

# Groton Daily Independent

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## UpComing Events

**Thursday, Jan. 27**

Basketball Doubleheader at Northwestern: Girls JV at 4 p.m. followed by Boys JV, Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity.

**Saturday, Jan. 29**

Groton Area Wrestling Tournament, 10 a.m.  
5 p.m.: Boys Basketball vs. Lennox at Madison

**Monday, Jan. 31**

Junior High Boys Basketball with Redfield at Groton. 7th at 4 p.m. followed by 8th grade game

**Tuesday, Feb. 1**

Boys Basketball hosts Langford Area with JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity

**Thursday, Feb. 3**

Basketball Doubleheader at Faulkton

**Friday, Feb. 4**

Wrestling triangular at Preshop

**Saturday, Feb. 5**

Girls basketball at Madison  
10 a.m.: Wrestling at Stanley County  
Boys Basketball with Clark/Willow Lake at Groton (7th grade at 4 p.m. followed by 8th grade, JV and Varsity).

**Monday, Feb. 7**

Junior High Boys Basketball at Aberdeen Christian.  
7th grade at 6 p.m. followed by 8th grade.

**Tuesday, Feb. 8**

Girls Basketball hosting Tiospa Zina with JV game at 6 p.m. followed by Varsity.

Boys Basketball vs. North Central at Edmunds Central with JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by Varsity.

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



**Thursday, Feb. 10**

Basketball Double Header at Milbank. 4 p.m.: Girls JV at elementary gym, Boys C game at Armory; 5 p.m.: Girls C game at elementary gym, Boys JV at Armory. 6:15 p.m.: Girls Varsity at HS Gym, 7:45 p.m. Boys Varsity at HS Gym.

**Friday, Feb. 11**

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

**Saturday, Feb. 12**

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

**Saturday, February 12, 2022**

9 a.m.: State Junior High Wrestling at Pierre  
Basketball Doubleheader with Mobridge-Pollock in Groton. Girls JV at 1 p.m. followed by Boys JV, Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity

**OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton**

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

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**King Air 350**

## **State Secures New Plane, Reverts Savings to General Fund**

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem announced that the state has taken possession of a 2015 King Air 350 after an extensive, nationwide search. Combined with the sale of two state-owned planes in 2021, the deal saved the State of South Dakota \$3.31 million compared to what had been budgeted. The savings will be reverted to the State General Fund.

“It’s our duty to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars, so my goal from the beginning was to purchase the best plane for the state’s needs at the most affordable cost. We achieved that,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “This plane is newer, safer, and will save the taxpayers money in the long run in maintenance costs.”

In 2021, the legislature appropriated \$5 million, plus the proceeds from the sales of the King Air 200 and one King Air 90, for the purchase of a new plane. The State retained the services of aircraft broker Verity Jet for \$195,000. The net proceeds from the two planes were as follows:

King Air 200: \$1.81 million (appraised for \$1.73 million)

King Air 90: \$1.24 million (appraised for \$1.12 million)

Despite having nearly \$8 million available for the purchase of a new plane, the Department of Transportation secured a much newer King Air 350, including all upgrades for just \$4.7 million, and the state took possession of that plane last week.

Additionally, purchasing a newer plane saved the state at least \$1.5 million in pending maintenance costs on the two planes that have been sold.

## Groton City Council Special Meeting Agenda

January 25, 2022 – 6:00pm  
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1  
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
3. Adjournment

## Groton Robotics Pancake Feed

Sponsored by Groton Lions Club

Sunday, January 30, 2022

10:00am-1:00pm

Groton Community Center



Pancakes, Sausage, Coffee, Milk and Juice will be served!

Free will donation!

Proceeds will go to Groton Robotics.

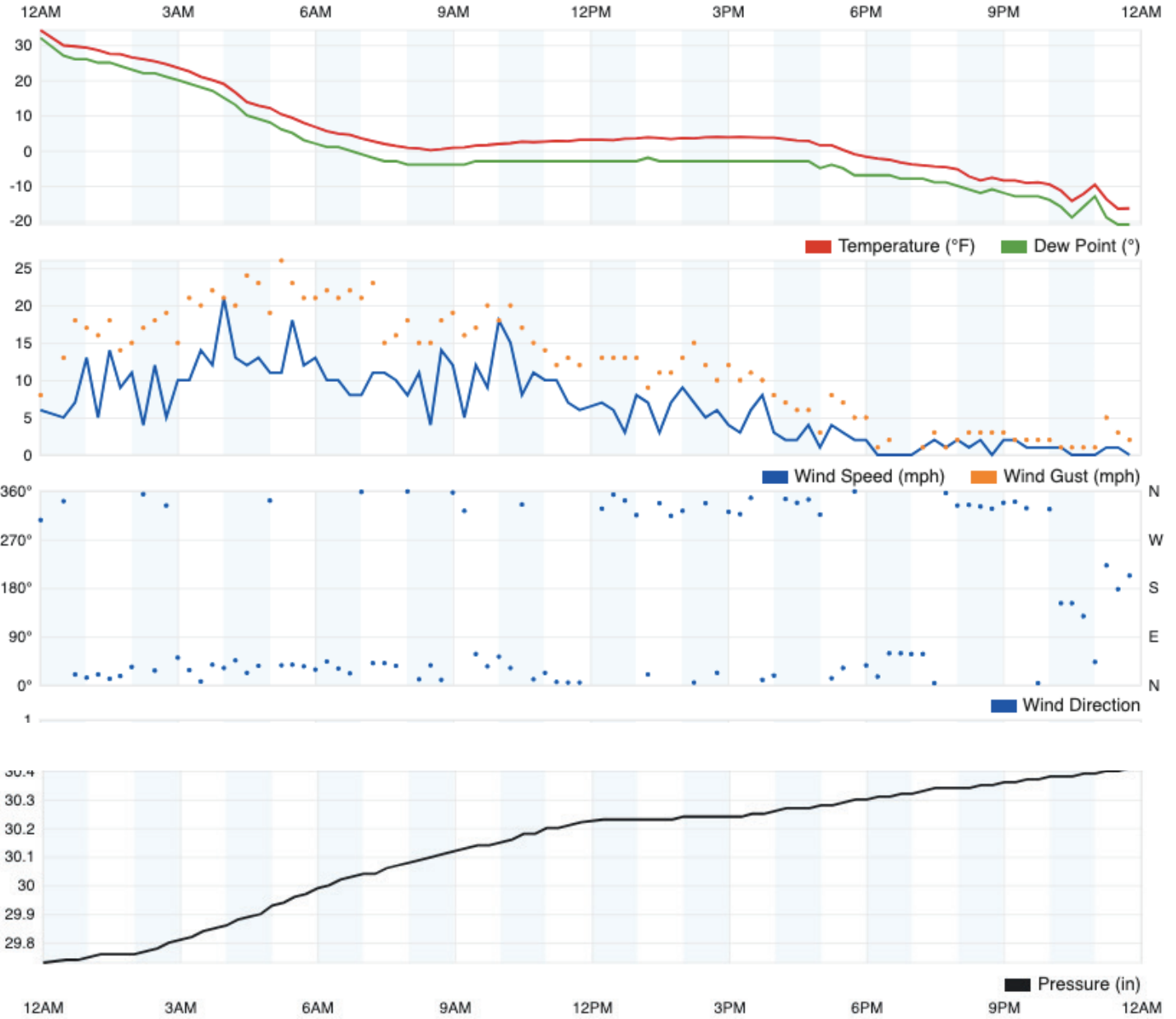


*Carnival of Silver Skates performing at 2pm & 6:30pm!*

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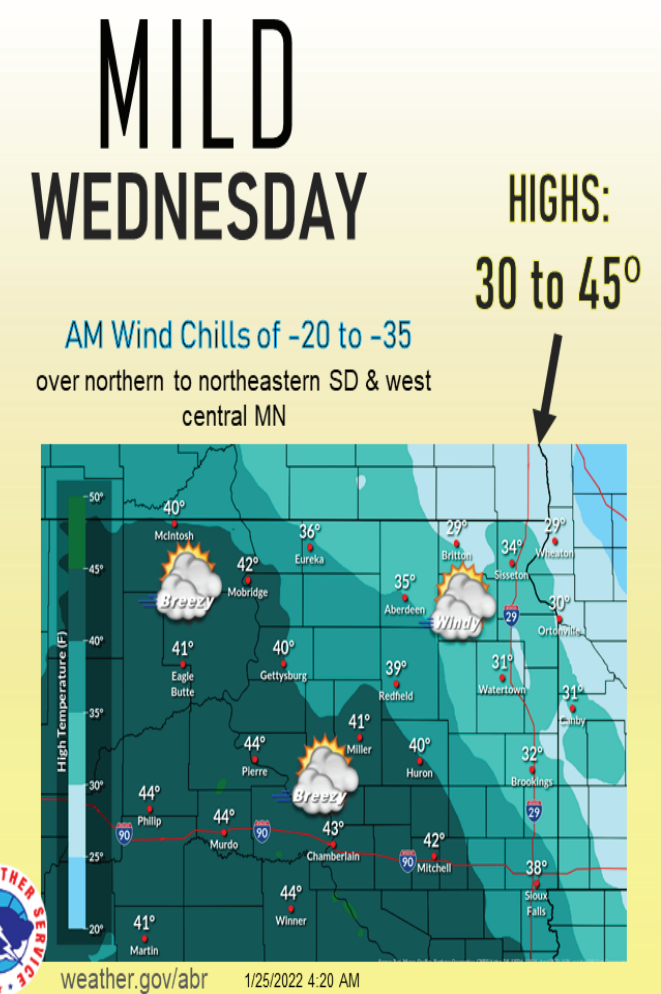
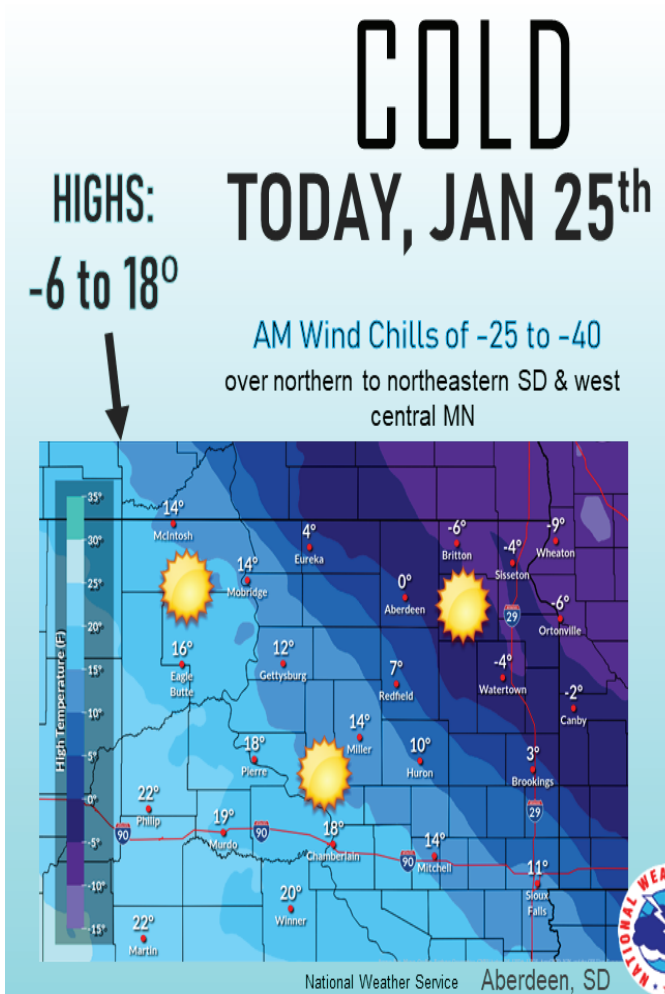
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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<p><b>Tuesday</b></p>  <p>Cold</p> <p>High: -1 °F</p>	<p><b>Wind Chill Advisory</b></p> <p><b>Tuesday Night</b></p>  <p>Mostly Clear</p> <p>Low: -12 °F↑</p>	<p><b>Wednesday</b></p>  <p>Partly Sunny and Breezy</p> <p>High: 34 °F</p>	<p><b>Wednesday Night</b></p>  <p>Mostly Cloudy</p> <p>Low: 16 °F</p>	<p><b>Thursday</b></p>  <p>20%</p> <p>Slight Chance Snow then Partly Sunny</p> <p>High: 22 °F</p>
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Bundle up both this morning and Wednesday morning, as bitterly cold wind chills are anticipated across portions of the area. The cold will be short-lived however, as the temperature rollercoaster continues - high temperatures will rebound 25 to 35 degrees from today into Wednesday thanks to increasing southerly winds on Wednesday (strongest across the Prairie Coteau). Dry meanwhile, with just a few light snow showers possible mainly Thursday morning.

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## Today in Weather History

January 25, 2010: A large upper-level low-pressure area combined with a cold surface high-pressure area building in from the north brought light snow and extreme winds creating widespread blizzard conditions across north-central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 1 to 4 inches combined with north winds of 25 to 40 mph gusting up to 55 mph, created frequent whiteout conditions across the area. Travel was significantly affected or halted, and several schools were closed. Interstate-29 was closed from the North Dakota border and south on the 25th until the morning of the 26th. The blizzard hampered efforts to restore power to the thousands of customers from the previous winter storm. The snowfall began in the morning hours from 6 to 10 am and ended when the blizzard conditions subsided.

1821: The Hudson River was frozen solid amid the coldest winter in forty-one years. Thousands of persons crossed the ice from New York City to New Jersey, and refreshment taverns were set up in the middle of the river to warm pedestrians.

1837 - At 7 PM a display of the Northern Lights danced above Burlington, VT. Its light was equal to the full moon. Snow and other objects reflecting the light were deeply tinged with a blood red hue. Blue, yellow and white streamers were also noted. (The Weather Channel)

1937: Las Vegas, Nevada dropped to 8 degrees above zero, setting a record low for the city.

1949: Las Vegas, Nevada, recorded 4.7 inches of snow. This brought the monthly snowfall total to 16.7 inches which still ranks as their snowiest month on record.

1965 - Alta, UT, was in the midst of a storm that left the town buried under 105 inches of snow establishing a record for the state. (David Ludlum)

1987 - The second major storm in three days hit the Eastern Seaboard producing up to 15 inches of snow in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. Up to 30 inches of snow covered the ground in Virginia following the two storms. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High winds created blizzard conditions in the mountains of Colorado. Winds gusted to 109 mph at Echo Lake, and a wind gust to 193 mph was reported atop Mount Evans. A "nor'easter" moving up the Atlantic Coast spread heavy snow from the Carolinas to New England, with as much as 16 inches reported in the Poconos of eastern Pennsylvania. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Bitter cold air, coming down from Alaska, settled over the Northern Rockies. Wilson WY reported a morning low of 48 degrees below zero. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. One thunderstorm in north central Texas spawned a tornado which injured three persons at Troy. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Low pressure developed explosively over east central Missouri and moved into Lower Michigan producing high winds and heavy snow across parts of Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. Wind gusts to 60 mph and up to a foot of snow created near blizzard conditions in southeastern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Wind gusts in Indiana reached 76 mph at Wabash. Thunderstorms associated with the storm produced wind gusts to 54 mph at Fort Madison IA. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2000 - Heavy snow fell from the Carolinas to New England, with up to 20 inches of snow and five deaths reported. (NCDC)

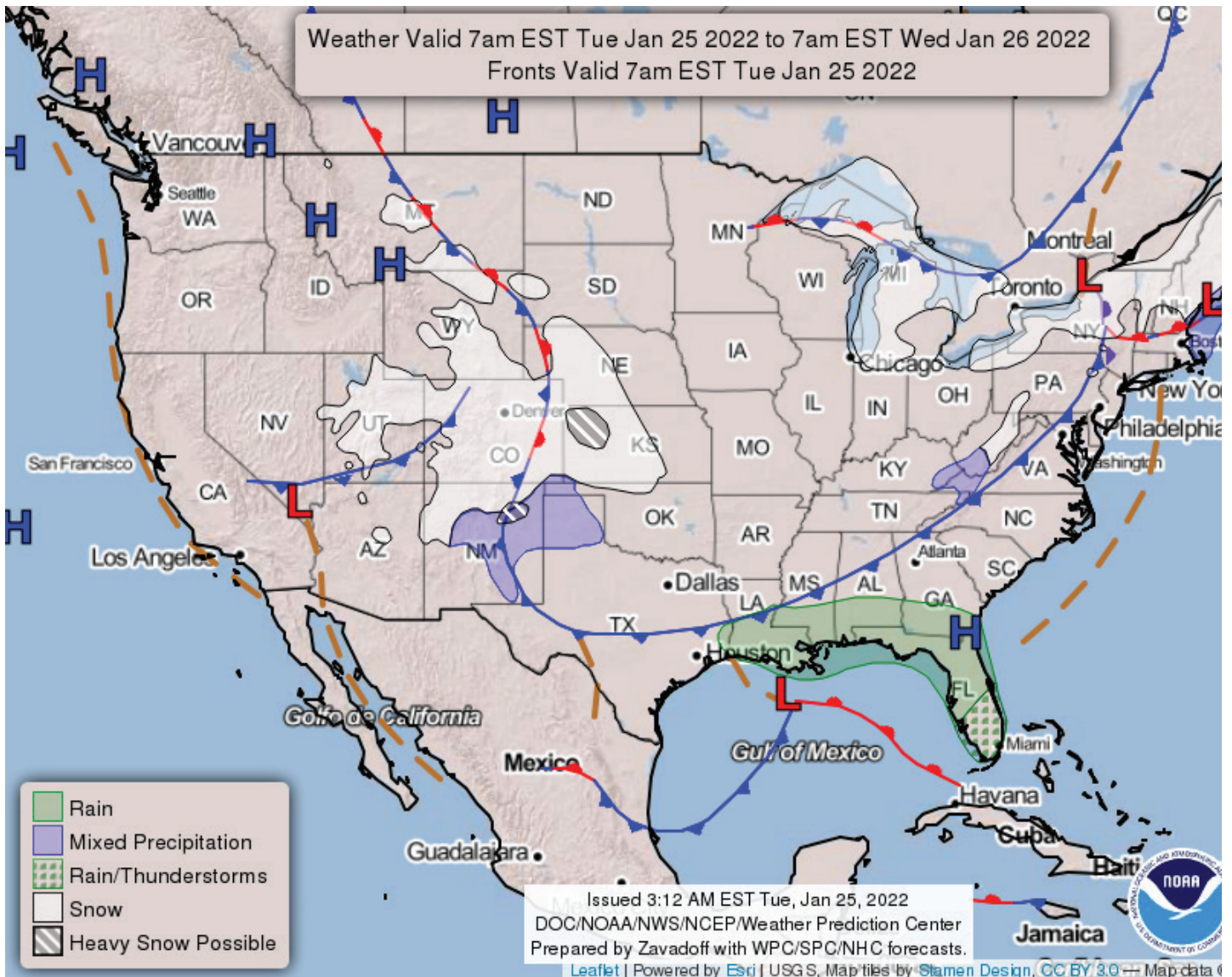
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 34 °F at 12:00 AM**  
**Low Temp: --16 °F at 11:27 PM**  
**Wind: 26 mph at 5:10 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 54 in 1942**  
**Record Low: -33 in 1904**  
**Average High: 24°F**  
**Average Low: 1°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.45**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.59**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.45**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.59**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:30:46 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:57:46 AM**





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## WHICH IS BETTER: LONG OR SHORT?

One of my childhood memories is standing for great lengths of time while certain people prayed long, boring prayers. I remember asking God more than once if there was not something more important for Him to do than to listen to Mr. "whatever his name was." Occasionally I would put my fingers over my eyes, slightly spread two of them apart and then look around to see what everyone was doing. Most of them, if I recall correctly, were slightly shifting their weight from one foot to the other, trying not to disturb the person standing next to them.

It was later in life that I discovered length was not all that important when we pray. It is our sincerity and the purpose of our prayers that gets God's attention.

Perhaps Psalms 117 was included in the Bible to make this point. It is a prayer of praise written by an unknown author. Notice also that it begins with an invitation to the Gentiles to "Laud Him" - the "Lord." The Psalmist wants everyone to know that everyone is invited to worship Yahweh.

And, after the invitation, the Psalmist gives a reason for this special call to worship: "For great is His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever." Then, he shouts in gratitude: "Praise the Lord."

The Psalmist made a special effort to announce the fact that all nations are included in this call to worship. It is echoed in the words of Jesus: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for Your great love and faithfulness that is limitless, all-inclusive and everlasting. What a blessing to know that I am included in Your love and faithfulness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: - Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD. Psalm 117

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## 2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)  
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,  
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)  
Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am  
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)  
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start  
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon  
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start  
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start  
(4th of July)  
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
Dacotah Bank Back To School Supply Drive  
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion  
Baseball Tourney  
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am  
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20  
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm  
JVT School Supply Drive  
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament  
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm  
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot  
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm  
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm  
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)  
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)  
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course  
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

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## Groton Daily Independent

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- 3 Months ..... \$21.30
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## News from the Associated Press

### Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Canistota 71, Ethan 62

Clark/Willow Lake 60, Great Plains Lutheran 44

Estelline/Hendricks 76, Wilmot 45

Marty Indian 67, Avon 36

Mitchell Christian 52, Freeman 45

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 79, Iroquois/Doland 33

Warner 52, Langford 34

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Bison vs. Dupree, ppd.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Chamberlain 61, Todd County 54

Corsica/Stickney 71, Bridgewater-Emery 55

Crow Creek 56, Winner 42

DeSmet 63, Willow Lake 43

Ethan 54, Canistota 17

Eureka/Bowdle 56, South Border, N.D. 40

Herreid/Selby Area 66, Napoleon/G-S, N.D. 38

Howard 64, Dell Rapids St. Mary 50

Kadoka Area 36, New Underwood 30

Mitchell Christian 52, Freeman 45

Mobridge-Pollock 65, Potter County 41

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 66, Iroquois/Doland 54

Platte-Geddes 38, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 34

West Central 64, Sioux Falls Christian 57

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) \_ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Monday:

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$396 million

Powerball

11-29-30-47-53, Powerball: 16, Power Play: 3

(eleven, twenty-nine, thirty, forty-seven, fifty-three; Powerball: sixteen; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$82 million

### Kamateros leads South Dakota over Western Illinois 75-72

MACOMB, Ill. (AP) — Tasos Kamateros had 17 points and 10 rebounds to lead five South Dakota players in double figures as the Coyotes edged past Western Illinois 75-72 on Monday night.

