

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

Thursday, Feb. 3

Basketball Doubleheader at Faulkton (5:15 p.m.: Girls JV in new gym, Boys JV in Competition Gym, Girls Varsity in Competition Gym at 6:20 p.m. followed by Boys Varsity.

5 p.m.: Junior High Wrestling Invitational in Groton

Friday, Feb. 4

Wrestling triangular at Presho

Saturday, Feb. 5

Girls basketball at Madison (Groton Area vs. Tea Area at 12:30 p.m. in the main gym)

10 a.m.: Wrestling at Stanley County

Boys Basketball with Clark/Willow Lake at Groton (7th grade at 1 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.

Girls Basketball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli. C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and then Varsity.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

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.

Wednesday, Feb. 9

LifeTouch picture re-take day at Elementary School

Thursday, Feb. 10



"All you need is the courage to believe in yourself and put one foot in front of the other."

KATHERINE SWITZER



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

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

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

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

OPEN: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Groton Area COVID-19 Report

Groton Area School District

Active COVID-19 Cases

Updated February 1, 2022; 4:14 PM

Increase of 1 since Monday

J	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	1	1	S	T
K	G										0	1	2	t	o
														a	t
														f	a
														f	l
1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	6

Change

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 **+1** 0 0 0 0 0 **+1**

**GUN SHOW: Dakota Territory Gun Collectors Association
 ABERDEEN Show, Saturday, Feb. 5, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday,
 Feb. 6, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at THE DAKOTA EVENT CENTER.
 Laura Ennen 701-214-3388.**

Heinrich hired as Finance Officer

Doug Heinrich has been hired as Groton's new finance officer. He was hired at the council meeting Tuesday night and will start at \$23 an hour and will be re-evaluated after six months.

In the mean time, Deputy Finance Officer April Abeln and Assistant Finance Officer Kellie Locke have been filling the shoes of the finance officer position. The council gave Abeln a temporary \$3 an hour raise and Locke a \$1.50 an hour raise from January 1, 2022 until a month after the new finance officer was hired.

It might be cold outside, but summer is coming and the council will begin accepting applications for summer employment.

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Groton Area boys run past Langford Area

Groton Area's boys basketball team took to the court with a chip on its shoulder after suffering its first loss of the season Saturday. Langford Area was the recipient of Groton Area's flurry of lighting the nets on fire as Groton Area won, 65-27. Groton Area took a 25-8 lead after the first quarter and a 49-10 lead at half time. The Tigers led, 61-17, after the third quarter.

Lane Tietz scored all 20 of his points in the first half, making three of seven three-pointers. He also had two rebounds and one assist. Jayden Zak had 13 points, two rebounds and one assist. Kaden Kurtz fired in four three-pointers in the first half to finish with a dozen points and had six rebounds, five assists and two steals. Jacob Zak had eight points, six rebounds, five assists, one steal and one block. Tate Larson had four points, four rebounds, three assists and one steal. Wyatt Hearnen had four points. Cade Larson had two points, one rebound and one assist. Taylor Diegel had two points. Cole Simon had three rebounds and two steals. Colby Dunker had one rebound and one block shot.

Groton Area made 17 of 30 field goals for 57 percent, made 10 of 17 in three-pointers for 59 percent, made one of two free throws, had 24 rebounds, eight turnovers, 18 assists, eight steals, 13 team fouls and two blocked shots.

Jesse Keough led the Lions with 10 points while Brayden Peterson had seven, Aden Godel six and Benjamin Gustafson added four points. The Lions made nine of 30 field goals for 30 percent, six of 15 free throws for 40 percent had seven team fouls and 15 turnovers.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, leading at the quarter stops at 13-2, 33-4 and 43-15 en route to the 48-20 win. Cole Simon had 12 points while Colby Dunker and Teylor Diegel each had 10, Dillon Abeln had five, Turner Thompson four, Holden Sippel three and Cade Larson had two points.

Keegan Schock led Langford Area with seven points while Kassen Keough and Jacob Samson each had five, Karen Godel had two and Ryder Smith had one point.

Both games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The varsity was sponsored by Groton Ford, Dacotah Bank, John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors and Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls. Kent and Darcy Muller sponsored the junior varsity team.

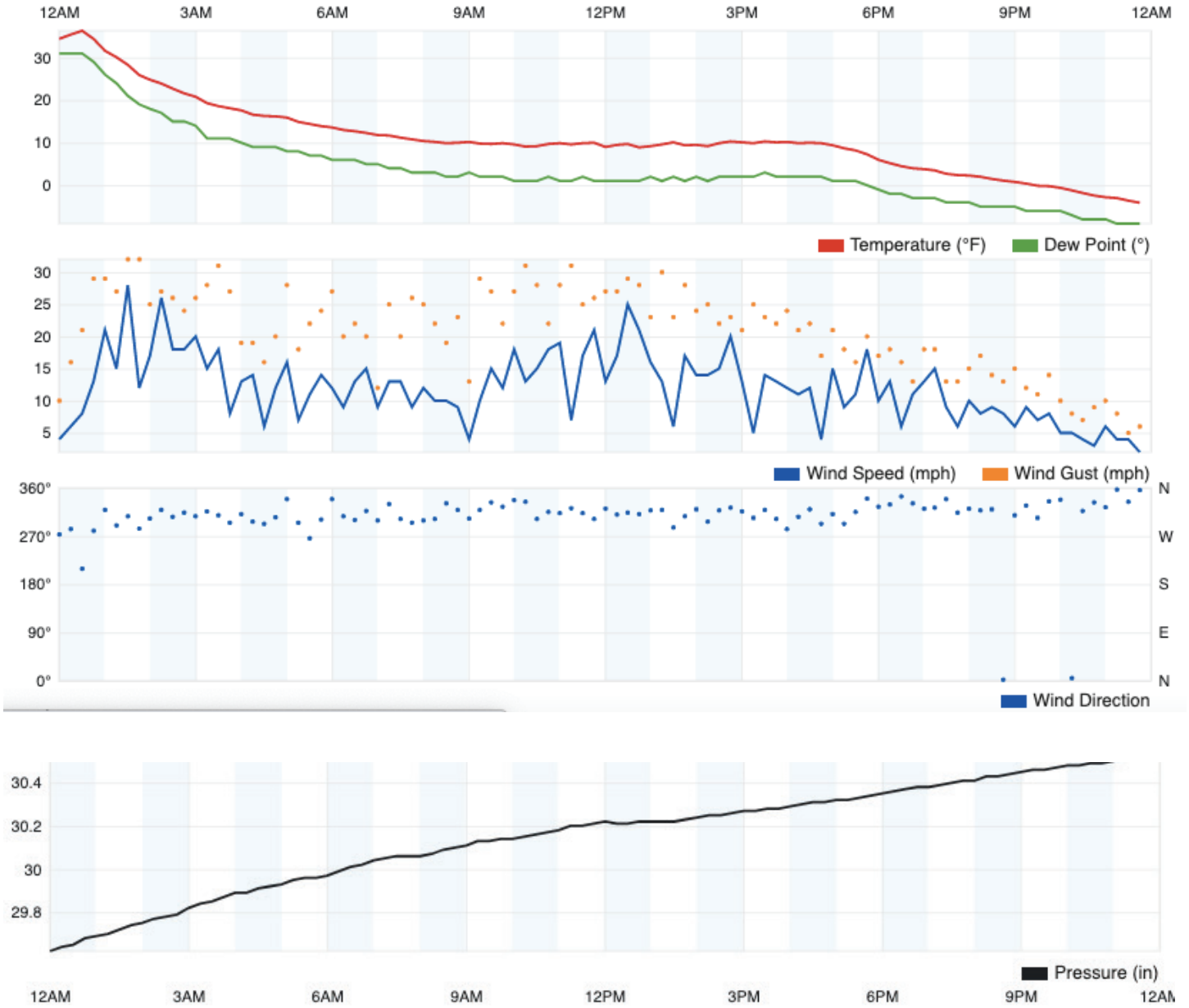
Several dance groups also performed and were all broadcast as well. The games are archived at 397news.com.

- Paul Kosel

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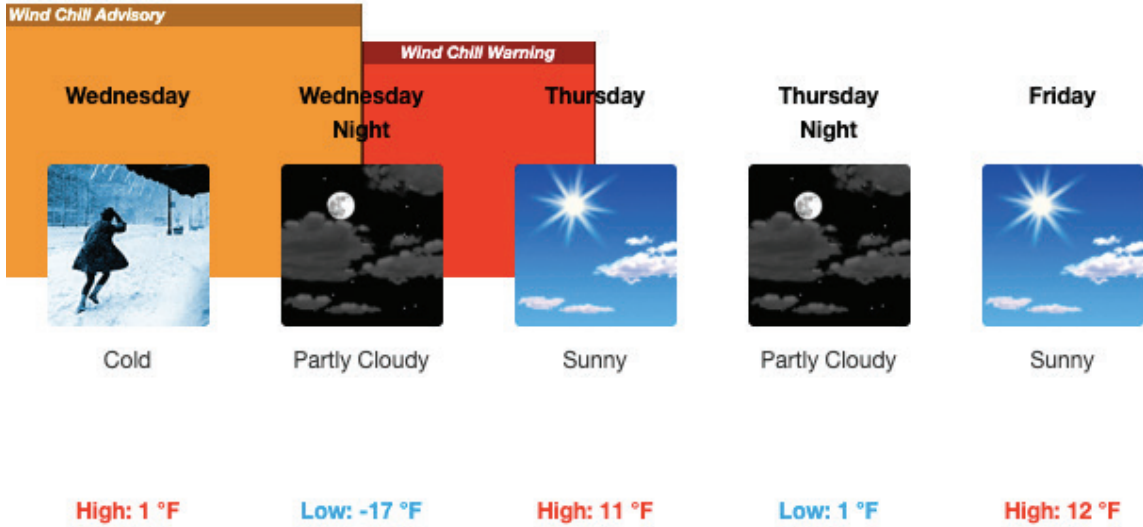
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



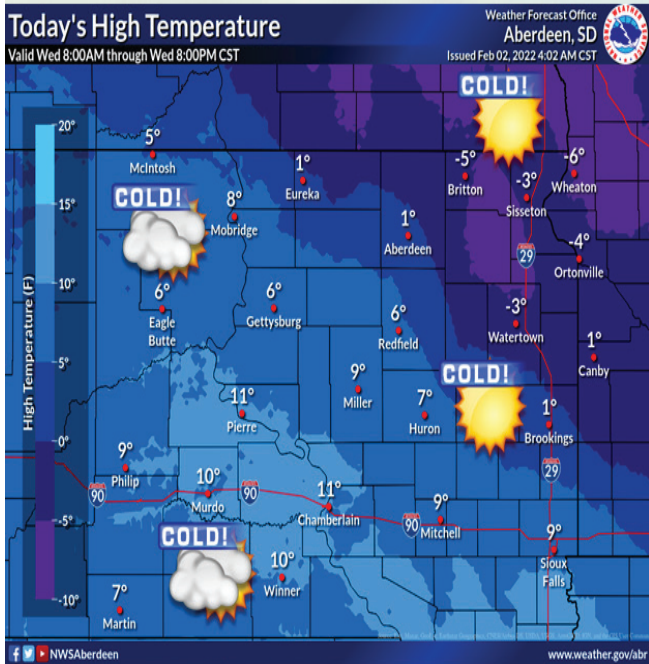
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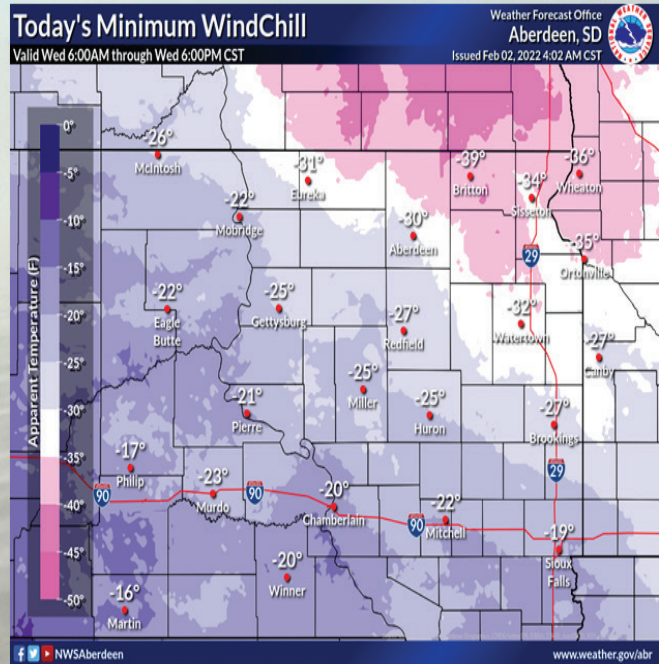


Arctic Air Remains Entrenched Today with Cold and Dangerous Wind Chills

High Temperatures Today



Minimum Wind Chills Through 6PM Tonight



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

The arctic air will remain solidly in place today across the region. High pressure will slowly build in through the day with northerly breezes up around 15 mph at times which will produce wind chill values of 25 to 35 below zero. Daytime temperatures won't budge up much with highs expected to remain subzero in the east to near 10 above in the west. Readings will plummet tonight with wind chill values falling to as low as 30 to 40 below zero by Thursday morning across northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota.

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Today in Weather History

February 2, 1960: Heavy icing from freezing rain accumulations from the afternoon of the 2nd to the afternoon of the 3rd occurred mainly across the eastern half of the state. Severe damage to power lines and telephone service happened in the Watertown and Wessington Springs area. Ice coatings of up to 3 inches thick and has an estimated weight of nine pounds per foot of wire formed around the telephone and some power lines over a wide area of the eastern counties. A 300-foot tower high collapsed at Wessington Springs, and in some areas, utility wires were entirely down for stretches of 2 to 3 miles. Some 170 long-distance telephone circuits were knocked out in larger cities, and 19 towns from Bonesteel to Watertown on the north were without phone service for two to three days after the storm. Many highways were treacherous, and numerous vehicles collided or slid off the road into the ditch. Many schools were also closed.

February 2, 2003: Widespread freezing rain developed across parts of central and into northeast South Dakota through the late-night hours producing significant icing of a quarter to a half-inch by the late morning hours. No significant tree damage or power outages occurred. However, travel was significantly disrupted with many accidents and vehicles sliding off the road. The freezing rain changed over to snow during the mid-morning hours and became heavy, with 6 to 9 inches of snow accumulating before it ended in the late evening. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Ree Heights, Miller, and Faulkton, 7 inches at Clear Lake, 8 inches at Bryant, and 9 inches at Milbank.

February 2, 2011: Blizzard conditions developed along and east of the Sisseton Hills late on February 2nd and continued into the mid-morning hours of February 3rd. Strong southwest winds of 30 to 40 mph, gusting to around 55 mph, picked up the existing snow cover causing blizzard conditions wreaked havoc along Interstate-29. Whiteout conditions and massive drifting brought traffic to a halt along a stretch of Interstate-29 from north of Wilmot to Sisseton. One-hundred fifty to two-hundred vehicles were stranded along this stretch. A full-scale rescue operation ensued during the night and continued into the next day. Interstate-29 was closed from Watertown to the North Dakota border as it took most of the day to clean up all of the stalled vehicles. There were also many accidents along the stretch of the interstate, with people stranded for up to twelve hours. No injuries occurred as a result of this incident. The Roberts County Emergency Manager was stranded and conducted emergency operations from his vehicle. Interstate-29 reopened the evening of the 3rd.

1870: Congressman Halbert Paine, who represented Wisconsin's Second District, introduced a joint resolution in the House of Representatives "to authorize the Secretary of War to provide for taking meteorological observations at the military stations and other points in the interior of the continent, and for giving notice on the Northern Lakes and seaboard of the approach and force of storms."

The House adopted the resolution by unanimous consent and, two days later, it passed the Senate. Five days later, on Feb. 9, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the joint resolution into law, officially creating the nation's first weather service.

1898: The naming of hurricanes after women was always the center of controversy. In the Southern Hemisphere near Australia, tropical cyclones were once called Willy-Willies. An Australian Meteorologist, Clement Wragge, is credited for giving girls names to tropical cyclones by the end of the 19th Century. On this date, Wragge's weather journal showed a Willy Willy named "Eline."

1996: An Arctic outbreak that lasted from late January through early February produced nearly 400 hundred record lows, 15 all-time low readings, and over 50 new record lows. Four states recorded their all-time record low temperatures, including Tower, Minnesota, on this date with a reading of 60 degrees below zero, canceling Tower's annual Icebox Days festival because it is too cold. Locations that reported their all-time record low or tied included: Cresco, IA: -36°, Osage, IA: -34°, Charles City, IA tied their record low with -32° and Lancaster, WI tied their all-time record low with -31°. International Falls, MN, and Glasgow, MT set records for February with -45° and -38°, respectively. The temperature at Embarrass, MN, plummeted to -53°. Rochester, MN, dipped to -34° for its coldest temperature in 45 years. Green Bay, WI only reached -16° for the high temperature for the day, their coldest high temperature on record in February. The place to be this day was in Orlando, FL, where it was a balmy 85 degrees.

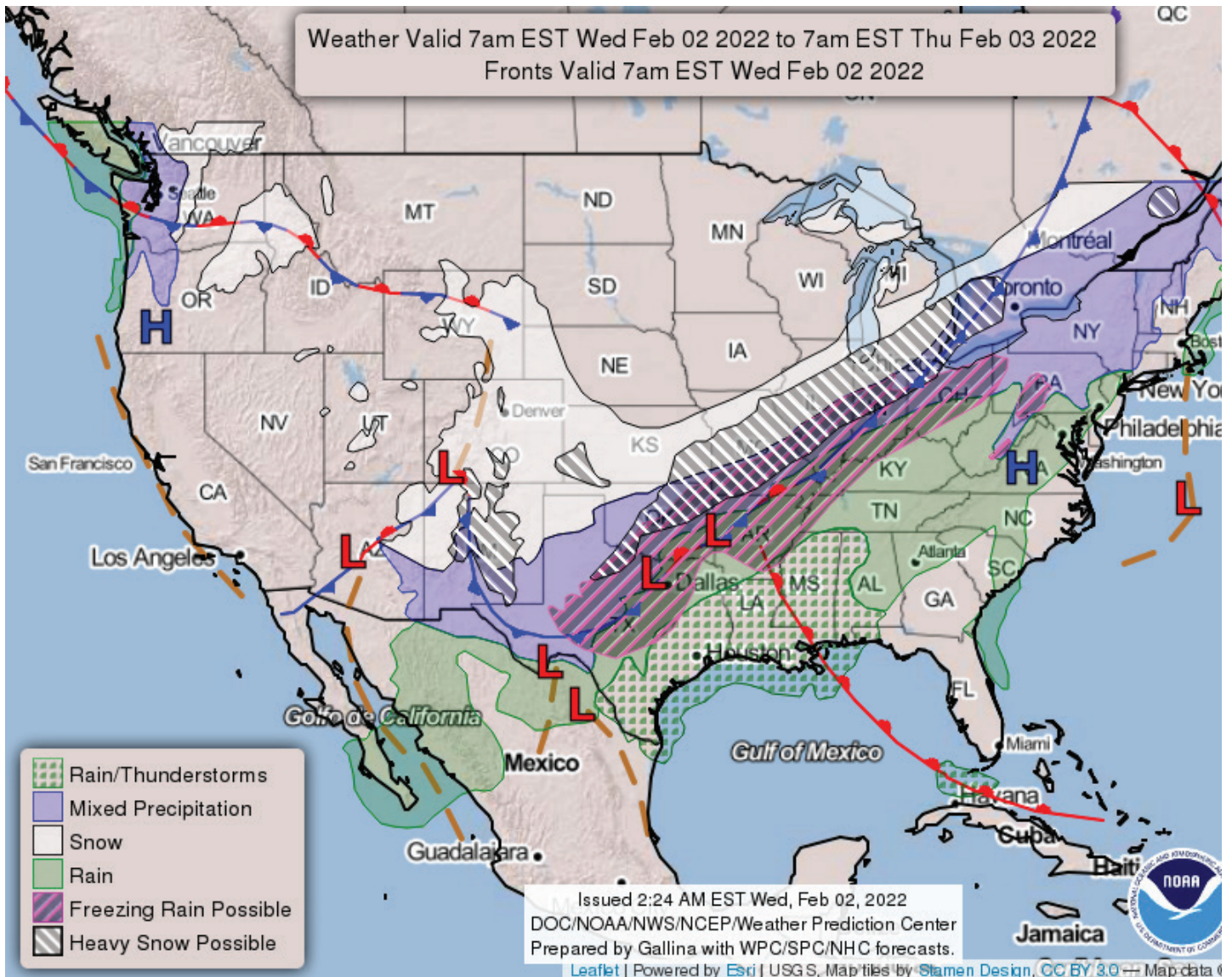
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 36 °F at 12:29 AM
Low Temp: -4 °F at 11:54 PM
Wind: 32 mph at 1:24 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 60 in 1991
Record Low: -39 in 1917
Average High: 25°F
Average Low: 2°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.04
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.59
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 5:42:13 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:48:45 AM



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HERE'S HAPPINESS!

"You're the happiest person I know, Bill. Why are you not only happy, but happy all the time?" asked Marie. "Well, I wasn't like this all the time. In fact, I've even considered suicide very seriously a time or two, to be honest with you. But, one day I decided to study happiness as a science and discovered how to be happy whether I'm happy or not. But, after all is said and done, it's a choice." Then, after he thought for moment he added, "You know, Abe Lincoln had it right. He said, 'Most people are about as happy as they want to be.' So, I guess there must have been a day when I just decided to be happy."

But, the Bible has a different source for being happy. The Psalmist under the inspiration of God wrote, "Blessed - or happy - are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord." There it is: God's promise for our happiness! Simple, indeed. But it is not very easy!

In the center of the verse are the words, "whose ways" or more precisely, "who follow the instructions of the Lord."

"Following the ways" of the Lord is to come first in the life of anyone who wants to be blessed or who wants true happiness. His ways are the ways to happiness!

Shortly after being discharged from the military, a soldier was being interviewed for a job. "What did you do in the service?" asked the interviewer. With no hesitation he answered, "I did as I was told!" Can Christians do less?

Prayer: Lord, teach us to seek happiness in ways that lead us to You rather than from You. Help us to maintain our integrity as we walk in Your ways. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: - Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Psalm 119:1

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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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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 73, North Central Co-Op 33

Canistota 68, Viborg-Hurley 49

Centerville 44, Alcester-Hudson 39

Clark/Willow Lake 54, Tiospa Zina Tribal 51

Crow Creek 63, McLaughlin 62

Deuel 56, Elkton-Lake Benton 44

Douglas 61, Custer 57

Estelline/Hendricks 64, Waverly-South Shore 40

Ethan 57, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 45

Faulkton 60, Warner 50

Flandreau 64, Dell Rapids 51

Freeman Academy/Marion 93, Marty Indian 65

Garretson 52, Baltic 43

Great Plains Lutheran 50, Lake Preston 38

Groton Area 65, Langford 27

Hamlin 79, Arlington 42

Hanson 52, Wagner 50

Harrisburg 60, Brandon Valley 58

Highmore-Harold 60, Sunshine Bible Academy 22

Hitchcock-Tulare 68, James Valley Christian 61

Howard 64, Irene-Wakonda 35

Kadoka Area 64, Bennett County 39

Kimball/White Lake 52, Colome 45

Lennox 67, Elk Point-Jefferson 65

Mobridge-Pollock 73, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 59

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 63, Gregory 60

Oelrichs 76, Bison 16

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 69, Mitchell Christian 44

Parker 68, Chester 52

Parkston 60, McCook Central/Montrose 54

Philip 57, New Underwood 40

Platte-Geddes 46, Chamberlain 44

Potter County 68, Aberdeen Roncalli 40

Rapid City Christian 53, Lyman 44

Red Cloud 70, Belle Fourche 30

Sioux Falls Christian 52, Canton 48

Sioux Falls Jefferson 54, Mitchell 45

Sioux Falls Lincoln 58, Watertown 45

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 72, Huron 39

Sioux Falls Washington 62, Brookings 33

Sisseton 54, Britton-Hecla 47

St. Thomas More 58, Sturgis Brown 28

Stanley County 42, Todd County 34

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Timber Lake 78, Dupree 41
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 54, Gayville-Volin 41
Vermillion 67, Beresford 31
Wakpala 80, Solen, N.D. 71
Webster 64, Wilmot 30
West Central 67, Tri-Valley 33
Western Christian, Iowa 77, Tea Area 42
White River 103, St. Francis Indian 42
Winner 72, Miller 38

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 65, North Central Co-Op 32
Avon 48, Menno 24
Bison 62, Oelrichs 19
Centerville 50, Alcester-Hudson 38
Chester 63, Parker 52
Clark/Willow Lake 51, Tiospa Zina Tribal 40
Colman-Egan 49, Bridgewater-Emery 45
Corsica/Stickney 53, Burke 36
Crow Creek 63, McLaughlin 36
Custer 54, Douglas 44
Deubrook 57, Madison 37
Deuel 50, Elkton-Lake Benton 48
Ethan 40, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 33
Faith 42, Herreid/Selby Area 38
Faulkton 51, Warner 43
Gayville-Volin 56, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 50, 20T
Great Plains Lutheran 57, Lake Preston 39
Hamlin 61, Arlington 34
Hanson 44, Wagner 40
Harding County 41, Lemmon 39
Highmore-Harrold 65, Sunshine Bible Academy 24
Hot Springs 44, Bennett County 41
Ipswich 48, Leola/Frederick 41
Irene-Wakonda 61, Howard 55, OT
James Valley Christian 50, Hitchcock-Tulare 36
Lakota Tech 102, St. Francis Indian 18
Marty Indian 55, Freeman Academy/Marion 51
Mitchell 46, Sioux Falls Jefferson 40
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 64, Gregory 46
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 52, Mitchell Christian 35
Pierre 63, Harrisburg 54
Platte-Geddes 41, Chamberlain 40, OT
Rapid City Christian 53, Lyman 41
Red Cloud 69, Belle Fourche 59
Scotland 49, Freeman 36
Sioux Falls Lincoln 53, Watertown 44
Sioux Falls Washington 61, Brookings 40
Sioux Valley 102, Flandreau Indian 17
Sisseton 61, Britton-Hecla 39

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Spearfish 58, Lead-Deadwood 20
Sully Buttes 50, Jones County 34
Timber Lake 52, Dupree 47
Vermillion 54, Beresford 25
Viborg-Hurley 62, Canistota 25
Wakpala 84, Solen, N.D. 35
Webster 64, Wilmot 41
West Central 79, Tri-Valley 47
Winner 52, Miller 24
Wolsey-Wessington 54, Kimball/White Lake 41

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 Tuesday:

Mega Millions

11-24-38-62-66, Mega Ball: 1, Megaplier: 4

(eleven, twenty-four, thirty-eight, sixty-two, sixty-six; Mega Ball: one; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$123 million

South Dakota House backs restrictions on trans students

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House on Tuesday passed two bills aimed at transgender students, seeking to restrict which bathrooms K-12 trans children can use and which sports teams trans girls and college-age women can join.

