



90°/70°
Partly cloudy

RISE IN VICTIM COMPENSATION REFORM

Throughout the country crime survivors turn for help with medical bills, relocation, funerals or other expenses. FEATURE, 6



Southwest Journalist

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN ■ DOW JONES NEWS FUND CENTER FOR EDITING EXCELLENCE ■ SWJOURNALIST.COM ■ THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 2023



House passes debt ceiling agreement

LISA MASCARO, KEVIN FREKING, STEPHEN GROVES AND FARNOUSH AMIRI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Veering away from a default crisis, the House approved a debt ceiling and budget cuts package late Wednesday, as President Joe Biden and Speaker Kevin McCarthy assembled a bipartisan coalition of centrist Democrats and Republicans against fierce conservative blowback and progressive dissent.

The hard-fought deal pleased few, but lawmakers assessed it was better than the alternative — a devastating economic upheaval if Congress failed to act. Tensions ran high throughout the day as hard-right Republicans refused the deal, while Democrats said “extremist” GOP views were risking a debt default as soon as next week.

With the House vote of 314-117, the bill now heads to the Senate with passage expected by week’s end.

Bill still needs Senate OK

McCarthy insisted his party was working to “give America hope” as he launched into a late evening speech extolling the bill’s budget cuts, which he said were needed to curb Washington’s “runaway spending.”

But amid discontent from Republicans who said the spending restrictions did not go far enough, McCarthy said it is only a “first step.”

Earlier, Biden expressed optimism that the agreement he negotiated with McCarthy to lift the nation’s borrowing limit would pass the chamber and avoid an economically disastrous default on America’s debts.

The president departed Washington for Colorado, where he is scheduled to deliver the commencement address Thursday at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

“God willing by the time I land, Congress will

have acted, the House will have acted, and we’ll be one step closer,” he said. That wasn’t quite the case — the vote began about an hour and a half after Biden arrived in Colorado.

Biden sent top White House officials to the Capitol to shore up backing. McCarthy worked to sell skeptical fellow Republicans, even fending off challenges to his leadership.

Swift action later in the week by the Senate would ensure government checks will continue to go out to Social Security recipients, veterans and others and would prevent financial upheaval at home and abroad. Next Monday is when the Treasury has said the U.S. would run short of money to pay its debts.

Biden and McCarthy were counting on support from the political center, a rarity in divided Washington, testing the leadership of the Demo-

cratic president and the Republican speaker.

Overall, the 99-page bill restricts spending for the next two years, suspends the debt ceiling into January 2025 and changes some policies. It also imposes new work requirements for older Americans receiving food aid, greenlights an Appalachian natural gas line that many Democrats oppose and bolsters funds for defense and veterans.

Raising the nation’s debt limit, now \$31 trillion, ensures the Treasury can borrow to pay already incurred U.S. debts.

Top GOP deal negotiator Rep. Garret Graves of Louisiana said Republicans were fighting for budget cuts after Democrats piled onto deficits with extra spending, first during the COVID-19 crisis and later with Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act, with its historic investment to fight climate change.

■ DEBT CEILING, Page 2



UT AUSTIN MOODY COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

University of Texas College of Communication graduates celebrate 2023 spring commencement.

No relief: Payment of student loans resumes in August

CORA LEWIS AND ADRIANA MORGHA
Associated Press

NEW YORK — A three-year pause on student loan payments will end this summer regardless of how the Supreme Court rules on the White House plan to forgive billions of dollars in student loan debt.

If Congress approves the debt ceiling deal negotiated by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and President Joe Biden, payments will resume in late August, ending any lingering hope of a further extension of the pause that started during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even if the deal falls through, payments will resume 60 days after the Supreme Court decision.

That ruling is expected sometime before the end of June. No matter what the justices decide, more than 40 million borrowers will have to start paying back their loans by the end of the summer at the latest.

Here’s what to know to get ready to start paying back loans:

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR STUDENT LOANS PAYMENTS TO RESTART?

Betsy Mayotte, President of the Institute of Student Loan Advisors, encourages people not to make any payments until the pause has ended. Instead, she suggested to put what you would have paid into a savings account to maintain the habit of making a payment while still earning interest.

“There’s no reason to send that money to the student loans until the last minute of the 0% interest rate,” Mayotte said.

She recommended borrowers use the loan-simulator tool at StudentAid.gov or the one on the insti-

■ LOANS, Page 2

“There’s no reason to send that money to the student loans until the last minute of the 0% interest rate.”

BETSY MAYOTTE,
PRESIDENT OF THE
INSTITUTE OF STUDENT
LOAN ADVISORS

WAWRINKA GETS SERVED



JEAN-FRANCOIS BADIAS

Australia’s Thanasi Kokkinakis, front, plays a shot against Switzerland’s Stan Wawrinka, rear, during their second round match of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros stadium in Paris on Wednesday.

Okla. court kills abortion ban

SEAN MURPHY
Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that two state laws banning abortion were unconstitutional, but the procedure remains illegal in the state in nearly all cases except life-threatening situations.

In a 6-3 ruling, the high court said the two bans were unconstitutional because they required a “medical emergency” before a doctor could perform an abortion. The court said this language conflicted with a previous ruling it issued in March that determined the Oklahoma Constitution provides an “inherent right of a pregnant woman to terminate a pregnancy when necessary to preserve her life.”

The court’s decision was welcomed by doctors who said uncertainty about the state’s abortion laws often forced

them to make women facing severe medical complications and nonviable pregnancies to wait for their condition to worsen before they could perform an abortion.

“In our practice we had cases where we would just have to tell women who we would normally offer a (pregnancy) termination to protect her health ... ‘We have to let you go home and monitor your condition and if you start showing signs of infection or worsening blood pressure, then come back and we have the ability to legally treat you,’” said Dana Stone, an Oklahoma City obstetrician and gynecologist.

“Otherwise, we’re at risk with these laws of going to jail for 10 years, having hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines and losing our medical licenses.”

Despite the court’s March decision

that the requirement to wait until an active medical emergency violated the state constitution, there remained uncertainty because of the two laws that remained in effect.

“With their decision today, the court has ensured that the March decision will be fully realized,” said Rabia Muqaddam, a senior staff attorney at the New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights, which challenged the laws on behalf of a Tulsa abortion provider. “Hopefully patients will be receiving the medically necessary care they need without waiting until they are on death’s door.”

Both laws struck down Wednesday included a civil-enforcement mechanism that allowed citizens to sue someone who either performed or helped someone perform an abortion.

■ ABORTION BAN, Page 2

15 news fund interns, 26 years of success

Fifteen college students journalists are headed to editing internships or returning to their newsrooms after completing 10 days of intensive preparation at the 26th Center for Editing Excellence at the University of Texas at Austin.

The participants have been placed in internships in multiplatform editing as part of the Dow Jones News Fund internship program.

The Associated Press allowed students to use the wire services for content and instructional material, and School Newspapers Online hosted the Southwest Journalist website.

Newspaper professionals, visiting faculty and UT journalism faculty moderated training sessions in the first half of the 25th residency program.

In the latter half of the pre-internship training, participants produced three issues of a model daily newspaper, the Southwest Journalist, as well as a companion online and social media product, swjournalist.com.

Grants from the Dow Jones News Fund and contributions from participating news organizations cover the cost of training. Participants spent more than eight hours each day on classroom instruction and production of the newspaper and website.

Bradley Wilson, an associate professor at Midwestern State University, served as director of the workshop

with assistance from Liesbeth Demaer and Alice Rentz in the UT School of Journalism and Media. David Ryfe is the director of the UT School of Journalism.

Faculty included Beth Butler, retired faculty at Kent State University and freelance editor, Mark Grabowski, associate professor at Adelphi University, and Griff Singer, retired senior lecturer at the UT School of Journalism and Media and former director of the workshop.

