

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, May 23

Senior Menu: Cheese tortellini Alfredo with diced chicken, green beans, mandarin oranges, whole wheat bread.

State Track Meet at Sioux Falls

Girls Golf Regional at Groton, 10 a.m.

High School Region baseball at highest two seeds

Story Time at Wage Memorial Library, 10 a.m.

## Friday, May 24

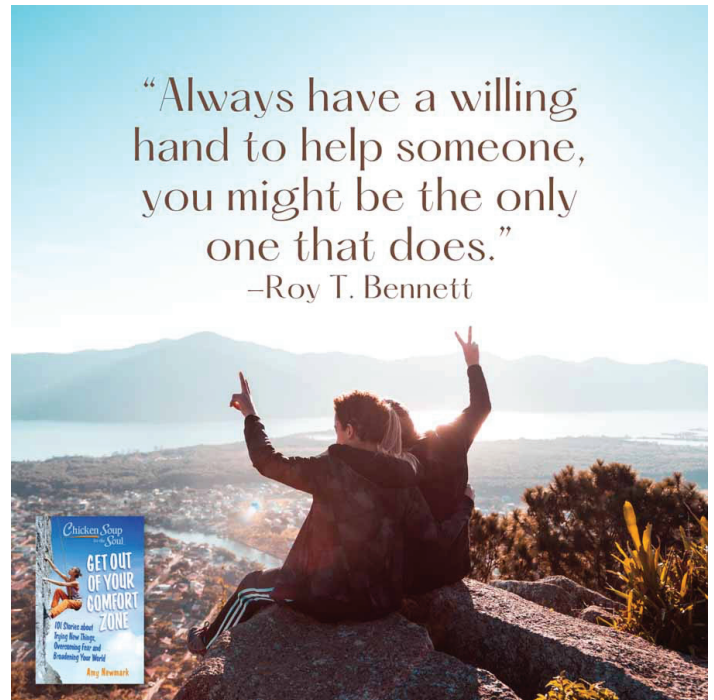
Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, mashed potatoes, sauerkraut, 3 bean salad, chocolate pudding with bananas.

State Track Meet at Sioux Falls

Groton Locke Electric Amateurs at Clark, 8 p.m.

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

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



## Saturday, May 25

State Track Meet at Sioux Falls

Common Cents Community Thrift Store hours 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

## Sunday, May 26

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.

**OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton**

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# 1440

In partnership with smartasset™

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak yesterday set the date for UK general elections for July 4. The announcement comes as Sunak's center-right Conservative Party trails 20 points behind the opposition Labour Party in polls, with respondents largely citing inflation and the influx of migrants for their discontent.

A Tennessee judge yesterday ruled to prevent the foreclosure and sale of Elvis Presley's Graceland estate. The Memphis estate—which had been scheduled to go to auction today—can stay with Presley's

family, with the judge accusing the company trying to sell it of possible fraud.

The Biden administration approved the cancellation of \$7.7B in student debt yesterday for an estimated 160,500 eligible borrowers. The move is part of the White House's incremental approach to canceling federal student loans via program adjustments as it builds out a broader debt plan. Yesterday's approval brings the administration's total debt relief to \$167B for nearly 5 million borrowers.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NHL Western Conference Finals kick off tonight (8:30 pm ET, TNT) with the Dallas Stars taking on the Edmonton Oilers. US investment fund takes ownership of Inter Milan soccer club after Chinese owner misses loan payment.

"Kairos," a novel by German writer Jenny Erpenbeck, wins prestigious 2024 International Booker Prize for best work of fiction translated into English.

Director Mohammad Rasoulof will attend Cannes Film Festival screening of his film "The Seed of the Sacred Fig" after fleeing Iran following being sentenced to eight years in prison by the Islamic Revolutionary Court.

## Science & Technology

AI startup Anthropic provides deepest study to date exploring why large language models, including the company's Claude 3 chatbot, generate content in response to different prompts.

Researchers develop a compound with the elusive radioactive element promethium for the first time, allowing it to be studied more easily; with no stable isotopes, only about one total pound of promethium exists in the Earth's crust at any given time.

Bilingual brain implant decodes words in both English and Spanish from analysis of brain waves; AI-powered device demonstrated in stroke patient who lost the ability to speak.

## Business & Markets

Markets close down (Dow -0.5%, S&P 500 -0.3%, Nasdaq -0.2%) on signals Federal Reserve may hold off on lowering interest rates. AI chipmaker Nvidia shares rise 3% in extended trading after reporting more than 260% increase in quarterly revenue year-over-year, will carry out a 10-for-1 stock split.

Mining giant Anglo American rejects takeover bid but will enter talks with rival BHP Group on a \$50B acquisition offer; bid would be the largest deal in the history of the mining industry.

Techstars CEO Maëlle Gavet steps down citing health reasons, will leave company at end of month; organization is one of the top groups offering preseed investment support for entrepreneurs.

## Politics & World Affairs

Spain, Norway, and Ireland announce plan to recognize Palestinian statehood on May 28; the Palestinian Authority and Hamas praise the move while Israel recalls ambassadors in protest.

City of Uvalde, Texas, reaches \$2M settlement with families of 19 victims of the 2022 Robb Elementary School shooting; city also pledges to overhaul the local police force and create a memorial for the victims.

Former UN ambassador Nikki Haley says she will vote for former President Donald Trump in November, consolidating further Republican support behind the presumptive nominee.



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## Groton Youth Baseball Teams Make Clean Sweep at the Spring League Tournament



### U12 Gray

In back, left to right, are coaches L-R, Matt Locke, Ryan Schelle, Jason Hill, Cody Hanten, Jarett Zimmerman; Kids back row L-R, Drew Fjeldheim, Asher Zimmerman, Easton Larson, Trayce Schelle, Gavin Hanten, Rylan Blackwood; Front row L-R, Hank Hill, Graham Rose, Mason Locke, Blake Malsam, Knox Mulder.



## Groton Youth Baseball Teams Make Clean Sweep at the Spring League Tournament



### U10 Green

Coaches L-R, Pat Krause, Eric Moody, Tigh Fliehs, Rich Fliehs, Travis Kurth; Back row kids L-R, Keenan Moody, Hank Fliehs, Greyson Warrington, Adam Fliehs, McCormick Hoffman, Jeremiah Yeigh, Rae Fliehs; Front row L-R, Titan Johnson, Hayden Hubbart, Boston Kurth, Brody Zimmerman, Micah Krause, Jack Schuelke, Calvin Locke.



## Groton Youth Baseball Teams Make Clean Sweep at the Spring League Tournament



### U8 Navy

Coaches L-R, Jeremy Iverson, Tigh Fliehs, Mitch Locke, Rich Fliehs; Back row kids L-R, Quinton Ronning, Samuel Fliehs, Freddy Cole, Jagger Penning, Braxten Sombke, Nolan Rose, Mavrik Severson, Saylor Gilchrist; Front row L-R, Dayton Gonsoir, Bo Fliehs, Landon Locke, Kroy Khali, Bennett Iverson, Holden Hubbard, Briggs Sperry; not pictured is Gauge Johnson.





## 2024 Groton Area "Tigers" State Track Meet Participants

### Boys Events:

**Lane Tietz:** Sprint Medley Relay

**Colby Dunker:** Sprint Medley Relay, Javelin

**Logan Ringgenberg:** Shot Put

**Blake Pauli:** Sprint Medley Relay

**Keegen Tracy:** Sprint Medley Relay, 100m Dash, 200m Dash, 400m Dash

### Girls Events:

**Laila Roberts:** 4x100m Relay, 4x200m Relay, 4x400m Relay, Sprint Medley Relay

**Faith Traphagen:** 4x800m Relay, Sprint Medley Relay

**Emma Kutter:** Shot Put

**Rylee Dunker:** 4x100m Relay, 4x200m Relay, Sprint Medley Relay

**Jerica Locke:** 4x100m Relay, 4x200m Relay, 4x400m Relay, Sprint Medley Relay

**Taryn Traphagen:** 4x800m Relay, 4x400m Relay, 400m Dash

**Kella Tracy:** 4x800m Relay, 4x100m Relay, 4x200m Relay, 4x400m Relay

**McKenna Tietz:** 4x100m Relay, 300m Hurdles

**Ashlynn Warrington:** 4x800m Relay, Sprint Medley Relay

**Ryelle Gilbert:** 4x800m Relay, Sprint Medley Relay

The State Track Meet is set for Howard Wood Field in Sioux Falls starting today.

(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



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## CARD OF THANKS

The family of Rich Anderson would like to thank everyone from Groton, Claremont, Langford, Andover, and surrounding communities for the outpouring of kindness and support throughout his struggle with Parkinson's disease. Your cards, phone calls, and visits were all very much appreciated. We would also like to extend a special thank you to Bethesda Nursing Home for the excellent care Rich received and the Avera Hospice nurses who helped him in the final weeks.

God Bless,

Vickie & Chuck Windham, Mort & Helen Cooper and family, Glenn & Wendy Cooper and family



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Adult Mosquito Control was conducted last night. The wind was light, starting out of the west, then northwest, then northeast and ended southeast. About five gallons of Perm-X ULV 4-4 chemical was used.

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DISTRICT 1

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- ✓ Property Rights



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## MEMORIAL DAY

HONORING ALL WHO SERVED



### Groton Post #39 Memorial Day Schedule

Hufton at 7:30 a.m.

James at 8:15 a.m.

Verdon at 8:45 a.m.

Bates-Scotland at 9:15 a.m.

Ferney at 10 a.m.

Andover Catholic at 11 a.m.

**Groton at Noon**

**Guest speaker at Groton  
is Rod Zastrow.**

**Lunch to follow at the Groton Post  
#39 home served by the Legion Aux-  
iliary.**

**In the event of inclement weather,  
the ceremony will be held at the  
Post home.**

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## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Opposition won't cause state to change prison location, official says

**Opponents say lack of communication persists**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 22, 2024 4:24 PM**

Department of Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko said the state will not change the location of a future men's prison south of Sioux Falls, despite pending litigation and local opposition.

"I know that we've talked about this and I have to be very careful because we are still in litigation, but we're not looking at other land," Wasko said Tuesday during a legislative budget hearing.

The site is a piece of state-owned property in rural Lincoln County, 15 miles south of Sioux Falls. Opponents, including people who own nearby homes, are frustrated that Wasko is avoiding them while discussing plans with lawmakers.

"How is she able to speak on that, but not speak to the people directly impacted by that?" said Maddie Voegeli with Neighbors Opposed to Prison Expansion (NOPE).

During a Jan. 22 hearing on NOPE's lawsuit against the state, the group's attorney argued the state's unilateral siting decision undermines local planning and zoning laws and economic development plans. A lawyer representing the state Department of Corrections countered that the notion of the state needing county permission to build a penitentiary is "absurd." The lawsuit awaits a judge's decision.

Voegeli said opponents tried to talk with the state and governor before filing their lawsuit. She said a lack of communication is "what propelled the lawsuit" in the first place.

Kyah Broders, president of NOPE, concurred.

"We reached out as soon as this became public knowledge," she said. "There's been no transparency in this. If there was, there wouldn't have been this much resistance."

Broders said the only person given any advance notice was the farmer leasing the land from the state for the last four decades. Sam Eiesland is that farmer's son. He had planned to farm the land after his dad.

Eiesland said the notice from the state essentially told them, "We're going to build here." From there, he said communication has been nonexistent with Wasko and Gov. Kristi Noem.

"We have heard nothing from either of the two," Eiesland said, adding, "If we could have sat down, as their constituents, looked at some other options, we maybe could have found another place."

Wasko told lawmakers Tuesday that other locations were considered for the 1,500-bed men's prison, which will largely replace the 143-year-old penitentiary in Sioux Falls. Legislators have set aside \$567 million for the project, but the final price estimate is not yet known.

"We did have several failed attempts at land that was brought to our attention, or we sought out," she said.

"Our design team had effectively told us that we were coming to a point in our timeline that if we didn't have land that could start a design and development, we were going to go into a potential six- to nine-month lag because of their timelines," she continued.

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, asked if expanding the existing penitentiary site in Sioux Falls is possible. But from building up a few more levels to expanding the site itself, "the answer to that is no," Wasko said.

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



## Amid discussion of new prisons, some lawmakers on budget panel call for reforms

**South Dakota incarcerates twice as many people as North Dakota, legislators told**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 22, 2024 2:08 PM**

A comparison with North Dakota caused some lawmakers on South Dakota's legislative budget committee to say Tuesday that changes are needed to curb high incarceration numbers.

The discussion came as South Dakota prepares to build a new men's prison near Sioux Falls and a new women's prison in Rapid City, for a combined estimated cost of around \$800 million.

"I would dare say it's probably not too late for the Legislature to pivot maybe in their philosophy for how we handle things in the state of South Dakota," said Rep. Mike Derby, R-Rapid City, the co-chair of the Appropriations Committee.

Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, agreed.

"It is time for us as a state to look at how we are focusing on individuals who are incarcerated, and how we help them reenter society," she said.

Sen. Jim Bolin, R-Canton, added "the cost of incarceration is very high for a state that doesn't like to tax very much."

The bipartisan sentiment was shared as Department of Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko and lawmakers discussed the price tags associated with new prison construction.

The Legislature has set aside \$567 million over the past several years for the men's prison that the state plans to build in rural Lincoln County, south of Sioux Falls and Harrisburg. Wasko said the full price for the new men's prison should be known in the coming months, but did not offer an estimate. During the most recent legislative session, the Bureau of Finance and Management said the cost could grow to \$700 million.

The men's prison will largely replace the 143-year-old penitentiary in Sioux Falls. Meanwhile, the state is also planning and has set aside money for an \$87 million women's prison in Rapid City, to ease overcrowding at the women's prison in Pierre.

With an incarceration rate of 824 per 100,000 residents as of 2021, the state was locking up a higher percentage of its people than any democratic country on earth, according to the nonprofit, nonpartisan Prison Policy Initiative.

Derby said he heard North Dakota had half as many people incarcerated as South Dakota, despite the states having similar populations.

"Is there maybe things we can do legislatively that would reduce the future number of inmates?" he asked.

"It's actually a little stunning," Wasko said, regarding the differences between North Dakota and South Dakota. "You're correct. South Dakota has about double the number of incarcerated inmates as North Dakota."

Wasko said North Dakota has about 1,850 inmates compared to South Dakota's 3,800. But North Dakota's focus on probation and other methods to keep people out of prison has come with a cost: North Dakota has 2,200 correctional employees, compared to South Dakota's 1,100, and North Dakota spends \$220 million annually on corrections, compared to \$145 million in South Dakota, according to Wasko.

Wasko said North Dakota has "a very robust probation program and a lot of pre-sentencing programs that South Dakota does not have."

"North Dakota is investing in the corrections philosophy, and I think we're catching up," she said. "I think it's just, with our institutions and some of our policies, I think that South Dakota is catching up."

She also said there are differences in sentencing.

"Again, I don't have to remind anybody, South Dakota is the only state in the United States that has ingestion as a mandatory minimum of two years in prison," Wasko said.

Wasko said the highest convicted crime for 241 prisoners in South Dakota is drug ingestion, and 236 of them are serving the maximum sentence of five years.

Duba reflected on a failed bill to roll back the state's ingestion sentencing law in 2020.

"And of course, it died painfully in committee," she said. "Unfortunately, there is a mentality in our state right now – it resides with a group of people – that, 'let's just lock them up,' versus, 'let's rehabilitate them.'"

Derby said it's not too late for change.

"In the business world, if I had this information, I'd be making different decisions," he said.

According to the Council of State Governments Justice Center, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum signed laws in 2017 that focused on reducing jail time for people who committed minor crimes or broke probation rules. The state also spent \$7.5 million to improve community behavioral health services and increase the number of providers through the Free Through Recovery program. By mid-2022, 2,700 people had participated in the program.

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

## 13 trainees sign up for state's first-ever tribal law enforcement course

**BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 22, 2024 10:49 AM**

Thirteen tribal law enforcement recruits have signed up for the state's first-ever tribal law enforcement-specific training session starting June 3 in Pierre.

The trainees are from the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Oglala Sioux Tribe and Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, according to the state Attorney General's Office. The rest of the 24-member class will consist of 11 officers from non-tribal law enforcement agencies.

Gov. Kristi Noem and Attorney General Marty Jackley announced their plan for the course in April, responding to calls from some tribes for training options closer to home.

Most officers in reservation communities are expected to attend a 13-week training session at the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs' Indian Police Academy in Artesia, New Mexico. Tribal officers can and do get trained in South Dakota, but there are limited slots available, and even those who complete state training are expected to spend two weeks in Artesia afterward.

For the new course, Bureau of Indian Affairs officials have agreed to come to South Dakota to offer a shortened version of that two-week portion of the training.

The new 13-week course in South Dakota will be at the George S. Mickelson Criminal Justice Center in Pierre, allowing tribal officers to go home on the weekends. Graduation is scheduled for Sept 3 in Pierre.

"We thank Gov. Noem for her support of this training session, and our tribes for trusting us with their officers," Jackley said in a news release. "Training tribal officers alongside state and local officers serving near our reservations strengthens relationships, increases consistency and makes sense for South Dakota."

Class members are required to complete course work in the law, arrest control tactics, firearms, vehicle handling and criminal investigations. The program is taught by full-time staff from the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation and adjunct instructors from law enforcement agencies across the state. U.S. Attorney Alison Ramsdell has also provided instructors.

The development of the course comes amid a period of heightened tension between Noem and tribal leaders. The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe said Tuesday that a ban of Noem from its lands "is imminent," which would make it the ninth of nine tribal governments in the state to endorse banning the governor.

The bans are in response to repeated comments from Noem alleging Mexican drug cartel activity on reservations, claiming tribal leaders are "personally benefitting" from cartels, and saying children on reservations "don't have any hope" because "they don't have parents who show up and help them."



## USDA chief voices 'deep concerns' over U.S. House GOP farm bill's nutrition cuts

BY: JANE NORMAN - MAY 22, 2024 5:00 PM

WASHINGTON — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on a call with reporters Wednesday strongly criticized a farm bill draft written by U.S. House Republicans, saying it would damage the coalition that traditionally has united behind farm bills and "raises the real possibility of being unable to get a farm bill through the process."

The massive five-year legislation governing farm, nutrition, commodity and conservation programs is scheduled for a markup beginning Thursday morning in the House Agriculture Committee, headed up by Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson, a Pennsylvania Republican.

It already has appeared headed for a clash with a proposal in the Democratic-controlled Senate amid disagreements over anti-hunger and conservation programs. In addition, the must-pass bill faces a House with a slim 217-213 GOP majority.

Vilsack expressed frustration that work on the \$1.5 trillion measure has been delayed by eight months and said he has "deep concerns" about the proposed package released by Thompson last week. Lawmakers fighting over spending and the speaker post in the House last year passed an extension of the 2018 farm bill that expires Sept. 30.

"I appreciate the fact that folks are working hard. I appreciate the fact that they've listened to people out there in the countryside," said Vilsack, a former governor of Iowa.

"But I'm afraid that what we have is a circumstance where the proposal being advanced by the House of Representatives, the Republican members of the Ag Committee, it really is designed not to create a route to passage ... I think it's designed, unfortunately, for a route to impasse, which will cause a further delay."

### Cuts to nutrition, disaster programs

Vilsack said he objects to provisions that would reduce spending on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, that delivers food assistance to more than 40 million low-income families.

By limiting future updates to the Thrifty Food Plan, the basis for benefit levels, the bill's reductions would amount to \$30 billion over 10 years, the liberal-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has estimated. Vilsack put the number at \$27 billion.

"It's been clear that there has been a coalition historically that is central to the passage of the farm bill, which understands the importance of addressing the nutrition programs and the farm programs," Vilsack said. "It is essentially a crack in the coalition that is absolutely necessary to the passage of the farm bill ... The fact that we're crossing that red line raises the real possibility of being unable to get a farm bill through the process."

He said he also has a problem with a section of the House bill dealing with the Commodity Credit Corporation, which carries out various farm programs.

The legislation would restrict the USDA's authority to use the CCC's Section 5, which Vilsack said would tie the agency's hands in responding to natural disasters affecting farmers and force USDA to rely on Congress to enact disaster assistance.

"There's no assurance that such bills get passed," Vilsack said. "And secondly, oftentimes Congress underfunds those bills, as was the case so recently with the 2023 situation disasters."

He said Thompson is proposing "essentially to eliminate the capacity of the secretary of Agriculture to utilize the CCC in the face of a natural disaster, for example, that distorts markets." He also said he believes the bill overestimates the savings that would be obtained.

Vilsack said he prefers a farm bill proposal offered by Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat, describing it as "more practical" and "doable." Stabenow, who has released a summary of her bill but not the text, would boost eligibility for nutrition programs such as SNAP, among other provisions.

## Chair defends proposal

Thompson, in a statement after the call, pushed back on Vilsack's comments and said his bill makes "historic investments" in agriculture.

"It's clear from this eleventh hour push that the Secretary is determined to use every penny of the borrowing authority made available to him to circumvent Congress if left unchecked," he said. "The Committee is reasserting Congress' authority over the Commodity Credit Corporation, which will bring reckless administrative spending under control and provides funding for key bipartisan priorities in the farm bill.

"The sudden rancor on using the CCC as a pay-for is nothing more than the latest partisan attempt to divide our committee and slow down progress on passing a farm bill."

The committee in a press release Wednesday also listed multiple statements of praise for the Thompson proposal, including the president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, the CEO of the National Conference of State Legislatures, the CEO of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture and leaders of various commodity and trade groups.

*As the Washington Bureau Chief of States Newsroom, Jane directs national coverage, managing staff and freelance reporters in the nation's capital and assigning and editing state-specific daily and enterprise stories. Jane is a veteran of more than three decades in journalism.*

## States need to keep PFAS 'forever chemicals' out of the water. It won't be cheap.

**11 states have set their own limits on PFAS, but now all states must meet new federal rules**

**BY: ALEX BROWN - MAY 22, 2024 6:00 AM**

In recent years, Michigan has spent tens of millions of dollars to limit residents' exposure to the harmful "forever chemicals" called PFAS. And some cities there have spent millions of their own to filter contaminated drinking water or connect to new, less-polluted sources.

"We've made significant investments to get up to speed," said Abigail Hendershott, executive director of the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team, which serves as a coordinating group for the state's testing, cleanup and public education efforts. "There's still a good chunk of the country that hasn't taken on anything."

That's about to change.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued new standards last month for PFAS levels in drinking water, giving water systems three years to conduct testing, and another two years to install treatment systems if contaminants are detected. State officials and utilities say it's going to be difficult and costly to meet the requirements.

"This is going to take a lot more investment at the state level," said Alan Roberson, executive director of the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators, a group that convenes leaders in state health and environmental agencies. "It creates a big workload for everybody."

PFAS chemicals are widespread, found in a host of everyday products and industrial uses, and they don't break down naturally, meaning they stay in human bodies and the environment indefinitely. Exposure has been shown to increase the risk of cancer, decrease fertility, cause metabolic disorders and damage the immune system.

To date, 11 states have set limits for PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, in drinking water. Several others have pending rules or levels that require public notice. While the federal rule builds on those efforts, it also sets limits that are stricter than the state-issued rules.

"We really have looked to the states as leaders in setting standards and doing some of the foundational science," said Zach Schafer, director of policy and special projects for the EPA's Office of Water. "The state



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agencies are the ones who will be playing the point role [in implementing the national rule]."

Schafer said the agency estimates that 6% to 10% of water systems nationwide will need to take steps to reduce PFAS contamination, at a cost averaging \$1.5 billion per year over an 80-year span.

Public health advocates say the EPA's rule is an important step to ensure all Americans have access to safe water. They say state actions show that such efforts can work.

But some state regulators and water suppliers — even in states that already have their own rules — say the strict thresholds and timelines imposed by the feds will be difficult for many utilities to achieve. While the Biden administration has dedicated billions in funding to help clean up water supplies, experts say the costs will far exceed the available money.

"It's going to have a significant impact nationally on water rates and affordability of water," said Chris Moody, regulatory technical manager with the American Water Works Association, a group that includes more than 4,000 utilities.

An estimate, conducted on behalf of the association, pegs the national cost of cleaning up contaminated water at nearly \$4 billion each year. The report found that some households could face thousands of dollars in increased rates to cover the costs of treatment.

## **'There's a lot of concern'**

New Jersey in 2018 became the first state to issue standards for PFAS in drinking water. While the state's regulations given New Jersey a head start, officials say they still have a difficult task ahead to meet the stricter thresholds.

"When we bring in the EPA number, the number of noncompliant systems goes up dramatically," said Shawn LaTourette, the state's commissioner of environmental protection. "There's a lot of concern about cost and implementation."

LaTourette said state leaders are working to analyze which water systems may fall out of compliance when the federal thresholds take effect. And he's calling on lawmakers to provide more money to communities that can't afford the upgrades.

In Washington state, utilities have begun testing for PFAS under state standards passed by regulators in 2021. Officials say that roughly 2% of the water systems tested so far aren't in compliance, but that number would jump to 10% when factoring in the stricter federal limits. State leaders say they'll be able to grandfather in the data they've been collecting to meet EPA's testing requirements.

The agency may ask state lawmakers for a "substantial" increase in staffing to implement the new rules, said Mike Means, capacity development and policy manager with the Washington State Department of Health.

Michigan has had its drinking water standards for PFAS since 2020. Hendershott said state officials are well prepared to incorporate the EPA's thresholds. But the strict new limits could quadruple the number of water systems that fall out of compliance.

Sarah Doll, national director of Safer States, an alliance of environmental health groups focused on toxic chemicals, said state efforts were key to bringing about the federal rule.

"They created the urgency for the feds to bring these standards," she said. "States that already have regulatory standards absolutely are in a better position."

## **'It's very expensive'**

While many states have not enacted their own standards, some have conducted testing or taken other steps to address residents' exposure.

Missouri has been testing water systems for PFAS for more than a decade and created maps to notify residents of potential exposure. Of the 400 systems it's sampled, 11 may have trouble complying with the EPA rule, said Eric Medlock, an environmental specialist with the state Department of Natural Resources. The agency aims to bring on a chemist and laboratory equipment to conduct more testing in-house.

Medlock expressed concern that the federal limits are so strict that they're near the threshold of what

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can be detected.

"When you get down to these really low detection levels that are right at the regulatory limit, that poses a problem," he said. "We're going to have to enforce and regulate what EPA proposed. It is going to be an issue."

Medlock and others noted that states will face longer-term issues with the storage of the waste products filtered from the water, which carry their own PFAS contamination risk.

The infrastructure bill passed by Congress in 2021 includes \$5 billion over five years to help communities treat PFAS and other emerging contaminants.

More funding for cleanup may come from state lawsuits filed against chemical manufacturers. Thirty attorneys general have filed litigation against polluters, and Minnesota settled its case against 3M Company for \$850 million. But leaders say such settlements aren't a predictable funding source.

In addition to the upfront cost of installing treatment systems, utilities face ongoing expenses, such as replacing filters and disposing of waste, that are less likely to benefit from federal grants and loans. Meanwhile, some water system leaders say the federal compliance timelines may not be long enough.

"It takes time to design and build a major capital project," said Erica Brown, chief strategy and sustainability officer for the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, a policy group that advocates for public water utilities. "It's not one of those things that you say, 'You have to do this, and next year,' and you can just turn it on."

And some officials fear the drinking water limits could lead to more state regulations on wastewater plants and other entities whose discharges may affect drinking water sources.

"It seems like it's going to be problematic, because [treatment] is very expensive," said Sharon Green, manager of legislative and regulatory programs with the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts, an agency whose members operate 11 wastewater treatment plants.

Both state regulators and regulated utilities say state leaders need a broader approach to the PFAS problem than just treating the water that comes out of the tap. Officials need to stop pollution at the source, regulate industrial operations and limit products that contain the chemicals.

"If we keep it out of the river in the first place, ... [the utility] doesn't have to spend millions of dollars for treatment," said Jean Zhuang, senior attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, an advocacy group focused on the South.

While Southern states have not adopted drinking water standards for PFAS, Zhuang said South Carolina's requirement that polluters disclose their discharges of PFAS is a good model to begin cutting off contamination sources.

As states face down the expenses of fixing the PFAS problem, some advocates also want them to remember the public health costs of inaction.

"People will ultimately be consuming less of these chemicals and getting sick less often," said Melanie Benesh, vice president of government affairs at the Environmental Working Group, a public health advocacy nonprofit.

