

Groton Daily Independent

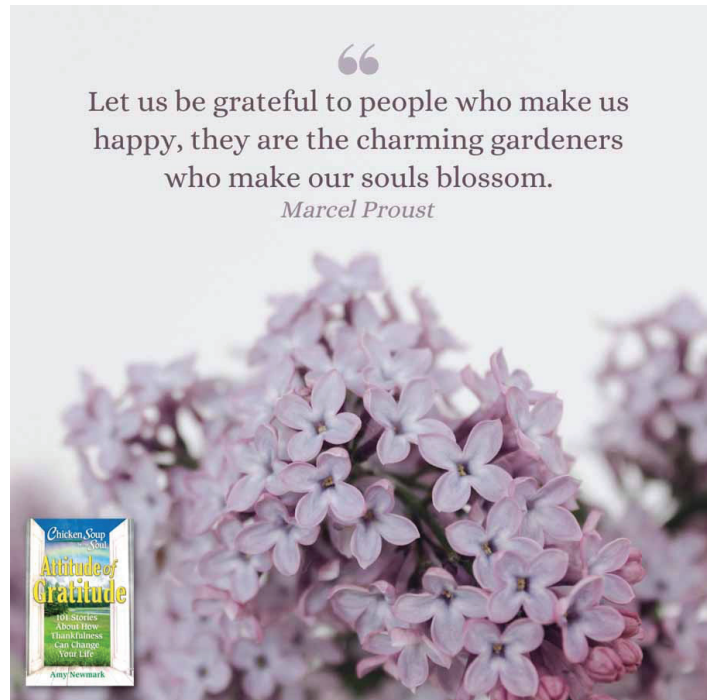
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Tuesday, May 14

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.

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



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.

Wednesday, May 15

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, peas and carrots, apricots,, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Cereal.
School Lunch: Sack lunch made by kitchen.
End of Fourth Quarter - LAST DAY OF SCHOOL
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
Emmanuel Lutheran: Pastor at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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1440

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The federal corruption trial for Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) began with jury selection in Manhattan yesterday over charges he and his wife, Nadine, accepted bribes from three wealthy businessmen in exchange for political favors.

GameStop shares reached their highest level since 2022 yesterday, after a leader of the meme-stock movement posted online for the first time in three years.

The world's fastest supercomputer remains Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Frontier system in Tennessee, ranking No. 1 in the semiannual list of the 500 most powerful systems. However, it is no longer the only exascale machine on the list, with the Argonne Leadership Computing Facility's Aurora system in Illinois taking the No. 2 spot and becoming the second-ever to break the computing barrier.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 77th Cannes Film Festival kicks off today from France; see preview and most anticipated films. Filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof flees Iran, one week after being sentenced to eight years in prison by the Islamic Revolutionary Court.

David Sanborn, six-time Grammy-winning jazz saxophonist, dies at 78.

Kendrick Lamar's "Not Like Us" diss track aimed at Drake debuts at No. 1 on Billboard Hot 100.

Science & Technology

OpenAI debuts GPT-4o, an updated version of its large language model that can analyze text, speech, videos, and images; see more announcements here.

New edible gel breaks down alcohol into acetic acid in the gut, helps prevent intoxication; blood alcohol levels were reduced by 50% in mouse studies, substance prevented harmful side effects from overdrinking like liver damage.

Prototype brain implant shows first-ever success in decoding words patients think entirely in their mind, without any corresponding lip movement or vocalization.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 0.0%, Dow -0.2%, Nasdaq +0.3%), with Dow ending its longest winning streak of the year; investors await fresh economic data releases today and tomorrow.

Melinda French Gates to resign as co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in June, will receive \$12.5B grant to pursue her own philanthropy; Melinda and her former husband, Bill Gates, launched the nonprofit in 2000.

UK private equity firm Permira to take Squarespace private in all-cash deal, giving the website builder an equity valuation of \$6.6B; Squarespace went public in 2021. Kraft Heinz reportedly exploring sale of Oscar Mayer meats business; deal could fetch between \$3B to \$5B.

Politics & World Affairs

Michael Cohen, ex-personal lawyer to former President Donald Trump, testifies in criminal hush money trial in Manhattan. Trump leads President Joe Biden in five of six swing states—Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, and Pennsylvania, new poll shows.

Canadian wildfire smoke drifts into northern US, triggering air quality alerts in states including Minnesota and the Dakota. Roughly 140 fires are burning across central Canada; nearly 40 are listed as out of control.

Controlled explosion brings down largest remaining part of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, marking step toward freeing grounded Dali container ship, which crashed into the bridge in March.

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—Weber—
Landscaping
Greenhouse

NOW
OPEN!

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

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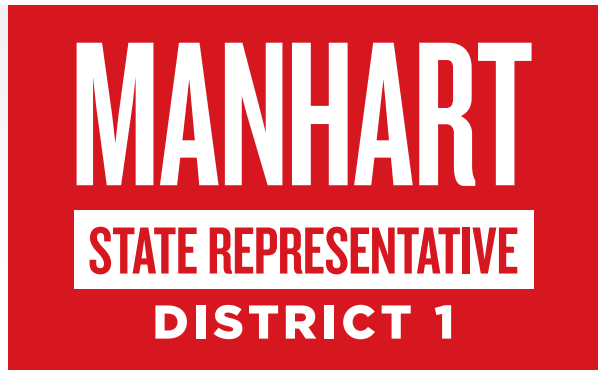
Telephone Scam – Secretary Johnson Warns Citizens of fake groups claiming to be making calls on behalf of SOS Office

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson is warning South Dakotans to be aware of scammers after citizens have reported receiving calls, coming from random numbers with a 605-area code, where the caller is claiming they are with the Secretary of State’s office. Scammers are pushing the voters to challenge the Abortion Rights ballot measure petitions.

The Secretary of State’s office has alerted law enforcement as to these groups impersonating themselves as SOS staff. The groups have stated they are the South Dakota Integrity Committee or the Petition Integrity Commission. It appears that the calls are trying to pressure voters into asking that their name be removed from the Abortion Rights petitions. “Citizens in South Dakota, by law, have the right to petition and people like these scammers are eroding public trust in the election process,” stated Secretary Johnson.

People who receive such calls are encouraged to contact the Secretary of State’s Office, the Division of Elections at elections@state.sd.us or call 605-773-3537. Please pass along any information that you receive.

A group did form a campaign finance committee this morning named South Dakota Petition Integrity. We are unaware if this group is affiliated with the calls.



Working to Protect & Promote Traditional American Values

- ✓ Pro Law Enforcement
- ✓ Pro Constitution
- ✓ Pro Family
- ✓ Property Rights



Visit the Campaign Site
ManhartForHouse.com or
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Paid for by Manhart for State House

Primary Election: Vote Now Through June 4th

DANR and DOH Announce Air Quality Alert for South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) issued an air quality alert for areas of South Dakota where smoke from wildfires in Canada is forecasted to settle. The smoke may cause low visibility and increased fine particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution. The South Dakota Department of Health (DOH) advises that these levels may be a concern to public health and provides additional resources to make an informed decision on personal healthcare choices.

The alert is in effect through Tuesday, May 14, 2024, or until conditions improve.

Elderly citizens, young children, and individuals with respiratory problems are the most susceptible to the smoke. All people should avoid excessive physical exertion and minimize outdoor activities during periods of low visibility caused by the wildfire smoke. People are also encouraged to keep indoor air clean by closing windows and doors.

Air pollution can aggravate heart and cardiovascular disease as well as lung diseases like asthma and COPD. When the air quality is unhealthy, people with these conditions may experience symptoms like chest pain, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, or fatigue. Anyone concerned about health effects related to poor air quality should contact their health care provider.

DANR provides air quality data on the department's website for several locations in South Dakota. Hourly PM2.5 values greater than 35 microgram per cubic meter (ug/m³) are a concern to public health.

Individuals may track the real time PM2.5 concentrations by visiting DANR's website at <https://denravweb.sd.gov/AirVision/default.aspx> or EPA's website at <https://www.airnow.gov/>.

An explanation of the air quality index levels and their meaning can be found at <https://danr.sd.gov/Environment/AirQuality/AirMonitoring/RealTimeData.aspx>.

For an easy-to-use outdoor activity and air quality guide created by the EPA and CDC visit <https://www.airnow.gov/sites/default/files/2018-09/air-quality-and-outdoor-activity-guidance-2014.pdf>.



**Now
HIRING!**

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

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Flags at Half-Staff Statewide on Wednesday in Honor of Peace Officers Memorial Day

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem ordered that flags be flown at half-staff statewide from sunrise until sunset on Wednesday, May 15th, 2024, in honor of Peace Officers Memorial Day.

Peace Officers Memorial Day honors law enforcement officers who gave their lives in the line of duty. It falls during National Police Week, which honors all law enforcement officers, past and present, who selflessly serve our communities.

We are thankful for the sacrifices of law enforcement officers and their families.

GROTON

SUBWAY

REOPENING SOON!

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Assistant Manager and
Sandwich Artists.**

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carmbruster_13@hotmail.com
with position, dates,
times available, and references.**



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Girls are winners in three relay events at Hamlin Track

The Groton Area girls 400m relay team, 800m relay team, 1600m relay team and Sprint Medley Relay Team were all winners at the Hamlin Invitational Track Meet held Monday in Hayti.

Those taking second were Keegen Tracy in the 200m and 400m dash, Blake Pauli in the 800m run, Colby Dunker in the Javelin and Taryn Traphagen in the 400m dash.

Boy's Division

Team Scores: 1. Elkton-Lake Benton 137, 2. Hamlin 107, 3. Viborg-Hurley 93, 4. Ipswich 64, 5. Flandreau 62, 6. Sioux Valley 56, 7. Groton Area 49, 8. Clark/Willow Lake 38.5, 9. Estelline/Hendricks 36, 10. Sisseton 31, 10. Aberdeen Roncalli 31, 12. Florence/Henry 14, 13. Iroquois/Lake Preston 13.5, 14. Wilmot 8

200 Meters: 2. Keegen Tracy, 23.19; 16. Gage Sippel, 25.62

400 Meters: 2. Keegen Tracy, 51.93; 9. Gage Sippel, 57.69

800 Meters: 2. Blake Pauli, 2:04.83; 9. Jayden Schwan, 2:19.32; 13. Garrett Schultz, 2:35.33

300m Hurdles: 16. Tristin McGannon, 48.92

4x200 Relay: 5. Lane Tietz, Colby Dunker, Blake Pauli, Keegen Tracy, 1:35.96

4x800 Relay: 3. Jayden Schwan, Tristin McGannon, Gage Sippel, Logan Warrington, 9:30.69

Shot Put: 5. Logan Ringgenberg, 45' 2.25; 19. Karter Moody, 35' 7.5

Discus: 6. Logan Ringgenberg, 124' 1.5; 10. Holden Sippel, 112' 1; 28. Karter Moody, 88' 1

Javelin: 2. Colby Dunker, 148' 1; 14. Karter Moody, 108' 5; 25. Drew Thurston, 86' 2

Triple Jump: 11. Tristin McGannon, 31' 11

Girl's Division

Team Scores: 1. Sioux Valley 90.5, 2. Ipswich 73.5, 3. Clark/Willow Lake 69, 3. Groton Area 69, 5. Howard 61, 6. Estelline/Hendricks 56, 7. Flandreau 52.5, 8. Iroquois/Lake Preston 51, 9. Elkton-Lake Benton 50, 10. Florence/Henry 36, 11. Viborg-Hurley 30, 11. Hamlin 30, 13. Sisseton 26, 14. Aberdeen Roncalli 23, 15. Wilmot 5.5

100 Meters: 20. Elizabeth Fliehs, 14.46; 22. Kayla Lehr, 14.49

200 Meters: 4. Rylee Dunker, 27.88; 17. Elizabeth Fliehs, 30.20; 25. Kayla Lehr, 30.74

400 Meters: 2. Taryn Traphagen, 1:02.89; 9. Ashlynn Warrington, 1:07.05; 15. Elizabeth Fliehs, 1:10.16

800 Meters: 7. Ashlynn Warrington, 2:39.41

100m Hurdles: 6. McKenna Tietz, 17.81; 13. Talli Wright, 19.36; 17. Emerlee Jones, 20.41

300m Hurdles: 4. McKenna Tietz, 51.08; 10. Talli Wright, 54.72

4x100 Relay: 1. Laila Roberts, Kella Tracy, McKenna Tietz, Rylee Dunker. 52.37

4x200 Relay: 1. Laila Roberts, Kella Tracy, Jerica Locke, Rylee Dunker, 1:49.44

4x400 Relay: 1. Jerica Locke, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Laila Roberts, 4:11.79

SMR 1600m: 1. Laila Roberts, Rylee Dunker, Taryn Traphagen, Faith Traphagen, 4:28.47

Shot Put: 3. Emma Kutter, 33' 4; 15. Faith Fliehs, 26' 11.75; 20. Avery Crank, 25' 2

Discus: 12. Faith Fliehs, 76' 6; 13. Avery Crank, 76' 0.5; 15. Emma Kutter, 71' 4.5

Javelin: 9. Emma Kutter, 79' 8; 11. Avery Crank, 74' 2; 17. Ashley Johnson, 57' 3

High Jump: 14. Emerlee Jones, 4' 0

Long Jump: 24. Teagan Hanten, 12' 3

Triple Jump: 11. Emerlee Jones, 28' 1.5; 14. Teagan Hanten, 26' 8

Guthmiller takes second at NEC Golf

Carly Guthmiller took second place at the Northeast Conference Girls Golf Meet held Monday in Redfield. She finished the day with a 94. Carlee Johnson placed fourth with a 97, Mia Crank was 12th with a 115, Claire Schuelke was 13th with a 119, Carly Gibert was 14th with a 120 and Halee Harder was 20th with a 141.

Roncalli won the team title with 381 points followed by Groton Area with 425, Milbank with 495 and Redfield with 564.

That's Life by Tony Bender: Graduation advice

For about as long as I've been writing this column, I've been dispensing advice to graduates. I dunno, after taking a look around at the state of the world, I sorta feel responsible. So I hereby rescind my previous advice to fight for your right to party or party like it's 1999.

Something I was right about is anyone can grow up to be president. So there's hope. Sorta.

One thing I don't think I've ever advised graduates to do, is really important. Vote. Vote in every election, every time. And make sure you understand what you're voting for or against. Do your homework—and homework isn't 30-second campaign commercials. Trust me, the guy wearing a flannel shirt standing in a billowing field of wheat probably doesn't know an air seeder from a manure spreader, and in the case of the later, it's ironic.

The bottom line is, nothing happens in this country without the expressed will of the people. And when the people are silent, bad things happen. After love, voting is the greatest form of expression ever invented. Followed by music, prose, art and baseball. Vote. Even if you're on the losing side of an issue, that vote sends a signal. Change is a process. Life involves compromise. None of us is so right in our convictions that they can't be improved upon.

I had a brief conversation the other day with a nice young man—he might have been 16—and during a bit of friendly verbal jousting, he said that he was a member of a particular political party. No you're not, kid. You're too busy trying to figure out how you're going to lose your virginity, and if she tells you she's a member of the Green Party, you're going to start dressing like a leprechaun.

Live a little. Experience has a way of hardening or softening our beliefs. Even changing them. Trust the evidence life offers.

Anyway, political parties are a bad idea because both sides always try to define who everyone in the other party is. Lazy socialists. Heartless conservatives. But people are more nuanced than that. Life is more nuanced than that. You can be a fiscal conservative and a social liberal. You can be an atheist and spend your life doing good works. You can be a zealot and leverage your beliefs to justify just about anything.

Be an independent. In doing so, your generation may have a shot at fixing things my generation screwed up. The irony of a Baby Boomer offering this advice is not lost on me. But in my defense, you'll find that the marginal players are sometimes the best coaches. They've learned from their own mistakes and shortcomings. We're graduates of the School of Hard Knocks. What you learn is, just about anything can be overcome. You can grow from adversity. Or you can be embittered.

Despite the chaos my previous advice to graduates has created, I'm sticking with some of it. It's like trickle-down economics. It'll work if you wait long enough or if you click your ruby slippers three times. One of those.

Here goes... The most important thing is to do something you love. You see, our society has become so materialistic, the goal has become wealth. Shouldn't the goal be happiness? Misguided people spend their lives chasing wealth, doing something they hate for decades, with the idea that when they've amassed enough money, they'll do the things that'll them happy.

Live a rich life along the way. When you love what you do, it's not work. If you can, work for yourself. It's about freedom. But before then, when you're working for someone else, do the job so well that when you leave, they really miss you.

Let debt be a tool, not your master. Things have a way of owning you.

Recognize opportunity when it presents itself. Seek out beauty in museums, at concerts, or in your backyard. Plant a tree.

It's an incredible epoch with incredible challenges. Sometimes it may seem overwhelming. Bad news and uncertainty. Then, if you can, step out under the stars or into the sunshine and breathe. You'll find things are just fine where you are. In fact, it's glorious.

Believe. Negative thoughts manifest negative outcomes. Think positive. It works.

Now, go get `em.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Grocery tax repeal validated for the ballot

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 13, 2024 4:06 PM

The South Dakota Secretary of State's Office said Monday that a petition seeking to repeal the state sales tax on groceries has enough signatures from registered voters to make the Nov. 5 ballot.

If nobody mounts a successful challenge to the petition's validation in the next 30 days, it will become the third statewide measure to make the ballot, with several more measures still possible.

The grocery tax repeal is a citizen-initiated proposal, led by the Dakotans for Health ballot question committee. The other two measures already on the ballot were placed there by the Legislature: a proposal to change male-specific officeholder references in the state constitution to neutral language, and a proposal that would allow the state to impose work requirements on some Medicaid expansion enrollees.

Validation is pending for citizen-led petitions that would create open primary elections, re-establish abortion rights and legalize adult recreational marijuana use.

Meanwhile, a citizen-led group is trying to refer a new pipeline law to the ballot. The Legislature passed the law last winter to implement new protections for landowners affected by a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline, while still allowing a regulatory path forward for the project.

In a related announcement, the Secretary of State's Office issued a warning Monday to South Dakotans about scam phone calls. The calls come from random numbers with a 605-area code, and the caller claims to be with the the Secretary of State's Office and the "South Dakota Integrity Committee" or the "Petition Integrity Commission." Scammers are pressuring people who answer the phone to withdraw their signature from the abortion rights petition. People who receive such calls are encouraged to contact the Secretary of State's Office, Division of Elections, at elections@state.sd.us or by phone at (605) 773-3537.

State law dictates the number of petition signatures required from registered voters to place a measure on the ballot. This year, the requirements are 17,508 signatures for an initiated measure or referred law, and 35,017 for an initiated constitutional amendment.

The grocery tax measure would prohibit the state from collecting sales taxes on "anything sold for human consumption," except alcoholic beverages and prepared food. The measure would wipe out the 4.2% state sales tax on such items, while cities could continue imposing a tax of up to 2%.

Proponents say the measure would help low-income people, but it would also cost the state an estimated \$124 million in lost sales tax revenue during its first year of implementation.

Ballot question status update

Measures placed on the Nov. 5 ballot by the Legislature:

An amendment to the state constitution updating references to certain officeholders and people (replacing male-specific pronouns with neutral language).

An amendment to the state constitution authorizing the state to impose work requirements on certain people who are eligible for expanded Medicaid.

Citizen-proposed measure validated for the ballot, pending potential challenges:

An initiated measure prohibiting state sales taxes on items sold for human consumption, specifically targeting state sales taxes on groceries.

Citizen-proposed measures, pending validation of the required number of petition signatures:

An initiated amendment to the state constitution re-establishing abortion rights.

An initiated amendment to the state constitution establishing open primary elections.
An initiated measure legalizing adult recreational use, possession and distribution of marijuana.
Petition still in circulation:
A proposed referendum of a new law regulating carbon dioxide pipelines.

Canadian wildfire smoke causes air quality alert in South Dakota

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 13, 2024 2:13 PM

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources issued an air quality alert Monday for areas of South Dakota where smoke from wildfires in Canada has settled.

The alert is in effect through Tuesday, or until conditions improve.

Elderly people, young children and people with respiratory problems are the most susceptible to the smoke, the department said, adding that all people should avoid excessive physical exertion and minimize outdoor activities during periods of low visibility caused by the wildfire smoke. People are also encouraged to keep indoor air clean by closing windows and doors.

Air pollution can aggravate heart and cardiovascular disease as well as lung diseases like asthma and COPD. When the air quality is unhealthy, people with these conditions may experience symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing or fatigue. Anyone concerned about health effects related to poor air quality should contact their health care provider.

The department provides air quality data on its website for several locations in South Dakota. Hourly fine particulate matter (PM2.5) values greater than 35 micrograms per cubic meter (ug/m3) are a concern to public health.

COMMENTARY

New audit points to fraud potential in tax credit program for biofuels

ED TIBBETS

A new federal audit has revealed a surprising claim about biofuel tax credits: One third of the credits sampled by investigators lacked the required documentation, meaning the claims should not have been allowed.

The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, or TIGTA, examined compliance procedures at the Internal Revenue Service and said after sampling 124 taxpayers claiming biofuel credits, 42 had not submitted the proper documentation. The erroneous claims in the sample, which included credits for alternative fuels (like liquified petroleum gas) and biodiesel, amounted to more than \$30 million out of the roughly \$252 million in credits claimed in the sample.

TIGTA also made this extraordinary statement: "The IRS does not have the legal authority to deny biofuel tax credits or otherwise enforce the registration requirements on taxpayers who are not eligible to receive the credits at the time a tax return is filed."

Under current law, the IRS could only address these claims after the tax returns are filed and examined and a notice of deficiency is issued. TIGTA recommended the administration develop a legislative proposal to ensure that claimants are entitled to the credit and are properly registered or supply the appropriate documentation along with their tax returns.

Critics of biofuel credits already claim the program is rife with potential for fraud. And even TIGTA, while cautioning the sample in the audit should not be extrapolated to the entire program, said ever since Congress enacted legislation creating biofuel tax credits in 2004, "the IRS has been susceptible to significant fraudulent schemes that have resulted in the payment of erroneous refunds."

Last year, five people were sentenced to prison in a yearslong conspiracy in which the Justice Depart-

ment said they had fraudulently claimed more than \$1 billion in refundable renewable fuel credits. The IRS ultimately paid out more than \$511 million to a Utah biodiesel company that was owned by two of the conspirators.

In Iowa, we tend not to hear much about such things. Our congressional delegation is famous for pumping out press releases touting their advocacy for biofuel credits, but we rarely hear from them when it comes to misuse of the credits. Still, one would think our representatives would be alarmed that documentation is lacking on many of these claims, and that the IRS doesn't even have the legal authority to require the appropriate proof of eligibility be attached to the claimants' tax forms when they are filed.

It seems like a loophole a congressman would rush to fix.

Needless to say, people illegally claiming biofuel credits hurt those in the industry who are playing by the rules. In addition, revelations like those in the TIGTA report give ammunition to critics who would like to see tax credits like these killed.