THE 2023 PARTICIPANTS:

- Isabella Avila, University of Oklahoma, *NerdWallet*
- Francesca Bermudez, Loyola Marymount University, *Los Angeles Times*
- Matthew Brown, UC Berkeley, *San Francisco Chronicle*
- Colin Crawford, Northwestern University, *The New York Times*
- Liset Cruz, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, *Associated Press*
- Joy Diamond, UC Berkeley, *The New York Times*
- Isabel Funk, Northwestern University, *San Francisco Chronicle*
- Dori Gray, Ohio University, *The New York Times*
- Aaron Hughes, Eastern Michigan University, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
- Grant Johnson, James Madison University, *The Washington Post*



- Spencer Otte, California State University - Fullerton, *Bay City News Foundation*
- Robert Stewart, University of Arkansas, *Stars and Stripes*
- Andrea Teres-Martinez, Boise State University, *The Wall Street Journal*
- Ethan Thomas, University of Texas at El Paso, *The Texas Tribune*
- Sophie Young, Kent State University, *The New York Times*

GUEST SPEAKERS:

- Craig Garnett, editor and publisher, *Uvalde Leader-News*

- Philana Patterson, head of newsroom audio, *Wall Street Journal*
- Ed Traves, retired, professor, Temple University, former director-editing program at *Temple University*

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- Shirley Carswell, executive director, Dow Jones News Fund
- Heather Taylor, manager of digital media and programs, Dow Jones News Fund

Va. Guard heading for Texas border

SEAN MURPHY
Associated Press

RICHMOND, Virginia.— RICHMOND, Virginia.— Virginia's Glenn Youngkin is joining the list of Republican governors sending soldiers or other state law enforcement officers to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Youngkin announced Wednesday, in response to a request from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, he had signed an executive order directing the deployment of 100 Virginia National Guard soldiers and 21 support personnel.

"The ongoing border crisis facing our nation has turned every state into a border state," Youngkin said in a statement. "As leadership solutions at the federal level fall short, states are answering the call to secure our southern border, reduce the flow of fentanyl, combat human trafficking and address the humanitarian crisis."

Youngkin's order said the soldiers will answer to a military commander during the 30-day deployment, not any local civilian authorities.

The governor's office said Texas made a request for out-of-state assistance in mid-May to address an increase in supply of illegal drugs and human trafficking at the southern border. Youngkin's press team did not immediately respond to a question about the expected cost of the mission or the source of funding.

While Virginia law prohibits governors from serving consecutive terms, Youngkin is frequently mentioned as a possible 2024 presidential contender. He said earlier this month that he had no plans to launch such a bid this year.

President Joe Biden announced in early May plans to send 1,500 active-duty troops to the border, in addition to the 2,500 guard members already there. Those military personnel were tasked with data entry, warehouse support and other administrative duties so that U.S. Customs and Border Protection can focus on fieldwork, the White House said.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE

Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., leaves the chamber after passage of a crucial procedural vote on the debt ceiling and budget cuts package he negotiated with Pres. Joe Biden, at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, May 31. The bill now goes to the Senate.

Oklahoma Court votes 6-3 against abortion ban

■ ABORTION BAN from Page 1

"Despite the court's decisions today on SB 1603 and HB 4327, Oklahoma's 1910 law prohibiting abortion remains in place," Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond said in a statement. "Except for certain circumstances outlined in that statute, abortion is still unlawful in the state of Oklahoma."

Oklahoma's 1910 law makes it a felony crime punishable by up to five years in prison for anyone to perform an abortion or help a woman obtain an abortion unless it is "necessary to

preserve her life."

The court's decision was decried by Republican leaders and Gov. Kevin Stitt, who has worked for years to tightly restrict abortion access in Oklahoma.

"This court has once more over-involved itself in the state's democratic process, and has interceded to undo legislation created by the will of the people," Stitt said in a statement. "I agree with Justice (Dustin) Rowe's dissent, 'The issues presented in this matter are political questions, which are better resolved by the people via our democratic process.'"

Loan payments restart

■ LOANS from Page 1

tute's website to find a payment plan that best fits their needs. The calculators tell you what your monthly payment would be under each available plan, as well as your long-term costs.

Sometimes, when borrowers are in a financial bind, they'll choose the option with the lowest monthly payment, which can cost more over the life of the loan, Mayotte said. Rather than "setting it and forgetting it," she encourages borrowers to reevaluate when their financial situation improves.

WHAT'S AN INCOME-DRIVEN REPAYMENT PLAN?

An income-driven repayment plan sets your monthly student loan payment at an amount that is intended to be affordable based on your income and family size. It takes into account different expenses in your budget. Most federal student loans are eligible for at least one of these types of plans.

Generally, your payment amount under an income-driven repayment plan is a percentage of your discretionary income. If your income is low enough, your payment could be as low as \$0 per month.

If you'd like to repay your federal student loans under an income-driven plan, the first step is to fill out an application through the Federal Student Aid website.

TALK TO AN ADVISER

Fran Gonzales, 27, works in Texas as a supervisor for a financial institution. She holds \$32,000 in public student loans and \$40,000 in private student loans. During the payment pause on her public loans, Gonzales said she was able to pay off her credit card debt, buy a new car and pay down two years' worth of private loans while saving money. Her private student loan payment has been \$500 a month and her public student loan payment will be \$350 per month when payments restart.



UT AUSTIN MOODY COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

University of Texas College of Communication graduates celebrate 2023 spring commencement.

Gonzales recommends that anyone with student loans speak with a mentor or financial advisor to educate themselves about their options, as well as making sure they're in an income-driven repayment plan.

"I was the first in my family to go to college, and I could have saved money with grants and scholarships had I known someone who knew about college," she said. "I could have gone to community college or lived in cheaper housing ... It's a huge financial decision."

Gonzales received her degree in business marketing and says she was "horrible with finances" until she began working as a loan officer herself.

Gonzales' mother works in retail and her father for the airport, she said, and both encouraged her to pursue higher education. For her part, Gonzales now tries to inform others with student loans about what they're taking on and what their choices are.

"Anyone young I cross paths with, I try to educate them."

CAN I SET UP A PAYMENT PLAN FOR MY STUDENT LOANS?

Yes — payment plans are always available. Even so, some advocates encourage borrowers to wait for now, since there's no financial penalty for nonpayment during the pause on payments and interest accrual.

Katherine Welbeck of the Student Borrower Protection Center recommends logging in to your account and making sure you know the name

of your servicer, your due date and whether you're enrolled in the best income-driven repayment plan.

WHAT IF I CAN'T PAY?

If your budget doesn't allow you to resume payments, it's important to know how to navigate the possibility of default and delinquency on a student loan. Both can hurt your credit rating, which would make you ineligible for additional aid.

If you're in a short-term financial bind, according to Mayotte, you may qualify for deferment or forbearance — allowing you to temporarily suspend payment.

To determine whether deferment or forbearance are good options for you, you can contact your loan servicer. However, interest will still accrue during deferment or forbearance. Both can also impact potential loan forgiveness options. Depending on the conditions of your deferment or forbearance, it may make sense to continue paying the interest during the payment suspension.

ARE STUDENT LOANS FORGIVEN AFTER 10 YEARS?

If you've worked for a government agency or a nonprofit, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program offers cancellation after 10 years of regular payments, and some income-driven repayment plans cancel the remainder of a borrower's debt after 20 to 25 years.

House approves debt ceiling

■ DEBT CEILING from Page 1

For weeks negotiators labored late into the night to strike the deal with the White House, and for days McCarthy has worked to build support among skeptics. At one point, aides wheeled in pizza at the Capitol the night before the vote as he walked Republicans through the details, fielded questions and encouraged them not to lose sight of the bill's budget savings.

The speaker has faced a tough crowd. Cheered on by conservative senators and outside groups, the hard-right House Freedom Caucus lambasted the compromise as falling well short of the needed spending cuts, and they vowed to try to halt passage.

A much larger conservative faction, the Republican Study Committee, declined to take a position. Even rank-and-file centrist conservatives were unsure, leaving McCarthy searching for votes from his slim Republican majority.

Ominously, the conservatives warned of possibly trying to oust McCarthy over the compromise.

Biden spoke directly to lawmakers, making calls from the White House.

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said it was up to McCarthy to turn out at least 150 Republican votes, two-thirds of the majority, even as he assured reporters that Democrats would supply the rest to prevent a default. In the 435-member House, 218 votes are needed for approval.

As the tally faltered in the afternoon procedural vote, Jeffries stood silently and raised his green voting card, signaling that the Democrats would fill

in the gap to ensure passage. They did, advancing the bill that 29 hard-right Republicans, many from the Freedom Caucus, refused to back.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said the spending restrictions in the package would reduce deficits by \$1.5 trillion over the decade, a top goal for the Republicans trying to curb the debt load.

