greatest thing in the world.'"

For the first time since his 1988 drama "Patty Hearst," Schrader is back in what he calls "the main show" — in competition for the Palme d'Or — with "Oh, Canada." The film, adapted from a Russell Banks novel, stars Richard Gere (reteaming with Schrader decades after "American Gigolo") as a dying filmmaker who recounts his life story for a documentary. Jacob Elordi plays him in '70s flashbacks.

After the Cannes lineup was announced, Schrader shared on Facebook an old photo of himself, Coppola and Lucas — all primary figures to what was then called New Hollywood — and the caption "Together again."

"I'll be there the same time as Francis. There's a question of whether either of us get invited back for closing," Schrader says, referring to when award-winners are asked to stay for the closing ceremony. "I would hope that either Francis or I could come back closing night for George's thing."

Who ultimately goes home with the Palme — the handicapping has already begun — will be decided

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by a jury led by Greta Gerwig, fresh off the mammoth success of "Barbie." But this year's slate will have a lot to live up to. Last year, three eventual best picture nominees premiered in Cannes: Justine Triet's Palme-winner "Anatomy of a Fall," Jonathan Glazer's "The Zone of Interest" and Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon."

What tends to really define a Cannes, though, is emerging filmmakers. Among those likely to make an impression this year is Julien Colonna, the Corsican, Paris-based director and co-writer of "The Kingdom." The film, an Un Certain Regard standout, is a brutal coming of age about a teenager girl (newcomer Ghjuvanna Benedetti) on the run with her father (Saveriu Santucci), a Corsican clan leader.

"We wanted to propose a kind of anti-mob film," Colonna says, referencing the prevalence of "Godfather"-inspired gangster dramas. "As a viewer, I'm quite bored of this. I think we need to move to something else and propose a different prism."

"The Kingdom," Colonna's debut feature film, arose out of his own anxieties around the birth of his child six years ago. It's an entirely fictional movie but it has personal roots for Colonna, who was inspired by the memory of a camping trip that he realized years later was "an entirely different matter for my father." He shot the most of the film in Corsica within a few miles of his hometown.

"This is where I grew up," says Colonna, smiling. "This is where I learned to swim. The shower where her kiss takes place is the shower where I kissed for the first time."

Blinken delivers some of the strongest US public criticism of Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday delivered some of the Biden administration's strongest public criticism yet of Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza, saying Israeli tactics have meant "a horrible loss of life of innocent civilians" but failed to neutralize Hamas leaders and fighters and could drive a lasting insurgency.

In a pair of TV interviews, Blinken underscored that the United States believes Israeli forces should "get out of Gaza," but also is waiting to see credible plans from Israel for security and governance in the territory after the war.

Hamas has reemerged in parts of Gaza, Blinken said, and "heavy action" by Israeli forces in the southern city of Rafah risks leaving America's closest Mideast ally "holding the bag on an enduring insurgency."

He said the United States has worked with Arab countries and others for weeks on developing "credible plans for security, for governance, for rebuilding" in Gaza, but "we haven't seen that come from Israel. ... We need to see that, too."

Blinken also said that as Israel pushes deeper in Rafah in the south, a military operation may "have some initial success" but risks "terrible harm" to the population without solving a problem "that both of us want to solve, which is making sure Hamas cannot again govern Gaza." More than a million Palestinians have crowded into Rafah in hopes of refuge as Israel's offensive pushed across Gaza. Israel has said the city also hosts four battalions of Hamas fighters.

Israel's conduct of the war, Blinken said, has put the country "on the trajectory, potentially, to inherit an insurgency with many armed Hamas left or, if it leaves, a vacuum filled by chaos, filled by anarchy, and probably refilled by Hamas. We've been talking to them about a much better way of getting an enduring result, enduring security."

Blinken also echoed, for the first time publicly by a U.S. official, the findings of a new Biden administration report to Congress on Friday that said Israel's use of U.S.-provided weapons in Gaza likely violated international humanitarian law. The report also said wartime conditions prevented American officials from determining that for certain in specific airstrikes.

"When it comes to the use of weapons, concerns about incidents where given the totality of the damage that's been done to children, women, men, it was reasonable to assess that, in certain instances, Israel acted in ways that are not consistent with international humanitarian law," Blinken said. He cited "the

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horrible loss of life of innocent civilians.”

Blinken spoke to Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on Sunday, reiterating the longstanding U.S. opposition to what is now the growing Israeli offensive in Rafah, given the toll on civilians there, according to the State Department’s recounting of the call.

Blinken urged Gallant to allow humanitarian workers to bring aid into Gaza and distribute it. Israel’s offensive into Rafah has shut down one of the two main border crossings into the territory for a week, and most operations have stopped at the other one after it was targeted by a Hamas rocket attack.

Seven months of fighting and Israeli restrictions on aid deliveries already have led to famine in the north of Gaza. Aid organizations say the now nearly total cutoff of food, medicine and fuel and the disruption from the Rafah offensive have humanitarian operations across Gaza on the brink of collapse.

Biden’s national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, in a call Sunday with his Israeli counterpart, Tzachi Hanegbi, raised concerns about a military ground operation in Rafah and discussed “alternative courses of action” that would ensure Hamas is defeated “everywhere in Gaza,” according to a White House summary of the conversation. Hanegbi “confirmed that Israel is taking U.S. concerns into account,” the White House said.

The war began on Oct. 7 after an attack against Israel by Hamas that killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians. About 250 people were taken hostage. Israel’s offensive has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

There are increasing tensions between Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about how the war has been conducted, and also domestic tensions about U.S. support for Israel, with protests on U.S. college campuses and many Republican lawmakers saying that Biden needs to give Israel whatever it needs. The issue could play a major role in the outcome of November’s presidential election.

Biden said in an interview last week with CNN that his administration would not provide weapons that Israel could use for an all-out assault in Rafah.

Blinken appeared on CBS’ “Face the Nation” and NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Controlled demolition at Baltimore bridge collapse site postponed due to weather

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The controlled demolition of the largest remaining steel span of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore has been postponed because of weather conditions, officials said Sunday afternoon.

Crews have been preparing for weeks to use explosives to break down the span, which is an estimated 500 feet (152 meters) long and weighs up to 600 tons (544 metric tons).

It landed on the ship’s bow after the Dali lost power and crashed into one of the bridge’s support columns shortly after leaving Baltimore. Since then, the ship has been stuck amidst the wreckage and Baltimore’s busy port has been closed to most maritime traffic.

Officials said the demolition had been tentatively moved to Monday evening. They said lightning in the area and rising tides Sunday prompted them to reschedule.

Six members of a roadwork crew plunged to their deaths in the March 26 collapse. The last of their bodies was recovered from the underwater wreckage last week. All the victims were Latino immigrants who came to the U.S. for job opportunities. They were filling potholes on an overnight shift when the bridge was destroyed.

The controlled demolition will allow the Dali to be refloated and guided back into the Port of Baltimore. Once the ship is removed, maritime traffic can begin returning to normal, which will provide relief for thousands of longshoremen, truckers and small business owners who have seen their jobs impacted by the closure.

