

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

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).

Sunday, Feb. 6

Show Choir Preview, 3 p.m., GHS Gym

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

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.

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

Chicken Soup
for the Soul.

In family
relationships,
love is really
spelled
T.I.M.E.

-Dieter F. Uchtdorf



Today on GDILIVE.COM

We will be livestreaming all of the games today in Groton with the seventh grade game starting at 1 p.m. followed by 8th grade, JV and varsity. Groton Area is hosting Clark/Willow Lake.

Meanwhile the girls are playing Tea Area at 12:30 p.m. The link to the Madison Livestream is posted at GDILIVE.COM.

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 4, 2022; 10:43 AM

**Decrease of 2 since
 Wednesday's report**

J	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	1	1	S	T
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0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4

Change **-1 0 0 0 -1 +1 0 +1 0 0 -1 0 -1 0 0 -2**

**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.**

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Wrestlers split duals at Presho

Groton Area split a pair of duals Friday at the Lyman Quad held in Presho. No results were available with Bennett County. Lyman won the first dual and the Tigers defeated a coop of five schools. The wrestling team will be at Stanley County today for a tournament.

Lyman 45, Groton Area 25

- 285: Lane Krueger (Groton Area) over Louie Thiry (Lyman) (Fall 3:03)
- 106: Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) over Lane Olivier (Lyman) (MD 9-1)
- 132: Pierce Ketterling (Groton Area) over Kellen Griffith (Lyman) (Dec 6-4)
- 138: Shilo Mowry (Lyman) over Brevin Flihs (Groton Area) (MD 14-4)
- 145: Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) over Tristan Penny (Lyman) (Fall 3:08)
- 152: Tance Wagner (Lyman) over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) (TF 15-0 5:38)
- 160: Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) wins by forfeit

Groton Area 30, Marion/Freeman/Freeman Academy/Canistota/Menno 24

- 285: Lane Krueger (Groton Area) wins by forfeit
- 106: Brody Gossen (Marion/Freeman/Freeman Academy/Canistota/Menno) over Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) (Fall 5:10)
- 120: Josh Popkes (Marion/Freeman/Freeman Academy/Canistota/Menno) over Isiah Scepaniak (Groton Area) (Fall 1:04)
- 132: Pierce Ketterling (Groton Area) over Finley McConniel (Marion/Freeman/Freeman Academy/Canistota/Menno) (Fall 1:08)
- 138: Brevin Flihs (Groton Area) over Riley Tschetter (Marion/Freeman/Freeman Academy/Canistota/Menno) (Fall 5:59)
- 145: Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) over Zac Saylor (Marion/Freeman/Freeman Academy/Canistota/Menno) (Fall 2:47)
- 152: Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) over Owen Eitenmiller (Marion/Freeman/Freeman Academy/Canistota/Menno) (Dec 8-3)
- 160: Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) over Tim Epp (Marion/Freeman/Freeman Academy/Canistota/Menno) (Dec 5-1)

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Northern State Falls at No. 18 St. Cloud State

St. Cloud, Minn. – The Northern State women’s basketball team dropped a 67-45 game at No. 18 St. Cloud State on Friday night. The Wolves offense struggled to gain momentum throughout the night, scoring more than ten points in only one quarter.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 45, SCSU 67

Records: NSU 10-11 (7-9 NSIC), SCSU 17-3 (15-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 852

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Two early scoring runs for St. Cloud State gave the Huskies control of the game, jumping out to a 16-8 lead at the end of the first quarter; Laurie Rogers scored all eight points for the Wolves in the period
- Northern had a quick response to start the second quarter, shooting 4-6 from the field in the first five minutes and out-scoring the Huskies 8-7 in the period entering the media timeout
- SCSU came out the media timeout making four of the next five shots to end the half on a 9-0 run, taking a 32-16 lead into halftime
- Northern State started the third quarter on a 10-3 run, and a layup by Haley Johnson cut the St. Cloud State lead back to nine points
- After the Huskies pushed the lead back to double digits midway through the third quarter; Carly Mekash, Kailee Oliverson, and Rianna Fillipi each made layups to spark another mini 6-0 scoring run to cut into the lead again and bring it down to seven points
- A 3-pointer for Tori Wortz at the buzzer extended the St. Cloud State lead back to ten points at the end of the third quarter, however Northern State shot 57.1 percent from the field and out-scored the Huskies 19-13 in the third period
- After a strong third quarter, the NSU offense went cold at the start of the fourth quarter, shooting 0-7 from the field while SCSU went on an 11-2 run to start the period
- Rogers recorded her fifth double-double of the season, scoring 12 points and grabbing ten rebounds
- The Wolves shot 19-51 (37.3%) from the field, 0-11 (0.0%) from 3-point range, and 7-12 (58.3%) from the free throw line
- For only the third time this season, Northern State was out-rebounded by their opponent as the Huskies held a 40-35 advantage on the boards, including a 16-12 advantage in offensive rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Laurie Rogers: 12 points, 10 rebounds, 2 blocks

Kailee Oliverson: 12 points, 7 rebounds

Rianna Fillipi: 8 points, 2 rebounds, 3 steals

UP NEXT

The Northern State women’s basketball team will end a 4-game road trip today as they visit Minnesota Duluth. The Wolves and the Bulldogs will tip-off at 3:30 p.m. this afternoon.

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Reede's Career High Lifts Northern State over St. Cloud State

St. Cloud, Minn. – The Northern State University men's basketball held on for a 5-point victory on the road at St. Cloud State on Friday evening. The Wolves shot 55.9% from the floor in the first half and knocked down 11 from beyond the arc in the win.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 85, SCSU 80

Records: NSU 15-10 (9-8 NSIC), SCSU 9-13 (5-9 NSIC)

Attendance: 846

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern State tallied 48 points in the first and 37 in the second in the win, despite being out-scored by St. Cloud in the second
- The Wolves out-rebounded the Huskies, 43-31 in the contest, and added 17 assists, three steals, and two blocks
- NSU shot 46.0% from the floor, 37.9% from the 3-point line, and 94.1% from the foul line, out-shooting SCSU in each category
- Northern recorded 28 points in the paint, 12 points off the bench, nine second chance points, nine fast break points, and eight points off turnovers
- Three Wolves scored in double figures, led by Augustin Reede with a career high 27 points; hitting 6-of-10 from beyond the arc
- Jordan Belka added a career high of his own, dishing out seven assists to go along with a team leading 11 rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Augustin Reede: 27 points, 60.0 3FG%, 2 rebounds
- Jacksen Moni: 24 points, 7 rebounds, 7-of-7 from the foul line
- Sam Masten: 10 points, 8 rebounds, 6 assists
- Jordan Belka: 8 points, 11 rebounds, 7 assists

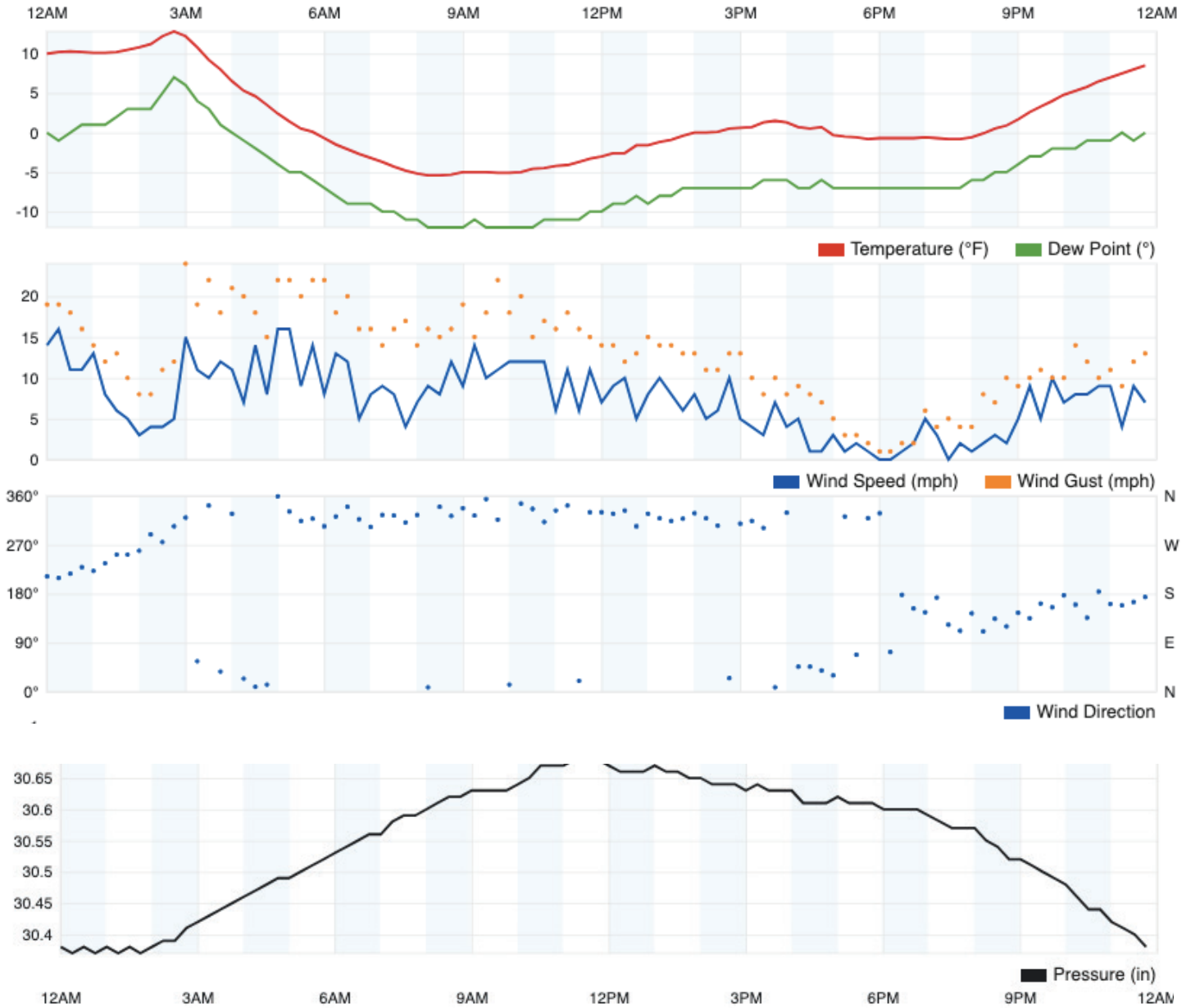
UP NEXT

Northern State takes on NSIC North Division Champions and seventh ranked Minnesota Duluth this evening. Tip-off is set for 5:30 p.m. versus the Bulldogs.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow	Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 41 °F	Low: 14 °F	High: 23 °F ↓	Low: 9 °F	High: 40 °F

Strong Gusts Could Result In Areas of Blowing Snow Mainly This Morning

Strongest Gusts in & around Oval

Terrain Map

Windy

Sisseton • Wheaton •

Downslope Winds/Blowing Snow This AM And Very High Fire Danger This PM

Wind Gusts 35 to 45 mph, Lowest Relative Humidity Values 35 to 45 %

Orange Colored Counties In Very High Fire Danger Today

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Feb 05, 2022 5:34 AM CST

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 2/5/2022 6:16 AM

Strong downslope winds are forecast through late this morning in the lee of the Prairie Coteau. These wind gusts may support the lofting and blowing of snow in some areas along and east of the eastern slopes of the Prairie Coteau. Then, later this afternoon, breezy to windy west to northwest winds are forecast to develop. Combined with the relatively warm and dry air and bare ground in place across central and north central South Dakota, the Grassland Fire Danger Index will top out in the Very High Category.

Warm & Breezy Saturday!

Partly Cloudy
Highs 30s to low 50s

Saturday is National Weatherperson's Day



High temperatures will likely be above freezing Saturday, even over northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota. The warmest air will again reside across south central South Dakota. The strongest winds, gusting to near 45 mph, will be possible over north central South Dakota around midday Saturday and across and just east of the Sisseton Hills during the morning to early afternoon hours. You can learn more about National Weatherperson's Day (birthday of John Jeffries) here, <https://www.weather.gov/cae/NationalWeatherpersonsDay>

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Today in Weather History

February 5, 1978: Another winter blizzard plagued the northern half of the state, beginning on February 5th and continuing until the 9th. The unusual aspect of this blizzard was that the wind came from the southeast between 25 to 45 mph. Only one to three inches of new snow accumulation fell during the five days but was piled high on the existing large snowdrifts. Most of the northern half of the state was paralyzed due to blocked roads. Eighteen counties across the north part of South Dakota were declared a disaster by the governor. There were also numerous livestock losses.

1745: Today is National Weatherman/Meteorologist day, commemorating the birth of John Jeffries in 1745. Jeffries, one of America's first weather observers, began taking daily weather observations in Boston, MA, in 1774, and he made the first balloon observation in 1784. You can read a narrative from the [Library of Congress](#) of the two aerial voyages of Doctor Jeffries with Mons. Blanchard: with meteorological observations and remarks. The first voyage was on November 13th, 1784, from London into Kent. The second was on January 7th, 1785, from England into France.

1887: San Francisco experienced its most significant snowstorm of record. Nearly four inches was reported in downtown San Francisco, and the western hills of the city received seven inches. Excited crowds went on a snowball throwing rampage.

1920: An intense nor'easter dumped 17.5 inches of snow over three days in New York City Central Park, New York. Boston, MA, saw 12.2 inches of snow on this day.

1976: Record-breaking snowfall of just two inches fell in Sacramento, California. February 5, 1976, is the only time since November 1941 when snow was reported in Sacramento.

1986: A supercell thunderstorm tracked through the Tomball area northwest of Houston, TX, and produced four tornadoes along with damaging microburst winds and up to tennis ball size hail. An F3 tornado killed two people, injured 80 others, and devastated a mobile home park and the David Wayne Hooks Airport. In addition, 300 aircraft were either damaged or destroyed. Much of the more substantial hail was propelled by 60 to 80 mph winds, resulting in widespread moderate damage. The total damage from this storm was 80 million dollars.

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Southern Plains Region caused flooding in parts of south central Texas. Del Rio TX was soaked with two inches of rain in two hours prior to sunrise. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Cold and snow invaded the southern U.S. Roswell NM was buried under 16.5 inches of snow in 24 hours, an all-time record for that location. Parts of the Central Gulf Coast Region reported their first significant snow in fifteen years. Strong winds in Minnesota and the Dakotas produced wind chill readings as cold as 75 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Severe cold gripped much of the nation. Thirty cities reported new record low temperatures for the date. Morning lows of 9 above at Astoria OR and 27 below zero at Ely NV were records for February. In Alaska, Point Barrow warmed to 24 degrees above zero, and Nome reached 30 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2008: The Super Tuesday 2008 Tornado Outbreak has been one of the deadliest tornado outbreaks in the US, with 59 fatalities reported. So far, it ranks in the top 15 deadly tornado outbreaks (and the highest number of tornado deaths since 1985). According to the [SPC Storm Reports](#), there were over 300 reports of tornadoes, large hail (up to 4.25 inches in diameter in Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri), and damaging wind gusts from Texas to Ohio and West Virginia. The outbreak produced at least 64 tornadoes, some producing EF-3 and EF-4 damage. [Click HERE for Satellite information.](#)

2010 - A mega-snowstorm, which President Obama dubbed Snowmageddon, buried the Washington D.C. area with more than 30 inches of snow in some areas. At American University in Washington the official snowfall was 27.5 inches. Snowfall totals in the Washington DC area range from a low of 17.9 inches at Ronald Reagan National Airport to 40 inches in the northern suburb of Colesville, MD. Dulles Airport reported 32.4 inches, which established a new two-day snowfall record. The Baltimore-Washington International Airport, MD, measured 24.8 inches from the storm breaking the record for the largest two day snowfall there. It is one of the worst blizzards in the city's history.

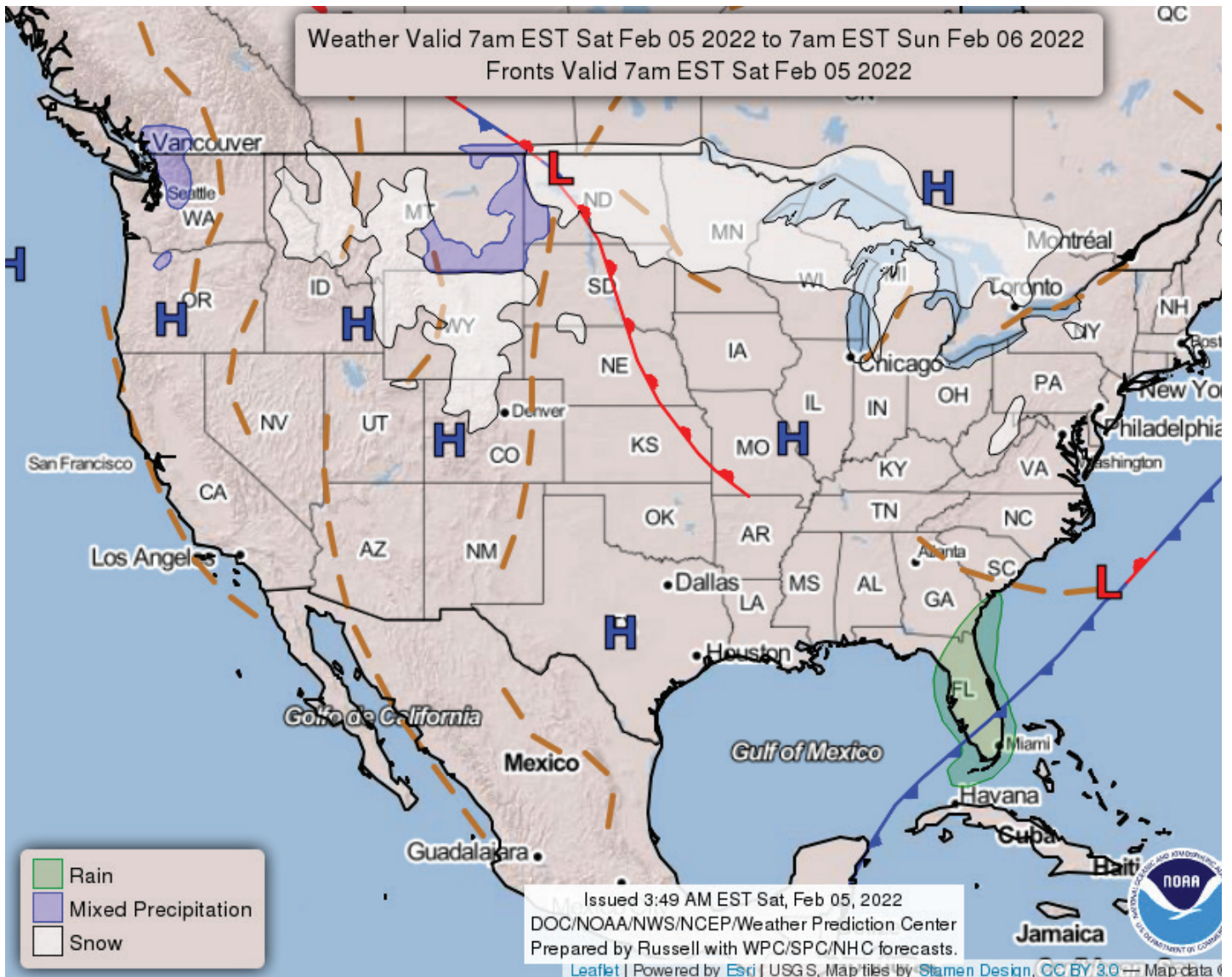
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 13 °F at 2:49 AM
Low Temp: -6 °F at 8:18 AM
Wind: 24 mph at 2:55 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 57 in 1991
Record Low: -36 in 1907
Average High: 26°F
Average Low: 3°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.10
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.65
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 5:46:34 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:44:53 AM



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LIVING THE WORD

"Papa, what do you want more than anything else in the entire world?" asked my grandson, Keller.

We had been watching a commercial on his hand-held tablet during a football game, and he hadn't blinked once during the entire advertisement. My first thought was that he wanted to know what was important to me. But, suddenly, the words of Jesus came to my mind: "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

"Well, Keller," I said, "most of all I want to be like Jesus, and then I'd also like to be the best Papa I can be. That's very important to me, and other than being like Jesus, I want to be a good example for you."

Not long ago, I read a story of a man in a foreign country who wanted to "Be like Jesus." So, he decided to memorize the New Testament and made it through the Beatitudes. One day, he ran into the missionary who led him to the Lord and baptized him. Immediately, he told him about his goal and began reciting the Beatitudes. After he heard him recite them, he said, "Good. Now put them into practice."

A few weeks later, he met the missionary again and said, "You know I tried doing what you said, and it didn't work out. I got confused. So, I started over with just the first one, and it worked better. Now I'm working on the second. I want to live what I know."

Knowing the Bible is one thing. Living it is very different. The Psalmist said, "Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying Your decrees."

Prayer: Lord, help us to keep it simple but steady as we grow into the likeness of Your Son, our Savior. Teach us to walk one step at a time in strength. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying Your decrees. Psalm 119:5

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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)
04/09/2022 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)
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
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

Nearly a century old, woman knocks skiing off bucket list

By TANYA MANUS Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Edyth Warne, 99, is proof that dreams can be achieved at any age. She skied for the first time with the help of Black Hills Ski for Light.

Skiing was “on her bucket list,” her grandson Austin Pearce said. Warne, of Rapid City, will celebrate her 100th birthday in March.

“She’s always been limited by physical disabilities. Ever since I’ve known my grandma, she’s been held to a walker or wheelchair,” he said. “She always wanted to ski.”

Every January, Black Hills Ski for Light holds a winter event that gives people with visual or mobility impairments opportunities to enjoy winter sports. This week, 110 participants from around the United States and 60 volunteers were in the Black Hills for outdoor adventures, the Rapid City Journal reported.

With the help of volunteers and adaptive equipment, Warne enjoyed three runs at Terry Peak. Including Warne, five generations of her family were there, and some of her great-grandchildren skied along with her, according to Tim Brumbaugh, a Ski For Light board member and volunteer.

Warne has a fused hip and because of macular degeneration she is blind, Brumbaugh said. She was able to ski by using a sit ski that was guided by Brumbaugh. Before her skiing day, Brumbaugh said he met with her to talk about Ski for Light and the opportunity for her to ski.

“She was super excited to go up and go skiing,” Brumbaugh said. “Everybody had a great time. She had a pretty big entourage.”

Volunteers ensured Warne was dressed for the sunny but brisk winter weather and strapped her into the sit ski. Warne rode the ski lift and skied three runs. Both she and Brumbaugh wore helmets equipped with microphones so they could talk to each other during each ski run.

Afterward, Brumbaugh said Warne was all smiles. “She said, ‘Oh, this is so much fun. I got another one off my bucket list,’” he said.

Black Hills Ski for Light is open to adults 18 and older. Although a lack of snow hindered this year’s cross-country skiing and snowmobiling activities, Ski for Light participants did a lot of hiking and snowshoeing, Ski for Light acting president Ray Bubb said.

Participants typically range in age from 18 to mid-60s. Warne is the oldest participant in Black Hills Ski for Light in several years, Bubb said.

“We’ve been having a great time,” he said.

Black Hills Ski for Light is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization that is based in Rapid City. The organization is perpetually in need of more volunteers 18 and older to assist with the winter Ski for Light and with the Ski Swap fundraiser each fall.

Volunteers don’t need to be skiers because the adaptive equipment accommodates guides and participants. Ski for Light needs volunteers indoors to help participants at the ski lodge, as well as outdoors with activities.

Friday’s Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 62, Iroquois/Doland 28

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 60, Colome 29

Arlington 47, Deubrook 45

Bridgewater-Emery 49, Gayville-Volin 26

Britton-Hecla 43, Milbank 37

Colman-Egan 44, Estelline/Hendricks 34

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DeSmet 50, Elkton-Lake Benton 30
Edgemont 61, Newell 45
Ethan 65, Kimball/White Lake 33
Flandreau 67, Sioux Valley 54
Great Plains Lutheran 49, Wilmot 39
Harrisburg 40, Aberdeen Central 38, OT
Hitchcock-Tulare 56, Sunshine Bible Academy 26
Little Wound 58, McLaughlin 15
Lower Brule 51, Flandreau Indian 22
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 51, Chamberlain 35
Parkston 56, Gregory 44
Rapid City Central 47, Brandon Valley 46
Rapid City Christian 47, Chadron, Neb. 45
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 50, Rapid City Stevens 36
Sioux Falls Washington 50, Watertown 19
St. Thomas More 40, Winner 28
Sully Buttes 61, Potter County 34
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 70, Marty Indian 62, 2OT
Viborg-Hurley 50, Freeman Academy/Marion 13
Wall 60, Kadoka Area 50
Waubay/Summit 60, Northwestern 45
West Central 66, Madison 19

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 56, Harrisburg 51
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 61, Colome 48
Avon 49, Bon Homme 33
Bison 44, McIntosh 38
Bridgewater-Emery 57, Gayville-Volin 42
Deubrook 82, Arlington 58
Dupree 79, Tiospaye Topa 61
Edgemont 33, Newell 32
Ethan 64, Kimball/White Lake 45
Faith 57, Harding County 47
Freeman Academy/Marion 57, Viborg-Hurley 42
Garretson 55, McCook Central/Montrose 38
Lakota Tech 84, Hill City 68
Langford 52, Redfield 35
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 63, Chamberlain 38
Parkston 56, Gregory 54
Pierre 61, Yankton 55
Potter County 72, Sully Buttes 57
Rapid City Central 47, Brandon Valley 46
Rapid City Christian 54, Chadron, Neb. 50
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 56, Rapid City Stevens 53
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 55, Mitchell 54
Sioux Falls Washington 68, Watertown 64
Timber Lake 49, Lemmon 45
Tiospa Zina Tribal 55, Deuel 51
Wakpala 64, Takini 63

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Wall 67, Kadoka Area 55
Waubay/Summit 67, Northwestern 50
Webster 64, Sisseton 53
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland vs. Sioux Falls Lutheran, ppd.

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 Friday:
Mega Millions
07-16-34-44-61, Mega Ball: 24, Megaplier: 4
(seven, sixteen, thirty-four, forty-four, sixty-one; Mega Ball: twenty-four; Megaplier: four)
Estimated jackpot: \$22 million
Powerball
Estimated jackpot: \$137 million

Lawmakers push for funding for missing Indigenous role

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press
PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A bipartisan group of South Dakota House lawmakers on Friday recommended a pair of proposals to fund a position in the attorney general's office to coordinate law enforcement investigations into the disappearance and murder of Indigenous people.

The House Judiciary committee's recommendation came after the Legislature last year created the position and pushed Attorney General Jason Ravensborg to work with the tribes to pursue funding to staff it, but he has not obtained the funds. The Republican has called the position an "unfunded mandate," but said he is pushing for the funds to fill it this year.

But Democratic Rep. Peri Pourier, who proposed the position last year and the money to staff it this year, called the delay "bewildering" and another example of miscommunication between law enforcement at the tribal, state and federal levels.

"All this misinformation, misunderstandings, miscommunication, missteps — this is what this office is intended to resolve," Pourier said. "This office is meant to try to bridge the gaps that are costing lives — children's lives."

Pourier sponsored a bill to fund the position for five years, saying she wanted to see it become a permanent fixture in state law enforcement. Republican Rep. Tamara St. John brought a bill to fund it for one year. And the committee recommended both proposals, sending them to lawmakers who are ironing out the state's annual budget.

Gov. Kristi Noem's administration said she would rather the proposals be included in the regular budgeting process, but that she too supported the ongoing funding of the office. Pourier credited the governor for prioritizing the issue, but said the separate proposal would ensure it stayed a highlighted priority during budget negotiations.

Ravensborg said Thursday that he is looking for funding, including from the tribes, as he beefs up the state's resources to tackle the problem. He plans to have the person he hires work with his office's human trafficking coordinator, as well as launch a more robust website listing missing people.

"Anything we can do in that area, I think helps relations between tribes and the state and also helps to find victims. Native, non-Native — I'm looking to find everybody who's missing," he said.

However, Pourier said Indigenous people are disproportionately at risk, presenting statistics from last year that showed over 70% of the state's missing people were Native American. But the issue is not confined to Indian reservations, she said, pointing out that some of the highest numbers of missing Indigenous

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people were in the state's largest cities, Sioux Falls and Rapid City.

"We have a vulnerable population who is across jurisdictional lines," Pourier said.

St. John, who is also an archivist with the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, said the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous people was rooted in historical injustices and she hoped whoever fills the position would be able to uncover the historical issues and crimes such as drug trafficking at play.

"I'm hoping that with this office, that person will be able to collect that data, those stories that we can start to understand it," she said.

State Bar pushes to make remote witness order permanent

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The State Bar of South Dakota is asking the Legislature to make permanent an emergency order that allows certain legal documents to be witnessed remotely.

The Supreme Court made the emergency order nearly two years ago in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Andrew Fergle, executive director of the State Bar, says COVID-19 has closed doors to lawyers needing to meet with clients in facilities and has made it difficult to get in-person witnesses for clients' signatures.

Fergle told the Senate Judiciary Committee recently that the problem goes beyond the pandemic for older attorneys who routinely face the same difficulties, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

"Restrictions to clients in nursing homes, assisted living, or other care facilities has been an issue for years in order to protect vulnerable populations from the flu and other communicable diseases," Fergle said.

To address that, the state bar's Elder Law Committee proposed a solution and the result is Senate Bill 107.

The bill provides for witnesses to appear by Zoom or other electronic means, to witness signatures on wills, living wills, healthcare powers of attorney, organ donations, and pre-need cremation authorizations.