In a surprise that complicated Republicans' support, the CBO said their drive to impose work requirements on older Americans receiving food stamps would end up boosting spending by \$2.1 billion over the time period. That's because the final deal exempts veterans and homeless people, expanding the food stamp rolls by 78,000 people monthly, the CBO said.

Liberal discontent, though, ran strong as Democrats also broke away, decrying the new work requirements for older Americans age 50-54, in the food aid program.

Some Democrats were also incensed that the White House negotiated into the deal changes to the landmark National


Environmental Policy Act and approval of the controversial Mountain Valley Pipeline natural gas project. The project is important to Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., but many others oppose it as unhelpful in fighting climate change.

In the Senate, Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell are working for passage by week's end. Schumer warned there is "no room for error."

Senators, who have remained largely on the sidelines during much of the negotiations, are insisting on amendments to reshape the package. But making any changes at this stage seemed unlikely with so little time to spare before Monday's deadline.

"God willing by the time I land, Congress will have acted, the House will have acted, and we'll be one step closer."

JOE BIDEN
PRESIDENT



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Center for Editing Excellence
School of Journalism and Media ■ The University of Texas at Austin

<p>BRADLEY WILSON Director Midwestern State University</p> <p>BETH BUTLER Workshop Faculty Kent State University</p> <p>MARK GRABOWSKI Workshop Faculty Adelphi University</p>	<p>S. GRIFFIN SINGER Workshop Director Emeritus UT Austin School of Journalism and Media</p> <p>DAVID RYFE Director UT Austin School of Journalism and Media</p> <p>LIESBETH DEMAER, ALICE RENTZ UT Austin School of Journalism and Media</p>	<p>SHIRLEY CARSWELL, HEATHER TAYLOR Dow Jones News Fund</p> <p>JOY DIAMOND UC Berkeley <i>The New York Times</i></p> <p>ISABEL FUNK Northwestern University <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i></p> <p>DORI GRAY Ohio University <i>The New York Times</i></p> <p>AARON HUGHES Eastern Michigan University <i>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</i></p> <p>GRANT JOHNSON James Madison University <i>The Washington Post</i></p>
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The Southwest Journalist is a teaching publication of the Dow Jones News Fund and the Center for Editing Excellence at The University of Texas at Austin. The Southwest Journalist is edited and designed by students attending the 2023 pre-internship training program funded by a grant from the DJNF and the news organizations hosting the interns.

BRIEFS

Rogers, Marisnick lead Tigers over Rangers 3-2

DETROIT — Jake Rogers hit a tiebreaking sacrifice fly in the sixth inning and Jake Marisnick followed with a run-scoring single in his Tigers debut, leading the Detroit Tigers over the Texas Rangers 3-2 Wednesday.

Texas took two of three games and has won six straight road series for the first time. The Rangers went 18-9 in May, and their 35-20 record is the team's best 55-game start.

Josh Jung extended his hitting streak to 14 games in the fourth, moving within two of Elvis Andrus' Texas rookie record, and scored on Jonah Heim's single.

Dane Dunning (4-1) allowed three runs and seven hits in five-plus innings.

Nathaniel Lowe cut the deficit with an RBI single in the seventh against Chasen Shreve.

Alex Lange worked around Marcus Semien's one-out walk in a hitless ninth for his 10th save in 11 chances.

Texas went 3-for-10 with runners in scoring position and stranded 10 runners.

UP NEXT — Rangers: RHP Jon Gray (5-1, 2.81) is scheduled to start Friday against visiting Seattle and RHP Luis Castillo (4-2, 2.69).

Bull rider docuseries debuts

NEW YORK — Cameras followed an engaging cast of competitors, along with coaches and executives during the Professional Bull Riders' 30th anniversary last year and the debut of its new Team Series.

The result was the eight-episode docuseries, "The Ride," now airing on Amazon Prime Video.

Around 800 riders globally compete in more than 200 events annually, hoping to qualify for the finals and take home a \$1 million bonus.

"It's not a hobby sport. This is a sport that you've got to have a passion and literally love enough to die for," said Tiffany Davis, who serves in an assistant GM-like capacity for the Carolina Cowboys, based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

With sports documentaries becoming more popular and fans craving content beyond the competition, there's optimism that "The Ride" can expose an even wider audience to the PBR.

One killed in plant explosion

FRANKLIN — One person was killed when a boiler exploded at a southeastern Texas power plant Wednesday morning, according to a spokesperson for Dallas-based electric utility Luminant, which owns the plant.

A contractor was fatally injured in the blast at the Oak Grove Power Plant about 8 a.m., according to Luminant spokesperson Meranda Cohn.

"All other employees and contractors have been accounted for and there are no other known injuries at this time," Cohn said.

Bill Huggins, the director of Robertson County Emergency Management, says there was no fire and no danger to the residents of the nearby town of Franklin, about 110 miles northwest of Houston.

The cause of the explosion remains under investigation, according to Cohn's statement, and the plant is still in operation and generating electricity.

Luminant will continue to work closely with the contractor's employer and state and federal regulators to investigate the cause of this event.

Phoenix successfully challenges 2020 census

PHOENIX — has become the largest U.S. city to successfully challenge its population count from the 2020 census after claiming dozens of group homes, jails, and drug and alcohol treatment centers were overlooked.

The Census Bureau has received over 100 submissions challenging the numbers from cities, towns and villages, including Austin. State, tribal and local governments have until the end of June to file challenges.

The U.S. Census Bureau told Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego last week that the agency had approved its submission claiming 3,550 people were missed in group quarters. The census determined Phoenix was the fastest-growing big city in the U.S. between 2010 and 2020.

The count of every U.S. resident determines political representation and how \$1.5 trillion in federal spending is distributed for transportation, health and more.

Refugee puppet to visit US historical sites

NEW YORK — Little Amal, a puppet of a 10-year-old Syrian refugee, will visit the U.S. Capitol, Boston Common, Joshua Tree National Park and the Edmund Pettus Bridge, among other sites, during a fall trek across America to raise awareness about immigration and migration.

The doll's stops in Texas include Austin, Houston, San Antonio and El Paso.

Organizers are reaching out to community artists and leaders at each of the 35 stops — including places revered in Civil Rights Movement history like Selma, Alabama, and recent scenes of gun violence like Uvalde, Texas — to create more than 100 special events.

"We work very closely with our local partners and try and understand what is the story they're trying to tell and try to co-create an event that resonates in this place to this community," said artistic director Amir Nizar Zuabi. "I think that's part of why this project becomes so emotional for many people."

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Abbott appoints interim AG

John Scott takes office after Paxton impeachment

ZACH DESPART AND
ROBERT DOWNEN
The Texas Tribune

Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday appointed Fort Worth lawyer and former Secretary of State John Scott as interim Texas attorney general, temporarily replacing Ken Paxton, who was suspended as attorney general pending the outcome of an impeachment trial in the state Senate.

Scott previously served as deputy attorney general for civil litigation when Abbott led that office. He has more than 34 years of legal experience and has argued more than 100 cases in state and federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

Scott will take leadership of an agency that has been caught up in the turmoil surrounding Paxton, who faces articles of impeachment accusing him of abusing the powers of office.

The accusations of misconduct were levied in 2020 by eight former top officials who quit or were fired shortly after taking their concerns about Paxton's behavior to law enforcement. Four of the fired executives filed a whistleblower lawsuit arguing that Paxton improperly retaliated against them.

Most recently, six officials and employees took a leave of absence from the agency to help with Paxton's Senate trial.

Scott served as secretary of state from October 2021 to December 2022, and his tenure as the state's chief elections officer received both plaudits and criticism.

Ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, some county elections officials



EDDIE GASPAR / THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Gov. Greg Abbott appointed Scott on Wednesday to temporarily serve as attorney general after the House voted to impeach Ken Paxton. Former Texas Secretary of State John Scott appears at a press conference in 2022.

praised him for pushing back against voter fraud conspiracy theorists. He was adamant that illegal voting was not a serious issue, telling The Texas Tribune, "Our elections are more accessible and safer than they've ever been."

Conversely, Scott enabled voter fraud myths that he battled as secretary of state. Previous to his appointment by Abbott, he briefly represented Donald Trump in one of the former president's failed challenges to the

2020 election. Scott later spearheaded audits of elections in four Texas counties that found no serious issues but fueled Republican distrust and, ultimately, bills this legislative session that would give the state unprecedented power over elections in Democratic-run Harris County.