The Dali’s 21-member crew will stay onboard the ship while the explosives are detonated.

William Marks, a spokesperson for the crew, said they would shelter “in a designated safe place” during the demolition. “All precautions are being taken to ensure everyone’s safety,” he said in an email.

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Officials said the demolition is the safest and most efficient way to remove steel under a high level of pressure and tension.

"It's unsafe for the workers to be on or in the immediate vicinity of the bridge truss for those final cuts," officials said in a news release Sunday.

In a videographic released last week, authorities said engineers are using precision cuts to control how the trusses break down. They said the method allows for "surgical precision" and the steel structure will be "thrust away from the Dali" when the explosives send it tumbling into the water.

Once it's demolished, hydraulic grabbers will lift the resulting sections of steel onto barges.

"It's important to note that this controlled demolition is not like what you would see in a movie," the video says, noting that from a distance it will sound like fireworks or loud thunder and give off puffs of smoke.

So far, about 6,000 tons (5,443 metric tons) of steel and concrete have been removed from the collapse site. Officials estimate the total amount of wreckage at 50,000 tons (45,359 metric tons), about the equivalent of 3,800 loaded dump trucks.

Officials previously said they hoped to remove the Dali by May 10 and reopen the port's 50-foot (15.2-meter) main channel by the end of May.

The Dali is currently scheduled to be refloated during high tide on Tuesday, officials said Sunday. They said three or four tugboats will be used to guide the ship to a nearby terminal in the Port of Baltimore. It will likely remain there for a few weeks and undergo temporary repairs before being moved to a shipyard for more substantial repairs.

The Dali crew members haven't been allowed to leave the vessel since the disaster. Officials said they have been busy maintaining the ship and assisting investigators. Of the crew members, 20 are from India and one is Sri Lankan.

The National Transportation Safety Board and the FBI are conducting investigations into the bridge collapse.

Danish shipping giant Maersk chartered the Dali for a planned trip from Baltimore to Sri Lanka, but the ship didn't get far. Its crew sent a mayday call saying they had lost power and had no control of the steering system. Minutes later, the ship rammed into the bridge.

Officials have said the safety board investigation will focus on the ship's electrical system.

Catalan separatists lose majority as Spain's pro-union Socialists win regional elections

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Six years after plunging Spain into its worst political crisis in decades, Catalonia's separatist parties are in danger of losing their hold on power in the northeastern region after the pro-union Socialist Party scored a historic result in Sunday's election.

The four pro-independence parties, led by the Together party of former regional president Carles Puigdemont, were set to get a total of 61 seats, according to a near-complete count of the ballots. That is short of the key figure of 68 seats needed for a majority in the chamber.

The Socialists led by former health minister Salvador Illa savored their best result in a Catalan election, claiming 42 seats, up from 33 in 2021, when they also barely won the most votes but were unable to form a government. This was the first time the Socialists led a Catalan election in both votes and seats won.

"Catalonia has decided to open a new era," Illa told his thrilled supporters at his party headquarters. "Catalan voters have decided that the Socialist Party will lead this new era, and it is my intention to become Catalonia's next president."

Illa led Spain's response to the COVID-19 pandemic before Sánchez sent him back to Barcelona to lead his party. The 58-year-old Illa's calm tone and focus on social issues convinced many voters that it was time to change after years of separatists pressing for severing century-old ties with the rest of Spain.

Sánchez congratulated Illa on the X platform for the "historic result."

The Socialists will need to earn the backing of other parties to put Illa in charge. Dealmaking in the

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coming days, maybe weeks, will be key to forming a government. Neither a hung parliament nor a new election is out of the question.

But there is a path for Illa to reach the goal of 68 seats. The Socialists are already in a coalition government in Madrid with the Sumar party, which now has six seats in the Catalan parliament. But the hard part will be wooing over a leftist party from the separatist camp.

Regardless of those negotiations, Illa's surge should bode well for Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and the Socialists before European Parliament elections next month.

Separatists have held the regional government in Barcelona since 2012 and had won majorities in four consecutive regional elections. But polling and a national election in July showed that support for secession has shrunk since Puigdemont led an illegal — and futile — breakaway bid in 2017 that led to hundreds of businesses and Catalonia's major banks leaving the region.

"The candidacy that I led had a good result, we are the only pro-independence force to increase in votes and seats, and we assume the responsibility that entails," Puigdemont said. "But that is not enough to compensate the losses of the other separatists parties."

Sánchez's Socialists have spent major political capital since then in reducing tensions in Catalonia, including pardoning jailed high-profile separatists and pushing through an amnesty for Puigdemont and hundreds more.

The Socialist win "is due to many factors that will have to analyze, but one of those factors were the policies and leadership of the government of Spain and Pedro Sánchez," Illa said.

The Together party of Puigdemont restored its leadership of the separatist camp with 35 seats, up from 32 three years ago. He fled Spain after the 2017 secession attempt and has run his campaign from southern France on the pledge that he will return home when lawmakers convene to elect a new regional president in the coming weeks.

Puigdemont's escape from Spain became the stuff of legend among his followers, and a huge source of embarrassment for Spain's law enforcement. He recently denied during the campaign that he had hidden himself in a car trunk to avoid detection while he slipped across the border during a legal crackdown that landed several of his cohorts in prison until Sánchez's government pardoned them.

Now, the only way Puigdemont could keep the separatists in government would depend on the far-fetched possibility of a deal with Sánchez to guarantee the separatists' support of his national government in Madrid in exchange for Illa returning the favor to the separatists in Barcelona.

The Republican Left of Catalonia of sitting regional president Pere Aragonès plummeted to 20 seats from 33. But the leftist separatist party, which has governed in minority during a record drought, could be key to Illa's hopes, although that would require it to break with the pro-secession bloc.

The Popular Party, which is the largest party in Spain's national parliament where it leads the opposition, surged to 15 seats from three.

The far-right, Spanish ultra-nationalist party Vox held its 11 seats, while on the other end of the spectrum, the far-left, pro-secession Cup took four, down from nine.

An upstart pro-secession, far-right party called Catalan Alliance, which rails against unauthorized immigration as well as the Spanish state, will enter the chamber for the first time with two seats.

"We have seen that Catalonia is not immune to the reactionary, far-right wave sweeping Europe," Aragonés, the outgoing regional president, said.

The crippling drought, not independence, is currently the leading concern of Catalans, according to the most recent survey by Catalonia's public opinion office.

The opinion office said that 50% of Catalans are against independence while 42% are for it, meaning support for it has dipped to 2012 levels. When Puigdemont left in 2017, 49% favored independence and 43% were against.

More than 3.1 million people voted, with participation at 57%. Potentially thousands of voters had trouble reaching their polling stations when Catalonia's commuter rail service had to shut down several train lines after what officials said was the robbery of copper cables from a train installation near Barcelona.