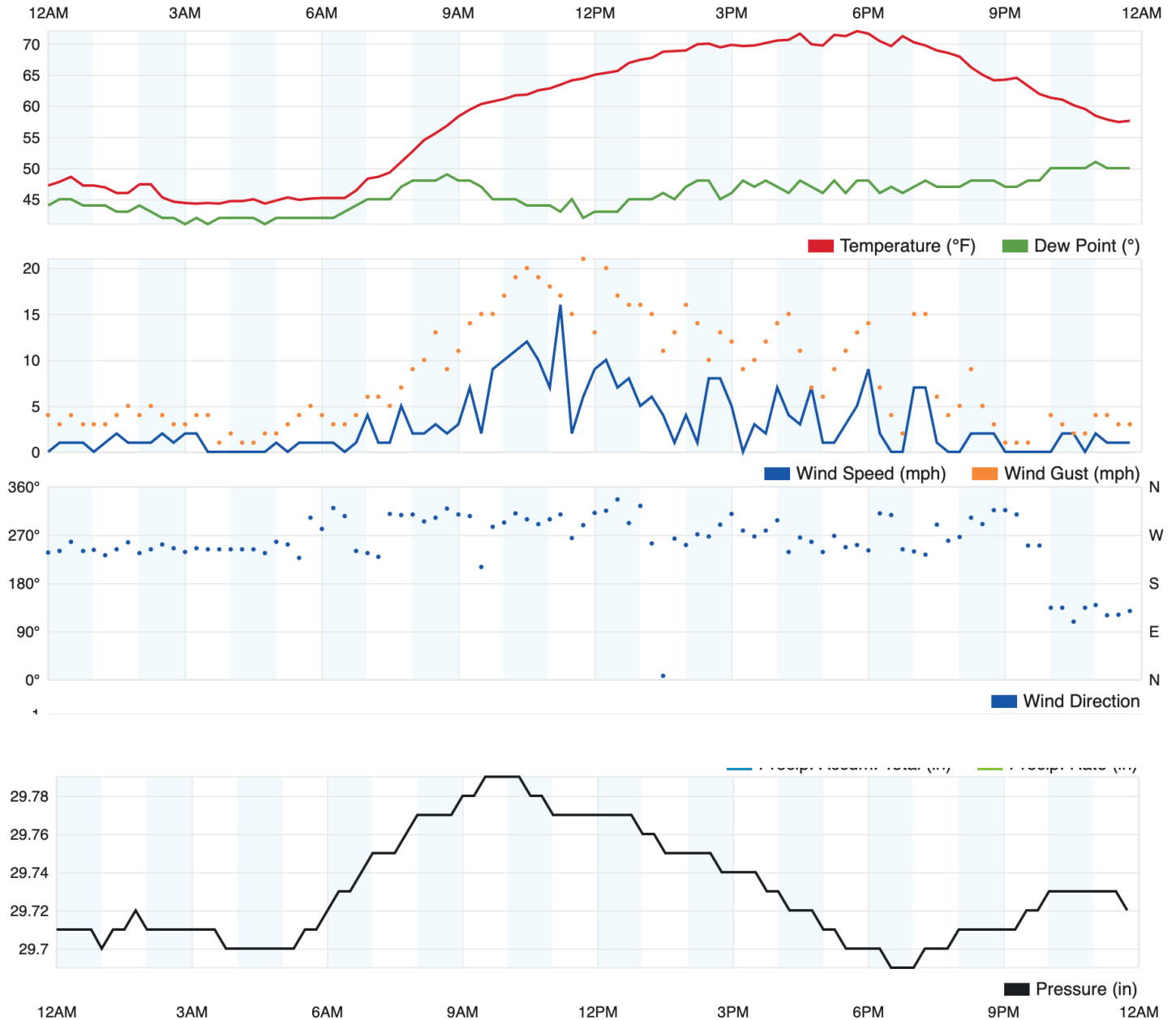
*Based in Seattle, Alex Brown covers environmental issues for Stateline. Prior to joining Stateline, Brown wrote for The Chronicle in Lewis County, Washington state.*



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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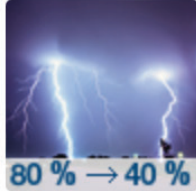
Thursday



High: 78 °F

Slight Chance  
Showers then  
Severe  
Thunderstorms  
and Breezy

Thursday  
Night



Low: 48 °F

Severe  
Thunderstorms  
and Breezy  
then Severe  
Thunderstorms

Friday



High: 60 °F

Breezy.  
Chance  
T-storms then  
Slight Chance  
Showers

Friday Night



Low: 39 °F

Partly Cloudy  
and Breezy  
then Mostly  
Clear

Saturday



High: 68 °F

Mostly Sunny  
then Slight  
Chance  
Showers



## Severe Weather Threat Overview

May 23, 2024  
4:12 AM

This afternoon and evening

### Timing/Location

As thunderstorms develop this afternoon (40-70%), there is a slight risk (2 out of 5) of these storms becoming strong to severe across the forecast area between 3-10 pm CDT.

**Primary Threats** for the **Yellow** areas:

**Tornado Potential**

Very Low **Low** Medium High

**Max Hail Size**

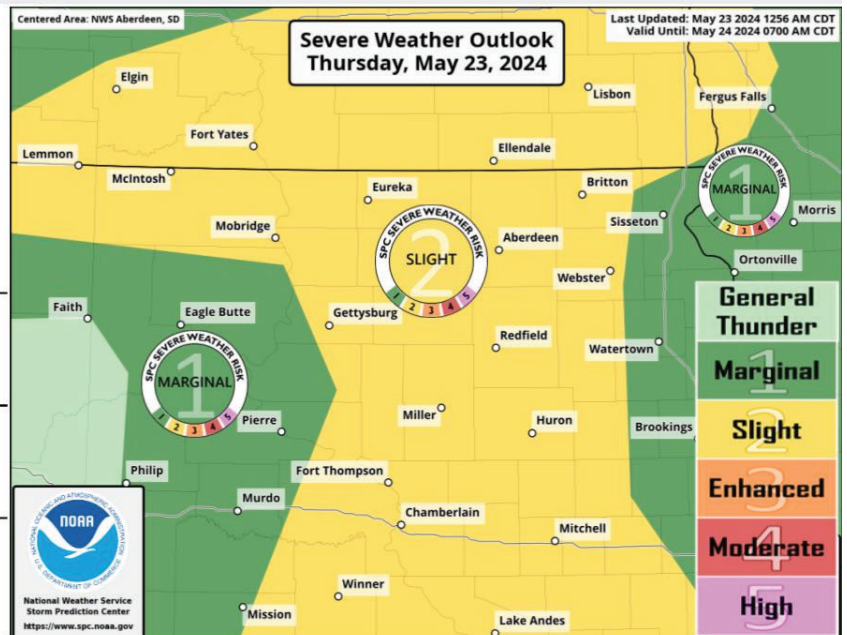
Dimes **Quarters** **Golfball** Baseball

**Max Wind Speed**

< 60 mph **60-70 mph** 70-80 mph > 80mph

**Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential**

**Very Low** Low Medium High



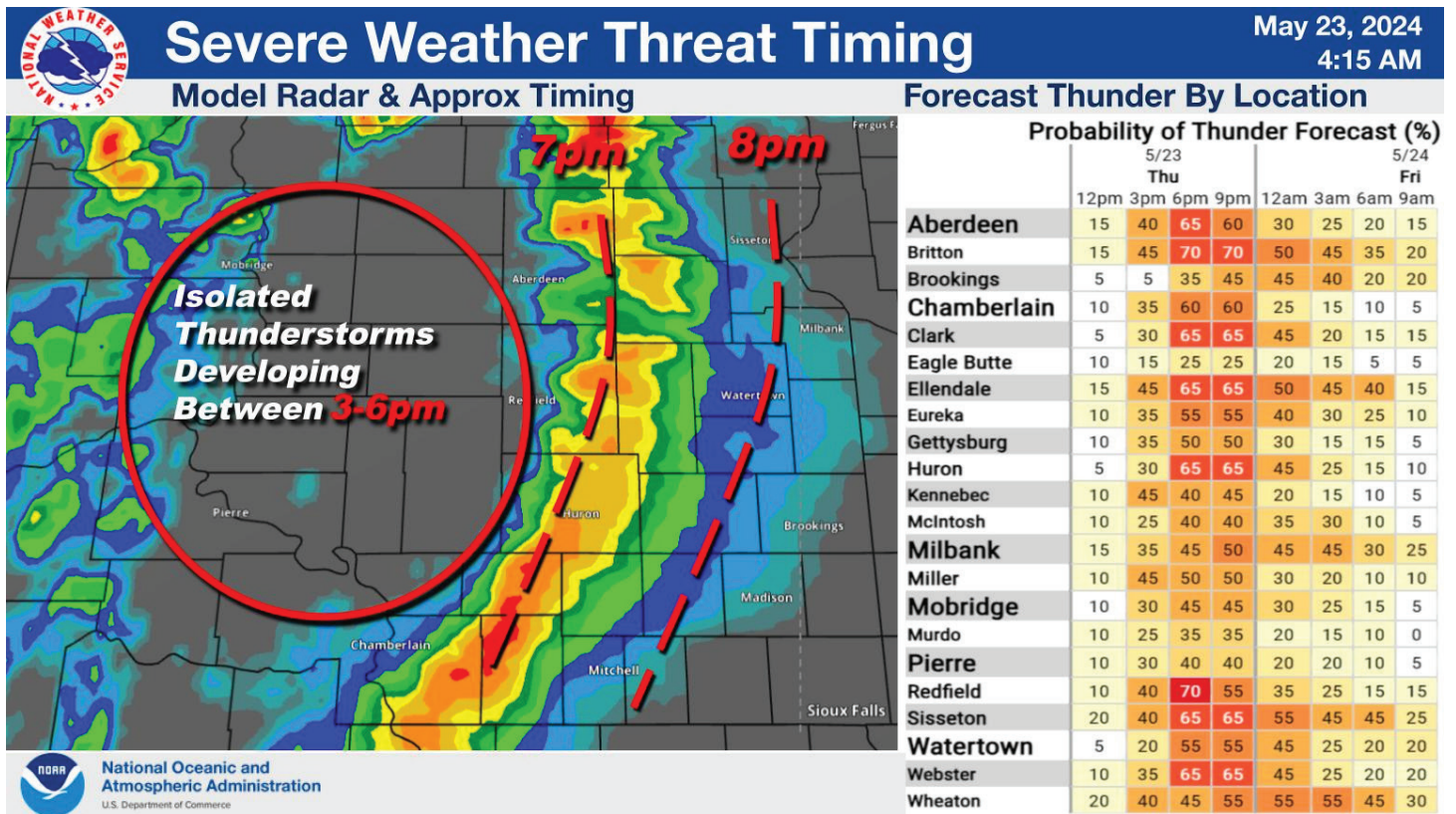
National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

As thunderstorms develop this afternoon (40-70%), there is a slight risk (2 out of 5) of these storms becoming strong to severe across the forecast area between 3-10 pm CDT. Main threats include large hail, up to around golfball size) and damaging winds between 60-70mph



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Isolated thunderstorms will develop between 3 and 6pm as line is forecasted for form over northeastern SD into west central MN through the later parts of the evening.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 72 °F at 5:20 PM**

**Low Temp: 44 °F at 3:06 AM**

**Wind: 21 mph at 10:21 AM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 15 hours, 15 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 1950

Record Low: 26 in 1897

Average High: 73

Average Low: 47

Average Precip in May.: 2.51

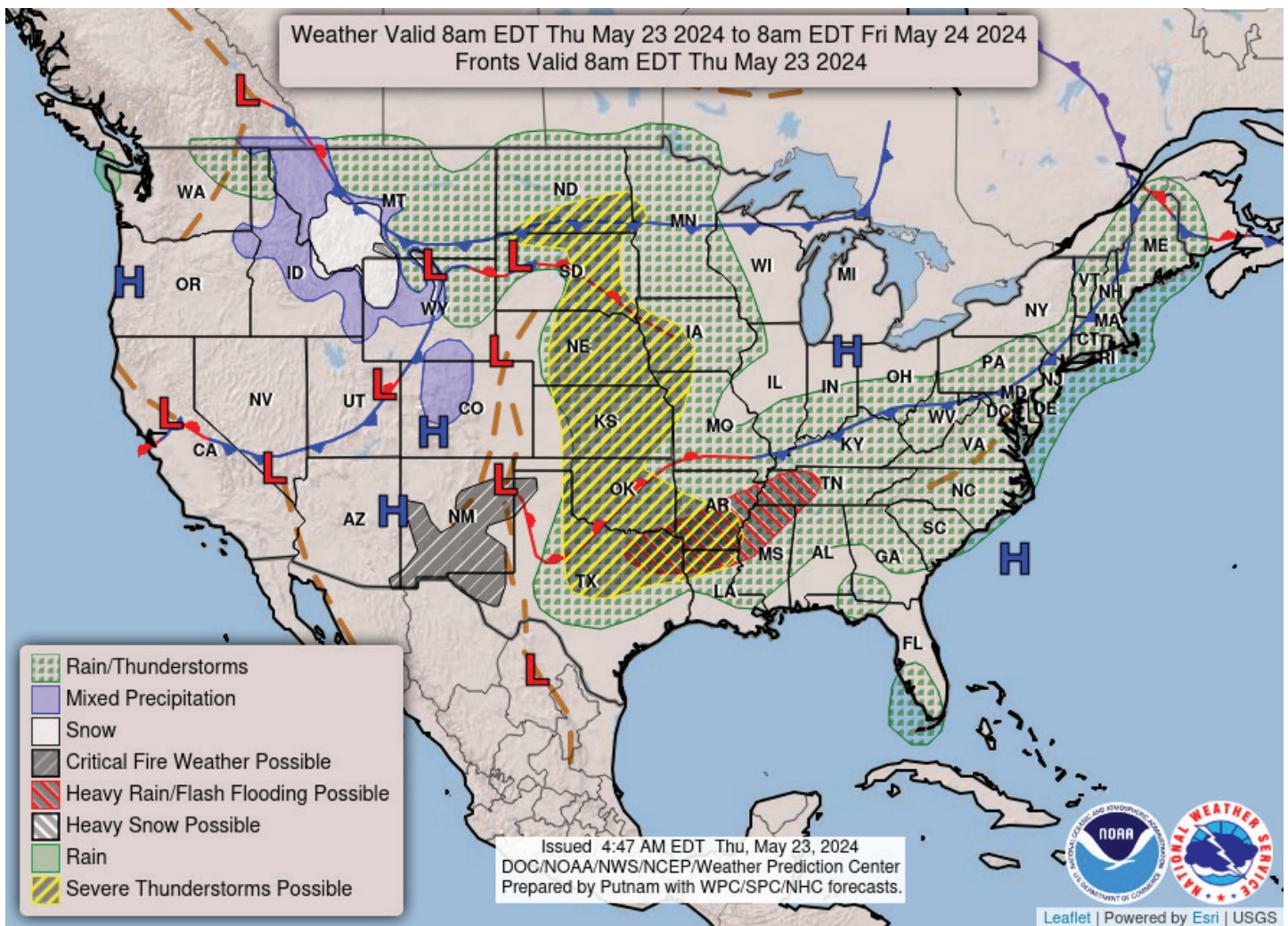
Precip to date in May: 1.71

Average Precip to date: 6.48

Precip Year to Date: 6.25

Sunset Tonight: 9:07:11 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:50:25 am





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## Today in Weather History

May 23, 1989: A complex of thunderstorms moved from southwest Minnesota through Iowa. One small tornado touched down briefly in Lyon County. But the main story with this complex was high winds and hail. Baseball size hail fell north of George in Lyon, County. Also, two-inch hail occurred in Sac County in Schaller and Odebolt, and golf ball size hail fell in Carroll, Iowa. The hail caused a lot of damage to vehicles, trees, and roofs. Thunderstorm winds of 60 miles an hour were also common across all of northwest Iowa with these storms.

2010: A rare tropical cyclone dubbed Bandu brings high winds and heavy rains to Somalia. The storm then moved into the Gulf of Aden where it quickly weakens and dissipates on the 23rd as it passes between Yemen and Somalia.

1882 - An unusual late season snow blanketed eastern Iowa, with four to six inches reported around Washington. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1953 - The temperature at Hollis OK soared from a morning low of 70 degrees to an afternoon high of 110 degrees to establish a state record for the month of May. (The Weather Channel)

1960: A massive earthquake in Chile the previous day produced a tsunami that killed 61 people in Hilo, Hawaii. An additional 180 people died on the islands of Honshu and Hokkaido in Japan.

1968: One of the costliest hailstorms in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma history pummeled the city on this date. Hail the size of baseballs fell over much of the city, resulting in more than 40,000 insurance claims over the 90,000 square mile path of the storm. The final cost was more than \$20 million. The parent thunderstorm also caused flash flooding that left 2 to 4 feet of water in some underpasses and a lightning strike that started a fire that killed two people.

1987 - It was a busy day for thunderstorms in the central U.S. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Shreveport LA and golf ball size hail at Marfa, TX. Hobart, OK, received 3.55 inches of rain in the morning, and another 4.03 inches of rain that evening. Thunderstorms in Nebraska produced 8.5 inches of rain in two hours north of Potter, and 7.5 inches of rain in ninety minutes north of Minatare. Thunderstorms in Colorado produced five inches of hail at Greeley. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather across much of the eastern U.S. Golf ball size hail was reported in Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Ohio. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Severe thunderstorms developing along a cold front resulted in 98 reports of large hail and damaging winds in the Northern Plains and Upper Mississippi Valley. Golf ball size hail caused a million dollars damage around Buffalo City, WI, baseball size hail was reported at Northfield and Randolph, MN, and thunderstorm winds gusted to 95 mph at Dunkerton, IA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably hot weather continued in the south central U.S. Pueblo, CO, equalled their May record with a high of 98 degrees, and the high of 106 degrees at Midland, TX, marked a record six straight days of 100 degree heat. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - A cold front crossing the western U.S. produced snow over parts of Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho and Utah, with five inches reported at Austin NV, and four inches at Crater Lake National Park in Oregon. Strong winds behind the cold front sharply reduced visibilities in blowing dust over central California, and two multi-vehicle accidents resulted in one death and eighteen injuries. In northern Idaho, a cloud-burst washed tons of topsoil, and rocks as large as footballs, into the valley town of Culdesac. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1997: David McWilliams Ludlum was born 1910 in East Orange, NJ - He is responsible for researching and publishing much of the early history of weather at the beginning of America. David died May 23, 1997, in Princeton, New Jersey. He was an American historian, meteorologist, entrepreneur, and author.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### STOPPED FROM GROWING

Over four hundred years ago, a Japanese gardener planted a small pine sapling in one inch of soil in a small bowl. As the tree aged, he would remove it from the soil, trim its roots and branches and then replant it.

When he died, his eldest son continued the work that he started, and a tradition was born. This tradition has been continued through thirteen generations. That tree still stands in the original dish. After four hundred years, that tree is only twenty inches tall.

In Peter's letter to the early church, he provided some extremely important advice: "Grow in the special favor and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Peter was well aware that his time on earth was ending. So in this letter he magnifies the message that God placed on his heart as he faced the end of his journey.

Through the ages his words echo in our hearts: "His divine power gives us everything we need to live a godly life."

That "divine power" leads to growth, that growth comes from knowledge and that knowledge comes from His Word that nourishes our faith and trust. If we want to become who God wants us to become and do what He would have us to do, we must allow the "roots" of our relationship with Christ to go deep into His Word so that our "branches" will bear the fruits of the Spirit.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to recognize the importance of growing in our knowledge of You so that we will enjoy Your favor as we live for and serve You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18



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: 05.21.24

2 5 8 28 69 14

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$453,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 47 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.22.24

2 5 15 41 43 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,600,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 2 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.22.24

5 8 15 17 37 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 17 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.22.24

13 24 25 30 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$113,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 17 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.22.24

10 12 19 21 67 25

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 46 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.22.24

5 16 18 26 67 4

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$120,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 46 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



## News from the Associated Press

### Wind towers crumpled after Iowa wind farm suffers rare direct hit from powerful twister

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A wind farm in southwest Iowa suffered a direct hit from a powerful tornado that crumpled five of the massive, power-producing towers, including one that burst into flames. But experts say fortunately such incidents are rare.

Video of the direct hit on the wind farm near Greenfield, Iowa, showed frightening images of the violent twister ripping through the countryside, uprooting trees, damaging buildings and sending dirt and debris high into the air.

Several of the turbines at MidAmerican Energy Company's Orient wind farm recorded wind speeds of more than 100 mph as the tornadoes approached just before the turbines were destroyed, the company said in a statement.

"This was an unprecedented impact on our wind fleet, and we have operated wind farms since 2004," MidAmerican said.

While there have been isolated incidents of tornadoes or hurricanes damaging wind turbines, fortunately such occurrences are extremely rare, said Jason Ryan, a spokesperson for the American Clean Power Association.

Although requirements vary from state to state about how far turbines must be located from other structures, Ryan said the giant turbines are not placed directly next to homes and other occupied structures.

There are currently nearly 73,000 wind turbines in operation across the country, he said. Many of those operate in the center of the country, often referred to as the wind belt, which stretches from Texas north through Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas, and includes large swaths of Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois.

Many of those same states also are prone to tornadoes, especially during the spring, including a portion of the Central Plains extending from the Dakotas south into Oklahoma and Texas, said Jennifer Thompson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Norman, Oklahoma.

Wind turbines are built to withstand high wind speeds and severe weather, like tornadoes, hurricanes and lightning strikes, but few structures are designed to withstand a direct hit from a powerful tornado, said Sri Sritharan, an engineering professor at Iowa State University who has studied the impact of earthquakes and severe weather on structures.

"When you do a design, you don't design something that can withstand an EF4 or EF5 tornado," Sritharan said.

Wind turbines are designed to meet industry standards for structural integrity that includes factors like wind speed, and it's possible that design code committees will consider the impact of Tuesday's tornado strikes in the future, he said.

"I would think they would look at this event and how they should update the standards," Sritharan said.

### Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. May 21, 2024.

Editorial: Vaccine Mandates And Future Questions

There is, quite likely, a conversation that will be looming in the South Dakota and Nebraska state capitols at some point, based on a disturbing trend being seen elsewhere.

According to the Stateline news service, more states are looking at loosening their childhood vaccination requirements. While it could be seen as COVID-19 vaccination backlash, the trend has actually been

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building for several years, although it has gained traction since the pandemic began.

And this trend has health officials worried.

Childhood vaccinations have been part of life for decades, and in the process, diseases such as polio, mumps and measles were greatly curtailed, even practically eliminated.

But resistance to the vaccines has risen. Misinformation has fueled some of this, especially a since-refuted — but still widely circulated — claim that vaccines can cause autism in children. And, frankly, people forget what life was like when vaccines weren't available or required — they forget the specter of death or a life spent crippled because of polio, which vaccines virtually eradicated. There is now not only a growing resistance to vaccination mandates but also a rise in exceptions to allow families to not have their children vaccinated.

"Public health experts worry the renewed opposition to childhood immunizations will reverse state gains in vaccination rates," Stateline reported. "Meanwhile, cases of some diseases, including measles, have increased across the country."

The Hill newspaper noted that every state in the country, as well as the District of Columbia, requires children to get vaccinated against certain diseases before they can start school.

But with more resistance to vaccination mandates, some diseases are staging a comeback. "There have been measles outbreaks in 15 states this year, most recently in Florida, where state Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo did not recommend parents vaccinate their children or keep unvaccinated students home from school as a precaution," The Hill reported.

The personal choice argument, unfortunately, does not limit the potential damage to just those families that resist vaccinations. As Stateline noted, "Vaccines protect not only the patient, but also those around them. Science has shown that a population can reach community immunity, also known as herd immunity, once a certain percentage of the group is vaccinated. That herd immunity can protect people who can't get vaccinated, such as those with weakened immune systems or serious allergies, by reducing their chances of infection."

But the trend is inching the other way. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that national vaccine coverage in schools fell from 95% in 2019-2020 to about 93% last year.

So, with vaccinations receding gradually and some lawmakers pushing anti-mandate legislation — and with former President Donald Trump stating on the campaign trail he would defund schools that have vaccine mandates (his handlers say he is referring to the COVID vaccine, but Trump himself does not specifically say that on the stump) — are we reopening a Pandora's box of nightmares?

"I feel like we're on the edge of a precipice here," Paul Offit, a pediatrician and vaccine expert at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, told The Hill. "You have the most contagious of the vaccine preventable diseases coming back to some extent, and with Donald Trump basically casting aspersions on vaccines, that's only going to worsen."

Which brings us back to what lawmakers in Pierre or Lincoln may do if anti-vaccine issues are brought up someday.

The science on the matter is clear, but so are the concerns — and the misinformation that can fuel worries.

Should the issue emerge, we hope our lawmakers rely on good science, and not bad politics, to make their decisions.

END

## Iran begins burying late president, foreign minister and others killed in helicopter crash

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran on Thursday prepared to inter its late president at the holiest site for Shiite Muslims in the Islamic Republic, a final sign of respect for a protégé of Iran's supreme leader killed in a helicopter crash earlier this week.

President Ebrahim Raisi's burial at the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad caps days of processions through

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much of Iran, seeking to bolster the country's theocracy after the crash that killed him, the country's foreign minister and six others.

However, the services have not drawn the same crowds as those who gathered for services for Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani in 2020, slain by a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad.

It's a potential sign of the public's feelings about Raisi's presidency during which the government harshly cracked down on all dissent during protests over the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, detained for allegedly not wearing her mandatory headscarf to authorities' liking.

That crackdown, as well as Iran's struggling economy, have gone unmentioned in the hours of coverage provided by state television and in newspapers. Also never discussed was Raisi's involvement in the mass execution of an estimated 5,000 dissidents at the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

Prosecutors have warned people against showing any public signs of celebrating Raisi's death and a heavy security force presence has been seen in Tehran since the crash.

Thursday morning, thousands in black gathered along a main boulevard in the city of Birjand, Raisi's hometown in Iran's South Khorasan province along the Afghan border. A semitruck bore his casket down the street, with mourners reached out to touch it and tossing scarves and other items to be placed against it for a blessing. A sign on the truck read: "This is the shrine."

Hours later, Raisi's casket arrived in Mashhad. He will be buried at the Imam Reza Shrine, where Shiite Islam's 8th imam is buried. The region long has been associated with Shiite pilgrimage. A hadith attributed to Islam's Prophet Mohammad says anyone with sorrow or sin will be relieved through visiting there.

In 2016, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei appointed Raisi to run the Imam Reza charity foundation, which manages a vast conglomerate of businesses and endowments in Iran, as well as oversees the shrine. It is one of many bonyads, or charitable foundations, fueled by donations or assets seized after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

These foundations offer no public accounting of their spending and answer only to Iran's supreme leader. The Imam Reza charity, known as "Astan-e Quds-e Razavi" in Farsi, is believed to be one of the biggest in the country. Analysts estimate its worth at tens of billions of dollars as it owns almost half the land in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city.

Raisi will be the first top politician in the country to be buried at the shrine, which represents a major honor for the cleric.

The death of Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and six others in the crash on Sunday comes at a politically sensitive moment for Iran, both at home and abroad.

Raisi, who was 63, had been discussed as a possible successor to Iran's supreme leader, the 85-year-old Khamenei. None of Iran's living past presidents — other than Khamenei, who was president from 1981 until 1989 — could be seen in state television footage of Wednesday's prayers. The authorities gave no explanation for their apparent absence.

Iran has set June 28 as the next presidential election. For now, there's no clear favorite for the position among Iran's political elite — particularly no one who is a Shiite cleric, like Raisi.

Acting President Mohammad Mokhber, a relatively unknown first vice president until Sunday's crash, has stepped into his role and even attended a meeting between Khamenei and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh on Wednesday. State media circulated photos Thursday showing a meeting between Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard chief and the head of its expeditionary Quds Force and representatives from Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels. That's another sign of Iran's government's commitment to those militias it arms against its rivals, Israel and the United States.

Meanwhile, former Foreign Ministers Mohammed Javad Zarif and Ali Akbar Salehi and other dignitaries paid respects to Amirabdollahian at Iran's Foreign Ministry, where his casket was put on display. His body later was interred in Shahr-e Rey just outside of Tehran at the Abdol Azim shrine, another final resting place for those famed in Persian history.