"He's supposed to act as an arbiter of truth when it comes to elections," said Alice Huling, senior legal counsel for voting rights at the Campaign Legal Center. "It is not sufficient to just

throw your hands up and say, 'I'm not pushing conspiracy theories.'"

As secretary of state, Scott also served in a diplomatic capacity, managing the state's relationship with Mexico, Texas' largest trading partner and cracking down on illegal immigration, a top priority for Abbott.

After stepping down as secretary of state in December, Scott worked as a lobbyist during the regular legislative session, according to Texas Ethics Commission records.

Border Patrol chief retires as Title 42 ends

COLLEEN LONG
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The head of the U.S. Border Patrol announced he is retiring, after overseeing a clamp down on illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border after the end of pandemic restrictions.

The Associated Press obtained a note from Ortiz to staff saying he will leave June 30. It's unclear who will replace him.

"I leave at ease, knowing we have a tremendous uniformed and professional workforce, strong relationships with our union partners, and outstanding leaders who will continue to tirelessly advocate for you each day," Ortiz said in the note.

Ortiz managed the Border Patrol and its roughly 20,000 agents through the COVID-19 pandemic and Title 42 restrictions that began in March 2020 and allowed agents to quickly return migrants over the southern border. He also oversaw the rollout of new policies on May 11 meant to discourage migrants from crossing illegally while opening up other legal pathways. The number of crossings has dropped, and the border has not seen the high numbers of crossings or chaos anticipated by President Joe Biden with the end of the restrictions.

Ortiz took over as chief in August 2021, following the dismissal of Rodney Scott, who enthusiastically embraced then-President Donald Trump's policies, including his plan to build a border wall. Ortiz was a career official who slowly climbed the ranks over 30 years, and he kept focused on the work of the job, staying away from more charged issues like the border wall.

In his message to staff, Ortiz said the leadership would continue to advocate for agents.

Model student 'ecstatic to leave' Texas ahead of trans health-care ban

WILLIAM MELHADO AND LEILA SAIDANE
The Texas Tribune

ROUND ROCK, Texas — Topher Malone was sprinting through her final days of high school: On Friday, she led a Gender-Sexuality Alliance club meeting, then stood before a rapt audience of National Honors Society juniors eager to hear how Malone got in to Harvard.

Malone explained that her application's strength came from sticking to a common theme throughout. Her essays told her story of queer activism and school leadership.

She's a straight-A student and class president at Round Rock Independent School District's Early College High School, she attends national youth leadership conferences and she's raised money to support the school group she leads.

Malone is also trans. She says having access to gender-affirming treatments before she turned 18 in May allowed her to embrace her true self and channel her energy into her advocacy for LGBTQ+ youth.

But young trans people like Malone will soon be a relic of a bygone era in Texas. Senate Bill 14, which would ban transgender youth from accessing gender-affirming care could go into effect in September.

The bill's passage would mark the culmination of a years-long political effort by conservative groups and state leaders that has painted gender-affirming care as "genital mutilation" of children.

Similar legislation failed to become law two years ago. Since then, Abbott has directed the Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate parents of trans youth, and some families fled the state.

Now the Legislature will prohibit physicians from administering treatments to trans people under 18, even though the state's medical associations have said the available medical studies have shown such treatments are effective at treating mental health problems caused by gender dysphoria, a medical term for the distress someone experiences when their gender identity doesn't match their body.

Under the new law, physicians who provide puberty blockers or hormone therapies to trans youth would lose their medical licenses.

For Malone, it's not a political topic. She said the animosity in her home state is driving her out.

"I'm absolutely ecstatic to leave and go to a state where everyone actually cares about me and cares about my identity as a trans person," she said. "A lot of the queer people I know, they want to escape as quickly as possible."

She plans to continue organizing and doing nonprofit work related to the LGBTQ+ population in Massachusetts, which is regarded as a refuge state for the trans community.



LEILA SAIDANE / THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Topher Malone's mother helps her get ready for graduation day in her bedroom in Round Rock in May.

In late March, Malone got her turn to testify to a House committee against House Bill 1686, SB 14's companion bill.

Malone told the lawmakers that she'd applied to colleges in Texas. But as soon as she received an offer from a college outside of Texas she had decided to leave the state.

"I don't want to stay here for college anymore because of what this state government is doing to trans people like me, and I can't stand it anymore," Malone told the committee members.

The last major debate over SB 14 took place in the Texas House, where Democrats proposed 17 amendments to soften the bill's impacts on LGBTQ+ youth.

The debate over the legislation alone could negatively affect the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth, according to a January report from the Trevor Project, a national LGBTQ+ youth suicide prevention organization.

Michael Stefanowicz, an Austin family doctor who has provided gender-affirming care to children and adults, said the bill's passage will have life-altering consequences for trans youth.

"That's where the bottom line is: After this legislation, more people will die," Stefanowicz said.

Foster care privatization model moves slowly

SNEHA DEY
The Texas Tribune

Texas lawmakers in 2017 ordered an overhaul of foster care services, kicking most of the state's responsibilities of monitoring children to contractors.

Under the new community-based care model, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services divided the state into regions and must hire third-party contractors for each region.

The model was designed to keep foster kids closer to their hometowns. Supporters argued local groups knew the region better than a state agency in Austin, enabling them to place children in homes and connect them to services in the area.

But the rollout has been complicated, working to hire more contractors to take over what has always been a state task.

Third-party vendors have entered and backed out of contracts, those that pushed through financial losses have publicly pressured the agency to be more flexible in its regulations, and

agency caseworkers feel like they've been hung out to dry.

Six years into the rollout, it's unclear whether the model has helped the foster care system.

Still, lawmakers have continued to favor community-based care model. This session alone, the Legislature set the aside at least \$91.9 million.

An eleventh-hour vote on legislation set into motion a complete overhaul of the state's child welfare agency that would move the management of foster care child placements from DFPS to local vendors.

"We must leave the status quo behind," state Rep. James Frank, a Wichita Falls Republican and the bill's sponsor, said on the House floor at the time. Since 2017, it's been a slow-footed rollout. Today,

only a third of Texans have contractors managing foster care services in their area. State officials estimate all regions will have a local contractor in 2029, more than a decade since the model was created.

DFPS officials insist they're committed to community-based care. The transition does require extra contractual and financial expertise, DFPS Commissioner Stephanie Muth told lawmakers earlier this year.

Community-based care was presented as a cost-neutral solution for the state, but it hasn't played out that way. The cost of services has exceeded state payments, forcing contractors to look externally for funding.

To come up with a formula on what to pay contractors, the state relied

on decades-old data, which they say doesn't accurately reflect the cost and staff time needed to provide care.

Still, reimbursement rates have made providers unsure about jumping into this new model. When DFPS tried to roll out the model in the Midland area, no providers wanted to become the lead contractor.

In Fort Worth, ACH Child and Family Services CEO Wayne Carson described an inefficient process to comply with new training requirements. Staff have had to often repeat training so it is marked as completed in DFPS's system.

In response to the criticism, DFPS implemented a streamlined process for policy waivers.

"It's nerve-wracking, if you've invested in the state pension system, to walk away from that," said Myko Gedutis, an organizer with the Texas State Employees Union.

Questions persist about how the state will take accountability if problems emerge with a contractor.

"It's nerve-wracking, if you've invested in the state pension system, to walk away from that."

MYKO GEDUTIS, UNION ORGANIZER

Murdaugh arraigned in S.C.

Convicted murderer may switch plea to guilty

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Alex Murdaugh was arraigned Wednesday on federal money laundering and wire fraud charges for indictments saying he stole money from his clients, and although he pleaded not guilty for now, his lawyer said that might change soon.

Murdaugh is already serving a life sentence in a South Carolina state prison for killing his wife and son, and the details of the 22 financial charges are not new.

State prosecutors have indicted him on similar charges, saying he diverted money to his own bank accounts that was meant for clients and a wrongful death settlement for his family's longtime housekeeper who fell at Murdaugh's home.

Murdaugh's lawyers said in a statement last week the former attorney has been cooperating with federal investigators, and they anticipated the latest charges would be "quickly resolved without a trial."