Flash floods in northern Afghanistan sweep away livelihoods, leaving hundreds dead and missing

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Shopkeeper Nazer Mohammad ran home as soon as he heard about flash floods crashing into the outskirts of a provincial capital in northern Afghanistan. By the time he got there, there was nothing left, including his family of five.

"Everything happened just all of a sudden. I came home, but there was no home there, instead I saw all the neighborhood covered by mud and water," said Mohammad. 48. He said that he buried his wife and two sons aged 15 and 8 years, but he's still looking for two daughters, who are around 6 and 11 years old.

The U.N. food agency estimated that unusually heavy seasonal rains in Afghanistan have left more than 300 people dead and thousands of houses destroyed, most of them in the northern province of Baghlan, which bore the brunt of the deluges Friday.

Mohammad said Sunday that he found the bodies of his wife and two sons late Friday night on the outskirt of Puli Khumri, the capital of Baghlan province.

"I hope someone has found my daughters alive," he said, holding back tears. "Just in the blink of an eye, I lost everything: family, home, belongings, now nothing is left to me."

Among at least 240 people dead are 51 children, according to UNICEF, one of several international aid groups that are sending relief teams, medicines, blankets and other supplies. The World Health Organization said it delivered 7 tons of medicines and emergency kits.

Aid group Save the Children said about 600,000 people, half of them children, live in the five districts in Baghlan that have been severely impacted by the floods. The group said it sent a "clinic on wheels" with mobile health and child protection teams to support children and their families.

"Lives and livelihoods have been washed away," said Arshad Malik, country director for Save the Children. "The flash floods tore through villages, sweeping away homes and killing livestock. Children have lost everything. Families who are still reeling from the economic impacts of three years of drought urgently need assistance."

He said that Afghanistan was a country least prepared to cope with climate change patterns, such as the heavier seasonal rains, and needs help from the international community.

At least 70 people died in April from heavy rains and flash floods in the country, which also destroyed About 2,000 homes, three mosques and four schools.

Michael Cohen: A challenging star witness in Donald Trump's hush money trial

By JENNIFER PELTZ and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — He once said he would take a bullet for Donald Trump. Now Michael Cohen is prosecutors' biggest piece of legal ammunition in the former president's hush money trial.

But if Trump's fixer-turned-foe is poised to offer jurors this week an insider's view of the dealings at the heart of prosecutors' case, he also is as challenging a star witness as they come.

There is his tortured history with Trump, for whom he served as personal attorney and problem-zapper until his practices came under federal investigation. That led to felony convictions and prison for Cohen but no charges against Trump, by then in the White House.

Cohen, who is expected to take the stand Monday, can address the jury as someone who has reckoned frankly with his own misdeeds and paid for them with his liberty. But jurors likely also will learn that the now-disbarred lawyer has not only pleaded guilty to lying to Congress and a bank, but recently asserted, under oath, that he wasn't truthful even in admitting to some of those falsehoods.

And there is Cohen's new persona — and podcast, books and social media posts — as a relentless and sometimes crude Trump critic.

As Trump's trial opened, prosecutors took pains to portray Cohen as just one piece of their evidence

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against Trump, telling jurors that corroboration would come via other witnesses, documents and the ex-president's own recorded words. But Trump and his lawyers have assailed Cohen as an admitted liar and criminal who now makes a living off tearing down his former boss.

"What the defense is going to want the jury to focus on is the fact that he's a liar" with a blemished past and a tetchy streak, said Richard Serafini, a Florida criminal defense lawyer and former federal and Manhattan prosecutor.

"What the prosecution is going to want to focus on is 'everything he says is corroborated — you don't have to like him,'" Serafini added. "And No. 2, this is the guy Trump chose."

LOYALIST TURNED FOE

Cohen's early-2000s introduction to Trump was a classic New York real estate story: Cohen was a condo board member in a Trump building and got involved on Trump's side of a residents versus management dispute. The mogul soon brought Cohen into his company.

Cohen, who declined to comment for this story, had had an eclectic career that veered from practicing personal injury law to operating a taxi fleet with his father-in-law. He ultimately functioned as both a Trump lawyer and shark-toothed loyalist.

He worked on some deal-making efforts but also spent much of his time threatening lawsuits, berating reporters and otherwise maneuvering to neutralize potential reputational dings for his boss, according to congressional testimony that Cohen gave after breaking with Trump in 2018. The rupture came after the FBI raided Cohen's home and office and Trump began to distance himself from the attorney.

Cohen soon told a federal court that he had helped candidate Trump wield the National Enquirer tabloid as a sort of house organ that flattered him, tried to flatten his opponents and bottled up seamy allegations about his personal life by buying stories or flagging them to Cohen to purchase. Trump says all the stories were false.

Those arrangements, which Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office portrays as a multipronged scheme to keep information from voters, are now under a microscope at Trump's hush money trial. He has pleaded not guilty to 34 counts of falsifying business records so as to veil reimbursements to Cohen for paying off porn performer Stormy Daniels. She claimed a 2006 sexual encounter with the married Trump, which the former president has denied.

Other witnesses have testified about the hush money dealings, but Cohen remains key to piecing together a case that centers on how Trump's company compensated him for his role in the Daniels payoff.

Trump's defense maintains that Cohen was paid for legal work, not a cover-up, and that there was nothing illegal about the agreements he facilitated with Daniels and others.

A WITNESS WITH HISTORY

In criminal trials, many witnesses come to the stand with their own criminal records, relationships with defendants, prior contradictory statements or something else that could affect their credibility.

Cohen has a particular set of baggage.

In testimony, he will need to explain his prior disavowals of key aspects of the hush money arrangements and to convince jurors that this time he is telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Still in the Trump fold when the Daniels deal came to light, he initially told The New York Times that he had not been reimbursed, later acknowledging repayment — as did Trump, who had previously said he did not even know about the Daniels payout.

Then, in the course of two federal guilty pleas, Cohen admitted to tax evasion, orchestrating illegal campaign contributions in the form of hush money payments, and lying to Congress about his work on a possible Trump real estate project in Moscow. He also pleaded guilty to signing off on a home equity loan application that understated his financial liabilities.

While many types of convictions may be used to question a witness' credibility, when crimes involve dishonesty, "there's a treasure trove of stuff there for a cross-examiner," Serafini said.

Moreover, Cohen raised new questions about his credibility while testifying last fall in Trump's civil fraud trial. During a testy cross-examination — he answered some questions with a lawyerly "objection" or "asked and answered" — Cohen insisted he was not quite guilty of tax evasion or the loan application falsehood.

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Ultimately, he testified that he had lied to the now-deceased federal judge who took his plea.

The fraud trial judge found Cohen's testimony credible, noting that it was corroborated by other evidence. But a federal judge suggested that Cohen perjured himself either in his testimony or his guilty plea.

Since splitting with Trump, Cohen has confronted his past lies head-on. His podcast's title – "Mea Culpa" – gestures at a reckoning with his crimes, and he acknowledged in the foreword to his 2020 memoir that some people see him as "the least reliable narrator on the planet."