Mason Archambault added 15 points for the Coyotes (12-7, 5-3 Summit League). Boogie Anderson

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chipped in 14, Kruz Perrott-Hunt scored 11 and Hunter Goodrick had 10. Anderson also had six assists, while Perrott-Hunt posted eight rebounds.

Luka Barisic had 18 points for the Leathernecks (12-8, 3-5). Trenton Massner added 17 points and seven rebounds. Colton Sandage had 15 points, eight rebounds and six assists.

## Noem pressures House to release AG fatal crash investigation

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Monday pressured House lawmakers weighing impeachment charges against the state attorney general to release investigative files on his 2020 fatal car crash.

The Republican governor last year delivered the crash investigation to House Speaker Spencer Gosch. But while the Republican lawmaker had pledged a transparent process as a House investigative committee sifts through the file, little of its information has been released publicly.

"I have seen the entire investigative file, and the public deserves to see it so that they can learn the truth of what happened," Noem said in a statement, adding that the House lawmakers "have the responsibility to see this process through in a timely manner."

Noem has stayed closely involved in the episode ever since Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg struck and killed a man walking on a rural stretch of highway in September of 2020. She has called for her fellow Republican's dismissal, but he has refused to step down.

Ravnsborg, who was elected to his first term in 2018, pleaded no contest in August to a pair of misdemeanors in the crash that killed Joseph Boever. The attorney general first reported the crash as a collision with an animal. He has insisted that he did not realize he had killed a man until he returned to the scene the next day and discovered Boever's body.

However, criminal investigators told the House impeachment investigation last week that they didn't believe Ravnsborg's account of what happened.

The committee held two days of public meetings last week after reviewing the crash investigation.

Gosch said the committee was still trying to work through redacting certain parts of the files that the committee has claimed are not relevant to their work of evaluating impeachment charges.

He added that the committee would likely meet next week, but it was not clear whether lawmakers would hold a public session or meet behind closed doors.

## SD House wants oversight of settlements after Noem probe

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's Republican-controlled House on Monday signaled its lawmakers want more power to look into settlement agreements after parts of a legislative probe last year were hampered as it examined Gov. Kristi Noem's alleged interference in a state agency that was evaluating her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license.

A bipartisan proposal easily cleared the House on a 64-6 vote and will next head to the Senate. It would require state agencies that enter into settlement agreements to give a copy of the agreement to the Legislature, as well as makes it clear that nondisparagement clauses in the agreements cannot be used to stop people from speaking to a pair of the Legislature's oversight committees.

"This is just an oversight that we need to have," Republican Rep. Ernie Otten said during a House debate in which Republican lawmakers avoided any mention of the Republican governor's actions.

However, the Legislature's heightened scrutiny of settlement agreements follows a report from The Associated Press that the longtime director of the state's Appraiser Certification Program, Sherry Bren, was pressured to retire by Noem's cabinet secretary late in 2020 and eventually received a \$200,000 settlement agreement to withdraw an age discrimination complaint she filed.

Months earlier, Noem had called a meeting with her daughter, Bren and other key decision-makers, just days after the Appraiser Certification Program moved to deny her daughter's application. Bren last month

told the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee that she felt intimidated at the meeting.

Through an agreement signed after the meeting, Noem's daughter, Cassidy Peters, received what Bren described as an unprecedented extra opportunity to show her appraiser work could meet federal requirements.

Lawmakers had also questioned why Bren was pressured to retire. But both Bren and Noem's cabinet secretary for the Department of Labor and Regulation, Marcia Hultman, declined to answer those questions. They were both bound by a nondisparagement clause in the \$200,000 agreement.

Otten said the bill would allow either the Government Operations and Audit Committee, or the Executive Board, which is made of senior lawmakers, to freely question people who have entered into settlement agreements that hold a nondisparagement clause. But that does not mean the public will get any more answers on the agreements because both boards can move into a closed-door executive session.

"They can shut it all down," he said. "This is a private conversation."

Noem, who is running for reelection and has positioned herself for a 2024 White House bid, has repeatedly denied wrongdoing and implied that Bren was standing in the way of efforts to make it easier for potential appraisers to get licenses.

But the organization that represents the state's appraisers, the Professional Appraisers Association of South Dakota, has been critical of changes at the agency since Bren departed. Earlier Monday, the organization's leadership spoke in support of a bill that would codify into law an advisory board that Bren had created, but that had fallen into disuse after she departed.

Republican lawmakers on the committee evaluating the bill, which was sponsored by Democratic Rep. Linda Duba, moved to delay action on the bill until several technical issues could be fixed. The House Commerce and Energy Committee is set to consider it Wednesday.

## House committee approves bill requiring teacher salary boost

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota House committee on Monday approved a proposal to prod school districts to use most of their boost in state funding for teachers' salaries.

The Republican-dominated committee approved the bill on an eight to six vote, sending it to debate on the House floor. Lawmakers were also considering whether to approve a historic 6% boost in state funding for schools to keep up with inflation.

In recent years, South Dakota has been trying to climb up the rankings of states with the lowest average teacher pay in the country. But even as a 2016 sales tax hike channeled more money to school districts, South Dakota's average teacher pay has remained among the lowest in the nation.

Republican Rep. Hugh Bartels is championing the bill, which would extend for three years a requirement that came with the 2016 tax plan. It would require school districts to use at least 85% of their funding increase for teachers' salaries and benefits. School districts would risk losing funding if they don't at least match average teacher compensation from 2017, but they could also apply for a waiver if they fail to.

"This is a way to collect some data to make sure that we raise teacher salaries so we don't fall behind," Bartels told the committee.

The teacher's union, South Dakota Education Association, is pushing the bill, while the organization that represents school districts, Associated School Boards of South Dakota, has not joined a side in the debate.

However, one district superintendent, Kimberly Kludt of the Deubrook Area School District, spoke against it, arguing that it would create "unintended and significant consequences" as school boards see year-to-year fluctuations in teacher compensation.

As teachers retire or change their health care plans, districts may see a drop in average teacher compensation, even if they are raising salaries across the board. Kludt said the requirement forces school boards "to give raises to teachers that they weren't planning and may not be able to sustain."

## London police investigating Downing Street lockdown parties

LONDON (AP) — London police said Tuesday they were investigating Downing Street parties during

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lockdown, putting further pressure on British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government.

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick revealed that an investigation was underway in a statement before the London Assembly. Dick said that Scotland Yard is now investigating "a number of events" at Downing Street.

Johnson's government has been under fire for allegedly holding events during months in which the nation was under lockdown because of COVID-19.

"The fact that we are now investigating does not, of course, mean that fixed penalty notices will necessarily be issued in every instance and to every person involved," Dick said. "We will not be giving a running commentary on our current investigations."

In the latest claim, ITV News reported that Johnson attended a birthday party in his Downing Street office and later hosted friends in his apartment upstairs in June 2020. His office denied it, saying that "in line with the rules at the time, the prime minister hosted a small number of family members outside that evening."

The "partygate" allegations have infuriated many in Britain, who were barred from meeting with friends and family for months in 2020 and 2021 to curb the spread of COVID-19. They are being investigated by a senior civil servant, Sue Gray, whose report, expected this week, will be a pivotal moment for the prime minister.

It wasn't clear which events the police were investigating.

## Snowstorm strands thousands in Istanbul, Athens

By MEHMET GUZEL and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Rescue crews in Istanbul and Athens scrambled on Tuesday to clear roads that came to a standstill after a massive cold front and snowstorms hit much of Turkey and Greece, leaving countless people and vehicles in both cities stranded overnight in freezing conditions.

Highways and roads in and around Istanbul became clogged on Monday after the storm pounded the city of about 16 million people that straddles the European and Asian continents — accumulating more than 80 centimeters (31 inches) of snow in some areas.

Stranded motorists either spent the night in cars, abandoned their vehicles to walk home or crowded subways and other public transportation.

Rescue teams worked overnight to clear snowy roads and highways, but abandoned vehicles hampered their operations. Istanbul Gov. Ali Yerlikaya urged motorists to return to their vehicles and move them.

In Athens, rescue crews were still trying to free around 200-300 drivers trapped on a major highway that runs across Athens and connects the Greek capital with the city's international airport.

Some drivers similarly abandoned their cars and walked home. Others trekked to a nearby train station, jumping over the barriers at the side of the road to reach the platform after spending the night in their cars. The train service had been suspended, but a train was there Tuesday morning to pick up those who had made it to the station from the highway.

The army was sent out overnight to deliver food and water to those trapped and to help free as many as possible.

Istanbul's Disaster Coordination Center, or AKOM, says an Icelandic low-pressure system is behind the cold front and precipitation affecting most of the country.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly said the snowfall in and around Istanbul would continue until Thursday and urged people not to venture out in private cars unless necessary. He said many of the stranded vehicles weren't fitted with snow tires.

Authorities suspended flights at Istanbul Airport — where the roof of a cargo facility collapsed from the weight of the snow on Monday — over safety concerns. But Adil Karaismailoglu, the transport minister, said limited flights would resume soon. Istanbul's second airport, Sabiha Gokcen, was also operating limited services.

"Nothing is moving. The snow ploughs can't even reach us," Ahmet Odabasi, 40, one of thousands of

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travelers stranded overnight on a highway west of Istanbul, told The Associated Press by telephone.

"I have been stuck here for 12 hours now. I am lucky that I have gas, food and water," said the motorist, who was driving to Istanbul from the city of Edirne, near the border with Greece.

Authorities in Greece had warned people to limit their movements to the essential only and to use snow chains on city streets, but many people had set out for work in the morning when the snowfall was much lighter and became trapped in their cars as the day wore on. Some of the problems were reportedly caused by trucks that slipped and jack-knifed across the road, blocking traffic.

Authorities and the highway management were coming under intense criticism for allowing a situation whereby drivers were stuck for so long.

The snowstorm, complete with thunder and lightning, hit the wider Athens area late in the morning Monday, dumping large amounts of snow on the city. It is the second year in a row that Greece has experienced a freak snowstorm. Last year, similar weather in February left tens of thousands of trees felled by the weight of the snow on city streets, parks and woodland around Athens.

Officials said the Greek prime minister contacted the highway's administration and asked for each trapped driver to receive 2,000 euros (\$2,265) in compensation, which the highway administration accepted.

The severe weather also brought rare snowfall to vacation resorts in Turkey's southwest region, including Bodrum and Datca, with snow and slippery conditions blocking a highway linking the provinces of Mugla and Denizli. Antalya city center, on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, saw its first snowfall in 29 years, the private NTV television reported.

In Istanbul, AKOM manager Selcuk Tutuncu told the AP that 40,000 tons of salt have been used since the beginning of the storm to clear roads.

"Right now there are over 1,500 vehicles and over 7,000 personnel working out in the field nonstop," Tutuncu said.

On Monday, authorities in Istanbul suspended intercity bus services and blocked travel to the city from Turkey's northwestern Thrace region. Civil servants were allowed to stay at home Tuesday, except for those employed in security, health and transportation sectors. Schools across Turkey were already closed for a winter break.

Imamoglu said the Istanbul municipality has provided shelter to around 1,500 homeless people. Teams have left some two tons of food for stray cats and dogs, Imamoglu said.

The mayor said he hoped the snow would fill dams and bring relief to the region, which has been suffering from a dry spell.

## **EXPLAINER: What are US options for sanctions against Putin?**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The financial options being considered to punish President Vladimir Putin if Russia invades Ukraine range from the sweeping to the acutely personal — from cutting Russia off from U.S. dollars and international banking to slapping sanctions on a former Olympic gymnast reported to be Putin's girlfriend.

Publicly, the United States and European allies have promised to hit Russia financially like never before if Putin does roll his military into Ukraine. Leaders have given few hard details to the public, however, arguing it's best to keep Putin guessing.

And weeks into the negotiations, it's far from clear that Americans have succeeded in achieving U.S. and European consensus on what sanctions will be imposed and what would trigger them.

A look at some of the financial actions under consideration:

### **SWIFT RETALIATION**

For the U.S. and its European allies, cutting Russia out of the SWIFT financial system, which shuffles money from bank to bank around the globe, would be one of the toughest financial steps they could take, damaging Russia's economy immediately and in the long term. The move could cut Russia off from most international financial transactions, including international profits from oil and gas production, which in all



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accounts for more than 40% of the country's revenue.

Allies on both sides of the Atlantic also considered the SWIFT option in 2014, when Russia invaded and annexed Ukraine's Crimea and backed separatist forces in eastern Ukraine. Russia declared then that kicking it out of SWIFT would be equivalent to a declaration of war. The allies — criticized ever after for responding too weakly to Russia's 2014 aggression — shelved the idea.

Russia since then has tried to develop its own financial transfer system, with limited success.

The U.S. has succeeded before in persuading the SWIFT system to kick out a country — Iran, over its nuclear program.

But kicking Russia out of SWIFT would also hurt other economies, including those of the U.S. and key ally Germany. U.S. lawmakers said last week the Biden administration is still analyzing how bad that impact would be. Annalena Baerbock, the foreign minister for Germany, asked by reporters about the proposed Russian SWIFT ban, seemed to express doubts.

"The toughest stick won't always ultimately be the most intelligent sword," Baerbock said.

## DOLLAR CLEARING

The United States already holds one of the most powerful financial weapons to wield against Putin if he invades Ukraine — blocking Russia from access to the U.S. dollar.

Dollars still dominate in financial transactions around the world, with trillions of dollars in play daily.

Transactions in U.S. dollars ultimately are cleared through the Federal Reserve or through U.S. financial institutions. Crucially for Putin, that means foreign banks have to be able to access to the U.S. financial system to settle dollar transactions.

The ability to block that access gives the United States the ability to inflict financial pain well beyond its borders. Previously, the U.S. has suspended financial institutions from dollar clearing for allegedly violating sanctions against Iran, Sudan and other countries.

Biden indicated to reporters that cutting off Russia's and Russians' ability to deal in dollars was one of the options the U.S. was studying. Unlike the SWIFT option and the other financial measures, it's one the U.S. could do on its own. Many Russians and Russian companies would be stymied in carrying out even the most routine transactions, like making payroll or buying things, because they would have no access to the U.S. banking system.

## EXPORT CONTROLS

White House press secretary Jen Psaki has confirmed that the U.S. is considering imposing export controls — potentially cutting off Russia from the high tech that helps warplanes and passenger jets fly and makes smartphones smart, along with the other software and advanced electronic gear that make the modern world run.

That could include adding Russia to the most restrictive group of countries for export control purposes, together with Cuba, Iran, North Korea and Syria, officials said.

That would mean that Russia's ability to obtain integrated circuits, and products containing integrated circuits, would be severely restricted, because of the global dominance of U.S. software, technology and equipment. The impact could extend to aircraft avionics, machine tools, smartphones, game consoles, tablets and televisions.

Such sanctions could also target critical Russian industry, including its defense and civil aviation sectors, which would hit Russia's high-tech ambitions, whether in artificial intelligence or quantum computing.

Like some of the other penalties under consideration, U.S. export restrictions would risk motivating businesses to look for alternatives in other countries, including China.

## BOND MARKETS

The Biden administration limited Russia's ability to borrow money by banning U.S. financial institutions from buying Russian government bonds directly from state institutions last year. But the sanctions didn't target the secondary market, leaving this as a possible next step.

## NORDSTREAM 2 NATURAL GAS PIPELINE:

Republicans and Democrats in the Congress fought Russia's new Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline to Germany for years, arguing it would help Russia use its control of the gas supply as leverage to achieve

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its policy aims in Europe. Rival bills in Congress would sanction the pipeline's operators — Republicans want to impose the sanctions right away, but Democrats only if Russia invades Ukraine.

The Biden administration previously has held off from that level of sanctions, to avoid getting crossways with ally Germany.

German officials say blocking operation of the pipeline if Russia moves in to Ukraine would be "on the table" if there's an invasion — but that's as far as they've gone publicly.

## GOING AFTER THE OLIGARCHS ... AND A REPORTED GIRLFRIEND

One of the most-used sanctions tactics by the U.S. is sanctioning the immediate circles of leaders, their families, and military and civilian circles. Putin and his friends and family could face that as well, along with Russia's powerful business oligarchs, and its banks.

Sweeping legislation by Indiana Republican Rep. Jim Banks, co-sponsored by nearly 40 other House Republicans, would pile on sanctions even before any further Russian invasion of Ukraine, from the SWIFT cutoff to the Nord Stream penalties.

They also would urge consideration of targeting many in Russia's upper echelon with sanctions.

That includes Putin's family and a woman reported to be Putin's romantic interest, Alina Kabaeva, who won Olympic gold in 2004 as a gymnast.

## **EXPLAINER: What post-unrest reforms is Kazakhstan proposing?**

By DASHA LITVINOVA and DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Kazakhstan's leader has trumpeted ambitious economic reforms following the worst unrest in the country of 19 million in three decades. The measures are aimed at reducing the state's deep involvement in the economy, bridging the gap between the wealthy minority and the struggling majority — and eliminating triggers for further turmoil.

Experts say the announced changes look good on paper, but question whether the new government in the energy-rich former Soviet state will implement them.

A look at the causes of discontent and the government's promised reforms:

### WHAT'S ROILING KAZAKHSTAN?

On Jan. 2, small protests broke out in an oil city in western Kazakhstan where residents were unhappy about a sudden spike in prices for liquified gas, which is widely used as automotive fuel.

The demonstrations soon spread across the vast country, reflecting wider public discontent with steadily decreasing incomes, worsening living conditions and the authoritarian government. By Jan. 5, the protests descended into violence, with armed groups storming government buildings and setting cars and buses on fire in Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty.

To quell the violence, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev requested help from a Russia-led security alliance, the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The bloc of six former Soviet states sent more than 2,000 troops.

Authorities arrested thousands of people and more than 220 — mostly civilians — were killed. About a week after the protests began, order was largely restored.

### WHY WERE GAS PRICES SUCH A SORE POINT?

The price of gas soared to 120 tenge (\$0.27) per liter, a significant increase in the country where, according to Tokayev's own admission, half the population earns no more than 50,000 tenge (\$114) a month. The spike came about as the government moved away from price controls as part of efforts to build a market economy.

Analysts say the increase came as a complete surprise.

"All these decisions were made without transparency. ... People woke up to a new gas price that was 2 1/2 times higher," said Kassymkhan Kapparov, an economist in Kazakhstan and founder of the Economist. Kz think tank.

The western region of Kazakhstan where the protests started also produces oil and gas. Residents were outraged that the price increased while their salaries remained stagnant, said Rustam Burnashev of the

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Kazakh-German University in Almaty, an expert on regional security in Central Asia.

"They were saying, 'Guys, we're producing it, and now we (have to) buy it at astronomical prices?' They agree that gas prices (all over the world) grow, but in that case (they say) that 'our salaries should too,'" Burnashev said.

HOW DID KAZAKHSTAN END UP IN THIS SITUATION?

Kazakhstan became independent when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. In the first post-independence years, the country saw rapid economic growth and rising prosperity. For almost three decades, it was dominated by Nursultan Nazarbayev, its last Communist Party leader at the time of independence.

The country profited from its natural resources, most notably oil. Foreign investors were welcome, money flowed into state coffers, and social spending helped keep abject poverty low. But key sectors such as mining, telecommunications and banking were dominated by state-owned companies and a few figures connected to Nazarbayev, either politically or through family ties.

As time went on, Nazarbayev increasingly monopolized the country's politics, suppressing opposition and introducing a highly personalized form of rule as Elbasy, the Leader of the Nation. Nazarbayev resigned in 2019, but until recently remained head of the ruling Nur Otan party and chair of the Security Council. Tokayev, the chair of the upper house of parliament, was appointed president and renamed the capital of Astana to Nur-Sultan, to honor his predecessor.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES BEHIND THE PUBLIC DISCONTENT?

Discontent among ordinary people goes way beyond gas prices. People are aware of the country's striking level of inequality and the immense economic privilege of those around Nazarbayev, in which 162 people control more than half the country's wealth.

Meanwhile, the average monthly wage is around 243,000 tenge, or \$558, according to government statistics, although the cost of living is relatively low compared with Western countries.

A recent report by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project found that a charitable foundation created by Nazarbayev held assets worth \$7.8 billion, including stakes in banking, shopping centers, logistics firms and food production.

British authorities issued "unexplained-wealth orders" to Nazarbayev's daughter and grandson demanding they reveal where they obtained funds for three London properties worth more than 80 million pounds. A judge threw out the orders.

WHAT APPROACH IS THE CURRENT PRESIDENT TAKING?

Tokayev publicly acknowledged Kazakhstan's rampant inequality and initially tried to quell the protests with a few concessions: He capped gas prices for 180 days, named a new Cabinet, and ousted Nazarbayev from the National Security Council.

The president outlined future reforms to "reset" the economy, remarking, "We need to define new 'rules of play' — fairer, more transparent and just."

Among the ambitious measures he touted are reducing the government's involvement in and oligarchs' influence on business; reforming the Samruk-Kazyna sovereign wealth fund, which owns major companies; and ensuring fair competition, a better investment climate and the integrity of private property, in part by overhauling the country's justice system.

WHAT CHANCE OF SUCCESS DO THE PROPOSED REFORMS HAVE?

Kapparov, the economist, said important questions remain about the Samruk-Kazyna fund and its companies.

"Will there be a privatization? On what scale? In which time frame?" he asked. "Will it be open to everyone, including foreign investors? These issues haven't been mentioned."

The inner circle's power and influence raise serious obstacles to any wide-ranging reform that would be required to privatize state companies and allow outside interests to compete in key sectors, said former World Bank official Simon Commander, now managing partner at emerging markets advisory firm Altura Partners. Tokayev's speech, while interesting, is "certainly more radical than is likely to be possible. ... Let's hope he turns out to be a genuine reformer."

But he added: "I'm very skeptical. Their economic and political structure hems them in."

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## WHAT ABOUT POLITICAL REFORMS?

During his years in office, Tokayev also has promised limited political reforms, including local elections. But the crackdown on protesters suggests authorities don't intend to allow genuine political opposition, and without political reform, economic reform is difficult to imagine.