A federal guilty plea to the charges that can mean decades in prison would guarantee a long time behind bars for Murdaugh even if his pending appeal of his double murder conviction is successful.

Murdaugh took the stand at his murder trial earlier this year to repeatedly deny shooting his son, Paul, 22, and wife, Maggie, 52, at their home. Prosecutors said he decided to kill them because his millions of dollars of theft were about to be discovered, and he was hoping their deaths would buy him sympathy and time to figure out a cover-up.

Murdaugh, who turned 55 in protective custody Saturday, also faces



GRACE BEAHM ALFORD / THE POST AND COURIER VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS, FILE

Defendant Alex Murdaugh gives a testimony during his murder trial at the Colleton County Courthouse in Walterboro, South Carolina, on Feb. 23. The convicted murderer Murdaugh is facing federal charges for the first time after being indicted on 22 financial fraud charges related to schemes the former attorney used to steal settlement money from clients.

around 100 other state charges, including stealing from clients and his family's law firm, insurance fraud and tax evasion.

Prosecutors, Murdaugh's attorneys and state Judge Clifton Newman, who presided over the murder trial, are trying to find court time to try at least some of those charges before Newman has to retire because of his age Dec. 31.

In federal court, Murdaugh faces 14 counts of money laundering, five counts of wire fraud, one count of bank fraud, one count of conspiracy

to commit wire fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and bank fraud.

Cory Fleming — an old college roommate and godfather to one of his sons — pleaded guilty last week to conspiracy to commit wire fraud for his part in helping Murdaugh steal more than \$4 million in wrongful-death settlements with insurers meant for the family of his longtime housekeeper Gloria Satterfield.

The other allegations prosecutors detail in Murdaugh's federal indict-

ments already have been revealed in state legal papers.

Murdaugh and banker friend Russell Laffitte worked together to take settlement money out of clients' accounts, prosecutors said. Laffitte was convicted of six wire and bank fraud charges in November.

Other federal indictments give detailed allegations of how Murdaugh created a bank account that had a similar name to a legitimate company that handled settlements to steal money from clients.

Amazon's climate goals protested

ED KOMENDA
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Telling executives to "strive harder," hundreds of corporate Amazon workers protested what they decried as the company's lack of progress on climate goals and an inequitable return-to-office mandate during a lunchtime demonstration at its Seattle headquarters Wednesday.

The protest came a week after Amazon's annual shareholder meeting and a month after a policy took effect returning workers to the office three days per week. Previously, team leaders were allowed to determine how their charges worked.

The employees chanted their disappointment with the pace of the company's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint — "Emissions climbing, time to act" — and urged Amazon to return authority to team leaders when it comes to work location.

Wearing a black pirate hat and red coat, quality assurance engineer Church Hindley said working from home allowed him to live a better, healthier life.

"I refuse to just sit idly by while mandates are dictated from above down that don't make sense and hurt the planet, hurt families and individual lives," Hindley said. "And just to get us into a seat at the office for their tax incentives."

As of Wednesday morning, organizers estimated more than 1,900 employees pledged to walk out around the world, including about 900 in Seattle.

5 still missing, 3 under rubble after Iowa apartment collapse

SCOTT MCFETRIDGE, HANNAH FINGERHUT
AND ERIN HOOLEY
Associated Press

DAVENPORT, Iowa — Five residents of a six-story apartment building that partially collapsed in eastern Iowa remained unaccounted for Tuesday, and authorities feared at least two of them might be stuck inside rubble that was too dangerous to search.

The three other missing residents aren't believed to have been in the building when it started collapsing Sunday evening, state Rep. Monica Kurth said. Mayor Mike Matson confirmed that not all the residents were accounted for.

A group of protesters held signs and chanted near the building Tuesday, arguing the city was moving too quickly toward demolishing the 116-year-old structure. Built as a hotel, it had been used as apartments, and tenants had been allowed to remain even as bricks began falling from the building. After the partial collapse, the city announced plans to begin demolishing the remains of the structure as early as Tuesday morning, but they delayed after a woman was found Monday evening.

Officials now say immediate demolition was never intended, but they wanted to quickly stage the site for demolition. The woman's rescue prompted officials to see if they could safely enter and ensure others weren't inside, but that is difficult when the building could collapse at any time, they said. City officials are trying to determine how to bring down what remains of the building while maintaining the dignity of people who may have been killed, Matson said.

Later Tuesday, there were no signs that authorities conducted a search. About 50 people gathered outside a perimeter of fencing and police tape. A candlelight vigil included five minutes of silence in honor of the five people missing.

Fire Marshal James Morris said explosives won't be used

on the building, which is near other structures and is "unstable." Removing the debris that is propping up the rest of the building could cause further collapse, he said.

"We're very sympathetic to the possibility that there's two people" still left inside, Morris said, fighting back tears.

He said there will be an investigation into what caused the collapse but that it's unclear so far whether a criminal investigation is warranted. City officials sought to explain why Fire Chief Michael Carlsten said Monday morning that "no known individuals are trapped." They also had issued a statement that the owner had been served with a demolition order and the process would begin Tuesday morning.

The discovery of another survivor Monday, rescued by ladder truck from a fourth-floor window, prompted the city to reevaluate, officials said Tuesday. The woman was pulled to safety only after popping out a window screen and waving to people gathered below.

"We had no indications from any of the responders that we had, any of the canines, any of the tools at the time" that there was anyone else left alive in the building, Morris said.

Patricia Brooks said her sister Lisa attempted to leave the building but rushed back to where she thought she could shelter most safely — in her bathtub. Brooks spoke with her sister when she was being evaluated at the hospital following rescue from a window on the side of the building that was still standing.

"It was just exhausting and a nightmare," Chicago resident Patricia Brooks said of the roughly 24 hours before Lisa's rescue. The family begged police and city officials to find Lisa in the apartment starting Sunday, daughter Porshia Brooks said.

"They allegedly did a sweep and said they didn't find anybody," Porshia Brooks of Moline, Illinois, said. "They're trying to tear the building down without doing a proper sweep."



NIKOS FRAZIER / QUAD CITY TIMES VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Emergency crews view the scene of a partial building collapse Sunday in Davenport, Iowa, where five people are missing.

Automatic braking soon to be required in vehicles

TOM KRISHER
AND ASHRAF KHALIL
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. government auto safety agency plans to require that all new passenger cars and light trucks include potentially life-saving automatic emergency braking and meet stricter safety standards within three years.

Wednesday's announcement by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration represents the agency's latest move toward regulating electronic systems that take on certain tasks that drivers themselves have normally done.

NHTSA officials have been reluctant to impose such regulations, saying the technology will change during the time it takes to enact new rules. Ann Carlson, the safety agency's chief counsel, said 90% of new passenger vehicles already include the braking technology under a voluntary program that automakers approved,

but NHTSA officials want to make the braking systems more effective at higher speeds and better at avoiding pedestrians, especially at night.

The regulation proposed by the NHTSA will require, for example, that the systems allow vehicles to fully avoid other vehicles at up to 50 mph if a driver should fail to react. If a driver brakes some but not enough to stop a collision, the system would have to avoid hitting another vehicle at up to 62 mph.

"With this proposal, we could change a high-speed crash from a deadly one to a lower-speed crash with minor injuries or just property damage," Carlson said.

The regulations will undergo a 60-day public comment period before the NHTSA will decide on a final version.

The technology is expected to reduce rear-end crashes dramatically, saving at least an estimated 360 lives per year. It also will cut injuries by at least 24,000 annually, according to the NHTSA's estimates, and reduce property damage. Transportation Department officials called the proposal an important step in the broader goal of reducing roadway deaths.

Though the number of people killed on U.S. roadways declined slightly last year, NHTSA officials said the 42,795 who died still represented a national crisis. Traffic deaths did slow slightly

in the fourth quarter of last year, but the pace was still close to the 2021 numbers, the highest in 16 years.

The NHTSA is responding to rules approved by Congress in 2021 to require automakers to equip new passenger vehicles with automatic braking and other technology. Automatic emergency braking can detect objects in the way and stop or slow a vehicle, thereby preventing a crash or making it less severe.

Carlson said the new rule will require braking systems to spot pedestrians in the dark to potentially save lives.