At his 2018 sentencing, he said his "blind loyalty" to Trump made him feel "it was my duty to cover up his dirty deeds, rather than to listen to my own inner voice and my moral compass." Outside court, he has cast himself as an avatar of anti-Trump sentiment. In social media salvos as the trial opened, Cohen used a scatological nickname for Trump, taunted him to "keep whining, crying and violating the gag order, you petulant defendant!" and commented acerbically on his defense.

The posts could give Trump's lawyers fodder to paint Cohen as an agenda-driven witness out for revenge. In a nod to that vulnerability, Cohen posted two days after opening statements that he would cease commenting on Trump until after testifying, "out of respect" for the judge and prosecutors.

Yet in a live TikTok this past week, Cohen wore a shirt featuring a figure resembling Trump with his hands cuffed, behind bars. After Trump's lawyers complained, Judge Juan M. Merchan exhorted prosecutors Friday to tell Cohen that the court was asking him not to make any more statements about the case or Trump.

To Jeremy Saland, a New York criminal defense lawyer and former Manhattan prosecutor, Cohen's background is not such a hurdle for prosecutors.

"Where Cohen has the problem is: He doesn't shut his trap," Saland said. "He just constantly takes shots at his own credibility."

Prosecutors will need to persuade Cohen to be forthright, acknowledge his past wrongdoing and rein in his freewheeling commentary, Saland said, or the case can become "the Michael Cohen show."

Indeed, Trump lawyer Todd Blanche used his opening statement to hammer on Cohen's "obsession" with Trump and his admitted past lying under oath.

"You cannot make a serious decision about President Trump relying on the words of Michael Cohen," Blanche told jurors.

But prosecutor Matthew Colangelo characterized Cohen as someone who made "mistakes," telling jurors they could believe him nonetheless.

Meanwhile, prosecutors have pointed to remarks Trump has made about Cohen and others to accuse him of multiple violations of a gag order that bars him from commenting on witnesses, jurors and some other people connected to the case. The judge has held Trump in contempt, fined him a total of \$10,000 and warned that jail could follow if he breached the order again.

Prosecutors also have not shied from testimony about Cohen's combative personality. A banker testified that Cohen was seen as a "challenging" client who insisted everything was urgent. Daniels' former lawyer, Keith Davidson, described his first phone call with Cohen as a screaming "barrage of insults and insinuations and allegations."

While such episodes might not be flattering to Cohen, eliciting them could be a way for prosecutors subtly to indicate he is not their teammate, but simply a person with information, said John Fishwick Jr., a former U.S. attorney for the Western District of Virginia.

"It's a way to try to build up his credibility while you distance yourself from him," he suggested.

When Cohen takes the stand, prosecutors would be wise to address his problematic past before defense lawyers do, said New York Law School professor Anna Cominsky. She taught a course with Bragg before he became district attorney, but she offered comments as a legal observer, not someone privy to his office's strategy.

"I imagine in their closing arguments," Cominsky said, "that the prosecutor is going to look right at the jury and say, 'This is not a perfect witness, but none of us are.'"

Hawks win NBA lottery in year where there's no clear choice for No. 1 pick

By ANDREW SELIGMAN AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — The Atlanta Hawks came in facing slim odds. They walked away with their biggest victory in years.

The Hawks won the NBA draft lottery on Sunday, landing the No. 1 pick and a potential cornerstone player in a year where there's no clear-cut choice.

"At least I can go home and tell my wife on Mother's Day, 'Hey, at least we won the lottery,'" general manager Landry Fields said. "That's her present. Yeah, there we go."

The Hawks hit the jackpot despite just 3% odds after finishing 10th in the Eastern Conference at 36-46. They dropped their final six regular-season games and lost to the Chicago Bulls in the first round of the play-in tournament.

"It was a shock," said Fields, who grinned ear to ear when deputy commissioner Mark Tatum announced the Hawks as the winners. "When I first saw that it wasn't us between 10 and 12, that launched us into the top four. I was like, all right, we've got a real shot at this thing. A bit of surprise, but a lot of excitement."

The Hawks haven't won a postseason series since a surprising run to the Eastern Conference finals in 2021. They got knocked out in the first round in 2022 and 2023.

Atlanta has some big decisions to make this offseason, including whether to break up its backcourt of Trae Young and Dejounte Murray. Fields can build with the No. 1 pick — assuming he keeps it — though it's not clear who will be taken first after Victor Wembanyama was the obvious choice for San Antonio last year.

"Our group has been fantastic," Fields said. "There's a whole lot of trust. They've put in the work. We'll kind of lean into our process and take it from there."

Washington, Houston, San Antonio and Detroit rounded out the top five. The draft is June 26-27 in Brooklyn.

Houston coach Ime Udoka was thrilled to get the third pick after the Rockets went 41-41 and missed the playoffs for the fourth straight year.

"Pleasant surprise when you move up the way that we did," he said. "I feel like there's a lot of qualified candidates out there."

Washington and Detroit had the best chances to land the top pick at 14%. Only four teams have won the lottery with slimmer odds than Atlanta, with the biggest longshot being Orlando at 1.52% in 1993. The Magic orchestrated a blockbuster draft night trade with Golden State, sending the rights to Chris Webber to the Warriors for the rights to Penny Hardaway along with three future first-round picks.

San Antonio landed a generational player last year in Wembanyama. The franchise that previously took David Robinson and Tim Duncan with the No. 1 overall pick got its next great big man, and all the Frenchman did was turn in one of the best rookie seasons in NBA history.

Fields disputed the idea that this year's class is a weak one, saying there are future All-Stars.

"Every draft class has great players in it," he said.

The No. 1 pick could once again come from France, whether it's center Alex Sarr or sharp-shooting forward Zaccharie Risacher, but that's far from a certainty. UConn guard Stephon Castle and Kentucky's Reed Sheppard and Rob Dillingham are both expected to be off the board within the first few selections.

The 7-foot-1, 224-pound Sarr has the size and mobility that teams crave and can defend the perimeter when he's not blocking shots down low. The 19-year-old from Toulouse is known for his explosiveness around the rim, though he could use some more muscle. It would help, too, if he developed into a more reliable 3-point shooter.

Sarr, whose brother Olivier plays for the Oklahoma City, spent this past season in Australia's National Basketball League.

Risacher, who was born in Spain and grew up in France, is known as a dynamic, albeit streaky shooter for JL Bourg, whether he's popping off screens or pulling up for 3-pointers. He often guards the other

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team's best player.

Castle joined Andre Drummond in 2012 as UConn's only one-and-done players when he declared for the draft in April after the Huskies' latest NCAA championship run. The 6-foot-6 guard averaged 11.1 points, 4.7 rebounds and 2.9 assists while often drawing the defensive assignment to shut down the opposition's top perimeter player.

Sheppard and Dillingham both came off the bench in their lone college seasons.