A recent article on the website of the Cato Institute highlighted the report and said with the new subsidies included in the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, "Congress should expect fraud and ballooning costs to continue." The article concluded by saying: "Every energy tax credit should be repealed. They are economically destructive, have proven enforcement problems, and create unexpected financial risks to federal budgets."

This is no small pot of money. The Inflation Reduction Act extended biofuel tax credits through the end of this year, and the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation estimates taxpayers will claim \$5.6 billion in these credits from 2023 to 2025. TIGTA said with the passage of the law there is an even "greater incentive" to take advantage of these credits and make fraudulent claims.

Subsidies for biofuels have long drawn criticism outside of farm states like Iowa, even as they have enjoyed broad bipartisan political support here. Sure, there are some conservatives who have never liked them for philosophical reasons, but the major parties have generally been supportive.

Lately, however, some on the left in Iowa — activists, if not lawmakers — are taking a more jaundiced eye toward government subsidies that help agriculture. They see big farming operations gobble up much of the money and contribute to our state's deteriorating water quality. And they're irritated Republicans routinely attack programs they support — like SNAP and the federally-funded summer meals program that Gov. Kim Reynolds killed.

Why support farm subsidies, they say, when their priorities, like hungry children, aren't valued by Republican politicians who are supported by those who mostly benefit from these subsidies?

Fraud is in nobody's interests. Obviously, it's not good for taxpayers, nor the people and businesses who have a legal right to claim these biofuel subsidies. It's also not a good thing politically. If the right safeguards aren't put in place, support for these tax credit programs will suffer. And it won't just be among the usual critics who target them. Even those who have historically been on board just might find enough reason to jump ship.

Ed Tibbetts, of Davenport, has covered politics, government and trends for more than three decades in the Quad-Cities. A former reporter and editorial page editor for the Quad-City Times, he now is a freelance journalist who publishes the Along the Mississippi newsletter on Substack. He is a member of the Iowa Writers' Collaborative.

Star witness in Trump trial tells of plot to conceal porn star hush money payments

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 13, 2024 5:44 PM

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's former fixer took the stand in a Manhattan courtroom Monday and told jurors that Trump was well aware of a scheme to hide the repayment of money intended to silence porn star Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

Michael Cohen, the prosecution's star witness, told the jury that he used a home equity loan to pay

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\$130,000 to Daniels' lawyer, trusting a promise from Trump — then a Republican candidate for the presidency — that he'd be repaid.

The criminal trial, the first ever for a former president, centers on Trump's reimbursement to Cohen and whether Trump illegally covered up the hush money as routine legal expenses, a felony in New York.

Trump is charged with 34 felony counts for each alleged falsified business record related to his repayment to Cohen — 11 invoices, 11 checks and 12 ledger entries.

Cohen has already served time in prison for several federal crimes, including campaign finance violations in relation to the hush money deals with women who alleged sexual affairs with Trump. He was sentenced to three years in August 2019, but did not serve the entire sentence.

Cohen's intense loyalty to Trump fizzled after the then-president distanced himself. The former fixer is now an outspoken Trump critic and has published books titled "Disloyal" and "Revenge," and produces a podcast called "Mea Culpa."

Cohen was called to the stand just days after Daniels, an adult film actress and director, described in lurid detail her alleged sexual encounter with Trump in 2006, the affair at the heart of the payments in question.

GOP senators show up as moral support

Journalists at the courthouse reported that Trump, the presumed 2024 Republican presidential candidate, was sleeping at times during the trial Monday and shaking his head in response to some of Cohen's testimony.

New York does not allow recording in the courtroom but provides public transcripts of the proceedings.

Trump was accompanied by Republican U.S. Sens. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama and J.D. Vance of Ohio, considered to be on the short list as Trump's running mate. Republican U.S. Rep. Nicole Malliotakis, of New York, also joined the senators and spoke to media outside the Lower Manhattan courthouse.

Florida's GOP Sen. Rick Scott made an appearance in the courtroom last week.

Prior to Monday's proceedings, Trump delivered remarks to the press with Tuberville and Vance, among others, behind him.

Trump defended his payments to Cohen and blamed the charges on the Biden administration, despite the indictment coming down from the state of New York.

"A legal expense is a legal expense. It's marked down in the book quote 'legal expense,'" Trump told reporters, making air quotes with his hands.

"This all comes from Biden in the White House by the way," he added.

Worries about 'Access Hollywood' tape

Cohen testified that he wanted to protect Trump from further alienating women voters just weeks before the November election, according to reporters at the courthouse.

A story about Trump's alleged extramarital affair with Daniels reaching the public shortly after the revelation of the "Access Hollywood" tape would have been "catastrophic," Cohen said.

The tape, published by the Washington Post just a month before the 2016 presidential election, showed Trump bragging to "Access Hollywood" host Billy Bush that fame allowed him to grab women's genitals.

The tape caused upheaval in the Trump camp as Election Day approached, former Trump spokesperson Hope Hicks testified on May 3.

Prosecutors showed phone records, texts and emails of Cohen's frantic attempts to quash stories of Trump's alleged trysts with Daniels, and with former Playboy model Karen McDougal, according to journalists witnessing the testimony.

Cohen testified for several hours about communications with David Pecker, former National Enquirer publisher; Keith Davidson, the attorney for both Daniels and McDougal; and Hicks — all of whom took the stand during the trial's preceding weeks.

Phone records revealed a five-minute call between Cohen and Trump on Oct. 28, 2016, at 11:48 a.m., during which Cohen told the jury that he assured Trump "that this matter is now completely under control

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and locked down," according to reporters at the courthouse. The phone call occurred on the same date Cohen signed the agreement with Daniels and Davidson.

The jury also saw records of a wire transfer from Cohen's shell company Essential Consultants to Davidson, the purpose of which was to "to pay Stormy Daniels to execute the non-disclosure agreement and to obtain the story, her life rights," Cohen said, according to reporters at the courthouse.

'Legal services rendered'

By late afternoon, Cohen began to testify about Trump's direct knowledge of the plan for reimbursement. The plan was hatched with the Trump Organization's longtime chief financial officer Allen Weisselberg, who is currently in prison for crimes related to Trump's civil fraud trial, which wrapped up in New York in February.

Jurors saw handwritten notes from Weisselberg detailing plans to get the money back to Cohen. This was the second time the jury has seen the notes, as Jeffrey McConney, the Trump Organization's longtime controller, testified to them on May 6.

Just before the court broke for the day, Cohen testified that he and Weisselberg went to Trump's 26th-floor office when Trump was president-elect and received Trump's approval for the reimbursement plan, according to reporters in the courthouse. Cohen said Weisselberg had instructed him to submit a series of invoices over 12 months and to label them "legal services rendered."

The prosecution's direct questioning of Cohen is expected to resume Tuesday.

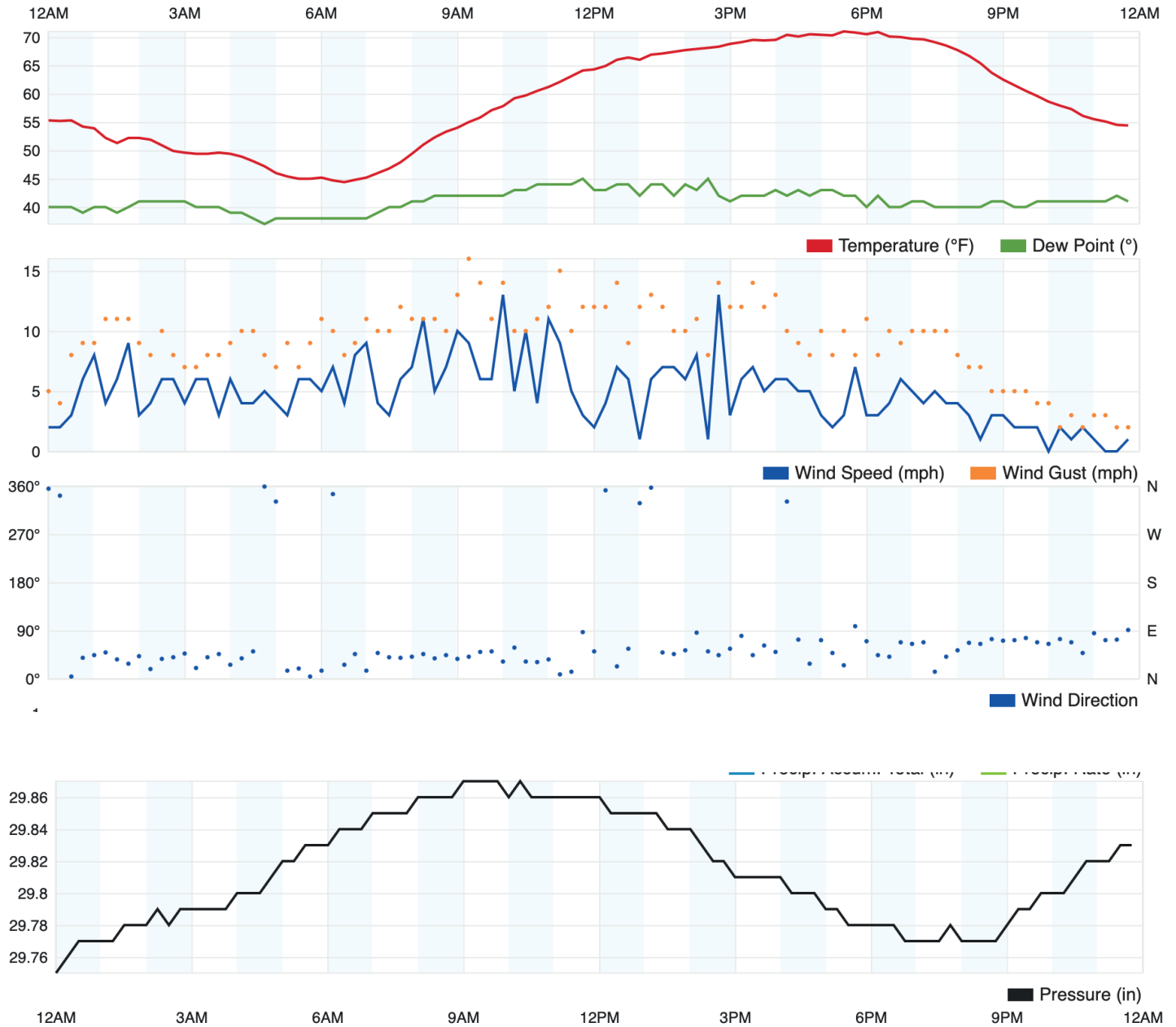
Weisselberg is serving time at Rikers Island after pleading guilty to committing perjury during Trump's civil fraud trial. The former financial officer for Trump had already spent three months at Rikers for tax fraud offenses stemming from the same case.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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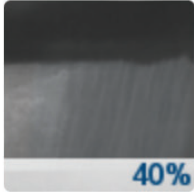
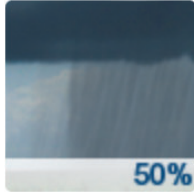

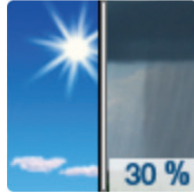
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
High: 75 °F	Low: 53 °F	High: 68 °F	Low: 46 °F	High: 74 °F
Increasing Clouds	Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Slight Chance T-storms then Mostly Cloudy	Sunny then Chance Showers



Rain Chances Returning Today - Wednesday

May 14, 2024
4:15 AM

- **Today:** Highs: 67 to 76°
 - Increasing clouds. Showers and Storms moving in from the northwest (20-65%)
 - There is a Marginal Risk for severe storms over south central SD. Wind gusts of 60 mph is the main severe threat.
- Precipitation ends west to east through Wednesday evening.
- **Percent chance of rainfall for Tues/Wed:**
 - 0.25" or more: 30-60%
 - 0.50" or more: 20-35%

	Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)														5/16 Thu Maximum	
	5/14 Tue						5/15 Wed						5/16 Thu			
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm		12am
Aberdeen	0	0	5	10	15	35	35	40	40	35	35	45	45	10	10	45
Britton	0	0	5	5	10	15	25	30	45	50	50	60	60	20	20	58
Brookings	0	0	0	0	10	25	35	35	35	25	60	60	30	30	60	
Chamberlain	0	0	0	5	30	55	55	35	25	15	15	30	30	5	5	56
Clark	0	0	0	0	5	15	25	35	35	35	35	60	60	20	20	61
Eagle Butte	20	20	30	50	60	50	30	25	20	15	15	15	15	0	0	60
Ellendale	0	5	5	10	20	40	35	45	45	45	45	45	45	10	10	47
Eureka	0	15	20	45	50	55	50	55	40	30	30	30	30	5	5	54
Gettysburg	0	10	15	35	55	55	55	55	35	25	25	25	25	5	5	56
Huron	0	0	0	0	10	30	45	55	35	30	25	45	45	15	15	54
Kennebec	0	0	5	15	45	60	55	40	20	15	15	25	25	5	5	59
McIntosh	20	30	40	55	55	45	35	25	20	15	15	15	15	5	5	54
Milbank	0	0	0	0	0	10	20	25	40	50	50	70	70	30	30	68
Miller	0	0	5	10	25	45	50	60	40	30	30	35	35	5	5	59
Mobridge	15	20	25	50	65	60	45	40	25	20	20	20	20	5	5	63
Murdo	0	5	10	40	65	45	25	30	20	15	15	20	20	5	5	64
Pierre	0	5	10	30	55	55	50	40	25	15	15	20	20	5	5	56
Redfield	0	0	5	5	15	40	45	50	40	30	30	45	45	10	10	50
Sisseton	0	0	0	5	5	10	20	25	45	55	55	65	65	30	30	67
Watertown	0	0	0	0	0	10	20	25	40	45	45	65	65	25	25	63
Webster	0	0	0	5	5	15	25	30	40	50	50	65	65	25	25	64
Wheaton	0	0	0	0	5	5	20	25	40	50	50	65	65	35	35	65



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A storm system crossing the area today will bring a 20 to 65% chance for showers and thunderstorms, mainly along and west of the James River. Chances will spread eastward overnight and into Wednesday. There is a Marginal Risk for severe storms over south central South Dakota.

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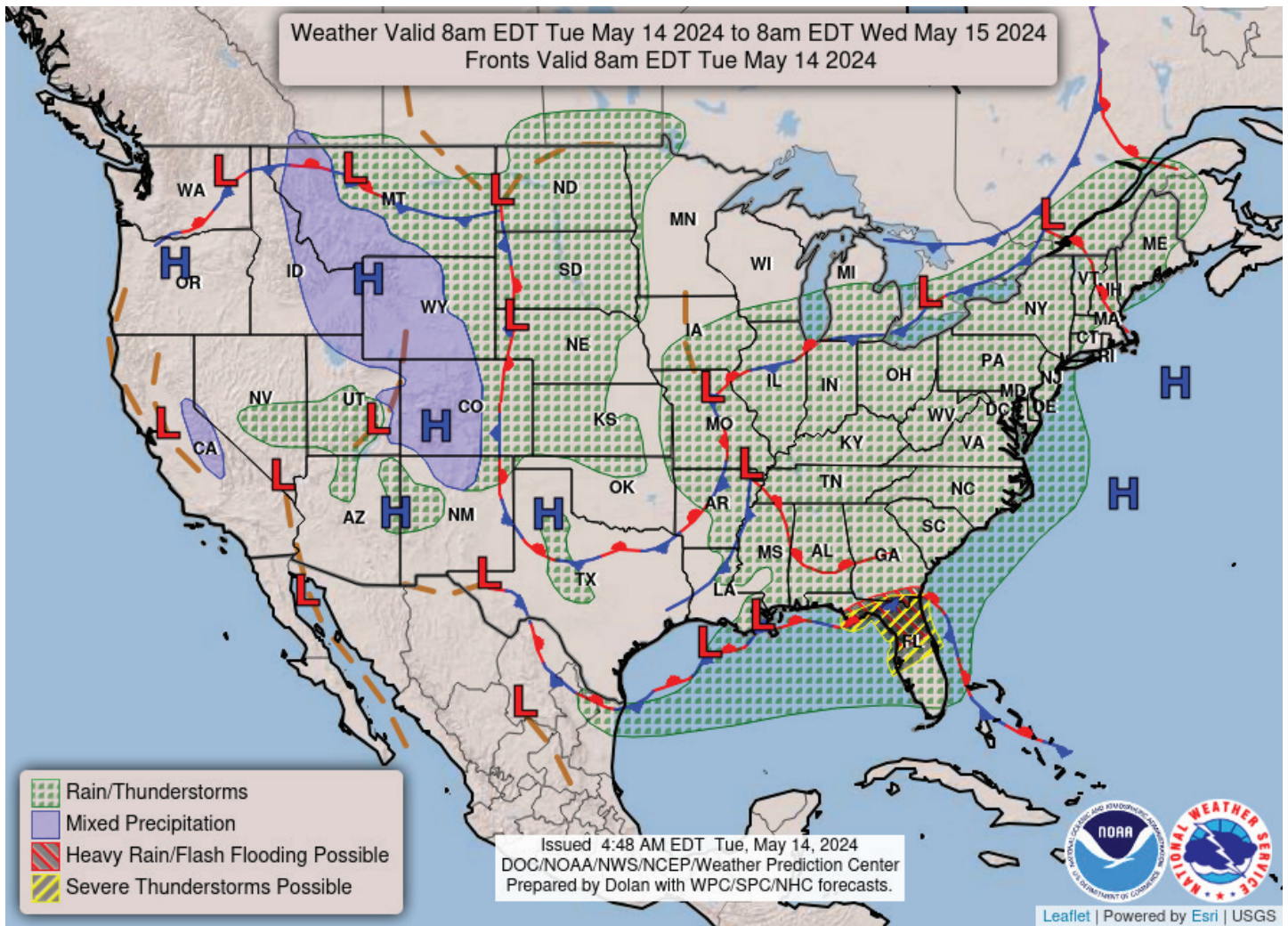
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 71 °F at 5:22 PM
Low Temp: 44 °F at 6:26 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 1:03 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 56 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 2001
Record Low: 24 in 2004
Average High: 70
Average Low: 44
Average Precip in May.: 1.54
Precip to date in May: 0.68
Average Precip to date: 5.51
Precip Year to Date: 5.21
Sunset Tonight: 8:57:09 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:59:13 am



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Today in Weather History

May 14, 1982: Torrential rains pushed the Bad River over the banks at Fort Pierre. One house four miles outside of Fort Pierre had to sandbag. Rainfall amount of 3.83 inches was recorded in Pierre.

1896 - The mercury plunged to 10 degrees below zero at Climax, CO. It was the lowest reading of record for the U.S. during the month of May. (David Ludlum)

1898 - A severe thunderstorm, with some hailstones up to 9.5 inches in circumference, pounded a four mile wide path across Kansas City MO. South-facing windows were broken in nearly every house in central and eastern parts of the city, and several persons were injured. An even larger hailstone was thought to have been found, but it turned out to be a chunk of ice tossed out the window of a building by a prankster. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac) (The Weather Channel)

1923: An early morning violent estimated F5 tornado cut a 45-mile path of destruction through Howard and Mitchell counties in Texas. 23 people lost their lives and 250 sustained injuries. The path width of the tornado reached 1.5 miles at one point, and entire farms were "wiped off the face of the earth." The First Baptist Church in Colorado City, Texas became an emergency hospital for tornado victims.

1987 - Seven cities across the western U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date as unseasonably hot weather made a comeback. The record high of 103 degrees at Sacramento CA was their ninth in eleven days, and also marked a record seven days of 100 degree heat for the month. Their previous record was two days of 100 degree heat in May. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Sunny and dry weather prevailed across the nation. Temperatures warmed into the 80s and lower 90s in the Great Plains Region and the Mississippi Valley. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced severe weather in south central Texas and the Southern High Plains Region during the afternoon and evening hours. Thunderstorms produced softball size hail at Spearman and Hitchcock, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from northwest Texas to western Missouri. Severe thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes, including nine in Texas. Four tornadoes in Texas injured a total of nine persons. Thunderstorms in Texas also produced hail four inches in diameter at Shamrock, and hail four and a half inches in diameter near Guthrie. Thunderstorms over northeastern Kansas produced more than seven inches of rain in Chautauqua County between 9 PM and midnight. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

KNOWING AND DOING

When Albert Einstein was a child, he enjoyed playing with a compass. When the Wright Brothers were children, they spent hours with a toy rubber-band-driven helicopter trying to make it fly. Their curiosity in objects gave them a desire to learn that lasted a lifetime and benefited the world.

Those who have studied the childhood of famous figures in history have come to an interesting conclusion: Many young children who become interested in some particular object make it a part of their life's interest and accomplishments.

What is true about the development of children is also true about the growth of Christians. Said Paul to young Timothy, "You have been taught the Holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus."

As parents we give our children many gifts. But rarely do we pause to think of the gift that these gifts will give them. God planted in all children the gift of curiosity. So when we give our children anything, we must always remember that gifts have consequences. They add "something" to a child's life.

Paul commended the parents of Timothy for giving him the gift of God's Word when he was a child. It made a difference in his life: "wisdom to receive salvation!"

Prayer: We pray, Heavenly Father, for insight to give our children those gifts that will lead them to Your grace, mercy and salvation that come from trusting You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: You have been taught the Holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:15



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 17 Hrs 19 Mins 46
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.13.24

1 15 16 26 47 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,400,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 34
DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.13.24

13 16 20 39 43 11

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 49 Mins 45
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.11.24

7 20 23 28 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$96,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 49
DRAW: Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.13.24

6 14 21 58 69 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 18
DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.13.24

5 14 29 38 66 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$59,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 18
DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Jets sign 1st-rounder Olu Fashanu to 4-year, \$20.51 million deal. Offensive tackle was No. 11 pick

By DENNIS WASZAK Jr. AP Pro Football Writer

The New York Jets signed first-round draft pick Olu Fashanu to a four-year, \$20.51 million contract on Monday.

The deal with the former Penn State offensive tackle is fully guaranteed and includes a fifth-year team option. Fashanu was the 11th overall pick last month after the Jets traded down one spot with the Minnesota Vikings.

The 6-foot-6, 312-pound Fashanu gives the Jets depth on their revamped offensive line, added protection for quarterback Aaron Rodgers and a potential future starter.

"The young man is only 21 years old and he hasn't even scratched the surface," coach Robert Saleh said shortly after Fashanu was drafted. "And he is walking into a situation where he is going to learn exactly what it takes to last in this league."

Fashanu was an Associated Press first-team All-America selection and the Big Ten offensive lineman of the year last season. He was a two-year starter at left tackle for the Nittany Lions and allowed only one sack in his entire college career.

He's expected to back up veteran Tyron Smith this season after the former Dallas Cowboys star signed a one-year deal with the Jets worth up to \$20 million.

"I feel like I'm kind of living like a fairytale or something like that," Fashanu said after he was drafted. "He was the first player I ever watched, watching film as a tackle. I didn't start playing football until I was a freshman in high school, and him at the time, he was the absolute standard at left tackle.