Bobbi Thury of Sioux Falls is an elder law attorney who works with vulnerable clients. She also testified before the Senate committee.

"We encounter these issues all the time," she told the committee. "Almost every year long-term care facilities will close down their doors to visitors or outsiders during the flu season."

History shows every moment counts for Dems' hold on Senate

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than 600 sitting senators have died or resigned from office since the first Congress met in 1789. That doesn't mean another will happen soon, but it does underline the precarious position that President Joe Biden and Democrats' reed-thin Senate majority are in following Democratic Sen. Ben Ray Lujan's stroke.

Lujan, 49, should recover and return to the Capitol in four weeks to six weeks, barring setbacks, Democrats say. If that happens, Lujan's absence could have limited impact on his party's priorities, including Biden's pending nomination to fill a Supreme Court vacancy.

If the New Mexico senator's recuperation takes longer or he has setbacks, Democrats' agenda would confront serious problems. And with Vice President Kamala Harris' tiebreaking vote all that gives them the 50-50 Senate's majority, each day presents a small chance that Democrats could abruptly lose control if something happens to any of their senators.

THE NUMBERS

According to Senate records, 301 sitting senators have died, most recently Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., in 2018. An additional 326 have resigned; the last was Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., who stepped down in ill health in 2019 and died two years later. The figures exclude senators who quit near the end of their terms, often to let a successor gain seniority in the chamber.

That means that of the 1,994 people who have served as senators over the chamber's 233 years, about 3 in 10 have died in office or quit. That's an average of 2.7 deaths and resignations annually.

Those events can come in spurts. Fifteen senators from Confederate states resigned because of the Civil War. Seven died in 1918 at the height of the Spanish flu, the most ever in one year, though all their

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deaths were attributed to other causes, according to Eric Ostermeier, a political research fellow at the University of Minnesota.

Life expectancy is longer today, and so far this century just seven senators have died in office, while 18 more have resigned to hold other offices or for health or personal issues — a combined average of a bit over one annually.

DEMOCRATIC SENATORS

Seventeen Democrats and the two independents who align with them — Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Angus King of Maine — are age 70 or older. That includes Colorado Sen. John Hickenlooper, who turns 70 on Monday. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., is the chamber's oldest member at 88.

The party has weathered at least two other recent health scares. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., 81, went to a hospital and was released within hours last year after not feeling well. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., 61, announced in September that she had been treated for breast cancer.

SHOULD A DEMOCRAT DIE OR LEAVE OFFICE ...

... things could get dicey.

Forty-five states empower governors to appoint replacements who serve until a special election can be held. Five states give the governor no role and only a special election fills the seat. Laws vary but it can take months until voting occurs.

Most Democratic senators' states have Democratic governors, who are all but certain to appoint Democrats should vacancies occur. Those include Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, D-N.M.

But currently, 16 Democratic senators plus Sanders, the Vermont independent, represent nine states with Republican governors. In seven of them, the governor can name whomever he or she would like as a replacement.

Of the remaining two states in this group, Arizona and Maryland — with two Democratic senators apiece — require their GOP governor to appoint a replacement from the departed incumbent's party. In addition, Gov. Phil Scott, R-Vt., has said he would replace Leahy with a Democrat or Sanders with a Democratic-leaning independent.

WHY EVERY VOTE, AND DAY, MATTERS

Republicans could capture House and Senate control in November's elections. That sound you hear is the dwindling days of 2022, when Democrats control the White House and Congress. The party wants accomplishments now — and definitely before autumn, when campaigning will be the priority and bipartisan cooperation will be nil.

In Luján's absence, Democrats still run the Senate but have lost their ability to muscle bills and nominations through the chamber by themselves. Any controversial legislation or nomination unanimously opposed by Republicans would lose 50-49, and worse if any Democrats defected.

Luckily for Democrats, some top items on the near-term agenda will need bipartisan agreement to reach the 60 votes that legislation usually requires. Such compromises, once reached, usually attract well over 60 votes, meaning Luján's absence might not matter.

One such effort is aimed at preventing a Feb. 18 government shutdown and financing federal agencies through September. Another would strengthen American research and manufacturing. A third would revamp how Congress certifies electoral votes in presidential elections, following former President Donald Trump's effort to undermine that normally routine ceremony on Jan. 6, 2021, amid his false claims that his reelection defeat was fraudulent.

Bipartisan talks are underway on each of those bills.

BOLDER GOALS WILL HAVE TO WAIT

Two top Democratic priorities that will likely encounter strong Republican opposition, but will need just 50 votes to pass, probably will not be ready for Senate votes for a while. That could give Luján time to return.

One is Biden's Supreme Court selection. The president has said he will pick a Black woman; Democrats hope several Republicans will support the nominee.

Biden has said he will announce his choice this month. The Senate would likely take weeks for hearings

and votes. A spokesperson for Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said last week that Luján's absence was not expected to affect the schedule.

Many Democrats, wary of risking that nomination should they suddenly lose the majority, want faster action.

"Anything they can do to speed up the process would be good," said Adam Jentleson, a progressive strategist and former top Senate aide.

The other key goal is their long-delayed, roughly \$2 trillion social and environment bill. It will take weeks of negotiations at best for them to revive that effort by reaching compromise with holdout Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz.

Its prospects are uncertain, with or without Luján.

Amir Locke, killed by Minneapolis cop, wanted music career

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

Before he was fatally shot by a Minneapolis police officer, Amir Locke had been making plans.

The 22-year-old Black man had filed paperwork to start a music business, his mother said, and had already designed a logo. Next week, he planned to move to Dallas, where he would be closer to his mom and — he hoped — build a career as a hip-hop artist, following in the musical footsteps of his father.

His death inside a Minneapolis apartment where police were serving a search warrant early Wednesday has renewed calls for police accountability and justice for Black people who are too often victims. It also left Locke's tight-knit family, friends and a community grieving for the life he didn't get to live.

"Amir was a bright light, and he deserves to be able to shine," his father, Andre Locke, said during a news conference Friday.

Many questions remain about the events leading up to Locke's death. But a police bodycam video shows officers entering the apartment without knocking and an officer kicking the couch where Locke's family said he was sleeping. On the video, he awakens and reaches for a gun, and an officer fires his weapon.

Locke had no criminal record, and he had a license and concealed carry permit for the gun, which his family said he had for protection because he worked in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area as a driver for a food delivery service. His family includes several people with backgrounds in law enforcement and the military, and his parents and a cousin said they spoke often with Amir and other young Black men in the family about how to handle interactions with police: keep your hands visible, don't make any sudden movements.

They believe Amir, who they say was a deep sleeper, was startled when the officer kicked the couch inside his cousin's apartment and didn't know who was inside when he grabbed for his gun.

Those closest to him repeatedly described him as "a good kid."

"You took a good kid who was trying to make the best out of his environment, and surpass it and succeed and he was doing it," said Reginald McClure, a close cousin of Andre Locke who works in law enforcement in Texas. "He was figuring out life, but he was doing it safely."

Amir Locke was born in the St. Paul suburb of Maplewood, his mother Karen Wells said, with "a headful of curly hair." He grew up in the suburbs, where he played basketball in middle school and tried out for his high school football team.

"But he broke his collarbone, so that didn't last," Wells recalled.

His true passion was music, and he had a natural talent for it, his mother said. Locke enjoyed hip-hop, and speaking about "the realities of what's going on in the neighborhoods," Andre Locke said. He also wanted to work with young people, his mother said.

McClure also recalled Amir Locke as having "a big heart."

When his grandmother died last year, Amir didn't want to see her body in the casket so he stayed outside in the parking lot during the funeral, McClure said. After the funeral ended, Andre Locke and the funeral director arranged to have Amir go inside through a back door so he could be alone with his grandmother.

"We have these pictures with him, and he's standing there and he's saying goodbye to his grandmother," McClure said. "And here's the crazy part. The same funeral home that he was so heartbroken to go see

his grandmother in because of the bigness of his heart, is the same one he's going to be in."

Olympic Updates: China wins 1st gold of Winter Olympics

BEIJING (AP) — The Latest on the Beijing Winter Olympics:

China has won its first gold of the Beijing Games, emerging victorious in the mixed team relay at short track speedskating in the event's Olympic debut.

Wu Dajing edged Italy's Pietro Sighel by .016 seconds. That's half a skate blade. Hungary earned bronze Saturday night.

Qu Chunyu, Fan Kexin and Ren Ziwei joined Wu for the historic victory. The small number of Chinese fans at Capital Indoor Arena cheered and waved tiny flags.

The results were delayed while the referee reviewed the race. Canada was penalized for pushing from behind and causing contact with Hungary.

China was the favorite coming in, having led the World Cup standings this season.

Italy remained undefeated in mixed doubles curling at the Beijing Olympics with a 7-5 victory against Britain while defending gold medalist John Morris of Canada and his new partner, Rachel Homan, beat Chris Plys and Vicky Persinger 7-2 to snap the Americans' win streak at two games.

Italy's Amos Mosaner and Stefania Constantini beat the British pair of Bruce Mouat and Jennifer Dodds to improve to 6-0 in the round robin competition in the 10-team field. Britain dropped to 4-2.

Morris and Homan scored a 3-end in the seventh to clinch their game against Plys and Persinger. The Canadians improved to 4-2 while the Americans dropped to 3-3.

The top four teams move into the semifinals on Monday and the medals will be decided on Tuesday.

Walter Wallberg of Sweden has dethroned the so-called King of Moguls to take home the gold in the freestyle skiing men's moguls.

The Swede looked almost in shock when his score of 83.23 flashed on the scoreboard, edging that of defending Olympic champion Mikael Kingsbury of Canada late Saturday night. Wallberg picked up points for his speed over the smooth and technical skiing style of Kingsbury, who ended up with silver.

Ikuma Horishima of Japan took home the bronze.

Wallberg's surprise victory interrupts the men's moguls dominance of Team Canada, which had won the event in the last three Winter Games. This was his first major win. The 21-year-old has never even won a World Cup event.

Slovenia's Ursa Bogataj has taken Olympic gold in women's ski jumping, floating 100 meters (328 feet) with 121 points on the final jump.

Katharina Althaus of Germany won silver for the second straight Olympics and Bogataj's fellow Slovenian Nika Kriznar took bronze. Japan's Sara Takanashi had entered as one of the favorites, but finished fourth.

Takanashi had won a record 61 World Cup events and earned bronze four years ago in South Korea. 2018's gold medalist, Maren Lundby, did not participate this year. The top-ranked women in World Cup standings, Austrian Marita Kramer, could not compete after testing positive for COVID-19.

This was the third time women had jumped for gold in the Winter Olympics.

The final round of women's ski jumping was delayed by 15 minutes, giving the athletes a brief break after the first round took more time than expected.

Germany's Katharina Althaus jumped 105.5 meters (346 feet) had 121.1 points in the first round. Althaus won silver at the 2018 Olympics and was aiming to hold off a trio of Slovenians: Ursa Bogataj, Nika Kriznar and Ema Klinec.

Japan's Sara Takanashi, the bronze medalist four years ago, was fifth after the first round.

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Norway has won gold in the biathlon mixed relay, beating France and the Russian team in the first biathlon event of the Beijing Olympics.

Johannes Thingnes Boe of Norway, Quentin Fillon Maillet of France and Eduard Latypov of the Russian team left the range close together after the last round of shooting and raced for position until the final stretch, when Boe sprinted for the win.

Norway, which came into the relay as the World Cup leader, also got strong performances from Marte Olsbu Røiseland and Tarjei Boe. But they trailed early in the race when Tiril Eckhoff struggled.

Fillon Maillet was joined on the French team by Emilien Jacquelin, Julia Simon and Anais Chevalier-Bouchet. The Russian team of Uliana Nigmatullina, Kristina Reztsova, Alexander Loginov and Latypov were leading after the last hand-off, but France and Norway caught them on the range.

Snowboarder Shaun White says the Beijing Games will be his last competition.

The three-time gold medalist held a reflective, sometimes emotional news conference not far from the halfpipe where he'll take his last competitive ride.

The 35-year-old said it's a decision that's been building since a soul-sucking training stop in Austria in November.

He was dealing with nagging remnants from injuries to his knee and back and ankle. He got lost on the mountain with the sun going down. This has been a rough season for him — including an ankle injury, a bout with COVID-19, a late unscheduled trip to Switzerland to secure his Olympic spot and, most recently, a training plan that got thrown off schedule during his stay in Colorado in January.

This has been a rough season for him — including an ankle injury, a bout with COVID-19, a late unscheduled trip to Switzerland to secure his Olympic spot and a training plan that got thrown off schedule.

But he says he still feels lucky to be here.

Irene Schouten gave the mighty Dutch a gold in the first speedskating event of the Beijing Winter Games, breaking a 20-year-old Olympic record in the women's 3,000 meters.

Skating in the last of 10 pairs, Schouten turned in a blazing final lap to post a winning time of 3 minutes, 56.93 seconds.

That broke the previous Olympic mark of 3:57.70, set by Germany's Claudia Pechstein at the 2002 Salt Lake City Games.

In a fitting bookend to the event, Pechstein skated in the opening pair to become the oldest female athlete in Olympic history at age 49. The German finished last — more than 20 seconds behind the winner.

Italy's Francesca Lollobrigida, pushing Schouten all the way in the final pair, held on for the silver in 3:58.06.

The bronze went to Canada's Isabelle Weidemann in 3:58.64.

Germany's Claudia Pechstein has become the oldest woman to compete at a Winter Olympics. The 49-year-old raced in the 3,000 meters, the opening event of the speedskating competition at the Ice Ribbon.

She becomes just the second athlete — and first woman — to compete in eight Winter Games.

Pechstein's career includes nine Olympic medals and a two-year doping ban, which she continues to fight in court. She tied Japanese ski jumper Noriaki Kasai for the most Winter Olympics.

Pechstein, who turns 50 two days after the end of the Beijing Games, finished with a time of 4 minutes, 17.16 seconds in the opening pair of the event. That was nearly 20 seconds off the Olympic record (3:57.70) she still holds from the 2002 Salt Lake City Games. She won her first medals at the Lillehammer Olympics of 1994.

Cross-country skier Therese Johaug of Norway has won the first gold medal of the Beijing Games in the women's 15-kilometer skiathlon.

Johaug fought wind and frigid temperatures to win by skiing away from a chase group of four.

Russian athlete Natalia Nepryaeva, the current overall World Cup leader, pulled away from the group on

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the last climb to take the silver. Teresa Stadlober of Austria followed just behind for the bronze medal.

The skiathlon was a mass-start race that began with 7.5 kilometers of classic skiing. After striding two laps around the 3.75-kilometer course, racers came through the stadium and quickly switched to skate skis before heading out for another two laps.

Johaug crossed the line with her arms in the air and a huge smile on her face. She has 10 world championship titles but has never won an individual Olympic gold medal.

Dinigeer Yilamujiang, a skier from China's Uyghur community who helped deliver the Olympic flame to the opening ceremony of the Beijing Games, placed 43rd.

A total of 45 new positive tests for COVID-19 have been announced by organizers of the Beijing Olympics. Athletes and officials account for 25 of the cases, with 20 detected in people arriving at the airport in Beijing and five more in daily PCR tests taken by everyone at the games.

The 20 other cases involved people working at the games, including media, with six at the airport and 14 inside the Olympic bubbles.

Organizing committee official Huang Chun says the numbers are "within our expectations."

A drop in cases is expected in the days ahead as fewer people arrive for the games and those inside the bubbles have already returned several days of negative tests.

The overall total of COVID-19 cases at the games is 353 since Jan. 23. More than 12,000 people have arrived from outside China.

The snow replica of the Great Wall constructed on the Olympic slopestyle course to block the strong wind has only helped a bit.

It was still gusty during the women's Olympic qualifying round on a bitterly cold day in the mountains above Beijing.

The swirling wind made judging the rails and jumps along the course tricky.

Snowboarder Zoi Sadowski Synnott of New Zealand navigated the extreme conditions and turned in the top score of 86.75. Synnott may just be the biggest challenger to two-time defending Olympic gold medalist Jamie Anderson of the United States.

Anderson finished fifth in qualifying. The top 12 advanced to Sunday's final.

The 31-year-old Anderson said the Great Wall barrier was helpful, but joked "they need a bigger wall."

The course makers built a carved-out, block-by-block structure at the top of the slopestyle course in recognition of China's iconic monument and to provide wind protection.

The temperature was 5 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 15 Celsius) and felt like minus 12 (minus 24 Celsius) during the competition.

The International Olympic Committee says an Olympic security guard was "being overzealous" by manhandling a reporter broadcasting live on Dutch television before the opening ceremony.

Asked about the incident, Beijing Olympics spokeswoman Yan Jiarong says "we welcome all the international media" to report on the games and will protect their legal rights.

Sjoerd den Daas was speaking to the camera Friday evening when a security official pushed him away. He was able to complete his report later.

IOC spokesman Mark Adams says "it was an unfortunate circumstance" and Olympic officials have contacted broadcaster NOS.

NOS is the Netherlands' state broadcaster and an official rights holder of the Olympic Games. Den Daas is its correspondent in China.

Beijing Olympic organizers and the International Olympic Committee responded to questions about why an athlete from China's Uyghur community was picked to help deliver the Olympic flame to the opening ceremony of the Beijing Games.

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Dinigeer Yilamujiang, a cross-country skier, is from Xinjiang province, where Western governments and human rights groups say the Beijing government has oppressed members of the Uyghur Muslim minority on a massive scale.

Yilamujiang's selection for the high-profile duty was seen by some as a provocation.

Asked about the choice, IOC spokesman Mark Adams said "we don't discriminate against people on where they are from" and she was entitled to take part as a competitor.

The 20-year-old cross-country skier was among seven current and former Chinese athletes chosen as the final torch-bearers to cap the ceremony.

Organizing committee official Chang Yu says the IOC gave final approval this week to picking athletes by age to represent each decade. The idea was to respect the Chinese tradition of passing legacy on between the generations.

China denies allegations of human rights abuses in a crackdown on the Uyghur community that the U.S. government and others have called genocide. That issue and others have led to diplomatic boycotts of the games by the United States and other countries.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping will meet with his counterparts from Egypt and Serbia on the sidelines of the Beijing Winter Olympics, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Serbia's Aleksandar Vucic are among more than a dozen world leaders who attended the opening ceremony Friday night.

Xi met with Russian President Vladimir Putin before the opening.

Egypt's ties with China have grown stronger, particularly during the pandemic. There are signs their worldviews are becoming more closely aligned, as el-Sissi seeks to move away from Western leaders who have concerns over his human rights record.

Vucic has been cultivating close ties with China, which has become one of the main investors in Serbia. He called Xi his "brother" at the start of the pandemic for supplying Serbia with respirators and vaccines. Opposition officials have been warning about a lack of transparency in deals Vucic has made with China, including major loans for building roads, highways and factories.

The third and final training session for men's downhill skiing at the Beijing Games has been canceled because of high winds.

Organizers say they made the decision "in the best interest of safety."

The start of the second training session had to be delayed Friday because of wind. Organizers said Saturday there was no window in the forecast that would allow them to push back the third session rather than canceling it.

Only three skiers had set off, including one of the favorites, Aleksander Aamodt Kilde of Norway.

The world's best skiers only saw the Rock course up close for the first time on Thursday because test events were canceled over the last two years amid the pandemic.

The men's downhill opens the Alpine competition on Sunday.

Ukrainian figure skater Ivan Shmuratko has cleared COVID-19 protocols by returning two negative tests on consecutive days. That allows him to begin preparing for the men's individual competition that begins Tuesday.

It was one day too late for his team, though. The Ukrainians scored zero points for the men's discipline in the team competition on Friday because Shmuratko was still going through protocols, taking them out of the running for a medal.

The team competition resumes Sunday with the women's short program. Then the top five nations will advance to the free skate, which begins with the men later the same day. The event concludes with the women, pairs and dance free skates on Monday.

China's National Health Commission says new domestic cases of COVID-19 in China have fallen into the

single digits, allaying fears for now of a new outbreak that could disrupt the Winter Olympics.

The commission says nine cases were reported in a 24 hour period, only one of them in Beijing.

The Beijing case was in the western district of Fengtai, far from the Olympic venues that have been sealed off into a bubble with gates and fencing to prevent any contact between athletes, officials and other participants on the inside and the general public.

Chinese authorities credit a strict "zero-tolerance" policy with keeping case numbers down through lockdowns and mass testing, even when only small numbers of cases are reported.

The commission on Saturday reported another 18 cases among people who had traveled from abroad, along with 60 imported asymptomatic cases.

As of Thursday, a total of 308 people associated with the Olympics had tested positive since Jan. 23, including athletes, officials and workers at the Games. Almost 12,000 people have arrived in Beijing from outside China for the Olympics.

Canadian hockey forward Melodie Daoust will not play against Finland in the Olympics and is being listed as day-to-day with an upper body injury.

Hockey operations director Gina Kingsbury says Daoust is expected to return during the tournament.

The three-time Olympian was hurt in the second period of Canada's 12-1 win over Switzerland in an opening day preliminary round Group A matchup on Thursday. Daoust has been playing on a line with Natalie Spooner and young star Sarah Fillier, who combined for four goals and three assists against the Swiss.

Sofia Goggia is back on snow and preparing to fly to China to defend her Olympic downhill title two weeks after crashing and injuring her left knee and leg.

Goggia posted a video on Facebook showing herself wearing Italy's Olympic team jacket and says, "today I got back on skis and it was great."

She adds, "So much work over these two weeks, so many injuries to cure, so much effort ... but so much desire to make it."

Goggia sprained her left knee, partially tore a cruciate ligament and has a "minor fracture" of the fibula bone in her leg. She also had some tendon damage after the crash in a World Cup super-G in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy.

Goggia has won the last eight World Cup downhills that she completed.

The Italian says that she's "always been able to focus on the goal and I never considered it lost." She adds that she'll fly to China "soon" and that once there she'll "put everything together turn after turn like always."

Goggia could race the super-G next Friday. The women's downhill is scheduled for Feb. 15.

Trump's GOP: Party further tightens tie to former president

By SAM METZ and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — In 2016, Donald Trump overtook the Republican National Committee through a shock and awe campaign that stunned party leaders. In 2020, the party was obligated to support him as the sitting Republican president.

Heading into 2024, however, the Republican Party has a choice.

The RNC, which controls the party's rules and infrastructure, is under no obligation to support Trump again. In fact, the GOP's bylaws specifically require neutrality should more than one candidate seek the party's presidential nomination.

But as Republican officials from across the country gathered in Utah this week for the RNC's winter meeting, party leaders devoted considerable energy to disciplining Trump's rivals and embracing his grievances. As the earliest stages of the next presidential contest take shape, their actions made clear that choosing to serve Trump and his political interests remains a focus for the party.

"If President Trump decides he's running, absolutely the RNC needs to back him, 100%," said Michele

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Fiore, an RNC committeewoman who has represented Nevada since 2018. "We can change the bylaws."

The loyalty to Trump is a fresh reminder that one of America's major political parties is deepening its alignment with a figure who is undermining the nation's democratic principles. As he fought to stay in the White House, Trump sparked a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. More recently, he has explicitly said that former Vice President Mike Pence could and should have overturned the election results, something he had no power to do.

Away from the ballrooms of the RNC meeting, Pence rebuked Trump on Friday, saying he had "no right to overturn the election" and that his former boss was "wrong" to suggest otherwise.

Pence is one of a few Republicans making moves toward a 2024 campaign regardless of whether Trump wages a comeback bid. If he were to run for the White House again, Trump is such a powerful force with the GOP base that he probably wouldn't need the party's help to become the nominee.

Some Republicans said that's beside the point.

"There's probably some disagreement there," said Bruce Hough, a longtime RNC member from Utah who lost to a Trump ally in a race for party co-chair last year. "The RNC has to provide a level playing field for any and all comers for president. That's our job. That's what we have to do."

But a stark divide has emerged between veterans like Hough, who are devoted to the GOP as an institution, and a larger group of Trump-aligned newcomers, who argue they're bringing new energy to the party. Their chief loyalty, however, seems to be to the former president.

"Leading up to 2020, or most of the time Trump was in office, he sent around his minions to populate the committee with very loyal Trump folks in a lot of red states," said Bill Palatucci, an RNC committeeman from New Jersey and frequent Trump critic. "And they still enjoy that strong majority."

The RNC's continued embrace of Trump more than two years before the 2024 election is a decided shift from the party's position in past elections.

In 2012 and 2016, for example, Reince Priebus as RNC chair went to great lengths to ensure each of the candidates was treated equally. The party sanctioned 12 debates, including early rounds that featured up to 17 candidates.

"Clearly, there's a bias that didn't exist in the past," said Tim Miller, who previously worked for the Republican National Committee and has since emerged as a fierce Trump critic. "It's all Trump all the time coming out of there."

A year ago, just after President Joe Biden's inauguration, RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel declined to encourage Trump to run again when asked, citing party rules that require neutrality. She also discouraged attacks on those Republicans who voted for Trump's impeachment.

This week, however, she backed an effort by Trump loyalists to censure Reps. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., and Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., a move triggered almost entirely by their fight against Trump's enduring influence in the party beyond the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

The censure, which passed on a voice vote Friday, says the two "support Democrat efforts to destroy President Trump more than they support winning back a Republican majority in 2022."

McDaniel's shift coincides with the RNC's reliance on Trump for fundraising. The party has issued hundreds of fundraising appeals since Trump left office evoking his name. One offered this message to prospective small-dollar donors on Tuesday: "YOU must stand with President Trump and YOUR Party."

In speeches made minutes before party leaders voted to censure Cheney and Kinzinger, McDaniel and co-chair Tommy Hicks did not mention Trump and stressed the need to unify for the 2022 midterm elections.

Though the committee's moves demonstrated a sustained loyalty to the former president, outside the winter meeting the censure was condemned by opponents as divisive and contrary to frequent appeals from leaders to expand the party's tent.

The RNC's discipline "shows more about them than us," Kinzinger said in an interview. "It shows that Trump and Trumpism has overtaken the RNC."

Cheney in a statement said the move demonstrated how the party had become hostage to Trump.

Indeed, this week's focus on debates that won't take place until 2024 and on anti-Trump Republicans

overshadowed the party's preparations for the midterm elections. That's notable because the GOP could reclaim control of at least one chamber of Congress and several governor's mansions.

But this week, Trump's grievances with his Republican critics took center stage instead.

"We should be focused on what the voters are focused on," said Caleb Heimlich, chair of the Republican Party in Washington state, where two of three Republican House members voted to impeach Trump following the Jan. 6 insurrection. "I've been talking to voters in Washington state, traveling around and nobody talks about Cheney. That's a D.C. topic."

Others disagreed.

Harmeet Dhillon, an RNC committeewoman from California, said it was imperative to send a clear message about Cheney and Kinzinger for her and the legions of volunteers working to elect Republicans this year.

"The midterms are about a party electing its leaders, and what Adam Kinzinger and Liz Cheney did here is defy their party's leadership," Dhillon said. "I do not want to elect people in the midterms who do what these two did."

Beyond the censure, Republicans set in motion a rules change rooted in another of Trump's longstanding grievances. A measure advanced that would force presidential candidates to sign a pledge saying they will not participate in any debates sponsored by the Commission on Presidential Debates advanced. It is expected to be voted on when RNC members convene again in August.

"We are not walking away from debates," McDaniel said. "We are walking away from the Commission on Presidential Debates because it's a biased monopoly that does not serve the best interests of the American people."

The eventual 2024 nominee, however, will have final say on whether to participate.

Another Republican eyeing a White House campaign, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, decried the RNC's push to punish Trump's rivals.

"The GOP I believe in is the party of freedom and truth," the frequent Trump critic tweeted Friday. "It's a sad day for my party — and the country — when you're punished just for expressing your beliefs, standing on principle, and refusing to tell blatant lies."

Arbery killers' failed pleas may complicate hate crime trial

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison, the men who chased and killed Ahmaud Arbery already faced steep obstacles to finding unbiased jurors for their upcoming trial on federal hate crime charges.

Now, with jury selection scheduled to start Monday, there's a new complication: Two of the defendants — the man who shot Arbery and his father — offered last week to plead guilty before a deal they had reached with prosecutors fell apart.

Travis and Greg McMichael ultimately decided against a plea bargain, but not before their willingness to cut a deal that would have included admissions of guilt was widely reported by news organizations. Legal experts said it's another detail that could taint potential jurors who have followed the case in the news and on social media.

"This is a case where it's hard to imagine there could be such a thing as more publicity," said Don Samuel, an Atlanta defense attorney who's not involved in the case. "It's such a hopeless situation for them as far as publicity goes."

The McMichaels armed themselves and chased the 25-year-old Arbery in a pickup truck on Feb. 23, 2020, after spotting him run past their home just outside the port city of Brunswick. A neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, joined the pursuit and recorded cellphone video of Travis McMichael blasting Arbery with a shotgun.

The McMichaels and Bryan were convicted of murder the day before Thanksgiving by a jury in Glynn County Superior Court, where they were sentenced to life in prison last month. All three also were indicted in a separate federal hate crimes case, which alleges that the deadly chase violated Arbery's civil rights

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and that he was targeted because he was Black.

Because of the intense public interest surrounding the case, the federal jury pool is being drawn from a broader area than typical in federal trials. U.S. District Court Judge Lisa Godbey Wood ordered that jury duty notices be mailed to roughly 1,000 people scattered across 43 Georgia counties. Some people summoned for jury service could have a four-hour drive to the courthouse.

The judge hasn't said how long she expects it could take to seat a panel of 12 jurors plus four alternates. In the state's murder trial, jury selection exceeded two weeks.

"I anticipate the jury selection process will be slow," Wood said in court Monday. "I require that it be careful and methodical and thorough."