Sheppard, who was voted the Southeastern Conference's top freshman by coaches, was one of the league's best playmakers and perimeter shooters. He was Kentucky's No. 3 scorer at 12.5 points per contest and averaged an SEC-best 2.5 steals that ranked eighth nationally, despite starting just five of 33 games.

Dillingham was voted the SEC's top sixth man after averaging 15.2 and 3.9 assists. Kentucky tied for second in the conference and earned a No. 3 seed in the NCAA Tournament, only to get knocked out by Oakland in the round of 64. Coach John Calipari then left after 15 years for Arkansas.

Election deniers: West Virginia voters must pick from GOP candidates who still dispute 2020 outcome

By LEAH WILLINGHAM and JOHN RABY Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — When West Virginia Republicans vote in Tuesday's primary, they will have a hard time finding a major candidate on the ballot in any statewide race who openly acknowledges that President Joe Biden won the 2020 election.

Embracing or skirting the line on election denialism has become an unspoken checkoff among Republicans running for governor and Congress in one of the states most loyal to former President Donald Trump. What is spoken — almost constantly — is praise for the party's presumptive White House nominee from a slate of candidates that includes a convicted Jan. 6 insurrectionist as well as the sons of two GOP members of West Virginia's congressional delegation.

Glenn Elliott, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for an open Senate seat, said denying the election outcome was a "purity test" for West Virginia Republicans.

"You're either with the leader of the party on everything, or you're kicked out. You're not a Republican anymore, you're a 'RINO,'" he said, using the acronym for "Republicans In Name Only." "That's not a party — that's a cult."

It's about the worst thing you can call a Republican candidate in West Virginia.

In the crowded governor's race, Secretary of State Mac Warner has said he "firmly" believes, like Trump, that the election was stolen, even though dozens of courts and audits have determined the race was fairly decided in Biden's favor.

Warner, whose office oversees West Virginia's elections, has said tech companies, the media and federal intelligence officials worked together to cover up incriminating information found on the laptop of Biden's son Hunter. Warner's statements came a few months after announcing his campaign after years of toeing the line on the 2020 election. The Army veteran said his views have nothing to do with running for office.

"Donald Trump won West Virginia in a landslide," former state lawmaker Moore Capito, another candidate for governor, said in response to a question from The Associated Press. "And I just wish that the rest of the country would run our elections like we do here in the state of West Virginia."

Other candidates hedge or do not answer directly.

Attorney General Patrick Morrisey has refused to provide a yes or no answer to questions about whether Biden won the 2020 race but has asserted that there were "huge irregularities," "significant irregularities," and "very, very severe issues" relating to that vote.

Businessman Chris Miller, also a candidate for governor and the son of U.S. Rep. Carol Miller, said people do not trust mail-in ballots. He did not say whether he thought Biden was the legitimate winner.

"If you are voting in-person and see your vote cast, that's one thing," he said. With mail-in ballots, he added, "You can't see it. You don't know what's happened, and that's the danger."

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Derrick Evans, a former state lawmaker who spent three months in prison for participating in the riot at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, has escalated his verbal attacks against his primary rival. He calls Carol Miller a "commie RINO" who "refused to stand and fight with President Trump," as well as an "undocumented Democrat."

Never mind that Miller was aligned with Trump in almost 100% of her House votes while he was in office.

Evans, in an interview, said he believes his willingness to stand by Trump and say the election was stolen will carry him to victory — even though Miller, hours after Evans and other rioters had stormed the Capitol, voted to challenge the Electoral College results in two states Biden won.

She said in a statement at the time that she had a constitutional duty to "ensure that all Americans have access to free, fair, and accurate elections."

Evans is undeterred, claiming his role in the violent attack on the Capitol as a badge of honor.

"I think when the people learn I'm the only elected legislator in the entire country who had the courage to stand up against the stolen election and had the courage to stand up beside of President Trump on Jan. 6," he said, "I think that that makes them realize very seriously that I am the guy to represent this district on a national stage."

In an email to the AP, Carol Miller did not directly address the 2020 result. But she said she is the only candidate in the race who "has never been a registered Democrat or run for office as a Democrat."

In the West Virginia governor's race, all four major candidates are in lockstep on supporting the state's coal industry, imposing stiffer penalties for fentanyl dealers and the importance of economic development.

Morrissey, the fundraising front-runner, tossed the "RINO" label at Capito, who is regarded as his main competitor. Morrissey cited a February 2024 social media post from Donald Trump Jr. criticizing a vote by Capito's mother, Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, to send aid to Ukraine. "She's not up for reelection this year, but her RINO son is running for Governor of West Virginia," Trump Jr. said. "MAGA — Send a message to the Ukraine First RINOs & OPPOSE," he said, referring to Donald Trump's "Make American Great Again" movement.

Morrissey, in an interview, connected the dots.

"I think the choice is very clear: You have a conservative fighter with a record of getting big things done, and you have members of political royalty, part of the liberal establishment," Morrissey said.

Moore Capito has since taken every opportunity to make sure voters know where his loyalty lies. In a Republican gubernatorial forum hosted by television station WSAZ, candidates were asked what they could do to help people on fixed incomes struggling to pay their bills amid frequent utility rate increases.

"That's why it's incredibly important that we elect Donald Trump as president," Capito said, after condemning a recently released Biden administration rule that would force coal-fired power plants to capture their emissions or shut down.

Ironically, Republican Gov. Jim Justice, who is running for the Senate seat held by retiring Democrat Joe Manchin, is the only candidate to garner the coveted Trump endorsement in any primary race. And Justice has disagreed with Trump more than most candidates. For example, the governor supported the bipartisan infrastructure act that poured millions of dollars into the state to build out broadband and roads.

Alex Mooney, a congressman running against Justice in the primary, has called Justice a "RINO" at every opportunity. Justice, a former billionaire businessman with a folksy personality that has won him a devoted following, was initially elected as a Democrat in 2017 before becoming a Republican at a Trump rally early in his term. Mooney voted against the infrastructure bill.

Mooney has said he recognizes Biden as president but feels the 2020 election was not a fair one. He voted not to certify Biden's victory in Pennsylvania.

Justice, asked during a news briefing this past week whether he thinks Biden won legitimately, took a defiant tone even as he hedged: "What does it matter? I mean, what in the world does it matter?"

The governor then spun a story he has told often about something his father told him when he was competing in golf tournaments as a young man.

"Dad would tell me, 'Son, the only shot that matters in golf is the next shot. If you made a hole in one as your last shot, well, so what?'"

UK foreign secretary says halting arms sales to Israel would only strengthen Hamas

LONDON (AP) — Halting arms exports to Israel is “not a wise path” and would only strengthen Hamas, Britain’s foreign secretary said Sunday.

Asked whether the U.K. would follow the U.S. in threatening to cut the supply of offensive weapons to Israel if it carried out an attack on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, Foreign Secretary David Cameron said the two countries cannot be compared because unlike the U.S., Britain supplies a very small amount of Israel’s weapons.