"So, for me, getting the opportunity to watch years upon years of film of him and now having this great opportunity to learn with him, learn any bits or tips of advice he has for me, what more could I ask for?"

Fashanu was limited during rookie minicamp earlier this month while still recovering from a strained quadriceps suffered running the 40-yard dash at the NFL combine in Indianapolis in February, but is expected to be healthy for the start of training camp in July.

NOTES: The Jets also announced the signings of RB Braelon Allen, a fourth-rounder from Wisconsin; their three fifth-round picks — QB Jordan Travis from Florida State, RB Isaiah Davis from South Dakota State and CB Qwan'tez Stiggers, who's believed to be the first CFL player drafted by an NFL team without any college playing experience — and seventh-rounder Jaylen Key, a safety from Alabama who was this year's "Mr. Irrelevant" as the final pick in the draft. ... New York's only unsigned pick is third-round WR Malachi Corley.

Canadian wildfire smoke chokes Upper Midwest for second straight year

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Smoke from Canadian wildfires has prompted health warnings across the Upper Midwest and Montana for the second year in a row.

Fires raging in British Columbia and Alberta have filled the skies with haze over parts of Montana, the Dakotas, Minnesota and Wisconsin on Sunday, lingering into Monday morning.

Unhealthy air pollution levels mean everyone in Minnesota should stay indoors and avoid heavy exertion outdoors, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency said in its first statewide air quality alert of the season Sunday. Scheduled to end at noon Monday, the advisory was extended until 11 p.m. for southern Min-

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nesota including the Twin Cities metro area.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources said the air quality was unhealthy for sensitive people in multiple counties across the state's northern two-thirds on Sunday. Set to end at noon Monday, the advisories were kept in place until midnight.

Michigan's Upper Peninsula was also under hazy skies Monday. Some people reported the smell of smoke, said Joe Phillips, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Marquette, Michigan.

Prevailing winds could send the smoke south and east as far as Iowa and Chicago, leaving skies looking milky by late Tuesday or early Wednesday, said Rafal Ogorek, a meteorologist in the National Weather Service's Chicago office. Most of the smoke was expected to linger over Minnesota, Wisconsin and northern Michigan, hanging between a mile (1.6 kilometers) and 2 miles (3 kilometers) above the ground.

A record number of wildfires in 2023 forced more than 235,000 people across Canada to evacuate and sent thick smoke into parts of the U.S., prompting hazy skies and health advisories in multiple U.S. cities.

There were 200 fires burning in Canada by mid-May last year, compared with 90 fires as of this Sunday, said Dave Phillips, senior climatologist at Environment and Climate Change Canada, a government environmental protection agency. A fire raging near Fort Nelson in British Columbia's far northeastern corner has forced evacuations.

The chances of more wildfires this summer appear high. Lightning strikes could trigger fires that quickly spread in forests suffering intense drought in northeastern British Columbia, northwestern Alberta and the southern Northwest Territories, according the Canadian National Wildland Fire Situation report.

An analysis by World Weather Attribution, an initiative that aims to quickly evaluate the role of climate change in the aftermath of extreme weather events, found climate change more than doubled the chances of hot, dry weather that helped fuel the fire season.

Loretta Mickley, co-leader of Harvard University's Atmospheric Chemistry Modeling Group, said her group did papers in 2013 and 2015 looking at fire activity and ecosystems with an eye toward the future. She said increasing fire activity is consistent with a warming climate.

Drought conditions look to be less severe in Ontario and Quebec in the coming months, but temperatures are expected to be higher than normal, and it's difficult to predict if the moisture will cancel out the heat, she said.

"What will happen this summer? It depends on what the meteorology is like today and what happened over the winter," she said. "In some regions a lot of rain in winter led to abundant vegetation. If that is followed by dryness or a drought then all that vegetation is ready to be burnt up and provide fuel to the fires."

If Canada does see a repeat of last year's fire season, it's far from clear if the U.S. will get haze on the scale of 2023. Fires in Quebec and Ontario produced most of the smoke that enveloped The Eastern U.S. — but those regions rarely see such large fires. Instead of pushing the smoke east the wind drove it south, covering the eastern quarter of the U.S. from the Mississippi River Valley to Manhattan with haze.

"It was an unfortunate, odd kind of weather pattern where you had winds encouraging that air to come south and then east," said Phillips, of the Canadian environmental protection agency. "And it was just a shock to meteorologists, to the world and to everyone who had to endure it ... I think it will be a fraction of a concern as it was last year."

Biden hiking tariffs on Chinese EVs, solar cells, steel, aluminum — adding to tensions with Beijing

By JOSH BOAK, FATIMA HUSSEIN, PAUL WISEMAN and DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration announced plans to slap new tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, advanced batteries, solar cells, steel, aluminum and medical equipment — an election-year move that's likely to increase friction between the world's two largest economies.

The tariffs come in the middle of a heated campaign between President Joe Biden and his Republican predecessor, Donald Trump, in which both candidates are vying to show who's tougher on China.

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The tariffs are unlikely to have much of an inflationary impact because of how they're structured. Administration officials said they think the tariffs won't escalate tensions with China, yet they expect that China will explore ways to respond to the new taxes on their products. It's uncertain what the long-term impact on prices could be if the tariffs contribute to a wider trade dispute.

The tariffs are to be phased in over the next three years, with those that take effect in 2024 covering EVs, solar cells, syringes, needles, steel and aluminum and more. There are currently very few EVs from China in the U.S., but officials worry that low-priced models made possible by Chinese government subsidies could soon start flooding the U.S. market.

Chinese firms can sell EVs for as little as \$12,000. Their solar cell plants and steel and aluminum mills have enough capacity to meet much of the world's demand, with Chinese officials arguing that their production keeps prices low and would aid a transition to the green economy.

Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, said the tariffs will raise the cost of select Chinese goods and help thwart Beijing's efforts to dominate the market for emerging technologies in ways that pose risks to U.S. national security and economic stability.

"China is simply too big to play by its own rules," Brainard told reporters on a Monday call previewing the announcement.

Administration officials have stressed that the decision on tariffs was made independently of November's presidential election. But Brainard noted in her remarks that the tariffs would help workers in Pennsylvania and Michigan, two of the battleground states that will decide who wins the election.

Under the findings of a four-year review on trade with China, the tax rate on imported Chinese EVs is to rise to 102.5% this year, up from total levels of 27.5%. The review was undertaken under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which allows the government to retaliate against trade practices deemed unfair or in violation of global standards.

Under the 301 guidelines, the tariff rate is to double to 50% on solar cell imports this year. Tariffs on certain Chinese steel and aluminum products will climb to 25% this year. Computer chip tariffs will double to 50% by 2025.

For lithium-ion EV batteries, tariffs will rise from 7.5% to 25% in 2024. But for non-EV batteries of the same type, the tariff increase will be implemented in 2026. There are also higher tariffs on ship-to-shore cranes, critical minerals and medical products.

The new tariffs, at least initially, are largely symbolic since they will apply to only about \$18 billion in imports. A new analysis by Oxford Economics estimates that the tariffs — which would be implemented over time — will have a barely noticeable impact on inflation by pushing up inflation by just 0.01%.

Still, Chinese officials voiced their frustration with the move.

Chinese embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu rejected U.S. claims that Beijing has encouraged excess factory capacity in order to dominate global trade in these goods. He also said that more expensive EVs and solar panels will make it more difficult to transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

"Despite its professed willingness to strengthen cooperation with China on climate change, the U.S. has been hyping up the so-called 'overcapacity' in China's new energy sector and vowing to impose additional tariff hikes on Chinese electrical vehicles and solar products," Liu said. "This is self-defeating."

The Chinese economy has been slowed by the collapse of the country's real estate market and past pandemic lockdowns, prompting Chinese President Xi Jinping to try to jumpstart growth by ramping up production of EVs and other products, making more than the Chinese market can absorb.

This strategy further exacerbates tensions with a U.S. government that claims it's determined to strengthen its own manufacturing to compete with China, yet avoid a larger conflict.

"China's factory-led recovery and weak consumption growth, which are translating into excess capacity and an aggressive search for foreign markets, in tandem with the looming U.S. election season add up to a perfect recipe for escalating U.S. trade frictions with China," said Eswar Prasad, professor of trade policy at Cornell University.

China's production of EVs and other green products are "coming to be seen by the U.S. as a zero-sum

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game in which China plays the spoiler that could hamper a U.S. manufacturing revival," Prasad said.

The Europeans are worried, too. The EU launched an investigation last fall into Chinese subsidies and could impose an import tax on Chinese EVs.

After Xi's visit to France last week, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned that government-subsidized Chinese EVs and steel "are flooding the European market. ... The world cannot absorb China's surplus production. Therefore, I have encouraged the Chinese government to address these structural overcapacities."

The Biden administration views China with subsidies of its own manufacturing as trying to globally control the EV and clean energy sectors, whereas it says its own industrial support is geared toward ensuring domestic supplies to help meet U.S. demand.

"We do not seek to have global domination of manufacturing in these sectors, but we believe because these are strategic industries and for the sake of resilience of our supply chains, that we want to make sure that we have healthy and active firms," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told reporters Monday.

The tensions go far beyond a trade dispute to deeper questions about who leads the world economy as a seemingly indispensable nation. China's policies could make the world more dependent on its factories, possibly giving it greater leverage in geopolitics. At the same time, the United States says it's seeking for countries to operate by the same standards so that competition can be fair.

For its part, China maintains that the tariffs are in violation of the global trade rules that the United States originally helped establish through the World Trade Organization.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said Friday that the new tariffs compounded the problems caused by tariffs that the Trump administration had previously put on Chinese goods, which Biden has kept.

"Instead of ending those wrong practices, the U.S. continues to politicize trade issues, abuse the so-called review process of Section 301 tariffs and plan tariff hikes," he said. "This will just double the U.S.'s fault."

Those questions are at the heart of November's presidential election, with a bitterly divided electorate seemingly united by the idea of getting tough with China. Biden and Trump have overlapping but different strategies.

Biden sees targeted tariffs as needed to defend key industries and workers, while Trump has threatened broad 10% tariffs against all imports from rivals and allies alike.

Biden has staked his presidential legacy on the U.S. pulling ahead of China with its own government investments in factories to make EVs, computer chips and other advanced technologies.

"So far, we've created \$866 billion in private-sector investment nationwide — almost a trillion dollars — historic amounts in such a short time," Biden said last week in Wisconsin. "And that's literally creating hundreds of thousands of jobs."

Trump tells his supporters that America is falling further behind China by not betting on oil to keep powering the economy, despite its climate change risks. The former president may believe that tariffs can change Chinese behavior, but he believes that the U.S. will be reliant on China for EV components and solar cells.

"Joe Biden's economic plan is to make China rich and America poor," he said at a rally earlier this month in Wisconsin.

Billboard that collapsed in Mumbai storms killed at least 14 and injured 75

MUMBAI, India (AP) — A large billboard that collapsed amid raging thunderstorms in Mumbai killed at least 14 people and injured 75 others, reports said on Tuesday.

A rescue operation was continuing Tuesday morning, and authorities told the Press Trust of India news agency that 89 people had been rescued since the incident occurred on Monday evening.

The rains, accompanied by high winds, caused the 30-meter-tall (100-foot-tall) billboard to fall onto a gas station in the suburb of Ghatkopar. Videos on social media and television showed the billboard shaking amid heavy winds before giving way. It collapsed onto several cars parked in the gas station, flattening and crushing them to the ground.

On Monday night, rescuers were rummaging through the wreckage to look for bodies as they used heavy equipment to cut through the metal girders attached to the billboard.

Rescue workers continued to clear the area on Tuesday, which still had mangled cars and debris.

A city official told PTI that more than 125 rescuers were on site, including gas cutter teams, using cranes to clear the wreckage.

Police are investigating the incident and say the billboard was illegally installed, officials told PTI.

The officials said 32 of the injured people had already been discharged from the hospital.

India has heavy rain and severe floods during the monsoon season between June and September that brings most of its annual rainfall. The rain is crucial for agriculture but often causes extensive damage.

Georgian parliament holds 3rd and final reading of divisive bill on foreign influence

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Georgia's parliament on Tuesday began the third and final reading of a divisive bill that sparked weeks of mass protests, with critics seeing it as a threat to democratic freedoms and the country's aspirations to join the European Union.

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.

A large crowd of demonstrators gathered on Tuesday morning in front of the parliament, amid a heavy presence of riot police, to protest the bill once again, as lawmakers were discussing it in the lead-up to a vote. Over the weekend, thousands poured into the streets of the Georgian capital Tbilisi, and many stayed in front of the parliament until Monday morning.

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.

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.

European Council President Charles Michel on Tuesday spoke of Georgia in Copenhagen at a conference on democracy, and said that "if they want to join the EU, they have to respect the fundamental principles of the rule of law and the democratic principles."

The Latest | More than half a million people flee fighting in Rafah and northern Gaza, UN says

By The Associated Press undefined

More than half a million Palestinians have been displaced in recent days by escalating Israeli military operations in southern and northern Gaza, the United Nations says.

Around 450,000 Palestinians were driven out of Rafah in Gaza's south over the past week, the United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees said Tuesday. There were roughly 1.3 million people sheltering in Rafah before Israel began pushing into the city, which Israel says is the last Hamas stronghold.

Israeli forces are also battling Hamas militants in northern Gaza, where the army had launched major operations earlier in the war. The army's evacuation orders issued Saturday have displaced around 100,000 people so far, U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters Monday.

Palestinian officials say Israeli strikes in central Gaza killed at least 12 people overnight and into Tuesday.

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No food has entered the two main border crossings in southern Gaza for the past week. Some 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza face catastrophic levels of hunger, on the brink of starvation, and a "full-blown famine" is taking place in the north, according to the U.N.

Seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground operations in Gaza have killed more than 35,000 people, most of them women and children, according to local health officials.

The war began Oct. 7 when Hamas attacked southern Israel, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting about 250 others. Israel says militants still hold around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Currently:

- Misery deepens in Gaza's Rafah as Israeli troops press operation.
- With the shock of Oct. 7 still raw, sadness and anger grip Israel on its Memorial Day.
- Pro-Palestinian protests dwindle on U.S. campuses, as some college graduations are marked by defiant acts.
- Blinken delivers some of the U.S.'s strongest public criticism yet of Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza.
- Palestinian band escapes horrors of war, but its members' futures remain uncertain.

Here's the latest:

NEARLY 450,000 PEOPLE HAVE FLED FROM RAFAH, UN SAYS

JERUSALEM — The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees says nearly 450,000 people have fled from Gaza's southern city of Rafah since Israel launched an incursion there last week.

In a post on the social platform X on Tuesday, UNRWA said "people face constant exhaustion, hunger and fear. Nowhere is safe. An immediate #ceasefire is the only hope."

The U.N. said Monday that another 100,000 people have been displaced in northern Gaza. Israel has ordered new evacuations in the north as it battles a resurgent Hamas in areas that were heavily bombed and cleared by ground troops earlier in the war.

That would mean that nearly a quarter of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced in just the last week, more than seven months into the Israel-Hamas war.

The fighting in Rafah has made the two main border crossings into southern Gaza largely inaccessible, while newly opened crossings in the north only allow in a trickle of aid.

Humanitarian organizations say they are struggling to provide dwindling supplies of food, tents and blankets to the large numbers of newly displaced.

Israel has portrayed Rafah as Hamas' last stronghold in Gaza and has said it must operate there in order to defeat the group and return scores of hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war.

Before the incursion began last week, Rafah was housing some 1.3 million Palestinians, most of whom had fled fighting elsewhere.

QATAR PM PLEDGES TO CONTINUE MEDIATING BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS AND SAYS 'A CEASE-FIRE IS REQUIRED NOW'

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Qatar's prime minister said Tuesday that Doha would continue in its work as a mediator between Israel and Hamas amid the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip and that "a cease-fire is required now."

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who also serves as Qatar's foreign minister, acknowledged that there had been a "reassessment" over its role as a mediator in recent weeks after facing widespread criticism by Israeli media outlets and politicians there. However, he said Qatar would continue in its work, though he noted that the country "didn't want to be used or abused as a mediator."

"We need to stop the killing," Sheikh Mohammed said. "We need to stop (the) atrocities that's happening and, of course, negotiate a deal for the hostages."

However, he added: "It's at the hands of the parties at the end of the day." He described the Israeli side as having "no clarity" over how to stop the war as it continued to squeeze in around Rafah, the city in the southern part of the Gaza Strip where many have fled amid the 7-month war there.

Sheikh Mohammed's remarks also suggested Hamas would continue to be based out of Doha. The militant group has had a political office there since 2012. Both Qatar and Egypt have served as mediators in

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negotiations over the war, which saw one cease-fire in November that saw Israeli hostages released in exchange for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

Sheikh Mohammed spoke at the Qatar Economic Forum, put on by the Bloomberg news agency.

Associated Press writer Jon Gambrell contributed.

RIGHTS GROUP SAYS ISRAELI MILITARY HAS CARRIED OUT AT LEAST 8 STRIKES ON AID WORKERS AND THEIR CONVOYS

JERUSALEM — Human Rights Watch says Israeli forces have carried out at least eight strikes on aid workers and their convoys, killing at least 15 people, including two children, since the start of the war in Gaza.

The New York-based rights group said in a report Tuesday that in each case the aid groups had provided their coordinates to Israeli authorities to ensure their safety. It says no advance warning was given before the strikes, which also wounded at least 16 people.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says over 250 aid workers have been killed since the start of the war, mostly Palestinian employees of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, the main provider in the territory.

The Israeli military says it is investigating after a member of a U.N. security team was killed while driving in the southern city of Rafah on Monday. The military said the shooting occurred in an "active combat zone" and that it had not been informed of the vehicle's route.

The U.N. said one of its international staff was killed and another wounded on Monday when their clearly-marked U.N. vehicle was fired upon. It did not say who was responsible or provide the nationalities of the staffers.

Human Rights Watch says the eight incidents it documented "reveal fundamental flaws with the so-called deconfliction system, meant to protect aid workers and allow them to safely deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance in Gaza."

Belkis Wille, associate crisis, conflict, and arms director at Human Rights Watch, said "Israel's allies need to recognize that these attacks that have killed aid workers have happened over and over again, and they need to stop."

Israel came under heavy criticism last month after launching a series of strikes that killed seven aid workers with World Central Kitchen, the charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés.

Israel acknowledged its forces had made a mistake in that case. It later said it had dismissed two officers and reprimanded three more for mishandling critical information and violating the army's rules of engagement.

Aid organizations say their ability to deliver life-saving assistance to Gaza's 2.3 million people has been hampered by Israeli restrictions, ongoing fighting and the difficulty of coordinating movements with the Israeli military. The U.N. says severe hunger is widespread in Gaza and that the northern part of the territory is experiencing "full-blown famine."

Human Rights Watch says Israel did not respond to a request for information on the strikes sent on May 1. The military did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

ISRAELI STRIKES IN CENTRAL GAZA KILL AT LEAST 12 OVERNIGHT, PALESTINIAN OFFICIALS SAY
JERUSALEM — Palestinian officials say Israeli strikes in central Gaza killed at least 12 people overnight and into Tuesday.

The Civil Defense says its first responders recovered eight bodies from a three-story house that was flattened in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp. Four of the dead, including two men in their 60s and two women, were brought to a nearby hospital.

Another strike hit a caravan used by the Hamas-run police in a school-turned shelter in Nuseirat, killing at least four police officers.

The nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital recorded the deaths.

Israel has repeatedly targeted Gaza's police force as part of its campaign to dismantle the group's military and governing abilities. The police in turn have largely vanished from the streets, contributing to a

breakdown in law and order that has hindered humanitarian aid operations.

Gaza's Health Ministry says a total of 82 people killed in Israeli strikes have been brought to hospitals in Gaza in the last 24 hours, as well as 234 wounded people.

It says a total of 35,173 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, which was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel. The ministry does not differentiate between fighters and civilians in its tallies.

The Israeli military says it has killed over 13,000 militants, without providing evidence.

WHITE HOUSE ADVISER SAYS ISRAEL RISKS AN ENDLESS COUNTERINSURGENCY IN GAZA

WASHINGTON — White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Monday that the U.S. administration has expressed concerns to Israeli officials about becoming "mired in a counterinsurgency campaign that never ends" as Israel's War Cabinet remains focused on carrying out a major operation the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

The comments from a top adviser to President Joe Biden came a day after Secretary of State Antony Blinken cautioned that Israel could be left "holding the bag" on an enduring insurgency in post-war Gaza.

"Look, we have painful experience in counterinsurgency campaigns fighting terrorists in urban environments, in populated areas," said Sullivan, referring to long U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "And we know that it is not as simple as executing a military operation and calling it a day."

Sullivan added that, "One of the risks of engaging in any kind of counterinsurgency campaign is the ability of the terrorist group to attract more recruits and more followers as time goes on."

Sullivan said he spoke to his Israeli and Egyptian counterparts on Sunday about redoubling diplomatic efforts on a hostage-for-truce negotiations, and that U.S. officials would have further conversations with the Israelis in the coming days about how Israel can refine its plan to go after Hamas militants in Rafah while lessening the risk to Palestinian civilians.

He also pushed back against growing criticism from around the globe — as well as American critics of Israel's prosecution of the war — who say Israeli forces are committing a genocide against the Palestinians.

Egypt, a key U.S. ally, said it would join South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, which accuses Israel of violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention.

"I can't say that it's helpful to the discussions between Egypt and Israel to try to sort through assistance and access issues," Sullivan said of the move announced Sunday by Cairo, which along with Qatar is a mediator in the cease-fire talks.

The top United Nations court has concluded there is a "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza — a charge Israel strongly denies.

Blinken visits Ukraine to tout US support for Kyiv's fight against Russia's advances

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday in an unannounced diplomatic mission to reassure Ukraine that it has American support as it struggles to defend against increasingly intense Russian attacks.

"We know this is a challenging time," Blinken said in the Ukrainian capital where he met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The visit comes less than a month after Congress approved a long-delayed foreign assistance package that sets aside \$60 billion in aid for Ukraine, much of which will go toward replenishing badly depleted artillery and air defense systems.

Assistance from the new package "is now on the way," Blinken said, adding that some of it has already arrived in Ukraine.

He said the aid would "make a real difference" on the battlefield where Russia's army has in some areas seized the initiative against Kyiv's depleted forces.

On his fourth trip to Kyiv since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Blinken will underscore the

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Biden administration's commitment to Ukraine's defense and long-term security, U.S. officials said. They noted that since President Joe Biden signed the aid package late last month, the administration has already announced \$1.4 billion in short-term military assistance and \$6 billion in longer-term support.

It is "trying to really accelerate the tempo" of U.S. weapon shipments to Ukraine, national security adviser Jake Sullivan said.

"What I am going to suggest is that the level of intensity being exhibited right now in terms of moving stuff is at a 10 out of 10," Sullivan told reporters at a White House briefing Monday.