Pedestrian deaths are up 53% nationwide in the past decade, and roughly two-thirds occur when someone is struck by the front of a passenger vehicle. All cars would be required to stop and avoid hitting a pedestrian at up to 37 mph.

Officials said many systems automakers are installing will have to be improved to make them more effective in darkness.

BRIEFS

Pence to announce presidential campaign

NEW YORK — Former Vice President Mike Pence will launch his campaign for the Republican nomination for president June 7 in Iowa, according to two people familiar with his plans who spoke on condition of anonymity to share details ahead of the official announcement.

His team sees early-voting Iowa as critical to his potential path to victory, and advisers say he plans to campaign aggressively for the conservative, evangelical Christian voters who make up a substantial portion of the state's Republican electorate.

The week will be a busy one for GOP announcements. Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie is planning to launch his campaign Tuesday at a town hall event in New Hampshire, and North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum will announce June 7 in Fargo.

Body of doctor found in lake with apparent gunshot

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — A missing emergency room doctor from Missouri was found dead in Arkansas from an apparent gunshot wound, authorities confirmed Wednesday, but they're still investigating what happened in the week since he was last seen.

A kayaker discovered the body of Dr. John Forsyth, 49, on Tuesday in Beaver Lake, a large reservoir in Northwest Arkansas, a Benton County Sheriff's Office spokesperson said. No further information would be released, authorities said, and they didn't specify if he was shot by someone else or if the wound was self-inflicted.

The doctor's unlocked vehicle with his wallet, two phones, a laptop and other items were found Sunday near a city-run public pool in Cassville, the town in the Missouri Ozarks where he worked, his brother Richard Forsyth said. The body was found at a location about 20 miles away, Arkansas authorities say.

Cassville is about 200 miles south of Kansas City.

6-term Utah Republican resigning from Congress

SALT LAKE CITY — U.S. Rep. Chris Stewart announced plans to resign his Utah seat Wednesday due to his wife's illness, triggering a special election to replace him in a reliably Republican district.

The six-term Utah Republican didn't offer details about his wife's illness or indicate when he planned to vacate his seat but said in the statement he planned to retire after an "orderly" transition.

Stewart's departure isn't expected to affect House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's ability to steer a tight Republican majority. Stewart defeated a Democratic challenger by more than 30 percentage points in 2022.

According to Utah law, Gov. Spencer Cox has seven days to lay out an election schedule to replace Stewart. Candidates need to have at least 90 days to campaign under state law.

NASA: No non-Earth life associated with UFOs

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA held its first public meeting on UFOs on Wednesday, a year after launching a study into unexplained sightings, and insisted it's not hiding anything.

The space agency televised the four-hour hearing featuring an independent panel of experts who vowed to be transparent. The team includes 16 scientists and other experts selected by NASA.

"I want to emphasize this loud and proud: There is absolutely no convincing evidence for extraterrestrial life associated with unidentified objects, NASA's Dan Evans said after the meeting.

NASA launched the study to probe what it calls UAPs — short for unexplained anomalous phenomena — in the sky, in space or under the sea.

The group is looking at what unclassified information is available on the subject and how much more is needed to understand what's going on in the sky, astrophysicist David Spergel, the committee's chair, said.

No secret military data is included, such as anything surrounding the suspected spy balloons from China spotted flying over the U.S. earlier this year.

A final report is expected by the end of July.

Al Pacino, 83, expecting baby with 29-year-old

NEW YORK — Eighty-three-year-old Al Pacino is expecting a baby with girlfriend Noor Alfallah, 29, the actor's representative confirmed Wednesday.

Stan Rosenfield, Pacino's publicist, verified the news first published by TMZ but said there would be no statement at this time. The baby would be Pacino's fourth child.

Pacino and Alfallah reportedly began dating last year. Alfallah describes herself as a "raconteur" on her Instagram page, and her IMDb page notes that she's a producer on two movies currently in post-production, including the Pacino-starrer "Billy Knight."

Pacino's baby news follows closely on the heels of longtime friend and fellow actor Robert De Niro's own announcement. A representative for the 79-year-old actor confirmed earlier this month that De Niro had become a father for the seventh time, but few other details — including the identity of the mother — were released.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

INTERNATIONAL

Mexican mayor cleared of student kidnapping charge

MEXICO CITY — José Luis Abarca, the former mayor of a southern Mexico town where 43 students were abducted and disappeared in 2014, has been cleared of a kidnapping charge in the case, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador confirmed Wednesday.

Abarca, who will remain in prison for other crimes, had been considered a key figure in the students' disappearances. More than eight years later, only small bone fragments of three of the students have been recovered and positively identified.

While the motive remains unclear, investigators have shown that local, state and federal authorities, including the military, were involved, as well as members of the Guerreros Unidos organized crime gang. A theory that Abarca ordered their abduction for political reasons was discarded; a leading hypothesis now is that the killings were somehow connected to heroin trafficking in the area.

López Obrador said Wednesday, "We continue the investigation and we are not going to fail to keep our promise" to arrive at the truth.

Marineland charged for black bear mistreatment

NIAGARA FALLS, Ontario — Ontario charged the Niagara Falls, Ontario, tourist attraction Marineland over the care of its black bears on Tuesday.

Brent Ross, a spokesperson for the Ministry of the Solicitor, said the charges have been laid under a section of the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act that allows an inspector to issue an order to help animals that may be in distress.

Marineland has previously said it treats all its animals well and exceeds the standards of care as prescribed under the law.

In 2016, Marineland was charged with one count of failing to comply with the prescribed standards of care for about 35 American black bears, including failing to provide them adequate and food and water.

The prosecution later dropped the charges, saying there was no reasonable chance for a conviction.

Fermented porridge kills family of 13 in Namibia

WINDHOEK, Namibia — Thirteen members of the same family have died in Namibia after eating porridge that authorities believe became toxic when it was mixed with a fermented substance left over from a homemade alcoholic beverage, the state broadcaster reported.

The incident occurred in the Kavango East region in the far northeast part of the country.

The Namibian Broadcasting Corporation said another four people are in critical condition in the hospital. NBC, quoting the Namibian health ministry, said at least 20 people consumed the "poisonous or toxic" porridge after it was mixed with sediment from a homemade beer.

The victims ranged in age from 2 to 33.

Canada's coastal fire still burning after 4 days

HALIFAX, Nova Scotia — An unprecedented string of wildfires in Canada's Atlantic coast province of Nova Scotia continued to burn out of control for a fourth day on Wednesday.

David Meldrum, Halifax deputy fire chief, made it clear that none of the 16,000 evacuees from the suburbs around Halifax will be able to return home for now.

Fire officials say an estimated 200 structures, including 151 homes, have been destroyed since the fire started in the Upper Tantallon area Sunday afternoon. No deaths or injuries have been reported.

"There are properties that are unharmed close to properties that are destroyed," Meldrum said. "It's terrible to see. These are people's homes."

Meldrum said the 3.2-square mile fire could flare up again in the warmer-than-usual weather. Wind gusts from the southwest were expected to reach 15 mph.

Russian athletes' return to Olympics remains in doubt

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — Complex questions about if — and how — Russian athletes could return to their competitions ahead of the 2024 Paris Olympics looked far from being resolved when sports governing bodies met Wednesday.

The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations annual meeting came two months after the International Olympic Committee gave detailed advice on how individual athletes from Russia and its military ally Belarus could be reintegrated as neutral athletes, despite those countries' ongoing war on Ukraine.

The IOC in March advised that some Russians and Belarusians could return in individual events but not team sports, if they had not actively supported the war in Ukraine and are not contracted to "military or national security agencies."

The IOC led calls within days of the invasion of Ukraine in February of last year to banish Russia from international sport, including to protect the security of athletes.

As the war continued, the IOC started to suggest it was discrimination to exclude all Russians and Belarusians. If approved to compete, the IOC said, Russians and Belarusians would not be allowed to use their flag, anthem or uniforms in national colors.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

North Korea spy satellite launch fails

HYUNG-JIN KIM AND KIM TONG-HYUNG
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's attempt to put its first spy satellite into space failed Wednesday, a setback to leader Kim Jong Un's push to boost his military capabilities as tensions with the United States and South Korea rise.

After an unusually quick admission of failure, North Korea vowed to conduct a second launch after it learns what went wrong. It suggests Kim remains determined to expand his weapons arsenal and apply more pressure on Washington and Seoul while diplomacy is stalled.