Samuel said he thinks the judge ultimately will be able to find enough jurors who haven't followed the case closely and don't have hardened opinions about it.

"You're going to have to find jurors who don't read the news on a day-by-day basis," he said.

Legal experts say it could be more difficult for prosecutors to prove Arbery was the victim of a hate crime than it was to convict his pursuers of murder.

"They're going to have to show that they intended to injure or harm Ahmaud Arbery because of his race," said Ed Tarver, an Augusta lawyer and former U.S. attorney who oversaw federal prosecutions in southern Georgia. "In any of these hate crime cases, I think the bar is extremely high. They're very difficult to prove."

Legal filings and pretrial testimony indicate federal prosecutors plan to use text messages and social media posts to show the defendants had expressed racist views before the shooting.

FBI agent Skyler Barnes said in court Monday that investigators reviewing Travis McMichael's cellphone and social media records found "frequent use of racial slurs, to include references to African-Americans as monkeys, savages and n---ers."

The challenge for prosecutors will be to persuade jurors that such racist beliefs motivated the decisions to chase and shoot Arbery, said Michael J. Moore, an Atlanta lawyer and a former U.S. attorney for Georgia's middle district.

"A defendant may appear to be bigoted and say terrible, off-color things in text messages, but can you translate that to why he pulled the trigger on a shotgun?" Moore said. "That's a very different level of proof."

During a pretrial hearing in the state murder case on June 4, 2020, Georgia Bureau of Investigation Agent Richard Dial testified that Bryan told investigators he heard Travis McMichael utter a racist slur after shooting Arbery. Attorneys for Travis McMichael denied it.

Defense attorneys in the murder case argued the McMichaels were justified in chasing Arbery because they had reasonable suspicions that he had committed crimes in their neighborhood. Travis McMichael testified that he shot Arbery in self-defense as Arbery threw punches and grabbed for his gun.

The McMichaels had planned to plead guilty to a hate crime charge after prosecutors and defense attorneys agreed to propose a 30-year sentence that would include a request to transfer the McMichaels from Georgia's state prison system to federal custody. Wood rejected the deal Monday, saying it would have locked her into a specific sentence. Arbery's parents argued that conditions in federal prison wouldn't be as harsh.

At the time Arbery was killed, Georgia was one of just four U.S. states without a hate crimes law. Though his death prompted Georgia lawmakers to move swiftly to pass additional penalties for crimes motivated by race, religion, sexual orientation or other factors, there would have been no hate crimes charges in Arbery's slaying if federal authorities hadn't pursued them.

"That to me shows the importance of having this federal legislation. It has really served to fill in gaps where you have them," said Kami Chavis, a former federal prosecutor who is now a law professor at Wake Forest University in North Carolina.

Chavis said the decision to press the federal hate crimes case even after the McMichaels and Bryan were convicted of murder sent a message that "in our country you cannot kill or injure someone because of their status or their race."

Looking for evidence? Trust us, Biden administration says

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Biden's administration was asked for evidence to back up dramatic claims about national security developments this past week, it demurred with a simple rejoinder: You'll have to trust us on that.

No, they would not reveal what led them to say they knew that Russia was plotting a false flag operation as a pretext to invade Ukraine. No, they would not explain their confidence that civilian casualties were caused by a suicide bombing rather than U.S. special forces during a raid in Syria.

The administration's response took a particularly caustic turn as spokespeople suggested that reporters were buying into foreign propaganda by even asking such questions.

The lack of transparency strained already depleted reserves of credibility in Washington, a critical resource diminished over the decades by instances of lies, falsehoods and mistakes on everything from extramarital affairs to the lack of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The exchanges were also a sign of increased skepticism of the Biden administration when it comes to intelligence and military matters, particularly after officials failed to anticipate how swiftly the Afghan government would fall to the Taliban last year and initially defended a U.S. missile attack in Kabul as a "righteous strike" before the Pentagon confirmed the action had killed several civilians but no terrorists.

"This administration has made statements in the past that have not proven accurate," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. "Kabul wasn't secure. The drone strike did kill civilians. The press is doing its job when it asks, 'How do you know that?'"

The latest scrutiny seemed to have struck a nerve, resulting in barbed interactions with White House press secretary Jen Psaki and State Department spokesman Ned Price that stood out even amid the typically contentious relationship between the government and the press.

Jamieson described the responses, which included insinuations that reporters were being disloyal, as "completely inappropriate."

"These are cases in which the reporters' role is even more consequential because the matters" — the use of lethal force by the U.S. military and a potential war in Europe — "are so important," she said.

The first exchange took place Thursday aboard Air Force One en route to New York as Psaki fielded questions about the U.S. special forces raid in Syria, which resulted in the death of Islamic State leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi.

U.S. officials said al-Qurayshi killed himself and his family with a suicide bomb, but NPR's Ayesha Rascoe said there "may be people that are skeptical of the events that took place and what happened to the civilians."

Psaki asked whether the reporter was suggesting that "ISIS is providing accurate information" as opposed to the U.S. military.

"I mean, the U.S. has not always been straightforward about what happens with civilians," Rascoe responded.

Asked about her comments, Psaki said Friday that "we welcome tough questions and good faith scrutiny."

She said officials were committed to providing as much detail as possible about the Syria raid and she was relying on "firsthand reports from our elite servicemembers" to describe the incident.

Price similarly sparred with a reporter at a State Department briefing on Thursday after U.S. officials said Russia was preparing a "false flag" operation as the opening act for an invasion of Ukraine. The alleged scheme included a staged explosion and enlisting actors to portray people mourning the dead.

"Where is the declassified information?" asked Matthew Lee of The Associated Press.

"I just delivered it," Price said.

"No, you made a series of allegations," Lee responded.

Price said U.S. officials needed to protect "sources and methods." After a contentious back and forth, Price said that if reporters want to "find solace in information that the Russians are putting out, that is for you to do."

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He later walked back his comments.

Rep. Jim Himes, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, said the administration hoped to prevent Russia from following through on a false flag plot by publicly airing the allegations.

"This really isn't a question of winning over the public," said Himes, D-Conn. "This is about altering Vladimir Putin's behavior."

Richard Stengel, a former editor of Time magazine and onetime senior State Department official, said the government frequently has to make difficult decisions about balancing sensitive information and the need to be transparent.

"There's a cost benefit analysis," he said. "That's the judgment they're making every day."

But there are long-percolating concerns that the scales have tipped too far toward secrecy. Even Biden's director of national intelligence, Avril Haines, said the government classifies too much information.

In a Jan. 5 letter to Sens. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and Jerry Moran, R-Kan., Haines said that "deficiencies in the current classification system undermine our national security, as well as critical democratic objectives, by impeding our ability to share information in a timely manner."

She added that this "erodes the basic trust that our citizens have in their government," especially as "the volume of classified material produced continues to grow exponentially."

Politicians have routinely promised to restore trust in Washington, but it remains a scarce commodity ever since the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. Soon afterward, President Jimmy Carter won office by telling voters "I'll never tell a lie." He was voted out after one term.

Scandals have tarnished subsequent administrations, from secretly funding the Contras in Nicaragua by selling weapons to Iran under President Ronald Reagan to President Bill Clinton covering up an affair with a White House intern.

After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, President George W. Bush claimed the U.S. needed to invade Iraq to eliminate Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, but no such weapons were found and American troops spent years wrestling with a bloody insurgency.

President Donald Trump routinely misrepresented basic facts about his administration throughout his term and continues to spread falsehoods about the last election.

Biden promised to restore truth in Washington after defeating Trump, but trust appears to be in short supply one year after taking office. Not only did the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan undermine his administration's credibility, Americans have grown exasperated with shifting public health guidance during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

According to a CNN/SSRS poll conducted in December, only 34% of Americans said Biden "is a leader you can trust." Another 66% said they "have some doubts and reservations."

Macron's government seeks to reform Islam in France

By BARBARA SURK Associated Press

NICE, France (AP) — The French government on Saturday forged ahead with efforts to reshape Islam in France and rid it of extremism, introducing a new body made up of clergy and laymen — and women — to help lead the largest Muslim community in western Europe.

With France bloodied by past Islamic extremist attacks, having hundreds of citizens who went to fight with jihadists in Syria in past years and thousands of French troops now fighting extremists in Africa, few disagree that radicalization is a danger. But critics also see the efforts as a political ploy to lure right-wing voters to President Emmanuel Macron's centrist party ahead of April's presidential election.

The new body, called the Forum of Islam in France, is being introduced Saturday by the French Interior Ministry. Supporters say it will keep the country — and its 5 million Muslims — safe and free of foreign influence, and ensure that Muslim practices in France adhere to the country's cherished value of secularism in public life.

Its critics, including many Muslims who consider the religion a part of their French identity, say the government's latest initiative is another step in an institutionalized discrimination process that holds the

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whole community responsible for violent attacks of a few and serves as another barrier in their public lives.

The new body will include imams, influential figures from civil society, prominent intellectuals and business leaders. All of its members are hand-picked by the government, and women will make up at least a quarter of its members, according to French media reports.

It replaces the French Council of Muslim Faith, a group set up in 2003 by former President Nicolas Sarkozy, then interior minister. The Council served as an interlocutor between the government and religious leaders. It is being dissolved this month by Macron's government because, according to Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, it was no longer fulfilling its role in the Muslim community and French society as it was reeling from attacks in recent years that killed hundreds.

"We want to launch a revolution by putting an end to (foreign influence) on Islam," Darmanin said in a recent interview with *Le Parisien* daily. "Islam is not a religion of foreigners in France, but a French religion that should not depend on foreign money and any authorities abroad."

In his project, Macron envisions measures like training imams in France instead of bringing them in from Turkey, Morocco or Algeria — a plan many in the Muslim community approve of.

Muslims are divided over the project. Some believers visiting the Grand Mosque of Paris for Friday prayers cautiously welcomed the idea while others worry it's going too far in trying to control their faith, or say that the government has singled out Islamic institutions but would not dare suggesting such changes to Christian ones.

Hamoud ben Bouzid, a 51-year-old Parisian, was optimistic about Macron's plan and his effort to include different voices from the Muslim community to show to the wider society its diversity. Members of the clergy "don't speak for every Muslim citizen" of France, he said.

"We live in a secular country so why not expand the forum and give voice to many more Muslims in France?" ben Bouzid said. "I would like Muslims to be heard as citizens in this country, not as Muslims. As full citizens."

Muslims in France have long complained of stigmatism in daily life, from being singled out by police for ID checks to discrimination in job searches. Whenever extremist violence hits, by foreign-born attackers or by French-born youth, France's own Muslims come under suspicion and pressure to denounce violence.

Islam is the second religion in France, with no single leader and multiple strains represented, from moderate to Salafist with a rigorous interpretation of the religion to outright radical upstarts.

Last year the French parliament approved a law to strengthen oversight of mosques, schools and sports clubs. The government says it was needed to safeguard France from radical Islamists and to promote respect for secularism and women's rights. The law, which raised concern in parts of the Muslim world, has been used to shut down multiple mosques and community groups.

The last run: White says Olympics will be his final contest

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

ZHANGJIAKOU, China (AP) — This really is it for Shaun White.

The three-time gold medalist made it clear that not only will the Beijing Games be his last Olympics, they'll mark his final contest, too.

During a reflective, sometimes emotional news conference Saturday, not far from the halfpipe where he'll take his last competitive ride, the 35-year-old said that, yes, he'll be hanging 'em up for good after the medal round next week.

"In my mind, I've decided this will be my last competition," he said.

It's a decision that's been building since a rough-and-tumble training stop in Austria in November. He was dealing with nagging remnants from injuries to his knee ... and back ... and ankle. He got lost on the mountain with the sun going down. It was one of those rare times when snowboarding didn't feel fun anymore.

"A sad and surreal moment," he called it. "But joyous, as well. I kind of reflected on things I've done and looked at the sun going down and went, 'Wow, next time I'm here, I won't be stressed about learning

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tricks or worried about some competition thing.”

White traditionally has taken a break for a season, sometimes two seasons, in the aftermath of an Olympics, so to hear him say he'd be checking out for good after Beijing was not a big shock. Still, it's not uncommon for some of the greats to make a curtain call. Usain Bolt, for example, competed in the 2017 world championships the year after going 3 for 3 in the Olympic sprints for the third straight time.

But White won't be going that route.

He is soaking in every moment on this fifth trip to the Games, and over his 45-minute session with the media, he fielded an equal number of questions about his past as about what's to come over the next seven days and beyond.

“I have some runs in my head that I'd like to do,” he said. “And it's all about visualizing and making that happen the 'day of.'”

Though he refused to take it off the table, those runs probably will not include a triple cork — the three-flip trick that Ayumu Hirano of Japan has landed twice in competition this season, but has not won with, because he could not link another trick to it.

Back in 2013, White worked on that trick for a time. Then, a different jump — the double cork 1440 — became the hottest thing in the halfpipe, so he abandoned the triple to work on that. The rest is history: The 1440 was not enough for him to win in Sochi, but four years ago in Pyeongchang, he linked two of them back to back and took his third gold medal.

“I'd never done that combination of tricks before and just put it down to win,” White said. “I mean, it's a legacy performance.”

His legacy goes well beyond that.

By making a choice that was unpopular in many circles — embracing competition, and embracing the Olympics — he took the entire sport with him and made the whole endeavor more mass-marketable, in large part because every sport needs a star.

He also set the bar in a game that treasures progression above all else. In 2006, he was the first man to land back-to-back 1080s in a contest. In 2010, he landed his patented Double McTwist 1260 — “The Tomahawk,” he calls it — in a victory lap in Vancouver; it's a trick that's still relevant today.

Though others started landing the 1440 and linking two together before him, White did it best — and did it when the stakes were the highest.

But when asked what would suffice as a “good” Olympics this time around, he wasn't talking about 1440s or triple corks or gold medals.

This has been a rough season for him — including an ankle injury, a bout with COVID-19, a late unscheduled trip to Switzerland to secure his Olympic spot and, most recently, a training plan that got thrown off schedule during his stay in Colorado in January.

“I approach every competition as, you've got to be content with your own riding,” White said. “And as long as you can go out there and put down your best, and lay it out there, then you can walk away, and in your mind, be good with that.”

White says he's toggling between trying to enjoy every moment of the last big contest week of his life and knowing there is work to do when the halfpipe opens for training Sunday.

“I'm sort of pinching myself, with how lucky I am to still be here at this age,” he said.

But it's hard not to look back. He told about how when he was a kid, everything he did, day in and day out, was wrapped around snowboarding. “I don't know how many kids out there aspire to be a cowboy and then really get to be a cowboy,” he said.

Asked what headline he would stamp on his career, he said he looks back at the kid he once was and thinks the perfect thing to say to him would be: “We did it!”

Rescuers fear for life of Moroccan boy, 5, trapped in well

By MOSA'AB ELSHAMY and TARIK EL-BARAKAH Associated Press

IGHRAN, Morocco (AP) — Attempts to rescue a 5-year-old boy trapped in a Moroccan well stretched into

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a fourth day Saturday, with unstable soil threatening the painstaking work of trying to dig him out safely. Fears grew that that it may be too late.

Online messages of support and concern for the boy, Rayan, poured in from around the world as the rescue efforts dragged through the night.

Rescuers used a rope to send oxygen and water down to the boy as well as a camera to monitor him. By Saturday morning, the head of the rescue committee, Abdelhadi Temrani, said: "It is not possible to determine the child's condition at all at this time. But we hope to God that the child is alive."

Rayan fell into a 32-meter (105-feet) well located outside his home in the village of Ighran in Morocco's mountainous northern Chefchaouen province on Tuesday evening. He is now trapped in a hole too narrow for rescuers to reach safely.

For three days, search crews used bulldozers to dig a parallel ditch. Then on Friday, they started excavating a horizontal tunnel to reach the trapped boy. Morocco's MAP news agency said that experts in topographical engineering were called upon for help.

Temrani, speaking to local television 2M, said Saturday that rescuers had just two meters (yards) left to dig to reach the hole where the boy is trapped.

"The diggers encountered a hard rock on their way, and were therefore very careful to avoid any landslides or cracks," he said. "It took about five hours to get rid of the rock because the digging was slow and was done in a careful way to avoid creating cracks in the hole from below, which could threaten the life of the child as well as the rescue workers."

The work has been especially difficult because of fears that the soil surrounding the well could collapse on the boy.

Medical staff, including specialists in resuscitation, are on site to attend to the boy once he is pulled out, with a helicopter on standby to transport him to the nearest hospital.

His distraught parents are joined by hundreds of villagers and others who have gathered to watch the rescue operation.

The village of about 500 people is dotted with deep wells, many used for irrigating the cannabis crop that is the main source of income for many in the poor, remote and arid region of Morocco's Rif Mountains. Most of the wells have protective covers.

The exact circumstances of how the boy fell in the well are unclear.

Nationwide, Moroccans took to social media to offer their hopes for the boy's survival, using the hashtag #SaveRayan which has brought global attention to the rescue efforts.

Olympic teams raise concerns over quarantine hotels

By JAMES ELLINGWORTH AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Not enough food. Inedible meals. No training equipment. Some Olympic athletes unlucky enough to test positive for the coronavirus at the Beijing Olympics feel their quarantine conditions are making a bad situation much worse.

"My stomach hurts, I'm very pale and I have huge black circles around my eyes. I want all this to end. I cry every day. I'm very tired," Russian biathlon competitor Valeria Vasnetsova posted on Instagram from one of Beijing's so-called quarantine hotels.

Her problem wasn't with any symptoms of the virus. It was the food.

Vasnetsova posted a picture Thursday of what she said was "breakfast, lunch and dinner for five days already" — a tray with food including plain pasta, an orange sauce, charred meat on a bone, a few potatoes and no greens.

She said she mostly survived on a few pieces of pasta because it was "impossible" to eat the rest, "but today I ate all the fat they serve instead of meat because I was very hungry." She added she lost a lot of weight and "my bones are already sticking out."

The quarantine hotels are increasingly the target of criticism from athletes and their teams, who are lobbying organizers for improvements. There's a lack of transparency, too, with only some virus-positive

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athletes forced into quarantine hotels where their teams don't have access, while teammates in similar situations are allowed to isolate within the Olympic village.

The rules for athletes who test positive say those without symptoms go to a dedicated hotel for isolation. Anyone who has COVID-19 with symptoms will go to a hospital. In both cases, they'll be unable to compete until cleared for discharge.

Teams have started going public with criticism.

After Eric Frenzel, a three-time gold medalist in Nordic combined, tested positive, German delegation head Dirk Schimmelpfennig lambasted the "unreasonable" living conditions. Germany wants larger, more hygienic rooms, and more regular food deliveries so athletes who are eventually released are still fit to compete, Schimmelpfennig said in comments reported by the FAZ newspaper.

The pressure can pay off. Belgian skeleton racer Kim Meylemans was brought back from a quarantine hotel to isolation in the athletes' village after she made a tearful post on social media. Her main gripe was the lack of information. She was loaded into an ambulance and transported from one quarantine facility to another on a day she thought she was being released.

Vasnetsova passed her time in quarantine with a little detective work. When fetching the food left outside her door, she took a glance at the boxes left outside other rooms in her corridor, whose doors were labeled with signs to distinguish Olympians from other people working at the Games who tested positive, such as team staff.

She concluded the athletes were getting worse food, and underlined it with a picture of food served to her team doctor, who had also tested positive and was living two floors below. He had fresh fruit, a salad and prawns with broccoli. "I honestly don't understand, why is there this attitude to us, the athletes?!" she wrote.

Two days on from her criticism, Vasnetsova is still in quarantine but things are looking up.

Russian biathlon team spokesman Sergei Averyanov posted a picture of what he said was an improved meal delivered to Vasnetsova's room including salmon, cucumbers, sausages and yoghurt. A stationary bike will be delivered soon, he added.

Vasnetsova, he wrote, "is already smiling, and that's the main thing."

EXPLAINER: How to stage Olympics in a snow-challenged city

KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Dry Beijing barely gets any winter precipitation, making this year's Winter Games the first to rely almost entirely on artificial snow. Organizers are touting the event's green credentials, but experts do worry about the environmental impact of such a massive snowmaking operation given the huge amounts of water and electricity it takes.

At Yanqing north of Beijing, where organizers built the alpine ski venue from scratch, the slopes stand out as ribbons of white contrasting starkly against the surrounding brown hillsides. Snowmakers have also been deployed farther north in Zhangjiakou, which is hosting freestyle skiing, ski jumping and biathlon.

All of it is the product of months of snowmaking using sophisticated European equipment.

Here's a closer look at the Olympic snowmaking operation:

HOW IT WORKS

Natural snow is formed high up in the clouds when water vapor molecules cling to tiny particles like pollen or dust. In scientific lingo, these specks are dubbed nucleators. They create a snow nucleus that then attracts more water molecules to form snowflakes.

Snowmaking equipment tries to duplicate this process, artificially, by spraying atomized water into the air along with mechanically created nucleators -- tiny ice crystals — that act as seeds for the manufactured snowflakes. This process has been around for decades: simulated snow was first used at the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid, New York.

SNOW GUNS

TechnoAlpin won the bid to supply the Beijing games with snowmaking equipment, a contract worth

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\$22 million.

The Italian company has blanketed the slopes with 272 snowmaking fan guns and another 82 stick "lances" to produce "technical snow" for the Winter Olympics skiing and snowboarding venues. They're all hooked up to a system of high pressure pumps and pipes that carry water chilled by cooling towers up the slopes.

TechnoAlpin's fan guns resemble small jet engines or oversized hair dryers, with nozzles spraying either atomized water or ice crystals mounted around the edge of a turbine. The guns, which can be aimed remotely using Bluetooth, blast the mixture dozens of meters into the air to cover broad downhill slopes.

"And while it's falling to the ground, snow is created," said Michael Mayr, TechnoAlpin's China sales manager.

Snow lances, meanwhile, are up to 10 meters tall and don't have fans, instead using gravity to carry the snowmaking mixture to the ground, making it a bit more like natural snowfall.

WATER WORRIES

Beijing and Zhangjiakou are both not far from the Gobi Desert and are "highly water stressed," China Water Risk, a Hong Kong-based consultancy, said in a 2019 report.

The International Olympic Committee even noted the issue in its own 2015 evaluation of Beijing's bid, saying the two districts "have minimal annual snowfall" and that the Winter Games would have to rely completely on fake snow.

The "Beijing – Zhangjiakou area is becoming increasingly arid" because of climate change and other factors, the IOC said, adding that Beijing's bid "underestimated the amount of water" needed for snowmaking.

The Winter Games are expected to use 49 million gallons of water, the equivalent of 74 Olympic swimming pools, to make snow.

SUSTAINABILITY

The IOC now says snowmaking in Beijing was developed "to high technical and environmental standards."

"The regions where the snow sport events will be held are constantly very cold," the IOC said in a statement. "This allows a very efficient snow production and does not require the constant reproduction of snow," like ski resorts elsewhere with fluctuating temperatures that cause snowmelt.

Snowmaking can raise other environmental concerns, including over the chemicals sometimes used to help water freeze at higher temperatures, and the electricity needed to power the systems, which could mean a bigger carbon footprint. The IOC says all venues and facilities are powered by wind and solar energy and that no chemicals are used because of the region's cold temperatures.

"Of course we are using a lot of energy of making snow," Bernhard Russi, chairman of the International Ski Federation's alpine committee, said at a press briefing Saturday. But he added that the challenge is how to store the snow over the summer for the next season - something already being done in Europe, allowing resorts to save up to half of it.

WHAT THE ATHLETES SAY

Athletes have voiced their concerns about competing on fake snow, saying it brings new risks.

Skiers and experts say manmade snow has more moisture, which means it ices up faster. Estonian Olympic biathlete Johanna Tali harm told the AP last month that artificial snow is "faster and more dangerous" because of the icing.

Russi, the 1972 downhill gold medalist in Japan, acknowledged that "of course ski racers and we organizers, we prefer to have natural snow," but added that using machines to make snow allows them to get it to the right "hardness" for each discipline.

The IOC said artificial snow is used regularly at World Cup ski competitions and denied that it makes courses more dangerous. "To the contrary, it creates a more consistent surface from the top to bottom, or start to finish, of a course."

As the Winter Games begin, Russi said "the snow we find right now on the courses is absolutely perfect, you cannot have it better."

In Beijing, Olympic ideals coexist with authoritarian rule

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

His collar turned up against the cold, the head of the International Olympic Committee looked out over the stadium and spoke of the ideals that had brought together athletes from all over the world.

"In our fragile world, where division, conflict and mistrust are on the rise, we show the world that it is possible to be fierce rivals while at the same time living peacefully and respectfully together," Thomas Bach, a gold-medalist fencer nearly 40 years ago, said Friday at the Winter Games' opening ceremony.

The Olympic mission is clear, he said: "Always building bridges, never erecting walls."

Critics of Bach and the IOC say those ideals are nonsense, and talk of respect and bridge-building is overshadowed by Olympic officials cozying up to some of the world's most powerful authoritarian rulers. Starting with holding this year's Games in a country accused of widespread human rights violations.

The IOC knows that Beijing has locked up hundreds of thousands of minority Uyghur Muslims, those critics say, and arrested countless people who dared voice criticism of the government.

The IOC's "failure to publicly confront Beijing's serious human rights violations makes a mockery of its own commitments and claims that the Olympics are a 'force for good,'" Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch, said shortly before the Games opened.

Some rights activists are calling these Olympics the "Genocide Games," and leaders of a string of democratic nations, including the U.S., Great Britain, Australia and Canada, are avoiding the Games, citing either Beijing's human rights violations or its sweeping coronavirus restrictions.

Meanwhile, Chinese President Xi Jinping is hosting a parade of fellow strongman leaders, including Russia's Vladimir Putin, who met Friday with Xi before attending the opening ceremony, as well as the leaders of Egypt and Serbia, who were meeting with China's leader on Saturday.

The Games come at a time when democracy can look like it's in retreat.

Over the past year there was a military takeover in Myanmar, Beijing's tightening grip over Hong Kong and a brutal political crackdown in Nicaragua. There are authoritarian rulers from Turkey to the Philippines.

The IOC rarely mentions any of this.

Bach, for his part, has studiously steered around talk of human rights in China. He did say he would meet Peng Shuai, the Chinese tennis star who largely dropped from sight after accusing a former top Communist Party official of sexual assault, then later insisted she'd been misunderstood. Bach said she'd told IOC officials that she "that she can move freely, that she's spending time with her family and friends."

He said he'd support Peng if she wants an investigation. "But it's her life, it's her allegations," he added. Avoiding controversy has long been Bach's rule.

"Sport must be politically neutral, but sport cannot be apolitical," he once wrote, threading the phrasing needle so carefully his actual meaning is unclear.

But he knows it's a gamble to make a stand on issues like human rights.

"If we are getting in the middle of tensions, disputes and confrontations of the political powers then we are putting the Games at risk," he told reporters at a Beijing press conference.

Olympic organizers have a long history with authoritarian rulers, from Adolf Hitler in the 1936 Summer Games in Berlin to Vladimir Putin and the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

"There's not a glorious history to look back on," said Andrew Zimbalist, an economics professor at Smith College who has extensively studied the Olympics.

Take those Berlin Games. By 1936, Nazi antisemitism was blatantly clear, with laws that excluded German Jews from citizenship and banned marriage or sex between Jews and "citizens of German or kindred blood."

Yet the Games went ahead. And two Jewish runners on the U.S. team, Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller, were pulled from the 4-X-100 meter relay squad one day before the race. U.S. officials insisted it had been done to bring in faster runners, but Glickman saw it differently.

"Here were two rather obscure Jewish athletes who could be kept off the podium so to not embarrass Adolf Hitler," he said years later in an interview.

Zimbalist says the Olympic Committee is so risk-averse that it's tarnishing its reputation.

"They pretend that they're apolitical even though they make choices that are inherently political," he said

in an interview. They are "giving a level of approval to the Chinese by hosting the Games there. That's a statement."

He said the IOC can look for ways to speak out on issues like human rights while being careful not to spark a political firestorm.

"They've been working with the Chinese Olympic Committee. They know the limits (of speaking out) better than you or I," he said. "I'd like to see the IOC testing some of those limits."

Instead, the committee remains silent, and not just about China.

Putin, for instance, attended the Games' opening even though sports sanctions mean the country's team must play as the "Russian Olympic Committee" because of a sophisticated doping scheme.

Putin and Xi used their meeting to project themselves as a counterweight to the United States and its allies. China has also been showing growing support for Moscow in its dispute with Ukraine, which has an estimated 100,000 Russian troops massed along its border, a predicament Washington fears could lead to all-out war.

With billions of dollars at stake for the host country, not to mention TV rights and sponsorships, the Olympics can seem as much about money as sports. The IOC is desperate for the Games to remain "brand safe," so that sponsors, some of whom have reportedly paid hundreds of millions of dollars, don't see those investments backfire. These include some of the world's best-known brands, from Coca-Cola to Visa to Toyota. The last thing they want is for their products to be associated with Chinese human rights abuses.

But Christopher Magee, a professor at Bucknell University, noted that the IOC is just one of many players in China's immense economy.

"It's fair to criticize them for prioritizing money over humanitarian concerns," he said. "But a lot of firms and countries do that. It's hard not to."

The economies of nearly every nation in the world - including those whose leaders are boycotting these Games - are deeply intertwined with Beijing's.

And every once in awhile, the IOC does speak up.

Maybe.

Some observers say Bach appeared to make an oblique reference to Ukraine in his opening speech, urging political leaders to "observe your commitment to this Olympic truth: Give peace a chance."

But if it was a Ukraine reference, it was so oblique that many political and Olympic analysts didn't even notice.