"Give Soleimani our greetings," a religious singer said as Amirabdollahian's body was placed inside its final resting place, referring to the slain general.



## Taiwan scrambles jets and puts missile, naval and land units on alert over China's military drills

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan scrambled jets and put missile, naval and land units on alert Thursday over Chinese military exercises being conducted around the self-governing island democracy where a new president took office this week.

China's military said its two-day exercises around Taiwan were punishment for separatist forces seeking independence. Beijing claims the island is part of China's national territory and the People's Liberation Army sends navy ships and warplanes into the Taiwan Strait and other areas around the island almost daily to wear down Taiwan's defenses and seek to intimidate its people, who firmly back their de facto independence.

China's "irrational provocation has jeopardized regional peace and stability," the island's Defense Ministry said. It said Taiwan will seek no conflicts but "will not shy away from one."

"This pretext for conducting military exercises not only does not contribute to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, but also shows its hegemonic nature at heart," the ministry's statement said.

In his inauguration address on Monday, Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te called for Beijing to stop its military intimidation and pledged to "neither yield nor provoke" the mainland Communist Party leadership.

"Facing external challenges and threats, we will continue to maintain the values of freedom and democracy," Lai told sailors and top security officials Thursday as he visited a marine base in Taoyuan, just south of the capital Taipei.

While not directly referring to China's moves, he said international society was concerned about Taiwan's security, a likely reflection of its key role in supply chains for the most advanced computer chips as well as a democratic bulwark against Chinese moves to assert its control over the Asia-Pacific.

Lai has said he seeks dialogue with Beijing while maintaining Taiwan's current status and avoiding conflicts that could draw in the island's chief ally the U.S. and other regional partners such as Japan and Australia.

The main opposition Nationalist Party, which is generally seen as pro-China, also condemned Beijing's actions.

The Nationalists, also known as the KMT, called on "the opposite side of the (Taiwan Strait) to exercise restraint, cease unnecessary maneuvers, avoid a conflict in the Taiwan Strait and maintain the cherish the results of peace and development between the sides."

Thursday's tensions came amid protests outside Taiwan's legislature against moves by the Nationalists and allies to use their slim majority to force through legislation that could affect military budgets and key judicial and other appointments.

The People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theater Command said the land, navy and air exercises around Taiwan are meant to test the navy and air capabilities of the PLA units, as well as their joint strike abilities to hit targets and win control of the battlefield, the command said on its official Weibo account.

"This is also a powerful punishment for the separatist forces seeking 'independence' and a serious warning to external forces for interference and provocation," the statement said.

The PLA also released a map of the intended exercise area, which surrounds Taiwan's main island at five different points, as well as places like Matsu and Kinmen, outlying islands that are closer to the Chinese mainland than Taiwan.

China's coast guard also said in a statement that it organized a fleet to carry out law enforcement drills near two islands close to the Taiwanese-controlled island groups of Kinmen and Matsu just off the Chinese coast.

While China has called the exercises punishment for Taiwan's election result, the Democratic Progressive Party has now run the island's government for more than a decade, although the pro-China Nationalist Party took a one-seat majority in the parliament.

Speaking in Australia, Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Stephen Sklenka, the deputy commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, called on Asia-Pacific nations to condemn the Chinese military exercises.

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"There's no surprise whenever there's an action that highlights Taiwan in the international sphere the Chinese feel compelled to make some kind of form of statement," Sklenka told the National Press Club of Australia in the capital Canberra, in a reference to Monday's presidential inauguration.

"Just because we expect that behavior doesn't mean that we shouldn't condemn it, and we need to condemn it publicly. And it needs to come from us, but it also needs to come, I believe, from nations in the region. It's one thing when the United States condemns the Chinese, but it has a far more powerful effect, I believe, when it comes from nations within this region," Sklenka added.

Japan's top envoy weighed in while visiting the U.S., saying Japan and Taiwan share values and principles, including freedom, democracy, basic rights and rule of law.

"(Taiwan) is our extremely important partner that we have close economic relations and exchanges of people, and is our precious friend," Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa told reporters in Washington, where she held talks with Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

She said the two ministers discussed Taiwan and the importance of the Taiwan Strait, one of the world's most important waterways for shipping, remaining peaceful.

## **Toronto awarded WNBA's first franchise outside US, with expansion team set to begin play in 2026**

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Toronto has been awarded the WNBA's first franchise outside the United States, with the expansion team set to begin play in 2026.

Larry Tanenbaum-led Kilmer Sports Ventures is paying \$50 million for the team. Tanenbaum also is the chairman and a minority owner of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, the Toronto sports giant that also owns the NHL's Maple Leafs and NBA's Raptors along with Toronto's MLS and Canadian Football League franchises.

"Growing internationally, I've been trying to think through next steps on a global platform," WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert told The Associated Press ahead of the official announcement Thursday morning. "It helps us reach new audiences and bring in new partners. The thing I love about going to another country is that the young girls and boys get to see professional basketball for women is important, too."

Toronto will be the WNBA's 14th franchise, with the expansion Golden State Valkyries set to start play next year.

"Our Toronto sports franchises are thriving but, we have been missing one critical piece — women's professional sports," Tanenbaum told the AP. "The world is finally taking notice of something that's been there all along — the immense talent, passion and competition in women's sports. So, once again, I saw an opportunity and knew we were in the right place at the right time to bring Canada's first WNBA team to Toronto. And now we have, making sports history."

Toronto will play at 8,700-seat Coca-Cola Coliseum at Exhibition Place and will have the ability to move up to the Scotiabank Arena on occasion. Opened in 1921, Coca-Cola Coliseum also is the home of the American Hockey League's Toronto Marlies.

"Women's sports is good business," Tanenbaum said. "Just look around — it's not a moment, but a movement and it's just the beginning. The investment that we'll put into the franchise will also be no different than the other franchises."

Tanenbaum said that the team also will play some games in Vancouver and Montreal. As far as the name of the team, he said that they'd take their time and "solicit public input."

Kilmer Sports Ventures, created as a stand-alone company to operate the team, has committed to building a practice facility, but until that is ready, it will train at University of Toronto's Goldring Centre for High Performance Sport.

Engelbert said WNBA exhibition games in Canada the last two seasons showed the passion of the fans in the country for women's basketball.



"When I was up for the preseason game, Kia (Nurse) and I did a youth clinic. The reaction from young girls to Kia and what she stands for, they so admire her," Engelbert said.

Nurse is one of a handful of Canadian players playing in the WNBA with more on the way.

"No doubt it's helpful to have household names," Engelbert said.

The commissioner expects the league to get to 16 teams by 2028.

"We've already had a lot of interest and it got more tangible and serious from a fair amount of cities after the draft," Engelbert said. "We are in a good position to get to 16 by certainly '27-28."

## The Latest | 12 Palestinians killed and 25 wounded in Israel's 2-day West Bank operation

By The Associated Press undefined

The Israeli military said Thursday it has completed a two-day operation in the occupied West Bank that the Palestinian Health Ministry says killed 12 Palestinians and wounded 25.

Rippling tensions from the Israel-Hamas war were also felt in the Red Sea, where a missile splashed down in the water near the crucial Bab el-Mandeb Strait on Thursday, but caused no damage, and in Lebanon, where state-run National News Agency says an Israeli drone strike killed one person and wounded three school students who were passing nearby in a bus. More than 400 people have been killed in Lebanon since Israel and Hezbollah began exchanging fire the day after the latest war in Gaza began.

Norway, Ireland and Spain said Wednesday they were recognizing a Palestinian state, a move welcomed by Palestinians as an affirmation of their decadeslong quest while Israel recalled its ambassadors to the three countries.

It was the second blow to Israel's international reputation this week after the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said he would seek arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defense minister. The International Court of Justice is also considering allegations of genocide that Israel has strenuously denied.

At least 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Israel launched its war in Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed about 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250.

Currently:

- ICC prosecutor's warrant requests for Israel and Hamas leaders ignite debate about the court's role.
- Norway, Ireland and Spain recognize a Palestinian state in a historic move.
- Families of Israeli hostages release video of female soldiers being captured by Hamas.
- First aid from the U.S. pier in Gaza has reached starving Palestinians, the U.N. says.

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

Here's the latest:

**UNITED NATIONS' TOP COURT SAYS IT WILL RULE FRIDAY ON SOUTH AFRICA'S REQUEST FOR A CEASE-FIRE IN GAZA**

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The United Nations' top court says it will rule Friday on South Africa's latest urgent request for the judges to order a cease-fire in Gaza.

South Africa's ambassador to the Netherlands, Vusumuzi Madonsela, had urged the panel of 15 international judges to order Israel to "totally and unconditionally withdraw" from the Gaza Strip. Israel strongly denies charges of genocide, telling the International Court of Justice that it is doing everything it can to protect the civilian population during its military operation in Gaza.

It was the third time the International Court of Justice held hearings on the war in Gaza since South Africa filed proceedings in December at the court, based in The Hague in the Netherlands, accusing Israel of genocide.

The International Court of Justice said Thursday it will deliver its decision Friday afternoon at 1300 GMT, just days after the chief prosecutor at another Hague-based court, the International Criminal Court, an-

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nounced he is seeking arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and three Hamas leaders on charges linked to the Gaza war.

**A MISSILE SPLASHES INTO THE RED SEA IN LIKELY HOUTHİ REBEL ATTACK, MISSING NEARBY VESSEL**  
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A missile splashed down in the waters of the Red Sea near the crucial Bab el-Mandeb Strait on Thursday, but caused no damage to a passing commercial vessel in an attack likely carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said.

The Houthis did not immediately claim the attack, though it can take hours or even days for them to acknowledge their assaults.

The Houthis have launched attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in recent months, demanding that Israel ends the war in Gaza, which has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostage.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the United States Maritime Administration.

Shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat. In recent weeks, the tempo of Houthi attacks has dropped, though the rebels have claimed shooting down U.S. surveillance drones.

## 12 PALESTINIANS KILLED IN ISRAEL'S 2-DAY WEST BANK OPERATION

TEL AVIV, Israel — The Israeli military said Thursday it has completed a two-day operation in the occupied West Bank that the Palestinian Health Ministry says killed 12 Palestinians and wounded 25.

The military launched the operation Tuesday in the city of Jenin and an adjacent urban refugee camp as part of a crackdown against militants in the area. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group said its fighters battled the Israeli forces.

Militant groups claimed at least eight of the dead as fighters: one from Hamas and seven from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, an armed offshoot of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party. Islamic Jihad group said an unspecified number of its fighters were killed.

Among those killed was a surgeon at a local hospital, according to Wissam Abu Baker, the director of Jenin Governmental Hospital. The surgeon was killed on his way to work, Abu Baker said.

The military did not immediately disclose additional details about the operation.

Jenin and the adjacent urban refugee camp have long been a bastion of armed struggle against Israel's occupation, and the frequency of raids by Israeli troops has increased during the war in Gaza.

Violence has surged in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza. The Palestinian Health Ministry says more than 500 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since Oct. 7. Many were shot dead in armed clashes during military raids, others for throwing stones or explosives at troops. People not involved in the confrontations have also been killed.

## ISRAELI STRIKE KILLS 1 AND INJURES 3 STUDENTS, LEBANON STATE NEWS AGENCY SAYS

BEIRUT — Lebanon's state-run National News Agency says an Israeli drone strike killed one person and wounded three school students who were passing nearby in a bus.

The agency said the Thursday morning strike damaged the bus and destroyed a car on a road leading to the southern market town of Nabatiyeh. It said the wounded students were taken to hospitals in the area.

The man who was killed was identified as Mohammed Farran, whom Hezbollah identified as one of its members.

Israeli airstrikes have killed scores of Hezbollah members in recent months.

The exchange of fire between Hezbollah and Israel began a day after the Israel-Hamas war broke out on Oct. 7. Since then, more than 400 people have been killed in Lebanon. Most of the dead were fighters, but more than 70 were civilians and non-combatants.

## Leaders of Northwestern, UCLA and Rutgers to testify before Congress on campus protests

By ANNIE MA AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans have summoned the leaders of Northwestern University and Rutgers University to testify about concessions they gave to pro-Palestinian protesters to end demonstrations on their campus.

The chancellor of the University of California, Los Angeles, also was scheduled to appear Thursday in the latest in a series of hearings by the House Committee on Education and the Workforce into how colleges have responded to the protests and allegations of antisemitism. Tensions over the Israel-Hamas war have been high on campuses since the fall and spiked in recent weeks with a wave of pro-Palestinian tent encampments that led to over 3,000 arrests nationwide.

After the first of those hearings in December, an outcry of criticism from donors, students and politicians led to the resignations of the presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, who gave cautious, halting answers to questions about whether calls for the genocide of Jews would violate their schools' conduct policies.

In April, the committee turned its attention to Columbia President Minouche Shafik, who took a more conciliatory approach to Republican-led questioning. Shafik's disclosure of disciplinary details and concessions around faculty academic freedom upset students and professors at Columbia. Her testimony, and subsequent decision to call in police, escalated protests on campus that inspired students at other colleges to launch similar demonstrations.

Thursday's hearing expands the scope of the committee's inquiry for the first time to large, public universities, which are more strictly governed by First Amendment and free speech considerations. Earlier hearings largely focused on private, Ivy League colleges.

Originally, the presidents of Yale University and the University of Michigan were called to testify. But the committee shifted its attention to Northwestern and Rutgers after those colleges struck deals with pro-Palestinian protesters to limit or disband encampments.

Expected to testify Thursday are Michael Schill, the president of Northwestern; Gene Block, UCLA's chancellor; and Jonathan Holloway, the president of Rutgers.

The concessions that Northwestern and Rutgers agreed to were limited in scope. Like some other colleges that reached agreements with protesters, they focused on expanding institutional support for Muslim and Arab students and scholars on campus.

At Northwestern, the administration agreed to re-establish an advisory committee on its investments that includes student, faculty and staff input. The university also agreed to answer questions about financial holdings including those with ties to Israel.

Rutgers agreed to meet with five student representatives to discuss the divestment request in exchange for the disbanding of the encampment. The university also stated it would not terminate its relationship with Tel Aviv University.

The committee's chair, Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., criticized the schools for their decision to negotiate with protesters.

"The Committee has a clear message for mealy-mouthed, spineless college leaders: Congress will not tolerate your dereliction of your duty to your Jewish students," she said in a statement. "No stone must go unturned while buildings are being defaced, campus greens are being captured, or graduations are being ruined."

UCLA's oversight of its campus protests has been under scrutiny since counter-demonstrators with Israeli flags attacked a pro-Palestinian encampment on campus. The counter-demonstrators threw traffic cones and released pepper spray in fighting that went on for hours before police stepped in, drawing criticism from Muslim students and political leaders and advocacy groups.

On Wednesday, the police chief at UCLA was reassigned "pending an examination of our security processes," according to a statement from the school.



## Remember last year's Memorial Day travel jams? Chances are they will be much worse this year

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

You didn't think summer travel would be easy, did you?

Highways and airports are likely to be jammed the next few days as Americans head out for Memorial Day weekend getaways and then return home.

AAA predicts this will be the busiest start-of-summer weekend in nearly 20 years, with 43.8 million people expected to travel at least 50 miles from home between Thursday and Monday. The Transportation Security Administration says up to 3 million might pass through airport checkpoints on Friday alone.

And that is just a sample of what is to come. U.S. airlines expect to carry a record number of passengers this summer. Their trade group estimates that 271 million travelers will fly between June 1 and August 31, breaking the record of 255 million set — you guessed it — last summer.

The annual expression of wanderlust is happening at a time when Americans tell pollsters they are worried about the economy and the direction of the country.

A slowdown, and in some cases a retreat, from the big price increases of the last two years may be helping.

Airfares are down 6% and hotel rates have dipped 0.4%, compared with a year ago, according to government figures released last week. Prices for renting a car or truck are down 10%. The nationwide price of gas is around \$3.60 a gallon, about 6 cents higher than a year ago, according to AAA.

Johannes Thomas, CEO of the hotel and travel search company Trivago, said he thinks more customers are feeling the pinch of prices that have plateaued but at much higher levels than before the pandemic. He said they are booking farther in advance, staying closer to home, taking shorter trips, and compromising on accommodations — staying in three-star hotels instead of five-star ones.

Many travelers have their own cost-saving strategies, including combining work and pleasure on the same trip.

"I have largely been able to adapt by traveling at strange hours. I'll fly out late at night, come in early in the morning, stay longer than I intended, and work remotely," said Lauren Hartle of Boston, an investor for a clean-energy venture firm.

Hartle, who flew from Boston to Dallas on Wednesday for a work conference, plans to attend a summer family gathering in North Carolina but is otherwise considering trips closer to home — and maybe by train instead of plane.

Catey Schast, a nanny and piano teacher in Maine, said her Boston-Dallas flight cost \$386 round trip. "It wasn't terrible," but it was higher than the \$200 to \$300 she paid in the past to visit family in Texas, she said.

Schast plans a beach vacation in Florida in July. High prices could discourage her from taking other trips, but "if I really want to go somewhere, I'm more of a how-can-I-make-this-happen type of person, as long as I have the time off work."

As in past years, most holiday travelers are expected to travel by car — more than 38 million of them, according to AAA. The organization advises motorists hoping to avoid the worst traffic to leave metropolitan areas early Thursday and Friday and to stay off the roads between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday and Monday.

"We haven't seen any pullback in travel since the pandemic. Year after year, we have seen these numbers continue to grow," AAA spokesperson Aixa Diaz said. "We don't know when it's going to stop. There's no sign of it yet."

There's certainly no slowdown at airports. The number of people going through security checkpoints is up 3.2% this year. The TSA said it screened 2.85 million people last Friday and nearly as many on Sunday — the two busiest days of the year so far.

TSA predicts it will screen more than 18 million travelers and airline crew members during the seven-day stretch that begins Thursday, up 6.4% from last year. Friday is expected to be the busiest day for air

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travel, with nearly 3 million people passing through checkpoints. The TSA record is 2.91 million, set on the Sunday after Thanksgiving last year.

"We're going to break those records this summer," TSA Administrator David Pekoske said.

The agency, which was created after the 9/11 terror attacks, has struggled at times with peak loads. Pekoske told The Associated Press that pay raises for front-line screeners have helped improve staffing by reducing attrition from more than 20% to less than 10%.

Airlines say they also have staffed up since being caught short when travel began to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring and summer of 2022.

With any luck from the weather, travelers could see fewer canceled flights than in recent summers. So far this year, U.S. airlines have canceled 1.2% of their flights, according to FlightAware data, compared with 1.4% at this point last year and 2.8% in 2022 — a performance so poor it triggered complaints and increased scrutiny from Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

Even before the holiday weekend started, however, storms caused widespread cancellations at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, the biggest hub for American Airlines. The carrier dropped more than 200 flights, or 5% of its schedule, by late afternoon.

Stranded travelers were not happy.

"Our flight got canceled right before the check-in. And now there's no flights here until Friday because (open seats on other flights) went really quickly. We might wind up driving. Isn't that terrible?" said Rosie Gutierrez of Allen, Texas, who was trying to get to Florida along with her son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter.

American's chief operating officer, David Seymour, said the airline has beefed up its staffing and technology in preparation for the seasonal rush.

"It's a long summer, but we're ready for it. We have the right resources," he said.

American is offering its most ambitious summer schedule ever — 690,000 flights between May 17 and Sept. 3.

United Airlines forecasts its biggest Memorial Day weekend, with nearly 10% more passengers than last year. Delta Air Lines expects to carry 5% more passengers this weekend, kicking off its heaviest summer schedule ever of international flights.

According to AAA, the top domestic and international destinations are familiar ones. They include Orlando, Las Vegas, London, Paris and Rome.

So what about nervousness over the economy?

It's important to note that people often say their own finances are better than average. In an AP survey from February, 54% said their personal situation was good — but only 30% felt the same about the nation's economy.

That could explain why they can afford to splurge on travel.

## 5 dead and nearly 3 dozen hurt in tornadoes that tore through Iowa, officials say

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and MARGERY A. BECK Associated Press

GREENFIELD, Iowa (AP) — A deadly tornado that wreaked havoc in the small city of Greenfield, Iowa, left four people dead and nearly three dozen injured, officials said, while a fifth person was killed elsewhere.

The twister that tore through the city on Tuesday was rated at least an EF-3 by the National Weather Service and was so destructive that it took authorities more than a day to account for the area's residents.

It's believed that the number of people injured is likely higher, the Iowa Department of Public Safety said.

The fifth person was killed about 25 miles (40 kilometers) from Greenfield when her car was blown off the road in a tornado, according to the Adams County Sheriff's Office. Monica Zamarron, 46, died in the crash Tuesday afternoon, officials said.

Officials haven't yet released the names of the other victims.

The severe weather turned south Wednesday. In Texas, officials issued an emergency declaration in

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Temple, a city of more than 90,000 people north of Austin, after powerful storms ripped through the area. Thousands of residents lost power, schools canceled classes for Thursday and nearby Fort Cavazos reported significant debris blocking traffic at the Army installation.

In Iowa, the Greenfield tornado obliterated homes, splintered trees and crumpled cars in the town of 2,000 about 55 miles (89 kilometers) southwest of Des Moines. The twister also crumpled massive power-producing wind turbines several miles outside the city.

Greenfield resident Kimberly Ergish and her husband dug through the debris field Wednesday that used to be their home, looking for family photos and other salvageable items. There wasn't much left, she acknowledged. The reality of having her house destroyed in seconds hasn't really set in, she said.

"If it weren't for all the bumps and bruises and the achy bones, I would think that it didn't happen," Ergish said.

The deadly twister was spawned during a historic tornado season in the U.S., at a time when climate change is heightening the severity of storms around the world. April had the second-highest number of tornadoes on record in the country.

Through Tuesday, 859 tornadoes had been confirmed this year, 27% more than the U.S. sees on average, according to NOAA's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma. Iowa has so far recorded the most, with 81 confirmed twisters.

On Tuesday alone, the National Weather Service said it received 23 tornado reports, with 21 in Iowa.

Tuesday's storms also pummeled parts of Illinois and Wisconsin, knocking out power to tens of thousands of customers in the two states.

The National Weather Service said initial surveys indicated at least an EF-3 tornado in Greenfield, but additional damage assessment could lead to a more powerful ranking.

The tornado appeared to have been on the ground for more than 40 miles (64 kilometers), AccuWeather Chief Meteorologist Jon Porter said. A satellite photo taken by a BlackSky Technology shows where the twister gouged a nearly straight path of destruction through the town, just south of Greenfield's center square.

"Debris was lifted thousands of feet in the air and ended up falling to the ground several counties away from Greenfield. That's evidence of just how intense and deadly this tornado was," Porter said.

People as far as 100 miles (160 kilometers) away from Greenfield posted photos on Facebook of ripped family photos, yearbook pages and other items that were lifted into the sky by the tornado.

About 90 miles (145 kilometers) away, in Ames, Iowa, Nicole Banner found a yellowed page declaring "This Book is the Property of the Greenfield Community School District" stuck to her garage door like a Post-It note after the storm passed.

"We just couldn't believe it had traveled that far," she said.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said FEMA's administrator would be in Iowa Thursday and that the White House was in touch with state and local officials. She said they were "praying for those who tragically lost their lives" and wished those injured a "speedy recovery."

Greenfield's 25-bed hospital was among the buildings damaged, and at least a dozen people who were hurt had to be taken to facilities elsewhere. Hospital officials said in a Facebook post Wednesday that the hospital will remain closed and that full repairs could take weeks or months. An urgent care clinic was set up at an elementary school with primary care services to start there Thursday, the post said.

Residential streets that on Monday were lined with old-growth trees and neatly-appointed ranch-style homes were a chaotic jumble of splintered and smashed remnants by Wednesday. Many of the homes' basements where residents sheltered lay exposed and front yards were littered with belongings from furniture to children's toys and Christmas decorations.

Roseann Freeland waited until the last minute to rush with her husband to a concrete room in her basement. Seconds later, her husband opened the door "and you could just see daylight," Freeland said. "I just lost it. I just totally lost it."



## How does this end? With Hamas holding firm and fighting back in Gaza, Israel faces only bad options

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Diminished but not deterred, Hamas is still putting up a fight after seven brutal months of war with Israel, regrouping in some of the hardest-hit areas in northern Gaza and resuming rocket attacks into nearby Israeli communities.

Israel initially made tactical advances against Hamas after a devastating aerial bombardment paved the way for its ground troops. But those early gains have given way to a grinding struggle against an adaptable insurgency — and a growing feeling among many Israelis that their military faces only bad options, drawing comparisons with U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This was the subtext of a rebellion in recent days by two members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's three-man War Cabinet — Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Benny Gantz, Netanyahu's main political rival — who demanded that he come up with detailed postwar plans.

They supported Israel's retaliation for Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, including one of the heaviest bombing campaigns in recent history, ground operations that obliterated entire neighborhoods and border restrictions that the U.N.'s World Food Program says pushed parts of the territory into famine.

But now the two retired generals fear a prolonged, costly re-occupation of Gaza, from which Israel withdrew soldiers and settlers in 2005. They are also opposed to a withdrawal that would leave Hamas in control or lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Instead, they have put forth alternatives that many Israelis see as wildly unrealistic. Hamas, meanwhile, has proposed its own postwar plan.

Here's a look at four ways this war might end.

### FULL-SCALE MILITARY OCCUPATION

Netanyahu has promised a "total victory" that would remove Hamas from power, dismantle its military capabilities and return the scores of hostages it still holds from the attack that triggered the war.

He has said victory could come within weeks if Israel launches a full-scale invasion of Rafah, which Israel portrays as the last Hamas stronghold.

Amir Avivi, a retired Israeli general and former deputy commander of the Gaza division, says that's only the beginning. He said Israel would need to remain in control to prevent Hamas from regrouping.

"If you don't drain the swamp, you cannot deal with the mosquitoes. And drain the swamp means a complete change in the education system, and dealing with local leadership and not with a terror organization," he said. "This is a generational process. It's not going to happen in a day."

Far-right members of Netanyahu's governing coalition, who hold the key to his remaining in power, have called for permanent occupation, "voluntary emigration" of large numbers of Palestinians to anywhere that will have them, and rebuilding of Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Most Israelis are opposed, pointing to the immense costs of stationing thousands of troops in the territory that is home to 2.3 million Palestinians. As an occupying power, Israel would likely be held responsible for providing health, education and other services. It's unclear to what extent international donors would step in to fund reconstruction amid ongoing hostilities.

There's also no guarantee such an occupation would eliminate Hamas.

Israel was in full control of Gaza when Hamas was established in the late 1980s. Israel's 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon coincided with the rise of Hezbollah, and Israeli troops routinely battle militants in the West Bank, which it has controlled since 1967.

### A LIGHTER OCCUPATION, AIDED BY 'UNICORNS'

Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain security control over Gaza but delegate civilian administration to local Palestinians unaffiliated with Hamas or the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, which governs parts of the occupied West Bank. He has suggested that Arab and other countries assist with governance and rebuilding.

But so far, none have shown interest.

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No Palestinians are known to have offered to cooperate with the Israeli military, perhaps because Hamas has said they would be treated as collaborators, a veiled death threat.

Efforts to reach out to Palestinian businessmen and powerful families “have ended in catastrophe,” says Michael Milshtein, an Israeli analyst of Palestinian affairs at Tel Aviv University and a former military intelligence officer.

He says Israelis seeking such allies are searching for “unicorns” — something that does not exist.

Arab states have also roundly rejected this scenario — even the United Arab Emirates, which is one of the few to formally recognize Israel and has close ties with it.

“The UAE refuses to be involved in any plan aimed at providing cover for the Israeli presence in the Gaza Strip,” Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan said this month.

## A GRAND BARGAIN

Instead, Arab states have coalesced around a U.S. proposal aimed at resolving the decades-old conflict and transforming the Middle East.

Under this plan, a reformed Palestinian Authority would govern Gaza with the assistance of Arab and Muslim nations, including Saudi Arabia, which would normalize relations with Israel in return for a U.S. defense pact and help in building a civilian nuclear program.

But U.S. and Saudi officials say that hinges on Israel committing to a credible path to eventual Palestinian statehood.

Netanyahu has ruled out such a scenario — as have Gallant and Gantz — saying it would reward Hamas and result in a militant-run state on Israel’s borders.