A proposal from Republican Gov. Kristi Noem to ban transgender women and girls from playing in school sports leagues, including college athletes, that match their gender identity cleared its final hurdle in the Legislature with its passage in the House. Meanwhile, a proposal to ban transgender children from using school restrooms that match their gender identity was headed to the Senate.

Advocates for transgender people decried the passage of the bills as another round of bullying by Republican lawmakers. Both trans students and their family members have testified in opposition to the bills, telling lawmakers that the proposals would increase the alienation that such students already face.

Susan Williams, who has a trans son and directs the Transformation Project, said the House votes Tuesday were “devastating” for her community and generated a flurry of text, email and phone exchanges to offer support and encouragement.

“Right now, it’s a very hostile environment and these kids are feeling unwelcome in their home state,” she said. “Many want to leave as soon as they can. They don’t feel safe or accepted.”

Republicans who support the bills have pushed schools to assess students based on the sex on their birth certificates, basing their arguments on the idea that other students need protection, either from transgender girls and women on sports teams or in bathrooms.

“If we’re going to have boys bathrooms and girls bathrooms, then there has to be some objective standard of who goes in which one, and the only one I can think of is physical, biological sex,” said Republican state Rep. Bethany Soye.

Republican state Rep. Fred Deutsch said he proposed the bill, which would apply to bathrooms, locker rooms and overnight accommodations, after the Vermillion school district in November established a policy that allows students to use restrooms that correspond with their “consistently asserted gender.” The school

district's final policy only applied to bathrooms.

Deutsch pushed a similar bill in 2016 that was passed by the Legislature but vetoed by the state's Republican governor at the time, Dennis Daugaard. This year's legislation, which passed on a 38 to 29 vote in the Republican-controlled House, will next be considered by the Senate, where bills aimed at trans people have faced more opposition from Republicans wary of enmeshing the state into legal battles.

However, the state Senate already passed the bill addressing women's sports, which is headed to Noem's desk.

The Republican governor has lobbied forcefully for the bill this year after shying away from signing a similar ban last year. She issued a "style and form veto" that led to its demise and argued that it contained flawed language that put the state at risk of litigation and retribution from the NCAA.

But Noem, who is thought to be considering a 2024 run for the White House, has seized on the momentum of a cause taking hold among Republicans and trumpeted her support for "protecting fairness in women's sports."

South Dakota would be the 10th Republican-dominated state to adopt such a ban on transgender women or girls. Federal judges have halted enforcement of such laws in two of those states — Idaho and West Virginia. The U.S. Department of Justice has challenged bans in other states, slamming them as violations of federal law.

Report: Loss of manufacturing jobs leads to index drop

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A loss of manufacturing jobs combined with other factors to slow growth in the regional economy of nine Midwest and Plains states, according to a new monthly report released Tuesday.

Business leaders in nine Midwest and Plains states indicated in Creighton University's Mid-America Business Conditions cited the job losses, continued supply chain problems and growing inflation. The overall index for January fell to 56.2 from December's 64.6. Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests recession.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the monthly survey, said that for the first time since the spring of 2020, the region lost manufacturing jobs.

"In terms of supply chain disruptions and bottlenecks for the first half of 2022, approximately one-third of supply managers expect delays to worsen, with only 12% anticipating improvements," Goss said.

Conditions also had a roller coaster effect on the survey's business confidence index, which looks ahead six months. After soaring to 64.0 in December, the index plummeted in January to 36.2 — the lowest reading since the beginning of the pandemic. Goss blamed disappointing jobs numbers, the supply chain issues and rising inflation, combined with the added concern of the Federal Reserve's promise to raise interest rates starting as soon as March.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Democratic state Rep. Jamie Smith running for SD governor

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota state lawmaker Rep. Jamie Smith, who leads the House Democratic caucus, said Tuesday he is running for governor.

Smith's announcement comes after a monthslong search by Democrats for a candidate to mount a challenge to Republican Gov. Kristi Noem. The governor also faces a Republican primary challenge from state Rep. Steve Haugaard.

Smith, who is also a Sioux Falls real estate agent, acknowledged that he faced an "uphill climb" as he enters a race in which Noem has already raised \$11.8 million and carved out a nationwide profile among Republicans. He told The Associated Press he plans to make a broad appeal to "Democrats, independents and Republicans" and that he will portray Noem as setting her political ambitions above state interests.

"Gov. Noem has been too busy cozying up to big out-of-state donors to focus on South Dakota," Smith

said during a news conference to announce his candidacy.

Smith, who also has worked as a teacher and wrestling coach, plans to focus on bolstering education resources. He said also he will pitch improvements to mental health resources and plans to reduce incarceration rates. He pointed to his record of "building bridges" in the Legislature to "solve real problems."

During his three terms in the House, Democrats have lost legislative seats to the point Smith is leading an eight-person caucus this year. He has found occasional victories by finding allies among his GOP colleagues, but often has represented a dissenting voice as Republicans push a conservative agenda on education, transgender rights and other social issues.

Noem's campaign jabbed back at Smith's announcement and willingness to attack the governor.

"Jamie's voting record and values don't align with the people of South Dakota," said Joe Desilets, Noem's campaign manager, adding that Smith had opposed expanding access to firearms, opposed restrictions on abortion access and supported government orders aimed at slowing COVID-19 infections.

While Smith at the news conference laughed off an accusation from Desilet that he is an "extreme liberal," the Democrat will undoubtedly have to find a way to appeal beyond his party to have any hope of making the race competitive.

Democrats have lost thousands of registered voters in recent years. The state GOP boasts more than 280,000 registered voters, while Democrats have 152,000. There are an additional 140,000 independent voters.

Meanwhile, Noem's approval among Republicans has risen with her hands-off approach to restrictions during the pandemic, and she has taken credit for the state's rosy economic outlook. Smith last year pushed for mask-wearing requirements both in Sioux Falls and in the House chamber. He pointed out that the state's economy has largely been bolstered by federal funding.

However, Smith, who cast himself as a "pro-business Democrat," said he believes he can win support from a segment of Republican voters frustrated by Noem. He said he has already received support among "Republicans from in our state and out of our state."

Noem won her first term in 2018 by defeating Democrat Billie Sutton by a little over 3 percentage points.

Robins Kaplan LLP Announces Proposed Opioid Settlement for Its Tribal Nation Clients

MINNEAPOLIS & BISMARCK, N.D. & SIOUX FALLS, S.D.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Feb 1, 2022--

Robins Kaplan LLP announces a proposed \$439 million settlement of the national opioid litigation claims by Tribes brought against AmerisourceBergen Corp., McKesson Corp., Cardinal Health, Inc ("Distributors") and a proposed \$150 million settlement of the national opioid litigation claims by Tribes brought against Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., Janssen Pharmaceutica, Inc. N/K/A Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., Johnson & Johnson, Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., N/K/A Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc. ("Janssen"). The proposed settlement, which must be agreed to by the sovereign governments of Tribes, comes at a critical time to address the addiction and prevention needs of residents, as drug overdose deaths in the U.S. rose nearly 30 percent in 2020, according to preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control.

Janssen has agreed to resolve the Tribal claims for \$150,000,000, payable over two years. The Distributors resolved the Tribal claims for \$439,964,500, payable over seven years. These two settlements are initial, partial settlements as Tribal opioid claims against several other Defendants remain pending in the consolidated Multi-District Litigation venued in federal court in Cleveland, Ohio.

"This initial settlement for Tribes in the national opioid litigation is a crucial first step in delivering some measure of justice to the Tribes and reservation communities across the United States that have been ground zero for the opioid epidemic," said Tara Sutton, Chair of Robins Kaplan LLP's Mass Tort Group. Ms. Sutton acted as one of the negotiators for the plaintiffs' Tribal Leadership Committee in the negotiations with the settling Distributors.

Chairman Douglas Yankton of the Spirit Lake Nation in North Dakota welcomed this first opioid litigation

settlement noting, "American Indians have suffered the highest per capita rate of opioid overdose and are more likely than other group in the United States to die from drug-induced deaths. Given this, the dollars that will flow to Tribes under this initial settlement will help fund crucial, on-reservation, culturally appropriate opioid treatment services."

Tim Purdon, the Co-Chair of Robins Kaplan LLP's American Indian Law and Policy Group, added, "At Robin Kaplan, we were one of the first to identify the opportunity for Tribes to exercise their sovereignty by bringing suit, just as State Attorneys General did, against the companies that created and drove the opioid epidemic. This is the first time in history that Tribal Nations in these numbers have participated in nationwide mass tort litigation at this scale." The Robins Kaplan LLP American Indian Law and Policy Group was co-founded by Purdon, the former United States Attorney for North Dakota and Brendan Johnson, the former United States Attorney in South Dakota when the two joined the firm in 2015.

The court appointed Tribal Leadership Committee on which Robins Kaplan LLP serves and the settling Defendants have entered into settlement Term Sheets summarizing their agreements and are in the process of drafting definitive settlement agreements. All federally recognized Tribes will receive notice of how they may participate in both settlements. All federally recognized Tribes will be eligible to participate in both settlements regardless of whether the Tribe has previously filed suit against the Settling Defendants.

Two defamation lawsuits filed by Rapid City man dismissed

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Pennington County judge has dismissed two defamation lawsuits filed by a Rapid City real estate investor who claimed his sister and the mother of his child both made false statements about him on social media.

A judge recently dismissed the lawsuits with prejudice, meaning the same claims cannot be refiled.

According to the original complaint, Josiah LaFrance alleged that both Natalie LaFrance-Slack and Karli Shama made false statements with malice to damage his personal and professional reputations on social media.

LaFrance-Slack told the Rapid City Journal Monday that the cases recognize that posts made online should be true and purposeful and that people should be aware there are risks involved when telling the truth.

She said she wants her brother to have a successful career and wants him to have the ability to pay child support and be a good father.

Josiah LaFrance was sentenced 180 days in jail and five years of probation for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon for a domestic assault charge in October.

20 years behind bars for Sioux Falls teen who killed father

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls teen has been sentenced to spend 20 years in prison for fatally shooting his father and injuring his father's girlfriend.

Minnehaha County Judge Susan Sabers on Monday gave 17-year-old Matthew Wittrock 30 years with 10 years suspended for first-degree manslaughter and 15 years suspended for aggravated assault.

Wittrock earlier pleaded guilty to the charges in an agreement with prosecutors.

Sabers acknowledged that Wittrock had some mental health issues, but said she saw no reason for the attack, the Argus Leader reported.

"The fact there was no defined trigger I do think makes you a danger to the community," Sabers told Wittrock.

According to a criminal complaint, on May 5, 2020, Wittrock, who was 15 at the time, armed himself and waited for his father and Teri Handel to return home, then shot 42-year-old Craig Wittrock and Handel as she tried to offer help. Wittrock then beat Handel in the head with the gun and held her hostage as she pleaded with him to get help for his father, the complaint said.

Wittrock addressed the court and said he has grown a lot since being held at the Juvenile Detention Center. He said one of his goals for the future was to contact his mother, who had left nine years ago, and establish a relationship with her.

Sabers questioned that goal, saying the woman didn't deserve to have a relationship with her son and said she found it strange he wanted to contact her.

As Russia tensions boil, US farmer remains jailed in Ukraine

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Kurt Groszhans set out from North Dakota for Ukraine in 2017, he was eager to connect with his family's ancestral homeland and to farm the rich, black soil for which the country is known.

But his farming venture with a law professor who's now a high-ranking Ukrainian government official soon collapsed in acrimony and accusations, culminating in his arrest last November on charges of plotting to assassinate his former business partner. His family and supporters say the accusations are bogus and designed to silence Groszhan's claims of corruption in Ukraine, a country pulled between Russian and Western interests and straining to shed its reputation for graft and cronyism.

The case is unfolding as Ukraine braces for a potential Russian invasion and as the U.S. has ordered the families of American personnel at the U.S. Embassy there to evacuate. The upheaval has Groszhan's family afraid that the North Dakota farmer could be left behind, with the U.S. government preoccupied with broader concerns of possible military action and geopolitical chaos.

"We're terrified for my brother's well-being right now, especially everything that you're hearing in the news with the Russian troops on the border," his sister, Kristi Magnusson, said in an interview with The Associated Press. With fears an invasion could force the evacuation of U.S. diplomatic staff, she called on the Biden administration and the State Department to "use their leverage" to get him home.

"If the embassy is not there to check on him and make sure that he's doing OK, we don't know what will happen," she added.

Asked for comment, the State Department said the administration took seriously its responsibility to help detained Americans and was closely following the case, but declined to comment further.

Republican Sen. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, who recently visited Groszhans at the detention center where he awaits trial, said the episode has "created friction between at least me and them, if not our two governments, that should be alleviated" at a time when U.S. and Ukrainian interests should be aligned in countering the threat from Moscow.

"This bit of friction is unnecessary," he added. "And I think we could relieve all of us of it simply by releasing Kurt."

Groszhans, a 50-year-old farmer from Ashley, North Dakota, traveled in 2017 to Ukraine, where his ancestors are from. The chance to work the country's coveted black earth was a "dream come true," and he invested a large sum to get a farming operation up and running, his sister said. In a country with a prized agricultural sector, Groszhans was proud of his work, she said, sending pictures to his family of his crops.

Once there, he connected with a law professor, Roman Leshchenko, who offered himself up as a native speaker with knowledge of the local farming business and regulatory requirements. Groszhans named him the director of his company.

Things fell apart quickly.

Groszhans has alleged in a lawsuit and in an internet post that Leshchenko began embezzling money from him, defrauding him of over \$250,000 in total and transferring funds to a family company. Groszhans has been vocal about his allegations, describing himself in a Medium post in August as a "humble" but deceived investor.

"Probably, I am not the first or the last American investor who made a mistake in the person hired as a manager. But the personality of this manager makes my case unique," he wrote.

Leshchenko declined to comment to the AP, but has denied the embezzlement claims in interviews with the Ukrainian media and has insisted that the men had agreed that Leshchenko's company would run the farming business.

He's leveled his own accusations against Groszhans, alleging that the American farmer planted geneti-

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cally modified soybean that is banned from cultivation and sales in Ukraine and it was that discovery that prompted Leshchenko to resign from the company and was the source of their dispute.

"The circumstances of this criminal proceedings must be verified as part of the pre-trial investigation conducted by the National Police and only on the basis of the results of which, after the relevant facts and their evidence have been clarified and established, the prosecutor's office can make appropriate procedural decisions," Tetyana Kozachenko, a lawyer for Leshchenko, told The Associated Press.

Ukrainian media that began looking into the conflict reported that Leshchenko had used some of the funds for a roughly \$60,000 contribution to the 2019 campaign of current Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who later named Leshchenko the government's minister of agrarian policy and food.

The AP was unable to independently confirm the contribution. Zelenskyy's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Amid controversy about the contribution, Leshchenko was interviewed by the Kyiv Post last year. The article said the \$60,000 donation came from Leshchenko's dying father. Leshchenko said he and his father saw Zelenskyy "as the only person who wants to change Ukraine, bring structural reforms."

Magnusson says Leshchenko ultimately did return some money to her brother, but also threatened to have him arrested if he didn't stop talking publicly about his fraud accusations.

In November, Groszhans was arrested along with his assistant on charges of plotting to assassinate Leshchenko, allegations that Groszhans' supporters say are wholly fabricated but may have arisen from Groszhans' hiring of a private investigator to dig into Leshchenko as part of his litigation.

The arrest, his family and supporters believe, was a pretext for silencing his allegations, particularly in a country that has sought to shore up diplomatic and military support from the U.S. through reassurances it is making a serious effort to curb corruption.

"My brother has never in all of his 50 years of life ... been in trouble with the law," Magnusson said. "And we don't believe any of this can be true because why would you want to assassinate somebody if you're trying to collect money back that is legally owed to you?"

His supporters are asking the Biden administration to formally designate him a wrongful detainee, a classification that would allow for his case to be reassigned to the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs at the State Department.

But his family fears the window for attention to Groszhan's case may be limited, given the potential for an incursion by Russia and the dwindling diplomatic presence by the U.S.

"It just makes us more and more concerned for him and for his safety to know that these people could be leaving and Kurt is forgotten about, and he's left behind," Magnusson said.

Winter storm brings freezing rain, snow to wide swath of US

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A major winter storm with millions of Americans in its path brought a mix of rain, freezing rain and snow to the middle section of the United States on Wednesday as airlines canceled hundreds of flights, governors urged residents to stay off roads and schools closed campuses.

The blast of frigid weather, which began arriving Tuesday night, put a long stretch of states from New Mexico and Colorado to Maine under winter storm warnings and watches. On Wednesday morning, parts of Oklahoma, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan saw freezing rain, sleet and snow.

More than a foot of snow was possible in Michigan by the time the storm moves through, on the heels of a vicious nor'easter last weekend that brought blizzard conditions to many parts of the East Coast.

"It will be a very messy system and will make travel very difficult," said Marty Rausch, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland.

The footprint of the storm extended as far south as Texas, where nearly a year after a catastrophic freeze buckled the state's power grid in one of the worst blackouts in U.S. history, Gov. Greg Abbott defended the state's readiness. The forecast did not call for the same prolonged and frigid temperatures as the February 2021 storm and the National Weather Service said the system would, generally, not be as

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bad this time for Texas.

"No one can guarantee that there won't be any" outages caused by demand on the power grid, Abbott said Tuesday. "But what we will work to achieve, and what we're prepared to achieve is that power is going to stay on across the entire state."

In November, Abbott had, in fact, made a guarantee for winter: "I can guarantee the lights will stay on," he told Austin television station KTBC.

Abbott, whose handling of last year's blackouts is a top line of attack for Democrats as the Republican seeks a third term in 2022, said thousands of miles of roads in Texas will become "extraordinarily dangerous" over the coming days. Energy experts said the forecast this week, although below freezing, should not pose a challenge for Texas' grid.

"The question has always been if we get a repeat of last year, would the power stay on? And this is nowhere near a repeat of last year," said Doug Lewin, an energy consultant in Austin who has criticized Texas' response to the blackouts as insufficient.

No large-scale power outages were reported early Wednesday in Texas or elsewhere, according to poweroutage.us.

Airlines canceled more than 1,000 flights in the U.S. scheduled for Wednesday, the flight-tracking service FlightAware.com showed, including more than half taken off the board in St. Louis. In an effort to stay ahead of the weather, Southwest Airlines announced Tuesday that it would suspend all of its flight operations Wednesday at St. Louis Lambert International Airport and Thursday at its Dallas Love Field hub. Airports in Chicago, Kansas City and Detroit canceled more flights than usual.

"Around the country, we're planning to operate a limited or reduced schedule from some cities in the path of the storm but will make adjustments to the schedule as needed," Southwest spokesman Dan Landson said.

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson declared a state of emergency as school districts and universities shifted classes to online or canceled them entirely.

Illinois lawmakers canceled their three scheduled days of session this week as the central part of the state prepares for heavy snow, ice and high wind gusts in the region. In Oklahoma, Gov. Kevin Stitt has declared a statewide state of emergency as the winter storm approached that would remain in effect for seven days.

The National Weather Service said 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) of snow was expected by Thursday morning in parts of the Rockies and Midwest, while heavy ice is likely from Texas through the Ohio Valley.

On Wednesday and Thursday, the weather service said 8 to 15 inches (20 to 38 centimeters) of snow was possible in parts of Michigan. That includes Detroit, where the mayor activated snow emergency routes and city crews were expected to work 12-hour shifts salting and plowing major roads.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, where up to 7 inches (18 centimeters) of snow and sleet was forecast but little ice, emergency management director Joe Kralicek said the event is not expected to cause large-scale power outages based on an ice index used by the National Weather Service.

"We could see some power outages, however, it's also suggesting that they be limited in scope and nature and very short term in duration," Kralicek said.

Becky Gligo, director of the nonprofit Housing Solutions in Tulsa said teams are working to move homeless people into shelters ahead of overnight lows that are expected to drop into single digits by Friday night.

Olympic advisers at ease with COVID rate, see cases falling

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — With more than 30 new COVID-19 cases being detected daily ahead of the Beijing Olympics, organizers said Wednesday they aren't worried and expect numbers to drop within days.

A total of 32 new cases — 15 in tests of people arriving at the airport and 17 within the Olympic bubbles — were reported by the Beijing organizing committee on Wednesday, two days before the opening cer-

emony. The average was 31 cases over the past three days.

Athletes and team officials accounted for nine of the latest cases and 23 were "stakeholders," a category that includes workers and media. Athletes testing positive now could miss their events.

Eleven people have been treated at the hospital for a symptom among the 232 positive tests registered since Jan. 23, though "none of those are seriously ill in any way," Olympic medical adviser Brian McCloskey said.

The overall numbers are not worrying for the Olympics, said McCloskey, who is leading the organizers' medical expert panel.

"Virtually every country in the world at the moment has a higher level of COVID than China," he said, explaining why the risk of detection is greater at the airport and steadily decreasing.

Daily PCR tests are taken from every Olympic athlete, sports official and worker — more than 65,000 tests on Tuesday. All are living separate from the general public in what organizers call a closed-loop community.

"For the first few days in the closed loop the risk is still a bit higher because of the risk of people incubating the disease very slowly," McCloskey said.

After spending about five days at the Olympics, "the risk comes down to equivalent to the local population risk — very, very low," he said.

China has pursued a zero-tolerance public health policy during the pandemic, which spread from an initial outbreak in the country more than two years ago.

Olympic advisers are also looking for trends beyond the bare statistics at this year's Winter Games.

"The main challenge is not the number of cases, it's the indication of whether there is spread within the closed loop," said McCloskey, who is focused on spotting connected cases of community transmission that might threaten staging events. "We are obviously nowhere near that level at present."

Hunger crisis looms in Nigeria's 'food basket' amid conflict

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

AGATU, Nigeria (AP) — It's 2 p.m. and Hannah Mgbede asks her husband if she can take her first break of the day from threshing rice so she can breastfeed their 18-month-old baby girl fastened to her back during the grueling work.

Her husband Ibrahim Mohammed, 45, used to harvest as many as 10 bags of rice a year from his farm. But that dropped to just three bags after attackers burned his home to the ground a few years ago, as violence between farmers and herders escalated across the northwest and central parts of Nigeria.

With that decreased yield, Mohammed hasn't made enough money to buy seedlings to grow yams, soybeans and guinea corn (sorghum).

"Sometimes we manage to eat once (a day)," says Mohammed, who has three children, aged five and younger. "Since the crisis, it is only by the grace of God we are feeding to remain alive."