UN experts: Darfur rebel groups make money in Libya

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — U.N. experts say rebel groups in Darfur that signed a peace agreement with the Sudanese government in 2020 continue to operate in Libya and profit from opportunities provided by the civil war and lack of government control in the oil-rich north African nation.

In a report to the U.N. Security Council circulated Friday, the panel of experts monitoring sanctions against Sudan stemming from the 2003 Darfur conflict said several sources in the rebel movements said they have no intention of completely withdrawing from Libya because they get most of their financing and supplies including food and fuel from engagements there.

They quoted one commander as saying: "We will have one foot in Darfur and one foot in Benghazi," the main city in eastern Libya which is the stronghold of forces loyal to military commander Khalifa Hifter.

Libya plunged into turmoil after a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 toppled dictator Moammar Gadhafi, who was later killed. It then became divided between rival governments — one in the east, backed by Hifter, and a U.N.-supported administration in the capital Tripoli, each supported by different militias and foreign powers.

In April 2019, Hifter and his forces, backed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, launched an offensive to try and capture Tripoli. His campaign collapsed after Turkey stepped up its military support of the U.N.-supported government with hundreds of troops and thousands of Syrian mercenaries.

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An October 2020 cease-fire agreement called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Libya and led to an agreement on a transitional government in early February 2021. Elections that were supposed to be held on Dec. 24 have been delayed.

The panel of experts said despite the cease-fire agreement's call for foreign forces to leave, "most of the Darfurian groups in Libya continued to work under the Libyan National Army," securing areas and manning checkpoints.

In return for their work, the experts said, the five main Darfur rebel movements that signed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement were receiving payments and logistical support.

According to several unidentified sources in the movements, the experts said the money and support were agreed on in meetings between their military commanders and UAE representatives in Libya. "The payments were provided by the United Arab Emirates and channeled to the movements by the Libyan National Army, which took a cut," the panel said.

"In the recent months with relative peace in Libya and the announcement of elections, there is pressure on the signatory Darfurian armed groups to leave Libya," the panel said. "The payments to the Darfurian groups have been reduced."

Sudan had been on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising forced the military to remove autocratic President Omar al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019. But an October military coup has plunged the country into turmoil.

The Juba Peace Agreement was seen as a breakthrough in the conflict in the vast western region of Darfur that began when ethnic Africans rebelled, accusing the Arab-dominated Sudanese government of discrimination. The government in Khartoum was accused of retaliating by arming local nomadic Arab tribes and unleashing them on civilian populations — a charge it denies.

The experts said the UAE saw the Juba agreement as the basis for a successful transition and recommended that the Darfurian movements join the government. They said the UAE argued that it did not finance or arm the movements, and focused on health and education efforts as well as helping Sudan and other regional countries control their borders.

At a meeting in November, the panel said, the UAE responded to allegations of possible financial or military support to Darfurian forces both in Sudan and Libya by referring "to its country's moderate position and struggle against extremism and hate speech."

One major Darfur rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Movement-Army, led by Abdel-Wahid Nour, has refused to sign the Juba agreement and rejected the original military-civilian transitional government formed after al-Bashir's ouster.

The experts said the rebel group also has a presence in Libya and continues to take advantage of revenue from the Torroye gold mine in its stronghold in Jebel Marra and a gold mine near Danaya in South Darfur "to strengthen its capability."

The panel said it received information that UAE authorities had seized gold linked to one of the Darfurian movements and is seeking additional information.

It also reported that violations of the arms embargo against Sudan continued with the transfer of arms and other military materiel into Darfur.

Analysis: As Mideast wars encroach on UAE, US gets drawn in

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The wars of the wider Middle East that long surrounded the United Arab Emirates now have encroached into daily life in this U.S.-allied nation, threatening to draw America further into a region inflamed by tensions with Iran.

Yemen's Houthi rebels have launched missile and drone attacks since January targeting the Emirates, a federation of seven sheikhdoms home to oil-rich Abu Dhabi and the skyscrapers and beaches of Dubai. American forces at Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi, home to some 2,000 U.S. troops, twice have opened fire with their own Patriot missiles to help intercept the air assaults by the Iranian-backed Houthis.

The two incidents represent the first time since 2003 that the U.S. has fired the Patriot in combat — a

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nearly 20-year span. It also comes after the Biden administration's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and its declared end to the American combat mission in Iraq.

Though overshadowed by the Ukraine crisis, the U.S. now says it is committing more advanced fighter jets to the Emirates, as well as sending the USS Cole on a mission there. This spillover of Yemen's yearslong war into the UAE puts American troops in the crosshairs of the Houthi attacks — and raises the risk of a regional escalation at a crucial moment of talks in Vienna to potentially restore Iran's nuclear deal with world powers.

The Emirates since its founding in 1971 has been an otherwise safe corner of the Mideast. During the bloody 1980s war between Iran and Iraq, Dubai's massive Jebel Ali port repaired ships damaged in the so-called Tanker War. The 1991 Gulf War saw Kuwaitis flee into the Emirates and gave birth to the close military ties America has with the country today.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that followed again saw Dubai take in the money and families of wealthy émigrés. But the Emirates always seemed to remain out of bounds amid its neighbors' wars. Part of that came from the centrist foreign policy of its founders whose oil wealth built cities from the sand, the other from its economic importance. Dubai, for instance, has been a major trade outlet for Iran even as it faced cycles of international sanctions.

Under Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi's crown prince and the country's de facto ruler since 2014, the Emirates has taken a much more muscular approach. Nowhere is that more evident than in Yemen, where it joined a Saudi-led coalition in 2015 in support of the country's exiled government against the Houthis.

It largely withdrew its ground forces from the conflict in 2019 as the war stalemated and the coalition faced widespread international criticism for airstrikes killing civilians. But in recent weeks, Emirati-backed Yemeni militias made major advances in the war, sparking the Houthi counterattacks deep into the Emirates.

Now, wedged between sunny commodities reports and morning banter, state-owned Dubai talk radio opens newscasts with the latest attacks. A new message in some commercial segments urges the public not to share "rumors" — a reminder of how this autocratic nation that already tightly restricts speech has criminalized sharing any videos showing an attack or missile interception.

The U.S. State Department has urged Americans to "reconsider travel due to the threat of missile or drone attacks." The British Foreign Office starkly warned Wednesday that "further attacks are very likely." France meanwhile will send Rafale fighter jets based in the UAE on "surveillance, detection and interception missions if necessary," French ambassador Xavier Chatel said.

Yet bars and hotels in Dubai remain busy as the city-state welcomes travelers and business after conducting a major vaccination campaign amid the coronavirus pandemic.

But keeping business going requires the UAE to remain safe for all. State-linked media has praised the country's armed forces and air defense corps. And the Emirates has invested heavily in that defense. It uses both the Patriot missile and the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, which it acquired at a cost of over \$1 billion.

The Emirates used the THAAD in two interceptions, the first time the system has ever been fired in combat, said Gen. Frank McKenzie, the head of the U.S. military's Central Command. The U.S. announced a possible \$65 million sale of parts for HAWK, Patriot and THAAD missile systems to the UAE on Thursday.

However, the Patriot missiles visible on the outskirts of Dubai simply have pointed north for years toward Iran, seen by Sheikh Mohammed as its greatest threat. The attacks from the Houthis have come from the southwest. And on Wednesday, the UAE's military acknowledged intercepting drones claimed to have been launched by a shadowy group that earlier conducted an attack targeting a palace in Saudi Arabia from Iraq.

That widens the area that needs to be protected by air defenses, putting an additional burden on them and risking the chance that a complex attack could break through.

Such an attack could be catastrophic, like a 2019 assault that saw cruise missiles and drones successfully penetrate Saudi Arabia and strike the heart of its oil industry in Abqaiq. That attack temporarily halved the kingdom's production and spiked global energy prices by the biggest percentage since the 1991 Gulf War.

While the Houthis claimed the Abqaiq attack, the U.S., Saudi Arabia and analysts blamed Iran. U.N. experts

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similarly said it was “unlikely” the Houthis carried out the assault, though Tehran denied being involved. Already, the Houthis have described Al-Dhafra Air Base, home to a major American presence, as a legitimate target. Any attack harming U.S. troops likely would bring a response from Washington, even with President Joe Biden hoping to refocus on China and Russia. And a promised deployment of the Cole and the advanced fighter jets means more American equipment soon will be in the Emirates.

“They’re going to demonstrate ... our commitment to our Emirati partners but also to be prepared to deal with very real threats that the Emiratis are under,” Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Wednesday. “And quite frankly, it’s not just the Emiratis, it’s our people there at Al-Dhafra too.”

EXPLAINER: Ukraine not joining NATO so why does Putin worry?

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the core of the Ukraine crisis is a puzzle: Why would Russian President Vladimir Putin push Europe to the brink of war to demand the West not do something that it has no plan to do anyway?

Russia says NATO, the American-led alliance that has on its hands the biggest European crisis in decades, must never offer membership to Ukraine, which gained independence as the Soviet Union broke apart about 30 years ago. Ukraine has long aspired to join NATO, but the alliance is not about to offer an invitation, due in part to Ukraine’s official corruption, shortcomings in its defense establishment, and its lack of control over its international borders.

Putin’s demands go beyond the question of Ukraine’s association with NATO, but that link is central to his complaint that the West has pushed him to the limits of his patience by edging closer to Russian borders. He asserts that NATO expansion years ago has enhanced its security at the expense of Russia’s.

The Russians demand a legal guarantee that Ukraine be denied NATO membership, knowing that NATO as a matter of principle has never excluded potential membership for any European country — even Russia — but has no plan to start Ukraine down the road toward membership in the foreseeable future. The principle cited by NATO is that all nations should be free to choose whom they align with.

Why, then, is Moscow making an issue of Ukraine’s relationship with NATO now? The answer is complicated.

WHY IS PUTIN WORRIED ABOUT UKRAINE JOINING NATO?

The stated reason is that a further eastward expansion of NATO would pose a security threat to Russia. Washington and its allies deny this is a valid worry, since no NATO country is threatening to use force against Russia.

More broadly, Putin wants NATO to pull back its existing military presence in Eastern Europe, which includes a regularly rotating series of exercises in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, all former Soviet states. There are no U.S. troops based permanently in those three Baltic countries; currently there are about 100 serving a rotational tour in Lithuania and about 60 in Estonia and Latvia combined, the Pentagon says.

Putin also opposes NATO’s missile defense presence in Romania, a former Soviet satellite state, and a similar base under development in Poland, saying they could be converted to offensive weapons capable of threatening Russia. President Joe Biden this week approved sending an additional 2,700 American troops to Eastern Europe — 1,700 to Poland and 1,000 to Romania — plus 300 to Germany.

Ukraine has deep historical and cultural ties to Russia, and Putin has repeatedly asserted that Russians and Ukrainians are “one people.” He has said that large chunks of Ukrainian territory are historical parts of Russia that were arbitrarily granted to Ukraine by communist leaders under the Soviet Union.

Putin recently described his Ukraine concern more specifically. He sketched out a scenario in which Ukraine might use military force to reclaim the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014, or to recapture areas in eastern Ukraine that are now effectively controlled by Russian-backed separatists.

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

Indeed, some in NATO have thought about the prospect of an expanded war with Russia inside Ukraine.

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It is a reminder of what NATO membership means — an attack on one is an attack on all, which in the theoretical case of Ukraine being attacked by Russia would mean a legal commitment by every NATO member to come to its defense.

WHAT ARE UKRAINE'S PROSPECTS FOR JOINING NATO?

The prospects are extremely unlikely for the foreseeable future.

Although Ukraine has no membership offer from NATO, it has drawn closer to the alliance over time, starting with the establishment in 1997 of a NATO-Ukraine Charter to further develop cooperation.

NATO heads of government did publicly declare in 2008 that Ukraine, and its fellow former Soviet republic Georgia, "will become members of NATO." They did not say when or how, but the statement could be seen as explaining Moscow's concern that Kyiv eventually will join the alliance.

On the other hand, the U.S. and other NATO leaders who signed the 2008 statement about Ukraine and Georgia decided against giving them what is known as a Membership Action Plan — a pathway to eventual membership. Germany and France strongly opposed moving Ukraine toward membership and the broader view within NATO was that Ukraine would have to complete far-reaching government reforms before becoming a candidate for membership.

This seeming contradiction has never been resolved, which means that while NATO's door is open, Ukraine won't fit through anytime soon.

HOW IS PUTIN PRESSURING UKRAINE?

Moscow says it has no intention of invading Ukraine, yet over the past several months it has assembled a robust array of combat forces along Ukraine's borders and has implied it will take action of some kind if its demands of Washington and NATO are not met. The Biden administration says Russia is now capable of a wide range of actions, including a full-scale invasion to capture Kyiv.

Putin says NATO has gone too far not only by providing Ukraine with weaponry and military training but also by stationing forces in other Eastern European countries that compromise Russian security.

It's also true that increases over the past decade in the U.S. and NATO military presence in Eastern Europe were triggered by Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and its incursion into eastern Ukraine in 2014. Those Russian actions prompted NATO to redouble its focus on collective security. In September 2014, NATO leaders established a new rapid-response force capable of deploying within days, and they reaffirmed pledges to boost their defense spending.

Pence: Trump is 'wrong' to say election could be overturned

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

Former Vice President Mike Pence has directly rebutted Donald Trump's false claims that he somehow could have overturned the results of the 2020 election, saying that the former president was simply "wrong."

In a speech to a gathering of the conservative Federalist Society in Florida Friday, Pence addressed Trump's intensifying efforts this week to advance the false narrative that, as vice president, he had the unilateral power to prevent President Joe Biden from taking office.

"President Trump is wrong," Pence said. "I had no right to overturn the election."

Pence's declaration marked his most forceful response yet to Trump, who has spent his post-presidency fueling the lie that the 2020 campaign was stolen from him. And it comes as Pence begins laying the groundwork for a potential run for president in 2024, which could put him in direct competition with his former boss, who is also teasing a comeback run.

The relationship between the two men took on a new dynamic this week as Trump escalated his attacks on Pence.

In a statement Tuesday, Trump said the committee investigating the deadly Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol should instead probe "why Mike Pence did not send back the votes for recertification or approval." And on Sunday, he blasted Pence, falsely declaring that "he could have overturned the Election!"

Vice presidents play only a ceremonial role in the the counting of Electoral College votes, and any attempt to interfere in the count would have represented an extraordinary violation of the law and an assault on

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the democratic process.

Pence, in his remarks Friday to the group of lawyers in Lake Buena Vista, described Jan. 6, 2021 as “a dark day in the history of the United States Capitol” and framed his actions that day as in line with his duty as a constitutional conservative.

“The American people must know that we will always keep our oath to the Constitution, even when it would be politically expedient to do otherwise,” he told the group Friday. He noted that, under Article II Section One of the Constitution, “elections are conducted at the state level, not by the Congress” and that “the only role of Congress with respect to the Electoral College is to open and count votes submitted and certified by the states. No more, no less.”

He went on to call out those who have insisted that isn’t the case.

“Frankly there is no idea more un-American than the notion that any one person could choose the American president,” he added. “Under the Constitution, I had no right to change the outcome of our election. And Kamala Harris will have no right to overturn the election when we beat them in 2024.”

The audience applauded Pence’s line about beating the Democrats in the upcoming presidential election, but remained silent when Pence said earlier that “Trump is wrong.”

As Pence countered Trump in Florida, Republican officials gathered in Utah to align themselves even more closely with the former president. The Republican National Committee censured Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois for participating on the committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection. The GOP also assailed the panel for leading a “persecution of ordinary citizens engaged in legitimate political discourse.”

Pence was inside the Capitol on Jan. 6, presiding over the joint session of Congress to certify the presidential election, when a mob of Trump’s supporters violently smashed inside, assaulting police officers and hunting down lawmakers. Pence, who released a letter moments before the session got underway that made clear he had no authority to overturn the will of the voters, was rushed to safety as some rioters chanted “Hang Mike Pence!”

The former vice president, in his remarks Friday, acknowledged the lingering anger among many in Trump’s base, even as he said it was time “to focus on the future.”

“The truth is, there’s more at stake than our party or political fortunes,” he said. “Men and women, if we lose faith in the Constitution, we won’t just lose elections — we’ll lose our country.”

Trump aides did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the speech. Trump released a statement shortly after that slammed the Jan. 6 committee, but notably made no mention of Pence.

Trump’s escalating rhetoric comes as he is under growing scrutiny from the committee, which has now interviewed hundreds of witnesses, issued dozens of subpoenas and obtained reams of government documents that Trump tried to keep hidden.

It also comes as a bipartisan group of lawmakers push to update the Electoral Count Act to eliminate any ambiguity about the vice president’s role.

Pence has so far tried to thread a needle on his actions Jan. 6, which continue to enrage large portions of Trump’s base, posing a potential complication if he runs for president in 2024.

In recent months, he has generally refrained from voluntarily raising the events of that day but has defended his actions when pressed, saying he was abiding by his constitutional role. Last year, he said in a speech that he will “always be proud that we did our part on that tragic day to reconvene the Congress and fulfilled our duty under the Constitution and the laws of the United States.”

He has also accused Democrats and the media of continuing to focus on the insurrection to score political points against Republicans and divert attention from Biden’s agenda.

While a basic declaration of fact, Pence’s decision to describe Trump as “wrong” was especially significant given Pence’s posture in the White House. As Trump’s vice president, Pence was exceptionally deferential to him, never publicly voicing disagreement and defending even his most controversial actions.

After spending several months laying low after leaving the White House, Pence has returned to the public spotlight. He launched his own political advocacy group and has been traveling the country, visiting early

voting states, delivering speeches and hosting fundraisers for midterm candidates. Pence, unlike some possible 2024 presidential contenders, has notably declined to rule out running against Trump. He is also working on a book.

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. It is so far unclear what Pence will do.

'Someone else's festival': No North Korea at ally's Olympics

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — During the last Winter Games, North Korea basked in the global limelight in South Korea, with hundreds of athletes, cheerleaders and officials pushing hard to woo their South Korean and U.S. rivals in a bid for diplomacy that has since stalled.

Four years later, as the 2022 Winter Olympics come to its main ally and neighbor China, North Korea isn't sending any athletes and officials — ignoring the International Olympic Committee's suggestion that individual athletes could potentially compete despite a ban on the country. And though the country again finds itself on the world stage, this time it is because of belligerence, not charm, in the shape of a fast-paced string of increasingly powerful missile tests.

These tests are likely an attempt to do two things at once: perfect still-incomplete weapons systems that the North feels it needs to protect itself from its enemies, while also using the worry over those improving systems to wrest outside concessions and sanctions relief from the United States and South Korea.

Even if Pyongyang pauses or curtails those tests during the 17-day sporting spectacle that opened Friday — in a nod to its benefactor Beijing — experiments on bigger weapons, including ICBMs and nuclear bombs, could follow the Games, experts say. That's especially true as South Korean presidential elections, U.S.-South Korean military drills and several important North Korean anniversaries are approaching.

"For North Korea, the Beijing Olympics are still someone else's festival, and what's important now is furthering their own interests," said Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University in South Korea. "North Korea thinks it doesn't need to promote a peaceful image any longer through the Olympics as the United States will only notice them when they display a hardline posture by missile launches."

North Korea has often used Olympics and other sports events for political purposes, perhaps most spectacularly at the Pyeongchang Winter Games four years ago in the South.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un dispatched his powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, the first member of that ruling family to walk on South Korean soil since the Korean War, to the frigid opening ceremony. There, she sat in the same viewing box as the South Korean president and U.S. vice president.

None of North Korea's 22 athletes won a medal. But the country made a huge impression in the viewing stands, where its all-female cheering squads, dressed in matching red jumpsuits, performed meticulously choreographed routines alongside South Korean fans as they rooted for the Koreas' first combined Olympic team in women's ice hockey.

There was similar cooperation during the so-called Sunshine Era of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when North Korea received huge aid shipments from South Korea and the North frequently allowed its players to parade together with South Koreans at Olympics and other sports events.

The good feelings between the Koreas in Pyeongchang helped lay the ground for leader Kim to reach out to then-U.S. President Donald Trump for high-stakes nuclear summit talks later in 2018. Their diplomacy, however, collapsed the next year after Trump rebuffed Kim's calls for needed sanctions relief in return for limited denuclearization.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, a key player in the 2018 Olympics diplomacy, made a strong push to use the Beijing Games as yet another venue for Korean peace. He sought to have the leaders of the Koreas, the United States and China gather in Beijing and symbolically declare an end to the 1950-53 Korean War, which still technically continues.

The North, however, announced it was skipping the Games because of the coronavirus pandemic and

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moves by "hostile forces," and has ignored Seoul and Washington's repeated offers for talks as it restarted missile tests.

Last September, the International Olympic Committee suspended North Korea until the end of 2022 for refusing to send a team to the Tokyo Summer Olympics in 2021, which Pyongyang also skipped because of the virus. Still, there were hopes in Seoul that the Beijing Olympics could help ease Korean animosities — and the IOC left the door open for athletes to compete, if not represent their country. But the North did not walk through it.

North Korea's decision to avoid the Olympics, even as it proceeds with a tentative reopening of land-based trade with China following two years of pandemic border closures and economic decay, could reflect Pyongyang's frustration with Seoul and its inability to extract concessions from Washington on its behalf, said Moon Seong Mook, an analyst for the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy.

Even with the IOC ban, Moon, the analyst, said, the North "still could have pursued diplomatic opportunities on the sidelines, with the Games being hosted by ally China." Instead, the North Koreans are "saying that they don't want to get involved at all."

More than that, the North has pursued a course that the West sees as provocative.

In January alone, North Korea carried out seven rounds of missiles tests, including a medium-range weapon capable of hitting the Pacific U.S. territory of Guam. That is a record monthly number of weapons tests since Kim assumed power in December 2011. North Korea also recently threatened to lift a four-year moratorium on long-range missile and nuclear tests.

While Chinese officials may have been unhappy about North Korea's testing spree right before the start of the Games, China seems publicly willing to tolerate the tests amid a growing confrontation with Washington.

The North certainly needs China. Beijing is North Korea's economic pipeline, and its support is crucial if the North is going to revive its pandemic-battered economy. On Friday, Kim sent a message to Chinese President Xi Jinping saying the Beijing Olympics "strikingly demonstrate the dynamic spirits of China" and that he would boost bilateral ties to a new high stage with Xi.

Many observers are predicting a host of weapons tests after the Games meant to increase pressure on Washington.

Those could include a submarine-launched missile, a longer-range missile capable of reaching the American homeland or a nuclear device. Other options are a banned rocket launch to place a spy satellite into orbit or unveiling an advanced submarine.

The North may want these tests as a way to influence or draw attention to the March 9 presidential election in South Korea, the annual U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises in March, or the 110th birth anniversary of state founder Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Un's grandfather, on April 15.

It's unclear whether any attention-getting launches will result in the United States giving North Korea sanctions relief, international recognition as a legitimate nuclear state or security guarantees.

The Biden administration has offered open-ended talks but has showed no willingness to ease the sanctions unless North Korea takes real steps to abandon its nuclear weapons program. North Korea, for its part, has said it won't return to talks unless the United States drops its hostile policies first, which may be a reference to U.S. troops stationed in the South and international sanctions against its illicit weapons program.

If past events are any indication, Pyongyang and Washington could eventually meet again after a period of elevated confrontation, something the nations have repeatedly done since the first North Korean nuclear crisis in the early 1990s.

But Nam, the professor, said it's unlikely that U.S.-North Korea relations will have any major breakthrough under the Biden administration.

"In the past 30 years, they've confronted each other to an extreme degree before meeting again and reaching some deals," said Kim Yeol Soo, an expert at South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs. "What's scary in this repeated process is the fact that North Korea's nuclear and missile programs have continuously advanced in the meantime."

BEIJING SNAPSHOT: Together for a shared future, apart

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The ever-present slogan that governs these Winter Olympics is meant to evoke the ideal of one world. In reality, it's two.

Bus shelters, buildings and the walls that form the membrane of the Olympic bubble all exhort: "Together for a shared future." But the Chinese residents waiting in front of these hoardings, bundled up against the frigid temperatures, are solidly out of the loop.

At the opening ceremony, International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach declared that the mission of the Olympics rested in "always building bridges, never erecting walls." Yet with ticket sales closed to the public — Beijing is inviting 150,000 spectators, a chunk of which will be "international friends" — the locals are nearly completely walled out of their Olympics figuratively and literally.

Of course, the bifurcation of Beijing is not a capricious plot to alienate its residents. It's driven by China's "zero COVID" strategy and is, at least in part, an attempt to keep those same residents safe. Underscoring the rallying cry of the Olympic slogan is the desire for international cooperation to surmount shared challenges — like the pandemic from which the bubble swelled — together, not a literal call for mingling.

As Olympic shuttles roll through the streets, the membrane erodes to its thinnest point, allowing glimpses of the curiosity and, often, boredom with which Beijing residents study the riders. But any apathy was shed for unmitigated delight Friday night as residents clustered on city streets and by the riverbank to catch sight of the fireworks emanating from a lit-up Bird's Nest during the opening ceremony — residents and interlopers united in wonder, if merely for a moment.

Pence: Trump is 'wrong' to say election could be overturned

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

Former Vice President Mike Pence on Friday directly rebutted Donald Trump's false claims that he somehow could have overturned the results of the 2020 election, saying that the former president was simply "wrong."

In a speech to a gathering of the conservative Federalist Society in Florida, Pence addressed Trump's intensifying efforts this week to advance the false narrative that, as vice president, he had the unilateral power to prevent President Joe Biden from taking office.

"President Trump is wrong," Pence said. "I had no right to overturn the election."

Pence's declaration marked his most forceful response yet to Trump, who has spent his post-presidency fueling the lie that the 2020 campaign was stolen from him. And it comes as Pence begins laying the groundwork for a potential run for president in 2024, which could put him in direct competition with his former boss, who is also teasing a comeback run.

The already strained relationship between the two men further deteriorated this week as Trump escalated his attacks on Pence.

In a statement Tuesday, Trump said the committee investigating the deadly Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol should instead probe "why Mike Pence did not send back the votes for recertification or approval." And on Sunday, he blasted Pence, falsely declaring that "he could have overturned the Election!"

Vice presidents play only a ceremonial role in the the counting of Electoral College votes. Any attempt to interfere in the count would have represented an extraordinary violation of the law and an assault on the democratic process, sparking a Constitutional crisis.

Pence, in his remarks Friday to the group of lawyers in Lake Buena Vista, described Jan. 6, 2021 as "a dark day in the history of the United States Capitol" and framed his actions as in line with his duty as a constitutional conservative.

"The American people must know that we will always keep our oath to the Constitution, even when it would be politically expedient to do otherwise," he told the group Friday. He noted that, under Article II Section One of the Constitution, "elections are conducted at the state level, not by the Congress" and that

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"the only role of Congress with respect to the Electoral College is to open and count votes submitted and certified by the states. No more, no less."

He went on to call out those who have insisted that isn't the case.

"Frankly there is no idea more un-American than the notion that any one person could choose the American president," he added. "Under the Constitution, I had no right to change the outcome of our election. And (Vice President) Kamala Harris will have no right to overturn the election when we beat them in 2024."

The audience applauded Pence's line about beating the Democrats in the upcoming presidential election, but remained silent when Pence said earlier that "Trump is wrong."

Trump responded in a statement late Friday night, insisting a "Vice President's position is not an automatic conveyor if obvious signs of voter fraud or irregularities exist." Trump's claims of fraud have been rejected by dozens of state, local and federal elections officials, numerous judges — including some Trump appointed — and Trump's attorney general. All have said the vote was fair.

As Pence countered Trump in Florida, Republican officials gathered in Utah to align themselves even more closely with the former president. The Republican National Committee censured Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois for participating on the committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection. The GOP also assailed the panel for leading a "persecution of ordinary citizens engaged in legitimate political discourse."

Pence was inside the Capitol on Jan. 6, presiding over the joint session of Congress to certify the presidential election, when a mob of Trump's supporters violently smashed inside, assaulting police officers and hunting down lawmakers. Pence, who released a letter moments before the session got underway laying out his conclusion that he had no authority to overturn the will of the voters, was rushed to safety as some rioters chanted "Hang Mike Pence!"

The former vice president, in his remarks Friday, acknowledged the lingering anger in Trump's base, even as he said it was time "to focus on the future."

"The truth is, there's more at stake than our party or political fortunes," he said. "Men and women, if we lose faith in the Constitution, we won't just lose elections — we'll lose our country."

Trump's escalating rhetoric comes as he is under growing scrutiny from the Jan. 6 committee, which has now interviewed hundreds of witnesses, issued dozens of subpoenas and obtained reams of government documents that Trump tried to keep hidden.

It also comes as a bipartisan group of lawmakers push to update the Electoral Count Act to eliminate any ambiguity about the vice president's role.

Pence has so far tried to thread a needle on his actions Jan. 6, which continue to enrage large portions of Trump's base, posing a potential complication if he runs for president in 2024.

In recent months, he has generally refrained from voluntarily discussing the 6th, but has defended his actions when pressed, saying he was abiding by his constitutional role.

Last year, he said in a speech that he will "always be proud that we did our part on that tragic day to reconvene the Congress and fulfilled our duty under the Constitution and the laws of the United States." And while he has claimed the two men left the White House on amicable terms, he has acknowledged that he and Trump will likely never see "eye to eye" on what happened that day.

He has also accused Democrats and the media of continuing to focus on the insurrection to score political points against Republicans and divert attention from Biden's agenda.

While a basic declaration of fact, Pence's decision to describe Trump as "wrong" was especially significant given Pence's posture in the White House. As Trump's vice president, Pence was exceptionally deferential to him, never publicly voicing disagreement and defending even his most controversial actions.