Artillery, air defense interceptors and long-range ballistic missiles have already been delivered, some of them already to the front lines, said a senior U.S. official traveling with the secretary on an overnight train from Poland.

Blinken will "send a strong signal of reassurance" to Ukrainian leaders and civil society figures he will meet during his two-day visit, said the official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity ahead of Blinken's meetings.

In a statement released after Blinken's arrival, the State Department said he would hold talks with Zelenskyy and other top Ukrainian officials "to discuss battlefield updates, the impact of new U.S. security and economic assistance, long-term security and other commitments, and ongoing work to bolster Ukraine's economic recovery."

Delays in U.S. assistance, particularly since Israel's war with Hamas began to preoccupy top administration officials, triggered deep concerns in Kyiv and Europe. Blinken, for example, has visited the Middle East seven times since the Gaza conflict began in October. His last trip to Kyiv was in September.

The U.S. official added that Blinken also would give a speech later Tuesday extolling Ukraine's "strategic successes" in the war. It is intended to complement a Blinken address last year in Helsinki, Finland, deriding Russian President Vladimir Putin for Moscow's strategic failures in launching the war.

Since the Helsinki speech, however, Russia has intensified its attacks, most noticeably as the U.S. House sat on the aid package for months without action, forcing a suspension in the provision of most U.S. assistance. Those attacks have increased in recent weeks as Russia has sought to take advantage of Ukrainian shortages in manpower and weapons while the new assistance is in transit.

Top Biden administration officials and Ukrainian national security officials held a call Monday "about the situation on the front, about the capabilities that they are most in need of, and a real triage effort to say, 'Get us this stuff this fast so that we can be in a position to effectively defend against the Russian onslaught,'" Sullivan said.

Zelenskyy said over the weekend that "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.

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, Ukrainian commanders and 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 and a drive into the eastern Donetsk region come after months when the roughly 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.

Zelenskyy told Blinken that Ukraine urgently needs two Patriot air defense systems to protect Kharkiv.

The senior U.S. official said despite some recent setbacks, Ukraine could still claim significant victories. Those include reclaiming some 50% of the territory Russian forces took in the early months of the war, boosting its economic standing and improving transportation and trade links, not least through military successes in the Black Sea.

The official acknowledged that Ukraine faces "a tough fight" and is "under tremendous pressure" but argued that Ukrainians "will become increasingly more confident" as the new U.S. and other Western assistance begins to surge.

Blinken said Sunday that there was "no doubt" the monthslong delay in aid caused problems but that "we are doing everything we can to rush this assistance out there."

"It's a challenging moment," he told CBS' "Face the Nation." "We are not going anywhere, and neither are more than some 50 countries that are supporting Ukraine. That will continue, and if Putin thinks he can outlast Ukraine, outlast its supporters, he's wrong."

Dispute over transgender woman admitted to Wyoming sorority to be argued before appeal judges

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A U.S. appeals court in Denver is set to hear arguments Tuesday in a lawsuit brought by six members of a University of Wyoming sorority who are challenging the admission of a transgender woman into their local chapter.

A judge in Wyoming threw out the lawsuit last year, ruling that he could not override how the private, voluntary organization defined a woman and order that she not belong.

The case at Wyoming's only four-year public university has drawn widespread attention as transgender people fight for more acceptance in schools, athletics, workplaces and elsewhere, while others push back.

In their lawsuit, six members of the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority chapter challenge Artemis Langford's admission by casting doubt on whether sorority rules allowed a transgender woman.

The lawsuit and appeal describe in detail how Langford's presence made the women feel uncomfortable in the sorority house in Laramie, Wyoming, yet sorority leaders overrode their concerns after a vote by the local chapter members to admit Langford.

Last summer, Wyoming U.S. District Court Judge Alan Johnson in Cheyenne sided with the sorority and Langford by ruling that sorority bylaws don't define who's a woman.

Filing in the three-judge U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver, attorneys for the six sorority sisters continue to argue that sorority leaders have ignored sorority bylaws that they contend shouldn't allow transgender women to be members.

Johnson's ruling gave too much deference to sorority leaders in allowing them to define a woman under membership requirements, the sorority sisters argue on appeal.

Unlike in the original lawsuit, Langford is not included in the appeal. The national Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and its president, Mary Pat Rooney, are the current defendants.

The appeal brings fresh attention to transgender college students as the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority sisters in the lawsuit, their attorney and others plan a "save sisterhood" rally at the courthouse before the hearing.

Michael Cohen to face bruising cross-examination by Trump's lawyers

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, ERIC TUCKER, MICHELLE L. PRICE and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's fixer-turned-foe awaits a bruising round of questioning from the former president's lawyers on Tuesday after testimony that linked the celebrity client to all aspects of a hush money scheme that prosecutors say was aimed at stifling stories that threatened his 2016 campaign.

Michael Cohen returns to the stand Tuesday as the prosecution's star witness, where a day earlier he delivered matter-of-fact testimony that went to the heart of the former president's trial.

"Everything required Mr. Trump's sign-off," Cohen said.

He placed Trump at the center of the hush money scheme, saying he had promised to reimburse money the lawyer had fronted for the payments and was constantly apprised of the behind-the-scenes efforts to bury stories feared to be harmful to the campaign.

"We need to stop this from getting out," Cohen quoted Trump as telling him in reference to porn actor Stormy Daniels' account of a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier. The then-candidate was especially anxious about how the story would affect his standing with female voters.

A similar episode occurred when Cohen alerted Trump that a Playboy model was alleging that she and

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Trump had an extramarital affair. "Make sure it doesn't get released," was Cohen's message to Trump, the lawyer said. The woman, Karen McDougal, was paid \$150,000 in an arrangement that was made after Trump received a "complete and total update on everything that transpired."

"What I was doing, I was doing at the direction of and benefit of Mr. Trump," Cohen testified.

Trump has pleaded not guilty and has denied both sexual encounters.

Cohen is by far the prosecution's most important witness, and though his testimony lacked the electricity that defined Daniels' turn on the stand, he nonetheless linked Trump directly to the payments and helped illuminate some of the drier evidence such as text messages and phone logs that jurors had already seen.

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 prosecutors' reliance on a witness with such a checkered past — Cohen pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the payments — also carries sizable risks with a jury and could be a boon to Trump politically as he fundraises off his legal woes and paints the case as the product of a tainted criminal justice system.

The men, once so close that Cohen boasted that he would "take a bullet" for Trump, had no visible interaction inside the courtroom. The sedate atmosphere was a marked contrast from their last courtroom faceoff in October, when Trump walked out of the courtroom after his lawyer finished questioning Cohen during his civil fraud trial.

This time around, Trump sat at the defense table with his eyes closed for long stretches of testimony as Cohen recounted his decade-long career as a senior Trump Organization executive, doing work that by his own admission sometimes involved lying and bullying others on his boss's behalf.

Trump's lawyers will get their chance to begin questioning Cohen as early as Tuesday, where they're expected to attack his credibility — he was disbarred, went to prison and separately pleaded guilty to lying about a Moscow real estate project on Trump's behalf — and cast him as a vindictive, agenda-driven witness. The defense told jurors during opening statements that he's an "admitted liar" with an "obsession to get President Trump."

Prosecutors aim to blunt those attacks by acknowledging Cohen's past crimes to jurors and by relying on other witnesses whose accounts, they hope, will buttress his testimony.

Jurors had previously heard from others about the tabloid industry practice of "catch-and-kill," in which rights to a story are purchased so that it can then be quashed. But Cohen's testimony is crucial to prosecutors because of his direct communication with the then-candidate about embarrassing stories he was scrambling to suppress.

Cohen also matters because the reimbursements he received from a \$130,000 hush money payment to Daniels, which prosecutors say was meant to buy her silence in advance of the election, form the basis of 34 felony counts charging Trump with falsifying business records. Prosecutors say the reimbursements were logged, falsely, as legal expenses to conceal the payments' true purpose.

To establish Trump's intimate familiarity with the payments, Cohen told jurors under questioning that Trump had promised to reimburse him. The two men even discussed with Allen Weisselberg, a former Trump Organization chief financial officer, how the reimbursements would be paid as legal services over monthly installments, Cohen testified.

He said Trump even sought to delay finalizing the Daniels transaction until after Election Day so he wouldn't have to pay her.

"Because," Cohen testified, "after the election it wouldn't matter" to Trump.

Cohen also gave jurors an insider account of his negotiations with David Pecker, the then-publisher of the National Enquirer, who was such a close Trump ally that Pecker told Cohen his publication maintained a "file drawer or a locked drawer" where files related to Trump were kept. That effort took on added urgency following the October 2016 disclosure of an "Access Hollywood" recording in which Trump was heard boasting about grabbing women sexually.

The Daniels payment was finalized several weeks after that revelation, but Monday's testimony also centered on a deal earlier that fall with McDougal.

To lay the foundation that the deals were done with Trump's endorsement, prosecutors elicited testimony from Cohen designed to show Trump as a hands-on manager. Acting on Trump's behalf, Cohen said, he sometimes lied and bullied others, including reporters.

"When he would task you with something, he would then say, 'Keep me informed. Let me know what's going on,'" Cohen testified. He said that was especially true "if there was a matter that was troubling to him."

Russian president Putin to make a state visit to China this week

BEIJING (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin will make a two-day state visit to China this week, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said Tuesday, in the latest show of unity between the two authoritarian allies against the U.S.-led Western liberal global order.

Putin will meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping during his visit starting on Thursday, the ministry said, saying the two leaders would discuss "cooperation in various fields of bilateral relations ... as well as international and regional issues of common concern." No details were mentioned.

The Kremlin in a statement confirmed the trip and said Putin was going on Xi's invitation. It said that this will be Putin's first foreign trip since he was sworn in as president and began his fifth term in office.

China has backed Russia politically in the conflict in Ukraine and has continued to export machine tools, electronics and other items seen as contributing to the Russian war effort, without actually exporting weaponry.

China is also a major export market for energy supplies that keep the Kremlin's coffers full.

China has sought to project itself as a neutral party in the conflict, but has declared a "no limits" relationship with Russia in opposition to the West. The sides have also held a series of joint military drills and China has consistently opposed economic sanctions against Russia in response to its now two-year-old campaign of conquest against Ukraine.

The two continent-sized authoritarian states are increasingly in dispute with democracies and NATO while seeking to gain influence in Africa, the Middle East and South America.

Putin's visit comes just days ahead of Monday's inauguration of William Lai Ching-te as the next president of Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy that China claims as its own territory and threatens to annex by force if necessary.

Xi returned last week from a five-day visit to Europe, including stops in Hungary and Serbia, countries viewed as close to Russia. The trip, Xi's first to the continent in five years, was seen as an attempt to increase China's influence and drive a wedge between the EU and NATO on one side, and a yet-to-be-defined bloc of authoritarian nations on the other underpinned by Chinese economic influence that has been wavering amid a housing crisis and dramatically slower domestic economic growth.

Palestinians mark 76 years of dispossession as a potentially even larger catastrophe unfolds in Gaza

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinians on Wednesday will mark the 76th year of their mass expulsion from what is now Israel, an event that is at the core of their national struggle. But in many ways, that experience pales in comparison to the calamity now unfolding in Gaza.

Palestinians refer to it as the Nakba, Arabic for catastrophe. Some 700,000 Palestinians — a majority of the prewar population — fled or were driven from their homes before and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed Israel's establishment.

After the war, Israel refused to allow them to return because it would have resulted in a Palestinian majority within its borders. Instead, they became a seemingly permanent refugee community that now numbers some 6 million, with most living in slum-like urban refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

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In Gaza, the refugees and their descendants make up around three-quarters of the population.

Israel's rejection of what Palestinians say is their right of return has been a core grievance in the conflict and was one of the thorniest issues in peace talks that last collapsed 15 years ago. The refugee camps have always been the main bastions of Palestinian militancy.

Now, many Palestinians fear a repeat of their painful history on an even more cataclysmic scale.

All across Gaza, Palestinians in recent days have been loading up cars and donkey carts or setting out on foot to already overcrowded tent camps as Israel expands its offensive. The images from several rounds of mass evacuations throughout the seven-month war are strikingly similar to black-and-white photographs from 1948.

Mustafa al-Gazzar, now 81, still recalls his family's monthslong flight from their village in what is now central Israel to the southern city of Rafah, when he was 5. At one point they were bombed from the air, at another, they dug holes under a tree to sleep in for warmth.

Al-Gazzar, now a great-grandfather, was forced to flee again over the weekend, this time to a tent in Muwasi, a barren coastal area where some 450,000 Palestinians live in a squalid camp. He says the conditions are worse than in 1948, when the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees was able to regularly provide food and other essentials.

"My hope in 1948 was to return, but my hope today is to survive," he said. "I live in such fear," he added, breaking into tears. "I cannot provide for my children and grandchildren."

The war in Gaza, which was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel, has killed over 35,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, making it by far the deadliest round of fighting in the history of the conflict. The initial Hamas attack killed some 1,200 Israelis.

The war has forced some 1.7 million Palestinians — around three quarters of the territory's population — to flee their homes, often multiple times. That is well over twice the number that fled before and during the 1948 war.

Israel has sealed its border. Egypt has only allowed a small number of Palestinians to leave, in part because it fears a mass influx of Palestinians could generate another long-term refugee crisis.

The international community is strongly opposed to any mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza — an idea embraced by far-right members of the Israeli government, who refer to it as "voluntary emigration."

Israel has long called for the refugees of 1948 to be absorbed into host countries, saying that calls for their return are unrealistic and would endanger its existence as a Jewish-majority state. It points to the hundreds of thousands of Jews who came to Israel from Arab countries during the turmoil following its establishment, though few of them want to return.

Even if Palestinians are not expelled from Gaza en masse, many fear that they will never be able to return to their homes or that the destruction wreaked on the territory will make it impossible to live there. A recent U.N. estimate said it would take until 2040 to rebuild destroyed homes.

The Jewish militias in the 1948 war with the armies of neighboring Arab nations were mainly armed with lighter weapons like rifles, machine guns and mortars. Hundreds of depopulated Palestinian villages were demolished after the war, while Israelis moved into Palestinian homes in Jerusalem, Jaffa and other cities.

In Gaza, Israel has unleashed one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history, at times dropping 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs on dense, residential areas. Entire neighborhoods have been reduced to wastelands of rubble and plowed-up roads, many littered with unexploded bombs.

The World Bank estimates that \$18.5 billion in damage has been inflicted on Gaza, roughly equivalent to the gross domestic product of the entire Palestinian territories in 2022. And that was in January, in the early days of Israel's devastating ground operations in Khan Younis and before it went into Rafah.

Yara Asi, a Palestinian assistant professor at the University of Central Florida who has done research on the damage to civilian infrastructure in the war, says it's "extremely difficult" to imagine the kind of international effort that would be necessary to rebuild Gaza.

Even before the war, many Palestinians spoke of an ongoing Nakba, in which Israel gradually forces them out of Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories it captured during the 1967 war that the

Palestinians want for a future state. They point to home demolitions, settlement construction and other discriminatory policies that long predate the war, and which major rights groups say amount to apartheid, allegations Israel denies.

Asi and others fear that if another genuine Nakba occurs, it will be in the form of a gradual departure. "It won't be called forcible displacement in some cases. It will be called emigration, it will be called something else," Asi said.

"But in essence, it is people who wish to stay, who have done everything in their power to stay for generations in impossible conditions, finally reaching a point where life is just not livable."

K-pop fans around globe rally for climate and environment goals

By VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) —

Fans of Korean pop bands around the world are increasingly channeling their millions-strong online community into climate and environmental activism, protesting business deals linked to coal power, urging K-pop entertainers to cut waste and raising awareness about climate-related issues.

Other climate activist groups have begun joining forces with Kpop4Planet, an environmental group founded in 2021 by K-pop fans Nurul Sarifah and Dayeon Lee. After Kpop4Planet petitioned South Korean automaker Hyundai Motor Co., it recently scrapped a deal linked to coal power plants in Indonesia.

The ability to quickly organize a large, dedicated group has made K-pop fans an increasingly influential lobby online as they participate in protests and promote causes that have included the Black Lives Matter movement. Politicians also have tried to tap into that power.

"I spotted how K-pop fans can be seen as a potential power," said Sarifah. "We think we can harness that power for climate change action."

In 2021, Korea Beyond Coal—a coalition of civic groups calling for South Korea to stop using coal power—teamed up with Kpop4Planet in 2021 to raise awareness about plans for a coal-burning power plant.

The plant site near Maengbang Beach, the photo shoot location for album artwork for one of K-pop band BTS's hit songs, is a popular destination for the band's fans and a joint petition created by Kpop4Planet and Korea Beyond Coal got thousands of signatures.

"We realized Kpop4Planet has the experience of mobilizing and connecting people and sharing information using social media ... which is very helpful when it comes to climate campaigning," said Euijin Kim, a communications officer for Solutions for Our Climate, which is part of Korea Beyond Coal.

The power plant is still going ahead, but the groups were able to raise awareness about the environmental issues caused by coal power, Lee said.

"We want to show the power and influence that the K-pop fans can have ... we believe that if we gather all together, we can make better social impacts and maybe change our society in more sustainable ways," said Lee. "And, of course, love K-pop together."

Korean pop culture fan clubs' activism and philanthropy began in the 1960s, said Stephanie Choi, a post-doctoral associate at the University of Buffalo studying K-pop culture. Now, K-pop fans regularly organize thousands of people on social media platforms to buy gifts for wildly popular K-pop singers and bands, or promote other causes.

Sarifah and Lee have aligned Kpop4Planet's activities with various causes, beginning with urging entertainment companies to cut back on waste related to the K-pop fan culture of collecting photo cards of band members, which are included in albums and sold as merchandise. K-pop labels often release multiple versions of albums with dozens of different photo cards, encouraging fans to bulk-buy albums to participate in lucky draws for meet-and-greet events with K-pop stars.

"The problem is that this creates a lot of waste," Lee said in an interview. "We wanted to tackle that issue first, because it was the most well-known issue among K-pop fans."

Entertainment companies haven't directly responded to Kpop4Planet's petitions and other approaches, but Lee still views the campaign as a success.

"There were changes after our campaigning: major entertainment companies published environmental, social and governance reports and published eco-friendly albums, including some releasing records using QR codes to minimize waste," she said.

Kpop4Planet's petition against Hyundai protested an agreement the company signed to buy aluminum from projects linked to coal power in Indonesia.

The memorandum of understanding signed in 2022 with a unit of one of Indonesia's largest coal miners, Adaro Energy Indonesia, gave Hyundai the right to purchase low-carbon aluminum from an industrial park Indonesian officials portray as "green".

However, the smelter used to make the aluminum initially will be powered by newly built coal-fired plants. Hydroelectric and solar power will power the industrial park at a later date.

Given K-pop group BTS's collaboration with Hyundai, Kpop4Planet saw a chance to put their influence to work. In March 2023, Kpop4Planet launched a petition asking Hyundai to withdraw from the project until it phases out coal, and to disclose details of the energy used to make the aluminum. The petition got over 10,000 signatures in two months, and Kpop4Planet sent their pleas to Hyundai Motor's headquarters. In March, Hyundai Motor said it had ended its agreement with Adaro.

"Following the expiry of the MOU at the end of 2023, both companies have decided not to renew it and to explore other opportunities independently," a spokesperson for Hyundai Motor wrote in an email to The Associated Press.

Adaro did not respond to a request for comment sent by AP.

"This a victory of thousands of people, friends who took actions and also show that they genuinely care about the climate crisis and local communities," said Sarifah.

Ex-Ukrainian president says US delay in war aid was 'colossal' waste, let Putin inflict more damage

By HANNA ARHIROVA and TASSANEE VEJPONGSA Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko said the long delay by the U.S. Congress in approving military aid for his country was "a colossal waste of time," allowing Russian President Vladimir Putin to inflict more suffering in the 2-year-old invasion and prolonging the war.

The severe lack of ammunition, which forced outgunned Ukrainian forces to surrender village after village on the front lines, also sowed concern among Ukraine's other Western allies about Kyiv's prospects in repelling the Russian invasion, Yushchenko told The Associated Press in an interview Monday.

That sent a signal to Putin to "attack, ruin infrastructure, rampage all over Ukraine," said Yushchenko, a pro-European reformer who sought to distance Kyiv from Moscow during his 2005-2010 administration.

"And, of course, this undermines the morale of those in the world who stand with and support Ukraine," said Yushchenko, who was in Philadelphia to speak at a World Affairs Council event.

The delay "is not fatal" to Ukraine, but it forced Ukraine's war planners to revise the current year's campaign, he said.

Yushchenko has backed the handling of the war by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and has asserted that no Ukrainian politician would give up territory in order to end the war.

Yushchenko said it would be a "big mistake" for the U.S. and Europe to expect such a deal for peace, and would only embolden Putin to attack again.

It would, he said, "give Putin five or seven years to get stronger and then start this misery again."

On the battlefield, Russia is pushing ahead with a ground offensive that opened a new front in eastern Ukraine's Kharkiv region and put pressure on overstretched Ukrainian forces.

Yushchenko urged Western allies to make political decisions faster to aid Ukraine in a fight that soldiers are waging every day around the clock.

"The front line is working 24 hours, it doesn't take vacation," he said.

After the U.S. aid was approved last month, President Joe Biden said he was immediately rushing badly needed weaponry to Ukraine as he signed into law a \$61 billion war aid measure for Ukraine. Without it,

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CIA Director Bill Burns has said, Ukraine could lose the war to Russia by the end of this year.

Still, only small batches of U.S. military aid have started to trickle into the front line, according to Ukrainian military commanders, who said it will take at least two months before supplies meet Kyiv's needs to hold the line.

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said Monday that the Biden administration was "trying to really accelerate the tempo" of U.S. weapons shipments to Ukraine following the monthslong delay by Congress. "The level of intensity being exhibited right now in terms of moving stuff is at a 10 out of 10," he said.

The U.S. secretary of state, Antony Blinken, arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday in an unannounced diplomatic mission to reassure Ukraine that it has American support.

Biden and Ukraine's allies in Congress pushed for months to overcome resistance from hard-right Republican lawmakers in the House over renewed American support for repelling Russia's invasion.

Final action only came after Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson pushed past that opposition last month to bring Ukraine aid to a vote.

The funding impasse dated back to August, when Biden made his first emergency spending request for Ukraine. Since Russia's February 2022 invasion, the U.S. has sent more than \$44 billion worth of weapons, maintenance, training and spare parts to Ukraine.

Yushchenko acknowledged the huge losses that Ukraine has suffered in over two years of war, costing lives every day and forcing regular Ukrainians to join the fight. But he said that he was ashamed to hear arguments about "war fatigue" and that it shouldn't be an excuse to stop fighting.

"Every day we pay with our lives," Yushchenko said. "The lives of children and women, the lives of Ukrainian soldiers. Our infrastructure is being destroyed every day."

Despite his harsh criticism of the U.S. delay in approving the latest military aid, Yushchenko acknowledged that Ukraine has been able to recapture a significant part of the occupied territory thanks to Western support.