Greeting discontent with more than 12,000 arrests "is a pretty good metric for how the regime thinks it needs to respond," Commander said.

## Europe shares up, Asia stocks fall on Fed, Ukraine, omicron

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — European stocks opened higher Tuesday after a day of steep losses in Asia as markets waited to hear from Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell after a two-day policy meeting that ends Wednesday.

The possibility of conflict between Russia and Ukraine and concern over coronavirus outbreaks also were adding to uncertainties.

France's CAC 40 edged up 1.1% to 6,861.14 in early trading, while Germany's DAX added 0.6% to 15,100.95. Britain's FTSE 100 rose 0.5% to 7,334.99. The future of the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 1.1% lower, while the S&P 500 future fell 1.6%.

On Monday, a late buying spree pushed the benchmark S&P 500 index to a 0.3% gain after pulling it out of so-called correction territory — a drop of 10% or more from its recent high.

The Fed meeting will provide an update on policymakers' latest thinking on the economy and interest rates.

Some economists worry the Fed is moving too slowly in tamping down inflation by raising rates that have been kept low for nearly two years to support markets and economies slammed by the pandemic.

Others fret that the Fed may act too aggressively and could risk causing a recession without managing to cool inflation.

Meanwhile, tensions have soared between Russia and the West over fears that Moscow is planning to invade Ukraine, with NATO outlining potential troop and ship deployments.

The Pentagon ordered 8,500 troops on higher alert to potentially deploy to Europe as part of a NATO "response force" to a military move on Ukraine. President Joe Biden has consulted with key European leaders, underscoring U.S. solidarity with allies there.

Asian shares declined as Japan made official a government plan to expand areas where pandemic restrictions are being advised to help curb the spread of COVID-19. That will again put a damper on business activity and travel.

Toyota Motor Corp. shares fell nearly 2% after Japan's top automaker said further adjustments to its production in Japan were needed because of a shortfall in computer chips from disruptions related to COVID-19 restrictions and infections. Toyota has apologized for keeping customers waiting for its products.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 slipped 1.7% to finish at 27,131.34. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dropped 2.5% to 6,961.60. South Korea's Kospi lost 2.6% to 2,720.39. Hong Kong's Hang Seng shed 1.7% to 24,243.61, while the Shanghai Composite dipped 2.6% to 3,433.06.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude added 48 cents to \$83.79 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It tumbled \$1.83 to \$85.31 on Monday.

Brent crude, the basis for pricing international oil, rose 59 cents to \$86.86 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar fell to 113.84 Japanese yen from 113.96 yen. The euro cost \$1.1311, down from \$1.1326.

## German caution on arms to Ukraine rooted in history, energy

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's refusal to join other NATO members in providing weapons to Ukraine has

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annoyed some allies and raised questions about Berlin's resolve in standing up to Russia.

The issue rose to the fore over the weekend following a report that Berlin had gone so far as to block Estonia from supplying old German howitzers to Kyiv to help defend itself against Russian troops massing near the Ukrainian the border.

Germany's stance on arms supplies does "not correspond to the level of our relations and the current security situation," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Twitter.

Speaking to reporters Monday in Berlin, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz denied a decision had been made on the howitzers and insisted that his country stands with its NATO and European Union allies in opposing any Russian incursion into Ukraine.

"Should this situation occur, we will jointly act," he told reporters. "There would be a high price."

Still, while Germany would continue to provide help to Ukraine, there would be one exception, he said: "We don't provide any lethal weapons."

That stance, criticized in Kyiv and — less loudly — in Washington and London, has caused consternation among some in Germany who worry that their country may not be considered a reliable partner.

"How many in Berlin are actually aware how our seemingly confused Ukraine policy harms not just (Germany) but the entire EU?" asked Wolfgang Ischinger, Germany's former ambassador to the United States and now head of the annual Munich Security Conference.

Experts say Germany's position is partly rooted in its inglorious history of aggression during the 20th century.

"There's the obvious legacy of Germany's own militarization in Europe during two world wars that has led many German leaders to view any military response as the last resort," said Rachel Ellehuus, deputy director of the Europe, Russia and Eurasia program at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

That attitude could backfire, she said. "The current government does not seem to grasp that sending defensive weapons to Ukraine might actually deter further Russian aggression."

And while Germany has pointed to its restrictive position on arms exports to conflict zones in the past, analysts say the rule has not been consistently applied.

"There have always been borderline cases here, such as the Kosovo war or support for the Kurds against IS in Syria," said Sabine Fischer, a senior Russia expert at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

The debate over German weapons was unfolding days after the head of the German navy resigned following criticism at home and abroad for comments he made on Ukraine and Russia. Speaking at an event Friday in India, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schoenbach said it was important to have Russia on the same side against China and suggested that Russian President Vladimir Putin deserved "respect."

With Scholz's Social Democrats steeped in the legacy of Cold War rapprochement pursued by his predecessor Willy Brandt, and the Greens rooted in a tradition of pacifism, two out of Germany's three governing parties would balk at the idea of supplying arms to a non-NATO country in a conflict with Russia. But letting Estonia pass on the old Soviet-designed 122-mm D-30 howitzers to Ukraine might be an acceptable compromise.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock made clear that, qualms about exporting arms to Ukraine aside, Berlin takes a dim view of Russia's behavior.

"In recent weeks, more than 100,000 Russian troops with tanks and guns have gathered near Ukraine for no understandable reason. And it's hard not to see that as a threat," she said during a recent visit to Moscow.

Speaking alongside her Russian counterpart — whom she referred to as "dear colleague" — Baerbock acknowledged the "suffering and destruction that we Germans brought upon the peoples of the Soviet Union" during the Nazi era, but warned that Germany was willing to consider tough steps if Russia acts against Ukraine.

This includes calling into question the future of the new Nord Stream 2 pipeline meant to bring much-needed natural gas from Russia to Germany.

Such a move against its biggest energy supplier would come at a high price for Germany, too.

With plans to switch off its last three nuclear power plants this year and phase out the use of coal by 2030, Germany's reliance on gas will increase in the short term until enough renewable energy comes online, said Georg Zachmann, a senior fellow at the Bruegel economic think tank in Brussels.

Yet German officials believe that being a large customer of Russian gas can give it leverage, as Moscow won't want to harm its reputation as a reliable supplier of gas, painstakingly built up over decades.

Speaking Monday at a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels, Baerbock said the German government's priority is to deescalate the situation over Ukraine, dampening allies' calls for military support to Kyiv and swift new sanctions against Moscow.

"Berlin will have to deal with the criticism that is now coming from Ukraine, other European countries and Washington," Fischer said. "At the same time, Germany remains an important player in the negotiations surrounding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and, I predict, will continue to support sanctions and other measures in the future."

## **EU continues training Libyan partners despite migrant abuses**

By RENATA BRITO, FRANK JORDANS and LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — A confidential European Union military report calls for continuing a controversial EU program to train and equip Libya's coast guard and navy despite growing concerns about their treatment of migrants, a mounting death toll at sea, and the continued lack of any central authority in the North African nation.

The report, circulated to EU officials this month and obtained by The Associated Press, offers a rare look at Europe's determination to support Libya in the interception and return of tens of thousands of men, women and children to Libya, where they face insufferable abuse.

Compiled by Italian navy Rear Adm. Stefano Turchetto, head of the EU arms embargo surveillance mission, or Operation Irini, the report acknowledges the "excessive use of force" by Libyan authorities, adding that EU training is "no longer fully followed."

Hundreds of thousands of migrants hoping to reach Europe have made their way through Libya, where a lucrative trafficking and smuggling business has flourished in a country without a functioning government, fragmented for years between rival administrations in the east and west, each backed by armed groups and foreign governments.

The EU report acknowledges "the political stalemate" in Libya has hindered Europe's training program, noting that the country's internal divisions make it difficult to obtain political support for enforcing "proper behavioral standards ... compliant with human rights, especially when dealing with irregular migrants."

The European Commission and the EU's External Action Service — the equivalent of the 27-nation bloc's foreign office — declined to comment on the report. But spokesman Peter Stano confirmed the EU is determined to train coast guard personnel and bolster Libya's capacity to manage a massive search-and-rescue area of the Mediterranean.

The EU training program "remains firm on the table to increase the capacity of the Libyan authorities to save lives at sea," Stano said.

Criticism of Europe's migration policies has been growing. At least three requests have been filed to the International Criminal Court demanding that Libyan and European officials, as well as traffickers, militiamen and others be investigated for crimes against humanity. A U.N. inquiry published in October also found evidence that abuses committed in Libya may amount to crimes against humanity.

Last week, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for countries to "re-examine policies that support interception at sea and return of refugees and migrants to Libya."

Stano dismissed those criticisms. "When it comes to migration, our objective is to save peoples' lives, protect those in need and fight trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling," Stano said.

Human rights defenders and asylum seekers disagree.

"The Europeans pretend to show the good face," said a Cameroonian woman who arrived in Libya in

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2016 with her child thinking she would find work. Instead, she was trafficked and forced into prostitution after being separated from her daughter. The AP does not identify victims of sexual violence.

In 2018 she got on a smuggler's boat bound for Europe but her group was caught by Libyan authorities and taken to the notorious Tajoura detention center where detainees were beaten and abused. She was only released after a friend paid a \$700 ransom to the guards.

"They're calling it saving lives? How is it saving lives when those lives are tortured after being saved?" the woman asked.

Questioned about the detention centers in Libya, Stano said the EU's position is clear: "They are unacceptable. The current arbitrary detention system must end."

But despite such assertions nothing has changed on the ground. The Libyan government last month named Mohammed Al-Khoja, a militia leader implicated in abuses against migrants, to head the Department for Combating Irregular Migration, which oversees the detention centers.

"The same people in charge of dismantling the trafficking business are the traffickers themselves," said Violeta Moreno-Lax, founder of the immigration law program at Queen Mary University of London.

The EU report noted the "excessive use of physical force" by a Libyan patrol during the Sept. 15 interception of a wooden boat with about 20 migrants off the coast of Libya.

The Libyan forces used tactics "never observed before and not in compliance with (EU) training ... as well as international regulation," said the report. It provided no further details about what exactly happened.

A spokesman for the Libyan coast guard did not respond to AP requests for comment about that incident or the EU report. In the past, Libyan interior ministry and coast guard officials have said they are doing their best with limited resources in a country plagued by years of civil war.

In response to AP questions, Frontex, the European coast guard and border agency that documented the Sept. 15 interception said it had filed a "serious incident report" but could not disclose details.

Ozlem Demirel, a German Left party member of the European Parliament, said the report offered "further evidence that there should be no cooperation with this force."

"The fact that Irini is even seeking further training is, in my view, outrageous," he said.

Violent tactics employed by Libyan authorities at sea have been widely documented for years. Last week, activists on a volunteer rescue ship reported seeing a Libyan patrol vessel "shooting at a person who had jumped into the water."

Some 455 million euros (\$516 million) have been earmarked for Libya since 2015 through the EU's Trust Fund for Africa, substantial amounts of which have gone to finance migration and border management.

However, huge sums have been diverted to networks of militiamen and traffickers who exploit migrants, according to a 2019 AP investigation. Coast guard members are also complicit, turning migrants intercepted at sea over to detention centers under deals with militias or demanding payoffs to let others go.

EU money, much of it funneled through Italy, has been used to train staff and refurbish boats for Libyan authorities. The Libyan coast guard also received satellite phones and uniforms and will get three new patrol vessels in the next two years.

To intercept the small unseaworthy migrant boats in the Mediterranean, Libyan authorities also depend on surveillance gathered and shared by European drones, aircraft and radar. But even then the political chaos in the country often impacts search-and-rescue operations.

Irregular migration from North Africa to Italy and Malta spiked in 2021 after a drop in 2020 largely due to the coronavirus pandemic. Crossings on the central Mediterranean accounted for one-third of all reported illegal border-crossings into Europe, according to Frontex.

But as departures increased, so did interceptions. Last year, the Libyan coast guard picked up and returned to Libya more than 32,000 migrants, nearly triple the number for 2020.

Yet despite all the equipment and training provided to Libya to save lives, more than 1,500 people died or went missing last year, the highest death toll since 2017.

## S. Korean officials say North Korea tested cruise missiles

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By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Tuesday test-fired two suspected cruise missiles in its fifth round of weapons launches this month, South Korean military officials said, as it displays its military might amid pandemic-related difficulties and a prolonged freeze in nuclear negotiations with the United States.

One official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, citing department rules, said South Korean and U.S. intelligence officials were analyzing the launches, but didn't provide further details. Another military official, who requested anonymity over similar reasons, said the tests were conducted from an inland area, but didn't specify where.

North Korea has been increasing its testing activity recently in an apparent effort to pressure the Biden administration over the stalled diplomacy after the pandemic unleashed further shock on an economy broken by crippling U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons program and decades of mismanagement by its own government.

North Korea last Thursday issued a veiled threat to resume the testing of nuclear explosives and long-range missiles targeting the American homeland, which leader Kim Jong Un suspended in 2018 while initiating diplomacy with the United States.

Some experts say North Korea could dramatically escalate weapons demonstrations after the Winter Olympics, which begin Feb. 4 in China, the North's main ally and economic lifeline.

They say Pyongyang's leadership likely feels it could use a dramatic provocation to move the needle with the Biden administration, which has offered open-ended talks but showed no willingness to ease sanctions unless Kim takes real steps to abandon the nuclear weapons and missiles he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

Tuesday's launches could have been followup tests of a weapon North Korea has described as a long-range cruise missile and first tested in September, said Kim Dong-yub, a professor at Seoul's University of North Korean Studies.

State media in reports at the time said the missiles were fired from launcher trucks and could strike targets 1,500 kilometers (932 miles) away. It described those missiles as a "strategic weapon of great significance" — wording that implies they were developed to carry nuclear weapons.

While halting the tests of nuclear devices and intercontinental range ballistic missiles, Kim Jong Un since 2019 has been ramping up tests of various shorter-range weapons apparently designed to overwhelm missile defenses in the region. Experts say the North's expanding missile arsenal reflects an aim to apply more pressure on its rivals to accept it as a nuclear power in hopes of winning relief from economic sanctions and convert the diplomacy with Washington into mutual arms-reduction negotiations.

## Prosecutors: Video will show 3 cops violated Floyd's rights

By AMY FORLITI and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Witness testimony will get underway in earnest Tuesday at the federal civil rights trial of three former Minneapolis police officers accused of failing to intervene as fellow Officer Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd by pressing his knee into the Black man's neck as he lay facedown, handcuffed and gasping for air.

Former officers J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao are broadly charged with depriving Floyd of his civil rights while acting under government authority. Floyd, 46, died on May 25, 2020, after Chauvin knelt on his neck for 9 1/2 minutes. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back, Lane held his legs and Thao kept bystanders from intervening.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys spent most of Monday laying out their cases to the jury during opening statements of the former officers' trial, with prosecutors saying they will show that Kueng, Lane and Thao stood by as Chauvin "slowly killed George Floyd right in front of them."

"We will ask you to hold these men accountable for choosing to do nothing and watch a man die," said prosecutor Samantha Trepel, who works for the Justice Department's civil rights division.

But it was Chauvin, the senior officer at the scene, who called "all of the shots," one defense attorney



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told jurors, adding that the Minneapolis Police Department did too little to train officers to intervene when a colleague should be stopped.

Another officer's attorney focused on Floyd's struggle with police before they restrained him. And an attorney for the third officer said his client raised concerns about the restraint of Floyd, but was rebuffed.

Chauvin was convicted of murder and manslaughter last year in state court in the videotaped killing that triggered worldwide protests and a reexamination of racism and policing.

Kueng, who is Black; Lane, who is white; and Thao, who is Hmong American, are all charged for failing to provide Floyd with medical care. Thao and Kueng face an additional count for failing to stop Chauvin, who is white. Both counts allege the officers' actions resulted in Floyd's death.

Attorneys for both Kueng and Thao noted that prosecutors must prove the officers willfully violated Floyd's constitutional rights — a high legal standard that essentially requires prosecutors to prove the officers knew what they were doing was wrong, but did it anyway.

Trepel said videos will show that Thao stood directly next to Chauvin, but instead of intervening, taunted Floyd for using drugs, telling bystanders, "This is why you don't" use drugs, and ignoring their pleas to check Floyd's pulse.

The prosecutor said Kueng "never once" told Chauvin to get off Floyd, even after Floyd stopped struggling and Kueng could not find a pulse. Instead, she said, Keung remained kneeling on Floyd.

And she said that Lane "chose to do nothing" after Kueng and Chauvin rejected Lane's suggestion to roll Floyd on his side.

Later, prosecutors began introducing video taken from Lane's body camera that shows Floyd's struggle with officers, Floyd being held on the ground and the arrival of paramedics. The video will come up again when testimony resumes Tuesday.

Tom Plunkett, Kueng's attorney, highlighted the rookie status of his client and Lane, who were responding to a 911 call accusing Floyd of using a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy a pack of cigarettes at a corner market. Thao and Chauvin responded as backup.

"You'll see and hear officer Chauvin call all of the shots," said Plunkett, who also said that Kueng and Lane were not trained in the department's policy on neck restraint.

Lane's attorney, Earl Gray, said Lane was at Floyd's legs and could not see Chauvin's knee on Floyd's neck.

Lane at one point suggested that they use a restraint called the hobble on Floyd, which would have meant Floyd would have been on his side "and no doubt he'd be alive today," Gray said. But he said Chauvin said no. Lane also suggested twice that they roll Floyd over, but was rebuffed, Gray said.

Gray also said Lane called an ambulance because of a cut on Floyd's lip and later had another officer increase the urgency of the ambulance code. Gray noted that Lane got into the ambulance and helped perform chest compressions on Floyd.

Thao's attorney, Robert Paule, said Floyd's death was a tragedy, "however, a tragedy is not a crime." He also said a widely watched bystander video of the arrest does not show everything, including Floyd struggling with officers who were trying to put him in a police vehicle.

Last week, 18 people were swiftly chosen for the jury; 12 will deliberate and six will be alternates. Two of the jurors — one expected to deliberate and one alternate — appear to be of Asian descent. The rest appear to be white. The court declined to provide demographic information.

Gray said Lane will testify, but it's not known if Thao or Kueng will. It's also not clear whether Chauvin will testify, though many experts who spoke to The Associated Press believe he won't.

U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson told jurors that the trial could last four weeks.

Lane, Kueng and Thao also face a separate state trial in June on charges they aided and abetted both murder and manslaughter.

## **EXPLAINER: Why Yemen's war has spilled into the Emirates**

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Twice in the past week, Yemen's rebels have launched attacks with missiles and drones

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on the United Arab Emirates, a major escalation for one of the world's most protracted conflicts.

The attacks underscore how the war that has ground on for over seven years in the corner of the Arabian Peninsula can flare into a regional danger. One of this week's attacks targeted an Emirati military base hosting U.S. and British forces.

Already, the conflict has killed tens of thousands of civilians and fighters in Yemen and created a yearslong humanitarian disaster in the Arab world's poorest country.

The war pits the internationally recognized government, backed by a coalition including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. It began in September 2014, when the Houthis seized the capital, Sanaa, and much of northern Yemen. At the time with American backing, the coalition entered the war in March 2015 to support the government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, whose forces and other loosely allied militias hold the south.

Here's a look at the latest developments.

## WHY HAS THE WAR ESCALATED?

The Houthis blame the Emirates for significant recent battlefield losses inside Yemen, that have virtually ended their efforts to complete control of the country's north.

Primarily, they are looking to retaliate after their offensive aiming to seize the crucial central Yemeni city of Marib floundered.

The Houthis launched the offensive last year, and at times it looked like they might succeed in taking the city from the government. Capturing Marib would have sealed their control over the entire north of Yemen, brought the province's relative wealth into their hands and given them leverage in future peace negotiations.

Despite suffering heavy casualties from coalition airstrikes, the Houthis reached just outside the city. The coalition stepped up ground support to the city's defenders. But the tide only really turned when Emirati-backed forces known as the Giants Brigade made a concerted push in the southern province of Shabwa this month. They pushed out the Houthis and reclaimed Shabwa, then cut off key Houthi supply lines in Marib province and are now advancing into the province.

The escalation prevented Marib from falling into Houthi hands but "it required some political realignments" within the coalition, said Peter Salisbury, a Yemen expert at the International Crisis Group. The Saudis, he said, had to allow the empowering of Emirati-backed forces, undermining allies of Hadi, who has had a longtime rivalry with the UAE.

## HOUTHIS REACTION

The Houthi's reply has been to fire ballistic missiles and explosive-laden drones, first on Saudi Arabia and now on the UAE.

On Monday, the UAE and U.S. militaries said they intercepted two ballistic missiles over Abu Dhabi. The rebels said they targeted the Al-Dhafra Air Base, which hosts both American and British forces.

Last week, the rebels claimed another attack on Abu Dhabi that targeted the airport and a fuel depot. The strike killed three people and wounded six others.

The attacks threaten the Emirates' business-friendly, tourism-focused reputation.

Earlier this month, the Houthis also seized an Emirati ship in the Red Sea, off the coast of Hodeida, a rebel-held port that the two sides have long battled over. They claimed the vessel carried weapons. The coalition said it carried medical equipment from a dismantled Saudi field hospital on the Yemeni island of Socotra. The coalition has threatened to attack Houthi-held ports if they don't release the vessel.

The rebels also fired missiles and drones at government-held areas in Yemen, often landing on civilian facilities.

In seeming retaliation, the coalition has launched intense airstrikes on Sanaa and other rebel-held areas. The strikes killed dozens of civilians, including over 80 people in a detention center in the northern province of Saada.

Another coalition airstrike on a telecommunications building knocked Yemen off the internet for days before being restored early Tuesday.

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Raiman al-Hamdani, a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said the Houthis are trying to draw the UAE back into a conflict from which it has been trying to extricate itself.

The fighting is "an example of the lack of willingness on all sides to come to any consensus," he said.

## STALLED PEACE EFFORTS

The escalation on both sides has brought condemnation from Western powers, who have grown tired of trying to broker a peace in Yemen. Most of that frustration now seems focused on the rebels.

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration is considering reversing a decision last year that lifted the Houthi's terrorist designation.