Palestinians say ending Israel’s decades-long occupation and creating a fully independent state in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem — territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war — is the only way to end the cycle of bloodshed.

Hamas has said it would accept a two-state solution on at least an interim basis, but its political program still calls for the “full liberation of Palestine,” including what is now Israel. Hamas has also said it must be part of any postwar settlement.

## A DEAL WITH HAMAS

Hamas has proposed a very different grand bargain — one that, ironically enough, might be more palatable to Israelis than the U.S.-Saudi deal.

The militant group has proposed a phased agreement in which it would release all of the hostages in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners — including senior militants — as well as the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, a lengthy cease-fire and reconstruction.

That would almost certainly leave Hamas in control of Gaza and potentially allow it to rebuild its military capabilities. Hamas might even claim victory, despite the extensive death and destruction suffered by Palestinian civilians since Oct. 7.

But thousands of Israeli protesters have taken to the streets in recent weeks calling on their leaders to take such a deal, because it’s probably the only way to get the hostages back.

They accuse Netanyahu of standing in the way of such an agreement because it could lead his far-right allies to bring down his government, potentially ending his political career and exposing him to prosecution on corruption charges.

Supporters of such a deal say there would be other benefits for Israel, beyond freeing the hostages.

The low-intensity conflict with Lebanon’s Hezbollah would likely die down as regional tensions ease, allowing tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border to return to their homes. Israel could finally reckon with the security failures that led to Oct. 7.

And it could prepare for another inevitable round of fighting.

Milshtein says Israel should adopt Hamas’ concept of a “hudna” — a prolonged period of strategic calm. “Hudna doesn’t mean a peace agreement,” he said. “It’s a cease-fire that you will exploit in order to make yourself stronger and then to attack and surprise your enemy.” \_\_\_\_

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

## In riot-hit New Caledonia, French President Macron says the priority is a return to calm

By CLAIRE RUSH and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

French President Emmanuel Macron pushed Thursday on a visit to riot-hit New Caledonia for the removal of protesters' barricades and said police sent in to help battle deadly unrest in the French Pacific archipelago "will stay as long as necessary," even as security services back in France focus in coming weeks on safeguarding the Paris Olympics.

By canceling his previously announced schedule to fly across the globe from Paris to New Caledonia, Macron brought the weight of his office to bear on the crisis, which has left six dead and a trail of destruction on the archipelago where Indigenous Kanak people have long sought independence from France.

Pro-independence Kanak leaders, who a week earlier declined Macron's offer of talks by video, joined a meeting the French leader hosted in the capital, Nouméa, with rival pro-Paris leaders who want New Caledonia, which became French in 1853 under Emperor Napoleon III, to remain part of France.

Macron first called for a minute of silence for the six people killed in shootings during the violence, including two gendarmes. He then urged local leaders to use their clout to help restore order. He said a state of emergency imposed by Paris for at least 12 days on May 15 to boost police powers could only be lifted if local leaders call for a clearing away of barricades that demonstrators and people trying to protect their neighborhoods have erected in Nouméa and beyond.

"Everyone has a responsibility to really call for the lifting of the barricades, the cessation of all forms of attack, not simply for calm," he said.

Barricades made up of charred vehicles and other debris have turned some parts of Nouméa into no-go zones and made traveling around perilous, including for the sick requiring medical treatment and for families fretting about where to find food and water after shops were pillaged and torched. French authorities say more than 280 people have been arrested since violence first flared May 13 as the French legislature in Paris debated contested changes to New Caledonia voter lists.

The unrest continued to simmer as Macron jetted in, despite a 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew and more than 1,000 reinforcements for the archipelago's police and gendarmes, now 3,000 strong.

"I will be very clear here. These forces will remain as long as necessary. Even during the Olympic Games and Paralympics," which open in Paris on July 26, Macron said.

It was late Tuesday in Paris when he left on the 16,000-kilometer (10,000-mile) trip but, because of the distance and time difference, it was Thursday morning in New Caledonia when he arrived with his interior and defense ministers.

At Nouméa's La Tontouta International Airport, which remains closed to commercial flights, Macron said on arrival that he wanted "to be alongside the people and see a return to peace, calm and security as soon as possible."

Later, at Nouméa's central police station, Macron thanked officers for facing what he described as "an absolutely unprecedented insurrection movement."

"No one saw it coming with this level of organization and violence," he said. "You did your duty. And I thank you."

The violence is the severest in New Caledonia since the 1980s, the last time France imposed a state of emergency on the archipelago of 270,000 people and decades of tensions over the issue of independence between Kanaks and the descendants of colonists and other settlers.

Fires, looting and other violence targeting hundreds of businesses, homes, stores, public buildings and other sites in and around Nouméa have caused destruction estimated in the hundreds of millions of euros (dollars). This week, military flights evacuated stranded tourists.

"We will discuss questions of economic reconstruction, support and rapid response, and the most delicate political questions, as we talk about the future of New Caledonia," Macron said. "By the end of the day, decisions will be taken and announcements will be made."



When asked by a reporter whether he thought a 12-hour visit was enough, Macron responded: "We will see. I don't have a limit."

Macron flew to the archipelago under pressure from politicians in France and pro-independence supporters to delay or scrap the overhaul of the voting system for New Caledonia which triggered the unrest. Both French houses of parliament in Paris have approved the proposed reform but it requires a revision of France's Constitution to take effect. It would enlarge voter numbers in provincial elections for New Caledonia's legislature and government, adding about 25,000 voters, including people who have been residents of the archipelago for at least 10 years and others born there.

Opponents fear the measure will benefit pro-France politicians in New Caledonia and further marginalize the Kanaks, who once suffered from strict segregation policies and widespread discrimination. Supporters say the proposed overhaul is democratically important for people with roots in New Caledonia who can't currently vote for local representatives.

Macron in the past has facilitated dialogue between the divided pro- and anti-independence camps. France's efforts included three referendums from 2018 to 2021 which asked voters if they wanted independence. They voted no each time, but the last referendum in 2021 was boycotted by pro-independence forces.

## **Strong winds topple stage at a campaign rally in northern Mexico, killing at least 9 people**

By ALBERTO MENDOZA Associated Press

SAN PEDRO GARZA GARCIA, Mexico (AP) — A strong gust of wind toppled the stage at a campaign rally Wednesday evening in the northern Mexican state of Nuevo Leon, killing at least nine people — including a child — and injuring 63, the state's governor said.

The collapse occurred during an event attended by presidential long-shot candidate Jorge Álvarez Máynez, who ran to escape. Videos of the collapse on social media showed people screaming, running away and climbing out from under metal polls.

The victims "will not be alone in this tragedy," Máynez told reporters Wednesday night, adding that he had suspended upcoming campaign events.

Afterward, soldiers, police and other officials roamed the grounds of the park where the event took place while many nearby sat stunned and haunted by the tragedy.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he "sends a hug to family members, friends of the victims and political supporters." Condolences poured in from across Mexico, including by other presidential candidates.

In a video message, Nuevo Leon Gov. Samuel Garcia, a leading member of Máynez's Citizens Movement party, asked residents to shelter in their houses for the next two hours.

MÁYnez wrote in his social media accounts that he went to a hospital after the accident in the wealthy suburb of San Pedro Garza Garcia, near the city of Monterrey. He said he was in good condition.

"The only important thing at this point is to care for the victims of the accident," he wrote.

Videos of the accident showed Máynez waving his arm as the crowd chanted his name. But then he looked up to see a giant screen and metal structure toppling toward him. He ran rapidly toward the back of the stage to avoid the falling structure, which appeared to consist of relatively light framework pieces as well as what appeared to be a screen with the party's logo and theater-style lights.

MÁYnez has been running third in polls in the presidential race, trailing both front-runner Claudia Sheinbaum of the ruling Morena Party and opposition coalition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez. Both sent their condolences, and Sheinbaum canceled a campaign event in nearby Monterrey the next day "in solidarity" with victims and their loved ones.

"My condolences and prayers with the families of the dead, and my wishes for a speedy recovery to all those injured," wrote Gálvez in a social media post.

The accident happened at the height of campaign season, with many events held this week and next in

anticipation of the June 2 presidential, state and municipal elections.

The campaign has so far been plagued by the killings of about two dozen candidates for local offices. But it has not been marred by campaign accidents.

## France is proud of its secularism. But struggles grow in this approach to faith, school, integration

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MARSEILLE, France (AP) — Brought into the international spotlight by the ban on hijabs for French athletes at the upcoming Paris Olympics, France's unique approach to "laïcité" — loosely translated as "secularism" — has been increasingly stirring controversy from schools to sports fields across the country.

The struggle cuts to the core of how France approaches not only the place of religion in public life, but also the integration of its mostly immigrant-origin Muslim population, Western Europe's largest.

Perhaps the most contested ground is public schools, where visible signs of faith are barred under policies seeking to foster a shared sense of national unity. That includes the headscarves some Muslim women want to wear for piety and modesty, even as others fight them as a symbol of oppression.

"It has become a privilege to be allowed to practice our religion," said Majda Ould Ibbat, who was considering leaving Marseille, France's second-largest city, until she discovered a private Muslim school, Ibn Khaldoun, where her children could both freely live their faith and flourish academically.

"We wanted them to have a great education, and with our principles and our values," added Ould Ibbat, who only started wearing a headscarf recently, while her teen daughter, Minane, hasn't felt ready to. Her 15-year-old son, Chahid, often prays in the school's mosque during recess.

For Minane, as for many French Muslim youth, navigating French culture and her spiritual identity is getting harder. The 19-year-old nursing student has heard people say even on the streets of multicultural Marseille that there's no place for Muslims.

"I ask myself if Islam is accepted in France," she said in her parents' apartment, where a bright orange Berber rug woven by her Moroccan grandmother hangs next to Koranic verses in Arabic.

Minane also lives with the collective trauma that has scarred much of France — the gripping fear of Islamist attacks, which have targeted schools and are seen by many as evidence that laïcité (pronounced lah-eee-see-tay) needs to be strictly enforced to prevent radicalization.

Minane vividly remembers observing a moment of silence at Ibn Khaldoun in honor of Samuel Paty, a public school teacher beheaded by a radicalized Islamist in 2020. A memorial to Paty as a defender of France's values hangs in the entrance of the Education Ministry in Paris.

For its officials and most educators, secularism in public schools and other public institutions is essential. They say it encourages a sense of belonging to a united French identity and prevents those who are less or not religiously observant from feeling pressured, while leaving everyone free to worship in private spaces.

For many French Muslims, however, and other critics, laïcité is exerting precisely that kind of discriminatory pressure on already disadvantaged minorities, denying them the chance to live their full identity in their own country.

Amid the tension, there's broad agreement that polarization is skyrocketing, as crackdowns and challenges mount for this French approach to religion and integration.

While open confrontations are still numbered in the dozens among millions of students, it has become common to see girls put their headscarves back on the moment they exit through a public school's doors.

"Laws on laïcité protect and allow for coexistence — which is less and less easy," said Isabelle Tretola, principal of the public primary school whose front gate faces the door to Ibn Khaldoun's small mosque.

She addresses challenges to secularism every day — like children in choir class who put their hands on their ears "because their families told them singing variety songs isn't good."

"You can't force them to sing, but teachers tell them they can't cover their ears out of respect for the instructor and classmates," Tretola said. "In school, you come to learn the values of the republic."

Secularism is one of four fundamental values enshrined in France's constitution. The state explicitly

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charges public schools with instilling those values in children, while allowing private schools to offer religious instruction as long as they also teach the general curriculum that the government establishes.

Unlike the United States, where fights over what values schools teach cleave along partisan lines, support for laïcité is almost universal in France's political establishment, though some on the right criticize it as anti-religion and on the left as a vestige of colonialism.

Government officials argue the prohibition against showcasing a particular faith is necessary to avoid threats to democracy. In the 19th century, those were seen as stemming from the political influence of the Catholic Church. Today, the government has made fighting radical Islam a priority, and secularism is seen as a bulwark against the feared growth of religious influence on daily life, down to beachwear.

"In a public school, the school for everyone, one behaves like everyone else, and should not make a display," said Alain Seksig, secretary general of the Education Ministry's council on secularism. It has produced guides for teachers and students after an increase in incidents, especially over headscarves.

"What do we say to the girl who says, 'I don't want to wear it under pressure?' The school is on her side," he added.

For many teachers and principals, having strict government rules is helping confront multiplying challenges. The curriculum — from music to evolution to sexual health — is a new target, though all public students receive a "secularism in school" guide that notes objecting to teaching on the basis of religion is forbidden.

Some 40% of teachers report self-censoring after the attacks on Paty and another teacher, Dominique Bernard, slain last fall by a suspected Islamic extremist, said Didier Georges. He's in charge of secularism issues for SNPDEN-UNSA, a union representing more than half of France's principals.

Like him, Laurent Le Drezen, a principal in a small city about an hour from Marseille and a leader of another education workers union, SGEN-CFDT, sees a nefarious influence of social media in the growth of Muslim students challenging secularism at school.

"I'm intransigent on laïcité, because it helps with national cohesion, national community. It's not a negation of religion," Le Drezen said.

His classroom experience in Marseille's Quartiers Nord — often dilapidated suburbs with projects housing mostly families of North African origin — also taught him the importance of showing students that schools aren't coming after them for being Muslim.

At Marseille's Cedres Mosque, next to the projects, Salah Bariki, who has worked on interreligious affairs with city hall, said youth are struggling with exactly that sense of rejection from France.

"What do they want us to do, look at the Eiffel Tower instead of Mecca?" Bariki quipped. Nine of ten young women in the neighborhood are now veiled, "for identity more than religion," he added.

To avoid a vicious cycle, more — not less — discussion of religion should be happening in schools, argued Rabbi Haïm Bendao. He runs a small conservative synagogue in a nearby neighborhood, and wishes he could give talks about integration in public institutions as he routinely does in private ones, in partnership with imams.

"To establish peace, it's a daily effort. It's crazy important to speak in schools," said Bendao, who has gone to both Ibn Khaldoun and the Catholic school across from it, Saint-Joseph, which also enrolls many Muslim students.

Its principal, Cédric Coureur, says private schools have the advantage of being allowed to address questions students might have about God — and provide the kind of answers "within the republican framework" that helped him integrate into France as the son of Mauritian immigrants.

"School welcomed me, it gave me the keys to love this country without telling me to do so," Coureur said. "The French state doesn't recognize being Christian or Muslim or Jew or Buddhist, it recognizes that you are French."

Several families at Ibn Khaldoun said they chose that private school, however, because it can support both identities instead of exacerbating all-too-public doubts over whether being Muslim is compatible with being French.

"When I hear the debate over compatibility, that's when I turn off the TV. Fear has invaded the world,"



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said Nancy Chihane, president of the parents' association at Ibn Khaldoun.

At a recent spring recess where girls with hijabs, others with their hair flowing in the fierce local wind known as Mistral, and boys all mingled, one headscarf-wearing high-schooler said transferring to Ibn Khaldoun meant both freedom and community.

"Here we all understand each other, we're not marginalized," said Asmaa Abdelah, 17.

Nouali Yacine, her history and geography teacher, was born in Algeria — which was under French colonial rule until it won independence in 1962 in a violent struggle — and raised in France since he was 7 months old. While his parents would have considered it treason to identify as French in the anti-colonial context, his daughter — a public school student — tells him she knows no other identity.

"We are within the citizenry. We don't pose that question, but they pose it to us," Yacine says.

Started in 2009 with 25 students, Ibn Khaldoun now enrolls nearly 400 as one of the few private Muslim schools under contract with the French government. That means they're financially supported but have to abide by strict curricular and behavioral requirements.

The school's founding director, Mohsen Ngazou, who's also an imam and president of the national association Muslims of France, is equally adamant about respecting religious and education obligations.

He recalls once "making a scene" when he saw a student wearing an abaya over pajamas — the student code prohibits the latter alongside shorts and revealing necklines.

"I told her she wasn't ready for class," Ngazou said. "The abaya doesn't make a woman religious. The important thing is to feel good about who you are."

## Javier Milei, the hard rocker in Argentina's highest office, turns his book talk into wild show

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — A book presentation about neoclassical economic theory may not sound like a crowd-pleaser.

But on Wednesday in Buenos Aires mobs of star-struck fans packed a giant auditorium to hear Argentina's president, the libertarian economist Javier Milei, lecture on the importance of freeing capital from the control of the state.

As he strode through a sea of fans jostling for selfies and climbed onstage, the shouting crowd leapt to its feet. Whistles, stomps and chants of his political slogan "Long live liberty, dammit!" filled the theater.

They were greeting Milei like a stadium rocker. And within moments, he became one.

Grabbing the mic and swinging into a cover of "Panic Show" by Argentine hard rock band La Renga, Milei jumped frenetically around the stage, whipping 10,000 fans into a frenzy.

"I am the lion," he hollered, shaking his unruly hair to the beat. "I am the king of a lost world."

When the music came to a stop, he tossed off his black leather jacket to reveal a business suit underneath and stepped up to the podium, returning to his usual persona as a disheveled academic. "I wanted to do this because I really wanted to sing," he said.

Then Milei launched into the presentation of his new book, "Capitalism, Socialism and the Neoclassical Trap," published May 1, a contribution to the so-called Austrian School of economics that calls for governments to step out and let the market decide.

"Market failures do not exist," he said. "First, check there is no state intervention."

Milei had initially planned to promote his book at the Buenos Aires International Book Fair, the country's largest literary event that kicked off earlier this month. But when the left-leaning organizers gave speeches calling out Milei for defunding cultural institutions, the president canceled the event and promoted a new one at the city's Luna Park arena downtown instead.

He gave ironic thanks to the book fair organizers on Wednesday night. "With an attempted boycott, you gave us this party," he said, as pulsating lights and clouds of artificial smoke enveloped the stage.

It wasn't Milei's first time jamming out in public. "Panic Show" performances with reworked lyrics were an occasional feature of campaign events. His love for rock music dates back to high school, where he

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started a Rolling Stones tribute band and danced like Mick Jagger during recess, according to journalist Juan Luis González's biography of Milei, "El Loco."

He kept his taste for theatrics as a libertarian pundit invited onto TV and radio stations to rail against Argentina's economic malaise — drawing attention as much for his entertaining antics as his "anarcho-capitalist" theories.

"This connection he has with people, I've never seen anything like it," said 72-year-old attendee Liliana Varela as she watched Milei glad-handing supporters. "He is creating a disruption at the very moment that we need it."

Milei's latest flamboyant episode Wednesday comes at a sensitive time for Argentina, in the midst of its worst economic crisis in two decades with more than half of the population living in poverty and annual inflation surging toward 300%.

Milei's severe austerity measures have so far compounded the struggles of Argentina's poor and middle classes. An unprecedented diplomatic crisis is underway with Spain, Argentina's historic ally and major trading partner, over Milei's criticism of socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and his wife.

"Milei doesn't have to answer to Sanchez," said 62-year-old Hernan Sanchez queuing outside the venue. "He is defending his beliefs."

When the crowd screamed vulgar insults about Sánchez, Milei responded with a smirk. "Stop that or Mondino is going to ask me for overtime," he quipped, referring to the foreign minister.

Despite the turmoil Milei's ratings have stayed strong. His die-hard fans were out in force on Wednesday, lining up for hours in frigid weather and dancing to keep the energy up when Milei ran over an hour late.

"He's the best president in the world," gushed 20-year-old Matías Muzica, dodging questions about his policies but praising him as Argentina's answer to Donald Trump. "He can make Argentina great again."

## **Norway, Ireland and Spain say they will recognize a Palestinian state, deepening Israel's isolation**

By JOSEPH WILSON, MELANIE LIDMAN and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Norway, Ireland and Spain said Wednesday they would recognize a Palestinian state, a historic but largely symbolic move that further deepens Israel's isolation more than seven months into its grinding war against Hamas in Gaza. Israel denounced the decisions and recalled its ambassadors to the three countries.

Palestinian officials welcomed the announcements as an affirmation of their decades-long quest for statehood in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war and still controls.

While some 140 countries — more than two-thirds of the United Nations — recognize a Palestinian state, Wednesday's cascade of announcements could build momentum at a time when even close allies of Israel have piled on criticism for its conduct in Gaza.

The timing of the move was a surprise, but discussions have been underway for weeks in some European Union countries about possibly recognizing a Palestinian state. Proponents have argued that the war has shown the need for a new push toward a two-state solution, 15 years after negotiations collapsed between Israel and the Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government opposes Palestinian statehood.

It was the second blow to Israel's international reputation this week after the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said he would seek arrest warrants for Netanyahu and his defense minister. The International Court of Justice is also considering allegations of genocide that Israel has strenuously denied.

In addition to recalling the ambassadors to the three countries, Israel summoned their envoys, accusing the Europeans of rewarding the militant Hamas group for its Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war. Foreign Minister Israel Katz said the European ambassadors would watch grisly video footage of the attack.

In that assault, Hamas-led militants stormed across the border, killing 1,200 people and taking some

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250 hostage. The ICC prosecutor is also seeking arrest warrants for three Hamas leaders. Israel's ensuing offensive has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, and has caused a humanitarian crisis and a near-famine. The ICC prosecutor has accused Israeli leaders of using starvation as a weapon.

"History will remember that Spain, Norway, and Ireland decided to award a gold medal to Hamas murderers and rapists," Katz said.

In response to the announcements in Europe, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir paid a provocative visit Wednesday to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound — a flashpoint in Jerusalem that is sacred to Muslims and Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount.

"We will not even allow a statement about a Palestinian state," he said.

In further retaliation, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said he would stop transferring tax revenue earmarked for the Palestinian Authority, a move that threatens to handicap its already waning ability to pay salaries to thousands of employees.

Under interim peace accords in the 1990s, Israel collects tax revenue on behalf of the Palestinians, and it has used the money as a tool to pressure the PA. After the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, Smotrich froze the transfers, but Israel agreed to send the money to Norway, which transferred it to the PA. Smotrich said Wednesday that he was ending that arrangement.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the cutoff was "wrong" because it "destabilizes the West Bank" and undermines "the search for security and prosperity for the Palestinian people."

The international community has viewed the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel as the only realistic way to resolve the conflict.

The United States and Britain, among others, back the idea of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel but say it should come as part of a negotiated settlement. Netanyahu's government says the conflict can only be resolved through direct negotiations.

The formal recognition by Norway, Spain and Ireland — which all have a record of friendly ties with both the Israelis and the Palestinians, while long advocating for a Palestinian state — is planned for May 28.

Their announcements came in swift succession. Norway, which helped broker the Oslo accords that kicked off the peace process in the 1990s, was the first. "There cannot be peace in the Middle East if there is no recognition," said Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre.

The country plans to upgrade its representative office in the West Bank to an embassy.

Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris called it a "historic and important day for Ireland and for Palestine," saying the announcements had been coordinated and other countries might join.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who announced his country's decision before parliament, has spent months touring European and Middle Eastern countries to garner support for recognition and a cease-fire in Gaza.

"This recognition is not against anyone, it is not against the Israeli people," Sánchez said. "It is an act in favor of peace, justice and moral consistency."

President Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, welcomed the decisions and called on other nations to "recognize our legitimate rights and support the struggle of our people for liberation and independence."

Hamas, which Western countries and Israel view as a terrorist group, does not recognize Israel's existence but has indicated it might agree to a state on the 1967 lines, at least on an interim basis. Israel says any Palestinian state would be at risk of being taken over by Hamas, posing a threat to its security.

The announcements are unlikely to have any impact on the war in Gaza — or the long-running conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem and considers it part of its capital, and in the occupied West Bank it has built scores of Jewish settlements that are now home to over 500,000 Israelis. The settlers have Israeli citizenship, while the 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank live under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule.



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Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain security control of Gaza even after any defeat of Hamas, and the war is still raging there. An Israeli airstrike early Wednesday killed 10 people, including four women and four children, who had been displaced and were sheltering in central Gaza, according to hospital authorities.

Hugh Lovatt, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said "recognition is a tangible step towards a viable political track leading to Palestinian self-determination."

To have an impact, he said, it must come with "tangible steps to counter Israel's annexation and settlement of Palestinian territory – such as banning settlement products and financial services."

Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide defended the importance of the move in an interview with The Associated Press, saying that while the country has supported the establishment of a Palestinian state for decades, it knew that recognition is "a card that you can play once."

"We used to think that recognition would come at the end of a process," he said. "Now we have realized that recognition should come as an impetus, as a strengthening of a process."

## Baseball becomes a shelter for Venezuelan children in soccer-mad Peru

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — The crack of bat on ball and the sight of Venezuelan children running the bases on the soccer field turned baseball diamond on the outskirts of Peru's capital are watched with confusion by locals accustomed to soccer.

The questioning looks don't deter the young Venezuelans for whom baseball reinforces a strong bond with their embattled homeland. And there is no shortage of players with more than 1 million Venezuelans estimated to live in Lima, a city of about 10 million people.

Immigrants, mainly Venezuelans, have opened five baseball academies in Peru's capital. One of them is the Astros, located on the northern edge of Lima and coached by Venezuelan Franklin López.

López believes his team had to leave one field in San Juan de Luringancho, Peru's most populous district, because neighbors didn't want the Venezuelans using it. When they arrived every Tuesday and Thursday to practice they would find the field mired in mud.

López doesn't hide from his players that the road ahead of them will be bumpy if they want to play baseball in a soccer-mad country where the sport is virtually unknown.

"Here we improve by suffering," the coach told his players as they wiped the sweat off their faces during a training session.

Of the more than 7 million Venezuelans who have left their homeland during the complex crisis that has marked President Nicolás Maduro's 11-year presidency, more than 1.5 million went to neighboring Peru, most arriving after 2017 when then-President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski said they were "welcome" and would be paid for their work.

The migrants brought with them a passion for baseball, a sport in which Venezuela is a world powerhouse sending many players to U.S. Major League Baseball.

As the Venezuelan kids practiced baseball in Lima, many locals had no idea what they were doing.

"What is this sport?" a girl asked as she saw the youngsters playing. Her mother answered: "It comes from another country."

Baseball is not the sport of choice in Peru, which has produced soccer players like Teofilo Cubillas, Claudio Pizarro and Paolo Guerrero, and it was a top contender in women's volleyball tournaments four decades ago.

But the passion for baseball burns among immigrants to Peru.

"There's something in my heart that likes baseball," said 8-year-old Dylams Yépez during a recent practice.

Born in the Caribbean city of Puerto La Cruz, he said his best memories of Venezuela are of sunny mornings with his father Raúl teaching him how to throw rocks into the sea like baseballs. The boy arrived in Lima two years ago and found the Astros shortly later.

His father, a taxi driver and leukemia survivor, bought him a baseball glove online because he couldn't find any in local stores.

Venezuelan Deremi Becerra, 10, is clear why he likes baseball.

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"My father liked this sport," Deremi said in his living room, which features two baseballs, a baseball cap, a picture of his father and small flags of Venezuela and Peru. His father died of COVID-19 in Lima three years ago.

Deremi's grandmother Bertha González, 62, takes him to practice and watches him play from the stands, as she remembers watching Venezuelan baseball teams with her late son.

"We bought a couple of beers, fried bananas and started watching the matches," she said. "I cheer for Los Tiburones de la Guaira, my son supported the Leones del Caracas just like my grandson."

Different Venezuelan accents can be heard as family members of the young Venezuelan players watch the action. The children compete in a league created in April by the five baseball academies. Each child pays \$24 per month to be on the team, which are named after MLB teams or Venezuelan clubs.

In a recent game, the team coached by López, and named after the Houston Astros, faced off against the Cachorros, who were dressed in the Chicago Cubs red, blue and white uniform.

The diamond lines and bases had been marked on the soccer field earlier by Roberto Sánchez, a baseball umpire and a motorbike messenger, and Rigoberto Roso, a food app rider.

"The idea is for us to play at a good level, not just for fun," said Roso.

"Let's go my pitcher! Let's go my catcher! Don't let him see it, don't let him see it, don't let him see it!" sang a group of mothers in support of their children playing on the field.

One father adjusted his son's belt, while another gave instructions to his.

"Do you see these moms and dads?" Sánchez said as he put his sunglasses on. "Without them, without their memories, without their joy ... baseball would be finished" here.

## Donald Trump may be stuck in a Manhattan courtroom, but he knows his fave legal analysts

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — If there are bragging rights associated with Donald Trump praising your legal acumen when he speaks after a day's testimony at his criminal trial, Fox News analyst Andy McCarthy has already been cited at least a dozen times.