“The U.K. provides less than 1% of Israel’s weapons and it’s not a state supplier,” Cameron told the BBC on Sunday. “We have a licensing system and those licences can be closed if it’s judged there’s a serious risk of a serious international human rights violation.”

U.S. President Joe Biden has said that his government will stop supplying weapons and artillery to Israel if its forces launch an all-out assault on Rafah, the last major Hamas stronghold in Gaza.

Britain’s opposition Labour Party and human rights groups have argued that the U.K. should follow a similar position and stop the sale of British-made weapons or components in a Rafah offensive.

The U.S. government said Friday that Israel’s use of U.S.-provided weapons in Gaza likely violated international humanitarian law. But it added that wartime conditions prevented U.S. officials from determining that for certain in specific airstrikes.

Cameron said the U.K. did not support a major offensive in Rafah without a clear plan about how civilians can be protected.

The Campaign Against Arms Trade nonprofit group estimates that the real value of U.K. arms exports of Israel is at least 1 billion pounds since 2015, much higher than government figures.

It says that British industry, namely BAE Systems, provides about 15% of the components in the F-35 stealth combat aircraft used by Israel. The group alleges that the jets were used in recent bombardment of Gaza. The full value of component and other licenses is not known, it said.

Cameron also said that putting British boots on the ground in Gaza as part of international efforts to deliver aid would be “a risk that we shouldn’t take.”

His comments came after reports that U.K. authorities were considering deploying troops to land humanitarian supplies from a temporary pier being built by the U.S. military.

Cameron said that his government’s view was that “actually putting British boots on to the beach was not a good move.” He said that instead, the aid delivery will likely be carried out by a contractor.

Caitlin Clark, much like Larry Bird, the focus of talks about race and double standards in sports

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

For much of the past two years, Caitlin Clark has been the centerpiece of the college basketball world.

Now Clark, like NBA Hall of Famer Larry Bird was 45 years ago, is involuntarily the focus of discussions about race and her transition to professional basketball. Though Clark hasn’t said anything to fuel the Black-white narrative surrounding her meteoric rise, talks about a double standard are being had.

“I think it’s a huge thing. I think a lot of people may say it’s not about Black and white, but to me, it is,” Las Vegas Aces star A’ja Wilson said when asked about the race element in Clark’s popularity and before she recently signed two major endorsement deals. “It really is because you can be top notch at what you are as a Black woman, but yet maybe that’s something that people don’t want to see.

“They don’t see it as marketable, so it doesn’t matter how hard I work. It doesn’t matter what we all do as Black women, we’re still going to be swept underneath the rug. That’s why it boils my blood when people say it’s not about race because it is.”

To be clear, Clark is a skilled hardcourt savant from Iowa. Bird was a skilled hardcourt savant from Indiana State. And like Bird, Clark has captivated audiences and brought unmatched attention to women’s

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basketball with an ability to score from every corner of the court.

Neither Bird nor Clark were the first great white male or female pro basketball players. Jerry West is the actual NBA logo and before Clark, the long list of talented white WNBA players included Sue Bird and Breanna Stewart.

But sports can be elevated by a heated rivalry, particularly when race is involved.

Clark's rise has come with an on-court bravado that made her must-watch TV as she led the Hawkeyes to back-to-back NCAA championship game appearances. When Bird led the Sycamores to the title game in 1979, he squared off against Magic Johnson in one of the most-watched games in NCAA tourney history.

At Iowa, Clark's on-court rival in the NCAA Tournament was former LSU star Angel Reese. Then she took on women's juggernaut South Carolina and coach Dawn Staley. The matchups created the kind of made-for-social media moments that captivated audiences, regardless of gender.

The matchups also led to ongoing discussions about how race plays a factor in the treatment afforded to Clark, a white woman from "America's Heartland," as compared to Black counterparts like Reese.

Clark has said she and Reese are just pieces of a larger movement.

"I would say me and Angel have always been great competitors," Clark said prior to Iowa's Elite Eight matchup with Reese and LSU in March. "I think Angel would say the same, like it's not just us in women's basketball. That's not the only competitive thing about where our game is at, and that's what makes it so good. We need multiple people to be really good."

Still, the race-based debate over perceived slights to Black players or favoritism toward Clark is not going away as the No. 1 pick in the WNBA draft prepares for her first regular-season game on Tuesday night when Indiana plays Connecticut.

"I think new fans, or maybe returning fans to women's college basketball, have been drawn in. In part because of Clark. But also, you know, because of the LSU-Iowa rivalry," said Victoria Jackson, a sports historian and clinical associate professor of history at Arizona State University.

"There are basketball reasons," Jackson said, "but also there are racial reasons for why Clark has been able to kind of break off into a completely different stratosphere from players that came before her."

Because of the perceived double-standard, nearly everything involving Clark gets questioned:

- Clark's first preseason game was streamed, but Reese's was not.
- Clark gets an endorsement deal. Other established Black stars not so much.
- If Reese talks trash, it's viewed as unsportsmanlike. If Clark does it, she's being competitive.
- Reese received some backlash for going to the Met Gala before a game, raising questions would there have been same type of scrutiny if Clark had graced the red carpet.

Wilson, who signed with Gatorade last week and announced Saturday that she is getting a Nike signature shoe, and others have cited how companies are clamoring to be in business with Clark as an example of the disparity in how players are treated.

The deal Clark struck with Nike will reportedly pay her \$28 million over eight years — making it the richest sponsorship contract for a women's basketball player, and it includes a signature shoe. Before Wilson's announcement Saturday, the only other active players in the WNBA with a signature shoe were Elena Delle Donne, Sabrina Ionescu and Stewart — who are all white.

The perception extends beyond endorsements.

While Clark's preseason debut was available on the WNBA League Pass streaming app, a post on the X platform from the WNBA incorrectly stated that all games, including the debut of Reese and fellow rookie former South Carolina standout Kamilla Cardoso for the Chicago Sky, would also be available.

So, a fan in attendance at the Sky's game livestreamed it. It received more than 620,000 views.

In an apology post explaining why the Sky's game wasn't also available, the WNBA said Clark's game was available as part of a limited free preview of its streaming app.

There also have been racial components to how Clark is treated on social media as compared to others, most notably Reese.

Reese, who has previously spoken about the vitriol she received online, was recently attacked again after she missed a preseason practice to attend the Met Gala. Clark also has been the target of online criticism,

but apparently not to the extent that Reese has been.

Online hate-speech accounts for approximately 1 percent of all social media posts in the context of sports, according to Daniel Kilvington, course director in Media & Cultural Studies at Leeds Beckett University in Leeds, England.

"Although this might sound quite low, consider how much traffic is online and how many posts are made every single day," said Kilvington, whose work with the Tackling Online Hate in Football research group has looked at the issue through the sport of soccer. "One percent is therefore 1% too high as athletes are primary targets of hate-speech, harassment and death threats simply for playing a game they love."

But as Clark's popularity grows, so will the debate. Jackson believes it's a good time to openly have discussions about it.