That de-listing, along with an official end to U.S. support for the coalition, had aimed to calm tensions in hopes of boosting peace efforts and addressing humanitarian needs. Yemeni and Saudi officials have maintained that the U.S. measures only emboldened the Houthis.

The U.S. and U.N. diplomatic moves failed to bring the two sides to negotiations as the Houthis pressed their Marib offensive. In July, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said that the Biden administration was "beyond fed up" with the Houthis.

The Houthis have also taken a hard line on other fronts. They have not allowed the U.N. special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, to visit since he was appointed in August. The rebels seized the now-closed U.S. Embassy in Sanaa and detained dozens of local employees. They also detained two U.N. staffers working for the U.N. human rights office and UNESCO.

Some speculate that Iran could be playing a role in their Houthi allies' escalations.

Al-Hamdani, the analyst, is reluctant to give too much credence to the idea that Iran is pulling strings.

The Houthis may owe Iran for its support, but Iran can't just order them to do something, he said. "This only occurs when it's convenient for both."

## Iconic musician seeks to rebuild Iraq through music

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA and ABDELRAHMAN ZEYAD Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — War kept him away from his beloved homeland for decades. Now, virtuoso oud player Naseer Shamma hopes to help rebuild conflict-scarred Iraq through a series of concerts and other projects to support culture and education.

The audience at the Iraqi National Theater were on their feet, overcome with emotion as Shamma played a night of classics from the Iraqi songbook and modern compositions.

"We will work on lighting the stage, to get out of the darkness into the light," he told the crowd, before kicking off the evening with, "Sabah El Kheir Ya Baghdad," or, "Good Morning Baghdad." Behind him, an orchestra, including young women musicians, played traditional instruments.

The 59-year-old Shamma is considered a modern-day master of the oud, a pear-shaped stringed instrument similar to a lute whose deep tones and swift-changing chords are central to Arabic music.

Born in the southern city of Kut and raised in a conservative family, he received his first oud lesson at the age of 11 and later graduated from the Baghdad Academy of Music in 1987.

He fled Iraq in 1993 during Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and gained international fame, performing around the world and receiving dozens of awards. In Cairo, he founded the House of the Oud, a school dedicated to teaching the instrument to new generations.

Shamma, who currently lives in Berlin, returned to Iraq for the first time in 2012 to perform in a concert hosted by the Arab League. He said he was shocked and overwhelmed with sadness to see what had become of his country, which had fallen into non-ending cycles of war and sectarian blood-letting after the U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam.

"I found concrete T-walls surrounding Baghdad, I felt like I was walking inside a can, not a city," Shamma told The Associated Press in an interview, referring to the blast walls that line many streets in Baghdad.

He returned several times since, most recently in 2017, when Iraq was torn apart in its battle with Islamic State group militants who had captured much of the north.

This was Shamma's first time back to an Iraq relatively at peace, though wracked by economic crisis.

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The mood, he noted, had changed, the city is more relaxed and the audience more responsive.

"The audience's artistic taste had changed as a result of wars, but last night it was similar to the audiences of the '80s. I felt as if it was in an international concert like one in Berlin," Shamma said Friday after the first of four concerts he is holding in Baghdad this month.

The concert series, held under the slogan "Education First," aims to highlight Iraq's decaying education system, which has suffered under years of conflict, government negligence and corruption. According to the World Bank, education levels in Iraq, once among the highest in the region, are now among the lowest in the Middle East and North Africa. Ticket sales will go toward renovating the Music and Ballet School in Baghdad.

"In Iraq there are still schools made of mud, and students don't have desks, they sit on the floor," Shamma said. "Education is the solution and answer for the future of Iraq."

Shamma is known for using his fame to support humanitarian causes, Iraqi children and art. A few years ago, he led an initiative that rebuilt the destroyed infrastructure of 21 main squares in Baghdad. He is also a UNESCO peace ambassador.

Shamma said he hopes he can return to Iraq for good in the near future and fired off a list of projects he has in mind to support reconstruction.

He expressed his opposition to religious parties who try to silence art and political opponents and praised Iraqi youth who paid a high price for revolting against their corruption.

"The Iraqi people and Iraqi youth will not accept the hegemony of so-called religious parties. This is an open country where culture plays a very big role," he said, advocating for separation of politics from religion.

Fatima Mohammed, a 55-year-old Iraqi woman, shivering from the cold as she emerged from the concert on an uncharacteristically icy January evening, said the event was a message to everyone that Baghdad will never die.

"I felt as I witnessed the women playing that Baghdad is fine and will return despite all the pain that we carry with us," she said.

"I will come tomorrow also to listen to music, it gives me hope in life."

## Where is Peng Shuai? T-shirts will be OK at Australian Open

By JOHN PYE AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Restrictions which resulted in the removal of a spectator for wearing a T-shirt supporting Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai at the Australian Open have been overhauled after international backlash.

With reports of activists planning to distribute hundreds of shirts branded with the question "Where is Peng Shuai?" in time for Saturday's Australian Open women's final, the message shouldn't be hard to find.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley told The Associated Press it would be OK for people to wear the shirts at Melbourne Park, as long as they didn't congregate in large groups or cause problems for other spectators.

"If they want to do that, that's fine," Tiley said in a telephone interview. But "if anyone's coming on site with the express intent of disrupting the comfort and safety of our fans, they're not welcome.

"We can't sell tickets in advance and have people come in and feel unsafe because there's a large group of people that are using (the tournament) as a platform to espouse their views on whatever topic it is."

Footage screened last weekend of security and police requesting a fan remove a shirt which featured an image of Peng on the front and "Where is Peng Shuai?" on the back sparked widespread condemnation, with some critics describing it as cowardly.

Tennis great Martina Navratilova, a three-time Australian Open singles champion, posted a tweet saying: "That's just pathetic. The @wta stands pretty much alone on this!!!"

Tennis Australia responded initially by stating that the clothing breached its rule on "political messaging."

"To ensure that the Australian Open remains a welcoming, safe and inclusive event for everyone, we have a longstanding policy of not allowing banners, signs or clothing that are commercial or political,"

organizers said in a statement.

In a later statement, Tennis Australia said it understood "people have strongly held personal and political views on a range of issues."

"Peng Shuai's safety is our primary concern. We continue to work with the WTA and the global tennis community to do everything we can to ensure her well-being," the statement said. "Our work is ongoing and through the appropriate channels."

Tiley said the security staffer was following the tournament's protocols on the weekend but, after a review, the woman involved in the incident would be invited back to the tournament because she wasn't deemed to be trying to cause a disruption.

China drew international criticism following the near-total disappearance from public view of Peng. She wrote in a social media post in November that she was sexually assaulted by a former senior member of the ruling Communist Party.

Her accusation against former Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli briefly appeared on her verified Weibo social media in early November before being swiftly removed. Screen shots of the post were shared across the internet, drawing widespread concern about Peng's safety.

Following the posting, the three-time Olympian and former doubles champion appeared standing beside a tennis court in Beijing, waving and signing oversize commemorative tennis balls for children. The foreign arm of state TV also issued a statement in English attributed to Peng that retracted her accusation against Zhang.

But WTA chief executive Steve Simon last month questioned the emailed statement's legitimacy while others said it only increased their concern about her safety.

The WTA made repeated calls for China to conduct an inquiry into the 35-year-old Peng's accusations and to allow the tennis officials to communicate directly with the former No. 1-ranked doubles player and owner of doubles titles at Wimbledon and the French Open.

## 2008 Beijing Olympics vs. 2022: No lofty promises this time

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

The 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics showcased China's reemergence on the world stage. In awarding those Games to China, the International Olympic Committee predicted the Olympics could improve human rights, and Chinese politicians hinted at the same.

Soaring promises are absent this time as the Beijing Winter Olympics open in just over a week in the midst of a two-year-long pandemic.

The Games are a reminder of China's rise, but also its disregard for civil liberties, prompting a diplomatic boycott led by the United States, which has called China's internment of at least 1 million Uyghurs a genocide.

Rights groups have documented forced labor, mass detention and torture, which China calls the "lie of the century."

With more political, economic, and military clout, China appears to worry less about global scrutiny than it did 13 1/2 years ago. And the pandemic has given it even more control over the Olympics, particularly with the isolation of visiting journalists, separated in a "bubble" from the general Chinese population.

"There's nothing to 'prove' at this point; 2008 was a 'coming out' party and all this one does is confirm what we've known for the last decade," Amanda Shuman, a China researcher at the University of Freiburg, wrote in an email to The Associated Press.

"If anything, there's a lot less pressure than 2008," she said. "The Chinese government knows full well that its global economic upper hand allows it to do whatever it wishes."

The IOC had few options when it awarded China the Games or the second time. Six possible European candidates, led by Norway and Sweden, bowed out for political or cost reasons. Voters in two other countries — Switzerland and Germany — voted "no" in referendums.

IOC members eventually picked Beijing over Almaty, Kazakhstan, in a close vote — 44-40. The result came on paper ballots after the IOC said there was an electronic glitch in the first vote. Beijing becomes

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the first city to host both the Summer and Winter Games.

IOC President Thomas Bach called Beijing a "safe choice." China spent more than \$40 billion organizing the 2008 Olympics. The authoritarian state doesn't need voter approval to proceed.

As for Kazakhstan, it was hit this month on the eve of the Olympics with massive protests and political unrest.

The IOC has allowed China to avoid human rights oversight. Beginning with the 2024 Paris Olympics, cities must adhere to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. However, China was not subjected to those rules when it was picked in 2015.

"When China hosts the Olympics again, it is no longer the China back in 2008," Ai Weiwei, China's famous dissident artist, wrote in an email to The AP. Ai helped design the famous Bird's Nest stadium — hoping it would signify a new openness — and then regretted doing so, calling it and the Olympics China's "fake smile."

Ai was jailed in 2011 in China on unspecified charges and now lives in exile in Portugal. The Bird's Nest will again host the opening ceremony on Feb. 4.

"China today has deviated further away from democracy, freedom of press and human rights, and the reality has become even harsher," Ai added.

Here are some examples of how China's tone has toughened.

In 2008, Beijing put some curbs on broadcasting from Tiananmen Square but allowed it; agreed to "protest zones," although they were never used with access repeatedly denied; and dropped some reporting restrictions more than a year ahead of the Games. It also unblocked its censored internet for journalists.

In 2022, there is less accommodation. The pandemic will limit journalists to a tightly sealed "bubble," though there will be internet access. Chinese organizers have warned foreign athletes that any statement that goes against Chinese laws could be punished, and a smartphone app widely used by athletes and reporters has glaring security vulnerabilities, according to an internet watchdog.

Some national Olympic committees have advised teams and staff not to take personal phones or laptops to Beijing. The IOC, which generates billions from sponsorships and broadcast rights, seldom pushes back in public against Chinese organizers who are, in reality, the Chinese government.

Changes that affect 2022 began a month after the 2008 Olympics ended when the global financial crisis hit world economies. China fared better than most, which — coupled with the Olympics — increased its confidence. This also coincides with the rise of Xi Jinping, who headed the 2008 Olympics and was named General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012.

"Although Xi was in charge of 2008 Olympic Games, the Winter Games is truly Xi's Games," said Xu Guoqi, who teaches history at the University of Hong Kong. He is the author of "Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895-2008."

Mary Gallagher, director of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan, said the state of U.S. democracy and its "poor pandemic response" has further emboldened China.

"Right now the multiple U.S. failures create momentum for renewed nationalism and confidence in China," Gallagher said by email. "This is made all the more effective by the Communist Party's strict control over information, which can rain 'positive energy' down on what's happening in China while only publicizing negative accounts of other countries, especially the U.S."

China complained in 2008 that human rights protests around Tibet politicized the Olympics. The Olympic Torch Relay, taken on a world tour, faced violent protests in London and elsewhere. The IOC has not tried such a relay since, and then-President Jacques Rogge said the protests put the Beijing Olympics in "crisis."

China again says the Olympics are only about sports, a shield the IOC's Bach also uses against critics. China says mixing in politics goes against the Olympic Charter, although China itself dabbled in politics by boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

"Sports and politics do mix," Laura Luehrmann, a China specialist at Wright State University, said in an email. "Politics is about the distribution and use of limited resources — most notably power and decision-making, but also finances as well. Sports is all about power and money — even if framed as glorifying

athletic achievement.”

Victor Cha, who served in the White House under President George W. Bush and is the author of “Beyond the Final Score — The Politics of Sport in Asia,” said China moaning about others politicizing sports was “the pot calling the kettle black.”

“There is no country that has ignored the Olympic Charter’s mandate to keep politics out of sports more than China,” Cha, who teaches at Georgetown University, wrote in an essay last week for the Center for Strategic & International Studies.

“Much as the world would like the Olympics to be devoid of politics, as George Orwell once wrote: ‘Sport is war minus the shooting.’”

## Delay in creating new cybersecurity board prompts concern

By ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — It’s a key part of President Joe Biden’s plans to fight major ransomware attacks and digital espionage campaigns: creating a board of experts that would investigate major incidents to see what went wrong and try to prevent the problems from happening again — much like a transportation safety board does with plane crashes.

But eight months after Biden signed an executive order creating the Cyber Safety Review Board it still hasn’t been set up. That means critical tasks haven’t been completed, including an investigation of the massive SolarWinds espionage campaign first discovered more than a year ago. Russian hackers stole data from several federal agencies and private companies.

Some supporters of the new board say the delay could hurt national security and comes amid growing concerns of a potential conflict with Russia over Ukraine that could involve nation-state cyberattacks. The FBI and other federal agencies recently released an advisory — aimed particularly at critical infrastructure like utilities — on Russian state hackers’ methods and techniques.

“We will never get ahead of these threats if it takes us nearly a year to simply organize a group to investigate major breaches like SolarWinds,” said Sen. Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat who leads the Senate Intelligence Committee. “Such a delay is detrimental to our national security and I urge the administration to expedite its process.”

Biden’s order, signed in May, gives the board 90 days to investigate the SolarWinds hack once it’s established. But there’s no timeline for creating the board itself, a job designated to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

In response to questions from The Associated Press, DHS said in a statement it was far along in setting it up and anticipated a “near-term announcement,” but did not address why the process has taken so long.

Scott Shackelford, the cybersecurity program chair at Indiana University and an advocate for creating a cyber review board, said having a rigorous study about what happened in a past hack like SolarWinds is a way of helping prevent similar attacks.

“It sure is taking, my goodness, quite a while to get it going,” Shackelford said. “It’s certainly past time where we could see some positive benefits from having it stood up.”

The Biden administration has made improving cybersecurity a top priority and taken steps to bolster defenses, but this is not the first time lawmakers have been unhappy with the pace of progress. Last year several lawmakers complained it took the administration too long to name a national cyber director, a new position created by Congress.

The SolarWinds hack exploited vulnerabilities in the software supply-chain system and went undetected for most of 2020 despite compromises at a broad swath of federal agencies and dozens of companies, primarily telecommunications and information technology providers. The hacking campaign is named SolarWinds after the U.S. software company whose product was exploited in the first-stage infection of that effort.

The hack highlighted the Russians’ skill at getting to high-level targets. The AP previously reported that SolarWinds hackers had gained access to emails belonging to the then-acting Homeland Security Secre-

tary Chad Wolf.

The Biden administration has kept many of the details about the cyberespionage campaign hidden.

The Justice Department, for instance, said in July that 27 U.S. attorney offices around the country had at least one employee's email account compromised during the hacking campaign. It did not provide details about what kind of information was taken and what impact such a hack may have had on ongoing cases.

The New York-based staff of the DOJ Antitrust Division also had files stolen by the SolarWinds hackers, according to one former senior official briefed on the hack who was not authorized to speak about it publicly and requested anonymity. That breach has not previously been reported. The Antitrust Division investigates private companies and has access to highly sensitive corporate data.

The federal government has undertaken reviews of the SolarWinds hack. The Government Accountability Office issued a report this month on the SolarWinds hack and another major hacking incident that found there was sometimes a slow and difficult process for sharing information between government agencies and the private sector, The National Security Council also conducted a review of the SolarWinds hack last year, according to the GAO report.

But having the new board conduct an independent, thorough examination of the SolarWinds hack could identify inconspicuous security gaps and issues that others may have missed, said Christopher Hart, a former National Transportation Safety Board chairman who has advocated for the creation of a cyber review board.

"Most of the crashes that the NTSB really goes after ... are ones that are a surprise even to the security experts," Hart said. "They weren't really obvious things, they were things that really took some deep digging to figure out what went wrong."

## Abortion opponents eye priorities as high court ruling looms

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

In the nearly two months since a conservative majority of justices on the Supreme Court indicated openness to dramatic new restrictions on abortion, money has poured into the political fundraising arm of the anti-abortion group Susan B. Anthony List.

The organization secured \$20 million in pledged financial contributions, five times more than it has had at the outset of an election year over its 30-year history, according to figures shared with The Associated Press. Before the recent surge, the group had already signed off on its largest-ever political budget, \$72 million, for 2022. That's nearly \$20 million more than it spent in 2020, a year that included a presidential election.

The cash pile virtually guarantees that the Supreme Court's abortion ruling, anticipated by the summer, will do little to quell what has become one of the most animating issues in the United States. Abortion opponents say they will pump their newfound resources into the November elections.

Once a decision is issued, "there will be a lot of focus on all the states and the midterm elections," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, the president of Susan B. Anthony List.

The Supreme Court is considering a Mississippi law that bans abortions after 15 weeks. If the law is upheld, anti-abortion activists said much of the attention would shift to Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Kansas. These are states with Republican legislatures but Democrats in the governorship, each of whom is up for election in November.

If the Supreme Court overturns the Roe v. Wade ruling that women have a constitutional right to an abortion, governors in Michigan and Wisconsin would be powerless to overturn restrictions in their states that were already in place before the 1973 decision.

But these governors would be the only obstacle to new measures passed by GOP legislatures, including outright bans on the procedure.

A Supreme Court decision is "really just the beginning of the work," said Terry Schilling, president of the socially conservative American Principles Project. "Groups have actually been really well-connected with state leaders and investing in campaigns at the local level in these swing states, trying to win control in



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divided governments.”

Supporters of abortion rights, already feeling a heightened sense of alarm by the prospect of a defeat at the Supreme Court, are well aware of how important the governors’ races may be to their cause.

“Really truly, governors in many states are going to be our backstop,” said Jenny Lawson, vice president of organizing and electoral campaigns for Planned Parenthood Action Fund. “As the decisions come down to the states, these governors are the ones who can protect access.”

She declined to specify how much money the group was budgeting to support candidates who back abortion rights.

Some of the Democratic governors up for reelection are increasingly highlighting their commitment to protecting some form of access.

“And as long as I’m governor, that’s what I’ll do,” Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers said during a news conference last week marking the 49th anniversary of the Roe decision.

“I’m proud to stand with so many Michiganders to protect the right to safe and legal abortion,” Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer tweeted last week on the same day organizers of a ballot drive to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution cleared a procedural step. Over the weekend, Whitmer tweeted that the right to abortion “hangs by a thread” in the Supreme Court.

For their part, abortion opponents are undeniably upbeat as the Supreme Court decision nears. Thousands gathered on a bitterly cold day in Washington last week for the March for Life, expressing joy and optimism about the prospect of Roe being overturned.

But the political fallout from such a move could be volatile for both parties. A decision drastically reducing access to abortion could energize Democrats heading into the fall campaign.

The issue is already rising in priority for Democrats, according to a December poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The poll found that 13% of Democrats listed abortion or reproductive rights as an issue they want the federal government to address. That’s up from less than 1% of Democrats who named it as a priority for 2021 and 3% who listed it in 2020.

Lawson predicted a court ruling sharply restricting or ending a federal right to abortion would “drive anger and outrage and cause a realignment at the voting booth.”

There’s a risk for religious conservatives as well, who have devoted decades of work to the issue and formed an unlikely alliance with Donald Trump to achieve their goals. The thrice-married former president who once expressed support for abortion rights ultimately named three justices to the Supreme Court, dramatically reshaping it to threaten Roe.

But if those justices fall short of overturning that decision or agree to some sort of compromise, conservatives could be deeply disappointed and feel less interested in participating in the midterm elections. The GOP has been stung before, notably when Republican-appointed Chief Justice John Roberts helped uphold President Barack Obama’s signature health care law, another issue that had galvanized the right.

But for now, opponents say they’re buoyed by a sense of momentum.

“It’s different now,” Dannenfelter said.

## **EXPLAINER: Supreme Court takes up race in college admissions**

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — The Supreme Court has agreed to review a challenge to the consideration of race in college admission decisions, often known as affirmative action. With three new conservative justices on the court since its last review, the practice may be facing its greatest threat yet.

The court said Monday it would consider a pair of lawsuits alleging that Harvard University and the University of North Carolina discriminate against Asian American applicants. The practice has been reviewed by the court several times over the past 40 years and has generally been upheld, but with limits.

A look at the case:

**WHAT ARE RACE-CONSCIOUS ADMISSIONS POLICIES?**

When colleges sort through their applicants deciding which ones to admit, some consider race along

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with grades and a host of other factors like athletics and community service. Some schools have used the practice for decades as a way to address racial discrimination against Black students and others who were long excluded from America's colleges. Today, supporters say it's an important tool that helps bring a diverse mix of students to campus, while opponents say it amounts to its own form of discrimination.

Most colleges don't disclose whether they consider race, but the practice is believed to be limited to a small fraction of schools. Some estimates put it at a few hundred of the nation's 6,000 colleges, mostly at more selective colleges.

Most states allow affirmative action but nine have outlawed it, including California, Florida and, most recently, Idaho, which banned it in 2020.

## WHAT'S THE LATEST CHALLENGE?

The Supreme Court is taking up two lawsuits filed by Students for Fair Admissions, a Virginia-based group that says race should play no part in the admission process. The group is led by Edward Blum, a legal strategist who has spent years working to rid racial considerations from college admissions.

In its lawsuits, the group argues that Harvard and UNC intentionally discriminate against Asian American applicants. Examining six years of data at Harvard, the group found that Asian American applicants had the strongest academics but were admitted at the lowest rates compared to students of other races.

It also found that Harvard's admissions officers gave Asian Americans lower scores on a subjective "personal" rating designed to measure attributes such as likeability and kindness.