The former president and current presidential candidate has routinely stepped to a metal barricade outside the courtroom in lower Manhattan to face cameras and get the last word on the day's proceedings. As the trial has wound down, his speeches — he rarely acknowledges shouted questions — more frequently consist of reading the words of friendly commentators from a sheaf of papers.

Besides McCarthy, a former Manhattan prosecutor and writer for National Review, Fox commentators Jonathan Turley, Gregg Jarrett and Mark Levin get frequent shoutouts.

"Every legal scholar says, 'They don't have a case,'" Trump has said more than once while reading back supportive quotes.

McCarthy, quoted by the former president three separate times on May 13, is a "great analyst," Trump said. Some favorites get personal praise: Byron York is "a great person, great reporter." Alan Dershowitz is similarly "a great person," Trump said. Occasionally, someone from CNN slips in. MSNBC gets the silent treatment.

For television, New York's ban on cameras in the courtroom means plenty of airtime for legal analysts. It evokes the high point of the form three decades ago, when the O.J. Simpson murder trial made household names of the likes of Jeffrey Toobin, Nancy Grace and Greta Van Susteren. Fox's Jarrett, who worked at Court TV in the 1990s, straddles the eras.

### OPINIONS FROM EXPERTS RUN THE GAMUT

Naturally, it's not hard to find those who contradict Trump. On the television news networks covering the trial extensively, prevailing opinions tend to reflect the audiences they seek: little sympathy for the prosecution's case on Fox, equally difficult to find praise for the defense on MSNBC. On CNN, it's more mixed.

The more experienced legal minds, like Chuck Rosenberg speaking on MSNBC on Wednesday, note that it would be foolish to predict an outcome. The only opinions that really matter are the jurors'.

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More nuanced coverage can usually be found offscreen. Sunday's edition of The New York Times, for example, had a news story quoting experts that concluded: "Several experts say the case remains the prosecution's to lose." In the same day's opinion section, columnist Ross Douthat concluded that the case has been a political winner for Trump so far.

"Just as even paranoid people can have enemies, even sinful demagogues can face a politically motivated prosecution — and stand to gain from the appearance of legal persecution," Douthat wrote. "And that appearance, so far, has been the trial's political gift to Donald Trump."

MSNBC was devoting a large part of its day to Trump's legal issues well before the current trial. Former prosecutor Andrew Weissmann is a huge presence there; he also contributes a podcast, "Prosecuting Donald Trump," with fellow analyst Mary McCord.

Even MSNBC's biggest stars, including Rachel Maddow, have spent time in the courtroom. After listening to Trump's defense earlier this week, she reported that it was "discursive, sprawling and uninteresting."

## TRUMP CHOOSES HIS FOCUS

Fox's commentators on this case have drawn much of Trump's attention. Turley made 47 appearances to talk about the trial on Fox's weekday programs from the start of the trial through May 15, with McCarthy logging 35, according to the liberal watchdog Media Matters.

McCarthy once prosecuted terrorism cases in the U.S. attorney's office in New York's Southern District and represented Rudolph Giuliani. Turley is a professor at George Washington University's law school and founded the Project for Older Prisoners, which helps seek release of geriatric prison inmates.

Writing about the trial in the National Review, McCarthy said that "Trump ought to be acquitted for the simplest of reasons: Prosecutors can't prove their case." He criticized prosecution witness and former Trump attorney Michael Cohen on the air, saying Cohen's dishonesty and bias against Trump will be problems he has to overcome with the jury.

Turley, speaking to Fox's Jesse Watters last week, called Cohen "the most compromised, unbelievable witness in the history of the federal legal system." On another Fox appearance, Turley said the judge, Juan Merchan, shouldn't even give the case to the jury.

"I think this case is gone," Turley said. "They didn't state the basis for a crime."

On Fox this week, anchor Martha MacCallum said that "if you watch the legal experts on the other channels, this case is airtight."

The network on Monday, as it usually does, ran Trump's daily wrap in its 5 p.m. ET hour — the time slot of "The Five," the most popular program on cable news. MSNBC didn't carry Trump. CNN showed the former president and immediately followed him with a fact-check.

As happened that day, and occasionally others, Trump singled out some CNN commentators for praise. He quoted CNN's Laura Coates, Elie Honig and Tim Parlatore, the latter a former Trump lawyer hired as an analyst.

CNN's fact-checker, Tom Foreman, said that Trump was doing "a lot of cherry-picking" in his citations.

"It is certainly true that we have some panelists who say this is not a good case," CNN's Jake Tapper said. "There are also people who feel the other way. And that's what we try to do here — bring a diversity of viewpoints."

David Bauder writes about media for The Associated Press. Follow him at <http://twitter.com/dbauder>

## A comment from Trump and GOP actions in the states put contraceptive access in the 2024 spotlight

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Republican lawmakers in states across the U.S. have been rejecting Democrats' efforts to protect or expand access to birth control, an issue Democrats are promoting as a major issue in this year's elections along with abortion and other reproductive rights concerns.

Former President Donald Trump, the presumptive GOP nominee, pushed the issue into the political



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spotlight this week when he said in an interview that he was open to supporting restrictions on contraception before he reversed course and said he “has never and never will” advocate to restrict access to birth control. He went further in the post on his social media platform, saying “I do not support a ban on birth control, and neither will the Republican Party.”

But recent moves in governor’s offices and state legislatures across the country tell a more complicated story about Republicans’ stances on contraception amid what reproductive rights advocates warn is a slow chipping away of access.

“Contraception is not as straightforward an issue for the GOP as Trump’s statement suggests,” said Mary Ruth Ziegler, a law professor at the University of California, Davis School of Law and a leading abortion politics scholar. “That’s why a lot of right-to-contraception bills have been failing in both Congress and the states. Contraception is more contested than most people understand it to be.”

Trump’s remarks this week and the increasing intensity of fights over contraceptives at the state level provide an opening for Democrats, who are seeking to capitalize on the issue as a potent driver of voter turnout in the fall — just as abortion has been since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a constitutional right to the procedure two years ago.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has said he wants a vote as soon as next month on a bill to protect access to contraception that is similar to one the U.S. House passed in 2022 when Democrats controlled the chamber. Even if that legislation fails to surmount the Senate’s 60-vote filibuster hurdle, it will put Republicans on record on an issue that resonates personally with a wide swath of the electorate.

Voters already have shown they broadly support abortion rights, even in conservative states such as Kansas, Kentucky and Ohio where they have sided with abortion rights advocates on ballot measures over the past two years. Legislative tangling over contraception access has been less visible, but that has begun to change as the abortion debate begins to branch off to other areas of reproductive rights.

Earlier this month, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, vetoed bills from the Democratic-controlled Legislature that would have protected the right to contraception, saying he supports the right to it but that “we cannot trample on the religious freedoms of Virginians.” He also said in his veto message that the measure would have interfered with the rights of parents.

A Missouri women’s health care bill was stalled for months over concerns about expanding insurance coverage for birth control after some lawmakers falsely conflated birth control with medication abortion. In March, Arizona Republicans unanimously blocked a Democratic effort to protect the right to contraception access, and Tennessee Republicans blocked a bill that would have clarified that the state’s abortion ban would not affect contraceptive care or fertility treatments.

Indiana adopted a law that requires hospitals to offer women who receive Medicaid coverage long-term reversible implantable contraceptives after giving birth — but only after stripping IUDs from the bill. That move was made over objections from Democrats and some healthcare providers.

Oklahoma’s Republican-controlled legislature advanced legislation many reproductive rights advocates warned could ban emergency contraception and IUDs. And on Tuesday, the same day Trump made his statements to a Pittsburgh television station, Louisiana lawmakers advanced a measure that would make it a crime to possess two abortion-inducing drugs without a prescription, although pregnant women would be exempted.

“If you look at the policies that have been moving in states since the fall of Roe, we are seeing Republicans dismantle reproductive rights, including contraceptives,” said Heather Williams, president of the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee.

Dr. Gabriel Bosslet, an associate professor of clinical medicine at the Indiana University School of Medicine, raised concerns about some Republican arguments in favor of restricting access to contraceptives. He said, for example, that some anti-abortion groups have called on lawmakers to treat emergency contraception — such as IUDs — differently from barrier methods of contraception such as condoms by falsely labeling them as “abortifacients,” claiming that they induce abortions.

Emergency contraception also is referred to as an “abortifacient” in the GOP’s Project 2025 playbook,

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which is a blueprint for ways to reshape the federal government in the event of a Republican presidential win this year.

"This is part of a slow chipping away of contraception access," said Bosslet, who testified against the Indiana bill.

In Wisconsin, Democrats introduced a bill that was intended to protect contraception access last year, but it never got so much as a hearing in either the GOP-controlled state Assembly or state Senate before the two-year session ended in March. Senate Democrats tried to pull the bill from committee in February and force a floor vote, but all the chamber's 22 Republicans voted against the move.

Asked Wednesday why the bill never got traction, Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, a Republican, said his caucus would rarely let Democrats make such a move regardless of the topic, though he also said he wasn't familiar with the details of the measure. After a reporter read parts of the bill to him, LeMahieu said the legislation seemed redundant.

"People can already get contraception," he said. "Not sure why we'd need to pass that bill."

About half the states have had legislation this year to establish a legal right to contraception, according to the Guttmacher Institute, which supports reproductive rights. As of May 1, the group found, the only state where one of those measures passed either legislative chamber was Virginia — though the bill was ultimately vetoed by the Republican governor.

Parental involvement in teens' birth control access also has become a point of contention since an April ruling upheld a Texas law requiring teens to get parental consent. Reproductive rights advocates have warned the ruling could open the door for other states to restrict teens' ability to access contraception. Meanwhile, efforts to place emergency contraceptives or "morning after" pill vending machines on college campuses also have sparked outrage from anti-abortion groups.

While Trump has sent mixed messages on reproductive rights, President Joe Biden has attacked his positions and highlighted their potential consequences. The Biden campaign this week warned that Trump, in light of the comments his campaign later walked back, would support other states taking similar action to restrict access to contraceptives.

"If Donald Trump returns to office, this terrifying agenda could spread across the country," Ellie Schilling, a Tulane Law School professor, said on a conference call with reporters.

On that same call, Biden supporters noted that when the Supreme Court overturned the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, Justice Clarence Thomas issued a concurring opinion that troubled reproductive freedom advocates. He suggested that the court also reconsider previous opinions that prohibited bans on contraceptives, sodomy and same-sex marriage.

Ziegler, the UC Davis law school professor, said the same legal reasoning behind the decision to overturn *Roe* could be used against contraception access. If anti-abortion groups make the false argument that certain contraception methods induce abortion, she said they might be able to use the Comstock Act to try to restrict the distribution of materials related to contraception. The 19th-century law has been revived by anti-abortion groups seeking to block the abortion drug mifepristone from being sent through the mail.

"We're seeing a borrowing of the anti-abortion playbook and seeing incremental attacks on contraception," she said.

## 5 dead and at least 35 hurt as tornadoes ripped through Iowa, officials say

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and MARGERY A. BECK Associated Press

GREENFIELD, Iowa (AP) — Five people died and at least 35 were hurt as powerful tornadoes ripped through Iowa, with one carving a path of destruction through the small city of Greenfield, officials said Wednesday.

The Iowa Department of Public Safety said Tuesday's tornadoes killed four people in the Greenfield area, and the Adams County Sheriff's Office said a fifth person — a woman whose car was blown off the road — was killed by a twister about 25 miles (40 kilometers) away. Monica Zamarron, 46, died in the crash

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Tuesday afternoon, officials said.

Officials did not release the names of the Greenfield area victims because they were still notifying relatives. The Iowa Department of Public Safety said Wednesday it's believed that the number of people injured is likely higher.

The Greenfield tornado left a wide swath of obliterated homes, splintered trees and crumpled cars in the town of 2,000 about 55 miles (88.5 kilometers) southwest of Des Moines. The twister also ripped apart and crumpled massive power-producing wind turbines several miles outside the city.

Greenfield resident Kimberly Ergish, 33, and her husband dug through the debris field Wednesday that used to be their home, looking for family photos and other salvageable items. There wasn't much left, she acknowledged.

"Most of it we can't save," she said. "But we're going to get what we can."

The reality of having her house destroyed in seconds hasn't really set in, she said.

"If it weren't for all the bumps and bruises and the achy bones, I would think that it didn't happen," she said.

Tuesday's storms also pummeled parts of Illinois and Wisconsin, knocking out power to tens of thousands of customers in the two states. The severe weather turned south on Wednesday, and the National Weather Service was issuing tornado and flash flood warnings in Texas as parts of the state — including Dallas — were under a tornado watch.

The National Weather Service said initial surveys indicated at least an EF-3 tornado in Greenfield, but additional damage assessment could lead to a more powerful ranking.

The tornado appeared to have been on the ground for more than 40 miles (64 kilometers), AccuWeather Chief Meteorologist Jon Porter said. A satellite photo taken by a BlackSky Technology shows where the twister gouged a nearly straight path of destruction through the town, just south of Greenfield's center square.

The deadly twister was spawned during a historically bad season for tornadoes in the U.S., at a time when climate change is heightening the severity of storms around the world. April had the second-highest number of tornadoes on record in the country.

Through Tuesday, there have been 859 confirmed tornadoes this year, 27% more than the U.S. sees on average, according to NOAA's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma. So far, Iowa's had the most, with 81 confirmed twisters.

On Tuesday alone, the National Weather Service said it received 23 tornado reports, with most in Iowa and one each in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The tornado that decimated parts of Greenfield brought to life the worst case scenario in Iowa that weather forecasters had feared, Porter said.

"Debris was lifted thousands of feet in the air and ended up falling to the ground several counties away from Greenfield. That's evidence of just how intense and deadly this tornado was," Porter said.

People as far as 100 miles (160 kilometers) away from Greenfield posted photos on Facebook of ripped family photos, yearbook pages and other items that were lifted into the sky by the tornado.

About 90 miles away, in Ames, Iowa, Nicole Banner found a yellowed page declaring "This Book is the Property of the Greenfield Community School District" stuck to her garage door like a Post-It note after the storm passed.

"We just couldn't believe it had traveled that far," she said.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said FEMA's administrator would head to Iowa on Thursday and that the White House was in touch with state and local officials. She said they were "praying for those who tragically lost their lives" and wished those injured a "speedy recovery."

Greenfield's 25-bed hospital was among the buildings damaged, and at least a dozen people who were hurt had to be taken to facilities elsewhere. Hospital officials said in a Facebook post Wednesday that the hospital will remain closed until it can be further assessed and that full repairs could take weeks or months. The hospital, with the help of other providers, set up an urgent care clinic at an elementary school with primary care services to start there Thursday, the post said.



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Residential streets that on Monday were lined with old-growth trees and neatly-appointed ranch-style homes were a chaotic jumble of splintered and smashed remnants by Wednesday. Many of the homes' basements where residents sheltered lay exposed and front yards were littered with belongings from furniture to children's toys and Christmas decorations.

Dwight Lahey, a 70-year-old retired truck driver, drove from suburban Des Moines to Greenfield to help his 98-year-old mother. She had taken refuge from the twister in her basement, then walked out through her destroyed garage to a nearby convenience store, Lahey said.

"I don't know how she got through that mess," he said. His mom was staying in a hotel, uncertain about where she'll end up with her home gone, he said.

Roseann Freeland, 67, waited until the last minute to rush with her husband to a concrete room in her basement. Seconds later, her husband opened the door "and you could just see daylight," Freeland said. "I just lost it. I just totally lost it."

Tuesday's destructive weather also saw flooding and power outages in Nebraska, damage from tornadoes in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and dust storms in Illinois that forced two interstates to be closed.

The devastation in Iowa followed days of extreme weather that ravaged much of the middle section of the country, including Oklahoma and Kansas. Last week, deadly storms hit the Houston area, killing at least eight and knocking out power to hundreds of thousands.

## Trump allies face skepticism as they try appealing to disaffected Arab Americans in Michigan

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Facing a room of Arab American activists from across the country angry at President Joe Biden's response to the Israel-Hamas war, a well-known adviser to Donald Trump was asked this week what the former president would have done differently had he been in office.

Richard Grenell, Trump's former ambassador to Germany, repeatedly pointed to Trump's governing record and said that other countries' fear of him decreased global conflict. But two people in the room said Grenell didn't provide the specific policy changes they were hoping to hear, which left at least one leader dissatisfied and unswayed.

The nearly two-hour meeting marked the beginning of increased outreach by Trump allies in swing state Michigan, where key parts of Biden's coalition are angry with him over Israel's offensive following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. But any apparent political opportunity for Trump may be limited by criticism from many Arab Americans about the former president's ban on immigration from several majority Muslim countries and remarks they felt were insulting.

"We appreciate the outreach," said Khaled Saffuri, an Arab American political activist who was in attendance Tuesday night. "But it won't be easy to convince the community to switch from Biden to Trump, because even though we are angry with Biden, many still have a bad taste in their mouth from the four years of Trump."

Grenell was joined in the meeting by Michael Boulos, the husband of Trump's daughter Tiffany, and his father, Massad Boulos, a wealthy Lebanese businessman. Palestinian American UFC fighter Belal Muhammad also took part in the meeting, which wasn't an official campaign event.

The nearly 40 Arab American activists in attendance came from across the country. Some already support Trump while others were attending to hear directly from his surrogates, according to Yahya Basha, a Michigan doctor in attendance.

"I think most people were there to hear what specific policy changes Trump would have. It was a lot of back and forth with questions," said Basha, who left the meeting still uncommitted to any candidate in November.

Grenell fielded questions related to a travel ban on majority Muslim countries enacted during Trump's presidency, which he denied was ever implemented, according to Saffuri. He was also asked about recent remarks from Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and a key adviser on the Middle East during his admin-

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istration, on the potential of Gaza's "waterfront property."

Saffuri said the topic of Gaza was "never addressed correctly" by Grenell.

"Most of the questions were not answered directly, and I didn't expect these issues to be answered in detail in such a meeting. That requires some thought. But at least engaging the community is one step forward," said Saffuri, who said that he leans Republican but voted third-party in 2020.

Grenell declined to comment.

In a statement in response to the meeting, a spokesperson for Biden's campaign, Ammar Mousa, said that Trump is "the biggest threat to the Muslim and Arab community," and that he is "openly speaking about allowing Israel to bomb Gaza without any regard."

"President Biden, on the other hand, is working tirelessly towards a just and lasting peace," said Moussa.

Massad Boulos, Tiffany Trump's father-in-law, said he gave a speech sharing his experiences as an immigrant and how they shaped his conservative values. He also highlighted a more personal side of Trump, emphasizing his "love and admiration for the Middle East in general," according to Boulos.

"And then we discussed the need to organize ourselves and get ready for November and to mobilize our respective communities," Boulos said in an interview.

Tuesday's meeting in Michigan was just the beginning of a series of larger gatherings between Trump allies and Arab American leaders, according to Bishara Bahbah, chairman of Arab Americans for Trump and organizer of the meeting. Bahbah, present at the meeting, said he is already arranging future meetings.

Brian Hughes, a spokesman for the Trump campaign, said in a statement that while the campaign didn't request the meeting, they "will continue to communicate to those voters and remind them that President Trump's policies in the Middle East brought that region historic levels of peace and stability."

Arab Americans in recent history have overwhelmingly supported the Democratic Party, but are angry at Biden due to his refusal to call for a permanent ceasefire and cut all aid to Israel. Metro Detroit, where Tuesday's meeting took place, has one of the largest Arab American populations in the country and has become a focal point of pushback due to its electoral importance in the battleground state.

About 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's offensive after the Oct. 7 attack, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't separate its death toll between combatants and noncombatants.

The anger has extended beyond Arab American voters to various groups, including young voters, evident in widespread protests on college campuses nationwide. A movement to choose "uncommitted" as a protest in Democratic primaries has garnered hundreds of thousands of votes across the country, receiving 18% of the vote in Kentucky's Democratic primary on Tuesday.

## Daily marijuana use outpaces daily drinking in the US, a new study says

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

For the first time, the number of Americans who use marijuana just about every day has surpassed the number who drink that often, a shift some 40 years in the making as recreational pot use became more mainstream and legal in nearly half of U.S. states.

In 2022, an estimated 17.7 million people reported using marijuana daily or near-daily compared to 14.7 million daily or near-daily drinkers, according an analysis of national survey data. In 1992, when daily pot use hit a low point, less than 1 million people said they used marijuana nearly every day.

Alcohol is still more widely used, but 2022 was the first time this intensive level of marijuana use overtook daily and near-daily drinking, said the study's author, Jonathan Caulkins, a cannabis policy researcher at Carnegie Mellon University.

"A good 40% of current cannabis users are using it daily or near daily, a pattern that is more associated with tobacco use than typical alcohol use," Caulkins said.

The research, based on data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, was published Wednesday in the journal *Addiction*. The survey is a highly regarded source of self-reported estimates of tobacco, alcohol and drug use in the United States.

From 1992 to 2022, the per capita rate of reporting daily or near-daily marijuana use increased 15-fold.

Caulkins acknowledged in the study that people may be more willing to report marijuana use as public acceptance grows, which could boost the increase.

Most states now allow medical or recreational marijuana, though it remains illegal at the federal level. In November, Florida voters will decide on a constitutional amendment allowing recreational cannabis, and the federal government is moving to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug.

Research shows that high-frequency users are more likely to become addicted to marijuana, said Dr. David A. Gorelick, a psychiatry professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, who was not involved in the study.

The number of daily users suggests that more people are at risk for developing problematic cannabis use or addiction, Gorelick said.

"High frequency use also increases the risk of developing cannabis-associated psychosis," a severe condition where a person loses touch with reality, he said.

## Families of Israeli hostages release video of female soldiers being captured by Hamas

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A group representing the families of hostages held in Gaza has released new video footage showing Hamas' capture of five female Israeli soldiers near the Gaza border on Oct. 7.

The video shows several of the young soldiers bloody and wounded. In one scene, a militant tells one of the terrified women she is beautiful.

The footage was taken by Hamas militants who stormed the Nahal Oz military base, part of the militant group's wider assault on southern Israel that killed roughly 1,200 people and took about 250 others hostage.

Seven female soldiers who worked as lookouts on the border with Gaza were taken captive from Nahal Oz, said the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, which released the footage. All were 19 or 20.

The army rescued one of the women early in the war in a ground operation and said a second was killed in Hamas captivity. The five women in the video are believed to still be held by Hamas.

The Israeli army recently declassified the video and turned it over to the women's families. The forum said the families made the footage public in an attempt to pressure the government into reaching a cease-fire deal with Hamas that would free their loved ones.

"Every new testimony about what happened to the hostages echoes the same tragic truth — we must bring them all back home, now," the forum said in a statement. "The Israeli government must not waste another moment."

Israel has released similar photos and videos from the Oct. 7 rampage in a campaign aimed at shoring up support for the ongoing war in Gaza.

The footage released Wednesday is roughly three minutes and edited, with some images blurred to censor what the forum said is especially sensitive material.

It shows a group of more than a dozen armed militants binding the soldiers, two of whom had visible bloodstains on their faces.

In the video, the women try to converse with the militants. One says in English, "I have friends in Palestine."

One militant yells back in English for them to be quiet. In other scenes, militants kneel to pray in front of at least four of the female soldiers, who are handcuffed and seated on the ground. One bears visible cuts on her legs, and her blood pools onto the ground beneath her as a militant binds her hands behind her back.

At least one of the soldiers appears to be in her pajamas, with blood visible on her face. One of the militants points at her and, in English, says, "You are beautiful."

In a statement, Hamas called the video "a manipulated excerpt" whose authenticity "cannot be verified." The militant group said the minor injuries and blood on the soldiers "is to be expected in such operations," but denied physically assaulting the women.



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Israel's offensive on Gaza, launched in response to the Hamas attack, has killed about 35,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Ashley Waxman Bakshi, a cousin of Agam Berger, one of the women in the video, said that she cried the first time she saw it.

"Toward the end, I felt like I was going to throw up. I think any person who watches this video will understand that feeling, especially as a woman," she said.

Other footage shows the militants dragging two of the female soldiers toward a jeep as gunfire rattles. One is led to the vehicle barefoot, hopping on one foot because of an apparent leg injury.

In another scene, a group of militants holds a hostage by their hands and feet. It is not clear whether the hostage is alive or dead. Another scene shows three of the female soldiers in the back of a moving vehicle, faces bloodied as militants yell around them. Berger, who is wearing a brown shirt, is one of them.

"We know she's alive. We can feel it. She has a twin sister, she feels her," Bakshi said of her cousin. "She was taken hostage not severely injured. You can see from the video."

## Senate confirms 200th federal judge under Biden as Democrats surpass Trump's pace

By KEVIN FREKING and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Wednesday confirmed the 200th federal judge of President Joe Biden's tenure, about a month earlier than when Donald Trump hit that mark in his term, though Trump still holds the edge when it comes to the most impactful confirmations — those to the Supreme Court and the country's 13 appellate courts.

The march to 200 culminated with the confirmation of Angela Martinez as a district court judge in Arizona. The milestone reflects the importance that Biden, a former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., placed on judicial confirmations after Trump put his enormous stamp on the federal judiciary with the confirmation of three Supreme Court justices.

"Reaching 200 judges is a major milestone," Schumer said just before the 66-28 vote. "Simply put, our 200 judges comprise the most diverse slate of judicial nominations under any president in American history."

The current pace of judicial confirmations for this White House came despite Biden, a Democrat, coming into office in 2021 with far fewer vacancies, particularly in the influential appellate courts, than Trump, a Republican, did in 2017.

"There is more work to do," Biden said in a statement after the vote. "Going forward, I will continue my solemn responsibility of nominating individuals who have excelled in their professional careers, who reflect the communities they serve and who apply the law impartially and without favoritism."

Another judge was confirmed Wednesday afternoon, bringing Biden's tally to 201. Yet it's unclear whether Biden can eclipse his predecessor's 234 judges before the year ends.

Democrats have solidly backed the president's judicial nominees, but there have been some cracks in that resolve in recent weeks. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said he would not support nominees who do not have some bipartisan support, and the two Democratic senators from Nevada are opposing a nominee who would become the nation's first Muslim appellate court judge. They did so after some law enforcement groups came out against the nomination.

The White House is aware of the obstacles as they rush to surpass Trump's accomplishment. It's a high water mark that remains a point of pride for the former president and senior Republicans who made it happen, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. Filling dozens of judicial vacancies requires time on the Senate floor calendar, which becomes more scarce as senators in the narrowly divided chamber shift into election-year campaign mode.

Of the more than 40 current judicial vacancies nationwide, half are in states with two Republican senators. That matters because for district court judges, home-state senators still can exercise virtual veto power over a White House's nominations due to a long-standing Senate tradition.

White House officials say they have no illusions about the challenges they face but feel reaching 235 is

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possible. That doesn't please Republicans.

"Unfortunately, they learned from our example about prioritizing lifetime appointments," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas. Meanwhile, liberal advocacy groups are thrilled with the results so far.

"I just cannot rave enough about these judges," said Jake Faleschini, who leads nominations work at the Alliance for Justice. "It's been nothing short of transformative of the federal judiciary in terms of both excellence, but also demographic and professional diversity."

At this stage in his term, Trump had two Supreme Court justices and 51 appellate court judges confirmed to lifetime appointments. Biden has tapped one Supreme Court justice and 42 appellate court judges. Biden has more confirmations of the district judges who handle civil and criminal cases. Those nominations tend to be less hard fought.

Biden has emphasized adding more female and minority judges to the federal bench. On that front, 127 of the 200 judges confirmed to the bench are women. Fifty-eight are Black and 36 are Hispanic, according to Schumer's office. Thirty-five judges are Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, more than any other administration, according to the White House.

In the appellate courts, 30 of the 42 circuit judges confirmed during Biden's term are women, according to the White House. Thirteen Black women have been chosen as circuit judges, more than all previous administrations combined.

Under Biden, more Hispanic judges have been confirmed to the appellate courts than any other administration.

As abortion access remains a vital priority for the Biden administration and a key argument for the president's reelection bid, the White House also points to several judges with backgrounds on the issue. They include Judge Julie Rikelman of the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, who before her nomination argued on behalf of the abortion clinic in *Dobbs vs Jackson*, the 2022 ruling that dismantled *Roe vs. Wade*; and Nicole Berner, a former attorney at Planned Parenthood who now serves on the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Conservatives say it is fine to have diversity, but that should not be the focus.