Here in Benue state, harvests of rice, yams and soybeans were once so bountiful that it was called the "food basket of Nigeria." But waves of violence over the last several years have reduced crops in the northcentral state of Africa's most populous nation.

More than 1 million farmers in the state have been displaced because of the intercommunal violence between herders and farmers competing for water and land, say officials.

"We are heading to a food crisis," Benue state Gov. Samuel Ortom told The Associated Press.

Across northern Nigeria, at least 13 million are now facing hunger amid a lean season, according to the U.N. World Food Program. The violence has also disrupted the sales of food as roads are too unsafe for farmers to transport crops and marketplaces have been razed by attackers.

Rice production has dropped so much that its price has jumped more than 60% in Benue state as well as some other parts of the country.

"There is a very real risk of famine because both conflict and COVID-19 has made it harder to reach those most in need," a spokesperson of the U.N. agency told AP.

Thousands of Nigerians have been killed in the decades-long clashes between agrarian communities and

nomadic cattle herders who are fighting over limited access to water and grazing land. The farmers often accuse the herders of encroaching in their fields while the herders, mostly from the Fulani ethnic group, claim the croplands are their traditional grazing routes.

The government has now launched an initiative under the National Livestock Transformation Plan in the hope of resolving the conflict which has been worsened by the proliferation of arms and the government's failure to prosecute past perpetrators from both groups.

About 3,000 people who have fled the violence in Benue state are now living at a camp in Guma local government area.

Mtonga Iliamgee, 43, says every day is a struggle to feed her family of 10. She was seen preparing their only meal of the day at 1 p.m.

"We live for the day and we don't know what tomorrow could bring," she says.

Felix Agune, the deputy head of the camp school, says some children come to class crying that they've had no breakfast. Non-government organizations are trying to fill the gap but it is "nothing compared to the massive hunger spread across Benue state," said Rex Elanu, a program director for the One to One Healthcare Initiative.

Government officials insist they are working to make farmlands safe enough for people to return and work the land. They're also trying to encourage nomadic herders to take up ranching so they are less at odds with farmers.

Seeds and fertilizers have also been supplied to farmers in the past to enhance food production, cushion the effect of the pandemic and encourage more youths to go into agriculture, according to a spokesman of the agriculture ministry.

Despite the violence, Nigerian farmers have been able to produce enough crops to keep the country self-sufficient in staples such as rice, cassava and yams.

"Nigeria survived with the produce generated by the smallholder farmers," Theodore Ogaziechi of the agriculture ministry said. "The farmers are doing their utmost best to feed the nation."

Farmers are resilient but also afraid because some who have attempted to go back to their farms have been killed, warned Ortom, the governor of Benue state.

"If there is security for these farmers, we'll continue to retain our position as the food basket of the nation," he said. "But if nothing is done, as it is now, it is a big challenge."

New turning point? More countries easing COVID restrictions

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Late-night disco partying. Elbow-to-elbow seating in movie theaters. Mask-free bearing of faces in public, especially in Europe and North America: Bit by bit, many countries that have been hard-hit by the coronavirus are opening up and easing their tough, and often unpopular, restrictive measures aimed to fight COVID-19 even as the omicron variant — deemed less severe — has caused cases to skyrocket.

The early moves to relax such restrictions evoke a new turning point in a nearly two-year pandemic that has been full of them.

Omicron, the Geneva-based World Health Organization says, has fueled more cases — 90 million — in the world over the last 10 weeks than during all of 2020, the outbreak's first full year. WHO acknowledges some countries can judiciously consider easing the rules if they boast high immunity rates, strong health care systems and favorable epidemiological curves.

Omicron is less likely to cause severe illness than the previous delta variant, according to studies. Omicron spreads even more easily than other coronavirus strains, and has already become dominant in many countries. It also more easily infects those who have been vaccinated or had previously been infected by prior versions of the virus.

But the U.N. health agency, ever leery about how a virus still spreading widely might evolve, warned about underestimating omicron.

"We are concerned that a narrative has taken hold in some countries that because of vaccines — and

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because of omicron's high transmissibility and lower severity — preventing transmission is no longer possible and no longer necessary," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a regular WHO briefing on the pandemic on Tuesday. "Nothing could be further from the truth."

His emergencies chief, Dr. Michael Ryan, said some countries could justifiably begin easing restrictions, but warned about a rush to the exits and advised that countries assess their own situations. He cautioned that "political pressure will result in people in some countries opening prematurely — and that will result in unnecessary transmission, unnecessary severe disease, and unnecessary death."

The most pronounced pullbacks are popping up in Europe, for many months the world's epicenter of the pandemic, as well as in South Africa — where omicron was first announced publicly — and the United States, which has tallied both the most cases and deaths from COVID-19 of any single country.

Britain, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and several Nordic countries have taken steps to end or ease their COVID-19 restrictions.

Last week, England ended almost all domestic restrictions: Masks aren't required in public and vaccine passes are no longer needed to get into events or other public venues, while the work-from-home order has been lifted. One lingering condition: Those who test positive still have to self-isolate.

On Tuesday, Norway lifted its ban on serving alcohol after 11 p.m. and the cap on private gatherings to no more than 10 people. Travelers arriving at the border no longer will be required to take a COVID-19 test before entry. People can sit elbow-to-elbow again at events with fixed seating, and sports events can take place as they did in pre-pandemic times.

"Now it's time for us to take back our everyday life," Norwegian Health Minister Ingvild Kjerkol said Tuesday. "Tonight, we scrap most measures so we can be closer to living a normal life."

As throughout the pandemic, many countries are going their own way: Italy has tightened its health pass requirements during the omicron surge. From Monday, its government requires at least a negative test within the previous 48 hours to enter banks and post offices, and anyone over age 50 who hasn't been vaccinated risks a 100-euro fine.

Other continents are being even more cautious. Some of the world's highest vaccination rates are found in Asia — which is no stranger to earlier outbreaks like SARS and MERS — and its leaders are holding to stricter lockdown measures or even tightening them, for now.

The Pacific Rim nation of Tonga was entering a lockdown Wednesday evening after finding coronavirus infections in two port workers helping distribute aid arriving after a volcanic eruption and tsunami. That came against fears that the fallout from the natural disaster last month could spark a second disaster by bringing the pandemic into a nation that had been virus-free.

On the eve of hosting the Winter Olympics, China was sticking to its formal zero-COVID-19 policy even as 85% of its population is fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data figures. Beijing imposes strict lockdowns and quarantines quickly when any cases are detected, and continue to require people to wear masks on public transportation and show with "green" status on a health app to enter most restaurants and stores.

Thailand, where 69% of the population is fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data, continues to require masks be worn in public and enforces social distancing, as well as other restrictions.

Singapore, which boasts Asia's highest rate of vaccination with 87% with at least two shots, is maintaining its restrictions even as it heads along a "transition journey to a COVID-19 resilient nation" begun in August, with steps to both relax and tighten rules as conditions warrant.

With nearly 80% of its people fully vaccinated, Japan has resisted mandated restrictions but continues exhorting the public to wear face masks and observe social distancing practices, while requesting restaurants to shorten opening hours. Cambodia, with 81% of its people vaccinated, has dropped restrictions on restaurants and other businesses but still requires masks to be worn in public and encourages social distancing.

Biden aims to reduce cancer deaths by 50% over next 25 years

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By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

President Joe Biden is committing to reduce the cancer death rate by 50% — a new goal for the “moonshot” initiative against the disease that was announced in 2016 when he was vice president.

Biden has set a 25-year timeline for achieving that goal, part of his broader effort to end cancer as we know it, according to senior administration officials who previewed Wednesday’s announcement on the condition of anonymity.

The issue is deeply personal for Biden: He lost his eldest son, Beau, to brain cancer in 2015.

The pain experienced by the president is shared by many Americans. The American Cancer Society estimates that there will be 1,918,030 new cancer cases and 609,360 cancer deaths this year. What Biden is aiming to do is essentially save more than 300,000 lives annually from the disease, something the administration believes is possible because the age-adjusted death rate has already fallen by roughly 25% over the past two decades.

Biden was scheduled to give remarks Wednesday from the East Room of the White House, along with his wife, Jill, and Vice President Kamala Harris. Also scheduled to attend the speech: members of Congress and the administration and about 100 members of the cancer community including patients, survivors, caregivers, families, advocacy groups and research organizations.

As part of the moonshot, Biden will assemble a “cancer Cabinet” that includes 18 federal departments, agencies and offices, including leaders from the Departments of Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs, Defense, Energy and Agriculture.

There were no plans to announce new funding commitments on Wednesday, though the administration will outline why it believes it can curb cancer through efforts such as increased screening and removing inequities in treatment. The coronavirus pandemic has consumed health care resources and caused people to miss more than 9.5 million cancer screenings.

The White House also will host a cancer moonshot summit and continue a roundtable discussion series on the subject. The goal is to improve the quality of treatment and people’s lives, something with deep economic resonance as well. The National Cancer Institute reported in October that the economic burden of treatment was more than \$21 billion in 2019, including \$16.22 billion in patient out-of-pocket costs.

President Barack Obama announced the moonshot program during his final full year in office and secured \$1.8 billion over seven years to fund research. Obama designated Biden, then his vice president, as “mission control,” a recognition of Biden’s grief as a parent and desire to do something about it. Biden wrote in his memoir “Promise Me, Dad” that he chose not to run for president in 2016 primarily because of Beau’s death.

When Biden announced he wasn’t seeking the Democratic nomination in 2016, he said he regretted not being president because “I would have wanted to have been the president who ended cancer, because it’s possible.”

The moonshot fell somewhat out of the public focus when Donald Trump became president, though Trump, a Republican, proposed \$500 million over 10 years for pediatric cancer research in his 2019 State of the Union address.

Biden continued the work as a private citizen by establishing the Biden Cancer Initiative to help organize resources to improve cancer care. When Biden did seek the presidency in 2020, he had tears in his eyes as he said in an interview on MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” that “Beau should be running for president, not me.”

N. Korean leader Kim attends concert glorifying his power

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his wife attended a Lunar New Year’s Day concert in Pyongyang where he received thunderous cheers from audience members and artists who praised him for heralding a “new era” of national power, state media reported.

The North’s official media has been highlighting Kim’s authoritarian leadership following a spree of missile tests in January, which some experts see as an attempt to pressure Washington over deadlocked nuclear

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negotiations after two years of pandemic border closures and economic decay.

The Biden administration has called for the U.N. Security Council to meet Thursday to discuss North Korea's most recent test of an intermediate-range missile potentially capable of reaching Guam, a key U.S. military hub in the Pacific. Sunday's test signaled a resumption of major weapons testing that Kim had suspended in 2018 while initiating diplomacy with then-U.S. President Donald Trump.

Talks between Washington and Pyongyang have stalled since the collapse of the second Kim-Trump meeting in 2019, when the Americans rejected North Korea's demands for a major release of crippling U.S.-led sanctions in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

The Korean Central News Agency on Wednesday said Kim and his wife, Ri Sol Ju, were greeted with "stormy cheers" after arriving at Pyongyang's massive Mansudae Art Theater for Tuesday's concert. KCNA said the audience appreciated that Kim was "ushering in on this land a new world and a new era when the people's ideals and happiness and desire for building a powerful country are comprehensively translated into reality."

Artists performed songs and dances that demonstrated the "single-minded unity" of North Korean people and their devotion to build a socialist country "to be envied by the world," the KCNA said.

Footage from state TV showed Kim and Ri smiling and talking at the theater while sitting near Kim Kyong Hui, the leader's aunt who was making her first public appearance in two years.

Kim Kyong Hui's fate had been in doubt after Kim Jong Un had her husband and the North's then-No. 2 official, Jang Song Thaek, executed for treason and corruption in 2013. Rumors that she had been purged or executed by her nephew circulated for years before she was seen — also at a Lunar New Year's concert — with Kim Jong Un in 2020.

Separately on Wednesday, North Korea's Foreign Ministry issued a statement accusing Washington of continued hostility against the North and questioning the sincerity of its dialogue offers. The ministry criticized the continuance of U.S.-South Korea military drills and repeated a dubious claim that the U.S. has been sending strategic military assets to the region to pressure the North.

The United States since 2018 has dramatically scaled down its combined exercises with South Korea, which have mostly been reduced to computer simulations, to make room for diplomacy with North Korea and because of COVID-19 concerns. Some experts say North Korean claims of U.S. hostility are a pretext for continuing testing as Kim aggressively expands his military capacities despite limited resources.

The North's accelerated weapons tests, which have come amid efforts to strengthen internal unity and tighten the government's grip over the economy, possibly reflect a sense of urgency within Pyongyang's leadership for outside relief, analysts say.

While tentatively reopening freight train traffic with China last month, Kim is also reviving his playbook in brinkmanship to wrest concessions from the Biden administration, which has offered open-ended talks but shown no willingness to ease sanctions unless Kim takes real steps to abandon his nuclear weapons program.

Sunday's flight test of the Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile marked the longest-distance weapon the North has tested since 2017, when it twice flew Hwasong-12s over Japan and, separately, three intercontinental ballistic missiles that demonstrated the potential to reach deep into the American homeland.

The launch came days after Kim called a ruling party meeting where officials issued a veiled threat to end the North's 2018 moratorium on the testing of nuclear devices and longer-range missiles, citing U.S. hostility.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa by phone and condemned North Korea's recent ballistic tests, which were in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, and vowed trilateral cooperation with South Korea to deal with the North Korean threat, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

Experts say the North could halt its testing spree after the start of the Beijing Winter Olympics this week out of respect for China, its major ally and economic lifeline. But there are also expectations it could significantly up the ante in weapons demonstrations once the Olympics end later this month to grab the

attention of the Biden administration, which has been focusing more on confronting China and Russia over its conflict with Ukraine.

Kremlin critics stay undaunted after yearlong crackdown

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The prison sentence imposed a year ago on leading Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny was a severe blow to Russia's opposition — and then the situation got worse.

Over the past 12 months, scores of activists, independent journalists and rights advocates were targeted with raids, detained and designated as terrorists and foreign agents.

"Legal opposition politics in Russia ended almost entirely," said Irina Fatyanova, former head of Navalny's office in St. Petersburg, who has fled the country.

The setbacks began when Navalny was arrested in January 2021 upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from nerve-agent poisoning he blames on the Kremlin. His jailing triggered Russia's largest wave of protests in years, followed by mass detentions.

Then on Feb. 2, 2021, a court ordered Navalny to serve 2½ years in prison over parole violations stemming from a 2014 suspended sentence in a fraud case Navalny insists was politically motivated.

The multi-pronged crackdown on dissenting voices was unprecedented in post-Soviet Russia.

"Repressions have always been used during Putin's tenure, but they were supplementary" to other efforts that targeted the political process directly, such as elections and propaganda, political analyst Abbas Gallyamov said. "The situation drastically changed last year."

In recent weeks, the government has again turned up the heat on Navalny and his team, adding him and his associates to the state registry of terrorists and extremists and petitioning to imprison his brother.

The authorities on Tuesday also ordered independent media outlets to take down dozens of stories based on Navalny's multiple exposures of corruption among government officials.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has insisted that no prosecutions in Russia are politically motivated.

Initially, Gallyamov said, the pressure on opposition activists and media outlets critical of the Kremlin was turned up because of the September 2021 parliamentary election, which was widely seen as key to Putin's effort to cement his hold on power.

After the vote went the Kremlin's way, the authorities saw no reason to stop tightening the screws on dissent. "It's easy to get the steamroller of repressions rolling. It's hard to stop it," Gallyamov said.

Navalny's associates, especially those who announced they were running for parliament, faced a flurry of criminal charges during the period preceding the election.

His closest allies, Ivan Zhdanov and Leonid Volkov, who had left the country, were put on a wanted list in connection with multiple criminal charges. In March, Zhdanov's father, a former municipal official in Russia's northern Nenets region, was arrested on abuse-of-office charges widely seen as politically motivated.

Oleg Stepanov, former head of Navalny's office in Moscow, had to run his campaign for the State Duma from under house arrest after he was charged with violating coronavirus regulations by calling for unauthorized protests over Navalny's arrest. The case also ensnared Navalny's brother Oleg, spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh, longtime ally Lyubov Sobol and several other activists.

Stepanov could communicate with the outside world only through his girlfriend and his lawyers. He was eventually barred from the race, just like the vast majority of opposition candidates, and handed parole-like restrictions in the virus-related case.

Sobol, who also sought refuge abroad, counted four criminal cases against her in 2021.

"I was convicted in two criminal cases. Two more were launched against me. I was deemed a member of an extremist group. My team was pushed out of the country, and some two months I spent under house arrest," she said.

In the most crushing blow to Navalny's team, authorities outlawed the Foundation for Fighting Corruption and its nearly 40 regional offices across the country in June 2021. The designation as an extremist organization exposed associates and supporters to prosecution and barred them from running for public office.

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Several former coordinators of the regional offices were detained on extremism charges late last year. Stepanov left Russia after the election to study and hoped to return after getting a degree, but the arrest of one of the regional coordinators made him rethink that.

"I underestimated the risk and left temporarily, but now I understand that it is for an indefinite amount of time," he said. He was put on a wanted list last week.

Other opposition groups suffered similar troubles. Open Russia, financed by Russian tycoon and Putin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky, disbanded in late May, fearing persecution of its members under a law that bans "undesirable" organizations. Several days after the group ceased to exist, its leader, Andrei Pivovarov, was jailed.

Authorities charged him with running an "undesirable" organization, even though Open Russia had ceased to exist by the time a case against Pivovarov was opened. If convicted, he could spend up to six years in prison.

Tatyana Usmanova, a close ally of Pivovarov and former campaign manager in his run for the State Duma last year, said the scale of the crackdown was hard to anticipate.

But as pressure mounted on Navalny's organizations, it became clear that the authorities "fear those who can rally hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of people and coordinate them somehow, direct them at something," Usmanova said.

The crackdown also extended to dozens of media outlets, individual journalists and rights groups. They were labeled "foreign agents" — a designation that invites excessive government scrutiny and connotations that discredit the recipient. Some were also declared undesirable or accused of ties with undesirable organizations.

Four independent news sites shut down, and at least two rights groups disbanded.

Separately, at the end of 2021, Russia's Supreme Court shut down Memorial, the country's oldest and most prominent human rights organization, citing violations of the foreign agents law.

Meduza, Russia's most popular independent news outlet based in Latvia, was the first in 2021 to receive the foreign agent designation. Alexei Kovalev, its investigative editor, said the outlet immediately started losing advertisers and sources.

Just like other organizations with the same designation, Meduza was obligated to put a cumbersome 24-word disclaimer in large print disclosing its status as a foreign agent on every piece of content it produces. Absence of the disclaimer might result in crippling fines.

Meduza managed to rally a hefty crowdfunding campaign among its readers. As the list of foreign-agent media grew, the designation started to lose its power, Kovalev said.

Advertisers who want to reach "a quality audience" will have to advertise in a foreign-agent outlet "because there are no longer any non-agents out there," he said.

Opposition activists refuse to admit defeat. Sobol told The Associated Press that members of Navalny's team "still make it work," despite being persecuted and chased out of the country.

"We post investigations. We do organizational work, and we see a strong support in the Russian society that hasn't shrunk," she said.

Usmanova said activists from Open Russia continued their efforts even after the group ceased to exist — some ran in local elections, others campaigned for various causes.

It would be impossible for authorities to stifle all critical voices, especially on the internet and social media and with growing awareness of the country's dire situation, Usmanova said.

"Even in the Soviet Union," she said, "they failed to throw all those who dissented into prison and silence them."

Power cuts help revive Syrian tradition of public bathhouses

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — At Hammam Bakri in Damascus' Old City, Syrian men wrapped in towels from the waist down lie down on a scalding marble floor. Masseurs vigorously scrub their skin with a soap-soaked loofah and wash them down with hot water.

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Around a hexagonal fountain outside — traditionally found in old Damascene houses — patrons sip an infusion of herbs and dried flowers known as zhourat. The soothing smell fills the air around the domed roof.

After having fallen victim to modernization, Syria's ancient public bathhouses, known as Hammamat, are picking up steam again, largely due to prolonged electricity cuts during a particularly cold winter in this war-scarred country.

With soaring fuel prices and barely enough power to heat water at home, many are turning to the few remaining Hammams in cities like Damascus, Homs and Aleppo more to the north.

Damascus, along with major Arab cities like Baghdad, Mosul and Cairo, is home to some of the country's oldest and best bathhouses, some of them over a thousand years old. Many of them have closed due to modernization, lack of business and the war that left much of the country in ruins, crippled the economy and shrunk wages.

Now, officials at Damascus' remaining public baths say they are doing brisk business again but it's mostly due to residents who come for the hot water — a luxury they no longer find at home. Power outages often run for more than 20 hours a day in Damascus. Few can afford to have a private generator or pay the price of fuel.

The difficult times, say owners of public bathhouses, are in a way helping keep the tradition alive.

For 10,000 lira (less than \$3), the customers at Hammam Bakri located within the old city are given towels, a loofah and a piece of traditional olive oil soap. They are then scrubbed in a steamy room, often with Arabic music in the background.

"Having a hot shower is very different than having cold showers especially in these temperatures," said Husam Hamami, the manager. "We are now going through a difficult time. There is little electricity and the water is little so people are not even getting a chance to heat their water so we are finding that many people are coming in once a week."

Bakri is one of the oldest bathhouses in Damascus, established in 1069. Instead of tourists, it is now residents who come in more frequently. On a recent day, a group of men sauntered in elevated clogs made from wood, known as qabqab, as they patted themselves dry with towels, emerging from a fog.

"There's been a good turnout from people who are not tourists looking to relax. These people are coming to bathe," Hamami said.

Israeli bigwigs eye profits from cannabis legalization

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

ASHKELON, Israel (AP) — Not too long ago, Ehud Olmert was trying to lead Israel to a historic peace agreement. These days, the former Israeli prime minister is pushing a different message: legalize marijuana.

Olmert is among a group of former Israeli leaders and security chiefs who have found new careers in the country's tightly controlled medical cannabis industry. They hope not only to cash in on the local market, but also to clear the way for the country's major marijuana producers to export.

"Everything will change dramatically overnight if there will be legalization," Olmert, an adviser to the start-up Univo, told The Associated Press. In Israel alone, he said, "the market would be unlimited. It would be huge."

Israel is one of the world leaders in medical cannabis consumption and marijuana possession is decriminalized. Yet tight regulations govern research, cultivation, possession, distribution and the sale of cannabis. These tight curbs, many say, have prevented turning domestic production into a major cash crop.

Over 100,000 Israelis have permits to consume medical cannabis, according to the Health Ministry, a 16-fold increase in the past decade. The boom is in large part thanks to a reform that took effect in 2019 making it easier for doctors to prescribe cannabis to people suffering from chronic pain, cancer, PTSD, epilepsy and other conditions.

Medical cannabis consumption in Israel grew to 43 metric tons last year, from 28.5 million tons in 2020, according to the Health Ministry. Israel's medicinal cannabis market was valued at around \$264 million in 2021, roughly \$7 million less than the entirety of Europe, according to Prohibition Partners, an industry

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analysis firm.

Despite the numerous Israeli companies producing medical marijuana, Israel imports more than half of its supply.

Golan Bitton, chief executive of Univo, said much of the locally grown supply is low quality that does not meet the expectations of Israeli consumers.

"The Israeli consumer is very, very selective," said Bitton, a retired commando.

Last year, he said his company had to incinerate around 600 kilograms (1,300 pounds) of cannabis that didn't meet the grade. Univo began importing marijuana from Canadian cannabis titan Tilray to pick up the slack.

Univo is one of a few companies in Israel that has full vertical integration from farm to pharmacy. His company's facility is housed in a nondescript warehouse in the industrial zone of the southern city of Ashkelon. The clean-rooms where buds are processed are heavy with resinous pungency.

Bitton said the facility is capable of testing, processing and packing up to 80 tons per year. But due to bureaucracy in the last year it only handled around six tons, some of it imported. Like other companies in Israel's cannabis industry, he said Univo is primed for the moment regulations change.

That is where Olmert and his counterparts come in. Olmert spent decades as Jerusalem's mayor, a member of parliament, Cabinet minister and prime minister from 2006-2009 before a corruption conviction sent him to prison for 16 months. The company is hoping that Olmert's public profile and intimate knowledge of Israeli bureaucracy can improve the business atmosphere.

"I really think that there is not a reason, except for some fears and obsessions and prejudices, that keeps (away) the complete legalization of cannabis," Olmert said.

Ehud Barak, another former prime minister, former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, former Police Commissioner Yohanan Danino and retired Shin Bet security agency director Yaakov Peri all are consultants and investors in Israeli cannabis companies.

"It's a market of several hundred millions of dollars, just in medical, and it's growing very fast in Israel," said Barak, who became chairman of cannabis manufacturer Intercure in 2018. "I expect that once it will be legalized, we will see a flourishing of the market for extreme, top-quality products."