South Korea and Japan briefly urged residents in some areas to take shelter after the launch.

A satellite launch by North Korea is a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban the country from conducting any launch based

on ballistic technology. North Korean long-range missile tests in recent years demonstrated a potential to reach all of the continental U.S., but outside experts say the North still has some work to do to develop functioning nuclear missiles.

The newly developed Chollima-1 rocket was launched at 6:37 a.m. at the North's Sohae Satellite Launching Ground in the northwest, carrying the Mallyong-1 satellite.

South Korea's military said the rocket had "an abnormal flight" before it fell in the water off the western shore of the Korean Peninsula. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters that no object was believed to have reached space.

The U.N. imposed economic sanctions on North Korea over its previous satellite and ballistic missile launches but has not responded to recent tests because China and Russia have

blocked attempts to toughen the sanctions.

Seoul's military said it boosted military readiness in coordination with the United States, and Japan said it was prepared to respond to any emergency. The U.S. said it will take all necessary measures to ensure the security of the American homeland and the defense of South Korea and Japan.

On Tuesday, Ri Pyong Chol, a top North Korean official, said the North needs a space-based reconnaissance system to counter escalating security threats from South Korea and the United States.

However, the spy satellite shown earlier in the country's state-run media didn't appear to be sophisticated enough to produce high-resolution imagery. Some outside experts said it may be able to detect troop movements and large targets such as warships and warplanes.

With three to five spy satellites, North Korea could build a space-based surveillance system that allows it to monitor the Korean Peninsula in near real-time, according to Lee Choon Geun, an honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

The satellite is one of several high-tech weapons systems that Kim has publicly vowed to introduce.

After repeated failures, North Korea successfully put its first satellite into orbit in 2012 and a second one in 2016. The government said both are Earth observation satellites launched under its peaceful space development program, but many foreign experts believe both were developed to spy on rivals.

Observers say there has been no evidence that the satellites have ever transmitted imagery back to North Korea.

'ACCOUNTABLE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE'



JONAS EKSTRÖMER

Margrethe Vestager, executive vice president for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age and Competition, left, shakes hands with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a stakeholder event in connection to the Trade and Technology Council meeting between Europe and the United States in Lulea, Sweden, on Wednesday.

AI code of conduct in motion
US, EU consider posed risks, seek regulation

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — The U.S. and Europe are drawing up a voluntary code of conduct for artificial intelligence, a top European Union official said Wednesday, as the developing technology triggers warnings about the risks it poses to humanity and growing calls for regulation.

The voluntary code would bridge the gap while the EU works on groundbreaking AI rules that won't take effect for up to three years, European Commission Vice President Margrethe Vestager said at a meeting

of the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council, which is jointly led by American and European officials.

At a press conference after the council's meeting in Sweden, she said officials will seek feedback from industry players, invite parties to sign up and promised a final proposal "very, very soon."

The breathtaking rise of generative AI systems such as ChatGPT has dazzled users while stirring fears about the risks they pose, setting off a global debate about how to design guardrails for the technology.

Scientists and tech leaders warned

that mitigating AI risks should be a global priority because the technology could lead to human extinction, according to a statement posted online Tuesday and signed by hundreds of experts.

Sam Altman, CEO of ChatGPT maker OpenAI, signed that statement and has suggested that AI should be regulated by a U.S. or international agency.

The EU is at the forefront of the global movement to regulate AI with its sweeping AI Act. The legislation is set for final negotiations, with political approval expected by year's end.

Canada to mark individual cigs

ROB GILLIES
Associated Press

TORONTO — Canada will soon become the first country in the world where warning labels must appear on individual cigarettes.

The move was first announced last year by Health Canada and is aimed at helping people quit the habit. The regulations take effect Aug. 1 and will be phased in. King-size cigarettes will be the first to feature the warnings and will be sold in stores by the end of July 2024, followed by regular-size cigarettes, and little cigars with tipping paper and tubes by the end of April 2025.

"This bold step will make health warning messages virtually unavoidable," Mental Health and Addictions Minister Carolyn Bennett said

This bold step
will make
health warning
messages virtually
unavoidable

CAROLYN BENNETT

Wednesday.

The warnings — in English and French — include "poison in every puff," "tobacco smoke harms children" and "cigarettes cause impotence."

Health Canada said the strategy aims to reduce tobacco use below

5% by 2035. New regulations also strengthen health-related graphic images displayed on tobacco packages.

Bennett's statement said tobacco use kills 48,000 Canadians every year.

Doug Roth, CEO of the Heart & Stroke charity, said the bold measure will ensure dangers to lung health cannot be missed.

The Canadian Cancer Society said the measure will reduce smoking and the appeal of cigarettes, preventing cancer and other diseases.

Rob Cunningham, senior policy analyst at the Canadian Cancer Society, said health messaging will be conveyed in every puff and during every smoke break. Canada, he added, will have the best tobacco health-warning system in the world.

Pope demands answers after priest's \$17M transfer

NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — The former monastery on a quiet residential street in Rome once sheltered Jews fleeing deportation during World War II. Purchased by the Vatican in 2021 as a dormitory for foreign nuns studying at Rome's pontifical universities, the building now stands empty, a collateral victim of the latest financial scandal to hit the Holy See.

Pope Francis has asked aides to get to the bottom of how at least \$17 million, including money to refurbish the dorm, was transferred from the Vatican's U.S.-based missionary fundraising coffers into an impact investing vehicle run by a priest. Two years later, the U.S. fundraiser says the money is gone, and the monastery is shuttered. Its renovation is tied up in bureaucratic red tape, while the nuns studying in Rome are still housed at a convent a 90-minute commute away.

The story of what happened to the money is one that has vexed Vatican officials on both sides of the



ALESSANDRA TARANTINO

This former monastery in Rome Monday once sheltered Jews fleeing deportation in World War II and was purchased by the Vatican in 2021.

Atlantic, all the more because the transfers appear entirely legal. But they have nevertheless prompted the new leadership of the Vatican's missionary fundraising operation in the U.S., the Pontifical Mission Societies, to replace the staff and board of directors

who approved them and overhaul its bylaws and statutes to make sure nothing like this happens again.

And for now, the organization known as TPMS-US has written off \$10.2 million of the total transferred as a loss since "there is no timeline and no guarantee of investment return," according to its latest audited financial statement.

The money was transferred from TPMS-US into a New York-based nonprofit, Missio Corp., and its private equity fund, MISIF LLC, both of which were created by the Rev. Andrew Small while he was the national director of TPMS-US. Both financial vehicles aim to raise capital to provide low-interest loans and investments to church-run farming initiatives in Africa. MISIF LLC is known as an impact investing fund because it seeks to do social good as well as provide a financial return.

"The Holy See is aware of the situation and is currently looking into the details of the events," Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said in a statement to AP.

Over 60 Sudan children die in orphanage

SAMY MAGDY
Associated Press

CAIRO — At least 60 infants, toddlers and older children perished over the past six weeks while trapped in harrowing conditions in an orphanage in Sudan's capital as fighting raged outside. Most died from lack of food and from fever.

The extent of the children's suffering emerged from interviews with more than a dozen doctors, volunteers, health officials and workers at the Al-Mayqoma orphanage.

Video taken by orphanage workers shows bodies of children tightly bundled in white sheets awaiting burial.

In other footage, two dozen toddlers wearing diapers sit on the floor of a room, many of them wailing, as a woman carries two metal jugs of water.

Another woman sits on the floor with her back to the camera, rocking back and forth and apparently cradling a child.

An orphanage worker later explained that the toddlers were moved to the large room after nearby shelling blanketed another part of the facility with heavy dust last week.

"It is a catastrophic situation," Afkar Omar Moustafa, a volunteer at the orphanage, said in a phone interview. "This was something we expected from day one (of the fighting)."

Among the dead were babies as young as three months, according to death certificates as well as four orphanage officials and workers for charities now helping the facility.

The weekend was particularly deadly, with 14 children perishing on Friday and 12 on Saturday.

This raised alarm and outrage across social media, and a local charity was able to deliver food, medicine and baby formula to the orphanage Sunday, with the help of the U.N. children's agency, UNICEF, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Orphanage workers warned that more children could die, and called for their speedy evacuation out of war-torn Khartoum.