"I think the right standard isn't trying to check boxes with nominees, but to try to find the men and women who are going to be faithful to the Constitution and the rule of law," said Carrie Severino, president of JCN, a conservative group that worked to boost support for Trump's nominees.

About a one-quarter of the judges Trump nominated were women and about 1 in 6 were minorities, according to the Pew Research Center.

Asked about the diversity of Biden's nominees, GOP senators said there was too much focus on "identity politics."

"I'm interested in competent lawyers who will administer justice fairly. Now, there are women that can do that. There are men that can do that. There are people of color that can do that," said Sen. John Kennedy, R-La. "But their primary characteristic that they're proudest of is racial identify or gender identify, and activist. And I just don't think that's what the American people want to see in their justice system."

Proponents of diversifying the federal judiciary counter that people who come before the court have more trust in the legal process when they see people who look like them. They said it's important to diversify the professional backgrounds of judges, too, so that more public defenders and those with a civil rights or non-profit background are considered.

"The American people deserve federal judges who not only look like America, but understand the American experience from every angle," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the Senate Judiciary Committee chairman.

## **Nikki Haley says she will vote for Donald Trump following their disputes during Republican primary**

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

Nikki Haley said Wednesday that she will be voting for Donald Trump in the general election, a notable show of support given their intense and often personal rivalry during the Republican primary calendar.

But Haley also made it clear that she feels Trump has work to do to win over voters who supported her during the course of the primary campaign and continue to cast votes for her in ongoing primary contests.

"I will be voting for Trump," Haley, Trump's former U.N. ambassador, said during an event at the Hudson Institute in Washington.

"Having said that, I stand by what I said in my suspension speech," Haley added. "Trump would be smart to reach out to the millions of people who voted for me and continue to support me and not assume that they're just going to be with him. And I genuinely hope he does that."

The comments in her first public speech since leaving the race are another signal of the GOP's virtually complete consolidation of support behind Trump, even from those who have labeled him a threat in the past.

Haley shuttered her own bid for the GOP nomination two months ago but did not immediately endorse Trump, having accused him of causing chaos and disregarding the importance of U.S. alliances abroad as well as questioning whether Trump, 77, was too old to be president again.

Trump, in turn, repeatedly mocked her with the nickname "Birdbrain," though he curtailed those attacks after securing enough delegates in March to become the presumptive Republican nominee.

Trump's campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Haley's announcement.

President Joe Biden's campaign, meanwhile, has been working to win over her supporters, whom they view as true swing voters. Biden's team is quietly organizing a Republicans for Biden group, which will eventually include dedicated staff and focus on the hundreds of thousands of Haley voters in each battleground state, according to people familiar with the plans but not authorized to discuss them publicly.

Despite Haley's announcement Wednesday, the Biden campaign made it clear they would continue to court voters who backed her in Republican primaries this year.

"Nothing has changed for the millions of Republican voters who continue to cast their ballots against Donald Trump in the primaries and care deeply about the future of our democracy, standing strong with our allies against foreign adversaries, and working across the aisle to get things done for the American people — while also rejecting the chaos, division and violence that Donald Trump embodies," Michael Tyler, the campaign's communications director, said in a statement. "Only one candidate shares those values, and only one campaign is working hard every day to earn their support — and that's President Biden's."

Meanwhile, Haley made several criticisms of Biden's foreign policy and handling of the U.S.-Mexico border in her speech Wednesday at the Hudson Institute, a conservative Washington think tank she recently joined as she reemerges in the political realm.

Earlier this month, Haley huddled in South Carolina with some of her donors, an event characterized as a "thank you" to her top supporters and not a discussion about Haley's future political plans or intended to push her backers toward any other candidate.

If she runs for president again, Haley will likely need to win over former Trump supporters in a Republican primary. But her support for him now risks offending moderates and anti-Trump conservatives.



## Second flag carried by Jan. 6 rioters displayed outside house owned by Justice Alito, report says

WASHINGTON (AP) — A second flag of a type carried by rioters during the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, was displayed outside a house owned by Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, The New York Times reported Wednesday.

An "Appeal to Heaven" flag was flown outside Alito's beach vacation home last summer. An inverted American flag — another symbol carried by rioters — was seen at Alito's home outside Washington less than two weeks after the violent attack on the Capitol.

News of the upside-down American flag sparked an uproar last week, including calls from high-ranking Democrats for Alito to recuse himself from cases related to former President Donald Trump.

Alito and the court declined to respond to requests for comment on how the "Appeal to Heaven" flag came to be flying and what it was intended to express. He previously said the inverted American flag was flown by his wife amid a dispute with neighbors, and he had no part in it.

The white flag with a green pine tree was seen flying at the Alito beach home in New Jersey, according to three photographs obtained by the Times. The images were taken on different dates in July and September 2023, though it wasn't clear how long it was flying overall or how much time Alito spent there.

The flag dates back to the Revolutionary War, but in more recent years it has become associated with Christian nationalism and support for Trump. It was carried by rioters fueled by Trump's "Stop the Steal" movement animated by false claims of election fraud.

Republicans in Congress and state officials have also displayed the flag. House Speaker Mike Johnson hung it at his office last fall shortly after winning the gavel. A spokesman said the speaker appreciates its rich history and was given the flag by a pastor who served as a guest chaplain for the House.

Alito, meanwhile, is taking part in two pending Supreme Court cases associated with Jan. 6: whether Trump has immunity from prosecution for his efforts to overturn the 2020 election results and whether a certain obstruction charge can be used against rioters. He also participated in the court's unanimous ruling that states can't bar Trump from the ballot using the "insurrection clause" that was added to the Constitution after the Civil War.

News of the second flag brought renewed calls for Alito to step aside from the Trump-related cases. "At this point it is difficult to make any reasonable case for Alito's impartiality. It can and must be questioned. As a result, he must not sit on cases about the 2020 election or the insurrection he appears to have supported," said Noah Bookbinder, president of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. The group represented Colorado voters in the "insurrection clause" case at the high court seeking to bar Trump from the ballot.

There has been no indication Alito would step aside from the cases.

Another conservative justice, Clarence Thomas, also has ignored calls to recuse himself from cases related to the 2020 election because of his wife Virginia Thomas' support for efforts to overturn Trump's loss to President Joe Biden.

Public trust in the Supreme Court, meanwhile, recently hit its lowest point in at least 50 years.

Judicial ethics codes focus on the need for judges to be independent, avoiding political statements or opinions on matters they could be called on to decide. The Supreme Court had long gone without its own code of ethics, but it adopted one in November 2023 in the face of sustained criticism over undisclosed trips and gifts from wealthy benefactors to some justices. The code lacks a means of enforcement, however.

## Michigan farmworker diagnosed with bird flu, becoming 2nd US case tied to dairy cows

By MIKE STOBBE and JONEL ALECCIA Associated Press

A Michigan dairy worker has been diagnosed with bird flu — the second human case associated with an outbreak in U.S. dairy cows.

The male worker had been in contact with cows at a farm with infected animals. He experienced mild eye symptoms and has recovered, U.S. and Michigan health officials said in announcing the case Wednesday.

A nasal swab from the person tested negative for the virus, but an eye swab tested Tuesday was positive for bird flu, “indicating an eye infection,” U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials said.

The worker developed a “gritty feeling” in his eye earlier this month but it was a “very mild case,” said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, Michigan’s chief medical executive. He was not treated with oseltamivir, a medication advised for treating bird flu, she said.

The risk to the public remains low, but farmworkers exposed to infected animals are at higher risk, health officials said. They said those workers should be offered protective equipment, especially for their eyes.

Health officials say they do not know if the Michigan farmworker was wearing protective eyewear, but an investigation is continuing.

In late March, a farmworker in Texas was diagnosed in what officials called the first known instance globally of a person catching this version of bird flu from a mammal. That patient reported only eye inflammation and recovered.

Since 2020, a bird flu virus has been spreading among more animal species — including dogs, cats, skunks, bears and even seals and porpoises — in scores of countries.

The detection in U.S. livestock earlier this year was an unexpected twist that sparked questions about food safety and whether it would start spreading among humans.

That hasn’t happened, although there’s been a steady increase of reported infections in cows. As of Wednesday, the virus had been confirmed in 51 dairy herds in nine states, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department. Fifteen of the herds were in Michigan.

The CDC’s Dr. Nirav Shah said the case was “not unexpected” and it’s possible more infections could be diagnosed in people who work around infected cows.

U.S. officials said they had tested 40 people since the first cow cases were discovered in late March. Michigan has tested 35 of them, Bagdasarian told The Associated Press in an interview.

Shah praised Michigan officials for actively monitoring farmworkers. He said health officials there have been sending daily text messages to workers exposed to infected cows asking about possible symptoms, and that the effort helped officials catch this infection. He said no other workers had reported symptoms.

That’s encouraging news, said Michael Osterholm, a University of Minnesota epidemiologist who has studied bird flu for decades. There’s no sign to date that the virus is causing flu-like illness or that it is spreading among people.

“If we had four or five people seriously ill with respiratory illness, we would be picking that up,” he said.

The virus has been found in high levels in the raw milk of infected cows, but government officials say pasteurized products sold in grocery stores are safe because heat treatment has been confirmed to kill the virus.

The new case marks the third time a person in the United States has been diagnosed with what’s known as Type A H5N1 virus. In 2022, a prison inmate in a work program picked it up while killing infected birds at a poultry farm in Montrose County, Colorado. His only symptom was fatigue, and he recovered. That predated the virus’s appearance in cows.

## First aid from US pier in Gaza has reached starving Palestinians, the UN says

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.N. World Food Program said Wednesday that it has handed out in Gaza in recent days a “limited number” of high-energy biscuits that arrived from a U.S.-built pier, the first aid from the new humanitarian sea route to get into the hands of Palestinians in grave need.

The small number of biscuits came in the first shipments unloaded from the pier Friday, WFP spokesman Steve Taravella said. The U.S. Agency for International Development told The Associated Press that a total of 41 trucks loaded with aid from the more than \$320 million pier have reached humanitarian organizations in Gaza.

“Aid is flowing” from the pier, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters Wednesday in response to questions about the troubled launch of aid deliveries from the maritime project. “It is not flowing at a rate that any of us are happy with.”

Pentagon spokesman Maj. Gen. Patrick Ryder told reporters Tuesday that he did not believe any of the aid from the pier had yet reached people in Gaza. Sullivan said a day later that some aid had been delivered “specifically to the Palestinians who need it.”

American officials hope the pier at maximum capacity can bring the equivalent of 150 truckloads of aid to Gaza each day. That’s a fraction of the 600 truckloads of food, emergency nutritional treatments and other supplies that USAID says are needed each day to bring people in Gaza back from the start of famine and address the humanitarian crisis brought on by the seven-month-old Israel-Hamas war.

Israeli restrictions on land crossings and a surge in fighting have cut deliveries of food and fuel in Gaza to the lowest levels since the first months of the war, international officials say. Israel’s takeover this month of the Rafah border crossing, a key transit point for fuel and supplies for Gaza, has contributed to bringing aid operations near collapse, the U.N. and relief groups say.

All 2.3 million people of Gaza are struggling to get food, according to aid groups, with the heads of the WFP and USAID having said famine has begun in north Gaza.

The U.S. pier project to bring aid to Gaza via the Mediterranean Sea has had a troubled launch, with groups of people overrunning a convoy Saturday and taking most of the supplies and a man in the crowd who was shot dead in still-unexplained circumstances.

Saturday’s chaos forced suspension of aid convoys from the pier for two days. Shada Moghraby, the WFP’s spokesperson at the U.N., said trucks carrying aid from the pier arrived at a U.N. warehouse Tuesday and Wednesday, but it wasn’t clear how many.

The WFP had warned this week that the U.S. project could fail unless Israeli authorities gave clearances and cooperation for alternate land routes and better security.

Humanitarian officials and the U.S. say the sea route is not a replacement for bringing aid through land crossings, and they have repeatedly called on Israel to allow a steady large flow of trucks through entry points and to ensure aid workers are safe from the Israeli military.

Israel insists it puts no restriction on the number of trucks entering Gaza and has blamed “lack of logistical capabilities and manpower gaps” among aid groups. But Israel’s military operations make it very difficult for groups to retrieve the aid.

## Heated hearing in classified documents case as lawyer for Trump co-defendant challenges prosecutors

By TERRY SPENCER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — A lawyer for Donald Trump’s personal valet took aim at the conduct of prosecutors in the classified documents case in a heated hearing Wednesday, the first since a judge indefinitely postponed the trial.

Stanley Woodward, a lawyer for Walt Nauta, said prosecutors had targeted his client for prosecution



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after he refused to cooperate against Trump in the investigation. Nauta was charged alongside Trump last year in a federal case accusing them of conspiring to conceal boxes of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's estate in Palm Beach, Florida.

The defense lawyer also said a prosecutor in the case had warned him earlier in the investigation that he needed to be careful or he would "mess up" his bid for a Washington, D.C., judgeship, a comment Woodward interpreted as designed to get him to pressure Nauta to assist the inquiry.

But David Harbach, a prosecutor with Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith's team, which brought the case, called Woodward's allegations "garbage" and "fantasy." He said the statements attributed to his colleague, Jay Bratt, had been taken out of context. Woodward said he would be willing to testify under oath about the exchange.

The encounter laid bare the simmering tensions between the two sides in a case that has been mired in delays and slowed by legal disputes that the Trump-appointed judge, Aileen Cannon, has yet to resolve. The case, among four criminal prosecutions against Trump, had been set for trial on May 20 but Cannon canceled the trial date earlier this month.

Woodward conceded to Cannon that there was insufficient evidence to dismiss the indictment on grounds of vindictive prosecution. But he said there was enough for her to order prosecutors to turn over all communication they had about Nauta to see if hostility existed.

He said he believed his client was only being prosecuted because he refused to testify against Trump and because he asserted his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination by refusing to testify a second time before a grand jury.

"There was a campaign to get Mr. Nauta to cooperate in the first federal prosecution of a former president of the United States and when he refused, they prosecuted him," Woodward told the judge. "That's a violation of his constitutional rights."

Prosecutor Harbach pushed back on Woodward's arguments, saying it was common for defendants to be offered better treatment if they cooperate,

"There is not a single bit of evidence of animus toward Mr. Nauta," Harbach said,

Trump was not present for the hearing. The GOP presumptive presidential nominee for 2024 has pleaded not guilty and denied any wrongdoing.

The arguments came one day after a newly unsealed motion revealed that defense lawyers are seeking to exclude evidence from the boxes of records that FBI agents seized during an August 2022 search of Mar-a-Lago.

The defense lawyers asserted in the motion that the search was unconstitutional and illegal and the FBI affidavit filed in justification of it was tainted by misrepresentations.

Smith's team rejected each of those accusations and defended the investigative approach as "measured" and "graduated." It said the search warrant was obtained after investigators collected surveillance video showing what it said was a concerted effort to conceal the boxes of classified documents inside the property.

"The warrant was supported by a detailed affidavit that established probable cause and did not omit any material information. And the warrant provided ample guidance to the FBI agents who conducted the search. Trump identifies no plausible basis to suppress the fruits of that search," prosecutors wrote.

The defense motion was filed in February but was made public on Tuesday, along with hundreds of pages of documents from the investigation that were filed to the case docket in Florida.

Those include a previously sealed opinion last year from the then-chief judge of the federal court in Washington, which said that Trump's lawyers, months after the FBI search of Mar-a-Lago, had turned over four additional documents with classification markings that were found in Trump's bedroom.

That March 2023 opinion from U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell directed a former lead lawyer for Trump in the case to abide by a grand jury subpoena and to turn over materials to investigators, rejecting defense arguments that their cooperation was prohibited by attorney-client privilege and concluding that prosecutors had made a "prima facie" showing that Trump had committed a crime.

## Average US vehicle age hits record 12.6 years as high prices force people to keep them longer

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Cars, trucks and SUVs in the U.S. keep getting older, hitting a record average age of 12.6 years in 2024 as people hang on to their vehicles largely because new ones cost so much.

S&P Global Mobility, which tracks state vehicle registration data nationwide, said Wednesday that the average vehicle age grew about two months from last year's record.

But the growth in average age is starting to slow as new vehicle sales start to recover from pandemic-related shortages of parts, including computer chips. The average increased by three months in 2023.

Still, with an average U.S. new-vehicle selling price of just over \$45,000 last month, many can't afford to buy new — even though prices are down more than \$2,000 from the peak in December of 2022, according to J.D. Power.

"It's prohibitively high for a lot of households now," said Todd Campau, aftermarket leader for S&P Global Mobility. "So I think consumers are being painted into the corner of having to keep the vehicle on the road longer."

Other factors include people waiting to see if they want to buy an electric vehicle or go with a gas-electric hybrid or a gasoline vehicle. Many, he said, are worried about the charging network being built up so they can travel without worrying about running out of battery power. Also, he said, vehicles are made better these days and simply are lasting a long time.

New vehicle sales in the U.S. are starting to return to pre-pandemic levels, with prices and interest rates the big influencing factors rather than illness and supply-chain problems, Campau said. He said he expects sales to hit around 16 million this year, up from 15.6 million last year and 13.9 million in 2022.

As more new vehicles are sold and replace aging vehicles in the nation's fleet of 286 million passenger vehicles, the average age should stop growing and stabilize, Campau said. And unlike immediately after the pandemic, more lower-cost vehicles are being sold, which likely will bring down the average price, he said.

People keeping vehicles longer is good news for the local auto repair shop. About 70% of vehicles on the road are 6 or more years old, he said, beyond manufacturer warranties.

Those who are able to keep their rides for multiple years usually get the oil changed regularly and follow manufacturer maintenance schedules, Campau noted.

## British prime minister sets July 4 election as his Conservatives face biggest challenge in a decade

By JILL LAWLESS and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday set July 4 as the date for a national election that will determine who governs the U.K., as his divided and demoralized Conservative Party faces its biggest challenge to its 14-year rule.

"Now is the moment for Britain to choose its future," Sunak said in an announcement that took many people who expected a fall election by surprise. He spoke on a day of good economic news, hoping to remind wavering voters of one relative success of his time in office.

But Sunak was drenched by heavy rain outside the prime minister's residence, and his announcement was nearly drowned out by protesters blasting "Things Can Only Get Better," a rival Labour campaign song from the Tony Blair era.

Sunak's center-right party has seen its support dwindle steadily. It has struggled to overcome a series of crises including an economic slump, ethics scandals and a revolving door of leaders in the past two years.

The center-left Labour Party is strongly favored in the election. Labour leader Keir Starmer said his party would bring stability.

"Together we can stop the chaos, we can turn the page, we can start to rebuild Britain and change our country," Starmer said.

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Bookies and pollsters rank Sunak as a long shot to stay in power. But he said he would "fight for every vote."

The election will be held against the backdrop of a cost-of-living crisis and deep divisions over how to deal with migrants and asylum seekers making risky English Channel crossings from Europe.

Sunak stressed his credentials as the leader who saved millions of jobs with support payments during the COVID-19 pandemic and got the economy under control. He said the election would be about "how and who you trust to turn that foundation into a secure future."

The announcement came the same day official figures showed inflation in the U.K. had fallen sharply to 2.3%, its lowest level in nearly three years on the back of big declines in domestic bills.

The drop in April marks the greatest progress to date on five pledges Sunak made in January 2023, including halving inflation, which had climbed to above 11% at the end of 2022. Sunak hailed the new figure as evidence his plan was working.

"Today marks a major moment for the economy, with inflation back to normal," Sunak said ahead of the election announcement. "Brighter days are ahead, but only if we stick to the plan to improve economic security and opportunity for everyone."

Voters across the United Kingdom will choose all 650 members of the House of Commons for a term of up to five years. The party that commands a majority in the Commons, either alone or in coalition, will form the next government and its leader will be prime minister.

Starmer, a former chief prosecutor for England and Wales, is the current favorite. The party's momentum has built since it dealt the Conservatives heavy losses in local elections earlier this month.

The Conservatives have also lost a series of special elections for seats in Parliament this year, and two of its lawmakers recently defected to Labour.

Lorraine Chase, a well-known British actress who was visiting Parliament, said she thought Labour is headed for victory because the country faces big problems and people want to send the Conservatives packing.

"They just want the Tories out," said Chase, 72. "I don't really know what someone else coming in can really help. It took years to get in this mess. It will take years to get out."

Following on his party's successes in the local elections, Starmer, 61, last week announced a platform focused on economic stability as he tries to win over disillusioned voters.

He also pledged to improve border security, recruit more teachers and police and reduce lengthy waiting lists at hospitals and doctors' clinics.

Elections in the U.K. have to be held no more than five years apart, but the prime minister can choose the timing within that period. Sunak, 44, had until December to call an election. The last one was in December 2019.

Many political analysts had anticipated that a fall election would give Conservatives a better chance of maintaining power. That's because economic conditions may improve further, voters could feel the effect of recent tax cuts, interest rates may come down and a controversial plan to deport some asylum-seekers to Rwanda — a key policy for Sunak — could take flight.

Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London, said some voters might give Sunak credit for gambling on an early election because it makes him look strong and bold rather than weak and indecisive. But he said voters care about the fundamentals.

"And those fundamentals don't look particularly good for the prime minister," Bale said. "The economy, whatever he says, is still fairly weak. Growth is fairly anemic. Inflation has come down, but it's still there ... (and) public services are in trouble."

Ed Glenn, who was outside Parliament, suggested that Sunak called the election because he thinks he has a better shot of winning sooner — or he wants to take an early summer vacation after losing.

"I have historically voted for the Tories," Glenn said. "But I would say I'm politically homeless right now because I don't really have any faith in either party, or the main parties."

Although inflation has fallen, Sunak's other promises — to grow the economy, reduce debt, cut waiting lists to see a doctor at the state-run National Health Service and stop the influx of migrants crossing the



English Channel — have seen less success.

He has struggled after entering office following the disastrous tenure of Liz Truss, who lasted only 49 days after her economic policies rocked financial markets. Truss had been chosen by party members after Boris Johnson was ousted over a series of ethics scandals.

## **Lawsuits claim 66 people were abused as children in Pennsylvania's juvenile facilities**

By MARK SCOLFORD Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Dozens of children suffered physical and sexual abuse including violent rapes inside juvenile detention centers and similar facilities in Pennsylvania, according to four related lawsuits filed Wednesday.

The lawsuits describe how 66 people, now adults, say they were victimized by guards, nurses, supervisors and others. Some attacks were reported to other staffers and were ignored or met with disbelief, the lawsuits allege.

Their claims point to a broken juvenile justice system, said Jerome Block, whose New York law firm has also pursued similar lawsuits in Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey and Michigan.

"The purpose of the juvenile justice system is to rehabilitate and educate and reform, to equip them to lead healthy, productive lives," Block said before filing the suits. "Instead these men and women were sexually traumatized as children. They came to these facilities needing help. Instead, they had trauma inflicted upon them."

The lawsuits name the state-run Loysville Youth Development Center, South Mountain Secure Treatment Unit and North Central Secure Treatment Unit in Danville; Merakey USA's Northwestern Academy outside Shamokin, which closed in 2016; and facilities run by Tucson, Arizona-based VisionQuest National Ltd. and Villanova-based Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health.

Department of Human Services press secretary Brandon Cwalina declined comment on the lawsuit but said the agency has zero tolerance for abuse and harassment. He urged anyone suspecting child abuse at any facility to call Pennsylvania's ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313.

"We take seriously our responsibility to protect the health and safety of children at licensed facilities," Cwalina wrote in an email.

Merakey said it will comprehensively review the allegations, some of which date back 25 years, and if they prove credible will have an obligation to help the former residents heal. But the company's statement said it has found no records corroborating the alleged conduct, and staff who worked there at the time said they have no knowledge that such abuse was reported.

Devereux vice president Leah Yaw also declined to address specific allegations, but said it has worked to prevent abuse and improve safety by including training and outside accreditation on sexual abuse prevention, improving the pipeline for people to work in nonprofit behavioral health and spending millions to improve its facilities and technology.

"There is no setting in which people work with other people that is entirely immune from the risk of abuse," Yaw said, but Devereux is trying "to create a comprehensive culture which prevents abuse before it can happen and ensures safety and quality."

Messages seeking comment also were left for VisionQuest.

All the plaintiffs were born after Nov. 26, 1989, and meet Pennsylvania's standards for filing claims of sexual abuse when they were children.

Block's said his legal team also represents more than 100 people who were abused too long ago to file civil claims. Proposals to open a two-year filing window have been blocked by Senate Republicans in the General Assembly.

Eighteen of the latest plaintiffs describe rapes and other sexual abuse at Devereux facilities. One says that when he was 14 and sedated during "major anger outbreaks," a staff member sexually abused him while he was restrained "so he could not fight back."

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Other claims say children at the state-run facilities “have long been subjected to a culture of exploitation, violence and rampant sexual abuse” committed by guards, counselors and other staff. The sexual abuse “has ranged from inappropriate strip searches to rape using violent physical force,” according to their lawsuit, which alleges negligence and failed oversight.

One plaintiff says a violent rape by a counselor at North Central left her pregnant as a teenager about 20 years ago, and another staffer didn’t believe her when she reported the rape. The lawsuit doesn’t describe what happened regarding her pregnancy.

Merakey USA, which operated Northwestern Academy before it shut down in 2016, is accused of a “culture of sexual abuse and brutality,” including “inappropriate and criminal sexual relationships with children,” who were granted or denied privileges to pressure them into sex.

That lawsuit says one 14-year-old girl who had not been sexually active was forced into sex acts by two Northwestern Academy staffers, and when she complained, she was accused of lying and her home leave passes were removed.

A male therapist then had her write about her sexual encounters during twice-a-week sessions for five months, telling her it was treatment for sex addiction and for a book he was writing. When she asked for the book upon leaving the facility, its director told her the book did not exist and her experience “would not be considered mental health treatment,” the lawsuit says.

A task force to address Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice problems — established by legislative leaders, the court system and then-Gov. Tom Wolf — concluded in 2021 that too many first-time and lower level juvenile offenders were being locked up, and Black offenders were disproportionately prosecuted as adults.

A Democratic-sponsored bill to adopt some of the task force recommendations is pending in the House after passing the Judiciary Committee in September on a party-line vote with all Republicans opposed. Supporters say talks also continue about legislation to establish an independent Office of Child Advocate.

Malik Pickett, a senior attorney at Juvenile Law Center in Philadelphia, said the lawsuits “ring far too familiar for what we know from our nearly 50 years of advocacy.”

“We have experienced one crisis for youth in detention after another,” Pickett said, while failing to pass meaningful changes.

## Graceland foreclosure sale halted as Presley estate’s lawsuit moves forward

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A judge on Wednesday said Elvis Presley’s estate could be successful in arguing that a company’s attempt to auction Graceland is fraudulent as he halted a foreclosure sale of the beloved Memphis tourist attraction.

Later Wednesday, a statement from someone who appeared to be a representative of the company said it would drop its claim, which the Presley estate has argued is based on fake documents. Online court records did not immediately show any legal filings suggesting the claim had been dropped.

Shelby County Chancellor JoeDae Jenkins issued a temporary injunction against the proposed auction that had been scheduled for Thursday in Memphis, where the king of rock ‘n’ roll’s former home is located. Jenkins’ injunction essentially keeps in place a previous restraining order issued at the request of Presley’s granddaughter Riley Keough.

“Graceland is a part of this community, well-loved by this community and indeed around the world,” the judge said.

A public notice for a foreclosure sale of the 13-acre estate posted earlier in May said Promenade Trust, which controls the Graceland museum, owes \$3.8 million after failing to repay a 2018 loan. Keough, an actor, inherited the trust and ownership of the home after the death of her mother, Lisa Marie Presley, last year.

Naussany Investments and Private Lending said Lisa Marie Presley had used Graceland as collateral for the loan, according to the foreclosure sale notice. A lawsuit filed last week by Keough alleged that Naussany

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presented fraudulent documents regarding the loan in September 2023.

"Lisa Maria Presley never borrowed money from Naussany Investments and never gave a deed of trust to Naussany Investments," Keough's lawyer wrote in a lawsuit.

Neither Keough nor lawyers for Naussany Investments were in court Wednesday. Keough's attorney, Jeff Germany, said outside of court that he has not had direct contact with representatives from Naussany.

Naussany did file an unsuccessful motion denying the lawsuit's allegations and opposing the estate's request for an injunction.