Livni and Peri's offices did not return messages, and Danino declined interview requests.

Israel has been at the forefront of medical cannabis research since the 1960s, when Hebrew University chemist Raphael Mechoulam first isolated THC, marijuana's primary psychoactive compound. Israeli scientists and entrepreneurs continue to develop new strains of cannabis, cultivation methods — such as generating THC-laden cells inside a sterile bioreactor — and medical applications for cannabinoids.

There are over 110 cannabis-related companies in Israel that have raised \$348 million in investment since 2015, according to figures from Start-Up Nation Central, a nonprofit that promotes the local technology sector.

But Israel maintains tight restrictions on exports — particularly to major markets in Europe and North America. Israel exported a comparatively meager 663 kilograms (1,462 pounds) of cannabis last year, according to the Health Ministry.

As more countries liberalize cannabis policies, Israel's edge is gradually slipping away.

Lilac Mandeles, the Israeli CEO of the TechforCann Europe cannabis accelerator, said that while Israel is a research leader, the business climate is "not optimal" for products and services.

She launched her company in Malta last year after determining the island nation offered a friendly business environment, 2.5 million euros in funds under a program for cannabis start-ups, and a critical gateway to European markets.

"Supporting early stage initiatives is challenging in Israel in general," and cannabis is no exception, Mandeles said.

Lawmakers are now working to pass legislation that could loosen regulations they say would benefit both businesses and consumers.

Sharren Haskel, a coalition lawmaker with the New Hope party, has championed cannabis decriminalization. She heads a parliamentary committee working to streamline regulations that she says will "put Israel

back on the forefront" of the industry.

The reforms are expected to remove bureaucratic hurdles for scientists studying cannabinoids, ease restrictions on exports and authorize the marketing of CBD — a cannabis-derived compound legal in much of the U.S.

She said red tape "has choked the entire market" and driven firms overseas. "It's almost impossible to have clinical research here in Israel," she said.

It remains unclear whether Haskel's reforms will approval. But Saul Kaye, an Israeli cannabis entrepreneur who runs a chain of dispensaries, said he remains hopeful.

"I think Israel has got a lot of magic in its cannabis industry, we are just lost right now," he said.

Punxsutawney Phil prepares to make Groundhog Day prediction

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. (AP) — It's Groundhog Day and people are waiting to learn whether a furry critter in a western Pennsylvania town will predict an early spring or six more weeks of winter.

People will gather Wednesday at Gobbler's Knob as members of Punxsutawney Phil's "inner circle" summon him from his tree stump at dawn to learn if he has seen his shadow. According to folklore, there will be six more weeks of winter if he sees his shadow. If he doesn't, spring comes early.

The event took place virtually last year because of the coronavirus pandemic, depriving the community, which is about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northeast of Pittsburgh, of a boost from tourists.

It was streamed live and seen by more than 15,000 viewers worldwide at one point. About 150 cardboard cutouts of fans were there to "watch."

Officials are hoping the usual crowd of between 10,000 to 15,000 visitors will return in person this year to spend money on lodging, food, beverages and souvenirs.

The annual event has its origin in a German legend about a furry rodent.

According to records dating back to 1887, Phil has predicted winter more than 100 times. Ten years were lost because no records were kept, organizers said.

The 2020 forecast called for an early spring.

Trump's heir? Some supporters eye DeSantis as alternative

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

CONROE, Texas (AP) — There was something different next to the "TRUMP WON!" T-shirts, the "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" hats and the "LET'S GO BRANDON" flags for sale at former President Donald Trump's recent Texas rally: a collection of "DeSantis 2024" bumper stickers.

Nikki Rye, who lives in Florida and has been selling Trump gear at his events since 2015, said the merchandise hyping her state's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, "is a very, very sought-after item." Beyond the stickers, a life-size cutout of DeSantis stood at one side of her shop, with Trump flanking the other.

As Trump aims for a political comeback, the DeSantis memorabilia signaled a shift emerging among the MAGA faithful. While the vast majority of the more than two dozen people interviewed at his rally at a Texas fairground cheered the prospect of another Trump White House bid, some began to concede that there might be better options.

And for anyone toying with a Trump alternative, DeSantis topped the list.

They were people like Kim Mitchell, 62, who lives in Canyon Lake, Texas, and was overjoyed to be seeing Trump in person. She and her husband have been longtime supporters; a Trump flag hangs proudly in his automotive garage. And if Trump goes through with another run, they both say they'll support him.

But Mitchell said she could see the benefits of a less polarizing alternative.

"You know, there's several people out there that seem to have the same beliefs that he does. And people don't hate them," she said, blaming Biden's victory on a combination of election fraud — which election officials and courts have rejected — and the visceral dislike Trump inspires. "I hate to say that because I feel like I'm being disloyal."

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But she's not alone.

A recent poll from The Associated Press-Center for Public Affairs Research found that while 71% of Republicans have a favorable opinion of Trump, a smaller percentage — 56% — want him to run again in 2024. The poll found 44% of Republicans do not want Trump to run.

Meanwhile, a recent NBC poll found that, by a 20-point margin, Republicans now identify more as supporters of the Republican Party than supporters of Trump — a reversal from the sentiment before the 2020 election.

Longtime GOP pollster Frank Luntz, who has conducted focus groups of voter opinion, said Republicans have fractured into three distinct blocs: those who have moved on from Trump, those who "will follow him off a cliff," and those who "really appreciate him, follow him, are still strongly favorable towards him," but are looking for another option.

"He still has a core of somewhere between one-third and 40% that will vote for him no matter what," Luntz said. "But it is now a minority. It was the majority up until six months ago. But it is now the minority."

The cracks in support are forming as Trump often appears more interested in relitigating the 2020 election than focusing on issues affecting voters' daily lives, such as inflation. That could give an opening to someone like DeSantis, who has branded himself in Trump's mold, but has less baggage in national politics.

"I've been hearing about that DeSantis guy. He would be a good next one to run," said Kathy Miguez, 58, who lives in Dayton, Texas, and works in a grocery store. "From what I hear, he's a lot like Trump."

For the last two years, DeSantis has deftly used the COVID-19 pandemic as a springboard to GOP stardom by portraying Florida as a beacon of freedom, even as public health experts have slammed as reckless and dangerous his hostility to basic public health precautions.

He has leaned further into policies that energize the GOP base as he runs for reelection, pledging to create a law enforcement agency to investigate alleged election crimes and pushing a bill that would prohibit schools and businesses from making white people feel "discomfort" when they teach students or train employees about discrimination.

Representatives for Trump and DeSantis did not respond to requests for comment for this story. But people close to the former president say he has been keeping a close eye on the governor, even as both men have dismissed talk of tension as a media creation.

Trump, who credits himself for DeSantis' win as governor, has been miffed by DeSantis' refusal to rule out a 2024 run if Trump moves forward, according to people familiar with his thinking.

The gamesmanship recently bubbled into the open, with Trump slamming politicians like DeSantis who refuse to disclose whether they have received COVID-19 booster shots as "gutless." DeSantis, in turn, said one of his biggest regrets in office was not speaking out louder against the COVID-19 precautions Trump urged in the early days of the pandemic. Trump has since largely avoided mentioning vaccinations, spending time railing against mandates instead.

Trump is still the overwhelming favorite among GOP voters and all signs suggest the 2024 nomination is his if he wants it. His political committee announced Monday that it has more than \$122 million cash on hand, after raising more than \$50 million in the second half of last year. And he still manages to draw crowds of many thousands to remote fairgrounds more than a year after leaving elected office.

But up until now, Trump has maintained a vise-like grip on the party's base, making any cracks in support notable. The openness to alternate candidates underscores how Trumpism is no longer a cult of personality about one man, but a larger movement that includes candidates like the conspiracy-mongering Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, who have embraced Trump's policy positions and replicated his attention-grabbing tactics.

That includes, for now, DeSantis, whom many see as a potential Trump 2024 running mate and a 2028 presidential contender.

"I think Trump is paving a way to open it up for DeSantis to run in 2028," said Thor Pearson, 32, who lives in El Paso. "And I would be absolutely happy because DeSantis is a great Republican. I think he's doing everything right,"

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Of course, there are others on the fringes, like a woman who insisted Trump would be reinstated as president "imminently." Others maintain, counter to reality, that he is currently the president of the United States.

But most remain all-in on Trump in 2024.

"We're hoping. We're praying," he runs in 2024, said Janice Shelton, 55, who lives in Austin and said Trump is the best option because "he's already tried and true."

"DeSantis is never gonna pull a crowd like this. He's just never gonna do it," she said.

"It's a no-brainer. He's 100% going to run," echoed Jonathan Riches, 45, of Tampa, Florida, who was attending his 41st Trump rally after sleeping in his rental car overnight. Riches said he would support any future candidate who receives Trump's endorsement, but believes DeSantis "will be president one day, for sure."

"I do think that Trump is going to hand the baton to him," he said, adding that that "could be possible in 2024."

And many maintain that Trump is the best possible candidate.

"We like Ron DeSantis. ... But to get us out of the hole that we're in now, I think we need Trump to run again," said Susan Roland, 63, who lives in Sugarland, Texas, and was among the hundreds of Trump supporters who protested outside the U.S. Capitol during the Jan. 6 insurrection.

"I think he's the only one with the intestinal fortitude to put our country back," echoed her husband, Perry, 62.

Looking forward, said Mitchell of Canyon Lake: "I feel that Donald Trump will do what's best for our nation. And if it's not him running for president, it's him being very involved in what happens."

"It has to be somebody that truly believes in Trump and that will listen to Trump, even if he's just whispering in their ear and telling them," she added. "I like to think of Trump as being the one in the back, you know, pushing everybody up."

For Taiwan's Olympics team, everything is in a name

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — For Taiwan, every appearance on the global stage is fraught with politics — and even more so when that stage is China.

The four Taiwanese athletes competing in Beijing for the Winter Olympics, which open Friday, can't use Taiwan's flag. They have long competed under a name — Chinese Taipei — that is rarely used and was forced on the team by a geopolitical divide that predates the Cold War.

Maggie Lee, a 19-year-old slalom skier, found herself giving people an impromptu lesson in the name as she traveled across Europe for training and competitions ahead of the Olympics.

"When I'm meeting people, I'll tell them I'm from Taiwan, because if you tell people you're from Chinese Taipei, nobody knows where you're from, you can't find it on Google," she said.

Taiwan is an island of 24 million people off China's east coast. It functions as a country with its own government and military. But China claims Taiwan as its territory, and only 14 countries recognize Taiwan as a nation. Most of the world, including the United States, have official ties with China instead.

The divide was born of a civil war in the late 1940s in which the Communists toppled the Republic of China's government and founded the People's Republic of China that rules to this day. China's former Nationalist leaders fled to Taiwan and set up a rival government in the city of Taipei.

Both claimed to represent China, and the U.S. among others sided with the government in Taipei. But a growing number of countries shifted to Beijing over the next two decades. The U.N. switched in 1971, forcing Taipei out of the organization. U.S. President Richard Nixon visited China the next year and the United States established ties with Beijing in 1979.

The name issue surfaced at the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. Taiwanese athletes had competed as the Republic of China in the previous two Winter Games, under its red flag with a white sun on a blue rectangle in one corner.

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It was communist China's first time at the Olympics, and the government successfully protested the island's participation under the Republic of China, Taiwan's formal name. The athletes got the bad news after arriving in Lake Placid, said Thomas Liang, a cross-country skier who competed in the 1972 and 1976 Games.

"We all went to the U.S., but they wouldn't let us on the playing field," he said. "I was sad because I couldn't compete. Losing this opportunity was such a shame."

The next time Liang went to the Olympics, he was a coach, and his team was known as Chinese Taipei. A 1981 agreement with the International Olympics Committee created the name and allowed athletes to compete under a newly designed white flag with a flower outline around a sun and the Olympic rings in the middle. A flag-raising song is played at medal ceremonies instead of the anthem.

In the decades since, a Taiwanese identity distinct from China has grown stronger, even as the island developed close economic ties with the mainland. The share of the population identifying as Taiwanese has risen to 62%, up from 48% in 2008, according to an annual survey by National Chengchi University in Taipei. 32% of the islanders identify themselves as both Chinese and Taiwanese, while 3% say they're Chinese.

Under President Tsai Ing-wen, who took office in 2016, Taiwan has sought to shore up its de facto position, while stopping short of declaring formal independence, a move that could spark a Chinese military invasion.

China has responded by sending warplanes on training missions toward Taiwan and cajoling other countries to break their ties with the island. It has also pressured airlines, hotels, luxury brands and others doing business in China to label Taiwan as a province of China online and in maps.

But not everyone was satisfied with the status quo. In 2018, former Olympian Cheng Chi launched a national referendum to change the team's name to Taiwan for last year's Tokyo Olympics.

"Is our country's name Chinese Taipei? Of course not," Cheng said in an interview with the Liberty Times newspaper in 2018. "In the past, we accepted that one moment of injustice to ensure the fulfillment of a lifetime of striving."

The vote failed after many athletes came out against it, worried that the change could result in them being blocked from competing. Many say they just want to focus on the competition, and not the politics.

The name doesn't bother Lee, the skier. "As long as we are clear on who we are, that's enough," she said.

At the Winter Olympics this week, the two skiers representing Taiwan say their focus is on doing their best, and that would serve their home better rather than political statements.

"I don't have the right to deal with this issue, as an athlete," said Ray Ho, the other skier representing Taiwan. "I can only do what is within my ability, which is to train and compete."

Yemen's Houthis add to Biden's foreign policy frustrations

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A clan-based militia government in the Arab world's poorest country is presenting the Biden administration with another foreign policy setback, as Yemen's Houthis launch cross-border drone and ballistic-missile strikes rattling the wealthy oil and banking hubs of the skyscrapered Gulf.

In the face of three such strikes in as many weeks, U.S. officials are studying financial measures targeting the Houthis and the group's top figures, with new sanctions possible as soon as this week. It's the latest in a so-far unsuccessful push by the Biden administration to get Houthi leaders into peace talks and wind down an eight-year war that has taken a devastating toll on Yemen, a nation of millions of impoverished people and cities thousands of years old, afflicted by misgovernment and wars.

The escalation makes Yemen one of the Middle East conflicts keeping the Biden administration and military deeply engaged in the region. That's despite President Joe Biden's vows to turn U.S. focus to what his administration sees as core U.S. challenges, including dealing with the rise of China.

Houthi fighters launched their latest air barrage into the United Arab Emirates on Monday, as Israel's president visited the UAE. Missile defense batteries operated by UAE forces and U.S. troops based in the

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emirates fired back to intercept.

From Biden down, U.S. officials are scrambling to assure Gulf strategic allies, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, they will provide defense support.

"America will have the backs of our friends in the region," Biden told reporters after Monday's strikes, which with the others are a factor in rising global petroleum prices.

Biden administration officials appeared taken aback and frustrated early on at the Iran-backed Houthis' determination to keep fighting to win control of more of Yemen, against a Saudi-led coalition equipped with the best U.S. arms that hundreds of billions of dollars can buy.

Biden's team began his administration distancing the U.S. from military involvement in Yemen's war, where both sides are accused of human rights abuses, and making a diplomatic push for peace talks. But Houthis scorned U.S. diplomats and their peace-talks initiative, and stepped up offensives instead.

"What I would hope ... is that the administration has now recognized that strategy, whether it was right or wrong in February of 2021, is not working, has not worked, and therefore they need to change their approach," said Gerald Feierstein, the Obama administration's ambassador to Yemen from 2010 to 2013.

The Saudi-led coalition battling the Houthis has intensified airstrikes, including on Yemen's Houthi-held capital, Sanaa, in retaliation for the Houthis' missile and drone strikes into the UAE, which follow sporadic strikes into Saudi territory. The retaliatory airstrikes have added to the war's civilian toll and drawn condemnation from U.N. officials and some Democrats in Congress. But they've failed to stop the Houthi missiles and attack drones.

Some analysts argue the strikes are meant as an implicit threat that Israel could be within range of the Iranian-supported Houthis as well.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke Tuesday to Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the de facto Emirati leader, on stepped-up U.S. military measures in the emirates' defense, including sending the USS Cole guided missile destroyer to Abu Dhabi and deploying advanced fighter jets.

A family-led movement from northern Yemen's mountains, Houthis emerged as one of the strongest of numerous rival groups vying for position in Yemen early in the last decade, a time of great political upheaval.

Houthis moved south, capturing the capital by 2014 and much of the rest of the north. A Yemen government backed by the U.N. and Saudi Arabia fled into exile in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi-backed coalition, aided by the U.S. until the Biden administration announced last year it was ending offensive support, sought to restore the rival government. Iran has supported the Houthis increasingly as the war goes on, including with what the UAE says were the missiles fired into its territory.

The problem now: After diplomacy has made little headway, and the Saudi-led coalition has failed to win militarily, no one seems to have any great ideas about how to stop the violence.

A UAE-backed local ground force from Yemen's south was successful recently at helping roll back Houthi advances in the south. Many believe the Houthis' cross-border strikes now are to pressure the UAE to sideline those forces.

But no outside power shows any appetite to get more involved militarily in what, up to now, has been a humanitarian catastrophe but a strategic sideshow.

"So they feel that they can get away with whatever they can get away with right now," Fatima Abo Alasrar, a Yemen and Gulf analyst with the Washington-based Middle East Institute, said of the Houthis. "Because it would be disastrous if the U.S. or other countries intervene."

After the Houthis began their current strikes into the UAE, Biden told reporters last month he was considering returning the Houthis to the list of foreign terrorist groups, a designation President Donald Trump made in his last days in office.

Biden took the Houthis off the terror list as one of his first acts. Saudis and the Emiratis have pushed to put them back on. The designation restricts others from financial and other dealings with the Houthis. Opponents say the designation had little impact on the Houthis, an insular group with few financial dealings overseas, but devastated aid and commercial food and fuel shipments into Yemen, where some 80% of the population lives under the de facto Houthi government.

Feierstein, the former ambassador, and others say the Biden administration can craft a new terror designation so as to lessen the impact on humanitarian groups and other conduits of vital goods.

Humanitarian groups say even the hint of that move by the U.S. could scare food and fuel businesses from working in Yemen, driving up costs and putting food and fuel out of the reach of many.

"That's what we fear the most for a country that suffered this much, for this long," said Amanda Catanzano, vice president of policy for the International Rescue Committee. "Where more than half the population doesn't have enough to eat, and 5 million people are on the brink of starvation."

Individual sanctions on Houthi leaders at least would have the impact of alarming those individuals — making them aware that the United States was aware of who they were, and might be thinking of targeting them, Abo Alasrar said.

"Now that's scary. That would be scary for them," Abo Alasrar said. "And that's where things could actually be real."

Trump attacks spur Congress to bolster electoral count law

By LISA MASCARO and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's relentless, false claims about the 2020 presidential election have sparked fresh urgency in Congress — and in both parties — for changing the Electoral Count Act to ensure no one can undo a future presidential election.

Lawmakers are working furiously to update the 135-year-old law that was put in place in the aftermath of the Civil War and came perilously close to unraveling on Jan. 6, 2021. At that time, the defeated president urged his followers to "fight like hell" over the election and pressured Vice President Mike Pence to ditch his ceremonial role presiding over the session and reject the results.

While Pence ignored the president's demands that day, Trump continues to insist the vice president "could have overturned the election" — a deeply troubling development as the former president considers another White House run.

"President Trump's comments underscored the need for us to revise the Electoral Count Act, because they demonstrated the confusion in the law and the fact that it is ambiguous," Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, told reporters at the Capitol.

The outcome of the bipartisan effort in Congress remains highly fluid, and could easily collapse, especially as Republicans are wary of crossing Trump and Democrats seek broader changes after their own sweeping elections and voting legislation fell apart last month. Any update to the 19th century law would likely face the filibuster's 60-vote threshold in the Senate, meaning the legislation would need bipartisan support in the evenly split chamber to advance.

Yet the effort to change the Electoral Count Act has been gaining political currency, especially with Trump edging toward another run. The urgency has continued to rise over the past year as the former president and his allies have led a steady drumbeat in state legislatures, working to install sympathetic leaders in local election posts and, in some cases, backing political candidates who participated in the riot at the Capitol.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday he's open to the effort, as he also rejected the idea Trump floated at a weekend rally of pardoning people who have been criminally charged in the deadly riot at the Capitol.

"What we saw here on January the 6th was an effort to prevent the peaceful transfer of power from one administration to another," McConnell said.

The Kentucky Republican went on to say the Electoral Count Act "is flawed and it needs to be fixed." He also said of those charged criminally in the riot, "I would not be in favor of shortening any of the sentences for any of the people who pleaded guilty."

A bipartisan group led by Collins, the rare and frequent Republican Trump critic, has been meeting behind closed doors and hopes to present a draft as soon as this week.

Senators are delving into potential changes to Electoral Count Act with ideas that would make it more difficult to challenge results. They are also considering ways to protect election workers, who are being harassed at alarming rates nationwide, and funding for election assistance and voting equipment. Some

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16 senators, Republicans and Democrats, are working swiftly, with the blessing of party leaders, much the way they did last year to produce the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill President Joe Biden signed into law.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., told The Associated Press that after Trump used the word "overturn" in describing his effort to challenge the election, "This does create a sense of urgency to get this done."

And while for many Democrats, including Kaine, the effort to change the Electoral Count Act is not a substitute for their own failed voting rights package, it does represent the opportunity for a potential legislative success, if not the starting point of further discussions.

"Reforming the Electoral College is a good thing to do, but it sure doesn't replace the need to deal with voting rights, dark money and reapportionment," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

Civil rights and voting rights advocacy groups are pushing Democrats to broaden their scope and include some elements of their failed voting legislation, particularly the John R. Lewis Voting Advancement Act, which would reinstate Justice Department's role in monitoring elections in states with repeated violations of voting laws.

The growing sense of urgency for electoral count changes boiled over this past weekend when Trump made arguably his most clear admission that he wanted Pence to overturn the election results when he presided over the joint session of Congress.

Republicans who rejected the Democrats' broader Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act as too broad see value in shoring up the more distinct Electoral Count Act system to prevent Trump or any other person who may seek to challenge it.

"I don't agree that Vice President Pence had that authority, but if that's an argument that some people find convincing, then I think that it's appropriate that Congress clarify the law," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas.

The bipartisan group is not operating in a vacuum.

Democracy groups for years have warned that the Electoral Count Act, which emerged after the disputed 1876 election that resulted in the withdrawal of troops stationed in the South to uphold laws ending slavery, needs an update.

Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, has been working on changes to the Electoral Count Act since last spring, in the aftermath of the Capitol riot, assembling experts and sharing ideas with senators of both parties.

On Tuesday, King, along with Rules Committee Chairman Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the Judiciary Committee chairman, unveiled their draft proposal and shared it with the bipartisan group headed by Collins. Their proposal includes clarifying that the vice president has "no role" in counting the votes and shifting from the vice president to a senior senator the ceremonial role of presiding over the tally.

King said he hopes the groups can merge their work. Of Trump's comment, he said, "It underlines why we have to get this done."

ABC suspends Whoopi Goldberg over Holocaust race remarks

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Whoopi Goldberg was suspended for two weeks Tuesday as co-host of "The View" because of what the head of ABC News called her "wrong and hurtful comments" about Jews and the Holocaust.

"While Whoopi has apologized, I've asked her to take time to reflect and learn about the impact of her comments. The entire ABC News organization stands in solidarity with our Jewish colleagues, friends, family and communities," ABC News President Kim Godwin said in a statement.

The suspension came a day after Goldberg's comment during a discussion on "The View" that race was not a factor in the Holocaust. Goldberg apologized hours later and again on Tuesday's morning episode, but the original remark drew condemnation from several prominent Jewish leaders.

"My words upset so many people, which was never my intention," she said Tuesday morning. "I understand why now and for that I am deeply, deeply grateful because the information I got was really helpful

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and helped me understand some different things.”

Goldberg made her original comments during a discussion on the show Monday about a Tennessee school board’s banning of “Maus,” a Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel about the Nazi death camps during World War II. She said the Holocaust was “not about race ... it’s about man’s inhumanity to other man.”

“I misspoke,” Goldberg said at the opening of Tuesday’s show.

The flare-up over Goldberg’s remarks this week highlighted the enduring complexity of some race-related issues, including the widespread but strongly contested notion that only people of color can be victims of racism.

“Effective immediately, I am suspending Whoopi Goldberg for two weeks for her wrong and hurtful comments,” Godwin said in her statement.

“The View” brought on Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League and author of “It Could Happen Here,” on Tuesday to discuss why her words had been hurtful.

“Jewish people at the moment are feeling besieged,” Greenblatt said.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, praised Goldberg for being outspoken over the years on social issues but said he struggled to understand her statement on the Holocaust.

“The only explanation that I have for it is that there is a new definition of racism that has been put out there in the public recently that defines racism exclusively as the targeting of people of color. And obviously history teaches us otherwise,” Cooper said.