A federal judge in 2019 upheld Harvard's admissions practices, saying it was "not perfect" but passed constitutional muster. The judge said race-conscious practices always penalize groups that don't get an advantage, but they're justified "by the compelling interest in diversity" on college campuses.

An appeals court upheld the ruling in 2020.

The group brought similar claims against UNC, saying its process disadvantages white and Asian American students. A federal judge sided with the university last year.

In its appeal to the Supreme Court, the group asked the panel to review both cases and also to overturn the court's 2003 decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, which upheld admissions policies at the University of Michigan's law school. That decision cleared colleges to consider race if it's done in a "narrowly tailored" way to serve a "compelling interest."

The group's appeal argued that the *Grutter* decision "endorsed racial objectives that are amorphous and unmeasurable and thus incapable of narrow tailoring."

## WHAT HAS THE SUPREME COURT SAID ABOUT AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

Race-conscious policies have gone before the Supreme Court several times dating to the 1970s and have generally been upheld, with some limits.

Racial quotas that reserve a certain number of seats for minority students have been deemed unconstitutional, but the court has said colleges can consider race as long as it's one of many factors in the decision.

Students' race can be used as a "plus factor" to give them an edge, but it can't be the defining factor, the court has said. Schools must be able to show they consider race in a "narrowly tailored" way, and that there is no race-neutral approach that would meet the same objective of increasing student diversity.

The court last examined affirmative action in 2016, when it upheld the admissions process at the University of Texas. That suit, also orchestrated by Blum, was filed by a white Texan who was denied admission to the university.

## WHAT ARE THE POLITICS?

The Trump administration sided with Blum in the Harvard case, saying in 2018 that the school's process "may be infected with racial bias." The administration also rescinded an Obama-era policy encouraging schools to consider race, and it filed its own lawsuit accusing Yale University of discriminating against Asian American and white applicants.

The Biden administration later dropped the Yale lawsuit and supported Harvard against Blum, urging the Supreme Court not to take up the case.

Meanwhile, the court has shifted further to the right, with three new conservative justices appointed by

Trump.

## WHAT IS THE POSSIBLE IMPACT?

Affirmative action backers hope the court leaves things as they are, giving colleges flexibility to consider race within certain bounds. Opponents hope for a sweeping decision that would remove race from the admission process entirely.

Eliminating the practice would send shockwaves across American higher education and leave many schools scrambling to find other ways to promote diversity. Some colleges say that, without considering race, they would expect to see a decrease in their Black student populations.

Opponents say ending affirmative action would make the process fairer, and some say colleges could preserve racial diversity by giving an advantage to low-income students.

Between both extremes are a wide range of possible options. The court could add further restrictions on the practice, for example, or it could raise the standard of proof colleges must meet to show they're within constitutional bounds.

## WHAT ARE PEOPLE ARE SAYING?

Blum welcomed the court's announcement, saying he hopes the justices will end racial considerations at all colleges. In a statement, he added that Harvard and UNC have "have racially gerrymandered their freshman classes in order to achieve prescribed racial quotas."

Harvard President Lawrence Bacow vowed to defend the school's use of race as one of many factors, saying it "produces a more diverse student body which strengthens the learning environment for all."

Several groups representing students of color denounced the court's decision to get involved. NAACP Legal and Educational Defense Fund director Sherrilyn Ifill said it "threatens the nation's ideals of equality."

In a statement, she said holistic, race-conscious admissions processes "mitigate systemic barriers to educational opportunities faced by many Black students and other students of color, ensuring that all hard-working and qualified applicants receive due consideration."

Some other groups applauded the news. Mike Zhao, president of the Asian American Coalition for Education, said Americans should have equal opportunity to achieve success "through hard work, determination and initiative."

"It's time for the U.S. Supreme Court to step up to protect our constitutional rights," he said in a statement.

## Report: Anti-corruption fight is stalled, COVID not helping

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Most countries have made little to no progress in bringing down corruption levels over the past decade, and authorities' response to the COVID-19 pandemic in many places has weighed on accountability, a closely watched study by an anti-graft organization found Tuesday.

Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index, which measures the perception of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople, found that "increasingly, rights and checks and balances are being undermined not only in countries with systemic corruption and weak institutions, but also among established democracies."

Among other issues over the past year, it cited the use of Pegasus software, which has been linked to snooping on human rights activists, journalists and politicians across the globe.

The report said the pandemic has "been used in many countries as an excuse to curtail basic freedoms and sidestep important checks and balances."

In Western Europe, the best-scoring region overall, the pandemic has given countries "an excuse for complacency in anti-corruption efforts as accountability and transparency measures are neglected or even rolled back," Transparency said. In some Asian countries, it said, COVID-19 "also has been used as an excuse to suppress criticism." It pointed to increased digital surveillance in some nations and authoritarian approaches in others.

The report ranks countries on a scale from a "highly corrupt" 0 to a "very clean" 100. Denmark, New Zealand and Finland tied for first place with 88 points each; the first two were unchanged, while Finland gained three points. Norway, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Germany

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completed the top 10. The U.K. was 11th with 78.

The United States, which slipped over recent years to hit 67 points in 2020, held that score this time but slipped a couple of places to 27th. Transparency said it dropped out of the top 25 for the first time "as it faces continuous attacks on free and fair elections and an opaque campaign finance system."

Canada, which slid three points to 74 and two places to 13th, "is seeing increased risks of bribery and corruption in business," the group said. It added that the publication of the Pandora Papers showed Canada as "a hub for illicit financial flows, fuelling transnational corruption across the region and the world."

The index rates 180 countries and territories. South Sudan was bottom with 11 points; Somalia, with which it shared last place in 2020, tied this time with Syria for second-to-last with 13. Venezuela followed with 14 — then Yemen, North Korea and Afghanistan tied with 16 apiece.

Transparency said the control of corruption has stagnated or worsened in 86% of the countries it surveyed in the last 10 years. In that time, 23 countries — including the U.S., Canada, Hungary and Poland — have declined significantly in its index, while 25 have improved significantly. They include Estonia, the Seychelles and Armenia.

Compiled since 1995, the index is calculated using 13 different data sources that provide perceptions of public sector corruption from business people and country experts. Sources include the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and private risk and consulting companies.

## US orders 8,500 troops on heightened alert amid Russia worry

By ROBERT BURNS and LORNE COOK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon ordered 8,500 troops on higher alert to potentially deploy to Europe as part of a NATO "response force" amid growing concern that Russia could soon make a military move on Ukraine. President Joe Biden consulted with key European leaders, underscoring U.S. solidarity with allies there.

Putting the U.S.-based troops on heightened alert for Europe on Monday suggested diminishing hope that Russian President Vladimir Putin will back away from what Biden himself has said looks like a threat to invade neighboring Ukraine.

At stake, beyond the future of Ukraine, is the credibility of a NATO alliance that is central to U.S. defense strategy but that Putin views as a Cold War relic and a threat to Russian security. For Biden, the crisis represents a major test of his ability to forge a united allied stance against Putin.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said about 8,500 U.S.-based troops are being put on alert for possible deployment — not to Ukraine but to NATO territory in Eastern Europe as part of an alliance force meant to signal a unified commitment to deter any wider Putin aggression.

Russia denies it is planning an invasion. It says Western accusations are merely a cover for NATO's own planned provocations. Recent days have seen high-stakes diplomacy that has failed to reach any breakthrough, and key players in the drama are making moves that suggest fear of imminent war. Biden has sought to strike a balance between actions meant to deter Putin and those that might provide the Russian leader with an opening to use the huge force he has assembled at Ukraine's border.

Biden held an 80-minute video call with several European leaders on the Russian military buildup and potential responses to an invasion.

"I had a very, very, very good meeting -- total unanimity with all the European leaders," Biden told reporters at the White House. "We'll talk about it later."

The White House said the leaders emphasized their desire for a diplomatic solution to the crisis but also discussed efforts to deter further Russian aggression, "including preparations to impose massive consequences and severe economic costs on Russia for such actions as well as to reinforce security on NATO's eastern flank."

A day earlier, the State Department had ordered the families of all American personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv to leave the country, and it said that nonessential embassy staff could leave at U.S. government expense.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Oleg Nikolenko, said that U.S. decision was "a premature step"

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and a sign of "excessive caution." He said Russia was sowing panic among Ukrainians and foreigners in order to destabilize Ukraine.

Britain said it, too, was withdrawing some diplomats and dependents from its Kyiv Embassy. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said an invasion was not inevitable but "the intelligence is pretty gloomy."

Ordering even a modest number of American troops to be ready for potential deployment to Europe is meant to demonstrate U.S. resolve to support its NATO allies, particularly those in Eastern Europe who feel threatened by Russia and worry that Putin could put them in his crosshairs.

"What this is about is reassurance to our NATO allies," Kirby told a Pentagon news conference, adding that no troops are intended for deployment to Ukraine, which is not a member of the alliance but has been assured by Washington of continued U.S. political support and arms supplies.

The Pentagon's move, which was done at Biden's direction and on Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's recommendation, is being made in tandem with actions by other NATO member governments to bolster a defensive presence in Eastern European nations. Denmark, for example, is sending a frigate and F-16 warplanes to Lithuania; Spain is sending four fighter jets to Bulgaria and three ships to the Black Sea to join NATO naval forces, and France stands ready to send troops to Romania.

In a statement prior to Kirby's announcement, NATO said the Netherlands plans to send two F-35 fighter aircraft to Bulgaria in April and is putting a ship and land-based units on standby for NATO's Response Force.

NATO has not made a decision to activate the Response Force, which consists of about 40,000 troops from multiple nations. That force was enhanced in 2014 — the year Russia seized Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula and intervened in support of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine — by creating a "spearhead force" of about 20,000 troops on extra-high alert within the larger Response Force.

If NATO does decide to activate the Response Force, the United States will contribute a range of military units, Kirby said.

"It is a NATO call to make," Kirby said. "For our part, we wanted to make sure that we were ready in case that call should come. And that means making sure that units that would contribute to it are as ready as they can be on as short a notice as possible."

He said some units will be ordered to be ready to deploy on as little as five days' notice. Among the 8,500 troops, an unspecified number could be sent to Europe for purposes other than supporting the NATO Response Force, he said. Without providing details, he said they might be deployed "if other situations develop."

Prior to the U.S. announcement, NATO issued a statement summing up moves already described by member countries. Restating them under the NATO banner appeared aimed at showing resolve. The West is ramping up its rhetoric in the information war that has accompanied the Ukraine standoff.

Russia has massed an estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine's border, demanding that NATO promise it will never allow Ukraine to join and that other actions, such as stationing alliance troops in former Soviet bloc countries, be curtailed.

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The alliance will "take all necessary measures to protect and defend all allies," Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said. "We will always respond to any deterioration of our security environment, including through strengthening our collective defense."

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was NATO and the U.S. who were behind the escalating tensions, not Russia.

"All this is happening not because of what we, Russia, are doing. This is happening because of what NATO, the U.S. are doing," Peskov told reporters.

The NATO announcement came as European Union foreign ministers sought to put on their own fresh display of unity in support of Ukraine, and paper over concerns about divisions on the best way to confront any Russian aggression.

In a statement, the ministers said the EU has stepped up sanction preparations, and they warned that "any further military aggression by Russia against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe costs."

## Ethics office says Reps. Newman, Lamborn may have broken law

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A congressional ethics watchdog has concluded that U.S. Reps. Marie Newman of Illinois and Doug Lamborn of Colorado may have violated federal law, prompting reviews from the House Ethics Committee.

Separate investigative reports from the Office of Congressional Ethics released Monday detailed a “substantial reason to believe” that Newman, a Democrat, promised federal employment to a political opponent and that Lamborn, a Republican, misused official resources for personal purposes.

Though the ethics office conducts the initial review and makes recommendations, only the House Ethics Committee has the power to punish a lawmaker for wrongdoing. The committee said in a statement Monday that it would review the reports and investigate further.

REP. MARIE NEWMAN, DEMOCRAT OF ILLINOIS

The allegations against Newman surfaced out of a legal dispute involving an employment contract between the Illinois Democrat and Iymen Chehade, a former foreign policy advisor during her successful House campaign in 2020. Newman a progressive lawmaker, unseated Chicago-area Rep. Dan Lipinski, a staunch abortion opponent and one of the most conservative Democrats in Congress at the time.

An attorney representing Newman told the committee in December that the congresswoman “cooperates completely with the review,” but, that OCE “has prejudged the matter from the beginning.”

The ethics office report says that at the start of her campaign, Newman made Chehade “certain promises about future employment,” in her congressional office. “Those promises were reduced to a contract signed by both parties,” in December 2018, the report reads.

When Newman did not hire Chehade, he filed a lawsuit to enforce the contract. He claimed that he decided to not run for the congressional seat in 2020 because of the promise that Newman would hire him as a foreign policy advisor during the campaign and then a district or legislative director once she took office. In a motion to dismiss the case, Newman’s counsel acknowledged that her contract was in violation of House employment and federal contracting rules.

Newman ended up settling the case with her former adviser and the two signed nondisclosure agreements as part of a settlement. The OEC recommended that the House committee subpoena Chehade and political consulting group LBH Chicago as it conducts its review of its findings.

A spokesperson for Newman said Monday that the OCE review stemmed from a “politically-motivated” complaint from a right-wing organization and that the materials produced during the probe “overwhelmingly demonstrate that the ethics complaint is completely meritless.”

Newman is a former management consultant who started and led an anti-bullying nonprofit. During her campaign for the House, she argued Lipinski no longer reflected the views of the district, which backed Sen. Bernie Sanders, a democratic socialist, over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential primary. She called herself the “true Democrat” during the race, and said she would fight for Medicare for All, abortion rights and a path to citizenship for people in the U.S. illegally.

REP. DOUG LAMBORN, REPUBLICAN OF COLORADO

The report into Lamborn looks at complaints that lawmaker has misused official resources for personal and non-official purposes. The OCE report included interviews with three current and two former Lamborn staffers as well as interviews with the lawmaker himself.

“The OCE uncovered evidence showing a pattern and practice in Rep. Lamborn’s office of official staff conducting personal and campaign-related tasks for Rep. Lamborn, his wife, and other family members during official work hours, and using official resources,” the report stated.

In a December statement to the committee, an attorney for Lamborn said, “A thorough review of the facts will make it clear to everyone that no ethical violation has occurred, and the same should be dismissed.” A request for comment from Lamborn was not immediately returned,

The report includes details about Lamborn’s wife having access to an official House email account and

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even at times sleeping in the office with Lamborn. The lawmaker told the ethics office his wife played "a substantial role," in his congressional office which at times included hiring, firing, and promotions.

"While it is not unusual for spouses to play a role in a congressional office or have an official email account, evidence obtained by the OCE indicated that Mrs. Lamborn had a role in the office that exceeded what is permissible for spouses," the report continued.

The OCE recommended the House Ethics Committee review other allegations against Lamborn, including that he solicited or accepted improper gifts from subordinates. It also recommended issuing subpoenas to Lamborn and several senior members of his staff.

Lamborn, the eight-term congressman from Colorado Springs, was sued in May by a former staffer for allegedly disregarding coronavirus safety protocols in his Washington office even after he and staff members were infected, letting one of his sons live in the basement of the U.S. Capitol and ordering staff to run personal errands for his family.

## US orders 8,500 troops on heightened alert amid Russia worry

By ROBERT BURNS and LORNE COOK Associated Press

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## Asian shares decline amid omicron, Fed, Ukraine jitters

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares skidded Tuesday following a volatile day on Wall Street. Inflation-fighting



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measures from the Federal Reserve and the possibility of conflict between Russia and Ukraine are overhanging markets.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 slipped 2.0% in morning trading to 27,027.23. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dropped 2.3% to 6,972.10. South Korea's Kospi lost 2.1% to 2,734.03. Hong Kong's Hang Seng shed 1.7% to 24,242.91, while the Shanghai Composite dipped 1.0% to 3,487.46.

"The surprise turnaround in U.S. market overnight does not seem to provide any relief into Asia's session today," said Yeap Jun Rong, market strategist at IG.

A late-day buying spree pushed the benchmark S&P 500 index to a 0.3% gain after pulling it out of so-called correction territory — a drop of 10% or more from its most recent high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average had declined more than 1,000 points before rallying and ending higher.

"We're in this wait-and-see mode, which is almost the most uncomfortable place to be, so I think the market is really grappling with that," said Lindsey Bell, chief markets and money strategist at Ally Invest.

Monday's wild turnaround followed a three-week decline for the S&P 500, concluding with its worst weekly stretch since the start of the pandemic.

The S&P 500 fell as much as 4% Monday. The index has recovered from an intraday loss that big only three times in the past. The tech-heavy Nasdaq index rose 0.6% after recovering from a nearly 5% descent.

Early in the day, benchmark stock indexes flirted with near 4-month lows as investors anticipated guidance from the Fed later this week about its plans to raise interest rates to tame inflation, which is at its highest level in nearly four decades.

The Fed's short-term rate has been pegged near zero since the pandemic hit the global economy in 2020 and that has fueled borrowing and spending by consumers and businesses.

But rising prices at supermarkets, car lots and gas stations are raising concerns that consumers will pare back spending to limit the pressure on their budgets. Companies have warned that supply-chain problems and higher raw materials costs could crimp their profits.

The Fed has kept downward pressure on longer-term interest rates by buying trillions of dollars worth of government and corporate bonds, but those emergency purchases are scheduled to end in March. Nudging rates higher is intended to help slow economic growth and the rate of inflation.

"There's a short-term panic and part of that is the high level of uncertainty around what the Fed is going to do," said Sylvia Jablonski, chief investment officer at Defiance ETFs.

Investors are also keeping an eye on developments in Ukraine. Tensions soared Monday between Russia and the West over concerns that Moscow is planning to invade Ukraine, with NATO outlining potential troop and ship deployments.

The S&P 500 rose 12.19 points to 4,410.13. It's now 8.1% below the all-time high it set on Jan. 3.

The Dow rose 99.13 points to 34,364.50. The Nasdaq gained 86.21 points to 13,855.13.

Small company stocks also bounced back. The Russell 2000 rose 45.59 points, or 2.3%, to 2,033.51. The index had been down 2.8%.

The wave of selling also extended to cryptocurrencies. Bitcoin fell as low as \$33,000 overnight but rallied back above \$36,000 by late afternoon. Still, the digital currency is far below the high of more than \$68,000 it hit in November.

Retailers notched some of the biggest gains in the comeback: Gap jumped nearly 8%.

The market is waiting to hear from chair Jerome Powell Wednesday after Fed policymakers conclude a two-day meeting and offer their latest thinking on the economy and interest rates.

Some economists worry the Fed is moving too slowly. Others fret that the Fed may act too aggressively. They argue that numerous rate hikes would risk causing a recession and wouldn't slow inflation in any case. In this view, high prices mostly reflect snarled supply chains that the Fed's rate hikes are powerless to cure.

When the Fed boosts its short-term rate, it tends to make borrowing more expensive for consumers and businesses, slowing the economy with the intent of reducing inflation. That could reduce company earnings, which tend to dictate stock prices over the long term.

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Europe's STOXX 600 index closed down 3.6% on concerns about Fed tightening and worries about the situation around Ukraine. The Russian ruble has also fallen after U.S. President Joe Biden indicated that in the event of a Russian invasion the U.S. could block Russian banks from access to dollars or impose other sanctions.

Investors are monitoring the latest round of corporate earnings, in part, to gauge how companies are dealing with higher prices and what they plan to do as inflation continues pressuring operations.

On Tuesday, American Express, Johnson & Johnson, and Microsoft report results. Boeing and Tesla report their results on Wednesday. McDonald's, Southwest Airlines and Apple report results on Thursday.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude added 38 cents to \$83.69 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It tumbled \$1.83 to \$85.31 on Monday. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 52 cents to \$86.79 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar fell to 113.77 Japanese yen from 113.96 yen. The euro cost \$1.1316, down from \$1.1326.

## **Soldiers declare military junta in control in Burkina Faso**

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — More than a dozen mutinous soldiers declared Monday on state television that a military junta had seized control of Burkina Faso after detaining the democratically elected president following a day of gunbattles in the capital of the West African country.

The military coup in a nation that was once a bastion of stability was the third of its kind in the region in the last 18 months, creating upheaval in some of the countries hardest hit by Islamic extremist attacks.

Capt. Sidsore Kaber Ouedraogo said the Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration "has decided to assume its responsibilities before history." The soldiers put an end to President Roch Marc Christian Kabore's presidency because of the deteriorating security situation and the president's inability to manage the crisis, he said.

It was not immediately known where Kabore was, and the junta spokesman said only that the coup had taken place "without any physical violence against those arrested, who are being held in a safe place, with respect for their dignity."

A soldier in the mutiny, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of situation, told The Associated Press that Kabore had submitted his resignation.

The new military regime said it had suspended Burkina Faso's constitution and dissolved the National Assembly. The country's borders were closed, and a curfew was in effect from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Ouedraogo said that the country's new leaders would work to establish a calendar "acceptable to everyone" for holding new elections without giving further details.

After the televised announcement, crowds took to the streets, cheering and honking car horns in support of the takeover. People hoped that the coup would ease the devastation they have endured since jihadist violence spread across the country.

"This is an opportunity for Burkina Faso to regain its integrity. The previous regime sunk us. People are dying daily. Soldiers are dying. There are thousands of displaced," said Manuel Sip, a protester in downtown Ouagadougou. The army should have acted faster in ousting the president, he said.

After the overthrow of strongman Blaise Compaore in 2014, several people told the AP they no longer cared if they had a democratically elected leader. They just wanted to live in peace.

The communique read aloud on state broadcaster RTB was signed by the country's apparent new military leader, Lt. Col. Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba. He sat beside the spokesman without addressing the camera during the announcement.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on coup leaders to lay down their arms. He reiterated the U.N.'s "full commitment to the preservation of the constitutional order" in Burkina Faso and support for the people in their efforts "to find solutions to the multifaceted challenges facing the country," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

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The U.N. chief said the military takeover was part of "an epidemic of coups around the world and in that region."

The U.S. State Department in a statement expressed deep concern about the dissolution of the government, suspension of the constitution and the detention of government leaders. "We condemn these acts and call on those responsible to deescalate the situation, prevent harm to President Kaboré and any other members of his government in detention, and return to civilian-led government and constitutional order," spokesperson Ned Price said.