A statement emailed to The Associated Press after Wednesday's ruling said Naussany would not proceed because a key document in the case and the loan were recorded and obtained in a different state, meaning that "legal action would have to be filed in multiple states." The statement, which was sent from an email address listed in court documents, did not specify the other state.

"The company will be withdrawing all claims with prejudice," the statement said.

The court documents included addresses for the company in Jacksonville, Florida, and Hollister, Missouri. Both were for post offices, and a Kimberling City, Missouri, reference was for a post office box. The business also is not listed in state databases of registered corporations in Missouri or Florida.

Kimberly Philbrick, the notary whose name is listed on Naussany's documents, indicated that she never met Lisa Marie Presley nor notarized any documents for her, according to the estate's lawsuit. The judge said the notary's affidavit included in the lawsuit brings into question "the authenticity of the signature."

Paul Golden, a lawyer for New York-based Coffey Modica who handles real estate litigation but is not directly involved in the case, said that affidavit and other inconsistencies in the company's paperwork appeared to be "extremely strong evidence" to support the Presley estate's position.

Graceland opened as a museum and tourist attraction in 1982 as a tribute to Elvis Presley, the singer and actor who died in August 1977 at age 42. It draws hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. A large Presley-themed entertainment complex across the street from the museum is owned by Elvis Presley Enterprises.

"Graceland will continue to operate as it has for the past 42 years, ensuring that Elvis fans from around the world can continue to have the best in class experience when visiting his iconic home," Elvis Presley Enterprises said in a statement.

## **Lara Trump is taking the reins and reshaping the RNC in her father-in-law's image**

By MARTHA MENDOZA and JULIET LINDERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The direction of the Republican National Committee is clear from the last name of its new second-in-command: Trump.

"My No. 1 goal is making sure that Donald Trump is the 47th president," said Lara Trump, the RNC co-chair, in an Associated Press interview.

It's one more step in solidifying Trump's hold over the Republican Party. The daughter-in-law of the former president has wasted no time in rebranding the typically staid committee in Trump's image, embracing her own version of his pugilistic politics and brash management style in ways that affirm his sway over the Republican establishment.

The RNC has fired dozens of longtime staffers and sought alliances with election deniers, conspiracy theorists and alt-right advocates the party had previously kept at arm's length. Lara Trump, who is married to Trump's third child, Eric, has been an outspoken defender of the former president and has not hesitated to blast his foes, promising four years of "scorched earth" political retribution if he wins the election.

She has led a steep increase in fundraising, a particularly acute need for Trump's election bid because his political fundraising operations have spent tens of millions of dollars in legal fees to defend him in criminal and civil cases.

Trump supporters say Lara Trump is breathing new life into the party, and say her charisma and dogged work ethic make her an ideal choice to serve as its champion.



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But her installation has raised concerns among some Republicans who say the RNC is being run in ways that could harm its mandate to help all its candidates up and down the ballot. By prioritizing the presidential campaign, they said, the RNC might not be able to dedicate the necessary resources to assist other office seekers.

"It kind of suggests an expectation of complete, unabashed and, perhaps, a blind loyalty to the candidate," said Marc Racicot, a former RNC chair who served as Montana's governor for eight years.

Acknowledging that she is confronting a "big, big learning curve," Lara Trump told the AP she has the background to succeed, having worked on both of Trump's previous presidential campaigns.

"You'd be hard pressed to find someone who has had as much political experience as I have in any campaign right now, and that's kind of unique to be able to say," she said.

She is also aware that, as a Trump, she makes a particularly tempting political target.

"Certainly," she said, "I am in the crosshairs for a lot of people given this position."

## THE NEW RNC

Lara Trump became co-chair in March, culminating efforts by Trump and his allies to shake up the RNC, the party's governing body.

Trump and other members of his "Make America Great Again" movement had grown disenchanted with the RNC's leadership, blaming the organization for the party's lackluster performances in 2018, 2020 and 2022. They were also concerned about the RNC's financial position.

They succeeded in replacing its chair of eight years, Ronna McDaniel, with Michael Whatley, a fervent Trump supporter and leader of North Carolina's GOP. Lara Trump, a fellow North Carolinian, was tapped to be Whatley's No. 2. The chair runs the party's day-to-day operations. The co-chair, meanwhile, generally focuses on raising money and boosting morale.

As they took the reins, Lara Trump and Whatley promised to enact sweeping changes. And they did: They merged the GOP and the Trump campaign into a single operation.

Brian Hughes, a spokesman for the Trump campaign, told the AP the strategy was essential to ensuring Republican victories in November.

"By joining the two organizations together, we are all rolling in the same direction to get President Trump elected, as well as to increase the majority of the House and the Senate," he said.

Lara Trump said party and campaign staff are "all part of organizing the ground game, working on day-to-day operations."

She appears to have already helped turn around the committee's anemic fundraising operation. Republicans say she is a sought-after speaker on the fundraising circuit and has helped excite donors.

Whatley, the RNC's chair, told the AP that Lara Trump was among the party's "most important assets."

"My friend Lara has the ability to raise money, inspire our grassroots and deliver our message extremely effectively," he said.

The RNC brought in \$76 million in April and \$65.6 million in March — up from just \$10.6 million in February. The increase also reflects changes in donation limits after Trump, in March, became the party's presumptive nominee. The Democratic National Committee raised far less in April, \$51 million, down from \$72 million in March.

The RNC's ability to pump money into the election could prove critical to Trump's chances because he needs money. The former president is facing dozens of federal and state criminal charges over his alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 election and retention of classified documents. He is currently on trial in New York, accused of making hush money payments to bury allegations of extramarital affairs. His political action committee, Save America, presidential campaign and other fundraising organizations have spent at least \$76.7 million on legal fees over the past two years.

The donation button on the RNC webpage redirects to Trump's campaign site, where 90% of every donation goes to his reelection efforts and the remaining 10% goes to other committee business.

The RNC is "a very big fundraising arm," said Seth Masket, a political science professor at the University of Denver. "He's trying to get donors to help cover his legal fees, pay for his lawyers, pay for some of the fines he owes."

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The Trump campaign says money donated to the RNC will not be directed toward Trump's legal defense.

## CONCERNS ABOUT STRATEGY

Party insiders and former RNC staffers, including those swept out in recent months, say the committee is lagging in building a county-by-county operation that helps turn out the vote. Former staffers said they worry the RNC is focusing too much on Trump's race, putting down-ballot candidates in a tough spot.

Lara Trump brushed off such critiques, saying the restructuring will ensure the RNC is supporting candidates in state and local races.

"It would be very silly of me to assume that only having the presidency would be able to achieve the goals of the Republican Party," she said. "Obviously, that requires majorities in Congress, and that's our goal."

To help bolster turnout, she is embracing conservative groups that espouse fringe beliefs.

She speaks highly of Scott Presler, an election denier who chaired the group Gays For Trump and who described the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol as "the largest civil rights protest in American history." Lara Trump calls him a "grassroots hero," and said in March that she hoped to hire him to help run the RNC's "legal ballot harvesting" initiative, but later said the RNC would partner with his group, Early Vote Action, instead.

Another organization she said she wants to collaborate with is led by Charlie Kirk, a right-wing student organizer who leads Turning Point USA. Kirk has questioned whether Black pilots are qualified to fly and derided gymnast Simone Biles after she withdrew from the 2020 Olympics. His group has raised roughly a quarter-billion dollars since 2016 — enriching Kirk — but has generally struggled to help Republicans win elections.

"No prior political candidate has inspired grassroots supporters to start their own groups and initiatives like Donald J. Trump and it's why we have seen great expansion in the Republican Party," Lara Trump said, adding the RNC would work with groups run by Presler, Kirk and others "in whatever way we legally can."

## MAIL-IN BALLOTS

She is also hoping to encourage Republicans to adopt an election tactic that Trump and many of his allies view with suspicion: mail-in voting. The former president has long criticized the voting method as being rife with fraud — an unfounded assertion. Sizable contingents of voters rely on this method, and Lara Trump sees value in making it as easy as possible for Trump supporters to cast their ballots.

She said she supported a nationwide policy of not counting any ballots after Election Day but declined to go into specifics, adding it wasn't her area of "expertise."

That strategy is illegal. States set their own election laws, and many rely on postmarks to determine if a vote was cast in time. That's because it can take days — even weeks — for ballots cast on or before Election Day to arrive in the mail.

Stephen Richer, a Republican who runs elections in Maricopa County, Arizona, said under state law every legal ballot must be counted. He also said Lara Trump's policy would have hurt Trump in 2020: He had an edge over Biden in ballots that were tabulated after Election Day.

"That's not the law as we understand it and as it has been practiced for many, many, many, many elections in Arizona," he said.

Lara Trump is no stranger to controversy over counting ballots. In 2020, as the results of the presidential election rolled in, the Trump campaign fired off frantic fundraising missives to supporters, claiming they were victims of fraud and the election was being stolen.

In one email, Lara Trump told supporters the campaign will just "keep fighting."

Two months later, Lara Trump was onstage with the then-president and his family at the Jan. 6 rally that preceded the Capitol riot.

Richer said voter fraud and voter suppression are at an all-time low, and questioned the motivations for the Trumps' insistence that the vote count had been rigged.

"Which is worse, a person who really believes some of these things or the person who knows it's all nonsensical and goes along with it anyways?" he said. "I'm not sure."

## ON THE TALK SHOW CIRCUIT

Lara Trump is not the first presidential relative to be tapped to help lead the RNC. Maureen Reagan,

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daughter of then-President Ronald Reagan, was named co-chair in 1987 amid nepotism concerns.

But unlike Maureen Reagan, who kept her head down and spent her time attending party meetings and staying out of the headlines, Lara Trump has embraced her more public role. A communications major at North Carolina State University, she had dreamed of becoming a sportscaster, and dabbled in modeling before working as a producer on a TV news show.

She married Eric Trump in 2014 at Mar-a-Lago, the former president's estate and club in Florida.

Lara Trump has focused on reaching Trump voters through appearances on Fox News, smaller conservative outlets and podcasts, including her own. Such appearances have not always gone smoothly and some of her starkest rhetoric — while appealing to Trump supporters — could alienate moderate Republicans whose votes will count in November.

She was recently lambasted on social media and by a late-night comic for a gaffe during an appearance on Newsmax, a conservative cable channel, in which she asserted the RNC had filed lawsuits in "81 states."

The RNC co-chair was also roasted after releasing a cover of Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down," and Democrats in March used artificial intelligence to create a parody track after she released an original song, "Anything is Possible."

"Oh Lara, Lara," the AI voice croons, "what have you done, the party's fallin' down, it's no longer fun."

## SCORCHED EARTH

Lara Trump is painting a startling picture of what a second Trump term might look like.

At a conservative conference last month, she said Trump would punish his political enemies if he retakes the White House. It will be, she said, "four years of scorched earth," referencing the wartime strategy of destroying everything that could help an enemy, including food and water.

Such stark language has been known to backfire, said John J. Pitney, a professor of American politics at Claremont McKenna College.

"It fires up the Trumpist base, but it doesn't sound so good to that sliver of moderate voters that Trump is going to need," he said.

Supporters described Lara Trump as loyal, a staunch conservative committed to her family. She's a mother of two, a fitness buff and a fierce advocate for rescue dogs.

"I'm a kind-hearted person," she said. "I continue to maintain values with which I was raised."

But online, on television and on her podcast she sometimes uses aggressive and incendiary language, including describing political foes as "deranged" and "lunatics."

When asked about her tone, Lara Trump laughed.

"Obviously some of it is a bit of showmanship for sure," she said. "I have a fun time."

## Use of Wegovy and other weight-loss drugs soars among kids and young adults

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

At 17, Israel McKenzie was so burdened by obesity that he stopped going to high school in person and was embarrassed to speak to people at his restaurant job.

"I was in a really dark place," says McKenzie, whose weight had climbed to 335 pounds on his 6-foot-1 frame, despite repeated efforts to diet and exercise. "I had given up hope."

But last year, the weight-loss drug Wegovy helped him shed 110 pounds in nine months, making the rural Tennessee teen part of a surge of adolescents and young adults using diabetes and obesity medications known as GLP-1 receptor agonists, new research shows.

Even as millions of older adults clamor for drugs such as Ozempic and Wegovy, monthly use of the medications soared in people aged 12 to 25. That's according to the new analysis of dispensing records from nearly 94% of U.S. retail pharmacies from 2020 to 2023.

The report, published in the journal JAMA on Wednesday, used the IQVIA prescription database to compile the first look at the national uptake of GLP-1 drugs among that age group. Nearly 31,000 children aged 12 to 17 and more than 162,000 people aged 18 to 25 used the medications in 2023 alone, said Dr.



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Joyce Lee, a University of Michigan pediatrician and diabetes expert who led the research.

"What it's suggesting is that it's one of the tools in the toolbox and there are more providers prescribing this medication for the population," she said.

The report shows that the number of 12- to 25-year-olds using any GLP-1 drug — including older medications first approved to treat diabetes in 2005 and for weight loss in 2014 — climbed from about 8,700 a month in 2020 to more than 60,000 a month in 2023, a nearly 600% increase. The rise occurred even as prescriptions of other drugs among those patients fell by about 3%.

Those who received the drugs were just a fraction of young people who struggle with obesity, Lee noted. About 20% of U.S. children and adolescents and about 42% of adults have the chronic disease, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In early 2023, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended that children and teens with obesity be evaluated early and treated aggressively, including with surgery and medication if warranted.

McKenzie, the Tennessee teen, said he began gaining weight five years ago, during puberty.

"I started turning to food for all of my problems," he said.

The extra weight made his asthma worse and put him in danger of developing diabetes, his doctor said. He tried to follow medical advice by cutting out sugary soda and snack foods and exercising more, but the efforts failed to make a difference.

"My old doctor told me there was nothing he could do," he said. "He told me it was my fault."

In early 2023, McKenzie connected with Dr. Joani Jack, a pediatric obesity specialist at Children's Hospital at Erlanger in Chattanooga, Tennessee, who regularly prescribes GLP-1 drugs for kids.

"I told him I've seen 10 other people just like you today and we have lots of tools and treatment options," Jack said. Those typically include intensive behavioral and nutrition interventions combined with medication, if necessary.

In McKenzie's case, Jack prescribed the weight-loss drug Wegovy, which in late 2022 was approved for use in U.S. children over age 12. More than 6,000 kids in that age group received Wegovy in 2023, the new data show. More than 7,600 received Ozempic, which is approved to treat diabetes in adults, but can be used off-label in adolescents. Others received older GLP-1 drugs such as Saxenda and Trulicity.

McKenzie said he had no notable side effects from the medication, but Lee noted that some young people report nausea, vomiting or constipation, including symptoms so serious that they stop the drugs.

It's important to understand the surging use of these medications in young people, Lee said. The drugs are meant for continuing use, so "we really need to think about the long-term safety and effectiveness of these medications for this population," she said.

In addition, the drugs are expensive and often difficult to obtain, either because of supply problems or because they're not covered by insurance.

Notably, government-run Medicaid plans paid for nearly half of the GLP-1 drugs prescribed to 12- to 17-year-olds and about a quarter of those used by people aged 18 to 25, the research found. Commercial insurance covered care for nearly 44% of the younger kids and about two-thirds of those who were older.

Today, McKenzie says his asthma is better and he looks forward to interacting with co-workers and friends.

"I have a lot of self-confidence now, a lot more than I used to," he said. "It has changed everything."

## Takeaways: How Lara Trump is reshaping the Republican Party

By The Associated Press undefined

Lara Trump is wasting no time rebranding the typically staid Republican National Committee in the image of her father-in-law, former President Donald Trump, and showcasing her own version of his pugilistic politics and brash management style.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Lara Trump spoke about her famous family, the upcoming election and her vision for the party going forward.

Here are four takeaways about the new RNC co-chair's first few months on the job.

MERGING WITH THE TRUMP CAMPAIGN

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When Lara Trump and Chairman Michael Whatley took the reins in March, they promised to enact sweeping changes. They did: They merged the GOP and the Trump campaign into a single operation.

Brian Hughes, a spokesman for the Trump campaign, told the AP the strategy was essential to ensuring Republican victories in November.

"By joining the two organizations together," he said, "we are all rolling in the same direction to get President Trump elected, as well as to increase the majority of the House and the Senate."

Lara Trump said party and campaign staff are "all part of organizing the ground game, working on day-to-day operations."

Critics say such a laser focus on the presidential election could mean less time, money and resources spent on state and local races. That could hurt the party in the long term.

Lara Trump brushed off such critiques, saying the restructuring will ensure the RNC is supporting candidates in state and local races.

"It would be very silly of me to assume that only having the presidency would be able to achieve the goals of the Republican Party," she said. "Obviously, that requires majorities in Congress, and that's our goal."

## STEPPING INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

Unlike some previous party co-chairs, Lara Trump is embracing a very public role. She is doing television interviews and speaking on right-wing media outlets to promote her father-in-law's bid for reelection.

Her public turn hasn't been without controversy: She's made a few public gaffes, including an appearance on Newsmax, a conservative cable channel, during which she said the RNC had filed lawsuits in "81 states."

Acknowledging a "big, big learning curve," Lara Trump told the AP she has the requisite background to succeed, having worked on both of Trump's previous presidential campaigns.

"You'd be hard pressed," she said, "to find someone who has had as much political experience as I have in any campaign right now, and that's kind of unique to be able to say."

## FUNDRAISING TURNAROUND

Lara Trump appears to have already helped turn around the committee's anemic fundraising operation. Republicans say she is a sought-after speaker on the fundraising circuit and has helped excite donors.

The RNC brought in \$76 million in April and \$65.6 million in March, compared with \$10.6 million in February. The increase also reflects changes in donation limits after Trump, in March, became the party's presumptive nominee. The Democratic National Committee, by comparison, raised far less in April, \$51 million, down from \$72 million in March.

The RNC's ability to pump money into the election could prove critical to Trump's chances, in part, because he is choosing to spend campaign donations on legal fees. The former president is facing dozens of federal and state criminal charges over his alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 election and retention of classified documents. He is currently on trial in New York, accused of making hush money payments to bury allegations of extramarital affairs. His political action committee, Save America, presidential campaign and other fundraising organizations have spent at least \$76.7 million on legal fees over the last two years.

## MAIL-IN VOTING

Lara Trump is hoping to encourage Republicans to adopt an election tactic that Trump and many of his supporters view with suspicion: mail-in voting. The former president and his closest allies have long criticized the voting method as being rife with fraud — an unfounded assertion. Sizable contingents of voters rely on this method, and Lara Trump sees value in making it as easy as possible for Trump supporters to cast their ballots.

She said she supported a nationwide policy of not counting any ballots after Election Day but declined to go into specifics, saying it wasn't her area of "expertise."

That strategy is unworkable. States set their own election laws, and many rely on postmarks to determine if a vote was cast in time. That's because it can take days — even weeks — for ballots cast on or before Election Day to arrive in the mail.

## ICC prosecutor's warrant requests for Israel and Hamas leaders ignite debate about court's role

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The stunning announcement that the International Criminal Court is considering issuing an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for war crimes and crimes against humanity has ignited a fierce debate about the court's future as an independent arbiter.

The request by Prosecutor Karim Khan against the leader of a close U.S. ally also comes as the United Nations' highest court, the International Court of Justice, is investigating whether Israel has committed genocide during its seven-month war against Hamas in Gaza.

Although human rights activists generally welcomed Khan's move on Monday, which also included requests to arrest Israel's defense minister and three Hamas leaders, Netanyahu told ABC News that Khan's decision turned the ICC into a "pariah institution."

In Washington, where Senate Republicans have threatened sanctions against ICC staff, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the Hague-based court doesn't have jurisdiction and that it was "extremely wrong-headed" for the prosecutor to equate the Israeli officials with the Hamas leaders he's seeking to indict.

Blinken said Tuesday that the Biden administration would work with Congress to come up with an appropriate response.

Khan has warned that attempts to interfere with the ICC's work would be an offense under its founding treaty, the Rome Statute. However, the warning may not carry much weight, as world powers including the U.S., Israel, China and Russia, aren't members of the court and don't recognize its jurisdiction.

European countries generally support the court, with France and Belgium underscoring their backing after Monday's announcement.

"France supports the International Criminal Court, its independence, and the fight against impunity in all situations," the country's foreign ministry said in a statement late Monday, around the same time Belgium's foreign minister expressed support for the tribunal.

Some Palestinians were critical of a perceived lack of reach in Khan's requests.

In an opinion piece on the Global Issues website, analyst Mouin Rabbani wrote that Khan had ignored any and all "issues unconnected with the current situation in the Gaza Strip."

Nour Odeh, a Palestinian political analyst in Ramallah, said she wasn't surprised that Khan also sought charges against Hamas leaders, but noted in a text that he "had more charges against Hamas leaders than Israel which is a politicized choice that I find very cynical on his part."

The ICC prosecutor's office has been investigating alleged crimes in the Palestinian territories dating back to 2014 and could seek more arrest warrants in the future.

Nevertheless, Khan's announcement Monday marked the first time in its more than two-decade existence that the global court's prosecutor has sought to charge the leader of an important U.S. ally.

Israeli leaders fiercely deny they have committed crimes, saying they are defending their nation and abiding by international law. Because Israel doesn't recognize the ICC's jurisdiction, even if judges were to issue warrants, there is no immediate prospect of Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant being arrested anytime soon.

A decision on whether to issue warrants is expected to take several weeks. The legal bar for approving warrants is relatively low. Judges need to find "reasonable grounds to believe" that crimes outlined in Khan's request were committed. In the past, judges have generally approved such requests.

"This is a watershed event in the history of international justice," human rights lawyer Reed Brody, who has gone after leaders including Augusto Pinochet of Chile and former Chad strongman Hissène Habré, wrote in an email. "The ICC has never, in over 21 years of existence, indicted a western official. Indeed, no international tribunal since Nuremberg has done so."

And it might have an impact.

"The Court as an institution is overwhelmingly supported by Western governments. But that might not always be true in the future," Tom Ginsburg, a professor of international law at the University of Chicago



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Law School, told The Associated Press in an email. "By charging the head of a Western-supported government along with a terrorist leader, the Court is making an appeal to even-handedness."

Also unusual — and indicative of the profound sensitivity of the request to charge Israeli and Hamas leaders — was Khan's decision to consult a panel of top legal experts, including lawyer Amal Clooney, before seeking warrants.

"Clearly the prosecutor wanted some cover from prominent international lawyers for a highly charged decision," said Ginsburg.

"By including Amal Clooney, he will ensure a lot of attention; by including Theodore Meron, a former legal advisor to the Foreign Ministry in Israel and prominent former judge of international criminal tribunals, he seeks to insulate himself from the charge of bias," he added.

The latest Gaza war between began on Oct. 7, when Hamas-led militants crossed into Israel and killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 250 hostage. Khan is seeking warrants for Hamas leaders Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh on charges including the crimes against humanity of extermination, murder and sexual violence.

Among the charges Khan wants instated against Netanyahu and Gallant is the war crime of "starvation as a weapon of warfare." That's a first, too, in international courts.

"This is a watershed moment in addressing this egregious crime, which has long been viewed solely as a collateral or incidental effect of armed conflict, rather than a deliberate and calculated strategy," said Catriona Murdoch, of rights group Global Rights Compliance.

For Palestinians who have long sought action from the ICC, Khan's announcement was a breakthrough, even if they may not think he went far enough.

"Listening to Karim Khan talking about these crimes, these accusations, war crimes and crimes against humanity, knowing that this taboo has finally been broken, on an emotional level ... it is historic. It's monumental," said Odeh.

## **Stenhouse fined \$75,000 by NASCAR, Busch avoids penalty for post All-Star race fight**

CONCORD, N.C. (AP) — Ricky Stenhouse Jr. was fined \$75,000 by NASCAR on Wednesday for fighting with Kyle Busch after the All-Star race at North Wilkesboro Speedway. Stenhouse's father, who joined the fracas, was suspended indefinitely.

The \$75,000 fine was the largest ever handed down by NASCAR for fighting.

Busch was not penalized for his action in the Sunday night race.

The two tangled on the first lap and then Busch seemed to deliberately wreck Stenhouse on the second lap. Stenhouse parked his damaged Chevrolet in Busch's pit stall and aggressively climbed the spotter's ladder and exchanged words with members of Busch's crew.

Stenhouse then stormed to his hauler, leaving his car to be towed to the pits.

He also foreshadowed that he'd be back after the race to confront Busch. The two did exchange brief words before Stenhouse, wearing shorts and t-shirt, landed a right hook on Busch and a melee broke out involving members of both teams. Stenhouse's father, who has no affiliation with the team, then went after Busch, throwing punches.

NASCAR on Wednesday also suspended Stenhouse mechanic Clint Myrick for eight races and engine tuner Keith Matthews for four races.

Stenhouse in the fight vowed to wreck Busch this Sunday during the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

"Bring it," Busch replied. "I suck as bad as you," implying that both drivers are not having great seasons.

Neither driver has won a race this season. Busch is 13th in points standings and Stenhouse, a one-car team, is 26th.

Busch's car owner isn't taking that threat from Stenhouse lightly, however. Richard Childress vowed to

fight Stenhouse himself if he goes near Busch's car at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

The Coca-Cola 600 is the longest Cup Series race on the schedule, so there will be plenty of time for Busch and Stenhouse to meet up on the 1.5-mile track. NASCAR, no doubt, will be keeping an eye on the feuding drivers.

## **If this is Rafael Nadal's last French Open, it should be similar to Serena Williams' last US Open**

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

If this is, as expected, Rafael Nadal's final French Open, it will be one that everyone — the 37-year-old Spaniard included — surely will remember vividly.

No matter how healthy the guy everyone calls "Rafa" might be. No matter how long his stay in the bracket lasts. No matter whether he somehow adds another championship at Roland Garros to the record 14 he owns.

Narrator: Not even Nadal truly believes that is possible. Indeed, as of Wednesday morning, he had not announced definitely whether he would be in the field, although he showed up on-site to practice.

"I am not negative," he explained. "I am just realistic."

Think back just a couple of years ago to Serena Williams' farewell at the U.S. Open. That's the sort of atmosphere and adoration likely to be on display whenever Nadal swings a racket or simply strolls around the compact-for-a-Grand-Slam-grounds in the southwest section of Paris where the clay-court tournament begins Sunday.

"I cannot predict what kind of emotions I am going to have there," said Nadal, who has been saying for a while that he thinks 2024 will be his final season before retirement. "I just want to enjoy every day."

That's been difficult lately because of hip and abdominal muscle injuries that limited him to 20 matches, and a 9-11 record, over the past 20 months.

Nadal missed nearly all of 2023 after hurting his hip during a loss at the Australian Open that January. He had surgery almost exactly a year ago and sat out the French Open for the first time since making his debut there in 2005, when, naturally, he claimed the trophy at age 19.

A torn hip muscle this January forced Nadal to miss the Australian Open; an ab problem sidelined him later. He returned in April, but in three places he's won a total of 27 titles — Barcelona, Madrid, Rome — Nadal made it no further than the fourth round anywhere and called himself "unpredictable."

That stretch was capped by a 6-1, 6-3 loss to Hubert Hurkacz at the Italian Open, a result so dispiriting that Nadal wondered aloud whether he should bother showing up at Roland Garros, although did say he was reluctant to skip "the most important event of my tennis career."

The 22-time major champion is not able to run at full speed or compete with full force. He does not have the match-readiness required to succeed.

"For him to feel like he's going in with his 'C' game — not 'B' game; 'C' game — and maybe fearing almost that he could lose first or second round?" said Chris Evert, who won seven of her 18 Grand Slam titles in Paris. "He's been such a perfectionist on that surface, why would he want to expose himself at that level?"

No man has won even half as many French Opens as Nadal. His winning percentage there is .974. He had streaks of five championships in a row, four in a row and three in a row.

This says it all: There's already a statue of him near the main stadium.

"It's really a paramount challenge to play him in Roland Garros," said Novak Djokovic, whose 24 major trophies make him the only man with more than Nadal. "He's an incredible athlete. The tenacity and intensity he brings on the court, particularly there, is something that was very rarely seen, I think, in the history of this sport."

Djokovic — who formed, with Nadal and the now-retired Roger Federer, the so-called Big Three — and Iga Swiatek are the defending champions in France and both are ranked No. 1. Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner are the emerging stars of men's tennis; Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff have that status in the

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women's game.