“Everything about Nazi Germany and about the targeting of the Jews and about the Holocaust was about race and racism. That’s the unfortunate, unassailable historic fact,” he said.

Kenneth L. Marcus, chairman of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, linked Goldberg’s remarks to broader misconceptions of the Holocaust, Jewish identity and antisemitism.

“In her error, she was reflecting a misunderstanding of Jewish identity that is both widespread and dangerous that is sometimes described as erasive antisemitism,” said Marcus, who is the author of ‘The Definition of Anti-Semitism.’

“It is the notion that Jews should be viewed only as being white, privileged oppressors,” he said. “It denies Jewish identity and involves a whitewashing of Jewish history.”

Marcus referred to the use of anti-Jewish stereotypes “about being powerful, controlling and sinister,” coupled with downplaying or denying antisemitism.

Jill Savitt, president and CEO of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, offered a measured view of Goldberg’s comments.

“No one can get into Whoopi Goldberg’s head, ... But I think what she’s trying to say is that the Holocaust is about hatred. It’s about inhumanity. It’s about what human beings will do to one another that is inhumane,” Savitt said.

Complex issues demand more than placing blame, she said.

“I think people are not as quick to give anybody the benefit of the doubt these days, which is a shame because in order to work through painful, complicated, difficult issues, especially painful histories,” Savitt said, “we could give each other a little more grace because people are going to make mistakes or they’re going to say things that offend.”

In Israel, being Jewish is rarely seen in racial terms, in part because of the country’s great diversity. Yet Jewish identity goes far beyond religion. Israelis typically refer to the “Jewish people” or “Jewish nation,” describing a group or civilization bound together by a shared history, culture, language and traditions and deep ties to Jewish communities overseas.

On “The View” Monday, Goldberg, who is Black, had expressed surprise that some Tennessee school board members were uncomfortable about nudity in “Maus.”

“I mean, it’s about the Holocaust, the killing of 6 million people, but that didn’t bother you?” she said. “If you’re going to do this, then let’s be truthful about it. Because the Holocaust isn’t about race. No, it’s not about race.”

She continued on that line despite pushback from some of her fellow panelists.

The U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington responded to Goldberg with a tweet. "Racism was central to Nazi ideology. Jews were not defined by religion, but by race. Nazi racist beliefs fueled genocide and mass murder," it said.

That tweet also included a link to the museum's online encyclopedia, which said the Nazis attributed negative stereotypes about Jews to a biologically determined racial heritage.

Savitt said while Jews are not a race, Nazis made Judaism a race in their effort to create a racial hierarchy that "borrowed this, it should be said, from the American conversation about racial superiority and eugenics."

On Twitter, there were several calls for Goldberg's firing, where it appeared caught up in the familiar debates between left and right.

Greenblatt said the talk show, in the market for a new co-host following last summer's departure of Meghan McCain, should consider hiring a Jewish woman to keep the issue of antisemitism in the forefront.

Shortened Olympic torch relay starts for Beijing Games

BEIJING (AP) — The three-day torch relay for the Beijing Olympics, shortened considerably because of concerns about the coronavirus, started Wednesday with an 80-year-old former speedskater carrying the flame.

The relay opened at the Olympic Foreign Park. Luo Zhihuan, the country's first internationally competitive speedskater, ran the first leg.

The torch will be carried through the three Olympics zones, starting with downtown Beijing before heading to Yanqing district and finally Zhangjiakou in neighboring Hebei Province.

The Beijing Games have already been impacted on a scale similar to that experienced by Tokyo during last year's Summer Olympics. China says only selected spectators will be allowed to attend events, and Olympic athletes, officials, staff and journalists are required to stay within a bubble that keeps them from contact with the general public.

Beijing, with its 20 million residents, has experienced only a handful of COVID-19 cases and reported just two new ones on Wednesday. However, in keeping with China's "zero tolerance" approach to the pandemic, strict rules require lockdowns and mass testing when any real or suspected case is discovered.

The truncated program seemed to have little effect on Luo, who after receiving the torch from Vice Premier Han Zheng said it was the realization of decades-long aspiration.

"I've never participated in the Winter Olympics, so I had hoped our country could host the Winter Olympics and I had the dream for nearly 60 years," said Luo, wearing a red and white jacket marked with No. 1. "Today my dream has come true ... How happy I am!"

The opening of the Beijing Games comes only days after the start of the Lunar New Year holiday, China's biggest annual celebration when millions traditionally travel to their hometowns for family reunions. For the second straight year, the government has advised those living away from home to stay put, and train and plane travel has been curtailed.

Participants in the torch relay have undergone health screenings and have been carefully monitored, starting from two weeks before the event.

Others among the 135 torchbearers heading out Wednesday were Jing Haipeng, captain of the Chinese Astronaut Corps, Ye Peijian, a 77-year-old consultant to China's lunar exploration program, former NBA player Yao Ming, and Chinese film director Zhang Yimou, who will direct Friday's opening ceremony at the Bird's Nest.

The scaled-down torch relay is a far cry from 2008, when Beijing sent the Olympic flame on a global journey ahead of hosting that year's Summer Games. The relay drew protesters against China's human rights violations and policies in Tibet, Xinjiang and elsewhere, leading to violent confrontations and the cancellation of some overseas stages.

The Winter Games have been beset by similar political controversies, alongside medical considerations. Six weeks ago, the United States, Britain and several allies said they would not send dignitaries to attend

the Beijing Games as a protest against human rights abuses by the Communist Party regime.

Athletes have been threatened by the organizing committee with "certain punishments" for saying or doing anything that would offend their Chinese hosts, while several delegations urged anyone headed to Beijing to take "burner" phones instead of their personal devices because of concerns their personal information could be compromised.

The National Hockey League cited uncertainty caused by the pandemic to hold back all of its players from the Olympic tournament. And American broadcaster NBC said it won't be sending announcing teams to China, citing the same virus concerns raised when the network pulled most of its reporters from the Tokyo Games.

Fired Miami Dolphins coach sues NFL, alleging racist hiring

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Fired Miami Dolphins coach Brian Flores sued the NFL and three teams on Tuesday over alleged racist hiring practices for coaches and general managers, saying the league remains "rife with racism" even as it publicly condemns it.

The lawsuit, filed in Manhattan federal court, said the hypocrisy was on display with the chilly treatment Flores received from the Dolphins after he refused to accept a \$100,000-a-game offer from the club his first season to "tank" so it could secure the top draft pick.

The lawsuit sought class-action status and unspecified damages from the league, the Dolphins, the Denver Broncos and the New York Giants, along with unidentified individuals.

Flores, 40, was fired last month by Miami after leading the Dolphins to a 24-25 record over three years. They went 9-8 in their second straight winning season, but failed to make the playoffs during his tenure.

In a statement released by the lawyers representing him, Flores said: "God has gifted me with a special talent to coach the game of football, but the need for change is bigger than my personal goals."

"In making the decision to file the class action complaint today, I understand that I may be risking coaching the game that I love and that has done so much for my family and me. My sincere hope is that by standing up against systemic racism in the NFL, others will join me to ensure that positive change is made for generations to come," he said.

In a statement, the NFL said it will defend "against these claims, which are without merit."

It added: "The NFL and our clubs are deeply committed to ensuring equitable employment practices and continue to make progress in providing equitable opportunities throughout our organizations. Diversity is core to everything we do, and there are few issues on which our clubs and our internal leadership team spend more time."

The lawsuit alleges that the league has discriminated against Flores and other Black coaches for racial reasons, denying them positions as head coaches, offensive and defensive coordinators and quarterbacks coaches, as well as general managers.

According to the lawsuit, Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross told Flores he would pay him \$100,000 for every loss during the coach's first season because he wanted the club to "tank" so it could get the draft's top pick.

The lawsuit alleged that Ross then pressured Flores to recruit a prominent quarterback in violation of the league's tampering rules. When Flores refused, he was cast as the "angry Black man" who is difficult to work with and was derided until he was fired, the suit said.

The Dolphins issued a statement, saying: "We vehemently deny any allegations of racial discrimination and are proud of the diversity and inclusion throughout our organization. The implication that we acted in a manner inconsistent with the integrity of the game is incorrect. We will be withholding further comment on the lawsuit at this time."

The lawsuit said the firing of Flores was typical for Black coaches who are not given the latitude other coaches receive to succeed. It noted that Flores led the Dolphins to back-to-back winning seasons for the first time since 2003.

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Last week, the Giants disclosed to third parties that they had decided to hire Brian Daboll as their new coach even when they had not yet had their scheduled meeting with Flores, the lawsuit said.

"Mr. Flores was deceptively led to believe he actually had a chance at this job," the lawsuit said, adding that he had to endure a dinner with the Giants' new general manager knowing that the team had already selected Daboll.

The lawsuit also cited a message Flores received three days before his scheduled Giants interview from New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick, which at first told Flores he'd heard that Flores was "their guy." But the lawsuit said Belichick apologized and corrected himself, saying he'd misread the text and now realized Daboll was chosen.

A message left with the Patriots was not immediately returned.

In a statement, the Giants said: "We are pleased and confident with the process that resulted in the hiring of Brian Daboll. We interviewed an impressive and diverse group of candidates. The fact of the matter is, Brian Flores was in the conversation to be our head coach until the eleventh hour. Ultimately, we hired the individual we felt was most qualified to be our next head coach."

Patriots safety Devin McCourty, who played for Flores and shares a Twitter account with his twin brother Jason, tweeted that Flores was "pivotal in my career and love that I can support him for calling out what we all already know."

The lawsuit also claimed Flores was forced to undergo a "sham interview" with the Broncos in 2019, when then-Broncos general manager John Elway, President Joe Ellis and others showed up an hour later for his interview.

"They looked completely disheveled, and it was obvious that they had been drinking heavily the night before," the lawsuit said. "It was clear from the substance of the interview that Mr. Flores was interviewed only because of the Rooney Rule."

In a statement, the Broncos said the allegations were "blatantly false."

The club said its over three-hour interview with Flores began promptly on Jan. 5, 2019, at a hotel in Providence, Rhode Island.

"Pages of detailed notes, analysis and evaluations from our interview demonstrate the depth of our conversation and sincere interest in Mr. Flores as a head coaching candidate," the Broncos said. "Our process was thorough and fair to determine the most qualified candidate for our head coaching position. The Broncos will vigorously defend the integrity and values of our organization — and its employees — from such baseless and disparaging claims."

According to the lawsuit, Flores' treatment by the Giants and Broncos was typical of how the "Rooney Rule" has been administered for the last two decades.

The rule, named after former Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney while he was chairman of the NFL's diversity committee, was created to give more minority candidates opportunities to become a head coach and reward teams who develop them.

In 2020, the NFL amended the Rooney Rule to stipulate teams must interview at least two minority candidates not associated with their own team for a head coaching vacancy. Also, one minority candidate has to be interviewed for coordinator positions as well as high-ranking positions in the front office, including the general-manager role.

"In certain critical ways, the NFL is racially segregated and is managed much like a plantation," the lawsuit said.

"Its 32 owners — none of whom are Black — profit substantially from the labor of NFL players, 70% of whom are Black. The owners watch the games from atop NFL stadiums in their luxury boxes, while their majority-Black workforce put their bodies on the line every Sunday, taking vicious hits and suffering debilitating injuries to their bodies and their brains while the NFL and its owners reap billions of dollars," it added.

According to the lawsuit, only one of the NFL's 32 teams employs a Black head coach, only four of them employ a Black offensive coordinator and only 11 employ a Black defensive coordinator.

The lengthy lawsuit discusses the history of race in the league, from the slow acceptance of Black quarterbacks to the treatment that Colin Kaepernick endured when he kneeled during the national anthem to protest racial injustice.

Two lawyers, Douglas H. Wigdor and John Elefterakis, said in a statement that it was a privilege to file the lawsuit on behalf of Flores at the start of Black History Month.

"This case seeks to level the playing field in the hope that future owners and coaches will be representative of the athletes who are playing this great game," they said. "We fully expect coaches and players of all races to support Brian as he embarks on his journey to create positive change."

Native American tribes reach \$590 million opioid settlement

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

Native American tribes have reached settlements over the toll of opioids totaling \$590 million with drug-maker Johnson & Johnson and the country's three largest drug distribution companies, according to a court filing made public Tuesday.

The filing in U.S. District Court in Cleveland lays out the broad terms of the settlements with Johnson & Johnson and distribution companies AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson. Some details are still being hashed out.

All federally recognized tribes in the U.S. will be able to participate in the settlements, even if they did not sue over opioids. And there could be settlements between other firms in the industry and tribes, many of which have been hit hard by the overdose crisis.

W. Ron Allen, chairman of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe in Washington state, called it a big deal for tribes to reach their own settlement, in contrast with tobacco industry deals in the 1990s that left out Native American groups.

Allen doesn't expect his tribe of about 550 people to get much from the settlement, but it will help in its efforts to build a healing center that will address opioid addiction, he said.

"Every penny counts, so we'll take it and run with it," he said.

One study cited in the settlement found that Native Americans have had the highest per capita rate of opioid overdose of any population group in 2015.

"The dollars that will flow to tribes under this initial settlement will help fund crucial, on-reservation, culturally appropriate opioid treatment services," Douglas Yankton, chairman of the Spirit Lake Nation in North Dakota, said in a statement.

More than 400 tribes and intertribal organizations representing about 80% of tribal citizens have sued over opioids.

New Brunswick, New Jersey-based Johnson & Johnson — whose opioids included Duragesic and Nucynta but which has stopped selling opioids — said in a statement Tuesday that the settlement is not an admission of liability or wrongdoing.

AmerisourceBergen, based in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, said in a statement that the deal will expedite help for communities and let the company focus on the pharmaceutical supply chain.

Cardinal, based in Columbus, Ohio, and McKesson, based in Irving, Texas, declined to comment.

Under the deal, Johnson & Johnson would pay \$150 million over two years. AmerisourceBergen McKesson and Cardinal would contribute \$440 million in total over seven years.

Each of the 574 federally recognized tribes could decide whether to participate but would be required to use the money to deal with the opioid epidemic.

The deal would take effect when 95% of the tribes with lawsuits against the companies agree to the settlement, said Tara Sutton, a lawyer whose firm is representing 28 tribes.

Settlements are also in the works between tribes and other companies involved in opioids, Sutton said.

The newly announced deals are separate from a \$75 million one the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and the three distribution companies reached last year ahead of a trial.

The same four companies are nearing the final stages of approval of settlements worth \$26 billion with

state and local governments across the U.S. They have until later this month to decide whether enough government entities have signed on to continue in the deal.

The money for tribes will come out of the larger settlements.

The tribal settlements are part of about \$40 billion worth of settlements, penalties and fines rung up over the years by companies over their role in opioids.

The drugs, including both prescription drugs such as OxyContin and illicit ones including heroin and illegally made fentanyl, have been linked to more than 500,000 deaths in the U.S. in the past two decades.

Police: Gunman kills 2 Virginia college officers, arrested

BRIDGEWATER, Va. (AP) — A gunman shot and killed two campus officers at a private college Tuesday, prompting a protracted campus lockdown and search before the suspect was apprehended, state police and school officials said.

The lockdown began in the early afternoon when Bridgewater College officials sent out a tweet in warning students and faculty about a shooter on campus.

The college sent out a follow-up tweet about 2 p.m. saying police had apprehended a suspect after searching the campus but that students should continue sheltering in place.

A news photographer captured an image of the apparent suspect being arrested, laying face-down on the ground as more than a half-dozen law enforcement officers approached with guns drawn. The college gave the all-clear about 4:30 p.m.

No other injuries were reported.

At a news conference Tuesday night, Virginia State Police spokeswoman Corinne Geller said that the shooting happened shortly after the campus officers responded to reports of a suspicious man on campus around 1:20 p.m. She said that after a brief interaction, the man opened fire on the officers, shot them and fled on foot. The two officers succumbed to their wounds on the scene.

Officers from state and local law enforcement agencies then joined the search and found the suspect off campus. He waded into a river and was taken into custody on an island in the river., they said.

The suspect, 27-year-old Alexander Wyatt Campbell, was treated for a gunshot wound that wasn't life threatening. Geller said that it wasn't clear if he received he wound in an exchange with police or if it was self-inflicted, and he was given treatment for it.

Campbell was being held without bond on two counts of capital murder, one count of first degree murder, and one count of use of a firearm in the commission of a felony, according to a Virginia State Police news release.

His last known address was in Ashland, Virginia.

Geller said she didn't know if Campbell had a lawyer who could speak on his behalf.

A statement from school president David W. Bushman identified the two officers as campus police officer John Painter and campus safety officer J.J. Jefferson. He said that the campus was mourning the loss of the well-known and well-loved officers. Saying the pair was known as "the dynamic duo," the statement noted that Painter was the best man at Jefferson's wedding this year.

"Two members of the Bridgewater College family were senselessly and violently taken from us. The sadness is palpable. Words are not adequate, not nearly so, to express the grief, sadness, fear and — justifiably — the anger we all feel," Bushman added.

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin ordered flags across the state be flown at half-staff Wednesday to honor the officers.

"My heart is broken tonight by the tragic loss of two officers at Bridgewater College today ... The First Lady and I ask Virginians to keep their family, friends, and the Bridgewater community in your thoughts and prayers during this difficult time," he said in a statement.

Bridgewater College is a private liberal arts college located about 125 miles (200 kilometers) northwest of Richmond. Historically affiliated with the Church of the Brethren, the school had an enrollment of about 1,500 full-time students in the fall of 2021, according to its website.

Louisiana governor denies he delayed probe in deadly arrest

By JIM MUSTIAN, JAKE BLEIBERG and KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards defiantly denied Tuesday that he delayed or interfered with investigations into the deadly 2019 arrest of Ronald Greene — and for the first time he characterized the actions of the troopers seen on video stunning, punching and dragging the Black man as racist.

"I can't imagine if Mr. Greene had been white he would have been treated that way," an emotional Edwards told a news conference. "We have to acknowledge racism when we see it. We have to call it what it is."

The Democratic governor rejected the idea that his response to the Greene case was driven by a tight reelection campaign that depended heavily on the Black vote. He said that notion is nonsensical because prosecutors had the Greene case well before his election.

"Nothing like that has ever happened because of me," he said. "That is not who I am as a person."

Edwards' remarks were the first since an Associated Press report last week that showed he had been notified by state police within hours of Greene's May 2019 death that troopers engaged in a "violent, lengthy struggle," yet he kept quiet for two years as police told a much different story to the victim's family and in official reports: that Greene died from a crash following a high-speed chase.

Edwards stayed mostly silent on the case until last May when the AP obtained and published long-withheld body camera video showing what really happened on a dark roadside near Monroe: white troopers jolting Greene with stun guns, punching him in the face and dragging him by his ankle shackles as he pleaded for mercy and wailed, "I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

The governor's news conference came just minutes after a heated, closed-door meeting with the Legislative Black Caucus that at times erupted with members cursing over his muted response to Greene's deadly arrest.

Some caucus members asked why Edwards did not speak out or follow up more forcefully when informed of the circumstances.

"A man died in custody. You don't ask his name? You don't ask what happened? You don't get any facts?" one of the caucus members said, according to audio of the meeting obtained by the AP.

"This matter will not go away until there is an acknowledgement that there was a cover-up," said another.

Edwards at one point said, "I am not going to tell you everything that has happened with the state police since I've been governor has been perfect."

"They're alleging that I have been personally involved in these things and I have not," Edwards told the caucus.

In his news conference, the governor also denied the state House speaker's contention that he sought to discourage a legislative inquiry into the case last year by blaming Greene's death on a car wreck.

Edwards directly contradicted Rep. Clay Schexnayder's account that Edwards told him just that in June and called his relationship with the powerful Republican House speaker "especially strained."

Schexnayder told AP outside the House chamber Tuesday that "I stand by my comment." Asked whether his relationship with Edwards is "strained" he said, "I don't have any ill will toward the governor."

Leaders of Louisiana's GOP-led legislature have vowed to take action against Edwards over his handling of the Greene case. The drama is playing out amid a more than two-year-old federal civil rights investigation into the deadly encounter and whether police brass obstructed justice to protect the troopers who arrested Greene.

Edwards expressed private frustration with the amount of time it has taken federal authorities to file charges in Greene's death.

"Are they ever going to come out and have a charge?" the governor asked during his meeting with the lawmakers, adding he believed the troopers' treatment of Greene had been criminal "from the very first time I saw" footage of it in October 2020.

Edwards at times struck a dejected tone during the meeting, telling the lawmakers: "This is the worst."

I can't imagine a worse day in my life than today."

"I apologize with the core of my soul that we haven't made the progress over the last year that I hoped to have made and that I thought we were making with state police," he said. "I am more disappointed in me than probably you are."

Putin accuses US, allies of ignoring Russian security needs

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday accused the U.S. and its allies of ignoring Russia's top security demands but said Moscow is willing to talk more to ease tensions over Ukraine.

The comments were his first on the standoff in more than a month and suggested a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine may not be imminent and that at least one more round of diplomacy is likely.

Yet the two sides remain unyielding in their main positions, and there was little apparent hope for concessions. Russia is expected to respond soon to a U.S. proposal for negotiations on lesser Russian demands after which Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will speak.

Lavrov and Blinken spoke Tuesday and reiterated positions put forward by Putin and President Joe Biden. The White House said Biden and Putin could also speak once the U.S. receives Russia's response.

In remarks to reporters at a Moscow news conference with the visiting leader of NATO ally Hungary, Putin said the Kremlin is still studying the U.S. and NATO's response to the Russian security demands received last week. But he said it was clear that the West has ignored Russian demands that NATO not expand to Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations, refrain from deploying offensive weapons near Russia and roll back its deployments to Eastern Europe.

Putin argued that it's possible to negotiate an end to the standoff if the interests of all parties, including Russia's security concerns, are taken into account. "I hope that we will eventually find a solution, although we realize that it's not going to be easy," Putin said.

Russia has amassed over 100,000 troops along the border of Ukraine, fueling fears of an invasion. It has denied any intention to attack.

Washington and its allies have rejected Moscow's key demands. They emphasize that Ukraine, like any other nation, has the right to choose alliances, although it is not a NATO member now and is unlikely to join any time soon.

Putin said the Western allies' refusal to meet Russia's demands violates their obligations on the integrity of security for all nations. He warned that a Ukrainian accession to NATO could lead to a situation where Ukraine launches military action to reclaim control over Russian-annexed Crimea or areas controlled by Russia-backed separatists in the country's east.

"Imagine that Ukraine becomes a NATO member and launches those military operations," Putin said. "Should we fight NATO then? Has anyone thought about it?"

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 following the ouster of the country's Moscow-friendly president and later threw its weight behind rebels in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, triggering a conflict that has killed over 14,000 people.

Putin charged that while the U.S. airs concerns about Ukraine's security, it is using the ex-Soviet country as an "instrument" in its efforts to contain Russia.

He alleged that Washington may try to "draw us into a military conflict and force its allies in Europe to impose the tough sanctions the U.S. is talking about now." Another possible option would be to "draw Ukraine into NATO, deploy offensive weapons there" and encourage Ukrainian nationalists to use force to reclaim the rebel-held east or Crimea, "drawing us into a military conflict," Putin claimed.

Speaking after talks with Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban, who has forged closer ties with Moscow than almost any other NATO member, Putin noted that it's still possible to negotiate a settlement that would take every party's concerns into account.

"We need to find a way to ensure interests and security of all parties, including Ukraine, European nations and Russia," Putin said, emphasizing that the West needs to treat Russian proposals seriously to

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make progress.

He said French President Emmanuel Macron may soon visit Moscow as part of renewed diplomatic efforts following their call on Monday.

In a bid to exert pressure on the West, Lavrov sent letters to the U.S. and other Western counterparts pointing out their past obligations signed by all members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a top trans-Atlantic security grouping.

Russia has argued that NATO's expansion eastward has hurt Russia's security, violating the principle of "indivisibility of security" endorsed by the OSCE in 1999 and 2010. It says the U.S. and its allies have ignored the principle that the security of one nation should not be strengthened at the expense of others, while insisting on every nation's right to choose alliances.

In his letter, which was released by the foreign ministry, Lavrov said "there must be security for all or there will be no security for anyone." And in his call with Blinken, Lavrov warned that Moscow will not allow Washington to "hush up" the issue.

Blinken, meanwhile, emphasized "the U.S. willingness, bilaterally and together with Allies and partners, to continue a substantive exchange with Russia on mutual security concerns." However, State Department spokesman Ned Price said Blinken was resolute in "the U.S. commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the right of all countries to determine their own foreign policy and alliances."

Blinken "urged immediate Russian de-escalation and the withdrawal of troops and equipment from Ukraine's borders," Price said. He reaffirmed that "further invasion of Ukraine would be met with swift and severe consequences and urged Russia to pursue a diplomatic path."