The battle for control of Sudan erupted April 15, pitting the Sudanese military, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces commanded by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

The fighting has turned Khartoum and other urban areas into battlefields. Many houses and civilian infrastructure have been looted or have been damaged by stray shells and bullets.

The fighting has inflicted a heavy toll on civilians, particularly children. More than 860 civilians, including at least 190 children, were killed and thousands of others were wounded since April 15, according to Sudan's Doctor's Syndicate which tracks civilian casualties. The tally is likely to be much higher.



CARLOS OSORIO / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bernice Ringo wipes her eye during an interview March 28 in Detroit. Ringo had plans to move to Alabama with her son to get him away from the crime she had feared most of his life. But those plans crumbled in 2019 when Natalian, 23, was fatally shot while sitting in his parked car. Ringo's application for compensation was ultimately denied because police believed her son had contributed to his own murder.

MAKING PROGRESS

Rise in victim compensation reforms

New laws aim to close loopholes

CLAUDIA LAUER AND MIKE CATALINI
Associated Press

Vanessa Martinez was finishing preparations for her daughter's second birthday in September 2021 when her ex-boyfriend broke into her Mesa, Arizona, condo and shot her in the head as she frantically tried to shield their three young children.

Doctors had to remove a third of her skull, but Martinez survived. She left the hospital facing a fight for custody of her kids, who'd been placed in state care after the attack. She needed a new place to live after much of the house was damaged in a standoff between police and her shooter. Her 4-year-old son needed trauma counseling.

Arizona has a state safety net — local victim compensation programs — for victims of violent attacks like Martinez. But she was denied help because she was behind on about \$900 in court fines from unrelated incidents. Program officials told Martinez she could reapply if she got current with a payment plan, but every dollar

she made was needed for things like after-school day care, buying scrubs for her home-care job, finding a new home — and the list grows.

Across the country, victims like Martinez are using their stories to advocate for changes to state victim compensation programs, where thousands of crime survivors turn for help with medical bills, relocation, funerals or other expenses.

The programs disburse millions of dollars each year, but The Associated Press found racial inequities and other barriers in how claims are denied in many states.

Crime survivors have organized rallies, testified at legislatures and met with dozens of lawmakers — with much success.

Legislatures in more than half of U.S. states have passed measures to improve their programs in recent years. The changes vary widely: A victim's criminal history is no longer an automatic disqualifier in Illinois. The time limit to apply for help was increased from three to seven years in California.

States have also cut back on their denials to families based on the behavior of homicide victims and loosened requirements that crime victims must have cooperated with or reported the crime to police.

In Texas, failure to cooperate cannot be used to deny benefits if a victim does not talk to police at a crime scene or hospital.

In Ohio, denials are no longer automatic for crime victims who have felony convictions or for surviving family members if a murder victim had drugs in their system.

Those reasons were used to deny aid for a handful of victims in the 2019 mass shooting at a Dayton bar where nine people were killed and 17 others wounded.

Dion Green was at Ned Peppers Bar that night with his father, Derrick Fudge, who was killed. Green helped fight for the changes to Ohio's program after being denied help because his father had an almost 10-year-old felony conviction.

"I told them that I miss my father every day, but the survivors, the people left here, are the ones still moving through their pain," Green said.

Green recently helped a woman who had lost her children's father to gun violence start the compensation process by contacting a county representative.

The woman was initially turned away because the victim had a felony record, but Green helped her inform the official of the 2021 law change.

"It's the awareness part. People inside and outside the program need to know," Green said.

Christelle Perez sought an immediate attitude shift among staff when she took over as chief of the Illinois Crime Victims Compensation Bureau in May 2021. She wanted to stop decades of autopilot denials from holding up recently passed reforms.

"There was this culture of 'How can we deny a claim?' because that's what the staff were instructed to do," Perez said. "I met with the staff and I told them that we are a service organization and it is our job to serve."

Lenore Anderson, president and co-founder of the Alliance for Safety and Justice, which organizes victims to advocate for criminal justice reforms, has pushed program administrators for years to shift their focus from eligibility requirements to victim needs.

"It feels so obvious that the very least we can do when someone is hurt by crime and violence is ask, 'What do you need?' And the fact that that is completely counter to how these bureaucratic systems operate is shocking," she said.

Some victims advocates want the federal office to mandate changes to all programs as a condition for receiving federal funds to address programs that dole out inconsistent decisions.

The U.S. Office for Victims of Crime is in the process of overhauling compensation guidelines for the first time since 2001 with an "emphasis on equity and addressing programmatic barriers," according to an emailed statement from the department. But it's unclear how much of that new guidance will be

mandatory.

At the state level, hundreds of advocacy organizations are working for reforms, and Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice is one of the largest with over 100,000 members. Bernice "Tammi" Ringo is one of them.

After a lifetime living around Detroit, Ringo, 64, had plans to move to Alabama with her 23-year-old son Natalian to get him away from the crime she had feared most of his life. Those plans were shattered in 2019, when Natalian was fatally shot while sitting in his parked car in an enclave of Detroit.

Ringo applied for funeral and counseling aid but was denied because the program said she could rely on life insurance instead.

She appealed, but the program denied her again, saying her son had committed misconduct related to his own killing.

Overwhelmed with grief, Ringo later spoke before the Michigan Legislature about the trauma of being told her son had somehow caused his murder.

"They put me through more hell," she said of the program denial. After she and other victims testified, Michigan lawmakers passed legislation, set to go into effect in August, that makes numerous changes. These include increasing money available to victims, eliminating police reporting deadlines and expanding eligibility.

Data is not available for the handful of states that passed recent sweeping reforms. But New Jersey, which overhauled its program rules in 2020, saw an immediate change.

In 2018 and 2019, Black victims in New Jersey accounted for about 44% of applications but received nearly 60% of the denials, according to data obtained by the AP. After the overhaul, that disparity dwindled, and by 2021 it had disappeared.

Martinez hopes that speaking at rallies in support of a bill that would fund a pilot trauma-recovery center in Arizona will lead to more people getting help. The model moves money to victims faster and has fewer restrictions, like those that disqualified Martinez.

"I didn't really get any time to heal even emotionally from what happened," Martinez said. "But I really feel like this is my life's mission to get this changed."



CARLOS OSORIO / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bernice Ringo looks through photographs of her son Natalian on March 28 in Detroit. Ringo's testimony about her experience helped push Michigan lawmakers to increase eligibility and money available to victims.



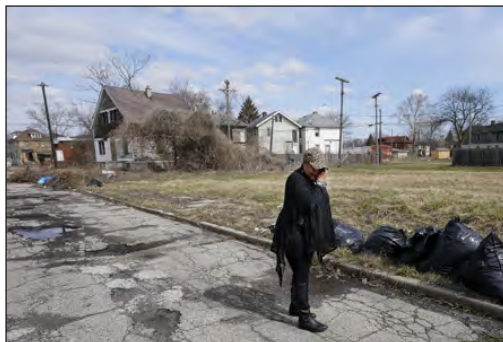
ASHLEY LANDIS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Vanessa Martinez helps her daughter, Janesa Wilford, 4, out of the car while dropping off her four children at day care on March 20 in Chandler, Arizona. Martinez's 4-year-old son needed trauma counseling after witnessing gun violence.



ASHLEY LANDIS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Vanessa Martinez was denied victim compensation due to unpaid court fines from unrelated incidents. Martinez was shot in the head while shielding her three young children from gun violence.



CARLOS OSORIO / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bernice Ringo tears up as she looks at the site where her son was fatally shot. Ringo became a member of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice after her compensation claims were denied.



GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Lenore Anderson is the president of the Alliance for Safety and Justice. The group has been a leader in organizing victims left out of compensation programs to advocate for state legislative changes.

RECENT STATE REFORMS

TEXAS Failure to cooperate cannot be used to deny compensation if a victim does not talk to police at the crime scene or hospital ■ **OKLAHOMA** Allows limited alternative to police reporting for sexual assault as long as a forensic sexual exam is completed within 120 hours. ■ **ARIZONA** One-time \$10 million allocation, and a promise for future infusions of \$2 million to the fund. ■ **KANSAS** Adds extra time to file for compensation for victims who have to testify at a sexually violent predator commitment, for victims who are notified there was a DNA match for their forensic exam, and for other victims of child sexual assaults.