In a statement, Kabore's political party accused the mutinous soldiers of trying to assassinate the president and another government minister and said the presidential palace in Ouagadougou remained surrounded by "heavily armed and hooded men."

The coup "is a signal of frustration and exasperation on the heels of a growing struggle to stem the threat of militants, cope with the degraded security structure, and an attempt to restore faith in the institution of the military," said Laith Alkhouri, CEO of Intelonyx Intelligence Advisory, which provides intelligence analysis.

Gunfire erupted early Sunday when soldiers took control of a major military barracks in the capital. In response, civilians rallied in a show of support for the rebellion but were dispersed by security forces firing tear gas. On Monday, groups of people celebrated again in the streets of the capital after reports of Kabore's capture.

Kabore was elected in 2015 after the popular uprising that ousted Compaore. Kabore was reelected in November 2020, but frustration has been growing at his inability to stem the jihadist violence. Attacks linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have killed thousands and displaced more than an estimated 1.5 million people.

The military has suffered losses since the extremist violence began in 2016. In December, more than 50 security forces were killed and nine more died in November.

Mutinous soldiers told the AP that the government was out of touch with troops. Among their demands are more forces in the battle against extremists and better care for the wounded and the families of the dead.

About 100 military members have planned the takeover since August, according to one of the mutinous soldiers.

The West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS said in a statement that it was following events in Ouagadougou with "great concern." The bloc has already suspended Mali and Guinea over military coups. Those coup leaders appear in no hurry to return their countries to civilian rule.

Burkina Faso has also seen its share of coup attempts and military takeovers, although it experienced a period of relative stability under Compaore, who ruled for 27 years until his ouster in 2014.

In 1987, Compaore came to power by force. And in 2015, soldiers loyal to him attempted to overthrow the transitional government put into place after his ouster. The army was ultimately able to put the transitional authorities back in power, who led again until Kabore won an election and took office.

## Sheldon Silver, NY power broker sent to prison, dead at 77

By MICHAEL HILL and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Former New York Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, one of the most powerful figures in state government for two decades before his conviction on corruption charges, has died in federal custody. He was 77.

Silver died Monday, the federal Bureau of Prisons said, adding that the official cause of death would be determined by the medical examiner.

Silver's supporters had said he was in failing health from multiple medical conditions. He had been serving his sentence at the Federal Medical Center in Devens, Massachusetts, but was in a hospital in nearby Ayer, Massachusetts, at the time of his death, the bureau said.

The Manhattan Democrat, who told a judge he prayed he would not die in prison, was serving a more than six-year sentence for using his clout in state government to benefit real estate developers, who re-

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warded Silver by referring lucrative business to his law firm.

Silver's conviction ended a nearly four-decade career in the Assembly. He first won a seat representing Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1976. Although he cut a low-key figure in the halls of the state Capitol, carefully parsing out comments in a baritone mumble, he was a consummate practitioner of Albany's inside game.

He became Assembly speaker in 1994, a powerful position that made him one of Albany's "three men in a room" negotiating annual budgets and major legislation with the governor and state Senate leader.

In all, Silver served as speaker during the tenure of five New York governors, from Mario Cuomo to Andrew Cuomo.

He became known as an inscrutable and stubborn negotiator, blocking proposals so often he was sometimes called "Dr. No." Some of his obstructionist reputation had to do with being the lone Democrat at the negotiating table during Republican Gov. George Pataki's three terms, during which time the GOP also controlled the state Senate.

He helped scuttle former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg's plan to locate a football stadium on Manhattan's West Side. And he took the brunt of the blame for the collapse in 2008 of Bloomberg's congestion-pricing plan for Manhattan, which would have charged electronic tolls for driving through the borough's most highly trafficked neighborhoods.

The exasperated mayor put out a press release saying it "takes a special kind of cowardice" not to have lawmakers vote on the plan. Silver said he didn't have the votes.

He survived an early tenure coup attempt and became adept at horse-trading to secure education funding, tenants rights legislation and other policies favored by Assembly Democrats.

"He was a fighter for his constituents and his work to rebuild lower Manhattan after the terrible events of 9/11 will never be forgotten," said current Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie in a statement. "For years he was the lone voice in the room pushing back against many regressive policies that would have harmed so many New Yorkers, and he presided over landmark laws to improve the lives of our most vulnerable residents."

An Orthodox Jew, Silver was known to observe Sabbath even during the marathon negotiation sessions that preceded annual budget deadlines and the end of legislative sessions.

Over time, he became a symbol of Albany's much-maligned opaque style of governance and, ultimately, a target of federal prosecutors.

Prosecutors accused Silver of trading his influence for money. In one instance, they argued that Silver persuaded a physician to refer asbestos cancer patients to his law firm so it could seek multimillion-dollar settlements from personal injury lawsuits, a secret arrangement that allowed him to collect about \$3 million in referral fees. In return, prosecutors said he directed hundreds of thousands of dollars in state grants to a research center run by the doctor.

Silver's lawyer argued that his client was entitled to accept payments for outside work.

His original 2015 conviction was tossed out by an appeals court after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that narrowed the definition of a corrupt act. He was convicted again at a second trial in 2018 tailored slightly to conform to the high court ruling.

But an appeals court ultimately threw out the conviction related to the asbestos cancer patients, citing a faulty instruction to the jury. Prosecutors decided not to retry him on that charge. In the part of his conviction that stuck, the court found that he had supported legislation that benefited real estate developers who were referring tax business to a law firm that employed him.

Silver gave up his leadership position following his arrest in January 2015 and lost his legislative seat upon his first conviction that November.

Silver joined a long list of state lawmakers, including other top leaders, who have been sentenced for crimes including bribery, conspiracy, tax evasion, fraud and racketeering. One of the leaders with whom he shared power during his time as speaker, Republican state Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, was convicted of extortion, wire fraud and bribery in a case that moved through the courts at roughly the same time as Silver's case.

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Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who had shared power with Silver, resigned from office last summer amid sexual harassment allegations.

Silver begged for mercy ahead of his sentencing in a letter to the judge.

"I pray I will not die in prison," Silver wrote, saying he was "broken-hearted" that he damaged the trust people have in government.

Silver was furloughed from prison for several days in May before federal authorities denied him home confinement.

Silver was the youngest of four children of Russian immigrants. His father ran a wholesale hardware store. As an adult, he and his wife had four children and lived in a lower Manhattan apartment blocks from his first home.

He received a bachelor's degree from Yeshiva University and a law degree from Brooklyn Law School.

## At least 6 reported dead in crush at African Cup soccer game

By EDWIN KINDZEKA MOKI and ISIFU WIRFENGLA Associated Press

YAOUNDE, Cameroon (AP) — At least six people died in a crush outside a stadium hosting a game at Africa's top soccer tournament in Cameroon on Monday, a local government official said, realizing fears over the capacity of the country to stage the continent's biggest sports event.

Naseri Paul Biya, the governor of the central region of Cameroon, said there could be more deaths.

"We are not in position to give you the total number of casualties," he said.

The crush happened as crowds struggled to get access to Olembe Stadium in the capital city of Yaounde to watch the host country play Comoros in a last 16 knockout game in the African Cup of Nations.

Officials at the nearby Messassi hospital said they received at least 40 injured people, who were rushed to the hospital by police and civilians. The officials said the hospital wasn't capable of treating all of them.

"Some of the injured are in desperate condition," said Olinga Prudence, a nurse. "We will have to evacuate them to a specialized hospital."

People were seen lying motionless on their backs near an entrance to the stadium in the aftermath of the crush. A man knelt next to one of the victims and appeared to be trying to resuscitate the victim. Shoes, caps and colorful wigs — part of some of the fans' game costumes — were strewn on the ground.

Witnesses said children were among those caught up in the crush. The witnesses said it happened when stadium stewards closed the gates and stopped allowing people in. It was not immediately clear if the crush happened before or during the game.

Soccer officials said around 50,000 people had tried to attend the match. The stadium has a capacity of 60,000 but it was not meant to be more than 80% full for the game due to restrictions on the size of the crowd because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Confederation of African Football, which runs the African Cup, said in a statement it was aware of the incident.

"CAF is currently investigating the situation and trying to get more details on what transpired," it said. "We are in constant communication with Cameroon government and the Local Organizing Committee."

One of the federation's top officials, general secretary Veron Mosengo-Omba, went to visit injured fans in the hospital, the statement said.

Cameroon is hosting the African Cup for the first time in 50 years. The Central African nation was meant to host the tournament in 2019 but the event was taken away from it that year and awarded to Egypt because of serious concerns with Cameroon's preparations, particularly the readiness of its stadiums.

Olembe Stadium was one of the venues that was under scrutiny. It is the main stadium for the monthlong tournament and will stage three more games, including the final on Feb. 6.

Monday's incident was the second serious blow to the country in the space of a day, after at least 17 people died when a fire set off a series of explosions at a nightclub in Yaounde on Sunday.

Following that incident, Cameroon President Paul Biya urged the country to be on guard while it hosts its biggest national sports event in a half century.

Cameroon won Monday's game 2-1 to move on to the quarterfinals.

## **New space telescope reaches final stop million miles out**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The world's biggest, most powerful space telescope arrived at its observation post 1 million miles from Earth on Monday, a month after it lifted off on a quest to behold the dawn of the universe.

On command, the James Webb Space Telescope fired its rocket thrusters for nearly five minutes to go into orbit around the sun at its designated location, and NASA confirmed the operation went as planned.

The mirrors on the \$10 billion observatory still must be meticulously aligned, the infrared detectors sufficiently chilled and the scientific instruments calibrated before observations can begin in June.

But flight controllers in Baltimore were euphoric after chalking up another success.

"We're one step closer to uncovering the mysteries of the universe. And I can't wait to see Webb's first new views of the universe this summer!" NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said in a statement.

The telescope will enable astronomers to peer back further in time than ever before, all the way back to when the first stars and galaxies were forming 13.7 billion years ago. That's a mere 100 million years from the Big Bang, when the universe was created.

Besides making stellar observations, Webb will scan the atmospheres of alien worlds for possible signs of life.

"Webb is officially on station," said Keith Parrish, a manager on the project. "This is just capping off just a remarkable 30 days."

The telescope was launched from French Guiana on Christmas. A week and a half later, a sunshield as big as a tennis court stretched open on the telescope. The instrument's gold-coated primary mirror — 21 feet (6.5 meters) across — unfolded a few days later.

The primary mirror has 18 hexagonal segments, each the size of a coffee table, that will have to be painstakingly aligned so that they see as one — a task that will take three months.

"We're a month in and the baby hasn't even opened its eyes yet," Jane Rigby, the operations project scientist, said of the telescope's infrared instruments. "But that's the science that we're looking forward to."

Monday's thruster firing put the telescope in orbit around the sun at the so-called second Lagrange point, where the gravitational forces of the sun and Earth balance each other. The 7-ton spacecraft will loop-de-loop around that point while also circling the sun. It will always face Earth's night side to keep its infrared detectors as frigid as possible.

At 1 million miles (1.6 million kilometers) away, Webb is more than four times as distant as the moon.

The Webb is expected to operate for well over a decade, maybe two.

Considered the successor to the Hubble Space Telescope, which orbits 330 miles (530 kilometers) up, Webb is too far away for emergency repairs. That makes the milestones over the past month — and the ones ahead — all the more critical.

Spacewalking astronauts performed surgery five times on Hubble. The first operation, in 1993, corrected the telescope's blurry vision, a flaw introduced during the mirror's construction on the ground.

Whether chasing optical and ultraviolet light like Hubble or infrared light like Webb, telescopes can see farther and more clearly when operating above Earth's distorting atmosphere. That's why NASA teamed up with the European and Canadian space agencies to get Webb and its mirror — the largest ever launched — into the cosmos.

## **Extra cash for low-income mothers may influence baby brains**

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

New research suggests giving extra cash to low-income mothers can change their infants' brain development.

Brain measurements at age 1 showed faster activity in key brain regions in infants whose low-income

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families received \$300-plus monthly for a year, compared with those who got \$20 each month, U.S. researchers reported Monday.

The same type of brain activity has been linked in older children to learning skills and other development, although it's unclear whether the differences found will persist or influence the infants' future.

The researchers are investigating whether the payments led to better nutrition, less parent stress or other benefits to the infants. There were no restrictions on how the money was spent.

The results suggest reducing poverty can directly affect infant brain development, said senior author, Dr. Kimberly Noble, a neuroscience and education professor at Teachers College, Columbia University.

"The brain changes speak to the remarkable malleability of the brain, especially early in childhood," she said.

While the researchers can't rule out that differences seen in total brain activity in both groups were due to chance, they did find meaningful differences in the frontal region, linked with learning and thinking skills. Higher-frequency activity was about 20% greater in infants whose families received the larger payments.

The findings build on evidence that cash support can improve outcomes for older children, said co-author Katherine Magnuson, director of the National Institute for Research on Poverty and Economic Mobility, based at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

It's also the first rigorous evidence of how the payments may affect children in the earliest years of life, she said. Results were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The study recruited mothers shortly after childbirth at hospitals in four metropolitan areas: Minneapolis-St. Paul, New Orleans, New York City and Omaha. The women reported an average household income of about \$20,000 and were randomly assigned to receive \$333 or \$20 each month on debit cards. The money was provided by private funders and the recipients could spend it as they wished.

The larger cash payments in the study were similar to those distributed to low-income families during the pandemic in President Joe Biden's child tax credit program, which ended last month.

The study "couldn't be more relevant to the current moment," Dr. Joan Luby, a professor of child psychiatry at Washington University's medical school.

While renewal of the tax credit is uncertain, "this study should really inform Congress about how tremendously important" it is, said Luby. She reviewed the study for the scientific journal but was not involved in the research.

Mothers enrolled in the study were mostly Black and Hispanic without a college education. As the infants neared their first birthday, researchers made home visits to test the children in person. Infants were fitted with special caps covered with electrodes that detect electrical signals brain cells use to communicate with each other.

Home visits stopped because of the pandemic, so researchers don't have full data on all 1,000 mothers who enrolled since 2018. They reported on the results for 435 but hope to resume home visits this year.

The study is ongoing and payments to families will continue until at least their children's fourth birthdays.

Natasha Pilkauskas, an associate professor of public policy at the University of Michigan, called it "a very important study," but said more research is needed to confirm the results and to see if they hold true for children older than infants.

## Judges approve special grand jury in Georgia election probe

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Judges have approved a request for a special grand jury by the Georgia prosecutor who's investigating whether former President Donald Trump and others broke the law by trying to pressure Georgia officials to throw out Joe Biden's presidential election victory.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis last week sent a letter to county superior court Chief Judge Christopher Brasher asking him to impanel a special grand jury. Brasher issued an order Monday saying the request was considered and approved by a majority of the superior court judges.

The special grand jury is to be seated May 2 for a period of up to a year, Brasher's order says. Fulton

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County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney is assigned to supervise and assist the special grand jury.

Willis wrote in her letter to Brasher that her office "has received information indicating a reasonable probability that the State of Georgia's administration of elections in 2020, including the State's election of the President of the United States, was subject to possible criminal disruptions." She said her office has "opened an investigation into any coordinated attempts to unlawfully alter the outcome of the 2020 elections in this state."

The special grand jury "shall be authorized to investigate any and all facts and circumstances relating directly or indirectly to alleged violations of the laws of the State of Georgia, as set forth in the request of the District Attorney," the order says.

Willis has declined to speak about the specifics of her investigation, but in an interview with The Associated Press earlier this month she confirmed that its scope includes — but is not limited to — a Jan. 2, 2021, phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a November 2020 phone call between U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and Raffensperger, the abrupt resignation of the U.S. attorney in Atlanta on Jan. 4, 2021, and comments made during December 2020 Georgia legislative committee hearings on the election.

In a statement last week, Trump called his call to Raffensperger "perfect" and said he did not say anything wrong. Graham has also denied any wrongdoing.

Special grand juries, which are not used often in Georgia, can help in the investigation of complex matters. They do not have the power to return an indictment but can make recommendations to prosecutors on criminal prosecutions.

Willis wrote in her letter that the special grand jury is needed because it can serve for longer than a normal grand jury term, which is two months in Fulton County. It also would be able to focus on this investigation alone, allowing it to focus on the complex facts and circumstances. And having a special grand jury would mean the regular seated grand jury would not have to deal with this investigation in addition to their regular duties, Willis wrote.

Willis' investigation became public last February when she sent letters to top elected officials in Georgia instructing them to preserve any records related to the general election, particularly any evidence of attempts to influence election officials. The probe includes "potential violations of Georgia law prohibiting the solicitation of election fraud, the making of false statements to state and local government bodies, conspiracy, racketeering, violation of oath of office and any involvement in violence or threats related to the election's administration," the letters said.

## **EXPLAINER: Federal charges against 3 cops in Floyd killing**

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Three former officers who were with Derek Chauvin during the arrest that led to George Floyd's killing are on trial on charges they violated the Black man's civil rights. In opening statements Monday, a prosecutor accused J. Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao of standing by as Chauvin "slowly killed George Floyd right in front of them."

One defense attorney countered that Chauvin, the senior officer, called the shots that day.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Floyd, 46, died on May 20, 2020, after Chauvin placed his knee on Floyd's neck and pinned him to the street for 9 1/2 minutes as he was facedown and gasping for air. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back and Lane held down Floyd's legs. Thao kept bystanders from intervening.

THE FEDERAL CHARGES

Kueng, Lane and Thao are broadly accused of willfully depriving Floyd of his constitutional rights while acting under "color of law," or government authority. Chauvin pleaded guilty to one count of violating Floyd's civil rights and is not on trial with his former colleagues.

Thao and Kueng are charged with willfully violating Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure by not intervening to stop Chauvin. The indictment says they knew what Chauvin was doing and that Floyd was handcuffed, unresisting and eventually unresponsive. It's not clear why Lane, who held Floyd's legs, is



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not mentioned in that count, but evidence shows he asked twice whether Floyd should be rolled on his side.

Kueng, Lane and Thao are all charged with willfully depriving Floyd of his liberty without due process, specifically depriving him of the right to be free from an officer's deliberate indifference to his medical needs. The indictment says the three men saw Floyd needed medical care and willfully failed to aid him.

Both counts allege the officers' actions resulted in Floyd's death.

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM THE STATE CASE?

The three officers are also charged in state court with aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter.

State prosecutors must prove the officers helped Chauvin commit murder or manslaughter, while federal prosecutors must show they violated Floyd's rights, essentially by failing to intervene or provide medical help.

Mark Osler, a former federal prosecutor and now a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, drew this distinction: The state case is about what the officers did, and the federal case is about what they didn't do.

The state trial is scheduled to begin June 13.

RARE PROSECUTIONS

To bring federal charges in deaths involving police, prosecutors must believe that an officer acted under the "color of law," or government authority, and willfully deprived someone of their constitutional rights, including the right to be free from unreasonable seizures or the use of unreasonable force. That's a high legal standard; an accident, bad judgment or simple negligence on the officer's part isn't enough to support federal charges.

Essentially, prosecutors must prove that the officers knew what they were doing was wrong but did it anyway.

Historically, federal charges have been brought after a state case was unsuccessful, Phil Turner, another former federal prosecutor, said. He pointed to the 1991 police beating of Rodney King as an example. After the Los Angeles officers were acquitted in state court, federal charges were brought "because the state system failed and it was obvious to everyone that it was a miscarriage of justice," Turner said. Two of the four officers were ultimately convicted in federal court.

Most of the high-profile fatal shootings by police in recent years have not resulted in federal charges, though activists have called for them. An exception is the case of Michael Slager, a white South Carolina police officer who fatally shot Walter Scott in the back as the unarmed, 50-year-old Black man ran from a 2015 traffic stop.

Slager's state murder case ended with a hung jury and mistrial in 2016. A year later, he pleaded guilty in federal court to violating Scott's civil rights; prosecutors dropped state murder charges. Slager was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Over the last 20 years, several corrections officers have been convicted of violating the civil rights of inmates who have died after they were denied medical care — sometimes after an assault. The allegation involving deprivation of medical care is similar to the count all three former Minneapolis officers face in Floyd's killing.

WHAT SENTENCE COULD THEY FACE?

Federal civil rights violations that result in death are punishable by up to life in prison or even death, but those sentences are extremely rare. Federal sentencing guidelines rely on complicated formulas that indicate the officers would get much less if convicted.

## Hope seen once the omicron wave increases global immunity

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

World health officials are offering hope that the ebbing of the omicron wave could give way to a new, more manageable phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, even as they warn of difficult weeks ahead and the possibility of another, more dangerous variant arising.

In the U.S., cases have crested and are dropping rapidly, following a pattern seen in Britain and South Africa, with researchers projecting a period of low spread in many countries by the end of March. Though

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U.S. deaths — now at 2,000 each day — are still rising, new hospital admissions have started to fall, and a drop in deaths is expected to follow.

The encouraging trends after two years of coronavirus misery have brought a noticeably hopeful tone from health experts. Rosy predictions have crumbled before, but this time they are backed by what could be called omicron's silver lining: The highly contagious variant will leave behind extremely high levels of immunity.

On Sunday, Dr. Anthony Fauci talked on ABC "This Week" about a "best-case scenario" where COVID-19 would fall to manageable levels so the United States could get "back to a degree of normality."

And on Monday, the World Health Organization issued a statement anticipating an end to the "emergency phase" of the pandemic this year and saying that the omicron variant "offers plausible hope for stabilization and normalization."

Both Fauci and the WHO's Europe regional director, Dr. Hans Kluge, cautioned that new variants are likely to emerge, but with vaccination, new drug therapies and — during surges — testing and masks, the world could reach a less disruptive level of disease in which the virus is, as Fauci put it, "essentially integrated into the general respiratory infections that we have learned to live with."

In the U.S., new cases are averaging a still extraordinarily high 680,000 a day, down from an all-time peak of over 800,000 a little more than a week ago.

The places in the U.S. where omicron struck first are seeing the sharpest declines. New cases in the Northeast are nose-diving, while other states — Arizona, Texas, Oregon, Kansas and North Dakota among them — are still waiting for relief.

Falling, too, are new U.S. hospital admissions of patients with confirmed COVID-19. They are averaging nearly 20,000 per day, down about 7% from the previous week, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Those numbers include patients who went to the hospital for other reasons and tested positive. But even after accounting for these incidental infections, the trend is hopeful.