Senior State Department officials described the call as professional and "fairly candid," noting that if Russia wanted to prove it isn't going to invade Ukraine, it should withdraw its troops from the border and neighboring Belarus.

Shortly after speaking to Lavrov, Blinken convened a conference call with the secretary general of NATO, the EU foreign policy chief and the chairman-in-office of the OSCE as part of efforts to ensure that the allies are engaged in any further contacts with Russia.

Speaking to reporters at the United Nations, Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said the U.S. statement about its readiness for dialogue "doesn't correlate" with Washington sending planeloads of military equipment to Ukraine.

"I don't know why the U.S. is escalating tensions and at the same time accusing Russia," he said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited Kyiv for scheduled talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Johnson said the U.K. has a package of measures including sanctions ready to go "the moment the first Russian toecap crosses further into Ukrainian territory."

"It is vital that Russia steps back and chooses a path of diplomacy, and I believe that is still possible," Johnson said. "We are keen to engage in dialogue, of course we are. But we have the sanctions ready."

He said he would have a call with Putin on Wednesday, noting that the Russian leader was trying to "impose a new Yalta, new zones of influence" in a reference to the 1945 deal between the allied powers. "And it would not just be Ukraine that was drawn back into the Russian sphere of influence," Johnson added.

In other developments, Biden was expected to nominate career foreign service officer Bridget Brink to assume the long-vacant diplomatic post of American ambassador to Ukraine, according to a U.S. official familiar with the decision. Brink currently serves as the ambassador to Slovakia.

Biden reaches for GOP support for Supreme Court nominee

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is reaching out for Republican support for his eventual Supreme Court nominee, inviting the GOP's top Judiciary Committee senator to the White House Tuesday along with the panel's Democratic chairman and phoning Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell for a one-on-one discussion.

Biden and fellow Democrats are working for significant GOP backing for the still-to-be-named nominee

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to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer — a steep challenge in a Senate that has been sharply and bitterly divided over the past three confirmations.

At the White House, former longtime Sen. Biden called Judiciary Chairman Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and the panel's top Republican, Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, "two good friends" and noted they had worked on many Supreme Court nominations together in their decades on the committee.

Biden noted that the Constitution calls for Senate "advice and consent," on a nominee, and he said, "I'm serious when I say I want the advice of the Senate as well as the consent."

As Biden mulls a replacement for Breyer — a Black woman, he has promised — Durbin has been proposing a ceasefire of sorts after the wrenching partisan fights over former President Donald Trump's three nominees. The Democratic senator has been vigorously reaching out to GOP colleagues since Breyer announced last week that he will step down this summer.

The White House outreach is a similar attempt at détente by the president, who along with Durbin and Grassley is a veteran of a bygone era when Supreme Court justices were confirmed with overwhelming support from both parties. Biden was chairman of the panel in 1994 when Breyer was confirmed 87-9.

"It was old home week," Durbin said as he returned from the White House.

Winning much GOP support for Biden's nominee will be a challenge, though, as advocates push him to nominate a strong liberal and some Senate Republicans have criticized the president even before he makes his decision.

McConnell, who also served with Biden for many years, has urged the president to pick a moderate. His office said he spoke with Biden Tuesday afternoon and "emphasized the importance of a nominee who believes in judicial independence and will resist all efforts by politicians to bully the Court or to change the structure of the judicial system."

At a committee meeting Tuesday morning, Grassley condemned Democratic advocates who pressured Breyer to retire, and he said nominees should be judged "solely on their qualifications." After the White House meeting, he said he told the president "that I want somebody that's going to interpret law, not make law."

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a moderate Republican who might be the most likely GOP senator to vote for a Biden nominee, on Sunday called the president's handling of the nomination so far "clumsy," saying he had politicized the process.

Other Republicans have openly stoked a debate over Biden's promise to nominate a Black woman. Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker said he views the process as "affirmative action." Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said it's "offensive" because Biden is saying white men and women have the "wrong skin pigment and wrong Y chromosome."

The court was made up entirely of white men for almost two centuries. Justice Clarence Thomas and the late Thurgood Marshall are the only two Black men who have served on the court. There has never been a Black woman.

Durbin has noted that Republican Presidents Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump both promised to pick women and were praised when they nominated Sandra Day O'Connor and Amy Coney Barrett, respectively. There have been only five female justices in U.S. history, while there have been 110 men.

"It is not uncommon for a president of the United States in filling a Supreme Court vacancy to announce in advance what type of person he wants," Durbin said Monday.

Collins is a particularly important target for Democrats. She has voted for some of Biden's lower court judges and against Barrett's nomination in 2020. Durbin called her within hours of learning that Breyer would step down, and has made clear that Democrats won't rush the confirmation, in line with her call for a deliberate process.

While criticizing Biden, she has also thanked Durbin for reaching out and saying he will provide whatever information she may need.

Collins said she wants "dignified hearings" and bipartisan support — but added that it depends on who the nominee is.

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"The reason for us to try to get the nomination process back to the way it used to be when Supreme Court nominees were frequently confirmed overwhelmingly is the credibility of the court is at stake," she said. "If the court is perceived by the American public as a political institution, that is harmful and undermines support for its decisions."

Two other Republicans have signaled they could vote for a Biden nominee — if it is the right one. South Carolina Sens. Lindsey Graham and Tim Scott have both praised J. Michelle Childs, a federal judge who got her law degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law. The White House has said Childs is under consideration.

"She has wide support in our state," Graham said Sunday on CBS, adding that the Supreme Court should look "like America."

Other Republicans could be open to voting for a Biden nominee, as well. Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who is up for reelection this year, has supported some of his lower court nominees. And some GOP senators said this week that they have no problem with Biden's approach. Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt said he would be "happy to vote for the first Black woman."

Working to win bipartisan support will be former Alabama Sen. Doug Jones, a Democrat who often crossed party lines before he was defeated for reelection in 2020. Jones will serve as the lead official for the White House to shepherd the nomination, said two people familiar with the discussions who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity. The former senator and U.S. attorney is another old friend of the president's, dating back to Biden's first presidential campaign in 1988.

Durbin acknowledged the challenges ahead, and the balance Biden will have to strike in picking the right person. He said that in reviewing early names that have been floated, he believes each is open to more moderate or conservative rulings.

"So that will be a plus and a minus," Durbin said. "Some Republicans may point to it as a reason to vote for her. Some in the far left may find it as a reason to vote against her."

Former UCLA lecturer threatened to 'hunt' female professor

By STEFANIE DAZIO and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A former lecturer at the University of California, Los Angeles who was arrested Tuesday after police say he emailed an 800-page document and posted videos threatening violence against the school had previously sent messages saying he would "hunt" and kill a professor, court documents show.

Matthew Harris, 31, was taken into custody in Colorado following a standoff at his Boulder apartment complex that ended peacefully.

The investigations in California and Colorado began this week after Harris, who had lectured in the UCLA philosophy department, sent the email to some of his former students. UCLA officials canceled classes on campus Tuesday and the university's police department tracked Harris to Boulder and reached out to law enforcement there.

University officials did not describe the email but Los Angeles Police Department Chief Michel Moore said Harris was "potentially planning for a mass violence or shooting event at UCLA." The university has more than 31,000 undergraduate students and 14,000 graduate students.

In Boulder, Police Chief Maris Herold said officials reviewed the manifesto and "we identified thousands of references to violence, stating things such as killing, death, murder, shootings, bombs, schoolyard massacre in Boulder and phrases like 'burn and attack Boulder outside of the university.'"

Herold said police had contact with Harris in October, though no criminal charges were filed, and authorities are reviewing their reports from that encounter.

Authorities said he attempted to buy a handgun in November but his purchase was denied. Officials believe the transaction did not go through because of a California-based protection order that said he could not purchase or possess a firearm.

Harris was placed on leave from UCLA last year and a female University of California, Irvine philosophy professor was granted a restraining order against him after he sent emails to his mother threatening to

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"hunt" the professor and "put bullets in her skull." Harris' mother alerted the woman.

Harris' mother and the woman could not be reached for comment.

Harris was being held in Colorado on state charges and federal charges may be pursued. It wasn't immediately known if Harris had a lawyer who could speak on his behalf.

The police search for Harris began after he sent his former students an email early Sunday that was full of slurs against Jewish and East Asian people, according to the Los Angeles Times. The email included links to what police termed a manifesto and videos, the Times reported, including one titled "UCLA PHILOSOPHY (MASS SHOOTING)."

Harris makes racist comments in several of the videos and cryptically names specific locations on the UCLA campus, noting that they've been added to his "list," according to the Times.

The UCLA video included footage from the 2017 mass shooting at a Las Vegas music festival, the newspaper reported, as well as clips from "Zero Day" – a 2003 film that was loosely based on the mass shooting at Colorado's Columbine High School.

Harris, who didn't appear to have any criminal record, began working at UCLA in the spring of 2019 as a postdoctoral fellow, according to a newsletter from the university's philosophy department. His focus was on "philosophy of race, personal identity, and related issues in philosophy of mind."

On bruinwalk.com, a website where UCLA students can post anonymous reviews of professors and other staff members, Harris got low ratings. In one review, a student wrote that Harris is "extremely unprofessional."

"I have no idea how this guy is still teaching," another student wrote.

Harris came to UCLA after completing his dissertation, "Continents in Cognition," at Duke University in 2019. Duke is where he first met the woman who was the subject of the restraining order. They had "minimal contact" but he reached out to her to discuss career advice in September 2020 because he had recently moved to Los Angeles, according to the court documents.

The woman initially was happy to meet with Harris, but "their initial interaction left her feeling very uncomfortable and concerned about his behavior," the court documents said.

Harris allegedly "began an aggressive campaign" of text messages and emails to the woman, leading her to fear for her safety. She told him to stop contacting her in March 2021.

Separately, UCLA that month placed him on investigatory leave for "predatory behavior" when the school had found he sent pornographic and violent content to students, court documents state.

In April, the professor was contacted by Harris' mother, who told her that four months earlier her son had sent her emails saying he wanted to move closer to the Irvine campus where the professor worked so he could kill her, court documents show. UC Irvine is about 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) south of UCLA.

"I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I did nothing and someone got hurt," Harris' mother wrote to the woman. His mother had not seen her son in five years and believed he was in need of psychiatric help, court document show.

The University of California regents sought a workplace violence restraining order last May, the day after UCLA officials learned Harris had been released from a mental health facility and was back in Los Angeles. A temporary restraining order was granted immediately, and a longer protective order – in place until 2024 – was approved less than a month later.

The court documents say that UCLA's police department and its Behavioral Intervention Team were aware of the threats against the professor and reached out to the FBI.

The UCLA director of media relations did not immediately return a request for comment Tuesday about the restraining order. The FBI did not immediately comment.

Anti-vaccine protest in Canada spurs outrage

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — In a scene at odds with Canadians' reputation for niceness and rule-following, thousands of protesters railing against vaccine mandates and other COVID-19 restrictions descended on the capital over the weekend, deliberately blocking traffic around Parliament Hill.

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Some urinated and parked on the National War Memorial. One danced on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. A number carried signs and flags with swastikas.

In the aftermath of Canada's biggest pandemic protest to date, the demonstrators have found little sympathy in a country where more than 80% are vaccinated. Many people were outraged by some of the crude behavior.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called the Ottawa protesters a "fringe minority" and said they reflected the proliferation of "disinformation and misinformation online, conspiracy theorists, about microchips, about God knows what else that go with the tinfoil hats."

Organizers, including one who has espoused white supremacist views, had raised millions for the cross-country "freedom truck convoy" against vaccine mandates. It attracted support from former U.S. President Donald Trump and Tesla billionaire Elon Musk.

Trudeau and his family were moved to an undisclosed location during the protest. (Two of his children tested positive for COVID-19, and a test Monday revealed he, too, was infected. He said he is fine and working remotely.)

A smaller but still significant number of protesters remained on the streets on Tuesday, saying they won't leave until all vaccine mandates and other restrictions are gone. They are also calling for the removal of Trudeau's government, though it is responsible for few of the measures, most of which were put in place by provincial governments.

"It's time for Canada and the rest of the world to find other ways to deal with this virus," said protester Michelle Kloet, 47, of Canmore, Alberta.

During the demonstration, the statue of Terry Fox, a national hero who lost a leg to bone cancer as a youngster and set off in 1980 on a fundraising trek across Canada, was draped with an upside-down Canadian flag and a sign that read "Mandate freedom."

"My kids were shocked. Like all Canadian young people, they have grown up with Terry Fox as a hero," Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said. "This is not the Canada who we want to be. And I really proudly believe, and I know, this is not what Canada is."

Ontario Premier Doug Ford said he was "extremely disturbed" to see people "desecrate our most sacred monuments and wave swastikas and other symbols of hate and intolerance."

The outburst was seen as so out of character for Canada that one U.S. scientist felt compelled to apologize for what he portrayed as America's influence.

"Canada gave us kindness, tolerance, poutine and hockey, and in turn we exported this awful fake health freedom movement linked to far right extremism that caused so much senseless loss of life in America and now might do the same there," tweeted Dr. Peter Hotez, an infectious-disease specialist at the Baylor College of Medicine in Texas. "Our apologies."

Many of the demonstrators refused to wear masks in hotels, malls and grocery stores. One homeless shelter reported protesters had demanded it feed them.

Ottawa Police Chief Peter Sloly said several investigations are underway and a tip line for hate crimes, threats and assaults related to the demonstration has been set up. Sloly said one person had been arrested in connection with the protest.

Tim Abray, a Ph.D. candidate, said he was assaulted by "so-called freedom fighters" while taking pictures of the protest in his neighborhood.

The most visible contingent of protesters were truck drivers who parked their big rigs on Parliament Hill. Some of them were protesting a rule that took effect Jan. 15 requiring truckers entering Canada to be fully immunized against the coronavirus.

The Canadian Trucking Alliance has estimated that 85% of truckers in Canada are vaccinated.

Meanwhile, police on Tuesday moved to end a protest convoy of trucks and other vehicles that had been blocking a major U.S. border crossing in Coutts, Alberta, since Saturday. It turned violent after some protesters breached police barriers to join the demonstration, authorities said.

"I've received reports in the last hour of people aligned with the protesters assaulting RCMP officers,

including one instance trying to ram members of the RCMP, later leading to a collision with a civilian vehicle," Alberta Premier Jason Kenney. "This kind of conduct is totally unacceptable. Without hesitation, I condemn those actions and I call for calm."

Some opposition Conservative lawmakers attended the protest in Ottawa, and Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole, who is facing a revolt among his lawmakers, met with some of the truckers.

Phil Haggart, a counter-protester, said he was there to show that there are voices in favor of public health measures.

"Masks are important, vaccines are important, and mandates are important only because we need them to stay alive and not fill our hospitals up," he said.

A surge of the highly contagious omicron variant has led to record cases and lockdowns in Ontario and Quebec, Canada's most populous provinces. Vaccine mandates imposed by the provincial governments remain in place.

But restaurants reopened Monday with 50% capacity, and Quebec's premier, Francois Legault, announced Tuesday he is abandoning his threat to tax the unvaccinated, saying the proposal has divided Quebecers.

"I have to protect the health of Quebecers, but I also have to protect the peace in our society," Legault said.

Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, said the misinformation rabbit hole in Canada is not as deep as it is in the U.S. for many reasons, including less political polarization north of the border.

"This leads to much less sympathy for or tolerance of the unvaccinated among Canadians. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis could not get very far in Canada. A Donald Trump would be shunned, even in Conservative Party circles," Wiseman said.

He added: "The protesters in Ottawa have not aided their cause as the demonstration drags on."

Virus enters Tonga along with disaster aid, lockdown planned

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Tonga will enter a lockdown Wednesday evening after finding coronavirus infections in two port workers helping distribute aid arriving in the Pacific nation after a volcanic eruption and tsunami.

The urgent announcement by Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni appeared to confirm fears that accepting the aid following the disaster last month could usher in a second disaster by bringing COVID-19 into a nation that had been virus-free.

The volcanic eruption and tsunami last month tainted drinking water, severed communications and left dozens homeless. Three people died in Tonga and two in Peru after the tsunami crossed the ocean.

Ships and planes from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Britain and China have been delivering aid. Those nations had promised to drop off their supplies of fresh water and medicine without coming into contact with anybody on the ground in Tonga, which usually requires incoming travelers to spend three weeks in quarantine.

But the threat was underscored when dozens of sailors aboard the Australian aid ship HMAS Adelaide reported infections after an outbreak. Crew members aboard aid flights from Japan and Australia also reported infections.

News site Matangi Tonga reported that the positive test results came after officials tested 50 front-line workers at the port. The lockdown was open-ended, the site said, with updates expected from health officials every two days.

Since the pandemic began, Tonga had previously reported just a single case of the virus when a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints missionary returning from Africa tested positive in October after flying home via New Zealand.

Tonga and several other small Pacific nations, including Kiribati and the Solomon Islands, were among the last places on the planet to have avoided any virus outbreaks, thanks to their remote locations and

strict border controls. But that's changed in the last few weeks as their defenses appeared no match against the highly contagious omicron variant.

The lockdown in Tonga comes as many homes and businesses remain without internet access after the tsunami severed the sole fiber-optic cable that connects Tonga to the rest of the world. Officials are hoping repairs will be completed within a week or two.

About 61% of Tonga's 105,000 people are fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data.

Pfizer asks FDA to allow COVID-19 vaccine for kids under 5

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer on Tuesday asked the U.S. to authorize extra-low doses of its COVID-19 vaccine for children under 5, potentially opening the way for the very youngest Americans to start receiving shots as early as March.

In an extraordinary move, the Food and Drug Administration had urged Pfizer and its partner BioNTech to apply earlier than the companies had planned — and before it's settled if the youngsters will need two shots or three.

The nation's 19 million children under 5 are the only group not yet eligible for vaccination against the coronavirus. Many parents have been pushing for an expansion of shots to toddlers and preschoolers, especially as the omicron variant sent record numbers of youngsters to the hospital.

"I would say the parents in my office are desperate" to get young kids vaccinated, said Dr. Dyan Hes, who runs a pediatrics practice in New York City, where vaccination rates are high. For many, "that's the first thing they ask when they walk through the door: 'When do you think the shot is going to come out?'"

Pfizer aims to give children as young as 6 months shots that contain one-tenth of the dose given to adults. The company said it had started submitting its data to the FDA and expects to complete the process in a few days.

An open question is how many shots those children will need. Two of the extra-low doses turned out to be strong enough for babies but not for preschoolers in early testing. Pfizer now is testing a third shot, data that's expected in late March.

That means the FDA may consider whether to authorize two shots for now, with potentially a third shot being cleared later if the study supports it.

Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement that company scientists believe this age group ultimately will need three of the extra low-dose shots but that FDA action now could let parents begin the vaccination process while awaiting a final decision.

The FDA said it will convene a panel of independent researchers and physicians in mid-February to help review the Pfizer data. The agency isn't required to follow their advice, but the input is a key step in publicly vetting vaccine safety and effectiveness.

The question of how long to wait for new vaccine data — and how much to require — is a concern for FDA regulators, who face pressure to be more proactive against a virus that has repeatedly confounded health experts.

The FDA asked Pfizer to begin submitting its application now due to omicron's "greater toll on children," an agency spokeswoman said, citing a peak in cases among children under 5.

"In light of these new data and the rise in illnesses and hospitalization in this youngest age group, FDA believed that it was prudent to request that Pfizer submit the data it had available," agency spokeswoman Stephanie Caccamo said in an emailed statement.

The FDA's ultimate decision could come within the month, but that isn't the only hurdle. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also has to sign off.

The Biden administration has been trying to speed the authorization of COVID-19 shots for children, contending vaccinations are critical for opening schools and day care centers and keeping them open, and for freeing up parents from child care duties so they can go back to work.

Yet vaccination rates have been lower among children than in other age groups. As of last week, just

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20% of kids ages 5 to 11 and just over half of 12- to 17-year-olds were fully vaccinated, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Nearly three-quarters of adults are fully vaccinated.

Young children are far less likely than adults to get severely ill from the coronavirus, but it can happen, and pediatric COVID-19 infections are higher than at any other point in the pandemic.

"What we're seeing right now is still a lot of hospitalizations and unfortunately some deaths in this age group," said Dr. Sean O'Leary of the University of Colorado, who is on the AAP's infectious disease committee. If the FDA clears vaccinations for these youngsters, "that's going to be really important because all of those hospitalizations and deaths essentially are preventable."

For kids under 5, Pfizer's study is giving participants two shots three weeks apart, followed by a third dose at least two months later. The company is testing whether the youngsters produce antibody levels similar to those known to protect teens and young adults.

In December, Pfizer announced that children under 2 looked to be protected but that the antibody response was too low in 2- to 4-year-olds. It's not clear why, but one possibility is that the extra-low dose was a little too low for the preschoolers.

Since the preliminary results showed the shots were safe, Pfizer added a third dose to the testing in hopes of improving protection.

A Kaiser Family Foundation poll found just 3 in 10 parents of children under 5 would get their youngster vaccinated as soon as shots were authorized, while about a quarter said they definitely would not. Results of the survey of 1,536 adults, conducted in mid-January, were released Tuesday.

Chicago health officials have been trying to prepare parents for months for the day the shots are available, said Dr. Nimmi Rajagopal, a family medicine physician for Cook County Health, which oversees the public hospital system. Some parents wonder how rigorously the shots will be evaluated or have other questions that she said are critical to address.

Rajagopal is excited about getting her own 2-year-old son vaccinated if FDA clears the way, so it will be safer for him to play with other children.

"I have been waiting and waiting and waiting," she said.

Climate change a rising Fed concern as nominees face hearing

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — How far the Federal Reserve can go to compel banks to consider the consequences of climate change in their lending policies could take center stage at a Senate hearing Thursday on the nominations of Sarah Bloom Raskin and two economists to the Fed's influential Board of Governors.

The Fed is already moving toward analyzing the risks that banks face from rising temperatures and changing weather patterns. What many in the oil and gas industry fear is something more far-reaching: That the Fed may eventually take steps to discourage banks from lending to energy companies — the first time, they say, that the central bank would be acting to disadvantage a specific industry.

A host of trade associations and business groups have written to the Senate Banking Committee in advance of the hearing, expressing concern about the nomination of Bloom Raskin to be the Fed's vice chair of supervision, the board member who leads its regulation of banks. Bloom Raskin has been outspoken in her belief that climate change poses risks to the economy and the financial system and that regulators should factor those risks into their oversight.

For now, most of the groups have stopped short of opposing her nomination. The Chamber of Commerce, in a letter to the committee last week, urged the senators to simply "raise several important issues" during the hearing.

Her supporters argue that Bloom Raskin is highly qualified and that her views on climate and the Fed are similar to those expressed by Chair Jerome Powell.

"I don't see her positions as being radical or out of the mainstream," said Cam Fine, a former lobbyist for small banks.

Bloom Raskin, who previously served on the Fed's seven-member board from 2010 to 2014, was subse-

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quently chosen by President Barack Obama to serve as a deputy Treasury secretary.

On Thursday, the Senate committee will also consider the nominations of Lisa Cook, an economics professor at Michigan State and a former staffer in the Obama White House, and Philip Jefferson, an economist and dean at Davidson College. Cook would be the first Black woman to serve on the Fed's board. Jefferson would be the fourth black man in the Fed's 108-year history.

Raskin's opponents have zeroed in on comments she has made suggesting that regulators should discourage banks from lending to oil and gas companies. Two years ago, in an opinion column in the New York Times, Raskin called oil and gas a "dying" industry. She went on to criticize the Fed's willingness to support lending to fossil fuel companies in its efforts to bolster the financial sector in the depths of the pandemic recession.

And at a conference last year, Bloom Raskin suggested that financial regulators should support "a rapid, orderly and just transition away from high emission assets."

Despite opposition from Republicans, most observers say she will likely be confirmed by the full Senate, which could vote as early as this month.

On Monday, 13 trade associations wrote to Sen. Sherrod Brown, the Ohio Democrat who leads the Banking Committee, to "express our concerns" with Bloom Raskin's views on climate change.

"Ms. Bloom Raskin's statements suggesting financial regulations should be used as an instrument to direct climate change policy will only raise energy costs and make America more dependent on foreign sources of energy," said Liz Bowman, a spokeswoman for the American Exploration and Production Council, which spearheaded the letter.

A larger group of 41 energy-focused trade groups went further last week and urged committee members to defeat Bloom Raskin's nomination.

Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, the senior Republican on the committee, echoed these concerns in a letter to Biden in which he asserted that Raskin "has also advocated for the Federal Reserve to pressure banks into choking off credit to traditional energy companies."

A White House official, who insisted on anonymity to discuss the administration's views, disputed Toomey's characterization and said Bloom Raskin is "firmly opposed to the Federal Reserve allocating credit by sector or choking off sectors from access to credit."