"I don't know how many times I read and heard her described as generational talent," the ASU professor said. "And whenever we're making those cases, I immediately think, well, who are the other generational talents we've had? And, I think too often the athletes could be placed in that category who have been Black women have not had that sort of gushing attention. And especially the kind of general public, crossover saturation that Caitlin Clark has had."

"There are overlapping, intersecting reasons for why that is. But, I think we can't not think about it if the goal here is to have equitable treatment of the athletes in the sport."

In progressive Argentina, the LGBTQ+ community says President Milei has turned back the clock

By DÉBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — When Luana Salva got her first formal job after years of prostitution, she was ecstatic.

A quota law in Argentina that promoted the inclusion of transgender people in the work force — unprecedented in Latin America except in neighboring Uruguay — pulled her from the capital's street corners into the Foreign Ministry last year.

Yet just months after Salva got her first paycheck, right-wing President Javier Milei entered office and began slashing public spending as part of his state overhaul to solve Argentina's worst economic crisis in two decades. Abruptly fired in a wave of government layoffs, Salva said her world began to unravel.

"The only option we have left is prostitution ... and I don't see myself standing on a corner, getting cold, enduring violence," Salva, 43, said. "This government is unaware of all that has been built to make us feel included."

Salva's sudden reversal of fortunes reflects the political whiplash being felt across Argentina. Past left-leaning presidents who enacted some of the most socially liberal policies on the continent have given way to a self-proclaimed "anarcho-capitalist" whose fiery appraisals of social justice and efforts to dismantle diversity and equity programs have made him into a global far-right icon.

"The only thing this radical feminist agenda has achieved is greater state intervention to hinder economic process," Milei said in a speech met with enthusiastic applause at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, earlier this year.

Few in Argentina are more enraged by Milei's anti-woke agenda than LGBTQ+ activists, who worry his government is rolling back their hard-won gains. Since drawing attention as a brash TV personality, Milei has lambasted feminist and human rights movements as a "cult of a gender ideology."

"Unfortunately, we are going backward," said Alba Rueda, a trans woman activist and diversity adviser in the former center-left government of President Alberto Fernández, who made Argentina the first country in the region to allow nonbinary people to make "X" the gender on their national identity documents.

"What we have achieved is being discredited," Rueda said.

After taking office in December, Milei wasted no time jumping into Argentina's culture wars. He shut down the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity, banned the government's use of gender-inclusive language and closed the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism.

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In an announcement timed for International Women's Day on March 8, Milei renamed the Women's Hall in the presidential palace to Hall of Heroes. To the delight of his conservative fans — and the outrage of tens of thousands of women's rights protesters outside his residence — he had portraits of historical female leaders in the room taken down and replaced with those featuring Argentina's founding fathers and soldiers.

Milei has also scrapped a decree calling for gender equality in companies and civil society groups and ended gender-focused training programs. He has repeatedly railed against abortion — or, as he calls it, "murder aggravated by the familial bond." A lawmaker from his party has presented Congress with legislation demanding the repeal of Argentina's breakthrough legalization of abortion in 2020.

It's a far cry from the past years when Argentina became the first country in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage and a few years later recognized choosing one's own gender identity as a human right. In 2021, the Fernández administration passed its employment quota law, requiring the state to reserve 1% of all jobs for transgender, transexual or nonbinary people who would otherwise struggle to find formal work.

Before Milei became president, efforts to fulfill the quota were just gaining traction, with 955 transgender people on the public payroll — far below the 5,551 positions allocated to them in compliance with the law. The fate of the legislation is now unclear.

"The quota does not make much sense," presidential spokesperson Manuel Adorni said. "Each position will be occupied by the best, most capable person, be it a man, a woman, a transvestite or anything else."

Some 105 transgender people have lost their civil service jobs in the last three months, according to the union representing state workers.

It's a small drop in the ocean of 15,000 state workers who have been fired as Milei races against the odds to push the state budget into surplus by the year's end.

But transgender people who benefited from the law insist each layoff has a ripple effect on Argentina's gender and sexual minorities who remain vulnerable to hate crimes and face widespread discrimination in the labor market. In 2016, 70% of trans women reported making a living from sex work. In 2022, after the law was passed, that figure fell to 56%, according to a study released last year by Buenos Aires government officials.

"The quota, for me, meant the possibility of changing my life," Salva said.

Milei's libertarian administration says the layoffs are part of its austerity program and not targeted at LGBTQ+ people. Milei has also devalued Argentina's currency, slashed subsidies, eliminated price controls and closed other government ministries unrelated to gender and sexual identity.

But those in the LGBTQ+ community insist the president's populist shock doctrine disproportionately impacts them. In his much-memed Davos speech, Milei slammed "women's ministries and international (feminist) organizations" for employing "bureaucrats who do not contribute anything to society."

"There is a focus here," said Clarisa Gambera, a gender specialist at one of Argentina's main labor unions. "Many of these people being affected worked in gender offices of public departments that were dismantled."

LGBTQ+ activists have fought back the way the government's many other political opponents have — on the streets.

"We obtained our rights thanks to the many warriors who gave up their lives for this cause," Ariel Heredia, a recently fired state worker who identifies as nonbinary, said at a protest earlier this year in Buenos Aires. After being laid off, Heredia, 36, lost health insurance he needed to access anti-HIV medication.

In his hunt for find work, Heredia says he'll dress as a cisgender man, hiding an identity he struggled for years to accept.

"It's a contradiction for me," Heredia said. "But I have to adapt."

More US parents than ever have paid leave this Mother's Day - but most still don't

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and CLAIRE SAVAGE AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — More working U.S. parents than ever are celebrating their first Mother's Day with hard-fought access to paid time off to care for newborns. But the majority still must forego pay to care for new babies or other loved ones, even as efforts to expand paid parental and family leave gain traction.

Bipartisan groups in the U.S. Senate and House have revived efforts to expand paid family leave to more workers, with momentum building to introduce legislation this year. In the absence of a federal law, 13 states plus the District of Columbia have adopted paid family and medical leave laws, which entitle workers to paid time off to care for newborns or other loved ones who require care.

Still, just 27% of civilian workers in the U.S. get paid family leave, according to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Workers who can least afford to take unpaid time off are also the least likely to have access to paid leave: According to the BLS, just 14% percent of workers in the lowest 25% wage category get that benefit, compared to 48% of those in the top 10%.

For families without paid leave, babies "are going to day care when they are two weeks old. They do not even have immunizations. They're not on regular feeding patterns. Moms are giving up breastfeeding far sooner than they would like to," Elizabeth Gedmark, vice president at nonprofit advocacy organization A Better Balance, said during a recent virtual conference to advocate for federal paid family leave organized by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The U.S. is one of just of seven countries — and the only industrialized one — that does not have a national paid maternity leave policy, according to the World Policy Analysis Center at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Caitlyn Householder has become an advocate for a universal paid family leave law in Pennsylvania since she was forced to quit her job as a floor supervisor of a clothing company five ago when she learned that she was pregnant shortly after being diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's B-Cell Lymphoma.