After spending several months laying low after leaving the White House, Pence has returned to the public spotlight. He launched his own political advocacy group and has been traveling the country, visiting early voting states, delivering speeches and hosting fundraisers for midterm candidates. Pence, unlike some possible 2024 presidential contenders, has notably declined to rule out running against Trump. He is also working on a book.

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. It is so far unclear what Pence will do.

GoFundMe ends fundraiser for Canada convoy protesters

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Ontario's Conservative premier called Friday for demonstrators to end the "occupation" of Ottawa, while the crowdfunding site GoFundMe said it would refund or redirect to charities the vast majority of millions raised by demonstrators protesting COVID-19 measures in the Canadian capital.

Ottawa police chief Peter Soly moved 150 officers to the parts of the capital most affected but he gave no indication when the days-old protest would end, saying police expected it to ramp up again this weekend, when protests are also planned in Toronto and Quebec City.

"It's not a protest anymore. It's become an occupation," Ontario Premier Doug Ford said. "It's time for this to come to an end."

Ford said the province is very close to getting back to normal in the pandemic and protests are a constitutional right, but he said an occupation is unacceptable.

GoFundMe said it cut off funding for the organizers, because it had determined the effort violated the site's terms of service due to unlawful activity. It had already suspended the fundraising effort, which had raised about 10 million Canadian (US\$7.8 million).

"We now have evidence from law enforcement that the previously peaceful demonstration has become an occupation, with police reports of violence and other unlawful activity," GoFundMe said in a statement.

"No further funds will be directly distributed."

Ottawa police thanked them for listening to the concerns and called "on all crowdfunding sites to follow." Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson did the same and said he hoped limiting the funding would restrict their ability to stay.

The protest organizers are also facing a class action lawsuit over the continuous horn noise, filed on behalf of residents.

Soly acknowledged "trust has been impacted" as Ottawa residents are furious with the blaring horns, traffic gridlock and harassment they have faced. Many complain police have done little and they call it an occupation.

"If we knew that it was going to seep into the neighborhoods we would have deployed more resources into those neighborhoods," deputy police chief Steve Bell said. "We've listened to our community. They are upset, they are fearful."

Thousands of protesters railing against vaccine mandates and other COVID-19 restrictions descended on the capital last weekend, deliberately blocking traffic around Parliament Hill. Police estimate about 250 remained, but Bell said they expected 300 to 400 more trucks this weekend and more than 1,000 protesters on foot. He said up to 1,000 counter-protesters were expected as well.

The "freedom truck convoy" has attracted support from former U.S. President Donald Trump and the opposition federal Conservative party in Canada, but two federal Conservative party lawmakers broke with the party and said the protest needed to end.

"I spent the week undergoing the Siege of Ottawa," Conservative lawmaker Pierre Paul-Hus tweeted. "I ask that we clear the streets and that we stop this occupation controlled by radicals and anarchist groups."

Sen. Dennis Patterson quit the Conservative caucus.

"I wholeheartedly and unreservedly deplore and denounce what is happening in Ottawa with the so-called Freedom Convoy right now. Let me be clear: If you wrap yourself in or go about waving a Nazi or Confederate flag, you are declaring yourself a person who embraces hate, bigotry, and racism," Patterson said in a statement.

The Conservative party ousted its moderate party leader this week and the interim leader has voiced support for the protesters.

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Many Canadians were outraged after some protesters 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.

Protesters have said they won't leave until all mandates and COVID-19 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.

Late Thursday, federal Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino said the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had approved the mayor's request for the national police force to support city police.

Organizers, including ones who have espoused racist and white supremacist views, had raised millions for the cross-country "freedom truck convoy" against vaccine mandates and other restrictions. Protests are planned for Toronto, Quebec City and Victoria, British Columbia as well. Toronto police closed a street south of the provincial legislature where major five hospitals are located. A convoy of semi-tractor trucks set up north of the legislature and blared horns Friday evening.

In a statement, Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps said they have already seen the egging of homes that had signs supporting health-care workers, people using anti-Semitic and racist language, and people violating health orders by entering businesses without masks.

The Canadian Trucking Alliance, a federation representing truckers across the country, has estimated that 85% of truckers in Canada are vaccinated. It opposes the protest.

Some of the demonstrators are protesting a rule that took effect Jan. 15 requiring truckers entering Canada to be fully immunized against the coronavirus. The U.S. has the same rule for truckers entering the U.S.

Emboldened China opens Olympics, with lockdown and boycotts

By SARAH DiLORENZO Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping declared the Winter Olympics open Friday night, inviting the world back — sort of — for the pandemic era's second Games, this time as an emboldened and more powerful nation whose government's authoritarian turn provoked some countries' leaders to stay home.

China used its first Olympics in 2008 to amplify its international aspirations. This time, in a ceremony held in the same lattice-encased Bird's Nest stadium that hosted the inaugural event of that year's summer Games, it presented a more confident, and defiant, face to the world.

Athletes Zhao Jiawen and Dinigeer Yilamujiang delivered the Olympic flame. The choice of Yilamujiang, a member of the country's Uyghur Muslim minority, was steeped in symbolism: Western governments and human rights groups say the Beijing government has oppressed Uyghurs on a massive scale.

With the flame lit, Beijing became the first city to host both winter and summer Games. And while some are staying away from the second pandemic Olympics in six months, many other world leaders attended the opening ceremony. Most notable: Russian President Vladimir Putin, who met privately with Xi earlier in the day as a dangerous standoff unfolded at Russia's border with Ukraine.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach addressed assembled athletes: "Dear fellow Olympians: Your Olympic stage is set."

The pandemic also weighs heavily on this year's Games, just as it did last summer in Tokyo. More than two years after the first COVID-19 cases were identified in China's Hubei province, some 700 miles (1,100 km) south of Beijing, nearly 6 million human beings have died and hundreds of millions more around the world have been sickened.

The host country itself claims some of the lowest rates of death and illness from the virus, in part because of strict lockdowns imposed by the government aimed at quickly stamping out outbreaks. Such measures instantly greeted anyone arriving to compete in or attend the Winter Games.

An Olympic opening ceremony typically provides the host nation a chance to showcase its culture, define its place in the world, flaunt its best side. That's something China in particular has been consumed with for decades. But at this year's Beijing Games, the gulf between performance and reality is shaping up to be particularly jarring.

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Fourteen years ago, a Beijing opening ceremony that featured massive pyrotechnic displays and thousands of card-flipping performers set a new standard of extravagance to start an Olympics that no host since has matched. It was a fitting start to an event often billed as China's "coming out."

Now, no matter how you view it, China has arrived — but the hope for a more open country that accompanied those first Games has faded.

For Beijing, these Olympics are a confirmation of its status as world player and power. Yet for many outside China, particularly in the West, they have become a confirmation of the country's embrace of more oppressive policies.

Chinese authorities are crushing pro-democracy activism and tightening their control over Hong Kong, becoming more confrontational with Taiwan, and interning Uyghurs in the far west — a crackdown the U.S. government and others have called genocide.

In protest of those actions, leaders of the United States, Britain, Australia and Canada, among others, imposed a diplomatic boycott on these Games, shunning appearances alongside Chinese leadership while still allowing their athletes to compete. But China came back with its own symbolic finger in the eye Friday, putting Yilamujiang in the opening night's most anticipated role.

In the runup to the Olympics, China's suppression of dissent was also on display in the controversy surrounding Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai. She disappeared from public view last year after accusing a former Communist Party official of sexual assault. Her accusation was quickly scrubbed from the internet, and discussion of it remains heavily censored.

In the shadow of those political issues, China put on its show. As Xi took his seat, the performers turned toward him and repeatedly bowed. A simultaneous cheer went up as they raised their pom poms toward their president — China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, who established the People's Republic in 1949. A barrage of fireworks, including some that spelled out "Spring," announced that the festivities were at hand.

A line of people dressed in costumes representing China's varied ethnicities passed the national flag to the pole where it was raised — a show of unity the country often puts on as part of its narrative that its wide range of ethnic groups live together in peace and prosperity.

But politics still elbowed its way into the proceedings. The parade of athletes from Taiwan — the island democracy that China says belongs to it but that competes separately as "Chinese Taipei" — was greeted with a cheer from the crowd, as were the Russian competitors. An overcoated Putin stood and waved at the delegation, nodding crisply as they marched.

The stadium was relatively full, though by no means at capacity, after authorities decided to allow a select group to attend events.

As with any Olympics, attention will shift Saturday — at least partially — from the geopolitical issues of the day to the athletes themselves.

All eyes turn now to whether Alpine skiing superstar Mikaela Shiffrin, who already owns three Olympic medals, can exceed sky-high expectations. How snowboard sensation Shaun White will cap off his Olympic career — and if the sport's current standard-bearer, Chloe Kim, will wow us again. And whether Russia's women will sweep the medals in figure skating.

And China is pinning its hopes on Eileen Gu, the 18-year-old, American-born freestyle skier who has chosen to compete for her mother's native country and could win three gold medals.

As they compete, the conditions imposed by Chinese authorities offer a stark contrast to the party atmosphere of the 2008 Games. Some flight attendants, immigration officials and hotel staff have been covered head to toe in hazmat gear, masks and goggles. There is a daily testing regimen for all attendees, followed by lengthy quarantines for all those testing positive. And there is no passing from the Olympic venues through the ever-present cordons of chain-link fence — covered in cheery messages of a "shared future together" — into the city itself.

China itself has also transformed in the years since its first Games. Then, it was an emerging global economic force making its biggest leap yet onto the global stage. Now it is a burgeoning superpower. Xi,

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who was the head of the 2008 Olympics, now runs the entire country and has encouraged a personality-driven campaign of adulation.

Three decades after its troops crushed massive democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, killing hundreds and perhaps thousands of Chinese, the government locked up an estimated 1 million members of minority groups, mostly Uyghurs, in mass internment camps. The situation has led human rights groups to dub these the "Genocide Games."

China says the camps are "vocational training and education centers" that are part of an anti-terror campaign and have closed. It denies any human rights violations.

Outside the Olympic "bubble" that separates regular Beijingers from Olympians and their entourages, thousands of people, bundled in winter jackets, gathered west of the stadium hoping for a distant glimpse of the fireworks, but they were pushed back by police.

Elsewhere in the city, others expressed enthusiasm and pride at the world coming to their doorstep. Zhang Wenquan, a collector of Olympic memorabilia, said Friday that he was excited, but that was tempered by the virus that has changed so much for so many.

"I think the effect of the fireworks is going to be much better than it in 2008," Zhang said. "I actually wanted to go to the venue to watch it. ... But because of the epidemic, there may be no chance."

US death toll from COVID-19 hits 900,000, sped by omicron

By MARK KENNEDY and KEN SWEET Associated Press

Propelled in part by the wildly contagious omicron variant, the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 hit 900,000 on Friday, less than two months after eclipsing 800,000.

The two-year total, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is greater than the population of Indianapolis, San Francisco, or Charlotte, North Carolina.

The milestone comes more than 13 months into a vaccination drive that has been beset by misinformation and political and legal strife, though the shots have proved safe and highly effective at preventing serious illness and death.

"It is an astronomically high number. If you had told most Americans two years ago as this pandemic was getting going that 900,000 Americans would die over the next few years, I think most people would not have believed it," said Dr. Ashish K. Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health.

He lamented that most of the deaths happened after the vaccine gained authorization.

"We got the medical science right. We failed on the social science. We failed on how to help people get vaccinated, to combat disinformation, to not politicize this," Jha said. "Those are the places where we have failed as America."

President Joe Biden lamented the milestone in a statement Friday night, saying, "After nearly two years, I know that the emotional, physical, and psychological weight of this pandemic has been incredibly difficult to bear."

He again urged Americans to get vaccinations and booster shots. "Two hundred and fifty million Americans have stepped up to protect themselves, their families, and their communities by getting at least one shot — and we have saved more than one million American lives as a result," Biden said.

Just 64% of the population is fully vaccinated, or about 212 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nor is COVID-19 finished with the United States: Jha said the U.S. could reach 1 million deaths by April.

Among the dead is Susan Glister-Berg, 53, of Sterling Heights, Michigan, whose children had to take her off a ventilator just before Thanksgiving after COVID-19 ravaged her lungs and kidneys.

"She's always cared more about people than she did herself. She always took care of everyone," said a daughter, Hali Fortuna. "That's how we all describe her: She cared for everyone. Very selfless."

Glister-Berg, a smoker, was in poor health, and was apparently unvaccinated, according to her daughter. Fortuna just got the booster herself.

"We all want it to go away. I personally don't see it going away anytime soon," she said. "I guess it's

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about learning to live with it and hoping we all learn to take care of each other better.”

The latest bleak milestone came as omicron is loosening its grip on the country.

New cases per day have plunged by almost a half-million since mid-January, when they hit a record-shattering peak of more than 800,000. Cases have been declining in 49 states in the last two weeks, by Johns Hopkins’ count, and the 50th, Maine, reported that confirmed infections are falling there, too, dropping sharply over the past week.

Also, the number of Americans in the hospital with COVID-19 has declined 15% since mid-January to about 124,000.

Deaths are still running high at more than 2,400 per day on average, the most since last winter. And they are on the rise in at least 35 states, reflecting the lag between when victims become infected and when they succumb.

Still, public health officials have expressed hope that the worst of omicron is coming to an end. While they caution that things could still go bad again and dangerous new variants could emerge, some places are already talking about easing precautions.

Los Angeles County may end outdoor mask requirements in a few weeks, Public Health Director Dr. Barbara Ferrer said Thursday.

“Post-surge does not imply that the pandemic is over or that transmission is low, or that there will not be unpredictable waves of surges in the future,” she warned.

Despite its wealth and its world-class medical institutions, the U.S. has the highest reported toll of any country, and even then, the real number of lives lost directly or indirectly to the coronavirus is thought to be significantly higher.

Experts believe some COVID-19 deaths have been misattributed to other conditions. And some Americans are thought to have died of chronic illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes because they were unable or unwilling to obtain treatment during the crisis.

The Rev. Gina Anderson-Cloud, senior pastor of Fredericksburg United Methodist Church in Virginia, lost her dementia-stricken father after he was hospitalized for cancer surgery and then isolated in a COVID-19 ward. He went into cardiac arrest, was revived, but died about a week later.

She had planned to be by his bedside, but the rules barred her from going to the hospital.

“I think it’s important for us not to be numbed. Each one of those numbers is someone,” she said of the death toll. “Those are mothers, fathers, children, our elders.”

When the vaccine was rolled out in mid-December 2020, the death toll stood at about 300,000. It hit 600,000 in mid-June 2021 and 700,000 on Oct. 1. On Dec. 14, it reached 800,000.

It took just 51 more days to get to 900,000, the fastest 100,000 jump since last winter.

“We have underestimated our enemy here, and we have under-prepared to protect ourselves,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, a public health professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “We’ve learned a tremendous amount of humility in the face of a lethal and contagious respiratory virus.”

The latest 100,000 deaths encompass those caused by both the delta variant and omicron, which began spreading rapidly in December and became the predominant version in the U.S. before the month was out.

While omicron has proved less likely to cause severe illness than delta, the sheer number of people who became infected with it contributed to the high number of deaths.

Ja said he and other medical professionals are frustrated that policymakers are seemingly running out of ideas for getting people to roll up their sleeves.

“There aren’t a whole lot of tools left. We need to double down and come up with new ones,” he said.

COVID-19 has become one of the top three causes of death in America, behind the big two — heart disease and cancer.

“We have been fighting among ourselves about tools that actually do save lives. Just the sheer amount of politics and misinformation around vaccines, which are remarkably effective and safe, is staggering,” Sharfstein said.

He added: “This is the consequence.”

Northeast grapples with icy roads as storm blows out to sea

By DAVID SHARP, KATHLEEN FOODY and JILL BLEED Associated Press

Northeast residents were urged to stay off the roads with temperatures beginning to drop Friday evening as a major winter storm turned already slippery roads and sidewalks into ice-covered hazards.

The storm spread misery from the Deep South, where tree limbs snapped and a tornado claimed a life, to the nation's northeastern tip where snow and ice made travel treacherous Friday.

Massachusetts State Police responded to more than 200 crashes with property damage or injuries, including one fatal crash, starting Thursday evening, officials said. New Hampshire State Police reported at least 70 crashes Friday morning.

"This number is most definitely low because reports are still being written and entered," state police in Massachusetts tweeted.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul warned residents as the snow blows out to sea late Friday and Saturday to stay home if possible to avoid ice-coated roadways and the threat of falling tree limbs in the Hudson Valley and Capital regions.

"We're not out of the danger zone yet," Hochul said. "The weather is wildly unpredictable."

More than a foot (30 centimeters) of snow fell in parts of Pennsylvania, New York and New England. Utility crews were making progress in an area stretching from Texas to Ohio after about 350,000 homes and businesses were in the dark at one point.

One of the hardest-hit places was Memphis, where more than 100,000 customers remained without power Friday night in Shelby County alone, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

Memphis resident Michael LaRosa described cracking and banging as the tree limbs fell, and the dull hum and pop of transformers blowing out in his tree-lined Midtown neighborhood. A fire started at the end of his street, caused by a live wire on Thursday.

"It was pretty surreal for a little while," LaRosa, a professor at Rhodes College and a book editor, said Friday. "There were people walking in the streets, and I was worried that limbs were going to fall on them. The neighborhood sort of collapsed pretty quickly and pretty spectacularly."

Crews worked to remove trees and downed power lines from city streets, while those who lost electricity spent a cold night at home, or sought refuge at hotels or homes of friends and family. Utility officials said it could take days for power to be restored.

It's also going to take days to clear 225 downed trees on city streets, and crews were working 16-hour shifts to get it done, Robert Knecht, Memphis' public works director, said Thursday night.

In Oklahoma, police in the Tulsa suburb of Broken Arrow said they were investigating a hit-and-run crash that killed a 12-year-old boy who was struck while sledding.

Tragedy also struck western Alabama, where a tornado on Thursday killed one person and critically injured three others, Hale County Emergency Management Director Russell Weeden told local news outlets.

The storm represented a "highly energized system" with waves of low pressure riding along like a train from Texas, where there was snowfall and subfreezing temperatures, to Maine and the Canadian Maritimes, said Hunter Tubbs, meteorologist from the National Weather Service in Maine.

Airlines scrubbed about 3,400 flights by midday Friday, with the highest numbers of cancellations at Dallas-Fort Worth and airports in the New York City area and Boston, according to tracking service FlightAware.

Slippery roads caused scores of vehicles to slide off roads, even before anticipated deteriorating conditions during the evening rush hour.

In Tennessee, a man was killed when his truck crashed into a tree that had fallen on a highway, causing the vehicle to spin into a ditch Thursday night in Haywood County, the highway patrol said.

In the Pittsburgh area, commuter rail service was halted when a power line went down, trapping cars at a Port Authority of Allegheny County rail yard.

In New York's Hudson Valley, the Catskill Animal Sanctuary was relying on generators for power Friday after the overnight ice storm.

"We had trees down all over the property and trees down on our road," said Kathy Stevens, founder of

the refuge for rescued farm animals.

But the roughly 250 animals in Saugerties were OK, she said. Large animals took shelter in barns and smaller animals were taken to offices, the infirmary and other places to keep safe from falling trees.

In Texas, the return of subfreezing weather brought heightened anxiety nearly a year after February 2021's catastrophic freeze that buckled the state's power grid for days, leading to hundreds of deaths in one of the worst blackouts in U.S. history.

But Gov. Greg Abbott said Thursday's power outages were due to high winds or downed power lines, not grid failures. About 13,000 homes and businesses in Texas remained without power Friday afternoon.

In New England, some places welcomed the winter weather, which was a boon for skiers and snowmobilers.

In Vermont, no one was complaining at the Stowe Mountain Resort where skiers and snowboarders reported some of the best conditions of the season, with more than 10 inches (25 centimeters) of snow overnight, and snow continuing to fall.

"We're just having a blast, the sauce is flowing," said Jared Marshall, of Denmark, Maine, a member of the ski team of New Hampshire's Colby Sawyer College in town for a ski meet.

Parents: Amir Locke 'executed'; mayor halts no-knock entries

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minneapolis mayor imposed a moratorium on no-knock warrants Friday, two days after a SWAT team entered a downtown apartment and killed Amir Locke, a 22-year-old Black man who his parents said was "executed" after he was startled from a deep sleep and reached for a legal firearm to protect himself.

Mayor Jacob Frey said while the moratorium is in place, he and police leadership will review and revise department policy with the help of two experts who helped shape Breonna's Law, the ban on no-knock warrants that was imposed in Louisville, Kentucky, following the death of Breonna Taylor in a botched raid at her home in 2020.

"No matter what information comes to light, it won't change the fact that Amir Locke's life was cut short," Frey said in a statement.

Locke's parents, Andre Locke and Karen Wells, described him Friday as respectful, including to police, and said some of their relatives work in law enforcement. Wells said the couple coached their son on how to act and do "what they needed to do whenever they encountered police officers" because of the danger to "unarmed Black males."

"My son was executed on 2/2 of 22," Wells said. "And now his dreams have been destroyed."

The parents spoke at a news conference organized by civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who said Locke's family was "just flabbergasted at the fact that Amir was killed in this way" and disgusted at how the Wednesday morning raid was conducted. They said he was law-abiding, with no criminal record, and had a permit to carry a gun.

"They didn't even give him a chance," Crump said, adding that it was shocking that Minneapolis police had not learned from Taylor's death, which led to calls for an end to no-knock warrants nationwide.

Police said Locke pointed a loaded gun "in the direction of officers." An incident report said he had two wounds in the chest and one in the right wrist.

The killing prompted outrage in Minneapolis, where prominent activists confronted the mayor and interim police chief at a news conference Thursday. Nekima Levy Armstrong, a civil rights attorney, called the city's release of information "the anatomy of a cover-up."

Gov. Tim Walz called Locke's death "a tragedy" and said it showed the need for further examination of no-knock warrants.

Frey's office said DeRay McKesson, a prominent activist, and Peter Kraska, a professor at the School of Justice Studies at Eastern Kentucky University, will work with the police department on possible changes to policy. Frey's office said both men helped shape Breonna's Law in Louisville and have spearheaded

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changes to unannounced entry policies nationwide.

His office said that under the moratorium, a no-knock warrant can only be used if there is an imminent threat of harm, and even then the warrant must be approved by the chief.

Body camera video released by police Thursday evening shows an officer using a key to unlock the door of a downtown apartment and enter without knocking, followed by at least four officers in uniform and protective vests, time-stamped at about 6:48 a.m.

After they open the door, they repeatedly shout, "Police, search warrant!" They also shout "Hands!" and "Get on the ground!" The video shows an officer kick a sectional sofa, and Locke, who was wrapped in a comforter on the sofa, begins to move, holding a pistol. Three shots are heard, and the video ends.

The city also released a still from the video showing Locke holding the gun, his trigger finger along the side of the barrel. Otherwise, all that can be seen of Locke is the top of his head.

Levy Armstrong posted a link to the video on social media "for those who can stomach the murderous conduct of the Minneapolis Police Department." She added: "The mother in me is furious and sick to my stomach. Amir never had a chance to survive that encounter with police."

Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman said he asked Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison to help review the case for possible charges. Ellison's office led prosecutions of former Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin in George Floyd's killing and of former Brooklyn Center Officer Kim Potter in the shooting of Black motorist Daunte Wright.

"Amir Locke's life mattered," Ellison said in a statement, promising a fair and thorough review "guided by the values of accountability and transparency."

A gun-rights group highlighted the timing of the raid, saying it appeared from the video that Locke was awakened by a confusing array of commands from officers pointing lights and guns at him.

"Mr. Locke did what many of us might do in the same confusing circumstances, he reached for a legal means of self-defense while he sought to understand what was happening," said Rob Doar, a spokesman for the Minnesota Gun Owners Caucus.

Interim Police Chief Amelia Huffman said during a news conference Thursday that Locke wasn't named in the warrants. She said it wasn't clear how or whether Locke was connected to St. Paul's homicide investigation. A spokesman for the St. Paul Police Department said he could not comment because the homicide investigation was ongoing.

The search warrants that led the SWAT team to enter the apartment were filed under seal and will not be made public immediately.

Frey said the video "raises about as many questions as it does answers" and that the city was pursuing answers "as quickly as possible and in transparent fashion" through investigations including one by the state Bureau of Criminal Apprehension.

Huffman said the officer, Mark Hanneman, was in a difficult position.

"The still shot shows the image of the firearm in the subject's hands, at the best possible moment when the lighting was fully on him. That's the moment when the officer had to make a split-second decision to assess the circumstances and to determine whether he felt like there was an articulable threat, that the threat was of imminent harm, great bodily harm or death, and that he needed to take action right then to protect himself and his partners," she said.

Hanneman was hired in 2015. Records released by the city showed three complaints, all closed without discipline, but gave no details. Data on the website of the citizen group Communities United Against Police Brutality showed a fourth complaint, in 2018, that remains open. No details were given.

The shooting came as three former Minneapolis officers are on trial in St. Paul on charges that they violated George Floyd's civil rights. Floyd was among several Black men to die in confrontations with Minneapolis police in recent years, and his death spurred widespread protests and drive to remake the department. The Department of Justice is currently investigating the Minneapolis Police Department to see if it has a pattern or practice of civil rights violations.

Walz on Friday authorized the National Guard to provide public safety assistance if needed. His order said it was in response to the city of St. Paul's request for aid during the trial in that city, but said Guard

members would also be ready to serve in Minneapolis if needed due to Locke's death.

Waffle House shooter found guilty on 4 counts of murder

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A man who shot and killed four people at a Nashville Waffle House in 2018 was found guilty on four counts of first-degree murder Friday by a jury that rejected his insanity defense.

Travis Reinking, 33, did not dispute the details of the shooting, which was caught on surveillance video and witnessed by numerous people.

Naked save for a green jacket, Reinking opened fire inside the restaurant just after 3:20 a.m. on April 22, 2018, killing Taurean Sanderlin, 29; Joey Perez, 20; Akilah Dasilva, 23; and DeEbony Groves, 21. He fled after restaurant patron James Shaw Jr. wrestled his assault-style rifle away from him, triggering a manhunt.

Reinking looked in the direction of his parents, sitting in the gallery, after the jury read the first of 16 guilty verdicts, but otherwise showed minimal reaction. Meanwhile, survivors of the shooting and family members sitting across the aisle audibly gasped, crying and hugging as they left the courtroom.

"True justice is having my son here," Dasilva's mother, Shaundelle Brooks, told reporters after the verdict. "This is the closest (thing) to true justice."

The jury will reconvene on Saturday to hear victim impact statements and decide whether Reinking will spend the rest of his life in prison or will have the possibility of parole. Brooks said she believes he should not be allowed parole.

Evidence presented during the trial showed Reinking had schizophrenia and had suffered delusions for years, believing that unknown people were tormenting him. He contacted law enforcement several times to report that he was being threatened, stalked and harassed. In July 2017, he was detained by the Secret Service after he ventured unarmed into a restricted area on the White House grounds and demanded to meet with then-President Donald Trump.

His behavior was so alarming that state police in Illinois, where he lived at the time, revoked Reinking's state firearms owner identification. But that only meant he had to turn over his guns to someone else with valid identification. Reinking surrendered the guns to his father, who later returned them to his son.

Since law enforcement declined to take his delusions seriously, Reinking began to feel that they and other random people were part of a conspiracy against him, psychologists testified at trial. Shortly before the attack, he believed that someone had drugged him, broken into his apartment and raped him. Reinking told psychologists that while praying about what to do, he received a command from God to go to the Waffle House and shoot three people.

To prove Reinking was not guilty by reason of insanity, defense attorneys had to show not only that he suffered from a severe mental illness, but also that the illness left him unable to understand the wrongfulness of his actions.

Prosecutors presented evidence that Reinking was calm and cooperative after his arrest, able to understand and respond to commands. Although Reinking was naked when he walked from the crime scene, when he was captured nearly two days later, he was dressed and carrying a backpack loaded with water bottles, sunscreen, a pistol, ammunition, Bible and several silver bars. And they mentioned he had asked to talk to an attorney after his arrest.

Davidson County Assistant District Attorney General Ronald Dowdy suggested that Reinking was acting out of revenge. He noted that days before the shooting, Reinking stole a BMW from a dealership. Reinking wrote in a journal about plans to drive to Colorado, describing a life in which he would hang out with friends, smoke marijuana, hike in the mountains and "repossess" cars and houses so that he would not have to work, Dowdy said.

After police took the BMW back the next day, he wrote, "This time I would have to punish them by taking something they couldn't take back, some of their own lives," the prosecutor said.

"He got upset, and so he drove to that Waffle House angry, because he wanted to exact the same kind of pain and suffering that he felt, on others," Dowdy said during closing arguments.

Prosecutor Jan Norman also emphasized Reinking's own account of the shooting: He said that after killing Perez, "I felt like I was going to throw up because this was something God told me to do but it felt evil."

The jury on Friday also convicted Reinking on four counts of attempted first-degree murder and four counts of unlawful employment of a firearm during commission of or attempt to commit a dangerous felony. In addition to the four people he killed, he seriously wounded Sharita Henderson and Shantia Waggoner. Kayla Shaw and James Shaw Jr., who are not related, suffered lesser injuries.

EXPLAINER: Amir Locke case shines light on no-knock warrants

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The death of a young Black man at the hands of a Minneapolis police SWAT team is shining new light on how police carry out no-knock warrants.

Attorneys and the family of 22-year-old Amir Locke said Friday that officers basically "executed" Locke, and that they were "flabbergasted" that Minneapolis police haven't learned from the botched no-knock raid in Louisville, Kentucky, in which Breonna Taylor was killed. And they were dismayed that Locke died at police hands in the city where George Floyd's killing in 2020 sparked a nationwide reckoning with racial injustice.