But all eyes — of spectators and of other athletes — will be on Nadal for however long he stays in the field.

"He's probably the only player that when I practice on the court next to him, I would literally zone out of my practice to watch him," said Gauff, the 20-year-old American who won last year's U.S. Open. "The way he carries himself is just great. His legacy is going to be something that is almost unmatched when it comes to just the intensity in which he approaches everything. That's something that the players will miss and the fans will miss."

So this represents a chance to say "Merci" and "Au revoir."

No one — maybe not even Nadal himself — knows how many more times he will play, whether at Roland Garros, which also is set to host tennis at the Summer Olympics (he already owns singles and doubles golds), or anywhere else.

So plenty of standing ovations await. Likely a post-match ceremony, too. Might even be the sort of requests seen at a recent tournament: One opponent asked for the shirt off Nadal's back after facing him; another asked if they could snap a photo together.

Swiatek, an unabashed Nadal supporter, was asked whether she ever did that sort of thing after a match. "Not really," she replied, "but if I would play against Rafa, for sure, I would ask for a T-shirt."

## **Iran's supreme leader and proxy militias pray for late president and others dead in helicopter crash**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's supreme leader and representatives of militia groups he backs in the Middle East prayed Wednesday over the coffins of the country's late president, foreign minister and other officials killed in a helicopter crash earlier this week. Hundreds of thousands of people later followed a procession honoring the dead down Tehran's main boulevard.

Iran's Shiite theocracy views mass demonstrations as crucial evidence of its legitimacy and the people's support.

Still, Wednesday's funeral service for President Ebrahim Raisi and others saw a turnout that onlookers described as noticeably lower than the 2020 procession honoring Revolutionary Guard general Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad.

Many of the participants said they came to Tehran for the ceremony from other cities and towns across the Islamic Republic, an indication of how those in Iran's capital viewed Raisi, who won the presidency in a record low turnout and later oversaw repeated crackdowns on dissent — including in the wake of the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini that sparked street protests over Iran's mandatory hijab, or headscarf.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who had openly wept for Soleimani, also remained composed while reciting the standard prayer for the dead.

"Oh Allah, we didn't see anything but good from him," Khamenei said in Arabic, the language of Islam's holy book, the Quran. Iran's acting president, Mohammad Mokhber, stood nearby and openly cried.

The death of Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and six others in the crash on Sunday comes at a politically sensitive moment for Iran, both at home and abroad.

Raisi, who was 63, had been discussed as a possible successor to Iran's supreme leader, the 85-year-old Khamenei. None of Iran's living past presidents — other than Khamenei, who was president from 1981 until 1989 — could be seen in state television footage of Wednesday's prayers. The authorities gave no explanation for their apparent absence.

Following the deadly helicopter crash, Iran set June 28 as the next presidential election. For now, there's no clear favorite for the position among Iran's political elite — particularly no one who is a Shiite cleric, like Raisi.

During Raisi's term in office, Iran launched an unprecedented attack on Israel last month as its war on



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Hamas in the Gaza Strip rages on. Iran has supported Hamas throughout the war and provided weaponry to the militants.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh attended the prayers Wednesday morning, just two days after the International Criminal Court's prosecutor said he'd seek an arrest warrant for him and others over the Oct. 7 attack that sparked the latest Israel-Hamas war. In the unprecedented assault on southern Israel, Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people and seized 250 hostage.

The ICC prosecutor is also seeking arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for their conduct in the war, which has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and also hundreds in the West Bank.

Haniyeh recounted Raisi telling him this year that the Oct. 7 attack was an "earthquake in the heart of the Zionist entity." In a later meeting with Khamenei, the supreme leader told Haniyeh that the "destruction of the Zionist regime is feasible and, God willing, the day in which Palestine will be created from the sea to river will arrive."

Haniyeh's presence likely signaled Khamenei intends to continue his policy of arming militant groups in the wider Mideast — including Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels — as a way to pressure its adversaries like Israel and the United States. Mourners at the ceremony chanted: "Death to Israel!"

Hezbollah and Houthi representatives were also in attendance.

Statesmen from the Mideast and beyond attended a later memorial service, including Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Tunisian President Kais Saied.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry was also there. Cairo and Tehran have been discussing reestablishing ties severed after the the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

A single black turban was placed over Raisi's casket during the morning service, which signifies he was considered a direct descendent of Islam's Prophet Muhammad. People then carried the coffins out on their shoulders as chants of "Death to America!" erupted outside.

People openly wept during the procession and beat their chests, a common sign of grief in the Shiite culture. They tossed scarves and other possessions up to the semitruck driving the caskets through Tehran, with coffin attendants brushing the items against the caskets in a gesture of blessing.

One man said he and his friends took a nearly seven-hour bus trip to attend the procession. Many expressed their sympathies for the dead, including Raisi.

"He was our president, the others were pilots and a minister, how can I be indifferent about their loss?" asked Sima Rahmani, a 27-year-old Tehran woman wearing a loose headscarf despite the risk of detention by police.

Prosecutors have warned people against showing any public signs of celebrating Raisi's death and a heavy security force presence has been seen in Tehran since the crash. Many shops and stores noticeably remained open while some took off early for a long weekend despite bulk text messages and state TV broadcasting times for the procession.

"I did not vote for Raisi in 2021 election, but he was the president of all people," said Morteza Nemati, a 28-year-old physics student at Tehran Azad University. "My presence is a way of paying tribute to him."

Meanwhile, an Iranian official offered a new accounting of Sunday's crash, further fueling the theory that bad weather had led to it. Gholamhossein Esmaili, who traveled in one of the two other helicopters in Raisi's entourage, told state TV that weather had been fine when the aircraft took off. But Raisi's helicopter disappeared into heavy clouds and the others couldn't reach the aircraft by radio.

The Friday prayer leader from the city of Tabriz, Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem, who was also on board, somehow answered two mobile phone calls after the crash, saying he was hurt, Esmaili said.

It wasn't clear why Iran could not at that point track the phone signal. A Turkish drone helped find the crash site. Tehran had even asked the U.S., its longtime foe, for help.

"The conditions of the bodies found showed that they (died) immediately after the incident," Esmaili said. "But Ayatollah Ale-Hashem (died) a few hours after the incident."

## Russia is waging a shadow war on the West that needs a collective response, Estonian leader says

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Perched on the open ramp at the rear of a British Chinook helicopter, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas flew home from the annual Spring Storm military exercises, pleased to see NATO allies cooperating. But she later said that other types of warfare were on her mind.

Her nation, which borders Russia, has seen a rise in sabotage, electronic warfare and spying — all blamed on Moscow.

As the war in Ukraine turns in Russia's favor, defenses are being bolstered in the front-line nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as in Finland and Poland.

Kallas says Russia is conducting a "shadow war" against the West.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda urged vigilance, saying Tuesday he had information that "acts of sabotage can happen again."

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said at least nine people were recently arrested on suspicion of beatings and arson, allegedly directed by Russia's secret services, and described them as Ukrainian, Belarusian and Polish nationals, some "from the criminal world."

Not everyone sees the attacks as interconnected, Kallas told The Associated Press, despite NATO's assertion this month that Moscow is intensifying its campaign against the alliance from the Baltics to Britain. Russia dismissed that allegation.

Because many Russian intelligence operatives already are sanctioned, Western officials and experts say the Kremlin is shifting tactics, hiring others for hybrid operations — nonmilitary strategies including cyberattacks, election interference and disinformation, and attacks on foes of President Vladimir Putin.

With crucial elections in the West, officials say they believe the tempo of such activities will only increase, and some want tougher countermeasures.

Kallas cited a warning from an intelligence agency to a European country that one of its warehouses was targeted by Russian military intelligence. When a fire occurred at the warehouse two weeks later, officials in the country suggested that "we don't know it is the Russians," she said. Kallas did not identify the country.

The West must have a "serious discussion of a coordinated approach," she said. "How far do we let them go on our soil?"

Estonia has taken the challenge of finding Russian agents of influence "very seriously" since regaining independence from the USSR in 1991, rebuilding its security services from scratch, U.S. Ambassador George Kent told AP.

This year in Estonia, a university professor was arrested on charges of spying for Moscow, 13 people were arrested over attacks allegedly organized by Russian military intelligence operating under diplomatic cover, and flights between Finland and the city of Tartu were disrupted by Russian jamming of GPS signals.

In October, a Baltic Sea gas pipeline and telecoms cables were damaged after a Chinese ship dragged its anchor for over 115 miles (185 kilometers) in an incident that is still under investigation. That ship was later seen in a Russian port.

Britain expelled Russia's defense attache in May after two British men were accused of working with Russian intelligence services to set fire to a London warehouse. In April, two German-Russian nationals were arrested and accused of trying to attack military sites in southern Germany.

"What I would like to see is the recognition that these are not isolated events," Kallas told AP. "Second, that we share information about this amongst ourselves. Third, make it as public as we can."

Estonia has a reputation for aggressively pursuing espionage activity and publicizing it, consistently seizing more Russian agents per capita in the country of 1.3 million than other European nations.

It is "not very plausible" that there's such a large pool of agents in Estonia that makes them easier to catch, said Kusti Salm, permanent secretary at Estonia's Defense Ministry, in an interview with AP, implying that other countries could work harder at it.

Former Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, in office from 2006-16, told AP that some nations don't

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act because they hope to do business with Russia again.

"People are afraid of decisive action, and the absence of decisive action basically tempts bad actors to keep pushing their luck," added Ilves, who dealt with a major cyber attack blamed on Russia in 2007.

Russian officials, he said, "will push their luck until something bad happens, but they won't pay the consequence. We will."

That could lead to unintended deaths and injuries, Estonian officials and security experts say, citing a trend of Russia is outsourcing attacks to locals, sometimes recruited relatively cheaply on video gaming platforms and social media. That makes it harder to identify connections between attacks or to trace them back to Russia.

Bulgarian investigative journalist Christo Grozev, who exposed Russian intelligence involvement in poisoning former spy Sergei Skripal in 2018 in Britain and the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2020, was a victim of such outsourcing.

A former Austrian intelligence officer was arrested in March for supplying Grozev's address to Russian intelligence, which allegedly hired burglars to break into the journalist's apartment in 2022 to steal a laptop connected to the Navalny investigation. Grozev had to move from Vienna last year after authorities said they couldn't guarantee his security.

Grozev said his son was in his room playing computer games when the 2022 break-in occurred, adding: "Imagine if he had walked out."

He and other journalists discovered links between an attack on a Russian opposition figure in Argentina last year and a Polish organized crime cell. When the information was passed to Polish authorities, they found a connection between the Argentina attack and one on Russian opposition figure Leonid Volkov in Lithuania in March. Lithuania's security service said that attack was probably Russian-organized.

Grozev said nations need to enforce intelligence sharing between their own security services and police and prosecutors and create a "proactive international working task force" to combat foreign influence operations.

Although Russia has been blamed for attacks in Europe for decades, Estonian officials and security experts indicated there's no collective mechanism for dealing with them, and suggested the EU do more.

Kallas says Russia uses spies in the guise of diplomats "all the time," and senior Estonian officials support a Czech initiative limiting visas for Russian envoys to the country where they are posted.

That would make it harder for them to travel in the EU, where IDs aren't needed at the border. It also could reduce the possibility of one nation expelling spies, only to see them return to another and continue working under diplomatic cover.

Estonia also is pushing for separate sanctions within the EU to counter hybrid threats. Although many Russian intelligence agents already are sanctioned, these could dissuade some "intermediaries" -- local organized crime figures, disillusioned youth and potential spies and collaborators -- from working for Moscow, said Jonatan Vsevirov, secretary general of Estonia's Foreign Ministry.

While some countries feel such exposure could cause instability and erode trust, Grozev called it an important deterrent.

Russian intelligence agents running operations abroad are "extremely averse" to incidents where they are named and shamed, Grozev said. Such individuals can be denied promotion, and proxies will realize they cannot be guaranteed immunity, he said.

The threat of sanctions and reduced opportunities for travel and study abroad can also help discourage younger Russians from joining security services.

Russia seeks "to sow fear" and break Western support for Kyiv, Kallas said.

Vsevirov said Putin wants to use every tool available, including the shadowy attacks, to "undermine our unity, collapse our policy and destroy the collective West, as we know it, as a functioning body."

## **GOP candidate for NC governor blasts public spending as his family nonprofit rakes in taxpayer funds**

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In his bid to become North Carolina's first Black governor, Republican Mark Robinson assails government safety net spending as a "plantation of welfare and victimhood" that has mired generations of Black people in "dependency" and poverty.

But the lieutenant governor's political rise wouldn't have been possible without it.

Over the past decade, Robinson's household has relied on income from Balanced Nutrition Inc., a nonprofit founded by his wife, Yolanda Hill, that administered a free lunch program for North Carolina children. The organization, funded entirely by taxpayers, has collected roughly \$7 million in government funding since 2017, while paying out at least \$830,000 in salaries to Hill, Robinson and other members of their family, tax filings and state documents show.

The income offered the Robinsons a degree of stability after decades of struggle that included multiple bankruptcies, home foreclosure and misdemeanor charges — later dropped — for writing bad checks. In Robinson's telling, the financial turnaround provided by the organization also allowed for his ascent into the North Carolina government.

"Yolanda's nonprofit was providing a salary for her that was enough to support us," Robinson wrote in his 2022 memoir, noting that its growth gave him the freedom to quit his furniture manufacturing job in 2018 and begin a career in populist conservative politics.

"I either was making speeches or was downtown at my wife's office, helping her with her work," he wrote of juggling his early political activity with Balanced Nutrition, which records indicate paid him about \$40,000 in 2018. "When I ran for office, I stopped doing that. ... Now my son does it."

Yet now in the closing months of a swing state campaign, the nonprofit that provided the family a vital lifeline has also become a political liability. In March, state regulators launched a probe of the organization's finances after flagging years of bookkeeping irregularities, including over \$100,000 in unaccounted spending.

The scrutiny adds to Robinson's challenges. He already has drawn negative attention for his history of inflammatory comments that include calling former first lady Michelle Obama a man and using the word "filth" when discussing gay and transgender people.

Robinson, who would oversee a state budget of more than \$30 billion if elected governor, has denied any wrongdoing and blasted the inquiry as politically motivated. His campaign declined to make Robinson or any of his family members available for an interview. But campaign spokesman Michael Lonergan defended Balance Nutrition's work, citing other state audits separate from the current inquiry.

"Lt. Gov. Robinson is proud of the work his wife has done to help needy children get nutritious meals," Lonergan said. "Democrats are weaponizing bureaucracy against the family of their political opponents."

### **PERSONAL STRUGGLES**

Robinson often speaks of struggle and redemption, setting himself apart from career politicians and wealthy influencers in Raleigh. This compelling autobiography, combined with Robinson's brash talk, has endeared him to supporters of Donald Trump, who endorsed Robinson at a March rally. The presumptive Republican presidential nominee often refers to Robinson as "Martin Luther King on steroids."

"I grew up poor," Robinson says frequently, detailing his childhood as the son of an alcoholic father who died when he was in elementary school. He recounts that he "lost my car, my home," was "forced into bankruptcy," and "lost my job not once but twice."

"Like you, I don't need a politician to tell me what to be worried about," he says, noting the "gnawing feeling" of money woes.

Indeed, from the 1990s until recent years, Robinson and Hill endured extended financial struggles, but one that's more complicated than what he usually tells voters.

The couple declared bankruptcy three times from 1998 to 2003 and failed to file federal income taxes for five years until compelled to do so during bankruptcy proceedings.



They've left behind a trail of aggrieved creditors, including the Girl Scouts, court documents show. Among them was a former landlord whose wife was dying of cancer when the Robinsons shorted him \$2,000 in rent, according to local news accounts and documents from a 2012 case.

A bankruptcy judge rejected their 2003 bankruptcy case after the Robinsons failed to make payments to their creditors that they'd agreed to in court. The case ended with Robinson and Hill having paid about \$9,000 on about \$71,000 in debt payments negotiated in bankruptcy court.

Lonergan called the bankruptcies "old news" that only proves Robinson has "lived the struggles" of many North Carolinians.

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## A NONPROFIT TO FEED CHILDREN

Hill founded her nonprofit in 2015 and soon gained approval to administer a joint state and federal program that reimburses day cares for feeding low-income children. The program requires detailed records of operations and spending.

Starting in 2020, state officials noticed problems with Balanced Nutrition's paperwork and nearly placed the organization on the Department of Health and Human Services "seriously deficient" list. A major issue, according to government emails obtained by The Associated Press, was a lack of documentation: missing menus, timesheets, prior approval for some expenses and confirmation of income eligibility for children receiving aid.

Another issue flagged in those emails: \$134,729.23 in spending from last year that was not explained in documents Hill submitted to the state as part of annually required paperwork. As state regulators ramped up scrutiny, Hill moved in April to shutter her nonprofit while suggesting that state officials were pursuing "some type of vendetta, be it personal or political," according to her email correspondence.

Documented clearly, though, is a series of raises Hill gave herself with the blessing of a Balanced Nutrition board that included her family members.

Though the organization had an inauspicious start, by 2022 its budget topped \$1.7 million, tax filings show. By 2023, Hill earned \$150,000 a year, according to state documents. Some of her raises coincided with Balanced Nutrition receiving additional government pandemic aid, including a \$150,000 grant in 2023 that was made possible through the American Rescue Plan — signature legislation signed into law by President Joe Biden. On the same day she disclosed receiving the grant, Hill submitted paperwork giving herself a \$10,000 raise, according to a revised budget for Balanced Nutrition that was submitted to the state.

Hill also took a \$28,000 raise in 2020 that coincided with about \$57,000 in federal loans through the Paycheck Protection Program, intended to help businesses struggling with lost revenue during the pandemic. The loans, which were later forgiven, were previously reported by The Assembly, a North Carolina news site. Balanced Nutrition received \$45,000 in minority women in business grants between 2022 and 2023, according to state documents.

Records also show a \$5,600-a-year raise given to the couple's son in 2023 for his part-time work, while their daughter was paid \$83,000 that year. The Robinson's children, who are both adults, did not respond to requests for comment.

Robinson himself appears to have been paid through the nonprofit in 2018, as previously reported by The Daily Haymaker, a conservative North Carolina website. State records show he was slated to earn \$42,000,

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though the organization did not report paying him on their tax filing that year, and he did not report making income from the organization on financial disclosure forms he filed as a candidate for lieutenant governor.

As Balanced Nutrition grew, Robinson campaigned for statewide office as a staunch fiscal conservative who criticized the government as too big and costly, especially with liberals in charge.

"The Democratic Party is the party of welfare checks and dependency. The Republican Party is the party of freedom and opportunity," Robinson wrote in his memoir.

In 2021, after he won statewide office and started drawing a public salary that is now \$157,000 a year, Balanced Nutrition stopped reporting specific compensation information for members of Robinson's family on its annual tax forms. The Internal Revenue Service requires such figures to be provided. Instead, the documents show Hill and their son earning \$0 – submissions that are at odds with figures the nonprofit provided on state filings.

The campaign pointed to a separate, routine audit for the 2021 calendar year in which an independent firm "did not identify any deficiencies in (Balanced Nutrition's) internal control that we consider to be material weaknesses."

Loneragan said that suggests "Democrats are just moving the goalposts" with the current inquiry.

The independent firm, however, noted that its audit was not the same as additional reviews by the state agencies that issue grants and then closely assess how that money is spent.

Balanced Nutrition's accounting irregularities are not the only aspect of the Robinsons' finances to be scrutinized since he first sought public office.

After his 2020 campaign, Robinson drew attention to how he used campaign funds. Some expenses became the subject of a state ethics complaint that Robinson's campaign says is still pending. Among the expenses: \$5,600 paid to Hill for "campaign apparel" and rental cars. Payments of \$2,375 to an outdoor equipment rental company at a popular vacation lake by the Virginia border. And on the day after Christmas 2019, \$2,400 in cash was withdrawn from Robinson's campaign fund without a given purpose, according to campaign finance disclosures.

North Carolina state law prohibits campaign expenses for personal or family benefits, as well as unexplained cash withdrawals over \$50. Lonergan said Robinson addressed questions from the state's campaign finance regulators "almost three years ago" and has not gotten a resolution, despite pressing the agency for one. A spokesman for the agency said North Carolina law bars it from discussing inquiries related to campaign finance complaints.

There are indicators the Robinsons are again facing financial pressure as the state conducts its probe of Balanced Nutrition.

Federal and state regulations bar the nonprofit from using public funding, its sole source of revenue, for legal fees. Earlier this month, the couple took out a \$96,000 line of credit on their home, according to public lending records.

In his 2022 book, Robinson is more forthright about his shortcomings than he often is as a bombastic candidate for governor. He wrote that he has searched for candidates "who have made no mistakes."

"I haven't found any," he declared.

Then, he shifted to one of his favorite targets: the federal government. "Truth be told," he wrote, "when you go to Washington, D.C., you will find people who have done way worse."

## **Kim's portrait is publicly displayed in North Korea. Here's a look at what it means**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The portrait of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was publicly displayed along with those of his father and grandfather for the first time, sparking speculation about the message it sends.

Portraits of leaders are at the core of North Korea's state-sponsored cult of personality that has but-

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tressed the Kim family's rule since the country's foundation in 1948. Almost all homes and public offices in North Korea must have portraits of Kim's father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung, but featuring that of the younger Kim hadn't yet been a requirement until recently.

Here's a look at what it means and why now:

## WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED?

On Wednesday, North Korea's state media released a photo showing Kim Jong Un's large portrait hung on the wall of a building alongside those of Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung, during his recent visit to the Central Cadres Training School of the ruling Workers' Party.

Another state media photo showed the smaller portraits of the three Kims placed side by side at a classroom, where Kim Jong Un, seated in a chair, talked to officials who took notes of his remarks.

Longtime North Korea watchers say it's the first time for North Korea to publicize images showing the portrait of Kim Jong Un installed together with those of the two late North Korean rulers since the younger Kim took power in late 2011.

## IS KIM BOOSTING HIS PERSONALITY CULT?

Placing his portrait next to those of his father and grandfather would suggest he wants to elevate his status to a level similar to that of the past two leaders, who are the subject of a strong and loyal following and regarded like gods. By doing so, Kim Jong Un wants to announce the start of his own era, according to Kwak Gil Sup, head of One Korea Center, a website specializing in North Korea affairs.

Few foreign experts question Kim's grip on power. But the 40-year-old has still avoided the same level of personality cult bestowed on his predecessors: they are memorialized in numerous statues and mosaics across North Korea, their birthdays are two of the country's biggest holidays and pins bearing their likenesses are worn by all North Korean adults.

Kwak said Kim Jong Un's portrait will now likely be hung on the walls of all households while his birthday could also be designated as an official holiday.

The place where his portrait was recently hung is the highest education facility for ruling party brass. Kwak said it shows that "Kim Jong Un wants to begin a new era with new people."

Observers say Kim needs stronger domestic support of his leadership as he struggles to navigate his country past economic hardships and protracted tensions with the United States over his nuclear program. In January, Kim announced he will no longer pursue a peaceful unification with South Korea, a decadeslong policy cherished by his father and grandfather.

## ANY PROBLEM WITH PROPAGANDA DRIVE?

Prospects for Kim's push aren't clear, though he likely thinks he has bolstered his power and built his nuclear and other military programs strong enough to elevate himself in the national mythology.

Kim's headlong pursuit of a bigger nuclear arsenal has drawn punishing U.S.-led sanctions, which together with border closures during the pandemic were believed to have badly hurt the North's fragile economy. Kim has subsequently admitted policy failures as his vow that North Koreans would "never have to tighten their belts again" remained unfulfilled.

"For regime propaganda to reach such a stage of personality cult suggests both impressive confidence and insecurity," said Leif-Eric Easley, professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

"However, this is also a political gamble, with Kim betting that ideology can buy time to address North Korea's economic struggles and social divisions," Easley said.

## IS HIS PORTRAIT PRELUDE TO ANOTHER HEREDITARY POWER TRANSFER?

Cheong Seong-Chang, an analyst at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea, said Kim's portrait is more likely associated with his possible bid to groom his preteen daughter, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae, as his heir.

"By hanging the portraits of all three — Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung — I assess that North Korea is underscoring the need to extend the Paektu bloodline to justify another hereditary power transfer for Ju Ae," Cheong said, referring to the Kim family's lineage named after the country's most sacred mountain.

Ju Ae, aged about 10, has been the subject of keen outside attention as she accompanied her father



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on a series of high-profile events such as missile tests and military parades since late 2022. State media called her Kim Jong Un's "most beloved" or "respected" child while churning out footage and photos proving her soaring political standing and closeness with her father.

In January, South Korea's spy agency said it saw Ju Ae as her father's likely heir apparent.

Some experts say it's still too premature to determine Ju Ae is Kim's heir, given her age and North Korea's male-dominated power hierarchy.

## Today in History: May 23, Bonnie and Clyde shot and killed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 23, the 144th day of 2024. There are 222 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 23, 1934, bank robbers Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker were shot to death in a police ambush in Bienville Parish, Louisiana.

On this date:

In 1430, Joan of Arc was captured by the Burgundians, who sold her to the English.

In 1533, the marriage of England's King Henry VIII to Catherine of Aragon was declared null and void by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer.

In 1915, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary during World War I.

In 1937, industrialist and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, founder of the Standard Oil Co. and the Rockefeller Foundation, died in Ormond Beach, Florida, at age 97.

In 1939, the Navy submarine USS Squalus sank during a test dive off the New England coast. Thirty-two crew members and one civilian were rescued, but 26 others died; the sub was salvaged and recommissioned the USS Sailfish.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied forces bogged down in Anzio began a major breakout offensive.

In 1945, Nazi official Heinrich Himmler committed suicide by biting into a cyanide capsule while in British custody in Luneburg, Germany.

In 1967, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, an action that helped precipitate war between Israel and its Arab neighbors the following month.

In 1975, comedian Jackie "Moms" Mabley, 81, died in White Plains, New York.

In 1984, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop issued a report saying there was "very solid" evidence linking cigarette smoke to lung disease in non-smokers.

In 2007, President George W. Bush, speaking at the U.S. Coast Guard commencement, portrayed the Iraq war as a battle between the U.S. and al-Qaida and said Osama bin Laden was setting up a terrorist cell in Iraq to strike targets in America.

In 2013, the Boy Scouts of America threw open its ranks to gay Scouts but not to gay Scout leaders.

In 2016, Prosecutors failed for the second time in their bid to hold Baltimore police accountable for the arrest and death of Freddie Gray, as an officer was acquitted in the racially charged case that triggered riots a year earlier.

In 2017, Roger Moore, the star of seven James Bond films, died in Switzerland at age 89.

In 2018, NFL owners approved a new policy allowing players to protest during the national anthem by staying in the locker room, but forbidding players from sitting or taking a knee if they're on the field.

In 2021, a cable car taking visitors to a mountaintop view of northern Italy's most picturesque lakes plummeted to the ground and tumbled down a slope, killing 14 people.

In 2022, President Joe Biden said the U.S. would intervene militarily if China were to invade Taiwan. It was one of the most forceful presidential statements in support of Taiwan's self-governing in decades.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Barbara Barrie is 93. Actor Joan Collins is 91. International Tennis Hall of Famer John Newcombe is 80. Actor Lauren Chapin is 79. Country singer Judy Rodman is 73. Chess grandmaster Anatoly Karpov is 73. Singer Luka Bloom is 69. Baseball manager Buck Showalter is 68. Actor-comedian-

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game show host Drew Carey is 66. Actor Lea DeLaria is 66. Country singer Shelly West is 66. Author Mitch Albom is 66. Actor Linden Ashby is 64. Actor-model Karen Duffy is 63. Actor Melissa McBride is 59. Rock musician Phil Selway (Radiohead) is 57. Actor Laurel Holloman is 56. Rock musician Matt Flynn (Maroon 5) is 54. Country singer Brian McComas is 52. Actor John Pollono is 52. Singer Maxwell is 51. Singer Jewel is 50. "Jeopardy!" host Ken Jennings is 50. Actor LaMonica Garrett is 49. Actor D.J. Cotrona is 44. Actor Lane Garrison is 44. Actor-comedian Tim Robinson is 43. Actor Adam Wylie is 40. Movie writer-director Ryan Coogler is 38. Golfer Morgan Pressel is 36. Actor Alberto Frezza is 35. Folk/pop singer/songwriter Sarah Jarosz (juh-ROHZ') is 33.