The rising profile of climate change as an issue for the Fed to consider reflects the growing pressure on the central bank to address issues that traditionally have been outside its purview of keeping unemployment low and prices stable. Powell has increasingly embraced that shift, though not to the extent that Bloom Raskin has or many environmentalists would prefer.

At his confirmation hearing in January, Powell said, "Our role on climate change is a limited one but it is an important one, and it is to assure that the banking institutions that we regulate understand their risks and can manage them."

Environmental advocates argue that climate change clearly fits in the Fed's legal mandate to ensure the "safety and soundness" of the financial system. Banks could experience damaging losses on their loans to commercial and residential property from increased weather-related damage. And if businesses and consumers increasingly move away from fossil fuels, causing the price of oil and gas to fall, they argue that this could cause losses on loans to oil and gas drillers.

Early last year, the Fed became the last major central bank to join the Network for the Greening of the Financial System, an international group focused on global warming and financial regulation.

"This is a train that has been moving at the Fed for awhile," said Sarah Dougherty, director of the NRDC's Green Finance Center and a former staffer at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

Lael Brainard, a Fed governor whom Biden has nominated to the central bank's No. 2 post, said last fall that the Fed is considering conducting "climate scenario analysis," which would involve modeling the impact of climate change on the financial system. Under questioning at her confirmation hearing last month, Brainard said that analyzing data was different from telling banks how they should lend.

"We don't tell banks what sectors to lend to," she said. "We just ask them to risk manage."

Some who support Bloom Raskin's nomination suggested that some critics may be refraining from public

opposition to her nomination because they have calculated that an all-out fight might be a losing battle. "The Fed is clearly headed in this direction one way or the other," said Adam Jentleson, a former top Senate aide who is coordinating support for Biden's three nominations. "What's the point of picking a huge fight over this if you're just going to get another nominee who may not have made the same statements on the record but has the same views?"

WHO: In 10 weeks, omicron surge causes COVID cases to soar

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization chief said Tuesday that 90 million cases of coronavirus have been reported since the omicron variant was first identified 10 weeks ago — amounting to more than in all of 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With many countries easing their restrictive measures amid public fatigue about them, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus cautioned that omicron should not be underestimated even though it has shown to bring less severe illness than earlier variants — and cited "a very worrying increase in deaths in most regions of the world."

"We are concerned that a narrative has taken hold in some countries that because of vaccines — and because of omicron's high transmissibility and lower severity — preventing transmission is no longer possible and no longer necessary," he told a regular WHO briefing on the pandemic.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," Tedros added. "It's premature for any country either to surrender or to declare victory. This virus is dangerous and it continues to evolve before our very eyes."

WHO said four of its six regions worldwide are seeing increasing trends in deaths.

Many European countries have begun easing lockdown measures, including Britain, France, Ireland and the Netherlands. Finland will end its COVID-19 restrictions this month.

On Tuesday, Denmark's government scrapped most restrictions aimed at fighting the pandemic, saying it no longer considers COVID-19 "a socially critical disease." The nation of 5.8 million has in recent weeks seen more than 50,000 new cases a day, but the number of patients in intensive care units has declined.

"Now is not the time to lift everything all at once. We have always urged — always urged — caution in applying interventions as well as lifting those interventions in a steady and in a slow way, piece by piece," said Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead on COVID-19.

Dr. Michael Ryan, the WHO emergencies chief, said countries with higher vaccination rates "have more choices" about whether to ease their restrictions, but said they should assess factors like their current epidemiology, at-risk populations, immunity in the population, and access to health care tools to fight the pandemic.

Speaking to countries' governments, he said: "Every country has to find its feet, know where it is, know where it wants to go, and chart its path ... You can look at what other countries are doing. But please don't just follow blindly what every other country is doing."

Ryan expressed concern that "political pressure will result in people in some countries opening prematurely — and that will result in unnecessary transmission, unnecessary severe disease, and unnecessary death."

Meanwhile, Van Kerkhove also said a group of experts that was set up last year to look into the emergence of new pathogens like the coronavirus — and assess its origins — is expected to issue a report "in the coming weeks." She said the group, known by the acronym SAGO, has held about a half-dozen meetings since its first one in late November.

She said the group would, among other things, look at early epidemiological studies and "our current understanding of the origins of this particular pandemic, building upon previous missions that have gone to China and worked with Chinese scientists." She alluded to the work of another WHO-led team that traveled to China, where the pandemic first emerged, and reported on the outbreak in March last year.

Ukraine-Russia crisis: What to know about rising fear of war

By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

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PARIS (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke about the escalating crisis over Ukraine for the first time in over a month on Tuesday as a series of high-level talks were underway to avert the threat of war.

The prime ministers of Britain and Poland were in Kyiv to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and the prime minister of Hungary met with Putin in the Kremlin.

Here are things to know Tuesday about the international tensions surrounding Ukraine, which has an estimated 100,000 Russian troops massed along its borders.

WHAT DOES HUNGARY WANT FROM RUSSIA?

Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban lobbied for larger shipments of Russian natural gas during a meeting with Putin. While no formal agreement was reached, Orban's request underscored the close economic and diplomatic ties that Hungary — a member of both the European Union and NATO — has pursued with Moscow. Those actions have raised eyebrows in some European capitals.

Hungary has avoided taking a definitive stance on the Russian military buildup on Ukraine's borders, but Orban on Tuesday urged a diplomatic resolution to the crisis.

"I viewed my current visit as a peace mission as well," Orban said. "I was able to tell the president that the European Union is united, and that there is not a single European Union leader who wants a conflict with Russia."

___ Justin Spike

WHAT MESSAGE DID BORIS JOHNSON BRING TO KYIV?

The British prime minister told Zelenskyy the Russian military buildup is "perhaps the biggest demonstration of hostility toward Ukraine in our lifetimes." Asked if the U.K. was exaggerating the threat from Russia, he said: "That is not the intelligence we are seeing. This is a clear and present danger."

Johnson said the U.K. has a package of measures including sanctions ready to go "the moment the first Russian toecap crosses further into Ukrainian territory."

But Johnson said he still believed it was possible that Russia would choose a path of diplomacy. He was scheduled to speak with Putin on Wednesday.

___ Jill Lawless

WHAT DOES PUTIN WANT?

Putin said the U.S. and its allies have ignored Russia's top security demands but added that Moscow is still open for more talks with the West on easing soaring tensions over Ukraine.

In his first comments in over a month about the crisis, Putin argued that it's possible to negotiate an end to the standoff if the concerns of all parties, including Russia's, are taken into account.

Putin noted that the U.S. and its allies have ignored the Kremlin's demands for guarantees that NATO won't expand to Ukraine, won't deploy weapons near the Russian border and will roll back its forces from Eastern Europe.

Putin spoke after talks with Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban in the Kremlin. He said French President Emmanuel Macron may soon visit Moscow.

___ Vladimir Isachenkov

HOW IS UKRAINE SHORING UP ITS DEFENSES?

Ukraine has announced a new trilateral political alliance with Britain and Poland and a decree expanding the army by 100,000 troops.

Tuesday's announcements by Zelenskyy came during visits by the British and Polish prime ministers, who promised support for Ukraine.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki promised to deliver more weapons, including portable air defense systems, drones, mortars and ammunition. He noted that Russia's neighbors feel like they are living "next to a volcano."

Zelenskyy signed a decree Tuesday expanding the country's army by 100,000 troops, bringing the total number to 350,000 in the next three years, and raising army wages.

___ Yuras Karmanau

WHAT ARE THE U.S. AND EUROPE DOING AGAINST POTENTIAL CYBERATTACKS?

A top White House cybersecurity official is in Europe meeting with U.S. allies to help coordinate efforts

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to defend against and respond to potential cyberattacks launched by Russia against Ukraine and others.

Anne Neuberger, the deputy national security advisor for cyber and emerging technology, is traveling to Brussels and Warsaw during a week-long trip to meet with NATO allies, senior Biden administration officials said Tuesday.

The purpose of the trip is to ensure that the U.S. and its allies are prepared for all cyber-related contingencies if the situation in Ukraine were to escalate, officials said.

Russia has launched significant cyberattacks against Ukraine previously and would almost certainly do so again as part of any operation against its neighbor. Such hostile activity against Ukraine could spread far and wide, as the devastating NotPetya attack did in 2017.

— Alan Suderman

WHAT WOULD A UKRAINIAN RESISTANCE LOOK LIKE?

The eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv is divided between people who are enthusiastically volunteering to join a civil resistance to a potential Russian invasion and those who just want to live their lives.

Which side wins out in Kharkiv, which is Ukraine's second-largest city and is just 40 kilometers (25 miles) from where Russian troops are massing, could well determine the fate of the country.

A guerrilla war fought by dentists, coaches and housewives defending a hometown with 1,000 basement shelters would be a nightmare for Russian military planners, according to both analysts and U.S. intelligence officials. And that's exactly what many people in Kharkiv — and across Ukraine — say they're planning to do.

"Both our generation and our children are ready to defend themselves. This will not be an easy war," said Maryna Tseluiko, a 40-year-old baker who signed up as a reservist with her 18-year-old daughter in Kyiv.

— Mystyslav Chernov and Lori Hinnant

WHY DOES RUSSIA SAY IT DIDN'T SEND A RESPONSE TO US?

Russia says the U.S. misinterpreted a request for clarification as its response to an American proposal aimed at de-escalating the Ukraine crisis.

Multiple Biden administration officials said the Russian government had provided a written response, but Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko on Tuesday told Russia's state RIA Novosti news agency this was "not true."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Tuesday there has been "confusion" — Russia's response to the U.S. proposals is still in the works, and what was sent "were other considerations on a somewhat different issue."

AP FACT CHECK: Biden exaggerates \$10 a month 'Obamacare'

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Affordable Care Act — "Obamacare" — has inspired many exaggerated claims through the years, both from fans and foes. Now President Joe Biden is adding his own.

With a few loose words turned into a pithy formula, the president implies that his enhanced version of the ACA is much better than it really is. Biden suggests that considerably more people are getting health insurance for less than \$10 a month than what's actually been the case.

BIDEN: "The American Rescue Plan did more to lower costs and expand access to health care than any action since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. It made quality coverage more affordable than ever — with families saving an average of \$2,400 on their annual premiums, and four out of five consumers finding quality coverage for under \$10 a month." — Jan. 27 statement on health insurance enrollment.

THE FACTS: His numbers are off the mark. According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS, about one in three of HealthCare.gov consumers (32%) is paying less than \$10 a month in premiums after tax credits.

That's not four out of five, as Biden suggests, which would translate to a much bigger share — 80%.

Biden's coronavirus relief bill did significantly reduce costs for people covered through the health insurance marketplaces. It increased taxpayer-provided subsidies for the private plans offered by participating insurers, and it made more people eligible for financial assistance. As a result, enrollment has grown to

14.5 million people this year, an increase of about 20% from the previous sign-up season.

The four-out-of-five statistic cited by Biden actually seems to refer to something else.

According to figures from CMS, four out of five consumers have access to a plan for less than \$10 a month after financial assistance. These consumers can find a plan for less than \$10 if they want to. But it doesn't mean they've picked one. Or even that they're aware such low-priced plans are available.

Consumers may have good reasons not to go for rock-bottom premiums. Such plans may not have the hospitals and doctors they're looking for, or the copays and deductibles may be higher than what they'd like.

"While it is important for consumers to have access to low-cost premiums, many consumers are choosing to balance premiums with other plan features like copays and deductibles," says Massey Whorley of the consulting firm Avalere Health. "Access to coverage starts with affordable premiums, but consumers are also thinking ahead to when they actually use their insurance."

So while most consumers can find plans for less than \$10 a month after financial assistance, finders aren't necessarily keepers.

Trump pushes false claims that Pence could 'send back' votes

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump is intensifying his effort to advance the false narrative that his vice president, Mike Pence, could have done something to prevent Joe Biden from taking office.

In a statement on Tuesday, Trump said the committee investigating his role in sparking the violent Jan. 6 insurrection should instead probe "why Mike Pence did not send back the votes for recertification or approval." In another statement on Sunday, he blasted Pence by falsely claiming that "he could have overturned the Election!"

The vice president does not have the authority to unilaterally overturn the results of an election, and doing so would have amounted to a profound break from precedent and democratic norms in the U.S.

Trump's escalating rhetoric comes in response to at least two developments on Capitol Hill. He is under growing scrutiny from the committee investigating the insurrection for his role in sparking the attack. And a bipartisan group of lawmakers is pushing changes to the Electoral Count Act to eliminate any ambiguity that a vice president could reject electors to prevent a future president from making the same threats.

Vice presidents play only a ceremonial role in the counting, but Trump has long insisted that Pence could have overturned the election results by sending the results back to state legislatures, falsely citing mass voter fraud. Numerous state and federal election officials, as well as Trump's own attorney general, have said the vote was fair.

The renewed attacks by Trump come as Pence has been traveling the country, visiting early voting states, delivering speeches and hosting fundraisers for midterm candidates as he mulls a run for president in 2024. Pence, unlike some possible contenders, has notably declined to rule out running against Trump, who has been teasing his own comeback campaign.

A Pence spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Trump's attacks. Pence will be delivering a speech Friday at the conservative Federalist Society and may respond then.

Pence has so far tried to thread a needle on his actions Jan. 6, which continue to enrage large portions of Trump's base. Pence has said he and Trump will likely never see "eye to eye" on what happened that day, when a mob of Trump supporters violently smashed through the U.S. Capitol building, assaulting police officers and hunting down lawmakers, including Pence. But Pence has defended his actions, saying he was abiding by his constitutional role.

Pence said in an interview with Fox News host Jesse Watters last month that he and Trump hadn't spoken since last summer, but insisted that they had "parted amicably."

"You know, I've said many times we — it was difficult, Jan. 6th was difficult. It was a tragic day in the life of the nation. I know I did my duty under the Constitution of the United States. But the president and I sat down in the days that followed that. We spoke about it, talked through it. We parted amicably," he said.

Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, the chair of the Jan. 6 committee, and Democratic

Rep. Adam Schiff of California have both said they plan to call Pence to testify as part of their investigation. But it's unclear what Pence will do.

During a trip to New Hampshire in December, Pence declined to say how he would respond, telling The Associated Press that "we'll evaluate any of those requests as they come."

Tom Brady retires after 22 seasons, 7 Super Bowl titles

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Tom Brady walked away from the NFL on his own terms, still at the top of his game. Brady, the most successful quarterback in league history and one of the greatest champions in professional sports, has retired after winning seven Super Bowls and setting numerous passing records in an unprecedented 22-year career.

"This is difficult for me to write, but here it goes: I am not going to make that competitive commitment anymore," Brady wrote in a lengthy post on Instagram. "I have loved my NFL career, and now it is time to focus my time and energy on other things that require my attention."

The 44-year-old Brady has long stated his desire to spend more time with his wife, supermodel Gisele Bündchen, and three children despite his unique ability to perform exceptionally well at an age when most athletes are way past their prime.

Brady goes out after leading the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to a Super Bowl title last season and NFC South championship this season.

News of Brady's pending retirement leaked Saturday but he said Monday night on his SiriusXM podcast he wasn't ready to finalize his plans.

That came Tuesday morning.

"Right now, it's best I leave the field of play to the next generation of dedicated and committed athletes," Brady said.

Brady thanked the Buccaneers organization, his teammates, ownership, general manager Jason Licht, coach Bruce Arians, his trainer Alex Guerrero, agents Don Yee and Steve Dubin and his family in his nine-page post. He didn't mention the New England Patriots, where he spent his first 20 seasons and won six Super Bowls playing for Bill Belichick. But Brady thanked the Patriots and their fans on Twitter, saying: "I'm beyond grateful. Love you all."

Brady said he's still figuring out how he'll spend his time, but he plans to be involved in his TB12 health and wellness company, Brady clothing line and NFT company.

"I know for sure I want to spend a lot of time giving to others and trying to enrich other people's lives, just as so many have done for me," he said.

Brady led the NFL in yards passing (5,316), touchdowns (43), completions (485) and attempts (719) in 2021, but the Buccaneers lost at home to the Los Angeles Rams in the divisional round.

Brady leaves as the career leader in yards passing (84,520) and TDs (624). He's the only player to win more than five Super Bowls and was MVP of the game five times.

Brady won three NFL MVP awards, was a first-team All-Pro three times and was selected to the Pro Bowl 15 times. He was 243-73 in his career in the regular season and 35-12 in the playoffs.

"To finish a 22-year career while still performing at his peak was nothing short of extraordinary," Licht said. "I wish we had more time with Tom, but I understand and respect his decision to leave the game in order to spend more time with his family."

Brady went from 199th pick in the 2000 draft to replacing an injured Drew Bledsoe in 2001 and leading New England to a Super Bowl victory over the heavily favored Rams that season.

He led the Patriots to consecutive Super Bowl titles following the 2003-04 seasons. No team has since repeated as champions.

But New England wouldn't win another one for a decade, twice losing to the New York Giants in the Super Bowl, including a 17-14 defeat on Feb. 3, 2008, that prevented the Patriots from completing a perfect season.

Brady earned his fourth ring after the 2014 season. Two years later, in the biggest Super Bowl comeback,

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he led the Patriots out of a 28-3 deficit in the third quarter against Atlanta to win in overtime for No. 5. Brady got his sixth championship when New England beat the Rams following the 2018 season.

He joined the Buccaneers in 2020 amid a pandemic, instantly transforming a franchise that hadn't won a playoff game in 18 years. His buddy Rob Gronkowski came out of retirement to join him and they helped the Buccaneers become the first team to play in a Super Bowl in its stadium.

"He set a standard and helped create a culture that took our team to the mountaintop," Arians said.

Brady reached the playoffs 19 times, won 18 division titles, went 10-4 in conference championships and 7-3 in Super Bowls.

After starting his first game on Sept. 30, 2001, Brady was under center for every game except when he suffered a season-ending knee injury in Week 1 in 2008 and the first four games in 2016 when he sat out a suspension because of the deflated footballs scandal.

"An incredible competitor and leader, his stellar career is remarkable for its longevity but also for the sustained excellence he displayed year after year," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement.

Known for his work ethic, intense exercise regimen and strict diet, Brady was better with age.

After turning 37, Brady won four Super Bowls and was 17-4 in the playoffs. He was 95-30, completed 65.2% of his passes for 35,371 yards, 265 TDs and 69 interceptions in the regular season in those eight seasons.

"I have always believed the sport of football is an 'all-in' proposition — if a 100% competitive commitment isn't there, you won't succeed, and success is what I love so much about our game," Brady said. "There is a physical, mental, and emotional challenge every single day that has allowed me to maximize my highest potential. And I have tried my very best these past 22 years. There are no shortcuts to success on the field or in life."

Minority women most affected if abortion is banned, limited

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — If you are Black or Hispanic in a conservative state that already limits access to abortions, you are far more likely than a white woman to have one.

And if the U.S. Supreme Court allows states to further restrict or even ban abortions, minority women will bear the brunt of it, according to statistics analyzed by The Associated Press.

The numbers are unambiguous. In Mississippi, people of color comprise 44% of the population but 80% of women receiving abortions, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, which tracks health statistics.

In Texas, they're 59% of the population and 74% of those receiving abortions. The numbers in Alabama are 35% and 70%. In Louisiana, minorities represent 42% of the population, according to the state Health Department, and about 72% of those receiving abortions.

"Abortion restrictions are racist," said Cathy Torres, a 25-year-old organizing manager with Frontera Fund, a Texas organization that helps women pay for abortions. "They directly impact people of color, Black, brown, Indigenous people ... people who are trying to make ends meet."

Why the great disparities? Laurie Bertram Roberts, executive director of the Alabama-based Yellowhammer Fund, which provides financial support for women seeking abortion, said women of color in states with restrictive abortion laws often have limited access to health care and a lack of choices for effective birth control. Schools often have ineffective or inadequate sex education.

If abortions are outlawed, those same women — often poor — will likely have the hardest time traveling to distant parts of the country to terminate pregnancies or raising children they might struggle to afford, said Roberts, who is Black and once volunteered at Mississippi's only abortion clinic.

"We're talking about folks who are already marginalized," Roberts said.

Amanda Furdge, who is Black, was one of those women. She was a single, unemployed college student already raising one baby in 2014 when she found out she was pregnant with another. She said she didn't know how she could afford another child.

She'd had two abortions in Chicago. Getting access to an abortion provider there was no problem, Furdge

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said. But now she was in Mississippi, having moved home to escape an abusive relationship. Misled by advertising, she first went to a crisis pregnancy center which tried to talk her out of an abortion. By the time she found the abortion clinic, she was too far along to have the procedure.

"Why can't you safely, easily access abortion here?" asked Furdge, 34, who is happily raising her now 7-year-old son but continues to advocate for women having the right to choose.

Torres said historically, anti-abortion laws have been crafted in ways that hurt low-income women. She pointed to the Hyde Amendment, a 1980 law that prevents the use of federal funds to pay for abortions except in rare cases.

She also cited the 2021 Texas law that bans abortion after around six weeks of pregnancy. Where she lives, near the U.S.-Mexico border in the Rio Grande Valley, women are forced to travel to obtain abortions and must pass in-state border patrol checkpoints where they have to disclose their citizenship status, she said.

Regardless of what legislators say, Torres insisted, the intent is to target women of color, to control their bodies: "They know who these restrictions are going to affect. They know that, but they don't care."

But Andy Gipson, a former member of the Mississippi Legislature who is now the state's agriculture and commerce commissioner, said race had nothing to do with passage of Mississippi's law against abortion after the 15th week. That law is now before the Supreme Court in a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade*, the court's 1973 ruling that legalized abortion nationwide.

Gipson, a Baptist minister who is white, said he believes all people are created in the image of God and have an "innate value" that starts at conception. Mississippi legislators were trying to protect women and babies by putting limits on abortion, he said.

"I absolutely disagree with the concept that it's racist or about anything other than saving babies' lives," said Gipson, a Republican. "It's about saving lives of the unborn and the lives and health of the mother, regardless of what color they are."

To those who say that forcing women to have babies will subject them to hardships, Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch, a white Republican, said it is "easier for working mothers to balance professional success and family life" than it was 49 years ago when *Roe* was decided.

Fitch, who is divorced, often points to her own experience of working outside the home while raising three children. But Fitch grew up in an affluent family and has worked in the legal profession — both factors that can give working women the means and the flexibility to get help raising children.

That's not the case for many minority women in Mississippi or elsewhere. Advocates say in many places where abortion services are being curtailed, there's little support for women who carry a baby to term.

Mississippi is one of the poorest states, and people in low-wage jobs often don't receive health insurance. Women can enroll in Medicaid during pregnancy, but that coverage disappears soon after they give birth.

Mississippi has the highest infant mortality rate in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Black infants were about twice as likely as white infants to die during the first year of life in Mississippi, according to the March of Dimes.

Across the country, U.S. Census Bureau information analyzed by The Associated Press shows fewer Black and Hispanic women have health insurance, especially in states with tight abortion restrictions. For example, in Texas, Mississippi and Georgia, at least 16% of Black women and 36% of Latinas were uninsured in 2019, some of the highest such rates in the country.

Problems are compounded in states without effective education programs about reproduction. Mississippi law says sex education in public schools must emphasize abstinence to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Discussion of abortion is forbidden, and instructors may not demonstrate how to use condoms or other contraception.

The Mississippi director for Planned Parenthood Southeast, Tyler Harden, is a 26-year-old Black woman who had an abortion five years ago, an experience that drove her to a career supporting pregnant women and preserving abortion rights.

She said when she was attending public school in rural Mississippi, she didn't learn about birth control. Instead, a teacher stuck clear tape on students' arms. The girls were told to put it on another classmate's

arm, and another, and watch how it lost the ability to form a bond.

"They'd tell you, 'If you have sex, this is who you are now: You're just like this piece of tape — all used up and washed up and nobody would want it,'" Harden said.

When she became pregnant at 21, she knew she wanted an abortion. Her mother was battling cancer and Harden was in her last semester of college without a job or a place to live after graduation.

She said she was made to feel fear and shame, just as she had during sex ed classes. When she went to the clinic, she said protesters told her she was "killing the most precious gift" from God and that she was "killing a Black baby, playing into what white supremacists want."

Harden's experience is not uncommon. The anti-abortion movement has often portrayed the abortion fight in racial terms.

Outside the only abortion clinic operating in Mississippi, protesters hand out brochures that refer to abortion as Black "genocide" and say the late Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood and a proponent of eugenics, "desired to eradicate minorities." The brochures compare Sanger to Adolf Hitler and proclaim: "Black lives did not matter to Margaret Sanger!"

The Mississippi clinic is not affiliated with Planned Parenthood, and Planned Parenthood itself denounces Sanger's belief in eugenics.

White people are not alone in making this argument. Alveda King, an evangelist who is a niece of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., is among the Black opponents of abortion who, for years, have been portraying abortion as a way to wipe out people of their race.