Body camera video shows that the SWAT team, dressed in tactical gear, used a key to enter a downtown apartment shortly before 7 a.m. Wednesday. Not until after they push the door open do they shout, "Police, search warrant!" They also shout "Hands!" and "Get on the ground!"

The video shows an officer kick a sectional sofa, and Locke, who was wrapped in a blanket on the sofa, begins to move, holding a pistol. Three shots are heard, and the video ends.

On Friday evening, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey imposed a moratorium on no-knock warrants. While that's in place, the mayor and police leaders will work with experts who helped shape Breonna's Law, the ban that was imposed in Louisville in 2020.

WHAT ARE NO-KNOCK WARRANTS?

No-knock warrants are orders by judges that allow police to enter premises without notifying residents, such as by ringing the doorbell or banging on the door. They've been blamed in several killings of Black people, some of which have led to criminal prosecutions against officers, and prompted bipartisan calls across the country to curtail their use.

WAS THIS A NO-KNOCK ENTRY?

Interim Police Chief Amelia Huffman said at a news conference Thursday night that the SWAT team had both a regular and a no-knock search warrant. She didn't specify whether the officers carried out a no-knock entry.

But John Baker, an assistant professor of criminal justice studies at St. Cloud State University, said the body camera video makes clear that it was indeed a no-knock entry.

Though no-knock entries have sometimes had deadly results, Baker said there are important and necessary reasons for police to have them as an option — including the possibility that they are going into a dangerous situation, or that evidence may be destroyed if an announced entry gives a person time to do so. In the Locke case, he said, authorities haven't disclosed what intelligence the officers had before they went in.

WHAT WAS THE DEPARTMENT POLICY ON NO-KNOCK WARRANTS?

The Minneapolis Police Department restricted their use as part of a wide-ranging set of reforms following the killing of George Floyd in May 2020. Under the policy, which took effect in November 2020, officers were required in most cases to do a "knock and announce" by announcing their presence as they entered, making periodic announcements while inside and giving occupants reasonable time to respond.

But judges can also sign warrants in high-risk situations that allow "unannounced entry," generally by SWAT teams. In the wake of Locke's death, activists said they're still abused.

WHAT DOES THE CITY'S MORATORIUM DO?

While it's in effect, Minneapolis officers can only use the knock-and-announce approach and must wait a reasonable time before entering. The mayor's order carved out a narrow exception for when there's an

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imminent threat of harm to an individual or the public, and those no-knock warrants must be specifically approved by the police chief.

Two recognized experts — prominent activist DeRay McKesson and Peter Kraska, a professor at Eastern Kentucky University — will work with the city to review and suggest revisions to the city's policy.

WHAT DOES STATE LAW SAY ON NO-KNOCK WARRANTS?

The Minnesota Legislature adopted some restrictions last June as part of its response to the killing of George Floyd, but still allowed their use when certain conditions were met. Democratic Gov. Tim Walz said Friday it's already time to revisit them.

"The events leading to the death of Amir Locke illustrate the need for further reform," the governor said in a statement. "To ensure the safety of both residents and law enforcement, we need to make additional changes to police policies and practices regarding the execution of search warrants." He made no specific proposals.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ACROSS THE COUNTRY?

Louisville, Kentucky, banned them following the killing of Taylor in her home in March 2020, which led to calls for change nationwide. Oregon and Florida have also outlawed such warrants. Kentucky followed Breonna's Law with a series of statewide restrictions that fell short of a total ban.

The Justice Department moved in September to curtail their use by federal agents. With limited exceptions, no-knock warrants now require approval from both federal prosecutors and ranking agency officials before seeking one from a judge. Federal agents are limited to using them in situations when an agent "has reasonable grounds to believe that knocking and announcing the agent's presence would create an imminent threat of physical violence to the agent and/or another person."

Biden sees US economy as powering past the pandemic

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — That bleak jobs report the White House had been bracing for never arrived Friday. Instead, President Joe Biden got the pleasant surprise that the U.S. economy had powered through the omicron wave of the coronavirus and posted 467,000 new jobs in January — along with strong revisions to job gains in the two prior months. It showed just how much the pandemic's grip on the economy has faded, though the nation is still grappling with high inflation.

"Our country is taking everything that COVID has to throw at us, and we've come back stronger," Biden declared at the White House.

The jobs report suggested the United States has entered a new phase in its recovery from the pandemic. And it capped something of a comeback week for the president.

Also on Friday, the House passed a bill to jumpstart computer chip production and development, a key step for reconciling differences with an earlier measure approved by the Senate. And a day earlier, outside the economy, the administration announced that U.S. forces had raided the home of the Islamic State leader, leading Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi to blow himself up.

Harvard University economist Jason Furman, a former adviser in the Obama White House, said the jobs report showed that employers and workers had gotten over the havoc caused by the pandemic.

The virus "is now one factor among many and no longer the dominant factor it was," said Furman. He pointed to broad strength across the report and the addition of 151,000 jobs in the leisure and hospitality sector — restaurants, hotels, entertainment and more in an area of the economy most prone to disruption from the pandemic.

Yet as the economy strengthens, a question for Biden personally — and his presidency — is whether he can stitch together the positives in a convincing way to revive his support that has declined in polls in the past year.

Who — and what — gets credit?

The infections caused by omicron had caused millions of Americans to miss work, leading to expectations that the economy lost jobs in January. Yet when the figures showed the virus had little impact, Republicans

were quick to offer an alternative narrative — that the job gains reflected the expiration of unemployment benefits added with a push by Biden and his Democrats months earlier.

“Now that there is no longer a barrier to work in the form of Democrats’ unemployment bonuses and monthly stimulus checks, Americans are finally coming off the sidelines,” said Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, the ranking Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee.

And, jobs aside, Biden acknowledged things aren’t entirely rosy. Inflation remains a major challenge, with consumer prices increasing at 7% over the past year.

The strong jobs report, however, may give the Federal Reserve reason to raise interest rates and pull back on its support for the economy to reduce inflation. Average hourly earnings rose 5.7% in January from a year ago, suggesting that the demand for workers is leading to higher incomes and possibly more sources of inflation.

Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at the consultancy RSM, said the solid labor market should make it easier for the Fed to hike rates without disrupting growth very much. It’s possible that workers will come out of the pandemic more productive than before, making it easier for growth to occur even as interest rates rise.

“Given the fact that corporate profits continued to rise at a strong clip even as wages quickly increased tends to imply that the American commercial sector and economy is in the midst of a productivity boom,” Brusuelas said. “That strongly implies that the economy will be able to absorb coming rate hikes in a better fashion than is currently acknowledged.”

Biden on Friday tried to make a play for the record books — touting the gains that have occurred under his stewardship. At 4% unemployment and 6.6 million jobs added during his first full year, he’s making his case that his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package was a wise choice and that lawmakers should now support the rest of his agenda to prolong the growth.

“History has been made here,” Biden declared “It comes alongside the largest drop in unemployment rate in a single year on record, the largest reduction in childhood poverty ever recorded in a single year. And the strongest economic growth this country has seen in nearly 40 years.”

GOP censures Cheney, Kinzinger as it assails Jan. 6 probe

By SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The Republican National Committee censured two GOP lawmakers on Friday for participating on the committee investigating the violent Jan. 6 insurrection and assailed the panel for leading a “persecution of ordinary citizens engaged in legitimate political discourse.”

GOP officials took a voice vote to approve censuring Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois at the party’s winter meeting in Salt Lake City. The censure was approved a day after an RNC subcommittee watered down a resolution that had recommended expelling the pair from the party.

The censure accuses Cheney and Kinzinger of “participating in a Democrat-led persecution.”

RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel denied that the “legitimate political discourse” wording in the censure was referring to the violent attack on the Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump and said it had to do with other actions taken by the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection. But the resolution drew no such distinction.

RNC members take issue with what they see as the overly broad subpoenas, including one for Arizona GOP Chair Kelli Ward. Ward, an osteopathic doctor, sued to block the subpoena and argues that providing her phone records would compromise patients’ privacy.

“What are you going for? What are you looking for? You should have a specific scope,” said Pam Pollard, an RNC member from Oklahoma.

But GOP Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, who voted to convict Trump in both of his impeachment trials, ex-coriated his party for the censure.

“Shame falls on a party that would censure persons of conscience, who seek truth in the face of vitriol,” he tweeted. “Honor attaches to Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger for seeking truth even when doing so comes at great personal cost.”

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McDaniel is his niece.

As Republicans in Salt Lake City tied the party even more tightly to Trump, his former vice president, Mike Pence, rebuked him. Speaking to the conservative Federalist Society in Florida, Pence said Trump was "wrong" to suggest he could have overturned the election.

"I had no right to overturn the election," he said, also noting that Jan. 6 was "a dark day in the history of the United States Capitol."

McDaniel and her co-chair Tommy Hicks focused their remarks to RNC members on the 2022 midterms and key tenets of their platform — crime rates, parental rights over school curriculum choices and pandemic restrictions on businesses. Though they hardly mentioned the former president by name, Trump's sway among party officials was made evident by the censure and criticisms of the Commission on Presidential Debates.

Cheney, of Wyoming, and Kinzinger, of Illinois, are the only two Republicans on the House committee investigating the attack on the Capitol. Trump and other GOP members were incensed when Kinzinger and Cheney agreed to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's invitation to join the Democratic-led House committee, giving the Jan. 6 panel a veneer of bipartisan credibility.

The most consequential element of the censure is a call for the party to no longer support Cheney and Kinzinger as Republicans.

The censure — combined with support from RNC members from Wyoming — allows the party to invoke a rule to back candidates other than Cheney. It sets in motion a way for the party to support Cheney's primary opponent, Harriet Hageman, who has been endorsed by Trump. Wyoming's primary is in August.

Cheney spokesman Jeremy Adler said in a statement that the move subverted the will of Wyoming voters.

"Frank Eathorne and the Republican National Committee are trying to assert their will and take away the voice of the people of Wyoming before a single vote has even been cast," he said, referring to the Wyoming GOP chair who co-sponsored the resolution.

Kinzinger is not running for reelection.

RNC members also voted in favor of a rule change that would prohibit their candidates from participating in debates organized by the Commission on Presidential Debates.

The institution has been a staple of presidential elections for three decades, but Republicans have decried the format as biased. After advancing on Friday, the rules change is expected to be completed when the RNC meets in summer.

Republicans object to past moderators they perceive as left-leaning and remarks about Trump made by commission co-chair Mike McCurry.

"Restoring faith in our elections means making sure our candidate can compete on a level playing field," McDaniel said in a speech on Friday.

"We are not walking away from debates, we are walking away from the Commission on Presidential Debates because it's a biased monopoly that does not serve the best interests of the American people," she added.

Even with a rules change, decisions about whether to participate in commission-sponsored debates will fall to the GOP's eventual 2024 nominee.

Did ABC miss a learning opportunity by suspending Whoopi?

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

ABC's decision to suspend Whoopi Goldberg from "The View" for two weeks for her remarks about the Holocaust has opened the network up to criticism that its response derailed a teachable moment for the nation about a sensitive topic often misunderstood and seldom discussed on air.

Goldberg set off a cancel-culture media circus Monday when she said on the show that the Nazis' genocide of 6 million Jews during World War II wasn't about race, but rather, "man's inhumanity to man" and that the conflict was between "two white groups of people." The Nazis were white supremacists who wanted to eradicate what they considered an inferior race.

Her suspension came after she apologized that night on Twitter and the next day on the show, which

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featured the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League at her invitation. The network's action spurred strong emotions and split allegiances about whether the politically liberal actor should be canceled or counseled.

Isaac de Castro, editor of Jewcy, an online platform for young Jews, said on Twitter that Goldberg's offensive comments reflected the inability of many Americans to understand race and racism outside their prism. But he also said in a tweet that "putting a grown woman in a time-out" does little to advance a reckoning with Jewish identity.

"Now we're talking about whether Whoopi should be suspended or not, instead of talking about the issue at hand ... and having a larger conversation about antisemitism and racism and the complexity of Jewish history," said de Castro, who is based in New York City and from Panama City, Panama.

As many Democrats turned on Goldberg, some prominent Republicans condemned her while others rushed to her defense.

"DON'T CANCEL Whoopi," tweeted Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who has long accused the media of trying to silence the right.

Some viewers threatened to boycott the show for what she said and others for what they saw as a lopsided response by the network against a Black woman for remarks that were not malicious.

"Whoopi made a comment that was misinformed, but then people jumped down her throat in ways that they haven't for non-Black celebrities," said Malana Krongelb, a librarian in Boston who is Black and Jewish. "'The View' has a platform that it could really use to popularly educate people. But instead it's almost used as clickbait."

Others echoed the sentiment that discussion was better than punishment.

"If what you want is to change someone's mind, I have to think education is more effective than public shaming and punishment. Particularly when that person shows a sincere willingness to learn and apologize," tweeted Sharon Brous, a rabbi in Los Angeles.

"The View" is an American daytime talk show in which women discuss hot topics of the day. They're encouraged to be somewhat edgy or provocative, and declining to have an opinion kind of defeats the purpose of the show, said Tom Jones, senior media writer at Poynter Institute.

"It would be nice if these things never happened, but if anything good can come out of it, it is education and it is people trying to find out more about what it was she said, why is it offensive?" he said.

Goldberg's defenders point to one of her former co-hosts, Meghan McCain, who apologized last year for previously condoning then-President Donald Trump's racist rhetoric toward Asians.

In a Daily Mail column published Tuesday, McCain said that she's not calling for Goldberg to be fired, largely because she doesn't think the show would ever do that to its star. It was unclear if McCain had written the column knowing of the suspension, but she called her apology evidence of a double standard — and urged this be used as a "teachable" moment.

"Instead of half-assed apologies and bringing in experts in the antisemitism space, maybe dedicate an entire 'Hot Topics' segment to discussing why what was said was so deeply offensive and dangerous," McCain wrote.

Goldberg explained to talk show host Stephen Colbert in an episode that aired Monday night that her perception of race is based on skin color but that she was wrong.

She apologized again Tuesday morning on "The View" and invited Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, on to that day's episode to talk about the Holocaust. He said in a tweet he deeply appreciated her invitation and that "her apology is very much welcome."

But ABC News President Kim Godwin announced her suspension later on Tuesday. On Wednesday, former GOP communications director Tara Setmayer sat in as guest co-host and nobody said anything about Jews or the Holocaust.

In announcing the suspension, ABC said it was asking Goldberg "to take time to reflect and learn about the impact of her comments." The network did not respond to requests for comment Friday about the public reaction to the suspension.

What people seem to be forgetting is that Goldberg made her remarks during a segment about a Tennessee school board's banning of "Maus," a Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel about the Nazi death

camp during World War II, said author Frederick Joseph.

Conservative officials across the country are trying to ban access to books such as "Maus" and the "The 1619 Project," which puts Black slavery and Black Americans at the center of U.S. history. His own book, "The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person," is being protested by some parents, he said, because they say it's indoctrination.

Joseph said Goldberg was seeing the issue of race through the lens of a Black woman in America and the lens lacked historical knowledge of what the Holocaust was actually about.

"But also, to be quite frank, as a Black American, I wasn't taught much myself about the Holocaust in school," said Joseph. "I do hope that Whoopi learns, I hope that Whoopi grows, but how can she if we don't give her the opportunity?"

Marginalized groups have long complained that children and teens do not get a robust education in the histories of Jewish, Black and other cultures. It would have been amazing if "The View" had devoted the length of the two-week suspension to serious discussions of the uglier parts of history, they said.

Krongelb, the librarian, says antisemitism and anti-Black racism have much in common, with both groups suffering from dehumanizing stereotypes and shared history of exclusion in the U.S. She wishes they could talk through these difficult issues instead of being manipulated by talking heads who want to sow discord.

"If we just canceled people for saying something problematic or for doing something that we don't agree with, then those cycles of harm just continue," she said.

The Anti-Defamation League said Greenblatt could not comment on the suspension, and pointed to an op-ed he wrote that published Thursday in USA Today. He said her remarks were especially hurtful at a time when Holocaust denial is on the rise globally and politicians falsely compared mask mandates and COVID-19 vaccines to Nazi actions, further trivializing the Holocaust.

His remarks seemed to acknowledge the audience power she has.

"She has a tremendous opportunity to use her platform not only to educate herself, but to share what she learns with her audience and the entire country," he said.

Michael Avenatti convicted of stealing from Stormy Daniels

By TOM HAYS and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Avenatti was convicted Friday of cheating porn actor Stormy Daniels out of nearly \$300,000 she was supposed to get for writing a book about an alleged tryst with former President Donald Trump.

Avenatti, who acted as his own lawyer, stared straight ahead as the guilty verdicts on wire fraud and aggravated identity theft were returned.

Just a few hours earlier, a mistrial had appeared possible when the jury foreperson complained that a juror was acting on "emotions" rather than evidence.

It was another defeat for the California lawyer, who has faced legal problems after briefly rising to fame as one of Trump's leading antagonists on cable news.

"I'm very disappointed in the jury's verdict," Avenatti told reporters outside the federal courtroom in New York. "I'm looking forward to a full adjudication of all the issues on appeal."

Judge Jesse M. Furman ordered Avenatti to surrender Monday to U.S. marshals in California. Avenatti has delayed serving a 2 1/2-year prison sentence for his 2020 conviction in an extortion case while waiting for the book trial and the retrial of a fraud case in a California federal court.

In an "Inside Edition" interview at her New Orleans home, Daniels said she was happy the jury made "the right decision."

"Justice was served, but we have a long way to go. Justice isn't money because I'll never see it," she told the syndicated TV program. "It is him being found guilty and the jury putting aside their preconceived notions about someone in the adult film industry and just looking at the facts."

Sentencing was set for May 24, and Daniels told "Inside Edition" that Avenatti "can bet on" her attendance. Wire fraud carries a maximum of 20 years in prison, and aggravated identity theft carries a mandatory two-year prison sentence.

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The verdict came hours after the jury foreperson sent the note to the judge saying one juror was acting on her feelings.

"She does not believe she needs to prove her side using evidence and refuses to show us how she has come to her conclusion," the note said.

But the verdict was unanimous.

It capped an unusual trial in which Avenatti dumped his lawyers, choosing on its second day to represent himself, setting up a face-to-face showdown with Daniels, his former client, who appeared in a new role as star witness.

Avenatti said after the verdict that he did not regret representing himself.

As he walked away from the courthouse surrounded by reporters, Avenatti he said he would "start working on my appeal tonight."

At one point, he said, "I have a message for my kids: I love you. Stay strong."

Prosecutors portrayed Avenatti as a common thief and serial liar. He countered by casting himself as a white knight who brought Daniels fame in her fight against Trump and a lucrative book deal she'd unsuccessfully been pursuing for a decade.

Daniels had initially hired Avenatti as she was trying to escape the terms of a \$130,000 hush payment deal that kept her from speaking publicly about an alleged sexual encounter that Trump says never happened.

Avenatti parlayed his representation with Daniels into cable news appearances in which he mocked and baited Trump.

Their relationship collapsed after Daniels said she learned Avenatti had taken a share of her \$800,000 book deal for himself. Avenatti insisted he was innocent.

During his questioning of Daniels, whose legal name is Stephanie Clifford, Avenatti asked her about her claims he'd swindled her out of book proceeds — and about things she'd said for a potential program called "Spooky Babes" about living in a haunted house in New Orleans.

Daniels had talked about an invisible assailant attacking her partner, communication with dead people and a doll who calls her "mommy."

Prosecutors argued Avenatti was trying to portray Daniels as crazy in a "blame-the-victim" defense that failed to support his claim he was owed the money after spending millions of dollars representing Daniels.

"Whether you think it's kooky to believe in the paranormal, whether you think it's weird, she can believe whatever she wants and still be stolen from by the defendant and still deserve not to," Assistant U.S. Attorney Mathew Podolsky told the jury.

Text messages, prosecutors said, showed that Avenatti repeatedly lied to Daniels in 2018 when she pressed him on when she would get a large installment she was owed on the book deal. They said he'd already spent the money on airfare, food and payroll for his debt-ridden law firm.

Podolsky likened Avenatti to a store cashier taking \$1,000 out of a register because he believed he'd worked hard and deserved a bonus.

In addition to the sentence he must still serve for trying to extort up to \$25 million from sportswear giant Nike, he awaits retrial in Los Angeles on charges he ripped off clients and others for millions of dollars. He represented himself last year for six weeks before a mistrial resulted.

Pentagon: Deadly Afghan airport attack was not preventable

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The military investigation into the deadly attack during the Afghanistan evacuation has concluded that a suicide bomber, carrying 20 pounds of explosives packed with ball bearings, acted alone, and that the deaths of more than 170 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members were not preventable.

The blast at Abbey Gate outside the Kabul airport on Aug. 26 killed 11 U.S. Marines, a sailor and a soldier, who were screening the thousands of Afghans frantically trying to get onto one of the crowded flights leaving the country after the Taliban takeover. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack.

At the Pentagon on Friday, military officials laid out a detailed and graphic minute-by-minute account of

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the bombing. The bottom line, they said, was that those who died had wounds that were "so catastrophic" that they couldn't be overcome. And they said that earlier thoughts that it was a complex attack involving gunfire turned out to be unfounded.

"A single, explosive device killed at least 170 Afghan civilians and 13 U.S. servicemembers by explosively directing ball bearings through a packed crowd and into our men and women at Abbey gate," said Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command. "The disturbing lethality of this device was confirmed by the 58 U.S. servicemembers who were killed and wounded despite the universal wear of body armor and helmets that did stop ball bearings that impacted them, but could not prevent catastrophic injuries to areas not covered."

Investigators said the bomber likely got near the gate by bypassing Taliban and other security checkpoints. They said it appears the Taliban didn't know of the attack, that security precautions were being taken and that intelligence about potential threats that was circulating that day was not specific.

"Based upon our investigation, at the tactical level this was not preventable," said Brig. Gen. Lance Curtis, who led the investigation. He added that military leaders on the ground in Kabul followed proper security measures, at times closing the gate or pausing the processing of evacuees.

Military officials said that gunfire after the blast was found to be warning shots fired by U.S. and British troops, and that no one was killed or wounded by gunshots.

McKenzie said the investigation revealed that the five-millimeter ball bearings in the bomb caused wounds that looked like gunshots. He said some troops in the area fired a number of warning shots, and that led others to believe that the attack also included gunmen.

Friday's briefing lasted more than an hour and resembled the detailed explanations military officials gave to the families of the troops killed that day. It included several videos of the chaos at the gate at the time of the bombing.

One is very brief and shows two Marines in the foreground, and deep in the background between them is a glimpse of a single person, dressed all in black. And then there is the sound of an explosion, and a cloud of black smoke rises from that area. Investigators said the bomber was likely standing on the far side of a sewage canal and was a bit "elevated" when detonating the bomb. Pieces of a backpack were found.

Three service members who were standing on a short wall looking over the crowd to identify potential evacuees were just 10 feet from the blast and were killed. Longer videos shot from overhead show Marines and others rushing to treat and evacuate the wounded, providing first aid and carrying people over their shoulders as they ran, while civilians scrambled to flee the area.

Marines cut holes in the adjacent fence so they could get to triage areas more quickly, while also struggling through a fog of tear gas that enveloped the area when the bomb fragments punctured the canisters troops carry.

The blast, said investigators, created "instant chaos and sensory overload." But within 20 minutes all of the killed and wounded had been moved to triage sites.

The nearly 20 pages of briefing documents included photos showing the crush of Afghans and others trying to get cleared into the airport, many waving documents and slogging through the sewage trench to get closer to the troops processing evacuees.

Investigators said that as the Taliban made it more difficult to get through checkpoints, Afghans and others began using side roads and back alleys to get closer to the outer gate.

The investigation also concluded that there was enough medical staff and blood at several sites around the airport, including nine surgical teams and a hospital. And it quoted a trauma surgeon who told investigators that "We had all we needed. Did we need more people? No, we had a lot of experience on the team and plenty of people."

The number of service members wounded in the bombing grew to 45 in the following days as they were examined and some were found to have traumatic brain injuries from the blast.

U.S. military officials have said all along that the U.S. forces at the gates were doing a dangerous job. Overall the U.S.-led coalition evacuated about 126,000 people in about three weeks, and the U.S. left Afghanistan for the last time at about midnight on Aug. 30.

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Early on, McKenzie said troops at the gates had to get close to the people they were screening. "This is close up work. The breath of the person you are searching is upon you," McKenzie said in August soon after the attack.

CDC backs Moderna COVID-19 shots after full US approval

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday continued its endorsement of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine for adults, now that U.S. regulators have given the shots their full approval.

The decision has little practical effect. Tens of millions of Americans have already gotten Moderna shots, following its emergency authorization by the Food and Drug Administration more than a year ago.

Earlier this week, the FDA gave the product full licensure, following the kind of rigorous, time-consuming review given to other vaccines.

While the FDA licenses vaccines, the CDC makes recommendations about how they should be used. So the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices took up the matter on Friday.

The panel heard summaries of medical studies that showed the vaccine is working against the coronavirus and there is no evidence of new safety concerns. It voted unanimously to continue to endorse the shots, and the agency's director later signed off on the recommendation.

The Moderna vaccine, now being marketed under the name Spikevax, is licensed as a two-dose series for people 18 and older. Under earlier emergency use authorizations, additional doses can be given as additional doses for people with weakened immune systems or as half-dose boosters.

The evolution of Steve-O, where every act is his last

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Steve-O dropped out of college in 1993. He told everyone his plan was to become a famous stuntman with his home video camera. He remembers people feeling genuinely sorry for him. To be fair, he wasn't even sure it would work or that he'd be successful, in the least, he just wanted to amass enough crazy footage so he'd have a legacy to outlive him when he, "Inevitably died young, having failed at life," he said.

It wasn't for lack of trying. Steve-O, born Stephen Glover, has spent his life treating every act as if it's his last. His on-screen bits were shocking and his off-screen antics infamous, culminating in an intervention by Johnny Knoxville and his Jackass family in 2008 and stays in rehab.

So it's as much a surprise to him as anyone that almost 30 years after making that wild proclamation, not only is he alive and "still getting away with it," but he is actually thriving and moving up in the world.

At 47, Steve-O — the man who walked on a tightrope over an alligator pit with raw meat in his underwear, snorted lines of wasabi and fish-hooked his own cheek on camera — is nearly 14 years sober with a successful stand-up comedy career, a podcast, a dog, a fiancé, a book of wisdom on the way, "A Hard Kick in the Nuts: What I Learned from a Lifetime of Terrible Decisions," and another "Jackass" movie in theaters.

"I'm beside myself with gratitude," he said in a Zoom call from his tour bus. It's actually an RV, he wants to clarify, but it's a "fun Class A RV" wrapped with "obnoxious" Steve-O art that's causing a bit of a stir with passersby trying to take photos.

But he likes it. He is, he knows, a bit of an "attention whore."

"I say that in a bit of a self-deprecating way, but it's true," he said. "At my core, I'm an exhibitionist and the idea of entertaining people, of communicating authentically is really what I'm all about."

For the past decade, Steve-O has been grinding through comedy clubs, building his act in which he reveals all about his wild life. The pandemic provided a break from the grueling touring lifestyle, and he was able to focus on building his podcast and merchandising. When he started back up again, he'd crossed an important threshold for any comic: He'd graduated from clubs to theaters. His first sold-out theater gig was at the Paramount in Austin, Texas, which seats 1,200.

"I was on the verge of tears," he said. "I was so emotional about it."

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But it was "Jackass," of course, that made Steve-O a name. The raucous MTV show started in 2000 and birthed a franchise of spinoffs and movies in which the cast blended comedy with dangerous, sometimes outrageous, stunts. And in even in this mad bunch, Steve-O managed to stand out as one of the craziest.

He was certain that the third film, "Jackass 3D," released in 2010 and filmed when he was newly sober, was their last. In fact, he's been certain that every film has been their last —Knoxville has always made a point of saying so in interviews. So he wasn't expecting "the captain," as he calls Knoxville, to propose a fourth. It had been 10 years and they were all now in their late 40s and early 50s. He worried a bit that it might be "creepy" for an audience to see them getting hurt like they used to.

But Knoxville felt strongly that the older they got, the funnier it got.

"The whole formula is that we all get together and try to make each other laugh. Once we got together, the chemistry was evidently there. It was like we had never stopped filming," he said. "We were as crazy as ever. What we learned is that we get knocked out more easily and our bones break a lot easier too."

Knoxville has said that this is the last movie he's going to risk his life for (a stunt with a bull left him with brain hemorrhage, a concussion, a broken wrist and a broken rib). But, Steve-O noted, this is actually the first time he hasn't said that the franchise is done.

"He very much left the door open to there being another Jackass movie. Who knows, maybe that was the plan all along by enlisting these younger, fresher faces as new cast members," he laughed. "For all I know, this is just an exercise in us recruiting our replacements."

Back when the first season of Jackass finished, Steve-O and the guys were at the wrap party at a bar and decided they didn't want it to end at last call. They made up a game called "I'm not leaving" and the idea was that no one was allowed to walk out on their own two feet. No punches were allowed, but they were going to do everything they could to resist — make themselves dead weight, hang on to furniture, each other. It became a tradition and a kind of symbol for their whole improbable run.

"Every act in my career has been my last," Steve-O said. "If not officially, I think I've approached it as such."

Soon he'll announce another leg on his "Bucket List" tour, in which he'll be on the bus traveling from Miami to Los Angeles, doing gigs along the way. And though he thought he'd mined every last thing for this show, he recently got an idea for another.

"It'll be the Steve-O's Gone Too Far Tour," he said with a smile. "And I cannot imagine any possible way to follow that up. So that's going to be my last."