More gains can be achieved if the allies are united, Yushchenko said.

"For Putin, the main geopolitical challenge is freedom and democracy. And today he is using all available resources to show that the Western world is weak" and unable to coalesce, Yushchenko said.

He has said he believes victory for Ukraine is inevitable, given the sacrifice of the country's citizens to fight, and sees the war as a larger, defining battle to defend democracy from tyranny and imperialism.

Yushchenko came to power as a popular opposition leader in the 2004 Orange Revolution protests, beating Putin's preferred candidate. As president he adamantly pushed to move Ukraine out of Moscow's shadow and integrate more closely with Western Europe.

But his presidency was marked by political skirmishing that paralyzed government and prevented any of his promised reforms from being passed. He lost power amid a plunging Ukrainian economy during the 2008 global financial crisis and tensions with Russia highlighted by a clash over gas prices.

Yushchenko survived a dioxin poisoning during his 2004 election campaign, and several former Russian intelligence officers accused Moscow of being behind the poisoning.

The poisoning forced Yushchenko to temporarily abandon campaign activities in the midst of Ukraine's hotly contested presidential race, and severely disfigured his face. But it also earned him the sympathy of many Ukrainians. He has said he subsequently underwent more than two dozen surgeries.

Cannes kicks off with Greta Gerwig's jury and a Palme d'Or for Meryl Streep

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — The Cannes Film Festival opens Tuesday with the unveiling of Greta Gerwig's jury and the presentation of an honorary Palme d'Or for Meryl Streep, as the French Riviera spectacular kicks off a potentially volatile 77th edition.

A 10-day stream of stars will begin flowing down Cannes' famous red carpet beginning with the opening night film, "The Second Act," a French comedy starring Lea Seydoux, Vincent Lindon, Louis Garrel and

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Raphaël Quenard. During the opening ceremony, Streep will be given an honorary Palme.

In the days to come, Cannes will premiere George Miller's "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga," Francis Ford Coppola's self-financed "Megalopolis" and anticipated new movies from Paolo Sorrentino, Yorgos Lanthimos, Andrea Arnold and Kevin Costner.

But much of the drama surrounding this year's Cannes has been off screen.

After French actor Judith Godrèche earlier this year accused two film directors of rape and sexual abuse when she was a teenager, the French film industry has been dealing with arguably its defining #MeToo moment. On Wednesday, Godrèche will premiere her short "Moi Aussi."

Festival workers, fed up with short-term contracts that leave them unqualified for unemployment benefits in between festivals, have threatened to strike.

And on Monday, the Iranian filmmaker Mohammed Rasoulof, whose film "The Seed of the Sacred Fig" is premiering next week in competition in Cannes, said he had fled Iran after being sentenced to eight years in prison and flogging. The film is said to be a critical depiction of the Iranian regime.

Many, though, will be focused on the stars parading Cannes' carpet. They'll include Emma Stone, Anya Taylor-Joy, Demi Moore, Selena Gomez, Nicolas Cage and Barry Keoghan. At the closing ceremony on May 25, George Lucas is to receive an honorary Palme d'Or.

Regardless, the 77th Cannes will have a lot to live up to. Last year's festival, widely celebrated for its robust lineup, produced three Oscar best picture nominees: "Anatomy of a Fall," "The Zone of Interest" and "Killers of the Flower Moon." To help rekindle last year's spirit, Messi, the canine star of "Anatomy of a Fall," is back in Cannes for a series of brief French TV spots.

A good Cannes will help France keep the global spotlight through the summer. The festival will be followed by the French Open, the Tour de France and, most notably, the summer Olympics in Paris. On May 21 in Cannes, the Olympic flame will be carried up the steps to the festival's hub, the Palais des Festivals.

Primaries in Maryland and West Virginia will shape the battle this fall for a Senate majority

By BRIAN WITTE, LEAH WILLINGHAM and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Voters across Maryland and West Virginia will decide key primary elections Tuesday with big implications in the fight for the Senate majority this fall.

At the same time, President Joe Biden and Republican rival Donald Trump hope to project strength in low-stakes presidential primaries, while further down the ballot, two congressional candidates on opposite sides of the 2021 Capitol attack serve as a stark reminder that the nation remains deeply divided over the deadly insurrection.

In all, three states are hosting statewide primary elections on Tuesday — Maryland, Nebraska and West Virginia — as Republicans and Democrats pick their nominees for a slate of fall elections. None are more consequential than Senate primaries in Maryland and West Virginia, where Republicans are eyeing pickup opportunities that could flip control of Congress' upper chamber for at least two years.

A Trump critic vies for Maryland's GOP nomination

In Maryland, Republican former Gov. Larry Hogan expects to dominate the state's GOP Senate primary despite his years-long criticism of Trump, whom Hogan describes as a threat to democracy. The former two-term governor would be the blue state's first Republican senator in more than four decades.

It's unclear whether Trump loyalists will ultimately embrace Hogan. In all, six other Republicans are challenging the 67-year-old former governor.

On the Democratic side, Rep. David Trone has been locked in a contentious — and expensive — battle with Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks.

Trone, the co-founder of the Total Wine & More national liquor store chain, has put more than \$61 million of his own money into the race. That's just shy of the national record for self-funding a Senate campaign, with much of it going to a months-long TV ad blitz. The three-term congressman says he's better positioned to beat Hogan in November as a progressive Democrat not beholden to special interests.

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Race has been an issue in the primary, with Alsobrooks working to become Maryland's first Black U.S. senator. Trone apologized in March for what he said was the inadvertent use of a racial slur during a budget hearing.

Alsobrooks, who serves as chief executive of Maryland's second-largest jurisdiction with the state's largest number of registered Democrats, has been endorsed by many of the state's top officials, including Gov. Wes Moore, Sen. Chris Van Hollen, Rep. Steny Hoyer and a long list of state lawmakers.

She has campaigned on growing economic opportunity, investing in education and protecting abortion rights.

The West Virginia battle to replace Manchin

Meanwhile, in West Virginia, the Republican Senate primary is likely to decide retiring Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin's replacement given the state's overwhelming Republican tilt.

Republican Gov. Jim Justice and U.S. Rep. Alex Mooney are the leading GOP candidates. With Manchin gone, the seat is almost guaranteed to turn red come November.

The Trump-endorsed Justice, a former billionaire with a folksy personality that's made him wildly popular in the state, is the front-runner against Mooney and five other lesser-known Republicans. A former Democrat, Justice switched to the Republican Party in 2017. He announced the change at a Trump rally.

Mooney has tried to win over conservatives by labeling Justice a "RINO" — which stands for "Republican in name only" — who would support Democratic policies. Justice did support Biden's bipartisan infrastructure law, saying West Virginia couldn't afford to turn away the money offered in the bill. Mooney voted against it.

On the other side, Democrats are choosing between Wheeling Mayor Glenn Elliott, who has Manchin's endorsement, and Marine Corps veteran Zach Shrewsbury, who has support from the Progressive Democrats of America. Also in the Democratic primary: former Republican Don Blankenship, who was convicted of violating safety standards after 29 people died in a 2010 coal mine explosion.

West Virginia is also deciding its candidates for governor.

Attorney General Patrick Morrisey, the Republican nominee in the 2018 Senate race against Manchin, is running for the Republican nomination. He's up against the sons of two members of West Virginia's congressional delegation: car dealer Chris Miller, whose mother is Rep. Carol Miller, and former state Rep. Moore Capito, whose mother is Sen. Shelley Moore Capito. West Virginia Secretary of State Mac Warner is also in the GOP race.

On the Democratic side, Huntington Mayor Steve Williams is unopposed.

Tests of strength in the presidential primary

There's far less drama in Tuesday's presidential primaries.

Biden and Trump have already amassed enough delegates to claim the presidential nominations at their respective national conventions this summer. Yet voters on both sides hope to register a significant protest vote Tuesday that will demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the Biden-Trump rematch.

Maryland progressives especially unhappy with the Biden administration's support for Israel in its war against Hamas are encouraging voters to select "uncommitted to any presidential candidate" instead of Biden. There is no uncommitted option in West Virginia or Nebraska.

Everett Bellamy, a Democrat who voted early in Annapolis, said he voted "uncommitted" instead of Biden as a protest against the killing of women and children and noncombatants in Gaza.

"I've got to make a decision come November, but for now while the violence is raging in Gaza and people are being killed every day and starving to death, I wanted to send a message," Bellamy, 74, said after leaving an early voting center. "Hopefully, I have a better choice come November."

Meanwhile, Trump's Republican critics cannot choose "uncommitted," but they can choose his former GOP rival Nikki Haley, who will appear on the ballot in Maryland, Nebraska and West Virginia despite formally suspending her campaign more than two months ago. Last week in Indiana, Haley earned nearly 22% of the Republican primary vote.

Trump has shrugged off his Republican critics, yet his weakness with the party's moderate wing could threaten him in the general election.

Two sides of the insurrection

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Tuesday's elections also include two candidates who were intimately involved in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

In West Virginia, a former member of the House of Delegates, Derrick Evans, is running for the Republican nomination in the 1st Congressional District. The 39-year-old Trump loyalist served a three-month jail sentence after livestreaming himself participating in the storming of the U.S. Capitol. He calls himself the only elected official who "had the courage" to stand behind efforts to temporarily halt certification of Biden's 2020 election victory.

Evans is trying to oust incumbent Republican Rep. Carol Miller.

In Maryland, former Capitol Police officer Harry Dunn is among nearly two dozen Democrats running in the state's 3rd Congressional District. The 40-year-old Democrat was in the Capitol working to repel the violent mob on Jan. 6.

Also on Tuesday, California voters in the state's 20th district will decide the special runoff election between Republicans Vince Fong and Mike Boudreaux. The winner of the seat previously occupied by former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy will be seated through the end of the year. The same two men will face off again in November for the next full term.

And in North Carolina, voters will finalize their pick in what has become a one-person Republican primary in the state's 13th Congressional District. Trump endorsed Brad Knott this month, leading his opponent to suspend her campaign.

Xi's visit to Hungary and Serbia brings new Chinese investment and deeper ties to Europe's doorstep

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — When Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Hungary last week, he arrived to one of the few places in the European Union where his country is considered an indispensable ally rather than a rival. By the time he left on Friday, he'd secured deals that provide fertile ground for China's plans of economic expansion in Europe.

After meeting with nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Thursday, the leaders addressed a small group of select media in Hungary's capital, Budapest, announcing the formation of an "all-weather partnership" that would usher in a new era of economic cooperation.

As most EU countries make efforts to "de-risk" their economies from perceived threats posed by China, Hungary has gone in the other direction, courting major Chinese investments in the belief that the world's second-largest economy is essential for Europe's future.

While Xi and Orbán didn't unveil concrete agreements following their meeting, Foreign Minister Péter Sijjártó later said in a video that a deal had been reached on a joint Hungarian-Chinese railway bypass around Budapest, as well as a high-speed train link between the capital and its international airport.

The two countries also agreed to expand their cooperation to the "whole spectrum" of the nuclear industry, Orbán said, and deals were reached on China helping Hungary build out its network of electric vehicle charging stations and on construction of an oil pipeline between Hungary and Serbia.

Zsuzsanna Vegh, a program assistant at the German Marshall Fund and visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said those deals were "a clear signal that China sees Hungary as a key and reliable ally" in the EU as it seeks to reverse Europe's toughening de-risking policy.

Xi's visit, Vegh wrote in a statement, shows that Hungary's government "remains indifferent to its allies' concerns and will continue to strengthen its bilateral ties with China in order to position itself favorably in what it perceives as a developing multipolar world."

Pursuing a similar strategy is Serbia, Hungary's neighbor to the south, which has also provided wide opportunities for Chinese companies to exploit its natural resources and carry out large infrastructure projects.

Like Orbán, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has built a form of autocratic governance that eschews the pluralism valued in more traditional Western democracies — making both countries attractive to China as opaque direct deals help to eliminate red tape.

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During Xi's visit to Serbia last week, he and Vučić signed an agreement to build a "shared future," making the Balkan country the first in Europe to agree on such a document with Beijing.

Vuk Vuksanović, a senior researcher at the Belgrade Center for Security Policy, said that Xi's interest in Serbia reflects his strategy of appealing to countries that are less committed to a U.S.-led economic and political community.

Xi's "shared future" agreement with Belgrade, Vuksanović said, promotes "China's vision of the international order, the one where China is much more powerful, the one where the Western powers, primarily the U.S., no longer have the ability to dictate the agenda to others."

China has poured billions of dollars into Serbia in investment and loans, particularly in mining and infrastructure. The two countries signed an agreement on a strategic partnership in 2016 and a free trade agreement last year.

While Serbia formally wants to join the 27-nation EU, it has been steadily drifting away from that path, and some of its agreements with China aren't in line with rules for membership.

Vučić is friendly with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and has condemned Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine but refused to join international sanctions against Moscow.

The red-carpet treatment by Serbia and Hungary has worried some of their Western partners, which see China's incursion into the region as both an economic and security risk. According to Gabriel Escobar, U.S. envoy for the Western Balkans, Xi chose to visit the neighboring countries because they "are open to challenging the unity of the Euro-Atlantic community."

"We caution all of our partners and all of our interlocutors to be very aware of China's agenda in Europe," Escobar said last week.

In February, Hungary followed Serbia's lead by concluding a security agreement with Beijing whereby Chinese law enforcement officers would be permitted to assist their Hungarian counterparts in police actions within Hungary.

The government has said the officers will ensure public safety among Chinese tourists and members of Hungary's large Chinese diaspora. But critics say the officers could be used as an extension of Xi's single-party state to exert control over the Chinese community.

As Orbán has deepened relations with Beijing, he has also been engaged in a protracted conflict with the EU that has seen billions in structural funds frozen to Budapest over concerns that he has captured democratic institutions and abused the bloc's funds.

That money shows no sign of arriving any time soon, and Hungary's pursuit of additional Chinese developments shows its government "does not envision the possibility of financing such strategic infrastructure projects from EU funds," Vegh wrote.

While the inflow of Chinese capital is a boon to Hungary's sputtering economy, having production sites on EU territory also helps Beijing to circumvent costly tariffs and Europe's increasingly protectionist policies.

In December, Hungary announced that one of the world's largest EV manufacturers, China's BYD, will open its first European EV production factory in the south of the country, and has invited large direct investments in the production of EV batteries.

Such investments, Orbán said Thursday, are what will keep Hungary competitive in the future, from wherever they come.

"The concept driving the Hungarians is that we want to win the 21st century, and not lose it," he said.

Congress is sending families less help for day care costs.

So states are stepping in

By MORIAH BALINGIT, SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and DYLAN LOVAN of The Associated Press and DANIEL BEEKMAN of The Seattle Times

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Across the country, the story for families is virtually the same: Child care is unaffordable for many, hard to find for those who can pay, and financially precarious for day care op-

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erators and their employees.

The Biden administration and Congress tried to alleviate some of these problems when the pandemic crippled the child care industry. But as the record \$52.5 billion in relief winds down, many states have stepped in with their own solutions.

States have expanded free preschool and early education and helped more families pay for child care, making it low-cost or even free for many. Recognizing that a federal solution is unlikely to materialize anytime soon, policymakers have come up with novel ways to pay for their plans, creating permanent funding sources that will make new programs sustainable.

New Mexico, for instance, has tapped into its petroleum revenue, Washington state put a new tax on investment profits, and Kentucky is incentivizing parents to become child care workers.

And while the largest investments in child care have come from Democrats, Republican state lawmakers across the country are embracing plans to support child care — citing the importance to the economy.

NEW MEXICO FUNDING MAKES CAREERS POSSIBLE

After she gave birth, Marissia Sigala put on hold plans to start her real estate career. She and her husband — a personal trainer — lived on one paycheck for about two years and realized the cost of child care would be out of reach even if both were working.

Then, in 2022, New Mexico made child care free for nearly all the state's families, amending the constitution to fund early childhood initiatives with money from leasing state land to oil and gas companies.

The change will bring in an estimated \$150 million a year for the early education of children like Mateo. Sigala and her husband qualify because they earn less than 400% of the federal poverty rate, currently about \$120,000 a year for a family of four. Mateo is one of more than 21,000 children now benefitting from the subsidies.

Now Sigala, 32, is back at work while Mateo attends Koala Children's Academy, which specializes in bilingual education.

"Being entrepreneurs, it's a lot more challenging, and we have to rely on ourselves. We don't have a paycheck coming in every week," Sigala said. "It's been a blessing for us."

Expanding free child care for families is "making a difference for families in such a profound way," said Elizabeth Groginsky, New Mexico's early childhood education secretary. And, she said, it's helping the people who care for and educate young kids, too.

Groginsky and other state leaders are hoping the massive investment will help blunt the effects of poverty. "It's just a really incredible opportunity we have here," she said.

PRESCHOOL FOR FAMILIES IN WASHINGTON

Washington state is aiming to offer free preschool to all low-income families, and child care vouchers to all low- and moderate-income families by the end of the decade, along with high-quality care for infants and toddlers with developmental concerns.

The state is expanding its programs with help from a new 7% tax on profits made from residents' financial investments — a levy intended to fall on wealthier people.

When Zaneta Billyzone-Jatta's daughter Zakiah was born prematurely in 2021, her mother hired a nanny to watch the baby three days a week. A clinical manager for a hospital network, Billyzone-Jatta, 42, had to work while keeping an eye on her daughter the other two days. She felt like she couldn't give her toddler enough attention, much less address the girl's developmental concerns like a professional could.

Through a state program for low-income families and kids with challenges like Zakiah, she now sends her daughter to a child care center near her Seattle-area home, free of cost. There, three teachers supervise seven children in Zakiah's class and diligently document her progress. Occupational and speech therapists see Zakiah at the school and work closely with the teachers.

Billyzone-Jatta said Zakiah has made huge strides at the school. She talks about her days in detail and refers to classmates by name. She has learned to interact with other students, drink from an open cup and share.

"Being a working mother and being able to know that you're bringing your child to an environment where

they're loved and cared for gives you so much peace," she said.

But the program helping infants and toddlers like Zakiah is still small, serving fewer than 200 kids statewide. And in November, Washington voters will have a chance to weigh in on the tax in a referendum that could lead to its repeal, endangering the progress the state has made, child care advocates say.

"It would be catastrophic," said Jon Gould, of Akin, the nonprofit that operates Zakiah's state-supported child care center.

IN KENTUCKY, KIDS OF CHILD CARE WORKERS ATTEND FREE

Rylee Monn, 24, was working at Baptist Health Child Development Center in Lexington when she had her second child, doubling what she paid for her children to attend the same center.

She thought about quitting and getting a night-shift job so she could stay home and care for her children during the day.

"All of my paycheck was going to child care," Monn said.

Then, in 2023, Kentucky started a program to cover or reduce the cost of day care for parents who work in the child care industry. The program was meant to tackle two challenges at once. Policymakers hoped it would draw more workers into the child care industry, addressing a shortage. And they wanted to provide more low-cost child care for all families.

Now, more than a dozen states are considering or have already adopted policies modeled after the one in Kentucky, according to EdSurge, a publication that focuses on education.

The program has helped the state's child care industry recruit workers who might otherwise be working in service jobs.

Delaney Griffin, 30, was working in a pizza restaurant last year and pondering her next move with her young family. Her child care costs consumed all but \$100 of her biweekly check.

After learning about the child care benefit, she took a job in December with Baptist Health Child Development Center. She now pays about \$5 a week. Her older child is in a preschool program.

"The free child care part was like the biggest reason that I actually got to start in child care," Griffin said.

Misery deepens in Gaza's Rafah as Israeli troops press operation

By WAFAA SHURAF, JOSEPH KRAUSS and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Aid workers struggled Monday to distribute dwindling food and other supplies to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by what Israel says is a limited military operation in Rafah, as the two main crossings near the southern Gaza city remained closed.

The United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees said 360,000 Palestinians have fled Rafah over the past week, out of 1.3 million who were sheltering there before the operation began. Most had already fled fighting elsewhere during the seven-month war between Israel and Hamas.

Israel has portrayed Rafah as the last stronghold of the militant group, brushing off warnings from the United States and other allies that any major operation there would be catastrophic for civilians. Hamas has meanwhile regrouped and is battling Israeli forces in parts of Gaza that Israel bombarded and invaded earlier in the war.

U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said Monday that another 100,000 Palestinians have been displaced in northern Gaza following recent Israeli evacuation orders there. That would mean that around a fifth of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced over the past week.

Thirty-eight trucks of flour arrived through the western Erez Crossing, a second access point to northern Gaza, said Abeer Etefa, a spokeswoman for the U.N.'s World Food Program. Israel announced the crossing's opening Sunday.

But no food has entered the two main crossings in southern Gaza for the past week.

The Rafah crossing into Egypt has been closed since Israeli troops seized it a week ago. Fighting in Rafah city has made it impossible for aid groups to access the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel, though Israel says it is allowing supply trucks to enter from its side.

For the past week, the Israeli military has intensified bombardment and other operations in Rafah while

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ordering the population to evacuate from parts of the city. Israel insists it is a limited operation focused on rooting out tunnels and other militant infrastructure along the border with Egypt.

Israeli forces were also battling Palestinian militants in Zeitoun and the urban Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza, areas where the army had launched major operations earlier in the war.

Etefa said WFP was distributing food from its remaining stocks in the areas of Khan Younis in the south and Deir al-Balah farther north, where many of those escaping Rafah have fled.

Inside Rafah, only two organizations partnering with WFP were still able to distribute food, and no bakeries were operating.

"The majority of distributions have stopped due to the evacuation orders, displacement and running out of food," she said.

Israeli protesters halted a convoy of aid bound for Gaza at a checkpoint between the occupied West Bank and Israel. Videos circulating online showed them hurling some of the aid off trucks and destroying it. Police said a number of arrests were made, without elaborating.

Almost the entire population of Gaza relies on humanitarian aid to survive. Israeli restrictions and ongoing fighting have hindered humanitarian efforts, causing widespread hunger and a "full-blown famine" in the north, according to the U.N.

The director of the Kuwait Hospital, one of the last functioning medical centers in Rafah, said medical staff and residents living near the facility have been told to evacuate. Sohaib al-Hams warned that any evacuation of the hospital itself would have "catastrophic consequences."

The international charity Oxfam, meanwhile, warned of disease outbreaks in Gaza following an estimated \$210 million worth of damage to water and sanitation infrastructure, mass displacement and the onset of summer.

"Oxfam staff in Gaza have described piles of human waste and rivers of sewage in the streets, which people are having to jump between. They also reported people having to drink dirty water and children being bitten by insects swarming around the sewage," it said in a statement.

The war began when Hamas and other militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking another 250 hostage. Militants still hold about 100 captives and the remains of more than 30 after most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year.

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.

Israel marked an especially somber Memorial Day on Monday, with ceremonies commemorating fallen soldiers, including the more than 600 killed since Oct. 7, more than half of them in the initial attack. Sirens announced two minutes of silence at 11 a.m.