Householder, of Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, could hardly drive herself to work because of agonizing pain in her leg, and it quickly became apparent that her employer wouldn't allow her to take enough time off for her medical needs.

"They showed their true colors," said Householder, who shared her story through the Children First, a organization campaigning for Pennsylvania's proposed law.

Householder's husband, an oil rig worker, also gets no paid parental or family leave to care for her and their kids. Most of the time, Householder took her baby and stepdaughter with her to the radiation treatments. When her husband did take off work, such as when Householder couldn't hold her baby for 24 hours after radiation, it meant foregoing hundreds of dollars in income. The family fell behind on mortgage payments during the most difficult months.

Pennsylvania's House and Senate are considering legislation that would provide up to 20 weeks of paid family leave through a payroll tax. The proposed measure has bipartisan sponsorship but some Republicans have vocally opposed it because of the cost to taxpayers.

Disagreements over how to fund family leave programs have been an obstacle in other states, and have long thwarted efforts to pass a federal law. Democrats generally favor funding such programs through payroll taxes, while many Republicans prefer tax incentives to encourage, but not require, employers to offer paid leave.

In January, a House bipartisan group led by Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, a Pennsylvania Democrat, and Rep. Stephanie Bice, an Oklahoma Republican, released a four-part framework to extend paid family leave to more workers, including funding for state programs or stronger tax breaks for small businesses to do so.

In a statement, Bice said the group is "excited about the momentum and will continue working together to craft legislative text which can get across the finish line." In an interview with The Associated Press, Houlahan said she was optimistic that legislation could be introduced this year. While any measure would fall short of a federal paid leave law, Houlahan said it reflects a yearlong effort to find common ground

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for policies that would extend the benefit to as many workers as possible.

Colorado's benefits kicked in on Jan. 1, four years after the state's paid family and medical leave program passed by ballot measure following a failed effort to move a bill through the legislature. The law gives most Colorado workers the right to take up to 12 week of paid leave to bond with a new baby and other family needs.

The new benefits came too late for Carrie Martin-Haley's family. Neither Martin-Haley, a small business owner in Denver who gave birth to her son in September 2023, nor her husband had any paid time off, so Martin-Haley had to put aside her dreams of opening a brick-and-mortar storefront for her business, Summit Sustainable Goods.

"That's been hard to sit with," said Martin-Haley, who shared her story through Small Business Majority, an advocacy group that is campaigning for federal paid family leave. "With the lack of sleep and everything else that comes along with new parenthood, and all of the uncertainties, finances should be the last thing on the totem pole."

Women's participation in the U.S. labor force has reached historic highs, but changes such as paid parental leave often come after long-fought campaigns by mothers.

Keenan Manzo of Dallas, a mother of three who has worked as a Southwest flight attendant for 18 years, said she launched a Facebook page for mothers at the company after having her first child 11 years ago to galvanize support for paid leave and other policies. She said paid leave often took a backseat to other priorities such as higher pay, but support grew as women shared stories of returning to work too early and struggling to pump during flights, sometimes as impatient passengers knocked on the bathroom stalls.

Southwest flight attendants finally won paid parental leave — up to eight weeks for birthing parents and two weeks for non-birth parents — in a contract ratified in April by the Transport Workers Union. TWU International President John Samuelson called the benefit a first for an industry with a long history of sexism against flight attendants, who are mostly women.

"I fought so hard. I'm done having babies, but I still get emotional just thinking about the moms that are coming after me that have this reprieve," Manzo said.

Today in History: May 13, Pope John Paul II is shot and wounded

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, May 13, the 134th day of 2024. There are 232 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 13, 1981, Pope John Paul II was shot and seriously wounded in St. Peter's Square by Turkish assailant Mehmet Ali Agca (MEH'-met AH'-lee AH'-juh).

On this date:

In 1607, English colonists arrived by ship at the site of what became the Jamestown settlement in Virginia (the colonists went ashore the next day).

In 1914, heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis was born in Lafayette, Alabama.

In 1917, three shepherd children reported seeing a vision of the Virgin Mary near Fatima, Portugal; it was the first of six such apparitions that the children claimed to have witnessed.

In 1940, in his first speech as British prime minister, Winston Churchill told Parliament, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

In 1972, 118 people died after fire broke out at the Sennichi Department Store in Osaka, Japan.

In 1973, in tennis' first so-called "Battle of the Sexes," Bobby Riggs defeated Margaret Court 6-2, 6-1 in Ramona, California. (Billie Jean King soundly defeated Riggs at the Houston Astrodome in September.)

In 1985, a confrontation between Philadelphia authorities and the radical group MOVE ended as police dropped a bomb onto the group's row house, igniting a fire that killed 11 people and destroyed 61 homes.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton nominated federal appeals Judge Stephen G. Breyer to the U.S. Supreme Court to replace retiring Justice Harry A. Blackmun; Breyer went on to win Senate confirmation.

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In 2002, President George W. Bush announced that he and Russian President Vladimir Putin (POO'-tihn) would sign a treaty to shrink their countries' nuclear arsenals by two-thirds.

In 2012, Donald "Duck" Dunn, the bassist who helped create the gritty Memphis soul sound at Stax Records in the 1960s as part of the legendary group Booker T. and the MGs, died in Tokyo while on tour at age 70.

In 2016, the Obama administration issued a directive requiring public schools to permit transgender students to use bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their chosen gender identity.

In 2018, 69-year-old "Superman" actress Margot Kidder was found dead by a friend near her Montana home in what was later ruled a suicide from a drug and alcohol overdose.

In 2019, Doris Day, the sunny blond film star and singer who appeared in comedic roles opposite Rock Hudson and Cary Grant in the 1950s and 1960s, died at her California home at the age of 97.

In 2020, the Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down Gov. Tony Evers' coronavirus stay-at-home order, ruling that his administration had overstepped its authority by extending the order for another month.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Buck Taylor is 86. Actor Harvey Keitel is 85. Author Charles Baxter is 77. Actor Zoe Wanamaker is 76. Actor Franklyn Ajaye is 75. Singer Stevie Wonder is 74. Former Ohio Gov. John Kasich is 72. Actor Leslie Winston is 68. Producer-writer Alan Ball is 67. Basketball Hall of Famer Dennis Rodman is 63. "Late Show" host Stephen Colbert is 60. Rock musician John Richardson is 60. Actor Tom Verica is 60. Singer Darius Rucker (Hootie and the Blowfish) is 58. Actor Susan Floyd is 56. Actor Brian Geraghty is 49. Actor Samantha Morton is 47. Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., is 47. Former NBA player Mike Bibby is 46. Rock musician Mickey Madden (Maroon 5) is 45. Actor Iwan Rheon is 39. Actor-writer-director Lena Dunham is 38. Actor Robert Pattinson is 38. Actor Candice Accola King is 37. Actor Hunter Parrish is 37. Folk-rock musician Wylie Gelber (Dawes) is 36. NHL defenseman P.K. Subban is 36. Actor Debby Ryan is 31.