One influential model projects that nearly all nations will be past the omicron wave by mid-March, including China and other countries with "zero COVID" policies. The wave will leave behind high levels of immunity — both from infection and vaccination — that could lead to low levels of transmission for many weeks or months.

"What do we end up with at the end of this?" said Dr. Christopher Murray of the University of Washington, who developed the closely watched Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation model. "We end up with the highest levels of global immunity that we've seen in the pandemic."

The model estimates that 57% of the world's population already has been infected with the virus at least once.

Another research group, which combines several models and shares the projections with the White House, predicts a strong decline in U.S. infections by April, unless a new variant emerges that can sidestep the growing levels of immunity.

"It would be dangerous to forget that possibility, as it has caught us before," said Katriona Shea of Pennsylvania State University, a leader of the team that pulls together the models.

She noted, too, that the projections show 16,000 to 98,000 more Americans dying before the omicron wave is through. The U.S. death toll stands at close to 870,000.

"Even if we project a more optimistic future, right now we still have a lot of COVID spreading, a lot of strain in our hospital systems, and our deaths have not yet peaked," said Lauren Ancel Meyers, director of the University of Texas COVID-19 Modeling Consortium.

"There's still a lot of pain before omicron has run its course," she said, but added: "It's very plausible that omicron will be a turning point in terms of our relationship with this virus."

## Djokovic could play in France under latest vaccine rules

By ANGELA CHARLTON and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

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PARIS (AP) — Top-ranked player Novak Djokovic could be allowed to defend his French Open title under the latest COVID-19 rules adopted by the French government, even if he is still not vaccinated when the clay-court Grand Slam starts in May.

Djokovic was deported from Australia and barred from playing in the Australian Open this month for not meeting the country's strict COVID-19 vaccination rules.

It initially appeared that the Serb tennis star would not be welcomed at Roland Garros either under a new law intended to exclude the unvaccinated from stadiums, restaurants, bars and other public places.

As questions quickly arose about Djokovic's status in France following his deportation from Australia, Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu previously said that as soon as the law was passed the country's vaccine pass would become compulsory to enter stadiums, theater or exhibitions, "for all spectators, practitioners, French or foreign professionals."

But the vaccine pass is not restricted to vaccination.

Under the law that took effect on Monday, anyone who has proof they tested positive within the previous six months is exempt from having to show a vaccine pass. That suggests Djokovic could play in the French Open in May and June, the next Grand Slam tournament, because he has said he tested positive in mid-December.

The French sports ministry was not immediately available to answer questions from The Associated Press on Djokovic.

French Open organizers have previously said it's too early to comment since virus restrictions can change between now and May depending on the virus situation.

Djokovic's team also declined to comment Monday. Djokovic said earlier he would not give public statements until the end of the Australian Open.

Cafe owners and patrons in Paris largely welcomed the new law, which is central to the government's anti-virus strategy.

"Personally, it reassures me in the sense that I know the people I have around me," said Parisian Charles Tuile. "We want to be in a place where we can be safe in terms of health. And if you can see that the waiter checks vaccine passes and even ID cards, then it's reassuring in many ways."

France is registering Europe's highest-ever daily coronavirus infection numbers, and hospitals are continuing to fill up with virus patients, even though the number of people in intensive care units has dropped in recent days.

The government has imposed few other restrictions amid the surge in the omicron variant, focusing instead on the vaccine pass, approved by France's parliament and Constitutional Council last week.

Critics question whether the pass will make much difference in a country where 94% of French adults have had at least one vaccine dose, and scattered groups held protests Saturday against the new law. The French government hopes that it protects the most vulnerable and reduces pressure on crowded ICUs, where most patients are unvaccinated.

Since last summer, France has required a "health pass" to go to any cafe, museum, movie theater or take a regional train or domestic flight. But until Monday, unvaccinated people could activate the pass by getting a recent negative test. The new pass only works for people who are fully vaccinated and those who recently recovered from the virus.

"To me, it's not a problem (to show ID card) but I can perfectly imagine the kind of downward spiral it could trigger – it's like racial profiling," said Tania Chauvin, 31, as she ate in a Paris restaurant.

France, meanwhile, opened up access to booster shots Monday for 12- to 17-year-olds.

Djokovic's Australian saga began when he was granted an exemption to strict vaccination rules by two medical panels and the tournament organizer in order to play in the Australian Open based on documents he supplied showing he had recently had COVID-19. He received a visa to enter the country through an automated process. But upon arrival, border officials said the exemption was not valid and moved to deport him.

In the end, Australian authorities revoked Djokovic's visa, saying his presence could stir up anti-vaccine sentiment and that kicking him out was necessary to keep Australians safe. He was deported a day before

the tournament got underway in Melbourne.

## China tests 2M in Beijing, lifts COVID lockdown in Xi'an

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Less than two weeks before the opening of the Winter Olympics, a few dozen COVID-19 cases in Beijing have prompted authorities to test millions of people in the capital and extend that to anyone buying cold medicine.

The tough new measures came even as the city of Xi'an, a major tourist destination that is the home of the Terracotta Warrior statue army, lifted a lockdown Monday that had isolated its 13 million people for a month.

More than 3,000 people have arrived for the Games since Jan. 4, including over 300 athletes and team officials, plus media and other participants, organizers said Monday. So far, 78 people have tested positive, including one who was an athlete or team official.

Those found to be infected are sent to an isolation center or a hospital, depending on their condition.

Officials in Beijing undertook testing of the Fengtai district's 2 million residents, where the majority of the capital's 40 coronavirus cases since Jan. 15 have been found.

Beijing authorities have also announced that anyone who buys or who has bought fever, cough or certain other medicines in the past two weeks will have to take a COVID-19 test within 72 hours.

The far-reaching precautions, despite a relatively low number of cases, illustrate the acute concern of government officials in the run-up to the Olympics, which open in Beijing on Feb. 4.

"The current epidemic prevention situation is still grim and complicated, and all departments across the city must act proactively and swiftly," Beijing city spokesperson Xu Hejian said.

"The overall situation is controllable," he added.

The ruling Communist Party has long pursued a "zero tolerance" COVID-19 policy that has brought drastic efforts to stamp out any signs of new outbreaks. But with the approach of the Olympics, that policy has become even stricter.

Overall, the number of reported new cases has been falling in China from more than 100 a day at the peak of the Xi'an outbreak to 18 on Sunday, six of which were in Beijing.

Ahead of the Games, all participants will be tested every day and kept isolated from the public. Visiting athletes are required to be vaccinated or undergo a quarantine after arriving in China.

Ben Cowling, a public health expert at Hong Kong University, said COVID-19 infections still could leak out of the Olympic bubble.

"I would estimate there is a good chance of at least one lockdown being implemented in Beijing in the coming month," he said.

The government told people in areas of Beijing deemed at high risk for infection not to leave the city. A number of nearby provinces reported cases linked to the outbreaks in the capital.

Beijing officials said an omicron cluster that infected six people had been brought under control. The Fengtai outbreak is delta-driven, and Chinese health officials say it is linked to imported frozen food.

Pang Xinghuo, deputy director of the Beijing Center for Disease Control, said gene sequencing of virus samples from the frozen food was consistent with that in 28 infected people. Foreign experts are skeptical that COVID-19 can spread easily from packaging.

Access to Xi'an was suspended Dec. 22 following a delta outbreak. More than 2,000 people were infected in the city, which is about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) southwest of Beijing.

Other outbreaks have prompted the government to impose travel bans on a number of cities, including the port of Tianjin, about an hour from Beijing.

The stiff regulations are credited with preventing major nationwide outbreaks. China has reported relatively few cases of the highly infectious omicron variant.

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## **EXPLAINER: Why effort to help Afghanistan is falling short**

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As winter deepens, a grim situation in Afghanistan is getting worse. Freezing temperatures are compounding misery from the downward spiral that has come with the fall of the U.S.-backed government and the Taliban takeover.

Aid groups and international agencies estimate about 23 million people, more than half the country, face severe hunger and nearly 9 million are on the brink of starvation. People have resorted to selling possessions to buy food, burning furniture for warmth and even selling their children.

The U.S. government this month announced \$308 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and is working with the U.N. and organizations such as the World Bank to provide additional help. The Biden administration has also sought to clarify that U.S. sanctions on the Taliban shouldn't block humanitarian aid. But there is growing pressure to do more, such as unfreezing Afghan government funds held at the New York Federal Reserve Bank.

A look at the situation:

**HOW DID CONDITIONS IN AFGHANISTAN GET SO BAD SO FAST?**

Life in Afghanistan was precarious before the Taliban takeover in August, with more than half the people surviving on less than \$2 a day. About 80% of the entire budget of the U.S.-backed Afghan government came from international donor funds. More than half of all children under 5 were expected to face acute malnutrition, according to the U.N. In addition to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was suffering through a prolonged drought, devastating in a country where agriculture makes up 25% of GDP.

The withdrawal of the U.S. after 20 years of war meant an end to the military and other support that made up about half of the economy. Most government employees had not been paid in the two months before the Taliban takeover. Since then, about half a million Afghans have lost their jobs, including many women pushed out of the workforce by the Taliban.

Afghans at home can get only limited amounts of any money they have in bank accounts because of a currency shortage. Meanwhile those abroad are having trouble sending help to family back in Afghanistan, in part because banks are reluctant to do business in a country whose leaders are under U.S. sanctions.

There is food in the markets, but many people can't afford to buy it, said Ciaran Donnelly, head of crisis response at the International Rescue Committee. "This is a humanitarian crisis, an economic collapse and a state failure all wrapped up in one," said Donnelly. "And they're feeding off each other."

**WHAT HAS THE U.S. DONE SO FAR TO HELP?**

President Joe Biden said the U.S. would continue to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan after the withdrawal, which was set in motion after a peace deal signed with the Taliban under President Donald Trump. The administration notes that the U.S. is still the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and is contributing to a U.N. effort to raise more than \$5 billion for the country.

But the U.S. has not recognized the new government or lifted sanctions on the Taliban and its senior leaders for providing a haven to al-Qaida while it plotted the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. That has created at least a perception that sending money or doing business in Afghanistan is off-limits.

A senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal policy discussions, acknowledged there's a perception that the sanctions are broader than the Taliban leadership. The official said the U.S. has sought to dispel it in part with what are known as "general licenses," issued in December to assure international organizations, other nations and nongovernmental organizations that they could provide humanitarian aid despite the sanctions.

The official said the U.S. also is working with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank to take money that had been set aside for Afghan reconstruction before the Taliban takeover and use it for humanitarian relief.

Roya Rahmani, a former Afghan ambassador to the U.S., said she doesn't support recognizing the new government but said the issue must be "untangled" from discussions of humanitarian aid, which is crucial even if some of it winds up in the hands of the Taliban.

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"There is a very potent and real catastrophe boiling up in Afghanistan, and people are suffering now," she said.

## WHAT ABOUT AFGHAN MONEY FROZEN IN THE U.S.?

There is nearly \$7 billion in Afghan funds at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York that have been frozen since the Taliban takeover in August. The Taliban has demanded the money, but it can't be transferred to them because of the sanctions. Complicating matters, families of people killed in the Sept. 11 attacks have filed a claim to the funds to pay the judgment in a lawsuit they filed against al-Qaida and the Taliban.

A letter sent Thursday to Biden, with the signatures of 41 mostly Democratic members of Congress, urged the president to "ensure that a substantial share" of the frozen assets is used for humanitarian relief, arguing that deteriorating conditions will lead to the country "once again become a breeding ground for terrorist organizations" such as al-Qaida.

Shah Mehrabi, an economics professor at Montgomery College in Maryland and a board member of the Afghanistan Central Bank, says a portion of the frozen funds should be used to help stabilize prices in the country, pay the salaries of civil servants and help keep the private sector alive. Otherwise, he warns, the economy could go into free fall.

"I don't think that's in our interests and in the interests of the United States," Mehrabi said "And I think the United States knows that as well."

The senior administration official said the administration is discussing the fate of the frozen funds but has to let the judicial process play out involving the legal claim filed by the Sept. 11 victim families.

Meanwhile, the Taliban and Western diplomats have started their first official talks in Europe since the Taliban took over control of Afghanistan in August. Taliban representatives will be certain to press their demand that money frozen by the United States and other Western countries, totaling nearly \$10 billion, be released.

## IS THERE MORE THE US AND OTHERS CAN DO?

Aid groups and others have urged the Treasury Department to issue "comfort letters" to businesses and governments assuring them they won't face legal consequences for doing business in Afghanistan, though the official said the general licenses were intended to accomplish just that.

The administration could also encourage the unfreezing of Afghan government assets in banks outside the U.S. Rahman, the former ambassador, says the international community should sit down and come up with "creative" solutions such as some form of mobile banking to make it easier for Afghans overseas to get money to their families.

Whatever is done, it should be soon, Rahman says.

"Starvation and suffering fosters hopelessness," she said, "and hopelessness fosters extremism, terrorism and much worse."

## Finding the 'happy bubble': Mental health key for Olympians

By MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

MIDWAY, Utah (AP) — Sean McCann peered at the targets through a spotting scope and used a hand-held magnetic board to mark where the bullets hit. He showed the results to the athlete as they left the range and then grabbed a broom to sweep shell casings off the mat before the next skier arrived.

To a casual observer, McCann appeared to be a U.S. biathlon coach helping his team get ready for the Olympic trials race earlier this season at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center.

But McCann's not a coach.

He's a clinical psychologist who works for the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee — one of seven assigned to various teams. At certain times of the year, he is "embedded" with the U.S. biathlon team to help them perform at their best. He lives, trains and travels with the athletes and coaches, interacting with them like a friend.

"In psychology, in particular, sports psychology, those relationships of trust are really important," McCann said. "Part of our job is taking care of the whole person, not just the athlete, because you can't

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leave the person at the door.”

He may seem casual, but his presence is serious business.

“Being an elite athlete, being an Olympic athlete is very stressful,” he explained. “You’re constantly measured, constantly challenged. You’re constantly under some sort of environmental stress, so what we do in sports psychology is stress management.”

The issue of mental health in sports became part of the national conversation last year after tennis star Naomi Osaka revealed her bouts with depression. The discussion was amplified when U.S. superstar gymnast Simone Biles withdrew from competition at the Tokyo Olympics, choosing her own health and well-being over the demands to perform.

Biles’ courage prompted Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian in history and an athlete who has been up front about his mental health struggles, to proclaim “it’s OK to not be OK.”

“It was a public education,” McCann said of those mental health revelations. It was helpful for the athletes but also important for the public to hear those messages: Have more compassion and empathy with what the athletes are going through.

Matt Whitcomb, head coach for the U.S. cross country ski team, said every athlete works with a sports psychologist. While traveling, they also receive help from their home club coach, national team staff, physical therapists and massage therapists — a whole support network.

U.S. cross country skier Jessie Diggins literally wrote a book on the struggles female athletes face as they try to stay fit while dealing with unrealistic pressures to have a certain body type. Skinny isn’t healthy, she said in her book “Brave Enough” about her journey to recover from bulimia.

Diggins has worked with a sports psychologist since she was 19, she said, and she’s glad more people feel comfortable talking about it.

“For many athletes, there is a priority on mental health that’s coming into focus,” she said. “We all have times when we’re not in a great place and it’s even harder for an athlete when the moment you’re struggling happens to be at the same time as the nation’s spotlight is shining on you.”

Part of her healing process was to talk about her struggles, which was why she wrote the book.

“Yes, I had an eating disorder, but I learned so much about myself going through recovery,” she said. “I learned that it’s OK to reach out for help. I learned that you don’t have to be perfect. I realized that you don’t have to change the body type that you were born with. You have to embrace your strength, try your best and don’t compare yourself to anyone else.”

It’s been a winning strategy.

Diggins wrote her story after she and Kikkan Randall won Team USA’s first-ever Olympic cross-country skiing gold medal in the team sprint at Pyeongchang in 2018. Randall retired but Diggins has gone on to attack the sport with spirit and enthusiasm, winning the overall World Cup title last year and earning repeated podium finishes this year.

She sits in second place in the overall standings heading to the Olympics.

All Olympic sports come with pressure, though McCann notes that biathlon is “crazy”: “It’s two sports that don’t belong together.”

Endurance athletes have the mentality to go as hard and fast as they can, he said. But in shooting, “it’s precision. It’s control. It’s focus. The mentalities are really different.”

So McCann helps the biathletes learn to switch their mindsets depending on where they are in the race. Ski hard when out on the trails, but in the range, execute the shots. “Focus on the process” is a biathlete’s mantra.

Easier said than done.

When a biathlete is shooting, they can’t think about the skier who just came in behind them; or that person’s heavy breathing; or listen to the sound of other targets going down; or shouts from the crowds or boos when you miss; or the announcer who’s broadcasting your progress over the loudspeaker.

And as soon as you think, “If I get this last shot, I’ll win the race,” you’ll miss. The pressure can be overwhelming.

Russia’s Alexander Loginov led the men’s biathlon pursuit race in Oberhof, Germany, on Jan. 9 until the

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last shooting stage. He missed his last three targets and was skiing penalty laps as France's Quentin Fillon Maillet hit all his targets and skied to the win. Loginov finished fifth.

Heading to Beijing, Olympic athletes won't be able to see their friends and family, which will be an additional challenge.

"So we'll keep our eye on the ... whole concept of loneliness that can creep in," Whitcomb said. "Because that's probably the biggest danger, but that's why we build what we've built."

Diggins said she plans to do a lot of FaceTime or Skype with family during the separation.

"So in that way, I hope to keep myself sane," Diggins said. "I also know that there's going to be a lot of pressure and a lot of different things pulling at me and pulling at my attention."

So she worked with her sports psychologist to identify what she might face emotionally while at the Olympics, and made a plan for how to react and respond. That plan includes a prohibition on all interviews 10 days before the Games start.

"It's really important to be able to focus on the team and focus on that happy bubble," she said,

## Democrats make surprising inroads in redistricting fight

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Democrats braced for disaster when state legislatures began redrawing congressional maps, fearing that Republican dominance of statehouses would tilt power away from them for the next decade.

But as the redistricting process reaches its final stages, that anxiety is beginning to ease.

For Democrats, the worst case scenario of losing well over a dozen seats in the U.S. House appears unlikely to happen. After some aggressive map drawing of their own in states with Democratic legislatures, some Democrats predict the typical congressional district will shift from leaning to the right of the national vote to matching it, ending a distortion that gave the GOP a built-in advantage over the past five House elections.

"We have stymied their intent to gerrymander their way to a House majority," Kelly Ward Burton, head of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee, said of the GOP.

The nation's congressional maps won't be settled for several more months. Republicans in some large states like Florida have yet to finalize proposed changes, giving the GOP a last-minute opportunity to seek an advantage.

But the picture could come into greater clarity this week as the Democratic-controlled New York state legislature gets a chance to seize map-drawing power from the state's bipartisan commission. That would almost certainly blunt the GOP advantage that has been in place since the last redistricting process in 2010.

The jockeying in state capitals has implications not just for Democrats' uphill effort to maintain a majority in the U.S. House in this year's midterm elections. It will affect the broader balance of power in Washington and state legislatures for the remainder of the decade.

While Republicans say they've achieved their goals so far, they're surprised at how much Democrats have tried to expand the number of seats their party can win. The GOP has taken a markedly different approach by aiming to shore up its vulnerable members' districts, transforming competitive seats into safe ones.

That's in part because Republicans already expanded the map with aggressive redistricting after the 2010 census, when they controlled more states. Now, as the lines are adjusted to meet 2020 census figures released last year, they are locking in their gains while Democrats are taking risks to fight back.

In a wave election, Democrats could lose even more seats in the maps they have drawn because they spread their voters so thin, analysts say. And, if political coalitions shift in upcoming years, seats Democrats thought were within reach could suddenly disappear.

"Republicans have given themselves pretty good tsunami protection," said Michael Li of the Brennan Center for Justice, which tracks redistricting. "But for Democrats, if it rains a little, their house is flooded."

The Democratic push comes as the party has unsuccessfully fought to ban partisan gerrymandering nationwide — their elections bill barring the practice died in the Senate last week during a Republican filibuster. Li said Democrats, however, are still gerrymandering in states they control, sometimes aggres-



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sively as in Illinois, other times relatively lightly, as in New Mexico and Oregon.

In contrast, experts say Republicans, who control more states, have gerrymandered heavily in places like Texas, North Carolina and Ohio. But the GOP's Ohio maps were tossed out by the state Supreme Court this month, and Democrats are hopeful North Carolina's high court follows suit with the districts there, part of the reason for the party's increased optimism.

The next and biggest opportunity for Democrats is in New York, which will test how much power Democrats are willing to give up to fight gerrymandering. Saying they wanted to take partisanship out of redistricting, Democrats there in 2014 backed a ballot measure to put the process in the hands of a bipartisan commission. But the state legislature can overrule the commission. In 2014 it was divided between Democratic and Republican control. Now Democrats have a supermajority in both houses.

The New York Legislature already rejected the commission's first attempt at maps, and Democrats on the commission declared a deadlock on Monday, giving the Legislature the opportunity to draw its own maps.

"The Democratic leadership and those on the far left that run the show in Albany, they're hellbent to take this process over to derail the commission, and to have the party bosses in Albany draw the maps," said Nick Langworthy, chairman of the New York GOP. "I think that they looked at a handful of states to give them a shot to hold on to the majority."

Republicans need only to net five seats in November's election to gain control of the U.S. House. They started the redistricting cycle controlling line-drawing in states representing 187 House seats while Democrats controlled only 75.

That means the final outcome will inevitably favor the GOP, no matter how hard Democrats fight back, said Kimbrall Brace, a veteran redistricting consultant. "They're ending up still putting a Republican flavor on the overall plan," Brace said.

So far, the GOP has gained a handful of seats in the maps that have been finalized, but it's hard to put a precise number on how many because half of the states have yet to formally adopt maps. If Democrats are aggressive, for example, they could net four seats in New York and largely wipe out the GOP's national gains. But then Republicans in Florida could counter with a gerrymander.

Still, Republicans have passed up multiple opportunities to pad their margins even more.