At a ceremony at Mount Herzl cemetery on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed once again to defeat Hamas.

"We exacted and will exact a high price from the enemy for their criminal acts. We will realize the goals of victory and at the center of them the return of all our hostages," he said.

Protesters and hecklers interrupted some of the ceremonies, reflecting growing discontent with Israel's leaders that has brought thousands of protesters into the streets in recent months. Critics blame Netanyahu for the security and intelligence failures that allowed the attack to happen and for the failure to reach a deal with Hamas to release the hostages.

Months of internationally mediated talks over a cease-fire and hostage release ground to an apparent standstill last week after Israel launched its incursion into Rafah. Israel has refused Hamas' central demands for an end to the war and the withdrawal of its forces from the territory, saying that doing so would allow the militant group to regain control and launch more Oct. 7-style attacks.

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration, which has provided crucial military and diplomatic support for the overall offensive, has expressed growing impatience with Israel, saying it won't supply offensive arms for a full-scale Rafah assault.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned Sunday that Israel could face an "enduring insurgency" if it

doesn't come up with a realistic plan for postwar governance in Gaza. Israel has rejected U.S. proposals for the Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza with help from Arab states because those plans depend on progress toward the establishment of a Palestinian state, which Netanyahu opposes.

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 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.

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The tumor's location and severity coupled with the complexity of the 10-hour surgery damaged Bogan's control of her 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 electrolynx 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.

Star witness Michael Cohen says Trump was intimately involved in all aspects of hush money scheme

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JILL COLVIN, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump was intimately involved with all aspects of a scheme to stifle stories about sex that threatened to torpedo his 2016 campaign, his former lawyer said Monday in matter-of-fact testimony that went to the heart of the former president's hush money trial.

"Everything required Mr. Trump's sign-off," said Michael Cohen, Trump's fixer-turned-foe and the prosecution's star witness in a case now entering its final, pivotal stretch.

In hours of highly anticipated testimony, Cohen placed Trump at the center of the hush money plot, saying the then-candidate had promised to reimburse the lawyer for the money he fronted and was constantly updated about behind-the-scenes efforts to bury stories feared to be harmful to the campaign.

"We need to stop this from getting out," Cohen quoted Trump as telling him in reference to porn actor Stormy Daniels' account of a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier. The then-candidate was especially anxious about how the story would affect his standing with female voters.

A similar episode occurred when Cohen alerted Trump that a Playboy model was alleging that she and Trump had an extramarital affair. "Make sure it doesn't get released," was Cohen's message to Trump, the lawyer said. The woman, Karen McDougal, was paid \$150,000 in an arrangement that was made after Trump received a "complete and total update on everything that transpired."

"What I was doing, I was doing at the direction of and benefit of Mr. Trump," Cohen testified.

Trump has pleaded not guilty and denied having sexual encounters with the two women.

Cohen is by far the prosecution's most important witness, and though his testimony lacked the electricity that defined Daniels' turn on the stand last week, he nonetheless linked Trump directly to the payments and helped illuminate some of the drier evidence such as text messages and phone logs that jurors had previously seen.

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 prosecutors' reliance on a witness with such a checkered past — Cohen pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the payments — also carries sizable risks with a jury and could be a boon to Trump politically as he fundraises off his legal woes and paints the case as the product of a tainted criminal justice system.

The men, once so close that Cohen boasted that he would "take a bullet" for Trump, had no visible interaction inside the courtroom. The sedate atmosphere was a marked contrast from their last courtroom faceoff, when Trump walked out of the courtroom in October after his lawyer finished questioning Cohen during his civil fraud trial.

This time around, Trump sat at the defense table with his eyes closed for long stretches of testimony as Cohen recounted his decade-long career as a senior Trump Organization executive, doing work that by his own admission sometimes involved lying and bullying others on his boss's behalf.

Jurors had previously heard from others about the tabloid industry practice of "catch-and-kill," in which rights to a story are purchased so that it can then be quashed. But Cohen's testimony, which continues Tuesday, is crucial to prosecutors because of his direct communication with the then-candidate about embarrassing stories he was scrambling to suppress.

Cohen also matters because the reimbursements he received from a \$130,000 hush money payment to

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Daniels, which prosecutors say was meant to buy her silence in advance of the election, form the basis of 34 felony counts charging Trump with falsifying business records. Prosecutors say the reimbursements were logged, falsely, as legal expenses to conceal the payments' true purpose. Defense lawyers say the payments to Cohen were properly categorized as legal expenses.

Under questioning from a prosecutor, Cohen detailed the steps he took to mask the payments. When he opened a bank account to pay Daniels, an action he said he told Trump he was taking, he told the bank it was for a new limited liability corporation but withheld the actual purpose.

"I'm not sure they would've opened it," he said, if they knew it was "to pay off an adult film star for a nondisclosure agreement."

To establish Trump's familiarity with the payments, Cohen told the jury that Trump had promised to reimburse him. The two men even discussed with Allen Weisselberg, a former Trump Organization chief financial officer, how the reimbursements would be paid as legal services over monthly installments, Cohen testified.

And though Trump's lawyers have said he acted to protect his family from salacious stories, Cohen described Trump as preoccupied instead by the impact they would have on the campaign.

He said Trump even sought to delay finalizing the Daniels transaction until after Election Day so he wouldn't have to pay her.

"Because," Cohen testified, "after the election it wouldn't matter" to Trump.

Cohen also gave jurors an insider account of his negotiations with David Pecker, the then-publisher of the National Enquirer, who was such a close Trump ally that Pecker told Cohen his publication maintained a "file drawer or a locked drawer" where files related to Trump were kept.

That effort took on added urgency following the October 2016 disclosure of an "Access Hollywood" recording in which Trump was heard boasting about grabbing women sexually.

The Daniels payment was finalized several weeks after that revelation, but Monday's testimony also centered on a deal earlier that fall with McDougal.

Cohen testified that he went to Trump immediately after the National Enquirer alerted him to a story about the alleged McDougal affair. "Make sure it doesn't get released," he said Trump told him.

Trump checked in with Pecker about the matter, asking him how "things were going" with it, Cohen said. Pecker responded, "We have this under control, and we'll take care of this," Cohen testified.

Cohen also said he was with Trump as Trump spoke to Pecker on a speakerphone in his Trump Tower office.

"David had stated that it's going to cost them \$150,000 to control the story," Cohen said. He quoted Trump as saying: "No problem, I will take care of it," which Cohen interpreted to mean that the payment would be reimbursed.

To lay the foundation that the deals were done with Trump's endorsement, prosecutors elicited testimony from Cohen designed to show Trump as a hands-on manager. Acting on Trump's behalf, Cohen said, he sometimes lied and bullied others, including reporters.

"When he would task you with something, he would then say, 'Keep me informed. Let me know what's going on,'" Cohen testified. He said that was especially true "if there was a matter that was troubling to him."

Defense lawyers have teed up a bruising cross-examination of Cohen, telling jurors during opening statements that he's an "admitted liar" with an "obsession to get President Trump."

Prosecutors aim to blunt those attacks by acknowledging Cohen's past crimes to jurors and by relying on other witnesses whose accounts, they hope, will buttress Cohen's testimony. They include a lawyer who negotiated the hush money payments on behalf of Daniels and McDougal, as well as Pecker and Daniels.

After Cohen's home and office were raided by the FBI in 2018, Trump showered him with affection on social media and predicted that Cohen would not "flip." Months later, Cohen did exactly that, pleading guilty to federal campaign-finance charges.

Besides pleading guilty to the hush money payments, 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 campaign. He was sentenced to three years in prison, but spent much of it in home confinement.

Collapsed Baltimore bridge span comes down with a boom after crews set off chain of explosives

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Crews set off a chain of carefully placed explosives Monday to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, and with a boom and a splash, the mangled steel trusses came crashing down into the river below.

The explosives flashed orange and let off plumes of black smoke upon detonation. The longest trusses toppled away from the grounded Dali container ship and slid off its bow, sending a wall of water splashing back toward the ship.

It marked a major step in freeing the Dali, which has been stuck among the wreckage since it lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's support columns shortly after leaving Baltimore on March 26.

The collapse killed six construction workers and halted most maritime traffic through Baltimore's busy port. The controlled demolition will allow the Dali to be refloated and restore traffic through the port, which will provide relief for thousands of longshoremen, truckers and small business owners who have seen their jobs impacted by the closure.

Officials said the detonation went as planned. They said the next step in the dynamic cleanup process is to assess the few remaining trusses on the Dali's bow and make sure none of the underwater wreckage is preventing the ship from being refloated and moved.

"It's a lot like peeling back an onion," said Lt. Gen. Scott Spellmon of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Officials expect to refloat the ship within the next few days. Then three or four tugboats will guide it to a nearby terminal at the port. It will likely remain there for a several weeks and undergo temporary repairs before being moved to a shipyard for more substantial repairs.

"This was a very big milestone for our progression forward," Col. Estee Pinchasin, Baltimore District Commander for the Army Corps of Engineers, said in the immediate aftermath of the demolition. She said crews don't anticipate having to use any more explosives.

The Dali's crew remained on board the ship during the detonation, and no injuries or problems were reported, said Capt. David O'Connell, commander of the Port of Baltimore.

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

Engineers spent weeks preparing to use explosives to break down the span, which was an estimated 500 feet (152 meters) long and weighs up to 600 tons (544 metric tons). The demolition was postponed Sunday because of thunderstorms.

"This is a best practice," Gov. Wes Moore said at a news conference Monday, noting that there have been no injuries during the cleanup to date. "Safety in this operation is our top priority."

Fire teams were stationed in the area during the explosion in case of any problematic flying sparks, officials said.

In a videographic released this week, authorities said engineers were using precision cuts to control how the trusses break down. They said the method allows for "surgical precision" and is one of the safest and most efficient ways to remove steel under a high level of tension. Hydraulic grabbers will now lift the broken sections of steel onto barges.

The National Transportation Safety Board and the FBI are conducting investigations into the bridge collapse. Officials have said the safety board investigation will focus on the ship's electrical system.

Danish shipping giant Maersk had 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.

State and federal officials have commended the salvage crews and other members of the cleanup operation who helped recover the remains of the six construction workers. The last body was recovered from the underwater wreckage last week. All of 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.

Officials said the operation remains on track to reopen the port's 50-foot (15-meter) deep draft channel by the end of May. Until then, crews have established a temporary channel that's slightly shallower. Officials said 365 commercial vessels have passed through the port in recent weeks. The port normally processes more cars and farm equipment than any other in the country.

Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Baltimore native whose father and brother served as mayor decades ago, compared the Key Bridge disaster to the overnight bombardment of Baltimore's Fort McHenry, which long ago inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner" during the War of 1812. She said both are a testament to Maryland's resilience.

Pelosi, a Democrat who represents California's 11th district, attended Monday's news conference with two of her relatives. She praised the collective response to the tragedy as various government agencies have come together, working quickly without sacrificing safety.

"Proof through the night that our flag was still there," she said. "That's Baltimore strong."

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators who blocked road near Sea-Tac airport plead not guilty

SEATAC, Wash. (AP) — More than three dozen pro-Palestinian protesters accused of blocking a main road into Seattle-Tacoma International Airport last month pleaded not guilty on Monday to misdemeanor charges of disorderly conduct and failing to disperse.

Thirty-seven people pleaded not guilty in SeaTac Municipal Court, where Judge Pauline Freund returned \$500 bail to each of them and released them on conditions including not returning to the airport without a travel purpose and appearing at their pretrial hearings June 11, The Seattle Times reported.

At least five others who were arrested hired private attorneys and waived arraignment, according to the City of SeaTac.

The Washington State Department of Transportation said that on April 15, a demonstration closed the main road to the airport for several hours. Social media posts showed people holding a banner and waving Palestinian flags while standing on the highway. Demonstrators also blocked roadways near airports in Illinois, California and New York on that day.

Outside the SeaTac City Hall after the arraignment, several people declined to speak to the newspaper about their cases except to say, "Free Palestine."

In Washington state, a misdemeanor carries a maximum penalty of up to 90 days in county jail or a fine of up to \$1,000, or both.

Among other things, the protesters that day were calling for an immediate cease-fire in the war between Israel and Hamas.

Students at college campuses across the U.S. this spring have been protesting as well, setting 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 the University of Washington in Seattle to Columbia University in New York City.

The latest Israel-Hamas war began when Hamas and other militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking an additional 250 hostage. Militants still hold about 100 captives and the remains of more than 30 after many were released last year during a cease-fire.

The ensuing war has killed more than 35,000 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Melinda French Gates resigns as Gates Foundation co-chair, 3 years after her divorce from Bill Gates

By THALIA BEATY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Melinda French Gates will step down as co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the nonprofit she and her ex-husband Bill Gates founded and built into one of the world's largest philanthropic organizations over the past 20 years.

"This is not a decision I came to lightly," French Gates posted on the X platform on Monday. "I am immensely proud of the foundation that Bill and I built together and of the extraordinary work it is doing to address inequities around the world."

She praised the foundation's CEO, Mark Suzman, and the foundation's board of trustees, which was significantly expanded after the couple announced their divorce in May 2021.

"The time is right for me to move forward into the next chapter of my philanthropy," French Gates wrote in her statement. She already organizes some of her investments and philanthropic gifts through her organization, Pivotal Ventures, which is not a nonprofit.

Bill Gates thanked French Gates for her "critical" contributions to the foundation in a statement, saying, "I am sorry to see her leave, but I am sure she will have a huge impact in her future philanthropic work."

The foundation will change its name to the Gates Foundation, a spokesperson said.

French Gates will receive \$12.5 billion as part of her agreement with Gates, which she said would commit to future work focused on women and families. The foundation said that Gates would supply those funds personally, not from the foundation's endowment.

The Gates Foundation is a massive funder of global health, supporting major international institutions like Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the World Health Organization and The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. It also funds research into a wide range of topics like child malnutrition and maternal health as well as eradicating polio and treating and preventing malaria. The foundation has also donated billions to help small farmers adapt to climate change.

In the U.S., it funded education policy and research that had sweeping, if mixed, effects, and now, has pledged to increase its support around antipoverty initiatives.

"The announcement is a surprise for many of us, but I don't think it's spur of the moment," said Latanya Mapp, president and CEO of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

French Gates has already helped cement a gender equity lens within the Gates Foundation's programs to ensure it continues on past her departure, Mapp said. The first president of the foundation's gender equity division was hired in 2020.

When French Gates officially resigns June 7, Bill Gates will be the sole chair of the foundation's board, though Suzman, as CEO, has taken on a higher profile role in the past three years. For example, he began writing the foundation's annual letter outlining its priorities in 2022.

Linsey McGoey, a professor of sociology at the University of Essex and author of "No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy," said French Gates' departure again raises the question of whether power over the foundation should be more widely distributed.

"Should there be more than a tight nucleus of people in charge?" asked McGoey, adding that the foundation controls a great deal of funding that affects people who lack "a democratic pathway" to contest how it's used.

In an emailed statement, the foundation said that Suzman announced French Gates' decision to employees on Monday.

"After a difficult few years watching women's rights rolled back in the U.S. and around the world, she wants to use this next chapter to focus specifically on altering that trajectory," Suzman said of French Gates.

Suzman said he knew many had joined the foundation in part because of their admiration for her advocacy, especially around gender equity.

"I know how beloved Melinda is here," Suzman wrote.

The Gates Foundation holds \$75.2 billion in its endowment as of December 2023, and announced in

January, it planned to spend \$8.6 billion through the course of its work in 2024.

The Associated Press receives financial support for news coverage in Africa from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and for news coverage of women in the workforce from Pivotal Ventures.

A town in western Canada prepares for a possible 'last stand' as wildfires rage in British Columbia

FORT NELSON, British Columbia (AP) — An intense wildfire could reach a town in western Canada this week, fire experts and officials warned, based on forecasts of winds that have fueled the out-of-control blaze, which has forced the evacuation of thousands of people.

The British Columbia Wildfire Service said the wildfire was burning 2½ kilometers (around 1½ miles) northwest of Fort Nelson. More than 4,700 people have evacuated after an order was issued on Friday.

Bowinn Ma, the province's minister of emergency management, said that drought conditions have persisted since last year and no rain is in the forecast.

"We are extremely concerned," she said. "It is extremely uncommon for us to have so many on a evacuation order."

Cliff Chapman, the service's director of operations, said they were fortunate that stronger winds didn't materialize overnight, but said that winds were expected to continue to blow west over the next day or two.

"We did not see the winds through the evening," Chapman said.

He said that helicopters and bulldozers are being used to fight the wildfire, while most ground crews focus on protecting structures.

Fire crews and emergency workers were preparing for a "last stand" if the fire advances into the town, said Rob Fraser, mayor of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality based in Fort Nelson. Fraser said that less than 100 people remained in town. The wildfire service encouraged those left to leave.

The wildfire had swelled to nearly 53 square kilometers (20 square miles).

The service's fire behavior specialist, Ben Boghean, said that the extreme fire behavior — made worse by years of drought and a below-normal snowpack this past winter — could threaten the crews that have been fighting the nearby Parker Lake wildfire.

In 2023, Canada experienced a record number of wildfires that caused choking smoke in parts of the U.S. and forced more than 235,000 Canadians to evacuate their communities. There were no civilian casualties, but at least four firefighters died.

A smoky haze from the Canadian wildfires hung over parts of the U.S. states of Minnesota and Wisconsin on Monday, pushing air quality down to unhealthy levels for the second consecutive day.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency issued its first air quality alert of the season for the entire state on Sunday, extending until noon on Monday.

Smoke from the fires has prompted air quality alerts in Canada spanning from British Columbia to Manitoba.

Fort Nelson is in the far northeastern corner of British Columbia, about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) from Vancouver. Fort Nelson and the Fort Nelson Indian Reserve have a combined population of around 3,400 people.

The blaze is one of several out-of-control wildfires in Western Canada threatening communities in provinces such as Alberta and Manitoba.

Fires burned near Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie in Alberta, while officials in Manitoba have evacuated about 500 people from Cranberry Portage, about 700 kilometers (435 miles) northwest of Winnipeg.

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in northeastern Alberta has told Fort McMurray residents to be ready to evacuate on short notice. Schools were still open Monday.

Predicted light showers near the oil sands region of Fort McMurray are expected to help lower fire activity and give crews a jump on containing the flames. Fort McMurray's population is about 68,000.

A major wildfire there in 2016 destroyed roughly 2,400 homes.

UNC board slashes diversity program funding to divert money to public safety resources

By MAKIYA SEMINERA Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — As North Carolina's public university system considers a vote on changing its diversity policy, the system's flagship university board voted Monday to cut funding for diversity programs in next year's budget.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Board of Trustees approved a change that would divert \$2.3 million of diversity spending from state funds to go toward public safety and policing at a special meeting to address the university's budget. The board's vote would only impact UNC-Chapel Hill's diversity funding, which could result in the loss of its diversity office.

UNC will join the ranks of other notable public universities that have stripped diversity spending, such as the University of Florida in Gainesville, which announced in a March memo it was reallocating funds to faculty recruitment. But unlike UF, which implemented its funding rollback after the state Legislature passed a bill banning diversity program spending at state universities, UNC "set the tone" on funding cuts before the North Carolina Legislature stepped in, budget chair Dave Boliek said.

"We're going ahead and, you know, sort of taking a leadership role in this. That's the way I view it," Boliek said on Monday after the vote.

The change would go into effect at the start of the 2024-2025 fiscal year on July 1, Boliek said. Any jobs that could be impacted would occur after that date, although Boliek said he wasn't sure how many positions may be affected.

But the decision about whether the spending cut would remove UNC's Office of Diversity & Inclusion will be up to the university's flexible management plan, which is operated by interim Chancellor Lee Roberts and his team. The diversity office has 12 staff members, including a chief diversity officer, according to its website.

The budget, which includes the \$2.3 million amendment, will now be submitted to the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, UNC spokesperson Kevin Best said in an email.

The vote to shift more funding to public safety comes as continued pro-Palestinian protests on UNC's campus have resulted in several arrests in recent weeks. The budget committee vice-chair Marty Kotis said law enforcement has already been forced to react to protests, but they need more funding to keep the university "safe from a larger threat."

"It's important to consider the needs of all 30,000 students, not just the 100 or so that may want to disrupt the university's operations," Kotis said. "It takes away resources for others."

But Boliek, who is also running for state auditor in Tuesday's runoff elections, said the timing of the re-allocation was "happenstance" and that internal conversations on diversity spending cuts have persisted for almost a year.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down affirmative action in college admissions last year — in which UNC was sued for its admission policies — the board has continually considered how it should handle university diversity programs, he said. Diverting more money toward public safety was also a concern for the board in the aftermath of a fatal August shooting on the UNC campus that left one faculty member dead.

"It makes sense where we can take money that I believe is not being productively used and put it to something that is more productive, and that is providing public safety," he said.

Before the start of North Carolina's short legislative session, Republican House Speaker Tim Moore told reporters there was interest in pursuing anti-DEI legislation but wanted to let university boards review their diversity policies first.

At least 20 states have seen Republican bill proposals seeking to limit diversity and inclusion programs in several public institutions such as universities.

Now, all eyes are on the UNC Board of Governors, whose 24 members are expected to vote next week on changing its diversity policy after the board's university governance committee voted to reverse and

replace the rule last month. The change would alter a 2019 diversity, equity and inclusion regulation that defines the roles of various DEI positions at 17 schools across the state — and it would appear to eliminate those jobs if the policy is removed.

If the alteration is approved, it will take effect immediately.

Russian assault opens new front, diverting Ukraine forces as Western aid trickles in

By SAMYA KULLAB and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops were locked in intense battles with Ukrainian soldiers around the embattled town of Vovchansk in northeast Ukraine on Monday, pushing ahead with a ground offensive that opened a new front and put more pressure on overstretched Ukrainian forces.

Moscow's renewed northeast offensive, launched late last week, was the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began.

In just two days, Moscow has captured from 100 to 125 square kilometers (38 to 47 square miles) that include at least seven villages, most of them already depopulated, according to two open source monitoring analysts.

Vovchansk, among the largest towns in the area whose pre-war population of 17,000 had dwindled to just 2,500 before Russia renewed its ground assault last week, has emerged as a key focus of the pitched battles engulfing the Kharkiv region. By Monday, only 200 to 300 residents remained, said Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov, as Russian forces closed in from three sides.

Poorly built fortifications and long-term ammunition shortages enabled Russia's sweeping advance in the area since Friday, local officials and soldiers said. The Kremlin's forces were seeking to divert and distract Ukrainian troops across the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line until 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, Ukrainian commanders and analysts said.

That makes this period a window of opportunity for Moscow and one of the most dangerous for Kyiv in the two-year war, they said. By intensifying offensive operations, Russia seeks to stretch Ukraine's forces thin and forge breakthroughs.

Russian forces claimed to have taken an additional 90 square kilometers (35 square miles), which has not been independently confirmed.

Opening a new front from two points along the border with the Russian region of Belgorod was the easiest tactic to pin down and divert Ukrainian forces from heavy battles raging in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Russia's most sought-after prize.