Tanya Britton, a former president of Pro-Life Mississippi, often drives three hours from her home in the northern part of the state to pray outside the abortion clinic in Jackson. Britton is Black, and she said it's a tragedy that the number of Black babies aborted since Roe would equal the population of several large cities. She also said people are too casual about terminating pregnancies.

"You just can't take the life of someone because this is not convenient — 'I want to finish my education,'" Britton said. "You wouldn't kill your 2-year-old because you were in graduate school."

But state Rep. Zakiya Summers of Jackson, who is Black and a mother, suggested there's nothing casual about what poor women are doing. Receiving little support in Mississippi — for example, the Legislature killed a proposal to expand postpartum Medicaid coverage in 2021 -- they are sometimes forced to make hard decisions.

"Women are just out here trying to survive, you know?" she said. "And Mississippi doesn't make it any easier."

Supreme Court shouldn't be covered in Ivy, 2 lawmakers say

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Enough already with the Supreme Court justices with Harvard and Yale degrees. That's the message from one of Congress' top Democrats to President Joe Biden, and a prominent Republican senator agrees.

Eight of the nine members of the current court went to law school at either Harvard or Yale. But it would be good if the person named to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer doesn't have an Ivy League degree, according to Rep. Jim Clyburn, a Democrat, and Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Republican. The bipartisan message from the two South Carolina lawmakers neatly aligns with the background of the South Carolina judge they've praised as a good candidate to fill the seat.

Biden, a Democrat, has pledged to make history by nominating the first Black woman to the Supreme Court. Clyburn, Congress' highest-ranking Black member, says Biden should be concerned about the court's lack of educational diversity, too.

"We run the risk of creating an elite society," said Clyburn, a graduate of South Carolina State University. "We've got to recognize that people come from all walks of life, and we ought not dismiss anyone because of that."

Graham, a member of the Judiciary Committee, which will hold hearings for the eventual nominee, said

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Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation" that he'd like to see the court "have a little more balance, some common sense on it. Everybody doesn't have to be from Harvard and Yale. It's OK to go to a public university and get your law degree."

Clyburn is a particularly prominent voice in the debate over whom the nominee should be. At Biden's lowest moment in the 2020 presidential campaign, it was Clyburn who suggested he pledge to name the first Black woman justice if given the opportunity as president. Biden's ultimate promise and Clyburn's endorsement helped Biden decisively win South Carolina's primary. The win revived his campaign and helped propel him to the White House.

Clyburn has made clear his own first choice for the open seat: J. Michelle Childs. The 55-year-old federal judge got her law degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law. She also has a master's degree from the university and another degree in law from Duke. Childs' non-Ivy League education and her upbringing in a single-parent household would make her a justice more representative of Americans, Clyburn said. Graham called Childs "a fair-minded, highly gifted jurist."

Other women frequently talked about as possible nominees are Ivy League graduates. Leondra Kruger, a justice on the California Supreme Court, graduated from Yale's law school. Ketanji Brown Jackson, a federal appeals court judge, went to Harvard.

Lawrence Baum, a professor emeritus at Ohio State who has studied the backgrounds of Supreme Court justices, said there's been a gradual shift to nominees with more elite law school backgrounds. The fact that a nominee has attended a school "regarded as the best, or at least among the best," might sway senators at the margins, he said. But going to a prestigious school can also connect a person with others who go on to politically important positions, he said, making them known in elite legal circles.

Judith Browne Dianis, the executive director of the Advancement Project, a racial justice organization, said the current nomination is "an opportunity for the legal profession to have more discussions about the term 'qualified.'" Dianis said the qualifications that have been used in the past are "based on a career pathway that has been reserved for white men traditionally and some white women." There are "very few people of color and Black people who have that pathway because there is a lot of discrimination that happens along the way," she said.

While the overwhelming dominance of Harvard and Yale law degrees on the court is something of a modern phenomenon, about a third of all the justices who have sat on the court attended an Ivy League law school.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, who went to Harvard as an undergraduate and Yale law school, said this week that the schools provide a good education and attract top talent, but he said that diversity of educational background can also benefit the judiciary. "I think, not that the top tier law schools are overrated, but they shouldn't be the sole source, of members of the bench," he said.

Education isn't the only way in which the backgrounds of the current justices are similar. All but one of the current justices is a former federal appeals court judge. And six served as a law clerk to a justice, a highly coveted position that often sets young lawyers on the path to other high-profile posts.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the court's first Latina justice, has said diversity can play an important function. "The advantage of diversity, whether it's gender or race or ethnicity or even professional work, whatever the diversity represents, it gives people who don't otherwise think there's opportunity, it inspires them to believe there might be," she said in 2019 at an event honoring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the court's first female member.

Currently, the court is split 4-4 between Harvard and Yale law graduates. Breyer attended Harvard, as did Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Elena Kagan and Neil Gorsuch. Sotomayor and Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Brett Kavanaugh attended Yale.

The court's newest member, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, is the outlier. Barrett, a graduate of Notre Dame's law school, mentioned the fact at her 2020 confirmation hearing. "I am confident that Notre Dame could hold its own," she said. "And maybe I could even teach them a thing or two about football."

Is NYC safe? Violence, perception and a complicated reality

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A teenage fast-food cashier shot to death in Manhattan. A woman pushed to her death in front of a subway train in Times Square. An 11-month-old girl wounded by a stray bullet in the Bronx. Two police officers killed in Harlem.

A string of headline-making violence in New York City has frayed nerves and become a rolling trauma for Mayor Eric Adams' nascent administration.

But while January brought tragedy to the city, statistics suggest it is still about as safe or safer than it was a decade ago, when former Mayor Michael Bloomberg touted it as the "safest big city in America."

New York City saw 28 killings in January, one fewer than the number it averaged for that month over the prior 10 years.

Last year, as violence spiked nationwide, the total was 488 — up from a record low of 292 in 2017 but a far cry from the early 1990s, when the city averaged over 2,000 killings a year. In 2011, the city had 515.

"In New York, it's sort of this dual situation," crime analyst Jeff Asher said. "It's important to know that this is not the worst it has ever been, while also understanding that it has gotten significantly worse in the last few years."

The number of people wounded by gunfire surged in New York City during the pandemic and remains stubbornly high.

But its homicide rate (5.5 killings per 100,000 people last year) has remained lower than that in the next six most populous cities, FBI and police crime data show, and lower also than many smaller cities like Jacksonville, Florida; Fort Worth, Texas; and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Adams, a former police captain who campaigned on a tough-on-crime message, says he is not only battling actual crime, but also a fear and perception of crime spiraling out of control.

Research shows that people tend to be bad at understanding crime trends and generally assume the worst, Asher said.

Adams says he wants to blanket the city with police officers to reassure New Yorkers and visitors alike. He also given outsize attention to his old department in his first month on the job, making it a point to visit roll call, standing with officers after recent violence and taking the lead on directing new crimefighting strategies.

"Being safe is also feeling safe. No one wants to hear stats when they don't feel safe," Adams told TV station NY1 last week.

In New York, 2022 began with a string of the type of arbitrary crimes that unsettle people most.

Kristal Bayron-Nieves, the 19-year-old cashier killed Jan. 9 in a late-night robbery at a Burger King in East Harlem, moved with her family to New York in search of a better life after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in 2017.

Michelle Go, the 40-year-old woman shoved to the tracks Jan. 15 at the Times Square subway station, worked for the global consulting firm Deloitte and volunteered with the Junior League to help at-risk and homeless families.

The 11-month-old was hospitalized in critical condition after she was hit in the cheek by a stray bullet while sitting in a parked car with her mother on Jan. 19, just days before her first birthday.

The slain officers, Jason Rivera, 22, and Wilbert Mora, 27, had joined the NYPD with hopes of bridging longstanding divides between police and immigrant communities, like the ones they grew up in.

President Joe Biden is scheduled to visit New York on Thursday to discuss ways to curb gun violence — though it is hardly the only place wrestling with the issue.

Los Angeles, the nation's second largest city, reported 397 killings in 2021, its most since 2007. Chicago had 797 last year, its most since 1996. Philadelphia set a record with 562 killings.

Fort Worth, Texas, a city one-tenth the size of New York, went from 69 killings in 2019 to 118 last year. Oklahoma City had 91 killings last year, its highest total since 2012. Jacksonville, Florida, reversed the trend, going from 140 killings in 2020 to 108 last year, but its homicide rate of 11.4 per 100,000 residents

was still double that of New York City.

Still, the recent violence has pushed the Big Apple to a crossroads, with elected officials rushing to prove they're tough on crime less than two years after leaders were going in the other direction after the Minneapolis police murder of George Floyd prompted a nationwide reckoning on criminal justice.

Elected as a progressive reformer, new Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg has found himself under fire after instructing staff not to prosecute some low-level offenses, like prostitution and some instances of resisting arrest. After a dustup with Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell, Bragg apologized and emphasized his office wasn't backing away from serious cases, like gun violence and assaults on police.

State bail reforms enacted two years ago to limit pretrial detention have become the bogeyman of police unions and politicians.

Adams took on bail reform in an anti-crime plan, proposing that judges be allowed to consider a defendant's criminal history and potential dangerousness when setting bail.

U.S. Rep. Tom Suozzi, who is challenging Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul for governor, has called on her to roll back bail reforms, as have six other Republicans in the state's congressional delegation. U.S. Rep. Lee Zeldin, a Republican who is also running for governor, even linked the bail law to the burning of an artificial Christmas tree outside Fox News headquarters in Manhattan.

The reforms included eliminating bail for nonviolent felonies, appearance tickets instead of arrests for low-level offenses.

Hochul says she is willing to have conversations about changing the law if data shows the reform is linked to rising crime.

State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, a Democrat who spearheaded the bail reform law, said he was frustrated politicians were "blaming bail reform when the sun comes up."

"I just think it's unfortunate to link the rise in gun violence solely on bail," Heastie said. "If that's the case, why are we having gun problems all over this country?"

Norway court rejects mass killer Breivik's parole request

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN (AP) — A Norwegian court ruled Tuesday that far-right extremist Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people in 2011, must remain in prison, saying there remains "an obvious risk" he could return to behavior that led up to the massacre.

Last month, Breivik faced a parole hearing before the three-judge Telemark District Court where he professed white supremacist views and flashed Nazi salutes on the hearing's opening day, while claiming to have renounced violence.

But the court said he remains a potential threat.

"Because his psychiatric condition is unchanged, there is an obvious risk that he will fall back on the behavior that led up to the terrorist acts on July 22, 2011," the court said in its ruling.

The ruling said he "used extreme violence as a tool to achieve his own political goals" and the court "has no doubt that (Breivik) still today has the ability to commit new serious crimes that may expose others to danger."

Breivik is serving Norway's maximum 21-year sentence for setting off a bomb in Oslo's government district and carrying out a shooting massacre at a summer camp for left-wing youth activists.

He was declared sane at his trial, although the prosecution argued that he was psychotic. He didn't appeal his sentence but unsuccessfully sued the government for human rights violations for denying him the right to communicate with sympathizers.

Breivik could be held longer than 21 years under a provision that allows authorities to keep criminals in prison for as long as they're considered a menace to society.

During last month's hearing, prosecutor Hulda Karlsdottir argued Breivik still is "a very dangerous man" and "has not shown any genuine remorse in court."

Norwegian news agency NTB quoted Karlsdottir welcoming the ruling as "well founded."

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A psychiatrist who has observed him since 2012, testified that Breivik can't be trusted while a prison official told hearing that "there is an imminent danger" that, if released, Breivik would again commit serious crimes.

Breivik's lawyer Øystein Storrvik said his client should be released to prove that he is reformed and no longer a threat to society, and that is not possible to prove while he is in total isolation.

Storrvik called it "a paradox that a person is treated so badly in prison that he never gets better. He never gets out."

Tuesday's ruling can be appealed. Norwegian broadcaster TV2 cited Storrvik saying Breivik would appeal the ruling. The lawyer was not immediately available for comment.

Danes halt virus restrictions; rest of Europe a patchwork

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Denmark took the European Union lead Tuesday by scrapping most pandemic restrictions as the Scandinavian country no longer considers COVID-19 "a socially critical disease." European nations elsewhere had a patchwork of different approaches, with some relaxing virus measures while others tightened them.

Officials say the reason for the Danish move is that while the omicron variant is surging in the country, it's not placing a heavy burden on the health system and Denmark has a high vaccination rate.

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told Danish radio it's too early to know if virus restrictions ever have to make a comeback.

"I dare not say that it is a final goodbye to restrictions," she said. "We do not know what will happen in the fall, whether there will be a new variant."

Denmark, a nation of 5.8 million, has in recent weeks seen more than 50,000 new cases a day but the number of COVID-19 patients in hospital intensive care units has dropped.

Some other nations were moving in the same direction as Denmark.

Last week, England lifted almost all domestic restrictions: masks are not mandatory anywhere, vaccine passes are not required for any venue and people are no longer advised to work from home. The only legal requirement is to self-isolate after a positive COVID test.

Ireland has dropped most of its restrictions and the Netherlands also has been easing its lockdown, although Dutch bars and restaurants still have to close at 10 p.m.

France — which is still reporting the continent's highest daily positive cases — plans on lifting some restrictions Wednesday, notably outdoor mask rules in Paris, a part-time work-from-home order and limits on crowd sizes. But face masks are still required indoor in many public places, nightclubs are closed and no eating or drinking is allowed in cinemas, stadiums or public transport.

Finland will end its COVID-19 restrictions this month. On Monday, border controls between Finland and the other Schengen countries that form Europe's ID check-free travel area, ended. Travelers coming from outside the EU will continue to face border controls at least until Feb. 14.

In Serbia, there are hardly any controls, so the few rules in place — mandatory face masks in closed spaces, passes for bars, restaurants and nightclubs in the evening and only 500 people at events — don't mean much. Nightclubs have been open all along.

Italy, however, has been gradually tightening its health pass requirements during the omicron surge. As of Monday, Italy requires at least a negative test within the previous 48 hours to enter banks and post offices, and anyone over 50 who has not been vaccinated risks a one-time 100-euro (\$112) fine.

Austria has imposed a vaccine mandate that takes effect this month and Greece has ordered fines for people 60 and over who refuse to get vaccinated. Germany politicians, meanwhile, have opened a debate on whether to impose a national vaccination mandate.

The head of the Danish Health Authority, Søren Brostrøm, told Danish broadcaster TV2 that his attention was on the number of people in ICUs rather than on the number of infections. He said that number had "fallen and fallen and is incredibly low."

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The most visible restriction disappearing is the wearing of face masks, which are no longer mandatory on public transportation and shops. Authorities only recommend mask use in hospitals, health care facilities and nursing homes.

Another restriction that no longer is required is the digital pass to enter nightclubs or eat indoors in restaurants.

Stefano Tandmark, a Copenhagen waiter, said bars and eateries can stay open now till 5 a.m. "We can dance and yeah, just be yourself again and don't worry about if corona is gone or where it is at the moment."

Still, many Danes took a cautious approach Monday, wearing face masks on public transport and in shops. Some noted that the omicron variant had led to staff shortages.

"There's a lot of our employees who are sick without the restrictions being lifted, and it's going to be even worse now," said Ulla Vestergaard, 59-year-old social care worker.

Health authorities urged Danes to get tested regularly so the country can react quickly if necessary but also praised citizens for embracing vaccines.

"A lot of people (in Denmark) have received two vaccination shots and a lot have received three doses as well, and many of those doses were provided in the fourth quarter of 2021," Jens Lundgren, a professor of viral diseases at Copenhagen University Hospital told The Associated Press.

More than 60% of Denmark's population over age 12 have gotten a third vaccine shot.

For Super Bowl entertaining, make room for melty hot dips

By KATIE WORKMAN Associated Press

In the coldest months, we all look for bright spots, and football fans this winter have had plenty.

The Super Bowl (on Feb. 13) is always a dead-of-winter highlight. And while gatherings might be smaller than in pre-pandemic years, we can still pull out the stops with snacks and food.

My Super Bowl menu changes from year to year, but there are recurring themes: sliders, chilis, nachos, pulled pork, pizza and always, always a dip. Most of the time, that's a hot dip plunked down on the table to a very warm reception. I've yet to find a person who doesn't get a little weak in the knees at the sight of a creamy, often cheesy dip bubbling away in its baking dish.

First, let's talk about what goes with those dips. I offer an assortment of dippers, from the healthy (whole-grain chips and crackers, loads of cut-up veggies like carrots, celery, cucumber, radishes, sliced bell peppers and so on) to the indulgent (potato and tortilla chips, buttery crackers, breadsticks, baguette slices, strips of focaccia, pita chips, pretzels). Each person can decide which direction appeals the most, and switch back and forth between a kettle-fried potato chip and a spear of endive lettuce as the mood strikes.

Hot dips often involve some sort of dairy, like sour cream or cream cheese, and often other melting cheese as well. They can be vegetarian, or feature a meat or seafood protein. Many vegan hot dip recipes include non-dairy ingredients like nut milks, soft tofu, vegan cheeses and nutritional yeast.

Most hot dips are baked in the oven or warmed through on the stove, and the recipe may call for occasional stirring. You can also make and serve hot dips in a slow cooker or instant pot.

I often divide hot dip mixtures into two smaller baking pans or casseroles and heat them one at a time, so by the time the first half is served and eaten, the other is just ready in the oven. If you use two smaller pans instead of one large one, the cooking time might be shortened a bit.

Cooking times and temperatures for hot dips are flexible on the whole – it's usually a matter of warming the dip so any cheese is melted and it's hot all the way through. If your oven is set for a slightly higher or lower temperature than the recipe calls for, just add or subtract some cooking time. Look for the dip to be hot in the center, slightly browned on top and bubbling around the edges.

Popular hot dip recipes include Buffalo chicken dip, cheesy artichoke dip, queso, and spinach and goat cheese dip. As you begin your hot dip cooking adventures, you'll see that many combinations of creaminess, vegetables and proteins can be worked into a bubbling pan of dip deliciousness.

Feel free to make substitutions. If a recipe calls for scallions but you're not keen on a supermarket run, use finely chopped onions or shallots instead, no problem. Use Greek yogurt instead of sour cream, and if

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you are out of cheddar, try Havarti, Monterey Jack or maybe even Gouda. Use a grated cheese that gets nice and melty.

Use shredded chicken from a rotisserie chicken in a chicken dip. Swap crab for shrimp. Try thyme instead of oregano. Use hot sauce instead of cayenne pepper.

Here's a recipe for one of my favorites:

HOT CRAB AND CORN DIP

(<https://themom100.com/recipe/hot-crab-and-corn-dip/>)

This dip combines sweet, luxurious crabmeat with corn. I first made this at the end of a summer, with fresh corn, but frozen or canned and drained corn works just fine.

You can use pretty much any grade of crabmeat here, depending on how much you want to spend and how indulgent you want the dip to feel. I suggest skipping the Colossal or Jumbo Lump Crabmeat, which are expensive and should be saved for dishes in which they star, rather than being blended with other ingredients. Go for any of the middle-grade ones, like Special, Lump or Backfin.

Ingredients:

1 8-ounce package cream cheese, at room temperature

1 cup sour cream

1 teaspoon minced garlic

2 scallions trimmed and minced (white and green parts)

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

16 ounces fresh crab meat, picked over for shells, excess liquid pressed out

1 cup corn kernels (fresh, frozen and defrosted, or canned and drained)

Preheat the oven to 475°F. Place the cream cheese, sour cream, garlic, scallions, cayenne, parsley, Worcestershire, lemon juice, and salt and pepper in a bowl and use a fork, spoon or electric mixer to blend well. Fold in the crab and corn until well combined.

Turn the mixture into a shallow 1- or 2-quart baking dish, spread it evenly, and bake for about 12 minutes, until hot and bubbly. Give it a final minute under the broiler to really brown the top if desired.

Serve hot with crackers, chips, fresh vegetables or the accompaniments of your choice!

Other hot dips to try:

Instant Pot Buffalo Chicken Dip (<https://themom100.com/recipe/instant-pot-buffalo-chicken-dip/>)

Spicy Cheesy Artichoke Hot Artichoke Dip (<https://themom100.com/recipe/spicy-cheesy-artichoke-dip/>)

Hot Creamy Mushroom and Spinach Dip (<https://themom100.com/recipe/hot-creamy-mushroom-spinach-dip/>)

Queso Fundido with Chorizo (<https://themom100.com/recipe/queso-fundido-with-chorizo/>)

Creamy Spinach and Goat Cheese Dip (<https://themom100.com/recipe/hot-creamy-spinach-and-goat-cheese-dip/>)

Easy Slow Cooker Hot Pimento Cheese Dip (<https://themom100.com/recipe/easy-slow-cooker-hot-pimento-cheese-dip/>)

Hot Cheesy Clam Dip (<https://themom100.com/recipe/hot-cheesy-clam-dip/>)

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 2, the 33rd day of 2022. There are 332 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

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On Feb. 2, 1990, in a dramatic concession to South Africa's Black majority, President F.W. de Klerk lifted a ban on the African National Congress and promised to free Nelson Mandela.

On this date:

In 1536, present-day Buenos Aires, Argentina, was founded by Pedro de Mendoza of Spain.

In 1653, New Amsterdam — now New York City — was incorporated.

In 1887, Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, held its first Groundhog Day festival.

In 1913, New York City's rebuilt Grand Central Terminal officially opened to the public at one minute past midnight.

In 1914, Charles Chaplin made his movie debut as the comedy short "Making a Living" was released by Keystone Film Co.

In 1925, the legendary Alaska Serum Run ended as the last of a series of dog mushers brought a life-saving treatment to Nome, the scene of a diphtheria epidemic, six days after the drug left Nenana.

In 1943, the remainder of Nazi forces from the Battle of Stalingrad surrendered in a major victory for the Soviets in World War II.

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman sent a 10-point civil rights program to Congress, where the proposals ran into fierce opposition from Southern lawmakers.

In 1980, NBC News reported the FBI had conducted a sting operation targeting members of Congress using phony Arab businessmen in what became known as "Abscam," a codename protested by Arab-Americans.

In 2006, House Republicans elected John Boehner (BAY'-nur) of Ohio as their new majority leader to replace the indicted Tom DeLay.

In 2016, health officials reported that a person in Texas had become infected with the Zika virus through sex in the first case of the illness being transmitted within the United States.

In 2020, the Philippines reported that a 44-year-old Chinese man from Wuhan had died in a Manila hospital from the new coronavirus; it was the first death from the virus to be recorded outside of China. Authorities in parts of China extended the Lunar New Year holiday break well into February to try to keep people at home.

Ten years ago: Egyptian security forces clashed with stone-throwing protesters enraged by the failure of police to prevent a soccer riot the night before that killed 74 people. Donald Trump announced his endorsement of Republican Mitt Romney for president, saying the former Massachusetts governor was "not going to allow bad things to continue to happen to this country we all love."

Five years ago: Using a backhoe to smash through a barricade of water-filled footlockers, police stormed Delaware's largest prison, ending a nearly 20-hour hostage standoff with inmates; one hostage, a guard, was killed.

One year ago: Ahead of the second Senate impeachment trial of outgoing President Donald Trump, House Democrats filed a legal brief saying Trump had endangered the lives of all members of Congress when he aimed a mob of supporters "like a loaded cannon" at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6; Trump denied the allegations through his lawyers and called the trial unconstitutional. U.S. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, who confronted the mob that stormed the building on Jan. 6 and died a day later, lay in honor inside the Capitol. The Senate approved Pete Buttigieg (BOO'-tuh-juhj) as transportation secretary, making him the first openly gay person confirmed to a Cabinet post. A Moscow court ordered Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to serve more than 2 1/2 years in prison on charges that he violated the terms of his probation while he was recuperating in Germany from nerve-agent poisoning.

Today's Birthdays: Comedian Tom Smothers is 85. Rock singer-guitarist Graham Nash is 80. Television executive Barry Diller is 80. Actor Bo Hopkins is 78. Country singer Howard Bellamy (The Bellamy Brothers) is 76. TV chef Ina (EE'-nuh) Garten is 74. Actor Jack McGee is 73. Actor Brent Spiner (SPY'-nur) is 73. Rock musician Ross Valory (Journey) is 73. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, is 70. The former president of South Korea, Park Geun-hye (goon-hay), is 70. Model Christie Brinkley is 68. Actor Michael Talbott is 67. Actor Kim Zimmer is 67. Actor Michael T. Weiss is 60. Actor-comedian Adam Ferrara is 56. Rock musician

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Robert DeLeo (Army of Anyone; Stone Temple Pilots) is 56. Actor Jennifer Westfeldt is 52. Rapper T-Mo is 50. Actor Marissa Jaret Winokur is 49. Actor Lori Beth Denberg is 46. Singer Shakira is 45. Actor Rich Sommer is 44. Country singer Blaine Larsen is 36. Actor Zosia (ZAH'-shuh) Mamet is 34.