In Missouri, some GOP state lawmakers are fuming that the legislature is advancing a plan that locks in the status quo rather than trying to turn Democratic Rep. Emanuel Cleaver's Kansas City-area seat to the GOP. In Indiana, Republicans did not split up the Gary-based district represented by Democratic Rep. Frank Mrvan.

Even in Georgia, where Republicans flooded a seat in the Atlanta suburbs held by Democratic Rep. Lucy McBath with GOP voters, they balked at doing the same to her Democratic neighbor, Rep. Carolyn Bourdeaux. Instead, they packed Democratic voters into Bourdeaux's district, making it safer so no other Republicans' seats would be at risk.

Adam Kincaid, executive director of the National Republican Redistricting Trust, said shoring up Republican incumbents is the party's top priority. He cites Texas, where the GOP-drawn maps make the few Democratic seats even more Democratic. That stacks up more Republican voters in the 23 GOP-held congressional districts and transforms them into safe seats. Republicans and their backers spent \$20 million on races in the state during the 2020 cycle. Now, Kincaid said, they can direct the money elsewhere.

"This cycle has unfolded just about exactly as we expected it to — with the exception that Democrats have placed a bigger bet than I expected," Kincaid said.

In contrast to the GOP, Democrats have been eager to spread their voters around, even at the possible expense of their own incumbents.

The starkest example is in Nevada, where the party's mapmakers moved liberal voters from Rep. Dina Titus' once-overwhelmingly Democratic Las Vegas district to shore up two neighboring swing seats represented by Democratic Reps. Steven Horsford and Susie Lee. That may keep all three seats safely Democratic in a good year, but puts them all at risk in a tough election cycle for Democrats like the current one.

Burton contended that tactical decisions like those made by Nevada Democrats and others elsewhere are not gerrymandering, but simply drawing lines to make seats competitive.

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"We are not scared of the voters," Burton said. "We are not scared of districts where voters decide the outcome."

Joel Wertheimer, a Democratic civil rights lawyer and analyst for the liberal group Data for Progress, has predicted for months that redistricting will shift the typical congressional district from about two percentage points to the right of the national vote to the five-point margin of Biden's 2020 popular vote victory.

He credits it to a change in the mindset of Democrats willing to risk bigger losses for an eventual better shot at the 218 seats needed to control the House.

"I think the calculation that Democrats are making is, do we care if we have 180 or 190 seats?" Wertheimer said. "I just want to have the majority."

## Analysis: Crisis in Ukraine a showdown of two world views

By JOHN DANISZEWSKI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The crisis in Ukraine is hardly going away — a showdown of two world views that could upend Europe. It carries echoes of the Cold War and resurrects an idea left over from the 1945 Yalta Conference: that the West should respect a Russian sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

Since coming to power in 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin has worked steadily and systematically to reverse what he views as the humiliating breakup of the Soviet Union 30 years ago.

While massing troops along Ukraine's border and holding war games in Belarus, close to the borders of NATO members Poland and Lithuania, Putin is demanding that Ukraine be permanently barred from exercising its sovereign right to join the Western alliance, and that other NATO actions, such as stationing troops in former Soviet bloc countries, be curtailed.

NATO has said the demands are unacceptable and that joining the alliance is a right of any country and does not threaten Russia. Putin's critics argue that what he really fears is not NATO, but the emergence of a democratic, prospering Ukraine that could offer an alternative to Putin's increasingly autocratic rule, which Russians might find appealing.

Russia's present demands are based on Putin's long sense of grievance and his rejection of Ukraine and Belarus as truly separate, sovereign countries, but rather as part of a historic Russian linguistic and Orthodox motherland.

In a millennium-spanning treatise last summer titled, "The Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," Putin tipped his hand. He insisted that the separation of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus into separate states today is artificial, due largely to political mistakes during the Soviet period and, in the case of Ukraine, driven by a malevolent "anti-Russia project" supported by Washington since 2014.

His Russo-centric view of the region poses a crucial test for U.S. President Joe Biden, who already is grappling with crises on multiple domestic fronts — the coronavirus pandemic, resurgence of inflation, a divided nation in which a large segment of the electorate refuses to acknowledge his presidency and a Congress that has blocked many of his social and climate goals.

Biden has ruled out military intervention to support Ukraine, and instead has employed intense diplomacy and rallied Western allies to support what he promises will be severe and painful sanctions against Russia if it dares to invade Ukraine. But depending on how the situation plays out, he has admitted he could have trouble keeping all the allies on board.

The Russian leader has already invaded Ukraine once, with little reaction. Russia took Crimea back from Ukraine in 2014 and has supported pro-Russian Ukrainian separatists fighting the Kyiv government in the Donbass region, a quiet war that has killed 14,000 people, more than 3,000 of them civilians.

Putin's strategy has been to try to recreate the power and a defined sphere of influence that Russia lost with the fall of the Berlin Wall, at least in the area of the former Soviet Union. He has bristled at what he sees as Western encroachment into the countries of the former Warsaw Pact -- which had once formed a pro-Soviet buffer between the USSR and NATO.

Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were allowed to join NATO in 1999, followed in 2004 by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia.

Subjected to post-World War II Soviet domination, the countries were eager to join the Western defen-

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sive alliance and the Western free-market system to secure independence and prosperity after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

For similar reasons, both Ukraine and Georgia also want in, and have been recognized by NATO as aspiring members of the alliance. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has asked Western leaders to take on Ukraine's request for membership with greater urgency as a signal to Moscow that the West will defend Ukraine's independence.

Russia contends that NATO expansion violates commitments made to it after the Berlin Wall's collapse in exchange for Moscow's acceptance of the reunification of Germany. U.S. officials deny any such promises were made.

Early in his presidency, Putin did not show adamant opposition to NATO. He suggested in a 2000 BBC interview that Russia might even be interested in joining; years later, he said he had raised that prospect with U.S. President Bill Clinton before Clinton left office in 2001.

Now, however, Putin sees the alliance as threatening Russia's security.

But the newer NATO countries take the opposite view. They regard Russia, which boasts the region's largest military and a vast nuclear arsenal, as the real threat, which is why they rushed to join NATO — afraid that a strengthened Russia might someday try to reimpose its dominance.

A disputed election in Belarus led to months-long mass demonstrations against longtime Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko. Alienated from his own people and unrecognized as a legitimate president in the West, Lukashenko has been driven closer into Putin's protective embrace.

Similarly, after civil unrest in Kazakhstan just weeks ago, Russia sent in troops to help that former Soviet republic's president restore order as part of a peacekeeping mission of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization alliance. The troops have since departed the country.

Putin's aim has been to reimpose ties with Russia's former Soviet neighbors, while challenging and dividing the West. Rather than leading Russia in a more democratic direction, he appears to now reject the very idea of liberal democracy as a sustainable model, seeing it rather as a conceit the West uses to pursue its own aims and humiliate its foes.

He came to power vowing to restore to Russia a sense of greatness. He seized back economic control from the oligarchs, crushed rebels in Chechnya, gradually strangled independent media and upped investment in the military. More recently, he has banned Russia's few remaining human rights organizations.

Beyond Russia's borders, his secret services have overseen the assassinations of critics and meddled in foreign elections, including offering clandestine support to the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the pro-Brexit campaign in Britain and various right-wing European parties that oppose European integration.

He told an interviewer in 2019 that "liberalism is obsolete," implying that the dominant Western ideal of liberal democracy no longer has a place in the world. The idea that Ukrainians are independent and could be freely choosing their own alliances is to him a charade.

"All the subterfuges associated with the anti-Russia project are clear to us. And we will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia. And to those who will undertake such an attempt, I would like to say that this way they will destroy their own country," he wrote in his essay last summer.

"I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia."

The challenge for Biden, NATO and the European Union is whether their collective resolve and solidarity can protect Ukraine's vision of itself as part of the West, and whether Putin's Russian nationalist ambitions in the region will succeed or fail.

## Taliban hold first talks in Europe since Afghan takeover

By DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

OSLO, Norway (AP) — The Taliban and western diplomats have begun their first official talks in Europe since they took over control of Afghanistan in August.

The closed-door meetings were taking place at a hotel in the snow-capped mountains above the Nor-

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wegian capital.

Taliban representatives will be certain to press their demand that nearly \$10 billion frozen by the United States and other Western countries be released as Afghanistan faces a precarious humanitarian situation.

"We are requesting them to unfreeze Afghan assets and not punish ordinary Afghans because of the political discourse," said Taliban delegate Shafiullah Azam on Sunday night. "Because of the starvation, because of the deadly winter, I think it's time for the international community to support Afghans, not punish them because of their political disputes."

Ahead of the talks, western diplomats met with Afghan women's rights activists and human rights defenders to about their demands and assessment of the current situation on the ground. The meeting was attended by representatives of the EU, the U.S., Britain, France, Italy and hosts Norway.

Standing silent as attendees gathered, women's rights activist Heda Khamoush, who lives in Kabul, held up the photos of Tamana Zaryabi Paryani and Parwana Ibrahimkhel, two women arrested by the Taliban last week following an anti-Taliban protest against the compulsory Islamic headscarf, or hijab, for women. They haven't been seen since.

Rejecting the accusation the Taliban had abducted them, Azam said he was "not aware of that" and suggested activists may be using this event to seek asylum.

The three-day talks opened on Sunday with direct meetings between the Taliban and civil society representatives.

On Monday the Taliban's acting foreign minister spoke to reporters, saying meetings with Afghanistan's civil society were not a negotiation, but rather a constructive exchange. The country's new rulers have been sharply criticized for their heavy-handed approach to security, dispersing women protesters with pepper spray and firing in the air, intimidating and and beating journalists and coming in the night to arrest anti-government demonstrators.

The Taliban have been criticized for establishing an interim Cabinet that is all-male and all-Taliban. Most are ethnic Pashtuns. Successive Afghan organizations as well as the international community have urged the Taliban to open the government to non-Taliban, as well as a strong showing of ethnic and religious minorities and women.

Muttaqi said most of the civil servants who have returned to work are from the previous government and about 15,000 women are working in the health and education sectors. There has been no decision yet he said on more women in the government work force.

"We have not dismissed anyone," he said. "This is progress, but of course it is not enough."

Talks with European and U.S. representatives were expected to cover everything from education to humanitarian aid to greater inclusivity.

Muttaqi said he had a message to Afghans and the international community:

"Our message is that after 40 years of war Afghans are in peace. War is ended and now is the time for progress and economic activity . . . We want Afghans to be happy after all those years of suffering. We want good relations with the world, with our neighboring countries, with the European countries . . . We have had good results and progress in our meetings."

Women's rights activist Mahbouba Seraj acknowledged the progress made. "Yes, they were listening. I should say that," she said Monday morning. "We gave them a paper. We asked them what we wanted. They took it. They were very, very cordial about it."

The talks come at a crucial time for Afghanistan as freezing temperatures are compounding misery from the downward spiral that has come with the fall of the U.S.-backed government and the Taliban takeover.

Aid groups and international agencies estimate about 23 million people, more than half the country, face severe hunger and nearly 9 million are on the brink of starvation. People have resorted to selling possessions to buy food, burning furniture for warmth and even selling their children. The United Nations has managed to provide some liquidity and allowed the Taliban administration to pay for imports, including electricity.

Faced with the Taliban's request for funds, Western powers are likely to put the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan high on their agenda, along with the West's recurring demand for the Taliban admin-

istration to share power with Afghanistan's minority ethnic and religious groups.

Since sweeping to power in mid-August, the Taliban have imposed widespread restrictions, many of them directed at women. Women have been banned from many jobs outside the health and education fields, their access to education has been restricted beyond sixth grade and they have been ordered to wear the hijab. The Taliban have, however, stopped short of imposing the burqa, which was compulsory when they previously ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The Taliban have increasingly targeted Afghanistan's beleaguered rights groups, as well as journalists, detaining and sometimes beating television crews covering demonstrations.

In a tweet Monday the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West welcomed talks between Taliban and the country's civil society representatives and said "we will continue clear-eyed diplomacy with the Taliban regarding our concerns and our abiding interest in a stable, rights-respecting and inclusive Afghanistan."

## Assange wins first stage in effort to appeal US extradition

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on Monday won the first stage of his effort to overturn a U.K. ruling that opened the door for his extradition to U.S. to stand trial on espionage charges.

The High Court in London gave Assange permission to appeal the case to the U.K. Supreme Court. But the Supreme Court must agree to accept the case before it can move forward.

"Make no mistake, we won today in court," Assange's fiancée, Stella Moris, said outside the courthouse, noting that he remains in custody at Belmarsh Prison in London.

"We will fight this until Julian is free," she added.

The Supreme Court normally takes about eight sitting weeks after an application is submitted to decide whether to accept an appeal, the court says on its website.

The decision is the latest step in Assange's long battle to avoid a trial in the U.S. on a series of charges related to WikiLeaks' publication of classified documents more than a decade ago.

Just over a year ago, a district court judge in London rejected a U.S. extradition request on the grounds that Assange was likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions. U.S. authorities later provided assurances that the WikiLeaks founder wouldn't face the severe treatment his lawyers said would put his physical and mental health at risk.

The High Court last month overturned the lower court's decision, saying that the U.S. promises were enough to guarantee Assange would be treated humanely.

Those assurances were the focus of Monday's ruling by the High Court.

Assange's lawyers are seeking to appeal because the U.S. offered its assurances after the lower court made its ruling. But the High Court overturned the lower court ruling, saying that the judge should have given the U.S. the opportunity to offer the assurances before she made her final ruling.

The High Court gave Assange permission to appeal so the Supreme Court can decide "in what circumstances can an appellate court receive assurances from a requesting state ... in extradition proceedings."

Assange's lawyers have argued that the U.S. government's pledge that Assange won't be subjected to extreme conditions is meaningless because it's conditional and could be changed at the discretion of American authorities.

The U.S. has asked British authorities to extradite Assange so he can stand trial on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse linked to WikiLeaks' publication of thousands of leaked military and diplomatic documents.

Assange, 50, has been held at the high-security Belmarsh Prison since 2019, when he was arrested for skipping bail during a separate legal battle. Before that, he spent seven years holed up inside Ecuador's Embassy in London. Assange sought protection in the embassy in 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault.

Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in November 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

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American prosecutors say Assange unlawfully helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

Lawyers for Assange argue that their client shouldn't have been charged because he was acting as a journalist and is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom of the press. They say the documents he published exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"He should not face criminal prosecution and decades in prison for publishing truthful information of great public importance," said Barry Pollack, his attorney in the United States.

## **Pandemic-era design solution from the past: The Murphy bed**

By MELISSA RAYWORTH Associated Press

When the vast majority of your life is happening within the four walls of your home, every square foot counts. So the past two years have inspired some serious, space-saving creativity.

"Everybody all of a sudden was just surrounded by their environment, just sort of thinking, 'If I'm going to be spending this much time here, I really want it to be great quality space,'" says interior designer and HGTV host Vern Yip.

Oddly enough, one popular strategy for creating multipurpose spaces at home in 2022 is an innovation born more than a century ago: the Murphy bed, a fully made bed emerging from a wall to instantly transform a living room into a bedroom.

New Jersey-based interior designer Karen Topjian remembers seeing Murphy beds in old black-and-white Hollywood movies and thinking they looked wonderfully glamorous. It seemed almost magical, she thought. Unlike a sofa bed that requires moving cushions and some degree of assembly, Murphy beds have the superpower of transforming a space with just a single motion.

Of course, the spring-loaded metal bed that nearly destroyed Charlie Chaplin in his 1916 short film "One A.M." appeared pretty uncomfortable. Even the World War II-era models probably weren't especially cozy, Topjian says, no matter how chic they looked in the movies. But technology has improved dramatically.

Today, she says, high-quality Murphy beds open easily and can be outfitted with high-end mattresses and lush bedding.

So when a client with a New York studio apartment challenged her to create a space where he could eat, sleep, live and work, Topjian designed a Murphy bed built into custom hardwood shelving, giving the compact living space plenty of storage and flexibility.

And the appeal of Murphy beds is moving beyond those who live in apartments. As the pandemic lingers, even people with larger homes are facing "small-space living issues," says Heather Higgins, another New Jersey interior designer.

Whether elderly relatives are moving in or adult children are returning home, many people are puzzling over how to add extra sleeping space to existing rooms. Depending on the circumstances, a Murphy bed can be the solution.

Among its best uses:

### **MAKING GUESTS AT HOME — WITHOUT SACRIFICING A ROOM**

Interior designer Gonzalo Bueno has a meticulously planned home office in Dallas. Behind his desk, a dramatic black-and-white painting extends from floor to ceiling, flanked on both sides by built-in shelving.

For 90% of the year, he says, his office is laid out in exactly this way. But when relatives visit from Mexico, his desk is moved forward and that painting is pulled down to reveal a Murphy bed.

It's a better option than even the highest quality sofa bed, he says: "This is a queen-size bed — a real bed. So it's heaven" for visitors. "But for my 90% of the year, it just looks like a beautiful built-in with an art piece."

Bueno created a similar design for clients who needed a playroom for their children and a guest room for visiting grandparents. They didn't want older relatives sleeping on a sofa bed, but also didn't want to lose an entire room to a queen-size bed. One end of their playroom now houses a Murphy bed concealed within built-in storage.

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Murphy beds can also be practical for single parents whose children don't live with them full-time. Bueno has a client who uses a spare bedroom primarily as a meditation space. But when his child lives with him, a Murphy bed is kept open and the room feels entirely like a bedroom.

## HYBRID HOMES

Higgins says the pandemic is inspiring some city dwellers to shift to a smaller apartment so they can afford a second space outside the city. In cases like this, a Murphy bed can make the city space more manageable.

Topjian recommends mapping out the room with the bed open to make sure it won't feel too crowded. Make sure any furniture you'll need to shift out of the way isn't too heavy or awkward.

If you'll be using a Murphy bed as your primary sleeping space and opening it frequently, it helps to choose a lightweight memory foam mattress rather than a conventional model. And look for a good-quality one that lowers slowly and "makes a soft landing," Topjian says.

Make sure your Murphy bed comes from a reliable manufacturer, the designers emphasized. The name was once trademarked, but has been used by a wide range of retailers since 1989.

## HOME OFFICE IN A SPARE BEDROOM

For those who have converted a spare bedroom into a work-from-home office, it can be challenging to create a space that looks professional on video calls while still keeping a bed there.

"People are paying a lot of attention to what their background is" on video calls, Yip says. "That little portion of your living environment that you're sharing now with the rest of the world -- what does it say?"

A Murphy bed can offer the elegant appearance of wooden doors, rather than a view of a bed laden with pillows and blankets.

Beyond creating a work-friendly Zoom background, that can also help you concentrate.

"You wouldn't want to be working all day seeing a bed next to you," Bueno says. "It will just be too too tempting."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Jan. 25, the 25th day of 2022. There are 340 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 25, 1945, the World War II Battle of the Bulge ended as German forces were pushed back to their original positions.

On this date:

In 1533, England's King Henry VIII secretly married his second wife, Anne Boleyn, who later gave birth to Elizabeth I.

In 1863, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln accepted Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's resignation as commander of the Army of the Potomac and replaced him with Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker.

In 1915, America's first official transcontinental telephone call took place as Alexander Graham Bell, who was in New York, spoke to his former assistant, Thomas Watson, who was in San Francisco, over a line set up by American Telephone & Telegraph.

In 1924, the first Winter Olympic Games opened in Chamonix (shah-moh-NEE'), France.

In 1945, Grand Rapids, Michigan, became the first community to add fluoride to its public water supply.

In 1959, American Airlines began Boeing 707 jet flights between New York and Los Angeles.

In 1971, Charles Manson and three women followers were convicted in Los Angeles of murder and conspiracy in the 1969 slayings of seven people, including actor Sharon Tate.

In 1981, the 52 Americans held hostage by Iran for 444 days arrived in the United States.

In 1993, Sears announced that it would no longer publish its famous century-old catalog.

In 1994, maintaining his innocence, singer Michael Jackson settled a child molestation lawsuit against him; terms were confidential, although the monetary figure was reportedly \$22 million.

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In 2004, NASA's Opportunity rover zipped its first pictures of Mars to Earth, showing a surface smooth and dark red in some places, and strewn with fragmented slabs of light bedrock in others.

In 2020, President Donald Trump's defense team opened its arguments at his first Senate impeachment trial, casting the effort to remove him from office as a politically motivated attempt to subvert the 2016 election and the upcoming 2020 contest. Canada, Australia and Malaysia each reported their first cases of the new coronavirus.

Ten years ago: U.S. military forces flew into Somalia in a nighttime helicopter raid, freeing an American and a Danish hostage and killing nine pirates. U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona returned to Congress to officially tender her resignation a year after she was shot and severely wounded in her home district.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump moved aggressively to tighten the nation's immigration controls, signing executive actions to jumpstart construction of his promised U.S.-Mexico border wall and cut federal grants for immigrant-protecting "sanctuary cities." Mary Tyler Moore, who created one of TV's first career-woman sitcom heroines in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," died at the age of 80. Actor John Hurt died at 77.

One year ago: House Democrats delivered the impeachment case against Donald Trump to the Senate for the start of his historic second impeachment trial even as Republican senators eased off of their criticism of the former president and shunned calls to convict him over the deadly siege at the U.S. Capitol. President Joe Biden reinstated COVID-19 travel restrictions on non-U.S. travelers from more than two dozen countries, including European countries that allowed travel across open borders; he added South Africa to the list because of concerns about a variant of the coronavirus that had spread beyond that nation. Biden signed an order reversing a Pentagon policy that largely barred transgender individuals from military service. Dominion Voting Systems filed a defamation lawsuit against Donald Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who led the former president's efforts to spread baseless claims about the 2020 election.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Claude Gray is 90. Actor Leigh Taylor-Young is 78. Actor Jenifer Lewis is 65. Country musician Mike Burch (River Road) is 56. R&B singer Kina is 53. Actor China Kantner is 51. Actor Ana Ortiz is 51. Drummer Joe Sirois (sìh-ROYS') (Mighty Mighty Bosstones) is 50. Musician Matt Odmark (OHD'-mark) (Jars of Clay) is 48. Actor Mia Kirshner is 47. Actor Christine Lakin is 43. R&B singer Alicia (ah-LEE'-shuh) Keys is 42. Actor Michael Trevino is 37. Pop musician Calum Hood (5 Seconds to Summer) is 26. Actor Olivia Edward is 15.