"The enemy identified the most geographically convenient place ... the state border line," said Yurii Federenko, commander of the ACHILLES battalion of the 92nd brigade. His unit was among others rotated into the northeast from the Donetsk region to stabilize the northeast front, he said.

He fears a similar front may be opened in the Sumy region, which also shares a border with Russia.

The string of villages captured along the contested gray zone, where enemy shelling precludes the building of fortifications, were also the easiest for Moscow's forces to nab. Their momentum will likely slow as they approach better fortified settlements, Ukrainian commanders said.

Small batches of U.S. military aid have started to trickle into the front line in the form of much needed artillery, said Federenko, whose unit received some of the aid. But it will take at least two months before incoming supplies will meet Kyiv's needs to hold the line, he said. Until they arrive, Ukraine won't be able to seize the battlefield initiative, he said.

"They now have an opportunity to attack us while we cannot properly reply," he said.

Russia's offensive seeks to take advantage of this window of time. "In order to achieve success, in my opinion, in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the enemy needed to spread ... our defense forces. Accordingly, the enemy started the campaign in Kharkiv region specifically," Federenko said.

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Top Biden administration officials and Ukrainian national security officials held a 90-minute call on Monday to discuss the situation on the ground in Ukraine as Russia intensifies its bombardment around Kharkiv.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff spoke with Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, and head of the office the president Andriy Yermak, according to Sullivan.

"It was a detailed conversation about the situation on the front, about the capabilities that they are most in need of, and a real triage effort to say, 'Get us this stuff this fast so that we can be in a position to effectively defend against the Russian onslaught,'" Sullivan told reporters at a White House briefing.

Sullivan added that a new influx of U.S. weaponry for Kyiv was expected to be announced by the U.S. administration in the coming days.

The Kharkiv incursion has effectively pinned Ukrainian forces in the region, while potentially drawing precious reserves away from heavy battles in the Avdiivka and Chasiv Yar areas of the Donetsk region, where Russia's advance has been far more significant and strategically important.

Ukrainian local officials said they feared Vovchansk's fate may mirror that of Bakhmut and Avdiivka, Ukrainian cities where fierce fighting and scorched earth tactics forced Ukrainian withdrawals.

Russian forces were inching closer to Vovchansk, and heavy battles were ongoing on the town's outskirts. Using assault infantry units Russian forces are attempting to secure positions in three directions, as Ukrainian forces attempt to dislodge them using firepower. Ukrainian commanders describe the battles as dynamic and complicated.

Russian troops have so far entrenched themselves in the villages of Strilecha, Pylna, Borysivka, Krasne, Oliynkove, Mrakovets, Pletenivka, and from there were launching attacks near Hlyboke Zelene Hatysche, and Buchansk.

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.

If Ukraine isn't able to halt Moscow's advance, it could create conditions for a possible attack on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city.

It could also create a "buffer zone" to protect Belgorod, where frequent Ukrainian attacks have embarrassed the Kremlin. In March, Russia announced plans to evacuate about 9,000 children from the Belgorod region because it was being shelled continuously.

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.

Yevgeny Poddubny, a usually well-connected military correspondent for Russia's state TV corporation VGTRK, said in a recent Telegram post that the Kharkiv assault marked the beginning of "a new phase."

"We're pushing the enemy back from the border, destroying the enemy in order to deprive the Kyiv regime of the opportunity to use relatively cheap rockets to attack Belgorod," he said.

Plans unveiled for memorial honoring victims of racist mass shooting at Buffalo supermarket

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — A permanent memorial honoring the 10 Black victims of a racist mass shooting at a Buffalo supermarket will feature interconnected stone pillars and arches, and a windowed building where exhibitions and events will be held, community and elected leaders announced Monday.

The design, "Seeing Us," by Jin Young Song and Douglass Alligood, was revealed a day before the second anniversary of the attack. It was selected from among 20 submissions to the 5/14 Memorial Commission, which was established months after an 18-year-old white gunman opened fire at a Tops supermarket on

May 14, 2022.

New York state has committed \$5 million to the \$15 million project, Gov. Kathy Hochul said at a news conference to unveil the design. Buffalo will contribute \$1 million, and a yearlong fundraising campaign is expected to make up the difference.

"As we approach the solemn two-year anniversary of when our neighbors were senselessly slaughtered solely because of the color of their skin, we rededicate ourselves in supporting the East Buffalo community, remembering those we lost, and supporting those who were injured," she said.

Nine shoppers, ranging in age from 32 to 86, and a retired Buffalo police officer working as a security guard, were killed during the Saturday afternoon attack. Three store employees were wounded.

The Rev. Mark Blue, chairman of the 5/14 Memorial Commission, said the victims' families were consulted during the design selection process.

"What happened on 5/14 was an act of senseless violence and it was an act of hate," he said. "It's my intent to make sure we have a memorial that the families and the communities can be proud of."

Payton Gendron is serving a sentence of life in prison with no chance of parole after he pleaded guilty to state charges of murder and hate-motivated domestic terrorism. He is awaiting trial on separate federal charges and could receive the death penalty if convicted. He has pleaded not guilty in that case.

To mark the second anniversary of the shooting on Tuesday, Tops Friendly Markets will dedicate another memorial near the store and hold a moment of silence at 2:28 p.m., the time of the attack.

Buffalo artist Valeria Cray and her son Hiram Cray, a faculty member at the State University of New York Corning Community College, created a sculpture called "Unity for the Honor Space" for the memorial. The site also features 10 granite bollards.

What to know about Trump fixer-turned-foe Michael Cohen's pivotal testimony in the hush money trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JILL COLVIN, LINDSAY WHITEHURST and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Once Donald Trump's loyal attorney and fixer, Michael Cohen pointed the finger at his former boss Monday in pivotal testimony about hush money payments at the center of the first criminal trial of a former American president.

Cohen provided jurors with an insider's account of payments to silence women's claims of sexual encounters with Trump, saying the payments were directed by Trump to fend off damage to his 2016 White House bid.

Cohen is expected to be on the witness stand for several days, and face intense grilling by Trump's attorneys, who have painted him as a liar who's trying to take down the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

While prosecutors' most important witness, he's also their most vulnerable to attack — having served time in federal prison and built his persona in recent years around being a thorn in Trump's side.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing in the case.

Here are some takeaways from Cohen's testimony so far:

'JUST DO IT'

Cohen tied Trump directly to the hush money scheme, recounting meetings and conversations with his then-boss about stifling negative stories in the waning weeks of the 2016 campaign.

"He expressed to me: Just do it," Cohen said of the \$130,000 payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels, who was threatening to go public with claims of a sexual encounter with Trump decade earlier. Trump denies they ever had sex.

Less than two weeks before the election, Cohen finalized the payments to buy Daniels' silence. Immediately, he went to Trump to inform him the deal was done, he testified.

"The task he gave to me was finished, accomplished and done," Cohen testified, before pointing to a

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second reason for updating his boss: "to take credit for myself so that he knew I had done it and finished it, because this was important."

About another story of an alleged affair with former Playboy model Karen McDougal, Cohen said Trump told him, "Make sure it doesn't get released." Cohen testified that he personally had no interest in acquiring the rights to McDougal's story, telling jurors, "What I was doing was at the direction of and benefit of Mr. Trump." Trump also denies having an affair with McDougal.

Cohen also recounted going to Trump after learning about a Trump Tower doorman who claimed, falsely, that Trump had a child out of wedlock.

In reply, Trump told him, "You handle it," according to Cohen.

Cohen described being angry when he wasn't initially reimbursed for the Daniels hush money payment. Eventually he met with Trump and then Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg in Trump Tower to discuss the debt owed to him, Cohen told jurors. There, Weisselberg informed Cohen the reimbursements would be paid as "legal services" in monthly installments, he testified.

That's important because the 34 counts of false business records Trump is charged with stem from paperwork such as invoices and checks that were deemed legal expenses in company records. Prosecutors say those payments largely were reimbursements to Cohen for Daniels' hush money payment.

ALL ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

Cohen testified that Trump feared Daniels' story would be a "disaster" for his presidential campaign, which was already reeling at the time from the release of the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape in which Trump boasted about grabbing women sexually without their permission.

That testimony could be key for prosecutors, who are trying to prove that Trump schemed to illegally influence the 2016 race by burying unflattering stories that could damage his campaign.

The defense has sought to show that the former president was trying to protect his family and reputation — not his campaign — by shielding them from embarrassing stories about his personal life.

Cohen testified that Trump was angry when he learned about Daniels' story, telling him, "I thought you took care of this."

Trump told Cohen: "This is a disaster, total disaster. Women are going to hate me. Women will hate me. Guys, they think it's cool, but this is going to be a disaster for the campaign," Cohen testified.

Cohen said he asked Trump how the story might impact his marriage with his wife, Melania. Cohen said Trump told him, "Don't worry," adding: "How long do you think I'll be on the market for? Not long."

Cohen said that comment led him to conclude that "this was all about the campaign."

A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP

Cohen spoke in glowing terms about his early days working for Trump, telling jurors he was surprised and honored when the former president first offered him a job. Cohen said he and Trump were so close in the decade Cohen worked for him that the two spoke in person or by phone multiple times every single day.

Cohen did everything from talking with the media to renegotiating bills on Trump's behalf, including outstanding invoices from 50 vendors of Trump's failed Trump University project. The praise he got from Trump afterward made him feel like he was "on top of the world," he told jurors.

"The only thing that was on my mind was to accomplish the task and make him happy," Cohen said, referring to Trump.

He also lied and bullied on Trump's behalf, he said. Part of his job included reaching out to reporters whose stories upset Trump, asking them to make changes or take them down — and sometimes threatening legal action. Asked if he had done so in a "strong and threatening manner," Cohen said he did.

But overall, Cohen told jurors, the job was "fantastic."

"It was an amazing experience in many, many ways," he added. "There were great times. There were several less than great times."

A HANDS-ON BOSS

Cohen portrayed Trump as deeply involved in the details and decisions of his company, the Trump Organization.

Prosecutors throughout the trial have been trying to elicit such testimony to support the idea that Trump

would have known about the payment to Daniels and subsequent reimbursement to Cohen.

Cohen testified that Trump wanted to be updated immediately about any developments regarding the tasks he assigned. Cohen said Trump had an "open-door policy" so executives could meet him in his office, without appointment, and keep him apprised of developments.

"When he would task you with something, he would then say, 'Keep me informed,' 'Let me know what's going on,'" Cohen testified. That was especially true "if there was a matter that was troubling to him."

If Trump "learned of it in another manner, that wouldn't go over well for you," Cohen testified.

THE SECRET RECORDING

With Cohen on the stand, jurors again heard the audio recording he secretly made of a meeting with Trump in September 2016 in which they discussed the plan to purchase McDougal's silence. In the recording, Trump can be heard saying: "What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?"

Cohen testified that it was the only time that he had ever recorded a conversation with Trump. He said made the recording so Pecker, the National Enquirer publisher, could hear the conversation and be assured that Trump was going to pay him back.

Cohen testified that the recording abruptly cut off because he was receiving an incoming call to his phone, a claim substantiated by cell phone carrier records shown in court. Cohen said the number listed in the carrier records belonged to a bank official who was trying to get ahold of him.

Cohen said the recording was not altered and sounded exactly the same as the day it was recorded. Prosecutors' questions eliciting that testimony were meant to rebut a suggestion previously raised by the defense that Cohen may have altered the tape.

Earlier in the trial, Trump's attorneys pressed a witness about the "gaps" in the handling of the phone after Cohen made the recording, along with the abrupt cut-off at the end of the tape.

Questions and grief linger at the apartment door where a deputy killed a US airman

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the apartment door where a Florida deputy shot and killed Senior Airman Roger Fortson, a small shrine is growing with the tributes from the Air Force unit grappling with his loss.

There is a long wooden plank, anchored by two sets of aviator wings, and a black marker for mourners to leave prayers and remembrances for the 23-year-old.

One visitor left an open Stella Artois beer. Others left combat boots, bouquets and an American flag. Shells from 105mm and 30mm rounds like those that Fortson handled as a gunner on the unit's AC-130J special operations aircraft stand on each side of the door — the empty 105mm shell is filled with flowers.

Then there's the quarter.

In military tradition, quarters are left quietly and often anonymously if a fellow service member was there at the time of death.

The 1st Special Operations Wing in the Florida Panhandle, where Fortson served took time from normal duties Monday to process his death and "to turn members' attention inward, use small group discussions, allow voices to be heard, and connect with teammates," the Wing said in a statement.

In multiple online forums, a heated debate has spilled out in the week since Fortson was shot: Did police have the right apartment? A caller reported a domestic disturbance, but Fortson was alone. Why would the deputy shoot so quickly? Why would the police kill a service member?

There are also questions about whether race played a role because Fortson is Black, and echoes of the police killing of George Floyd.

Fortson was holding his legally owned gun when he opened his front door, but it was pointed to the floor. Based on body camera footage released by the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, the deputy only commanded Fortson to drop the gun after he shot him. The sheriff has not released the race of the deputy.

"We know our Air Commandos are seeing the growing media coverage and are having conversations on what happened," Lt. Gen. Tony Bauernfeind, head of Air Force Special Operations Command, said in

a message to unit leaders last week.

He urged those leaders to listen with an effort to understand their troops: "We have grieving teammates with differing journeys."

In 2020, after Floyd's death, then-Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Kaleth O. Wright wrote an emotional note to his troops about police killings of Black men and children: "I am a Black man who happens to be the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force. I am George Floyd ... I am Philando Castile, I am Michael Brown, I am Alton Sterling, I am Tamir Rice."

At the time, Wright was among a handful of Black military leaders, including now-Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. CQ Brown Jr., who said they needed to address the killing and how it was affecting them.

"My greatest fear, not that I will be killed by a white police officer (believe me my heart starts racing like most other Black men in America when I see those blue lights behind me) ... but that I will wake up to a report that one of our Black Airmen has died at the hands of a white police officer," Wright wrote at the time.

Wright, who is now retired, posted a photo on his personal Facebook page Thursday of Fortson standing in matching flight suits with his little sister.

"Who Am I ... I'm SrA Roger Fortson," Wright posted. "This is what I always feared. Praying for his family. RIH young King."

On Friday, many from Fortson's unit will travel to Georgia to attend his funeral, with a flyover of Special Operations AC-130s planned.

"You were taken too soon," another senior airman wrote on the wooden plank at Fortson's front door. "No justice no peace."

The Latest | Nearly half a million people flee fighting in Rafah and northern Gaza, UN says

By The Associated Press undefined

Nearly half a million Palestinians have been displaced in recent days by escalating Israeli military operations in southern and northern Gaza, the United Nations says.

Around 360,000 Palestinians were driven out of Rafah in Gaza's south over the past week, the United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees said. There were roughly 1.3 million people sheltering in Rafah before Israel began pushing into the city, which Israel says is the last Hamas stronghold.

Israeli forces are also battling Hamas militants in northern Gaza, where the army had launched major operations earlier in the war. The army's evacuation orders issued Saturday have displaced around 100,000 people so far, U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters Monday.

No food has entered the two main border crossings in southern Gaza for the past week. Some 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza face catastrophic levels of hunger, on the brink of starvation, and a "full-blown famine" is taking place in the north, according to the U.N.

Seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground operations in Gaza have killed more than 35,000 people, most of them women and children, according to local health officials.

The war began Oct. 7 when Hamas attacked southern Israel, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting about 250 others. Israel says militants still hold around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Currently:

- Misery deepens in Gaza's Rafah as Israeli troops press operation.
 - With the shock of Oct. 7 still raw, sadness and anger grip Israel on its Memorial Day.
 - Pro-Palestinian protests dwindle on U.S. campuses, as some college graduations are marked by defiant acts.
 - Blinken delivers some of the U.S.'s strongest public criticism yet of Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza.
 - Palestinian band escapes horrors of war, but its members' futures remain uncertain.
- Here's the latest:

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WHITE HOUSE ADVISER SAYS ISRAEL RISKS AN ENDLESS COUNTERINSURGENCY IN GAZA

WASHINGTON — White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Monday that the U.S. administration has expressed concerns to Israeli officials about becoming “mired in a counterinsurgency campaign that never ends” as Israel’s War Cabinet remains focused on carrying out a major operation the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

The comments from a top adviser to President Joe Biden came a day after Secretary of State Antony Blinken cautioned that Israel could be left “holding the bag” on an enduring insurgency in post-war Gaza.

“Look, we have painful experience in counterinsurgency campaigns fighting terrorists in urban environments, in populated areas,” said Sullivan, referring to long U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. “And we know that it is not as simple as executing a military operation and calling it a day.”

Sullivan added that, “One of the risks of engaging in any kind of counterinsurgency campaign is the ability of the terrorist group to attract more recruits and more followers as time goes on.”

Sullivan said he spoke to his Israeli and Egyptian counterparts on Sunday about redoubling diplomatic efforts on a hostage-for-truce negotiations, and that U.S. officials would have further conversations with the Israelis in the coming days about how Israel can refine its plan to go after Hamas militants in Rafah while lessening the risk to Palestinian civilians.

He also pushed back against growing criticism from around the globe — as well as American critics of Israel’s prosecution of the war — who say Israeli forces are committing a genocide against the Palestinians.

Egypt, a key U.S. ally, said it would join South Africa’s case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, which accuses Israel of violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention.

“I can’t say that it’s helpful to the discussions between Egypt and Israel to try to sort through assistance and access issues,” Sullivan said of the move announced Sunday by Cairo, which along with Qatar is a mediator in the cease-fire talks.

The top United Nations court has concluded there is a “plausible risk of genocide” in Gaza — a charge Israel strongly denies.

U.N. SAYS 100,000 PEOPLE DRIVEN OUT OF NORTHERN GAZA BY NEW ISRAELI EVACUATION ORDERS

UNITED NATIONS -- Israeli evacuation orders issued on Saturday for northern Gaza amid its ongoing bombardment in the area “have resulted in the displacement of some 100,000 people so far,” the United Nations says.

U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters Monday those fleeing the north are in addition to the nearly 360,000 people that have fled the southern city of Rafah since the first Israeli evacuation order there a week ago.

“We remain deeply concerned about the lack of protection for civilians – and the lack of safety for humanitarian operations,” Haq said.

Under international humanitarian, he stressed, “civilians must be protected and have their basic needs met, whether they move or stay” and “those who leave must have enough time to do so, as well as a safe route and a safe place to go.”

Haq said he believes “a small amount” of fuel got into Gaza over the weekend, and the U.N. has been rationing what it has, “so we’re not in a shutdown mode, but we’re very low on fuel.”

U.S.-BUILT FLOATING PIER FOR GAZA AID COULD START OPERATING IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, U.S. AND CYPRUS SAY

NICOSIA, Cyprus — Humanitarian aid could start entering Gaza in the next few days through a long-promised floating pier built by the U.S. military after delays caused by bad weather, according to officials in the U.S. and Cyprus.

Improved sea conditions will allow the U.S. Army to anchor a causeway onto the beach this week, Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh said Monday. The work could be finished Wednesday or Thursday, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public.

At a news conference, Cyprus’ Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos said he hopes aid could start flowing into Gaza through the sea corridor this week. “All these issues will be basically resolved in the next few days,” he said.

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The plan is for aid ships to travel from the Mediterranean island of Cyprus to the floating pier near Gaza, where the cargo will be loaded into smaller U.S. Army boats that go to the causeway onshore. Trucks driven by contractors who are not from the U.S. will drive off the Army boats onto the causeway and down to the beach.

The U.S. ship Sagamore is in waters off Gaza, where U.S. officials said it would transfer some 475 pallets of food to another ship until the causeway is in place.

The Gaza pier project is expected to cost around \$320 million. No food has entered the two main land crossings into southern Gaza for the past week, as the Israeli military intensified its bombardment and other operations in Rafah.

Almost the entire population of Gaza relies on humanitarian aid to survive. Israeli restrictions and ongoing fighting have hindered humanitarian efforts, causing widespread hunger and a "full-blown famine" in the north, according to the U.N.

Jordan, the United States and other nations began airdropping aid into Gaza earlier this year, but aid agencies describe that as a costly, last-ditch effort that cannot meet mounting needs.

Associated Press writers Menelaos Hadjicostis in Nicosia and Tara Copp in Washington contributed to this report.

A UNITED NATIONS CONVOY WAS ATTACKED IN RAFAH, KILLING AN INTERNATIONAL U.N. STAFFER
UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations says a clearly marked U.N. convoy has been attacked in Gaza's southern city of Rafah, killing a U.N. international security staff member and lightly wounding another.

U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said the staff member who died in the attack Monday morning was the first U.N. international staff member killed since Israel's war in Gaza began on Oct. 7.

Around 190 U.N. staff members have been killed in the war, all Palestinian nationals working mainly for the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees known as UNRWA, Haq said.

Haq said the U.N. staffers, whose nationalities were not disclosed, were in a U.N.-marked vehicle in a convoy that was struck as it traveled to the European Hospital in Rafah.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "condemns all attacks on U.N. personnel and calls for a full investigation," the spokesman said.

The U.N. chief said the seven-month war has not only taken a heavy toll on civilians but all on humanitarian workers and reiterated his urgent appeal for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire and release of all hostages taken by Hamas on Oct. 7, Haq said.

ISRAELI PROTESTERS BLOCK AID TRUCKS FROM TRAVELING TO GAZA, MEDIA REPORTS SHOW
JERUSALEM — Israeli media are reporting that dozens of protesters opposed to sending humanitarian aid to Gaza have blocked trucks heading toward the territory, destroying some of the aid.

Videos online showed protesters tearing through boxes of aid and throwing them to the ground at a crossing between the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Israel. The aid trucks originated in Jordan and were making their way toward Gaza.

Israeli police said a number of people were arrested, without elaborating.

Over the past week, activists with the Tzav 9 organization have blocked trucks that arrived from Jordan bound for Gaza in a number of locations across Israel, snarling traffic in a number of protests. All of the trucks eventually reached the Gaza border.

This is one of the first documented incidents of protesters destroying aid destined for Gaza. The protesters say they are trying to prevent aid from reaching the militant group Hamas. Since Israel launched an operation in Rafah, limited aid has entered Gaza.

COGAT, the branch of the Israeli military responsible for Palestinian civil affairs, says the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing is open. But aid groups say the Gaza side of the crossing is inaccessible because of the fighting and that no aid has entered for the last week.

COGAT said a total of 64 trucks entered Gaza on Sunday, down from more than 250 per day in April.

HEZBOLLAH'S NASRALLAH VOWS TO KEEP FIGHTING ISRAELI FORCES ON THE LEBANESE BORDER
BEIRUT — Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah vowed that the Lebanese militant group will keep fighting

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the Israeli military on the Lebanon-Israel border in order to support its Palestinian ally Hamas in Gaza.

In a televised speech Monday, Nasrallah said militant activity from Hamas' allies in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon — all of which are backed by Iran — have pressured Israel's military during its war in Gaza.

Hezbollah and Israel have traded fire on a near-daily basis along the border since the war in Gaza started seven months ago. Tens of thousands are displaced along the border in both countries.

"We tell the (Israeli) settlers of the north: 'Go to your government and tell them to stop the war on Gaza,'" Nasrallah said, adding that Israel is now at a "dead end" in their operation in Rafah, as they struggle to dismantle Hamas despite months of bombarding the tiny Palestinian enclave.

He dismissed statements from Israeli officials promising all-out war on Lebanon, and maintained that Hezbollah's goal is to "put pressure to stop the war in Gaza."

Hezbollah and Israel have traded fire on a near-daily basis along the border since the war in Gaza started seven months ago. Tens of thousands are displaced on each side of the border.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 350 people in Lebanon, most of them fighters with Hezbollah and allied groups but also including more than 50 civilians. In Israel, strikes from Lebanon have killed at least 10 civilians and 12 soldiers.

SADNESS AND ANGER MARK ISRAEL'S MEMORIAL DAY AS NETANYAHU MAKES SPEECH

JERUSALEM — During Israel's Memorial Day speech by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, one spectator waved a flag with "7.10" in red, the date of Hamas' deadly attack last October, while another heckled the Israeli leader.

The usually somber event has been compounded by the sadness and simmering public anger over the failures of Oct. 7, when Hamas fighters from Gaza broke into southern Israel and killed 1,200 people, mostly Israelis, the act that sparked the war.

"We are constantly working to bring everyone back, the living and the fallen alike, to bring everyone back home. We have already returned about half of them, and we will return them all," Netanyahu said.

Shortly after finishing his speech at Mount Herzl cemetery a man in the crowd was heard shouting "garbage" in Hebrew in the direction of the Israeli leader.

Thousands of Israelis have been rallying every week in the coastal city of Tel Aviv, calling for Netanyahu to step down.

Many believe he should be doing more to secure the release of dozens of hostages captured by Hamas.

Netanyahu has rejected Hamas' demand for an end to the war, saying it would allow the group to remain in control of Gaza and eventually launch another Oct. 7-style attack.

AID AGENCIES STRUGGLE TO DISTRIBUTE FOOD AS HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS ARE ON THE MOVE

CAIRO — U.N. officials say 360,000 Palestinians have fled Rafah in the past week amid Israel's intensified assault on the southern Gaza city, and aid agencies are rushing to distribute dwindling food supplies to the newly displaced people.

Abeer Etefa, a spokesperson for the U.N.'s World Food Program, said Monday that 38 trucks of flour had arrived through the Western Erez Crossing, the second access point now operating to the largely devastated northern sector of the Gaza Strip. But no food has entered the two main crossings in southern Gaza for the past week.

The Rafah crossing into Egypt has been closed since Israeli troops seized it a week ago, while fighting in Rafah city has made it impossible for aid groups to access the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel.

The main U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, said Monday that so far 360,000 people have fled Rafah, where some 1.3 million Palestinians had been crowded for weeks after fleeing Israel's onslaught elsewhere in the Gaza Strip.

Etefa said WFP is distributing food from its remaining stocks in the areas of Khan Younis and Deir Balah further north to which many of those escaping Rafah have fled but that the situation is becoming "increasingly unsustainable."

Almost the entire population of Gaza relies on humanitarian groups' distribution of food and other supplies to survive. Amid Israeli restrictions and obstacles to aid distribution from violence, some 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza face catastrophic levels of hunger, on the brink of starvation, and a "full-blown famine"

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is taking place in the north, according to the U.N.

ISRAELI SOLDIERS WOUNDED BY MISSILES NEAR LEBANON BORDER

JERUSALEM — Israel's military said Monday that four of its troops were injured in missile fire from southern Lebanon, as cross-border exchanges of fire with Hezbollah militants continue.

Hezbollah acknowledged the strike, saying its forces struck and destroyed an Israeli tank in the Yitfah area, northern Israel, around a kilometer from the Lebanese border.

The Israeli army said one of the soldiers was moderately injured, and all were taken to hospital. No further information was immediately available.

Hezbollah and Israel have traded fire on a near-daily basis along the border since the start of the war in Gaza seven months ago.

The Shiite force, which controls vast swathes of southern Lebanon, says it is acting in solidarity with the Palestinian militant group Hamas, whose deadly Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel triggered the war.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 350 people in Lebanon, most of them fighters with Hezbollah and allied groups but also including more than 50 civilians. In Israel, strikes from Lebanon have killed at least 10 civilians and 12 soldiers.

NETANYAHU REITERATES VOW TO FIGHT HAMAS AS ISRAEL HONORS WAR DEAD

JERUSALEM — Israel's leaders commemorated Memorial Day on Monday, honoring the country's fallen soldiers and those killed in attacks on a holiday that was almost entirely absorbed by the ongoing war in Gaza.

The usually somber calendar event has been compounded by the sadness and simmering public anger over the failures of Oct. 7, when Hamas fighters from Gaza broke into southern Israel and killed 1,200 people, mostly Israelis, the act that sparked the war. The holiday began Sunday evening and lasts until nightfall on Monday.

During the day's opening ceremony at Mount Herzl cemetery on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed once again to defeat Hamas, a promise he has made repeatedly during Israel's brutal seven month war with the militant group.

"We are determined to win this struggle, we exacted and will exact a high price from the enemy for their criminal acts, we will realize the goals of victory and at the center of them the return of all our hostages home," Netanyahu said from the podium.

Israel responded to Hamas' deadly October assault by bombarding and invading Gaza, killing over 35,000 Palestinians from the enclave according to the Hamas-run health Ministry. More than 600 Israeli soldiers have been killed since the war erupted.

Among the other attendees at Mount Herzl was the Israeli President, Isaac Herzog.

At 11:00 A.M. on Monday, sirens announced two minutes of silence, and a formation of four fighter planes then flew over Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.

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.

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"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 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 a 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."

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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 bright green 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 a couple thousand dollars to the cost.

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 Associated Press 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's CEO said at a conference in May that it has no plans to sell EVs in the U.S.

BYD EVs aren't being sold in the U.S. now largely because of 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. 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."

Dr. Cyril Wecht, celebrity pathologist who argued more than 1 shooter killed JFK, dies at 93

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Dr. Cyril Wecht, a pathologist and attorney whose biting cynicism and controversial positions on high-profile deaths such as President John F. Kennedy's 1963 assassination caught the attention of prosecutors and TV viewers alike, died Monday. He was 93.

Wecht's death was announced by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, which did not disclose a cause or place of death, saying only that he "passed away peacefully."

Wecht's almost meteoric rise to fame began in 1964, three years after he reentered civilian life after serving a brief stint at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. At the time, Wecht was serving as an assistant district attorney in Allegheny County and a pathologist in a Pittsburgh hospital.

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The request came from a group of forensic scientists: Review the Warren Commission's report that concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, assassinated Kennedy. And Wecht, with his usual thoroughness, did just that — the beginning of what became a lifelong obsession to prove his theory that there was more than one shooter involved in the killing.

After reviewing the autopsy documents, discovering the president's brain had gone missing, and viewing an amateur video of the assassination, Wecht concluded the commission's findings that there was a single bullet involved in the attack that killed Kennedy and injured Texas Gov. John Connally was "absolute nonsense."

Wecht's lecture circuit demonstration detailing his theory that it was impossible for one bullet to cause the damage it did on that November day in Dallas made its way into Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" after the director consulted with him. It became the famous courtroom scene showing the path of the "magic bullet."

Attorney F. Lee Bailey called Wecht the "single most important spearhead of challenge" to the Warren report. Wecht's verbal sparring with Sen. Arlen Specter, a staffer on the commission, also became well known, culminating in an accusation in his book "Cause of Death" that the politician's support of the single-bullet theory was "an asinine, pseudoscientific sham at best."

Yet, somehow, Wecht and Specter overcame their differences and developed something of a friendship, with the senator coming to the pathologist's defense during a grueling, five-year legal battle that sapped him of much of his life's savings and ended in 2009.

In the end, Wecht emerged victorious in that, as well when a series of legal maneuvers and judicial decisions forced prosecutors to drop all fraud and theft charges against him in a case that revolved around accusations that he had used his public post as Allegheny County medical examiner to further his multimillion-dollar private practice.

Wecht's outspokenness on the Kennedy assassination, and the publicity he generated, later made him a go-to pathologist on dozens of other high-profile cases ranging from Elvis Presley to JonBenet Ramsey, the child beauty queen whose death remains unsolved.

At the homicide trial of school head Jean Harris, accused of murdering "Scarsdale Diet" Dr. Herman Tarnower, Wecht testified unsuccessfully for the defense. His testimony at the trial of Claus von Bulow may have helped acquit Von Bulow of charges he tried to kill his heir wife, Sunny.

After studying Elvis' autopsy report, Wecht concluded, and shared his findings on national television, that the King of Rock had likely died of an overdose, not heart disease. His findings spurred Tennessee officials to reopen the case in 1994, though, in the end, the official cause of death remained unchanged.

In the months preceding the O.J. Simpson homicide trial in 1994, Wecht was a frequent talk show guest, conjecturing on the "Today" show and "Good Morning America" about the significance of blood samples and other evidence.

When Michael Jackson died in 2009, Wecht again took to the airwaves, discussing the deadly mix of drugs and sedatives that killed the King of Pop.

Though he spent more than five decades dealing with death on an almost daily basis, Wecht managed to remain generally upbeat, his hearty laugh rumbling from deep within his gut, often humoring himself with his own, sometimes insulting and caustic, jokes.

Still, in a series of interviews with The Associated Press in 2009, Wecht was circumspect, dwelling on the possibility of his own death. His biggest fear, he noted at the time, was suffering or becoming dependent on others on friends and family.

"I want to be alive when I die. Think about that," Wecht said. "I mean, OK, what is life?"

It's key, he said, to die recognizing those you love, because when you die, they won't be there anymore.

"I will be separated from my wife and my children and my grandchildren and, someday, my great-grandchildren. That's what death means to me," Wecht said.

"I'd like to have it go on forever."

Always the realist, however, Wecht took the time to detail many of his cases in six books. In "Cause of Death" — a book authored by Wecht, his son Benjamin, and Mark Curriden, formerly a writer for the Atlanta

Journal-Constitution and The Dallas Morning News — attorney Alan Dershowitz praised the pathologist as the “Sherlock Holmes of forensic sciences.”

The son of a grocer, Wecht attended undergraduate school at the University of Pittsburgh and later received medical and law degrees from the same school. He served two stints as Allegheny County’s coroner, ending his second in 2006, when he resigned after being indicted with fraud and theft charges.

His first term, from 1970 to 1980, was also fraught. Then, too, he was accused of using county morgue facilities for his private forensic business while coroner. He paid \$200,000 in restitution following a lengthy legal fight. He also served a four-year term as an Allegheny County commissioner.

A run for U.S. Senate against John Heinz III in 1982 was unsuccessful.

Survivors include his wife, Sigrid, and their four children, David, a Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice; Daniel, a clinical professor in the Neurosurgery Department at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center; Benjamin, a freelance writer and teacher; Ingrid, a doctor specializing in obstetrics and gynecology; and 11 grandchildren.

Socialists deal blow to separatists in Catalan elections but face uphill task to form government

By CIARÁN GILES and JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Spain’s ruling Socialist party scored a crucial victory in regional elections in the powerful northeastern region of Catalonia, garnering the most seats and dealing a blow to the region’s two main separatist parties that have governed for decades.

But candidate Salvador Illa failed to win a majority in Sunday’s voting, and will face tough negotiations if he wants to form a government.

Illa’s party won 42 seats, and it was the first time the Socialists led a Catalan election in both votes and seats won. The result would seem to be a perfect payoff for Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and his efforts to reduce tensions in Catalonia in recent years, despite major opposition from right-leaning parties in Spain.

“The biggest takeaway from the election was that it’s the worst result for the forces of Catalan independence since 1982,” said Andrew Dowling, a specialist in Catalan history at Cardiff University in Wales.

But equally important, “it’s an excellent result for Pedro Sánchez, an excellent result for the government in Madrid,” Dowling said in a telephone interview Monday with The Associated Press.

But Illa will need the support of 26 other lawmakers to form a government in the 135-seat chamber in Barcelona — or he could try to secure the agreement of parties outside the proposed coalition to abstain from voting to make it easier for his bloc to gain a simple majority.

For the moment he has the backing of six deputies from the leftist Sumar group with whom Sánchez forms the country’s minority coalition government in Madrid.

But he will still need support or abstention from another group, possibly the pro-independence Republican Left of Catalonia of the sitting regional president, Pere Aragonès. But that party plummeted to 20 seats from 33 and a deal to support Illa could be suicidal.

Aragonès on Monday announced he would not take his seat in the next parliament and was retiring from front-line politics. He ruled out doing any deals with the Socialists and the right-leading Junts (Together) led by Carles Puigdemont, the fugitive former regional president.

Junts finished second with 35 seats. Speaking from France on Monday, Puigdemont said he intends to try to form a government with other separatist groups.

But the reality is that the four pro-independence parties, including Junts, only tot up 61 seats, seven short of a majority. Most of the other parties vehemently oppose Puigdemont.

The quagmire is made even more complicated by the fact that Sánchez relies on the support of Junts and the Republican Left to shore up his government in Madrid.

That was basically in return for Sánchez’s decision to try to calm matters in Catalonia in recent years by

pardoning jailed high-profile separatists and moving forward on a controversial amnesty for Puigdemont and hundreds more.

Puigdemont on Monday ruled out threatening the national government should Illa be able to form a government in Barcelona.

The Socialists have interpreted Sunday's results as putting an end to the illegal secessionist push by Puigdemont.

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

The party's spokeswoman in Catalonia, Núria Parlon, said Monday that the Socialists hope to form a government with the support of the Republican Left and Sumar. She ruled out Puigdemont's initiative.

"We will not support Puigdemont's investiture, the people have spoken clearly and the independence movement at this moment does not have a legitimate majority to demand this government headed by Carles Puigdemont," Parlon said.

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.

Cardiff University's Dowling believes Illa has the best possibility of forming a government and did not rule out him doing so by getting abstention of the right-leaning Popular Party and the far right VOX, who detest the whole idea of the Catalan separatism.

But he also ventured the possibility of "a totally surprising" administration led by the Socialists and Junts together, arguing that with the independence cause losing force the two parties actually have a lot in common on economic issues and combined they would have an absolute majority.

"There's going to be a lot of backroom deals to be considered," he said. "There are many, many moving plates."

The newly elected lawmakers are due to take their seats on June 10.

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."

Are US interest rates high enough to beat inflation? The Fed will take its time to find out

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The sharp interest rate hikes of the past two years will likely take longer than previously expected to bring down inflation, several Federal Reserve officials have said in recent comments, suggesting there may be few, if any, rate cuts this year.

A major concern expressed by both Fed policymakers and some economists is that higher borrowing costs aren't having as much of an impact as economics textbooks would suggest. Americans as a whole, for example, aren't spending much more of their incomes on interest payments than they were a few years ago, according to government data, despite the Fed's sharp rate increases. That means higher rates may not be doing much to limit many Americans' spending, or cool inflation.

"What you have right now is a situation where these high rates aren't generating more braking power on the economy," said Joseph Lupton, global economist at J.P. Morgan. "That would suggest that they either need to stay high for longer or maybe even higher for longer, meaning rate hikes might come into the conversation."

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said at a press conference earlier this month that an interest rate increase was "unlikely," but he did not fully rule it out. Powell emphasized, however, that the Fed needed to take more time to gain "greater confidence" that inflation is actually returning to the Fed's 2% target.

"I think the Fed's telling you hikes are not quite as on the table as the market was expecting," said Genadiy Goldberg, an economist at TD Securities.

On Friday, Dallas Federal Reserve President Lorie Logan said that it is "just too early to think" about cutting rates, according to news reports. She also suggested that it is unclear whether the Fed's rate is high enough to quell inflation. Logan is one of the 19 officials on the Fed's interest-rate setting committee, though she does not vote on rates this year.

Higher-for-longer borrowing costs are sure to disappoint many, from Americans hoping for lower mortgage rates before buying a home, to Wall Street traders eagerly awaiting a cut, to President Joe Biden, whose reelection campaign would likely benefit from lower rates.

On Wednesday, the government will release April's inflation report, and economists forecast it will show inflation declined slightly to 3.4%, from 3.5% in March. It has climbed from 3.1% in January, however, after falling sharply last year, raising concerns about whether progress in reducing inflation has stalled.

The Fed has pushed its key rate to a 23-year high of 5.3% in an effort to bring down inflation, which peaked at 9.1% in June 2022.

Yet despite those sharp increases, Americans, on average, spent just 9.8% of their after-tax income paying interest and principal on their debts in last year's fourth quarter. Two years earlier — before the Fed hiked rates — they spent 9.5%, a historically low percentage.

Why hasn't the figure risen by more? Millions of American homeowners refinanced their mortgages at very low rates during the past decade and a half when the Fed mostly kept its key rate at nearly zero to bolster the economy. As a result, their mortgages remain low and their finances largely unaffected by

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the Fed's policies. Consumers who paid off their cars, or who took out low-rate five-year car loans before rates rose, have also felt little impact.

The average rate for a new 30-year mortgage is nearly 7.1%, according to mortgage giant Freddie Mac. But Goldberg calculates that the average rate on all outstanding mortgages is just 3.8%, not much higher than 3.3% when the Fed began to hike rates. The gap between new rates and the average outstanding is the highest since the 1980s.

"One of the things we hear is that maybe because so many Americans refinanced their mortgages when mortgage rates dropped during the pandemic ... people are not feeling the bite of higher mortgage rates yet," Neel Kashkari, president of the Federal Reserve's Minneapolis branch, said last week. "If that's true, and I think there's some truth to that, then it may take longer" for the Fed's rate hikes "to be fully felt by the housing market and by the economy more broadly."

Many large corporations also locked in low rates before the Fed began hiking, further limiting the impact of higher borrowing costs.

"I think the most likely scenario is where we are right now, which is just we stay put for an extended period of time," Kashkari said, referring to the Fed's key rate.

There are signs that higher rates are causing more financial struggles for many Americans, as delinquencies on credit cards and auto loans rise. And many younger Americans are becoming increasingly concerned that, with mortgage costs so high, they will not be able to afford a home.

Yet delinquencies are climbing from very low levels and are not yet historically high. Pandemic-era stimulus checks and rising incomes allowed many people to pay down debt in the past few years.

And Americans, in total, are carrying much less debt as a percentage of their incomes than they did during the housing bubble 15 years ago, Lupton notes.

"With consumers and businesses alike sheltered from higher interest rates thanks to pandemic-era debt paydowns and refinancing, their aggregate interest burden is not yet historically elevated," Tom Barkin, president of the Richmond Federal Reserve, said in recent comments. "To me, that suggests the full impact of higher rates is yet to come."

Goldberg said that greater borrowing costs will eventually start to bite as more Americans throw in the towel and purchase homes, even with higher mortgage rates. In some cases, they may move for a new job or have family changes that require a move. And more companies, over time, will have to borrow at higher rates as well, as their low-interest loans mature.

"The longer we stay here, the more people can't wait," Goldberg said. "If the Fed can wait out consumers, that would be one way that higher for longer actually translates to Main Street."

Today in History: May 14, state of Israel is proclaimed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, May 14, the 135th day of 2024. There are 231 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 14, 1948, according to the current-era calendar, the independent state of Israel was proclaimed in Tel Aviv by David Ben-Gurion, who became its first prime minister; U.S. President Harry S. Truman immediately recognized the new nation.

On this date:

In 1643, Louis XIV became King of France at age 4 upon the death of his father, Louis XIII.

In 1796, English physician Edward Jenner inoculated 8-year-old James Phipps against smallpox by using cowpox matter.

In 1804, the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the Louisiana Territory as well as the Pacific Northwest left camp near present-day Hartford, Illinois.

In 1940, the Netherlands surrendered to invading German forces during World War II.

In 1955, representatives from eight Communist bloc countries, including the Soviet Union, signed the

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Warsaw Pact in Poland. (The Pact was dissolved in 1991.)

In 1961, Freedom Riders were attacked by violent mobs in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama.

In 1988, 27 people, mostly teens, were killed when their church bus collided with a pickup truck going the wrong direction on a highway near Carrollton, Kentucky. (Truck driver Larry Mahoney served 9 1/2 years in prison for manslaughter.)

In 1998, singer-actor Frank Sinatra died at a Los Angeles hospital at age 82 and the hit sitcom "Seinfeld" aired its final episode after nine years on NBC.

In 2001, the Supreme Court ruled 8-0 that there is no exception in federal law for people to use marijuana for medical purposes.

In 2003, more than 100 immigrants were abandoned in a locked trailer at a Texas truck stop; 19 of them died. (Truck driver Tyrone Williams was later sentenced to nearly 34 years in prison for his role in the deaths.)

In 2008, the Interior Department declared the polar bear a threatened species because of the loss of Arctic sea ice.

In 2013, in an op-ed in The New York Times, Oscar-winning actress Angelina Jolie said she'd undergone a preventive double mastectomy after learning she carried a gene that made it extremely likely she would get breast cancer.

In 2017, Emmanuel Macron swept into office as France's new president, pledging to fortify the European Union, redesign French politics and glue together his divided nation.

In 2018, writer Tom Wolfe, who chronicled the space race in "The Right Stuff" before turning his satiric wit to such novels as "The Bonfire of the Vanities," died in New York at the age of 88.

In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned doctors about a serious rare inflammatory condition in children linked with the coronavirus.

In 2022, a gunman wearing body armor opened fire in a supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, killing at least 10 people before being taken into custody.

Today's Birthdays: Photo-realist artist Richard Estes is 92. Actor Dame Sian Phillips is 91. Former Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., is 82. Movie producer George Lucas is 80. Guitarist Gene Cornish is 80. Actor Meg Foster is 76. Movie director Robert Zemeckis is 73. Rock singer David Byrne is 72. Actor Tim Roth is 63. Rock singer Ian Astbury (The Cult) is 62. Rock musician C.C. (aka Cecil) DeVille is 62. Actor Danny Huston is 62. Rock musician Mike Inez (Alice In Chains) is 58. Fabrice Morvan (ex-Milli Vanilli) is 58. R&B singer Raphael Saadiq is 58. Actor Cate Blanchett is 55. Singer Danny Wood (New Kids on the Block) is 55. Movie writer-director Sofia Coppola (KOH'-pah-lah) is 53. Former Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen is 52. Actor Gabriel Mann is 52. Singer Natalie Appleton (All Saints) is 51. Singer Shanice is 51. Actor Carla Jimenez is 50. Rock musician Henry Garza (Los Lonely Boys) is 46. Alt-country musician-singer Ketch Secor is 46. Rock singer-musician Dan Auerbach is 45. Rock musician Mike Retondo (Plain White T's) is 43. Actor Amber Tamblyn is 41. Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg is 40. Actor Lina Esco is 39. NFL player Rob Gronkowski is 35. Actor Miranda Cosgrove is 31.