House passes bill to boost US computer chip production

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats on Friday muscled legislation through the House that they say positions the United States to better compete with China economically and on the global stage by strengthening the domestic semiconductor industry and shoring up strained supply chains.

The bill passed by a vote of 222-210. It marks an important step for a top Biden administration priority, but the legislation is likely to be extensively revised as negotiators reconcile differences with what the Senate passed about eight months ago. President Joe Biden urged lawmakers to reach a deal quickly, saying, "America can't afford to wait."

The nearly 3,000-page bill, not counting scores of amendments added this week, includes massive investments designed to boost semiconductor manufacturing in the U.S. The big-ticket items include about \$52 billion in grants and subsidies to help the semiconductor industry and \$45 billion to strengthen supply chains for high-tech products.

But Democrats also tucked in other priorities that have raised GOP concerns about the bill's cost and scope. Rep. Adam Kinzinger of Illinois was the only Republican to vote for the measure, while Rep. Stephanie Murphy of Florida was the only Democrat to vote against it.

The bill includes \$8 billion for a fund that helps developing countries adjust to climate change; \$3 billion for facilities to make the U.S. less reliant on Chinese solar components; \$4 billion to help communities

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with significantly higher unemployment than the national average; and \$10.5 billion for states to stockpile drugs and medical equipment.

Democrats were in a celebratory mood prior to the vote after the latest jobs report showed employers added 467,000 jobs in January. They said the legislation would lead to more good news on that front.

"The bill we're talking about today is a jobs bill, a jobs bill for manufacturing in America, for making it in America," Pelosi said.

The bill gives Democrats a chance to address voter concerns about the economy at a time when a shortage of computer chips has led to higher prices for automobiles, electronics and medical devices. To show his administration is addressing inflation concerns, Biden highlighted the vote at a White House event Friday and reminded Americans of Intel's announcement two weeks ago that it would be building two computer chip production plants in Ohio.

Republicans, who for months have hammered Democrats over rising inflation, panned the measure as "toothless" and short of what is needed to hold China accountable for a range of economic and human rights actions. They also said it would waste taxpayer dollars on environmental initiatives and other unnecessary programs.

"This bill is actually just a long list of progressive dream policies that have nothing to do with China at all," said Rep. Michelle Fischbach, R-Minn.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo met with House Democratic lawmakers this week to discuss the bill. She said the most "urgent need" in the bill is the \$52 billion for domestic chip production because of the global chip shortage's effect on the economy, including the automotive sector, and the national security implications of having so many semiconductors made overseas.

"We just cannot wait anymore," she told reporters Friday. "We are so far behind. We're in such a dangerous place as a matter of national security just because of our reliance on Taiwan for our most sophisticated, leading-edge chips."

Big chipmakers like Intel and Samsung have recently announced plans to build new factories in the U.S., but Raimondo noted they have also indicated they could go "bigger and faster" with federal help.

One of the biggest flashpoints is the \$8 billion in the legislation to help developing countries reduce their emissions and cope with climate change. Former President Barack Obama pledged \$3 billion toward the fund, but former President Donald Trump withheld \$2 billion of that.

Rep. Michael McCaul, the ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, called it an "unaccountable UN slush fund" that has already provided at least \$100 million to China.

Meanwhile, America's share of semiconductor manufacturing globally has steadily eroded from 37% in 1990 to about 12% now. The Biden administration and lawmakers are trying to reverse that trend, which industry officials say is driven by foreign competitors receiving significant government subsidies.

The pandemic has strained the supply chain for the chips. The Commerce Department issued a report last week that found the median inventory of some semiconductor products had fallen from 40 days in 2019 to less than five days in 2021. The report also said stakeholders don't see the problem going away in the next six months. The administration cited the findings in calling for Congress to act.

Tensions with China are reflected in much the legislation. In a nod to concerns about the origins of COVID-19, the bill directs the president to submit a report to Congress on the most likely origin of the virus, the level of confidence in that assessment and the challenges of making such an assessment.

Republicans dismissed the provision as "no independent investigation, no sanctions, no punishment." They want a select committee of lawmakers to look into the origins of COVID-19. "Instead of taking action to get a real accountability, it's going to ask them for a report," said Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California.

Another provision would subject more lower-cost products made in China to tariffs. Currently, imports valued at less than \$800 are exempted from expedited processing and tariffs. The bill eliminates the threshold for certain countries, most notably China.

The Senate passed its computer chips legislation in June by a vote of 68-32, representing a rare bout

of bipartisanship on major legislation. Negotiators will now try to work out a compromise both chambers can accept, though it's uncertain they could do so before the midterm elections.

Whatever emerges will need support from 10 Republicans in the 50-50 Senate to be passed into law.

"We'll send House Republicans a much better option to vote on in the next couple of months," said Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., who worked with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on the Senate's version of the legislation.

"Democrats in the Senate and House know we have much more work to do to bridge our two proposals together and move this bill to the president's desk, and I believe we will," Schumer said.

School lunch rules updated to help ease pandemic disruptions

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

Low-fat chocolate milk instead of only non-fat. Fewer whole-grain offerings. Less severe salt limits.

The Biden administration issued transitional standards for school lunches Friday that are meant to ease the path for cafeterias to get back on a more healthful course as they recover from pandemic and supply chain disruptions.

Schools have struggled to meet the government's nutrition benchmarks through the pandemic but have not been punished for falling short. The "bridge" rule announced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture extends emergency flexibilities for the next two school years as schools gradually transition back to normal.

"We applaud schools' heroic efforts throughout the challenges of this pandemic to continue serving kids the most nutritious meals possible," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said.

"The standards we're putting in place for the next two school years will help schools transition to a future that builds on the tremendous strides they've made improving school meal nutrition over the past decade," he said.

The changes mean schools and child care providers will be allowed to serve low-fat -- not just nonfat -- flavored milk, alongside low-fat regular milk. At least 80% of cereals, breads and rolls -- instead of all of them -- will have to be whole grain rich.

The sodium allowed in school lunches will decrease by 10% beginning in 2023-24. That is a smaller reduction than previously planned but aligns with broader sodium reduction targets recently released by the Food and Drug Administration.

The USDA changed school nutrition standards in 2012 as part of then first lady Michelle Obama's healthy eating initiative. Schools were told to do away with white bread and other refined grains over time while increasing fruits and vegetables, reducing sodium and setting calorie limits.

The Trump administration later rolled back the nutrition standards, but that move was thrown out by a federal judge in 2020. The judge said his administration did not give adequate public notice of the change.

USDA oversees the national school lunch and breakfast programs, which serve millions of free and reduced-price meals daily.

Administrators say supply chain problems have made it hard to find foods that meet the standards, and COVID-19 infections and exposures have depleted staff.

A November 2021 survey by the nonprofit School Nutrition Association found more than 96% of respondents cited challenges with suppliers not carrying sufficient whole-grain, low-sodium and low-fat menu items.

"School nutrition professionals are frantic just trying to get enough food on the tray for our students amid relentless supply chain disruptions and labor shortages," association President Beth Wallace said in a statement praising the Agriculture Department action.

She said the group hoped to collaborate with USDA "to assess the viability of nutrition standards moving forward."

Vilsack said new long-term standards are planned for 2024-25 and beyond.

Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., who chairs the House Education & Labor Committee, said, "Throughout the pandemic, school meal programs have faced steep obstacles to serving students and families, from chal-

lenges to safely delivering food during school closures to securing the supplies and ingredients that school meal staff need.”

He called on Congress to build on support for child nutrition programs that were included in the administration’s American Rescue Plan.

“I am focused on securing the critical investments included in the House-passed Build Back Better Act and advancing a comprehensive reauthorization of federal child nutrition programs,” Scott said.

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 charged with first-degree murder, aggravated murder of a police officer, aggravated murder of multiple persons, aggravated murder of multiple persons within 3 years and possession 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.

EXPLAINER: What's changed with Oscar's best picture category

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

The Academy Awards change more than the public might realize.

Every year the academy's leadership board reviews categories and potential changes. That's meant some categories — juvenile acting, dance direction and split winners for black-and-white and color films — have gone away. Best picture, film's highest honor, frequently gets reviewed. Remember the brief moment not too long ago when there was going to be a popular Oscar category?

This year one such change takes effect: 10 best picture contenders will be announced come nomination morning on Feb. 8. Here's what to expect:

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THE BEST PICTURE CATEGORY THIS YEAR?

There will be 10 movies announced as best picture nominees for the 94th Oscars on Tuesday. For the past decade, it's been a sliding range of five to 10 nominees. Most years had eight or nine.

IS THIS UNPRECEDENTED?

No, the academy has shifted the number of best picture nominees several times. In the 1930s and early 1940s, eight to 12 films could be nominated in any given year. In 1944, it shifted to five and in 2009 it was expanded to 10. Then, in 2011, they went to five to 10.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A few reasons. A best picture nomination is a great asset to a movie. It increases awareness and can often lead to a box office bump (although this year may be an exception because of the pandemic). But, perhaps most importantly, many believe that expanding the field to 10 can open nominations up to genres that aren't typically thought of as Oscar-material, including comic-book films. Many assumed the 2009 change was a direct response to "The Dark Knight" not getting a nomination. The conventional thinking is that when popular films are nominated, more viewers will tune in for the show, which has seen declining ratings over the years. The show's biggest audience came in 1998 when over 55 million viewers tuned in to watch "Titanic" sweep the awards.

SO WILL SPIDER-MAN GET NOMINATED THIS YEAR?

The biggest blockbuster of the pandemic, "Spider-Man: No Way Home," doesn't seem to have much of a chance at a best picture nomination anymore considering it didn't get a Producers Guild nod. Same for the James Bond pic "No Time To Die." But there could be surprises on Tuesday morning.

WHO VOTES FOR BEST PICTURE NOMINEES?

Most categories limit nomination voting to their specific branch (actors nominate actors, costume designers nominate costume designers), but all academy members can vote for best picture.

WHAT OTHER BEST PICTURE CHANGES ARE IN THE WORKS?

New inclusion standards for best picture hopefuls were announced in 2020 and are meant to encourage diversity and equitable representation on screen and off, addressing gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and disability, but won't go into effect until the 96th Academy Awards in 2024.

NYPD honors whistleblower Frank Serpico — 50 years late

NEW YORK (AP) — More than 50 years after Frank Serpico testified about endemic corruption in the New York Police Department, the department finally recognized his service and injury in the line of duty with an official certificate and inscribed medal of honor.

The former undercover detective, 85, received the honor in the mail Thursday, the New York Daily News reported.

Serpico testified in December 1971 to a panel appointed by Mayor John Lindsay to investigate police corruption, breaking the "blue wall of silence," the protection that fellow officers sometimes give each other, such as refusing to testify.

Al Pacino went on to portray him in the hit 1973 movie "Serpico," and his story is also relayed in a book by Peter Maas.

Current Daily News and former Associated Press reporter Larry McShane interviewed Serpico in December

about the 50th anniversary of his appearance before the Knapp Commission.

"I felt that finally I was going to tell the world and nobody's going to interrupt me," Serpico told the newspaper, speaking from his home in upstate New York. "I thought, 'I know the truth.' ... Every single word was mine, and it came from the heart."

Serpico was shot in the face during a drug arrest in Brooklyn in 1971 months before he testified and has maintained that the other officers he was with never made a call for an "officer down."

While the department gave Serpico a medal recognizing his injury in 1972, it was handed over without ceremony or the accompanying certificate, he told the newspaper.

In recent years, the department has awarded medals to recipients at annual large public events.

Mayor Eric Adams responded to the coverage, saying Serpico's "bravery inspired my law enforcement career. Frank — we're going to make sure you get your medal."

On Thursday, Serpico tweeted a photo of the framed medal of honor and certificate that reads in part, "in recognition of an individual act of extraordinary bravery performed in the line of duty."

He has continued to speak out against corruption and abuse by the police since his retirement in 1972 and says he has supported and listened to other whistleblowers over the years, including those who testified about the now-terminated stop-and-frisk policy.

In 2017, he publicly supported quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who protested against racial injustice while playing in the NFL.

US economy defies omicron and adds 467,000 jobs in January

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a surprising burst of hiring, America's employers added a robust 467,000 jobs last month, a sign of the economy's resilience in the face of a wave of omicron infections.

The government's report Friday also drastically revised up its estimate of job gains for November and December by a combined 709,000. It also said the unemployment rate ticked up from 3.9% to a still-low 4%, mainly because more people began looking for work and not all of them found jobs right away.

The strong hiring growth for January, which defied expectations for only a slight gain, demonstrated the eagerness of many employers to hire even as the pandemic raged. Businesses appear to have regarded the omicron wave as having, at most, a temporary impact on the economy and remain confident about their longer-term prospects.

"Employers have assumed that omicron would be painful but short term, so they haven't changed their hiring plans," said Mathieu Stevenson, the CEO of Snagajob, a job listings site focused on hourly workers. "Demand from employers is as strong as ever."

January's hiring gain and sharp upward revisions to previous months mean that the United States has 1.1 million more jobs than government data had indicated only a month ago. The solid hiring, along with steady wage gains, are boosting consumer spending, which has collided with snarled supply chains to accelerate inflation to a four-decade high.

Adjusted for price increases, Americans' paychecks on average don't go as far as they did a year ago, even though many workers have received raises. Many households, especially lower-income families, are struggling to afford necessities like gas, food, rent and child care.

Those trends will give the Federal Reserve more leeway to raise interest rates, perhaps even faster than it had planned, to cool inflation. The Fed has indicated that it will begin raising rates in March, and it could do so again at its next meeting in May. Faster rate hikes could reduce borrowing and spending and possibly weaken the economy.

Stocks initially fell on the expectation that the Fed will tighten credit more quickly, before share prices recovered in early afternoon. But the yield on the 10-year Treasury jumped nearly one-tenth of a percentage point, to 1.91%, a sign that investors anticipate higher borrowing costs.

Across the economy, most industries hired workers last month, including retailers, which added more than 61,000 jobs, and restaurants and hotels, which gained 131,000. Shipping and warehousing firms

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added 54,000. Many companies in those industries likely held onto some of the workers they had hired over the winter holidays, economists said, rather than laying them all off.

Omicron did leave some fingerprints on the report: The percentage of Americans who were working from home rose to more than 15%, up from 11% in December. And the number of people out sick last month soared to 3.6 million, up from fewer than 2 million in the previous January and about triple the pre-pandemic level. This forced many companies, from restaurants to retailers to manufacturers, to reduce their hours or even close because of staff shortages.

Among the workers who were out sick was Perla Hernandez, whose entire family of eight contracted COVID last month. Hernandez and her husband and 20-year old daughter all missed work, a major blow to the family's finances.

Hernandez, 42, who lives in the San Jose, California, area, missed six days from her job as a Burger King cook and janitor. Because she has no paid sick leave, the paycheck she receives every two weeks amounted to just \$230.

About one-fifth of U.S. workers receive no sick pay, and the proportion is far higher among lower-paid service workers. Only 33% of workers who are at the bottom 10% of the pay scale receive paid sick leave, compared with 95% of employees in the top 10%.

"Thank God that we already had paid the rent for January," she said through an interpreter. "We had to go to a food bank."

Hernandez said she earns \$15.45 an hour, after having received a 45-cent raise six months ago. But she and her colleagues, including managers, have been working especially long hours because the restaurant has had difficulty hiring.

Daniel Zhao, senior economist at the employment website Glassdoor, said the healthy hiring — not only for January but also for November and December — is a sign that last month's gains weren't merely a blip.

"This is an actual trend, and job growth was faster than we realized," Zhao said.

A greater proportion of Americans are also now working or looking for work, the report showed, a trend that makes it easier for companies to find workers. It suggests that concerns about long-term labor shortages may have been overblown, at least in some industries.

"There are workers out there — it's just taking time to integrate them back into the labor force," Zhao said.

Grady Cope, the CEO of Reata Engineering and Machine Works, said nine of his 43 staffers were out sick last month — the most he can remember in nearly 30 years of running the company.

But Cope's company, which makes parts for airplane and medical device manufacturers, also has the biggest order backlog it's ever had. He wants to add at least eight employees, including machinists, assemblers and engineers. Last month, he raised pay 18%, far more than the usual 3%-4% increases. His company is based near Denver, where rents and other costs are rising fast.

"People have to have wages so they can support themselves and raise families," he said.

Still, Cope has been increasing his own prices to offset his workers' higher pay. The competition for workers, he said, is the toughest he's ever seen. In October, four of his workers quit. Only one gave notice.

"That's never happened in 28 years," he said.

The overall outlook for the job market remains bright, with openings near a record high, the pace of layoffs down and the unemployment rate having already reached a healthy level. The nation gained more jobs last year, adjusted for the size of the workforce, than in any year since 1978. Much of that improvement represented a rebound from record job losses in 2020 that were driven by the pandemic recession.

Russia, China push back against US in pre-Olympics summit

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The leaders of Russia and China pushed back against U.S. pressure on Friday, declaring their opposition to any expansion of NATO and affirming that the island of Taiwan is a part of China, as they met hours before the Winter Olympics kicked off in Beijing.

Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping issued a joint statement highlighting what they called "in-

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terference in the internal affairs" of other states, as both leaders face criticism from Washington over their foreign and domestic policies.

"Some forces representing a minority on the world stage continue to advocate unilateral approaches to resolving international problems and resort to military policy," it read, in a thinly veiled reference to the U.S. and its allies.

The two leaders are looking to project themselves as a counterweight to the U.S.-led bloc, as China shows growing support for Moscow in its dispute with Ukraine that threatens to break out into armed conflict.

China and Russia are committed to "deepening back-to-back strategic cooperation," Xi was quoted as telling Putin.

"This is a strategic decision that has far-reaching influence on China, Russia and the world," Xi said, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Faced with a "complex and evolving international situation," the two sides "strongly support each other" in confronting what Xi called "regional security threats" and "international strategic stability," without directly naming the U.S.

Putin is the highest-profile guest at the Beijing Games following the decision by the U.S., Britain and others not to send officials in protest of China's human rights abuses and its treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

Putin praised "unprecedented" close relations with China, in his opening remarks to Xi carried by Russian television.

Relations "are developing in a progressive way with a spirit of friendship and strategic partnership," Putin said. "They have indeed become unprecedented."

Putin highlighted close economic ties, including a new contract to supply China with 10 billion cubic meters of gas per year from eastern Russia.

"For our meeting today, our oilmen have prepared very good new solutions for the supply of hydrocarbons to the People's Republic of China, and another step forward has been taken in the gas industry," Putin said.

Russia has long been a key supplier of oil, gas and coal for China's massive economy, now the world's second largest, along with food and other raw materials.

China's state-run news agency reported the two leaders met at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse Friday afternoon, but gave no details. They did not appear to shake hands when greeting each other due to COVID-19 precautions.

Putin also recalled his presence in Beijing for the 2008 Summer Olympics, and the Chinese delegation's attendance at Russia's 2014 Winter Games in Sochi, calling such exchanges "to a certain extent a tradition."

Kevin Rudd, president of the Asia Society and former Australian prime minister, called Beijing's backing of Moscow over NATO expansion "highly significant."

"It puts at risk China's wider relationship with the Europeans," Rudd said. "But Xi believes he is now powerful enough and has sufficient economic leverage with Europe to get away with it. It also signifies that China now sees itself as a global, not just a regional, security actor."

The discussions mark the two leaders' first in-person meeting since 2019 and come as China and Russia increasingly align their foreign policies bilaterally and in world bodies such as the United Nations, in opposition to the Western bloc and other major powers.

Speaking to reporters after the talks, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noted that Putin and Xi discussed "the tensions deliberately incited by the West around the Russian Federation and China."

Leaders of the five ex-Soviet Central Asian nations, which have close ties with both Russia and China, all followed Putin's lead in attending the Olympics opening, along with other states that have political and economic interests with Beijing.

A buildup of more than 100,000 Russian troops near Ukraine has fueled Western fears that Moscow is poised to invade its neighbor. Russia has denied planning an offensive but urged the U.S. and its allies to provide a binding pledge that NATO won't expand to Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations or deploy weapons there, and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe — demands firmly rejected by the West.

Putin and Xi accused NATO and the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy of building closer military ties with other

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countries in Asia as destabilizing and threatening regional security.

"The parties oppose the further expansion of NATO, (and) call on the North Atlantic Alliance to abandon the ideological approaches of the Cold War," the joint statement said.

Speaking on MSNBC's Morning Joe program, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg rejected the criticism and described NATO's expansion to Central and Eastern Europe as a "a great success story" that "has helped to spread freedom and democracy across Europe."

"This is about respecting independent sovereign choices of independent nations, not returning to an age of spheres of influence where big powers decide what small neighbors can do or not do," Stoltenberg said.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a call last week that Moscow's security concerns need to be addressed, a statement that marked a notable policy shift for Beijing.

Some observers suggested that Beijing is closely watching how the U.S. and its allies act in the stand-off over Ukraine as it ponders further strategy on Taiwan, arguing that indecision by Washington could encourage China to grow more assertive.

The U.S. is Taiwan's main supplier of fighter aircraft and defensive arms and is legally bound to treat threats to the island democracy as matters of "grave concern."

The joint statement said that Russia reaffirms that Taiwan is an integral part of China and opposes Taiwan's independence in any form. China claims the self-governing island as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary.

Economic and diplomatic cooperation has expanded into the military field in recent years, as Russia and China have held a series of joint war games, including naval drills and patrols by long-range bombers over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. In August, Russian troops for the first time deployed to Chinese territory for joint maneuvers.

Putin has also noted that Russia has been sharing highly sensitive military technologies with China that helped significantly bolster its defense capability.

Lethal US raid on IS encounters a doll, crib, bomb, bullets

By GHAITH ALSAYED, ZEKE MILLER, LOLITA C. BALDOR and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

When helicopters carrying some 50 U.S. commandos thumped onto the ground in Syria an hour after midnight, the raiders confronted a houseful of extremists and children.

Baby comforts were inside — a stuffed bunny, a blue plastic swing, a crib. So was the paraphernalia of violence — such as the bomb Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi is said by U.S. officials to have used to blow up himself, his family and perhaps others in his immediate proximity.

It was an audacious raid in an extremist stronghold of northwest Syria, months in the works and executed with the understanding that children might die as well as the hunted IS chief if the building's occupants did not get out when given the chance to leave.

The apparent suicide bombing came before or early in a two-hour gun battle Thursday. First responders said 13 people died, six of them children. No U.S. commandos were wounded, military officials said.

President Joe Biden, who ordered the raid, said the world is rid of a man he described as the driving force behind the "genocide of the Yazidi people in northwestern Iraq in 2014," when slaughters wiped out villages, thousands of women and young girls were sold into slavery and rape was used as a weapon of war.

"Thanks to the bravery of our troops, this horrible terrorist leader is no more," Biden said.

THE PREPARATION

Over months of planning, U.S. intelligence first had to locate al-Qurayshi's whereabouts and understand his movements — or lack thereof. Officials concluded he rarely, if ever, left his family's third-floor quarters except to bathe on the building's roof.

Anticipating that al-Qurayshi could well choose death by self-detonation if cornered by U.S. forces, U.S. officials commissioned an engineering study-from-afar of the three-story, cinder-block building to see if it would collapse in that event and kill everyone inside.

They concluded that enough of the building was likely to survive such a blast to spare those not near him.

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They constructed a tabletop model of the house and in December set it up in the Situation Room, the ultra-secure White House command and communications post where presidents and their national security aides manage crises.

The second floor of the Syrian house, also white, was occupied by a lower-ranking Islamic State leader and his family. The ground floor, partly a basement, housed a family unconnected to the Islamic State and unaware of al-Qurayshi's presence or significance, U.S. officials said.

Biden was first briefed in depth more than a month ago by operational commanders after U.S. forces were satisfied they would find al-Qurayshi — also known as Haji Abdullah — where they did.

The Islamic State, which once controlled most of the territory in Iraq and parts of Syria, has been attempting to regenerate, and staged its most ambitious operation in years when it seized a prison in northeast Syria last month holding at least 3,000 IS detainees.

U.S.-backed Kurdish forces fought IS militants for 10 days to take back the prison, and a watchdog organization reported Friday that hundreds of boys who'd been held there are missing.

For all his brinkmanship with Russia as it amasses its forces for a possible new invasion of Ukraine, Biden could not afford to take his eyes off IS.

On Tuesday morning, he met Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in the Oval Office and gave the go-ahead. Wednesday evening in Washington, Biden was in the Situation Room, monitoring a live feed of the mission as it unfolded.

THE MISSION

At his refugee camp near the raid, Jamil el-Deddo heard aircraft and an explosion ripping through the night and thought at first it might be the notorious barrel bombs "that used to be dropped on us." President Bashar Assad's forces used the explosives-packed barrels against opponents during the Syrian conflict, inflicting indiscriminate death and injury.

"The first moments were terrifying," el-Deddo told AP. "No one knew what was happening."

The U.S. launched the raid from a unidentified base in the region after having "deconflicted" the mission with "a range of entities." That's jargon for giving certain other military forces or interests in the region — perhaps Russia — notice of a U.S. operation underway.

At the outset, the building's occupants were told to get out.

"If you don't leave, we have orders," a man speaking with Iraqi dialect could be heard saying through a loudspeaker. "We will fire missiles toward the house. There are drones overhead."

Ten people left the building, said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby — a man and woman from the first floor and eight children in all from the first and second.

Not long after came the explosion that collapsed much of the third story and blew bodies out of the house, al-Qurayshi's among them. Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, said the blast was more massive than one that would be expected from a suicide vest.

From the second floor, the barricaded IS lieutenant, whom officials did not identify, and a woman thought to be his wife exchanged sustained gunfire with the commandos, U.S. officials said. Both died in the fire-fight, U.S. officials said, and one child with them was also found dead, McKenzie said.

The special operations forces conducting the mission faced danger from outside the building as well.

While the commandos were clearing the second floor, a number of foreign fighters linked to al-Qaida in Syria "began maneuvering with weapons toward U.S. forces" at the scene, McKenzie said. Gunfire from a U.S. helicopter killed at least two of them, he said.

Another helicopter developed a significant malfunction, McKenzie said. After landing it safely, away from the scene, the Americans rigged it to explode, then struck it with munitions from the air to be doubly sure "no sensitive equipment would remain in Syria."

Videos released by the Syrian opposition group Syrian Civil Defense, also known as White Helmets, showed a paramedic rushing a little girl from the house into an ambulance. A photo of a girl circulated on social media later showing a girl who appeared to be about five with blood on her face.

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When the commandos safely departed, Biden uttered "God bless our troops," according to a U.S. official who briefed the press on condition of anonymity. Biden was kept abreast of their long flight out of Syria overnight by Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser.

AFTERMATH

In images afterward, blood could be seen on the walls and floor in what remains of the structure. A wrecked bedroom had a wooden crib and the stuffed rabbit doll. On one damaged wall, the baby swing was still hanging.

In the fog-of-war aftermath, there was no immediate accounting from the U.S. of how many children died in all, and how. The White House attributed the deaths of three of the children to al-Qurayshi's blast while the Pentagon spoke of two, both leaving unexplained, for now, how many might have been killed in the firefight.

Biden said U.S. forces chose a riskier commando raid instead of an attack from the air so as to minimize civilian casualties.

Yet the U.S. launched the operation knowing the IS leader might respond by killing innocent people around him as well as himself. McKenzie said the U.S. "as always" will look into whether innocent people were killed by its forces.

GOP's election inquiry: Courts, conspiracies and more costs

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — A Republican inquiry into Pennsylvania's 2020 presidential election inspired by former President Donald Trump's baseless claims of election fraud has spawned several court cases as it expands into multiple courses of inquiry, grows in cost and shows signs it will drag well into 2022.

The Republican pursuit has received a broad embrace by GOP candidates on the campaign trail. On Friday, the state GOP scheduled an hourlong presentation on it at the party's closed-press winter meeting in Lancaster.

The undertaking comes after Trump and his supporters have pressured allies in battleground states he lost to seek out fraud to validate their conspiracy theories. Senators leading what they call an "investigation" in Pennsylvania have yet to report any findings.

As it drags on, it is looking more and more like the partisan and widely criticized "audit" that Arizona's Senate Republicans carried out of heavily populated Maricopa County in a battleground state won — like Pennsylvania — by Democrat Joe Biden.

Senators in charge of it say they are simply looking for ways to improve the state's elections, not overturn the 2020 presidential election.

Critics, including Republican senators, warn that its backers want nothing less than to overturn 2020's election. Democrats have broadly opposed it and characterized it as an effort to discredit Biden's win, damage confidence in elections and take away voting rights.

A look at where everything stands:

VOTING MACHINES

The state Supreme Court has, for now, held up the downloading of digital data from voting machines and election equipment in a heavily Republican county, Fulton County.

The Republican senator in charge, Sen. Cris Dush, R-Jefferson, is targeting Fulton County because it used equipment made by Dominion Voting Systems in 2020's election.

Denver-based Dominion was the subject of some of the most feverish right-wing conspiracy theories about the election supposedly being stolen from Trump. It has since filed a number of defamation lawsuits against Trump allies and right-wing broadcasters.

In brief interview last month, Dush said he wants access to Dominion's equipment "because there have been reports that there are problems with it, and we're going to take a look at it."

The state had a responsibility to ensure the equipment was "properly investigated," but did not, Dush said.

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Dush would not say exactly what problems he had in mind. But he also suggested the inquiry would not necessarily stop at Fulton County.

"We're going to see if there is any evidence that causes further investigation and then we'll go from there," Dush said.

Fulton County, which is cooperating with Dush, is Trump country, delivering more than 85% of its vote in 2020's election to the former president.

But Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf's administration asked the court to get involved because it had tried fruitlessly to ensure that any access to the equipment is conducted under a specific set of rules to prevent the data and equipment from being damaged or altered.

Fulton County said the state's demands were unnecessary, and a lower court would not force it to agree.

Dominion's equipment was also used in Maricopa County, where it was inspected twice by two different federally accredited voting system laboratories. It passed both times, according to reports of the inspections posted by Maricopa County.

Dush has advocated for overturning Biden's victory in Pennsylvania and for bringing an Arizona-style election "investigation" to Pennsylvania.

THE SUBPOENA

The statewide Commonwealth Court last month rejected Democrats' efforts to block a subpoena issued by a Republican-controlled Senate committee for information from state election officials.

But the court also declined to greenlight the release of some information it sought, citing an argument by Democratic state Attorney General Josh Shapiro that it is protected by privacy laws.

That protected information, according to Shapiro's office, includes voters' partial Social Security numbers and driver's license numbers and details about election systems that are barred from public disclosure by federal law governing critical infrastructure.

Lawyers for Shapiro's office and Senate Democrats want the court to order hearings so they can question Dush about why he thinks it is necessary to have the information.

But instead, the court has ordered briefs due Feb. 15 on questions about the court's legal jurisdiction over a legislative subpoena.

When he voted for the subpoena, Dush said he wants the information because of questions "regarding the validity of people who have ... voted, whether or not they exist."

He did not give examples.

ELECTION FRAUD

An Associated Press investigation into potential cases of voter fraud in Pennsylvania and the five other battleground states where Trump disputed his loss to Biden in 2020 found a minuscule number of cases.

Election officials in 11 of the state's 67 counties identified a total of 26 possible cases of voter fraud, representing 0.03% of Biden's margin of victory. He defeated Trump in Pennsylvania by more than 80,000 votes, according to the state's certified results.

THE COST

It's going up.

In Arizona, millions of dollars were supplied by Trump supporters to underwrite the effort. In Pennsylvania, Senate Republicans concluded it would be illegal to accept private donations for the task and they would use taxpayer dollars.

The original contract between Senate Republicans and Envoy Sage is \$270,250, but Dush's office acknowledged the Fulton County undertaking was not covered under the original contract and requires an addendum. The addendum, dated Jan. 20, adds another \$187,865, according to a copy posted online by the state Treasury Department.

In addition, lawyers are now representing both Republican and Democratic senators in two different court cases, one on the subpoena and one over Fulton County's voting machines.

UK's Boris Johnson ends week of turmoil in weakened position

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By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — This was the week British Prime Minister Boris Johnson hoped to get a grip on his government after weeks of scandal. By Friday, he was struggling to hang on after a scathing report on lockdown-breaching parties and the departure of several top aides.

Johnson was rocked Thursday by the resignation of his policy chief, Munira Mirza, a trusted adviser who worked with him for more than a decade. Mirza stood by the prime minister amid “partygate” revelations that Johnson and his staff broke the rules they had imposed on the country. But she said Johnson’s “scurrilous accusation” this week that an opposition leader had failed to stop a notorious pedophile was the final straw.

“This was not the normal cut-and-thrust of politics; it was an inappropriate and partisan reference to a horrendous case of child sex abuse,” Mirza wrote in a resignation letter, which was published by The Spectator magazine.

After Mirza quit, Johnson’s office announced the departure of three more top staffers: chief of staff Dan Rosenfield, communications director Jack Doyle and principal private secretary Martin Reynolds. Elena Narozanski, who worked in Mirza’s policy unit, resigned Friday.

Johnson tried to reassure staff that he remained in control by quoting the wise monkey Rafiki from “The Lion King,” telling a meeting: “Change is good” even if it is difficult.

Conservative lawmakers loyal to Johnson depicted the departures as part of a planned overhaul to restore order to his 10 Downing Street office.

“The prime minister was absolutely clear on Monday that there would be changes at the top of No. 10 and that is what he has delivered,” Energy Minister Greg Hands said. “This is the prime minister taking charge.”

Others weren’t so sure. The prime minister’s grip on power has been shaken by public anger at revelations that his staff held “bring your own booze” office parties, birthday celebrations and “wine time Fridays” at times in 2020 and 2021 while millions in Britain were barred from meeting with friends and family because of COVID-19 restrictions.

A total of 16 parties have been investigated by a senior civil servant, Sue Gray, with a dozen of them also under investigation by the Metropolitan Police.

On Monday, Gray released an interim report looking at the four parties police are not probing. She found that “failures of leadership and judgment” allowed events to occur that “should not have been allowed to take place” and described a Downing Street operation marked by excessive drinking and dysfunctional dynamics.

Johnson apologized and pledged to fix the problems in his office, though he didn’t admit personal wrongdoing.

Rosenfield, Doyle and especially Reynolds — who sent 100 government staff an invitation to a BYOB garden party in May 2020 — were always likely to be ousted as part of Johnson’s post-“partygate” shakeup.

But Mirza’s departure was a major blow. In her resignation letter, she said Johnson had not heeded her advice to apologize for accusing Labour Party leader Keir Starmer in the House of Commons on Monday of “failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile” when Starmer was the U.K.’s director of public prosecutions. Savile was a long-time presenter of youth television shows who was exposed after his death in 2011 as a sexual predator who had abused hundreds of children.

Starmer said the accusation was “a ridiculous slur peddled by right-wing trolls.” A 2013 report found that Starmer hadn’t been involved in decisions about whether Savile should be prosecuted.

Some Conservatives also recoiled at the use of Savile in a political attack. In her resignation letter, Mirza said Johnson had let himself down “by making a scurrilous accusation against the leader of the opposition.”

The Downing Street exodus is sending further shockwaves through Conservative lawmakers as they mull whether to seek a no-confidence vote in the leader who won them a big parliamentary majority just over two years ago. Under party rules, such a vote is triggered if 15% of party lawmakers — currently 54 people — write letters calling for one. If Johnson lost such a vote, he would be replaced as party leader and prime minister.

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Only about a dozen Conservative legislators have publicly called for Johnson to quit, though the number who have written letters may be higher.

Aaron Bell, a lawmaker who asked in Parliament on Monday whether Johnson thought he was a fool for following social distancing rules at his grandmother's funeral in 2020, added his name on Friday to those calling for a no-confidence vote. He wrote on social media that "the breach of trust that the events in No. 10 Downing Street represent, and the manner in which they have been handled, makes his position untenable."

Many others are biding their time, waiting to see whether police censure the prime minister and what Gray will say in her final report, due once the criminal investigation is over.

Huw Merriman, a moderate Conservative lawmaker, said the prime minister had to shape up or ship out. "My constituents are upset," he told the BBC. "I feel like we've lost face and public trust with them. We've got to gain that back."

In opening of Winter Olympics, chances at politicking abound

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — For all the talk of a diplomatic boycott, Chinese leader Xi Jinping has managed to attract a globe-spanning roster of presidents, royals and other dignitaries to the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics.

The fact that most of them represent countries that are unlikely to win any medals — if they're even competing at all — doesn't seem to matter.

What does, from Beijing's perspective, is presenting an image that China has emerged as a global power whose authoritarian style of government can go head-to-head with a world dominated by the U.S. and its fellow democracies.

"There is a strong authoritarian tilt among the list of leaders attending," said Andrew Yeo, a politics professor at The Catholic University of America and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "It's a much different list of global leaders when compared with the attendees of Biden's Summit for Democracy last December."

The guest list for Friday includes Russia's Vladimir Putin, whose tens of thousands of troops are poised for a possible invasion of Ukraine. Also here: the heads of a good chunk of the rest of the former Soviet Union and the unelected rulers of several energy-rich Gulf Arab states. That leaves plenty of room for diplomatic intrigue and backroom deal-making for those making the trip.

One side effect of the pandemic has been to make face time with Xi more valuable than ever — even if it must be done behind a mask. The Chinese leader hasn't been abroad in more than two years. His country has sharply limited international travel while pursuing a zero-tolerance policy in fighting the virus.

So anyone who wants to meet Xi, China's most powerful leader in decades, or other top officials like Premier Li Keqiang in person has to make the trip — no matter how powerful they are at home. And so they are coming, from Argentina and Egypt, from Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan.

Just as notable is who won't be there. The United States and several other like-minded democracies are not sending political delegations as part of stated or unstated diplomatic boycotts of the games.

India became the latest nation to join the boycott Thursday after it emerged that a Chinese military commander involved in deadly clashes with Indian forces along their shared border in 2020 was reportedly chosen to be a torchbearer ahead of the Games.

While the decisions to keep officials away have dented the "propaganda coup" that Xi might have hoped for, the number of leaders that China has managed to attract is nevertheless testament to the country's growing economic clout, according to Anthony J. Saich, a China expert at Harvard University's Kennedy School.

"They do not want to be seen as slighting China," he said. The mood this year, he added, has a very different feel from the 2008 Beijing Olympics, "when there was international and domestic enthusiasm for the games being held in China."

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That means that the countries most likely to take home medals, aside from Winter Olympics powerhouse Russia, aren't among those gracing the Bird's Nest skyboxes.

At least eight of the roughly 20 countries sending high-level officials have no athletes competing. That includes steamy Cambodia, desert-covered Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, which at least boasts an indoor ski slope in Dubai. Several others are fielding only a single competitor, including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, both of whom have one male skier participating.

No leader aside from Xi himself is being as closely watched as Putin, a winter sports enthusiast who can use his visit to project a visage of business-as-usual statesman even as the U.S. and its allies fear he is preparing for war. His presence is also a reminder that Russia very much is at the Olympic Games even if the country's athletes can't compete under their own flag.

An overcoated Putin, standing by himself, waved from the stands as his nation's team — known once again as the Russia Olympic Committee because of doping sanctions — was introduced.

"This is more than a 'sideline' meeting," Yeo said. "It involves the leaders of two great powers who are looking to strengthen diplomatic and economic relations at a time when both countries feel emboldened to challenge the United States."

The Russian president met with Xi earlier Friday for their first in-person meeting since 2019. In his opening remarks, Putin said relations between the two nations are progressing in "a spirit of friendship and strategic partnership."

"They have indeed become unprecedented. It's an example of dignified relations that support mutual development," Putin said.

The two countries issued a joint statement reflecting their shared views on global security and planned to ink more than dozen trade, energy and other agreements. Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign affairs adviser, noted ahead of the meeting that China supports Russia's demands for security guarantees that have unpinned the standoff over Ukraine.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a call last week that Moscow's security concerns need to be taken seriously and addressed, a statement that marked a notable policy shift for Beijing.

Putin will have plenty of other leaders to talk to should he so choose. They include the heads of former Soviet states in Central Asia that Moscow sees, like Ukraine, as a natural part of its sphere of influence.

The region is also crucial for China's ambitious Belt and Road trade initiative, and trade has surged in recent years. Friday's attendees include the president of the region's largest economy, Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who enjoyed Xi's support when he faced a spike in political unrest last month.

But some of the guests don't fit into neat geopolitical categories. Take the tiny Gulf state of Qatar, for example.

Its powerful emir, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, is fresh off a meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden on Monday in which his country was designated a major non-NATO ally and hailed as a "good friend and reliable partner."

But as the world's second-biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas, the 2022 World Cup host is also eager to secure more sales of the fuel to China. And it could prove to be a useful backup option for European gas supplies in the event they are cut or curtailed in a conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

And then there's Poland, the only European Union nation sending an elected leader to the Games. While he's not the main decision-maker in Polish politics, President Andrzej Duda's presence is noteworthy given the U.S.-led diplomatic boycott and concerns over a crisis in Ukraine, with which it shares a lengthy border.

Duda is scheduled to meet Xi, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach during his visit. His press office said the goal of those talks "is to encourage the interlocutors to play an active role in leading to Russia-Ukraine talks."

Austria vaccine mandate to take effect, but few emulating it

By EMILY SCHULTHEIS and GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

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VIENNA (AP) — Austria is about to become the first country in Europe to require most adults to get vaccinated against COVID-19, but few other nations appear likely to join it as many turn their attention to loosening restrictions.

The mandate for people 18 and over takes effect on Saturday, 2 1/2 months after the plan was first announced amid a surge of delta-variant cases that sent the country into a since-lifted lockdown.

It comes into force as nations across Europe and beyond have seen infections reach unprecedented levels because of the omicron variant, which is highly contagious but generally causes milder illness and already appears to be leveling off or dropping in some places.

While the sense of urgency in Austria has largely evaporated, officials say the mandate still makes sense. "The vaccine mandate won't immediately help us break the omicron wave, but that wasn't the goal of this law," Health Minister Wolfgang Mueckstein said Thursday before parliament's upper house approved the plan. "The vaccine mandate should help protect us from the next waves, and above all from the next variants."

It will be awhile before Austria's 8.9 million people notice any practical change. And it isn't clear when or even if the toughest part of the plan will take effect.

But authorities hope the measure will drive up a vaccination rate that is relatively low for Western Europe: 69% of the population is considered fully vaccinated.

Only in mid-March will police start checking people's vaccination status during traffic stops and checks on coronavirus restrictions. People who can't produce proof of vaccination will be asked in writing to do so and will be fined up to 600 euros (\$680) if they don't. Fines could reach 3,600 euros if people contest their punishment.

In a third phase, officials will check the national vaccination register and send reminders to people who still aren't vaccinated, leading to potential fines. When and if those methodical checks start depends on whether authorities deem vaccination progress sufficient.

"I would like us not to need phase three at all," Mueckstein said.

The Austrian mandate — which will exempt pregnant women, people who can't be vaccinated for medical reasons and those who have recently recovered from COVID-19 — was first conceived as cases caused by delta surged.

Dr. Susanne Drapalik, overseeing Vienna's biggest vaccination center, said she still thinks more people will get their shots because of the mandate. The vaccination center was running at half-capacity on Friday, with only one of its two floors in use.

While there was an increase in November and December, demand for first shots lately has been "like a few raindrops" rather than a big rush, she said. "But we are still hopeful that people can be convinced."

Not everyone agrees the new rules are still worth having.

"I don't really see the added value of the vaccine mandate at this point," said Gerald Gartlehner, an epidemiologist at the Danube University Krems. He argued that omicron's highly infectious nature and milder symptoms have changed things and that much of the population now has immunity, via either vaccination or infection.

Elsewhere in Europe, some countries have vaccine mandates for specific professional or age groups, but only Germany is seriously considering a requirement for all adults. And its prospects are unclear, with Chancellor Olaf Scholz's own coalition divided on the issue and parliament left to design a mandate.

Germany does have a vaccine mandate for the military and has approved legislation that will require workers at hospitals and nursing homes to show that they are fully vaccinated or have recovered by mid-March.

In Britain, vaccination is compulsory for nursing home staff, and the government had planned to expand that to front-line health care workers in April. It is now reconsidering that amid concern about staff shortages. Calls last fall for mandatory vaccines in Belgium have faded.

Greece last month imposed a vaccination requirement for people 60 and older. Italy followed this week with a mandate under which people over 50 face a one-time 100-euro fine if they aren't vaccinated.

Outside Europe, Ecuador announced in December that vaccination against the coronavirus will be man-

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datory for most citizens.

Moves to loosen restrictions are garnering more attention in Europe and beyond amid increasing pandemic fatigue. England, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and several Nordic countries have taken steps to end or loosen their restrictions. In some places, like Norway and Denmark, the easing comes even though case counts are still hovering near their highs. Austria itself is easing some measures.

Vaccine mandates have become highly polarizing in the U.S. since President Joe Biden proposed requiring COVID-19 shots or regular testing at all workplaces with more than 100 employees. Republicans challenged the mandate, and the Supreme Court blocked it.

A scaled-back federal measure requiring vaccines for hospital and nursing home workers survived. The U.S. military is also requiring vaccines, and the Army this week said 3,300 soldiers are at risk of being discharged for refusing to get their shots.

Vaccine rules have set off raucous demonstrations in Canada in the past week, with protesters upset over a new requirement that truckers entering the country be fully immunized.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Vice president doesn't have power to 'change the outcome' of elections

CLAIM: Vice President Mike Pence "did have the right to change the outcome" of the 2020 election but chose not to use it.

THE FACTS: The vice president has no power to unilaterally "change" or overturn the presidential election results of a state under the Constitution or any law, experts say. While former President Donald Trump is no longer directly posting on Twitter or Facebook, a statement he issued on Sunday soon swirled on social media — falsely claiming that his former vice president "did have the right to change the outcome" of the 2020 election and that he "could have overturned" it. Trump pointed to a current effort in Congress to amend the Electoral Count Act, a law enacted in 1887 and amended in 1948, as purported proof for his assertion. The role of the vice president in the counting of Electoral College votes is largely ceremonial, as The Associated Press has explained. The Constitution directs the president of the Senate to open the certificates of the election results from the states in the presence of the Senate and House and instructs that the votes "shall then be counted," said Garrett Epps, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Oregon. He noted that the vice president is not explicitly referenced. However, the vice president serves as president of the Senate; if absent, the senior most senator from the majority party serves in that role. That language indicates Congress — not just the president of the Senate — is to count the votes, Epps said, and doesn't afford the vice president any special power to overturn them. The Electoral Count Act does allow for an objection to a state's vote in writing if it is signed by a member of the House and a member of the Senate. If there is such a request, then the House and Senate meet in separate sessions to consider it. The objection is only sustained if both chambers agree to it by a simple majority vote. Legislators are indeed in talks to update that law. Republican Sen. Susan Collins said in an interview on Sunday that she was "hopeful that we can come up with a bipartisan bill that will make very clear that the vice president's role is simply ministerial, that he has no ability to halt the count." Michael McConell, a law professor and director of the Constitutional Law Center at Stanford Law School, said there are some ambiguities within the Electoral Count Act that could be shored up, including language referring to how Congress handles competing slates of electors from a state when the law says only those that are "regularly given" shall be counted. But none of the ambiguities could be reasonably interpreted as giving the vice president the power to unilaterally overturn an election's results, said McConell, a former federal

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appellate judge. He said there was no serious basis for that claim. Lawmakers are also proposing changes to the Electoral Count Act regarding the threshold required for members of Congress to raise objections to a state's electoral votes, and the grounds for raising such objections.

— Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia contributed this report.

Trucks, crowds at Canada anti-vaccination protest exaggerated

CLAIM: Law enforcement officials in Canada report over 100,000 trucks and millions of people showed up last weekend in Ottawa for a vaccine mandate protest.

THE FACTS: No such estimates have been provided by the law enforcement agencies named in posts circulating on social media — the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Ontario Provincial Police, representatives said. As thousands of protesters gathered in Ottawa over the weekend to rally against vaccine mandates, numerous false claims about the event spread on social media. Some cited exaggerated crowd numbers, wrongly attributed to Canadian law enforcement, while others shared miscaptioned photos to erroneously suggest they showed the trucker demonstrations. Posts circulating Saturday and Sunday stated: "The OPP have reported over 100,000 trucks in Ottawa, an estimated 2.3 million on foot and an 'abundance' of trucks parked in fields just outside of the city. RCMP reports over 130,000 trucks in the city and more than 20,000 parked in fields outside of the city." But the claims are false, spokespersons for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Ontario Provincial Police told The Associated Press. "We are able to confirm that the RCMP did not issue any numbers publicly in relation to this," Stéphanie Dumoulin, a spokesperson for the agency, wrote in an email to the AP. "These numbers did not come from the Ontario Provincial Police," Bill Dickson, a spokesperson for the department, confirmed in a separate email to the AP. "We have not released any numbers." Ottawa Police Chief Peter Soly estimated there were about 8,000 people at the protest in the city on Saturday, according to Amy Gagnon, a spokesperson for the agency. Some protesters parked on the grounds of the National War Memorial and danced on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Others carried signs and flags with swastikas and some used the statue of Canadian hero Terry Fox to display an anti-vaccine statement, the AP reported. Some of the demonstrators were protesting a new rule that went into effect on Jan. 15 requiring truckers entering Canada to be fully immunized against the coronavirus. The U.S. has mandated the same requirement on truckers entering the country. The Canadian Trucking Alliance said a large number of the protesters had no connection to the trucking industry, adding they have a separate agenda to push. Other social media users this week shared a video of truckers taking part in the annual Feast of San Michele event in Turin, Italy, in 2021, but falsely claimed it showed Italian truckers mobilizing in support of the anti-vaccine protests in Canada on Jan. 28. Similarly, a 2019 photo of an unrelated protest in the Netherlands was misrepresented to incorrectly suggest it showed farmers blocking a freeway in solidarity with the Canadian protests.

— Associated Press writer Josh Kelety in Phoenix contributed this report with additional reporting from Beatrice Dupuy in New York and Sophia Tulp in Atlanta.

Canadian prime minister remained in Ottawa area amid protests

CLAIM: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been "hiding out" in the U.S. as a convoy of truckers and protesters demonstrate against vaccine mandates in Ottawa.

THE FACTS: The prime minister's office confirmed to The Associated Press that Trudeau has not left Canada. Trudeau was also recorded giving a press conference in the Canadian capital region on Monday, the same day that some social media users falsely claimed he was in the U.S. Additionally, public itineraries released by the prime minister's office show that he has remained near Ottawa, the capital of Canada, for more than a week. But as thousands of protesters gathered in Canada's capital to protest vaccine mandates, masks and lockdowns, several social media users pushed the falsehood that Trudeau fled Canada for the U.S. U.S. Rep. Chip Roy, a Republican from Texas, amplified the idea on Monday, tweeting to his nearly 85,000 followers: "If Justin Trudeau is hiding in the United States, we should return him to Canada and make him face his own people immediately. No safe haven for fleeing COVID tyrants."

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#LiveFree #DeportTrudeau." Roy's tweet came hours after Trudeau had given a public address from the Ottawa area in which he called for unity and condemned acts of violence at the protests. The prime minister has been isolating at home in Ottawa since Thursday, after learning he had been exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19. On Monday, Trudeau announced he also tested positive for the virus. Canadian rules mandate that fully-vaccinated people who test positive must isolate at home for five days and until symptoms improve. People who test positive for COVID-19 are not permitted to travel. There's no evidence that Trudeau has recently traveled outside of Canada, either. Itineraries released by his office show that he was based in the Ottawa capital region for all of last week, and for most of January. A spokesperson for the prime minister's office confirmed the daily, public itineraries accurately reflect the locations provided and that Trudeau "did not and has not left Canada." A number of protesters have remained in the capital this week.

— Sophia Tulp

False claim spreads about Japanese ivermectin study, despite correction

CLAIM: A Japanese study "says ivermectin is effective against Omicron in phase III trial."

THE FACTS: While scientists continue to conduct research into the drug's use against COVID-19, the finding being cited refers to pre-clinical research — not a "phase III trial," which involves testing the drug on humans. Social media users are sharing the false information about a Japanese company's research into using ivermectin to treat COVID-19, after Reuters published an erroneous headline Monday that it soon corrected. The inaccurate headline stated: "Japan's Kowa says ivermectin effective against Omicron in phase III trial." The story made it appear that the results broke significant new ground. "Phase III" clinical trials are conducted on people. But the research done by Kowa Co. Ltd. was conducted in a lab. The report was based on an announcement from Kowa that said ivermectin showed "antiviral" effects against omicron and other variants in pre-clinical research. Kowa said in a statement to the AP that "the press release announced that ivermectin was effective against Omicron strain" in an "in vitro study (i.e. non-clinical study), not in the clinical study." The company said it was currently conducting a study on volunteers to further evaluate the effectiveness of ivermectin in treating COVID-19. Reuters soon corrected its story and acknowledged the mistake. Its current headline reads: "Ivermectin shows 'antiviral effect' against COVID, Japanese company says." But social media accounts continue to share the falsehood. Ivermectin is approved in the U.S. in tablet form to treat parasitic worms as well as a topical solution to treat external parasites. The drug is also available for animals. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has not authorized ivermectin for use in preventing or treating COVID-19. And a National Institutes of Health panel on COVID-19 treatment guidelines has said there is "insufficient evidence" to "recommend either for or against the use of ivermectin for the treatment of COVID-19." A 2020 study in Australia found ivermectin inhibited the replication of the coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, in a laboratory setting. But Dr. David Fajgenbaum, an immunologist at the University of Pennsylvania who directs a database tracking research into treatments for COVID-19, said that showing a drug to be effective in lab tests on cells is a "starting point." Fajgenbaum said there have been 25 randomized controlled trials — a gold-standard for research — studying ivermectin as a treatment for COVID-19. The trials have collectively involved more than 2,000 patients, he said, and the results have been mixed. "In my opinion, there's a possibility of benefit, but given that so many trials have been done, if it clearly was effective you would expect that the majority of trials would show that it was effective," Fajgenbaum said. "If something works, then it should be a rare occurrence that a trial is done and it doesn't show that it works."

— Angelo Fichera

US congressman shares neo-Nazi's quote wrongly attributed to Voltaire

CLAIM: French philosopher Voltaire said: "To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize."

THE FACTS: Enlightenment-era writer Voltaire did not say this. The quote, which was paraphrased, comes

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from a 1993 radio broadcast by Kevin Alfred Strom, who has been identified as a neo-Nazi by organizations that monitor hate groups. U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie, a Kentucky Republican, shared the incorrectly attributed quote in a tweet Sunday to his more than 320,000 followers, with a caption criticizing Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert. The tweet contained a cartoon image along with the phrase: "To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize - Voltaire." Massie, who has been critical of pandemic mask and vaccine mandates, said in the caption of the post: "You mustn't question Fauci, for he is science." Many social media users quickly pointed out that the quote was wrongly attributed to Voltaire. Still, it was shared more than 7,000 times, including by many believing the attribution was correct. As of Friday, Massie's tweet remained online and the congressman had not publicly commented on the error. His office did not respond to a request for comment. The original quote from Strom, an American white nationalist and Holocaust denier, has been used previously online and paraphrased in a variety of ways. In a 1993 radio broadcast, Strom said: "To determine the true rulers of any society, all you must do is ask yourself this question: Who is it that I am not permitted to criticize?" according to an internet archive containing his full remarks. Despite the quote originating more than a hundred years after Voltaire's death in 1778, it has been repurposed and incorrectly attributed to him dozens of times. In 2019, actor John Cusack tweeted the quote before deleting the post and apologizing. Strom again took credit for the quote in a 2017 blog post in which he wrote: "My statement has become the stuff of Internet memes, quote collections, graphics, and motivational posters. ... Trouble is, the quote is almost always attributed to the 18th-century French writer Voltaire, and not to me."

— Associated Press writer Sophia Tulp in Atlanta contributed this report.

No plan for fourth round of federal stimulus checks, despite claims

CLAIM: The IRS will issue a fourth round of stimulus checks to Americans in February 2022.

THE FACTS: While some states have created stimulus programs for their own residents, Congress has not approved any plans to issue another round of nationwide stimulus checks. A spokesperson for the IRS confirmed that there have been three rounds of economic impact payments in total. Posts circulating widely on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube this week shared different versions of the baseless claim that a fourth round of federal stimulus checks was coming this month. One post on Facebook falsely claimed \$2,000 checks would be deposited in bank accounts nationwide on Feb. 9, while a blog headline hinted many Americans may be eligible for \$1,400 in relief in the near future. Earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic, lawmakers approved three rounds of stimulus payments to American households, up to \$1,200 per person in March 2020, up to \$600 per person in December 2020 and up to \$1,400 per person in March 2021. But Congress, which would have to approve any new government spending for nationwide stimulus, has not to date authorized another wave of payments from the federal government. IRS spokesman Anthony Burke confirmed in an email that there were three rounds of economic impact payments, all of which were already paid. Some advocates have urged the federal government to issue more direct payments to American households. In March, a group of 21 Democratic senators called for President Joe Biden to include recurring payments in his "Build Back Better" long-term economic plan. In May, asked about whether one of the bills in that plan could include a fourth round of direct payments, White House press secretary Jen Psaki punted back to Congress, saying, "We'll see what members of Congress propose, but those are not free." Meanwhile, some states have taken initiative to issue economic stimulus payments to their own residents. In California, for example, residents who have filed their 2020 tax returns and made less than \$75,000 that year are eligible for payments through a "Golden State Stimulus" program. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

Amazon workers try new tactics to unionize in Alabama

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon workers and organizers in Bessemer, Alabama, are making door-to-door

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house calls, sporting pro-union T-shirts and challenging anti-union messaging by Amazon-hired consultants as they try to convince their peers for the second time to unionize their warehouse in an election that starts Friday by secret ballot.

The new organizing tactics come two months after the National Labor Relations Board ordered a do-over election upon determining that Amazon unfairly influenced the first election last year. Workers back then overwhelmingly rejected the union in a vote of 1,798 to 738 and a turnout of 53%.

The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, which like last time is spearheading the union drive, has solicited help from other unions, including those representing teachers and postal clerks.

Stuart Appelbaum, president of the RWDSU, says the union is also courting community groups like Greater Birmingham Ministries to amplify the message that Amazon workers are not just warehouse workers but belong to communities and deserve respect.

"Alabama has a long history of denying the rights of workers in order to attract corporations," said Scott Douglas, executive director of Greater Birmingham Ministries. "We have to put a stop to this."

RWDSU estimates that more than half of the roughly 6,100 workers at the Alabama facility who voted last year remain eligible to vote in the current election. But the numbers also speak to high worker turnover — an issue that has made it difficult for organizing efforts to gain traction in Bessemer and elsewhere.

Organizers are nonetheless optimistic. Vaccines have made it easier for them to do face-to-face meetings during the pandemic as opposed to the texts, emails and phone calls they relied on last year. They also say workers are more open to being unionized and that new employees are taking note of the labor unrest that has become even stronger in recent months, not just at Amazon but other companies such as Starbucks.

"We are letting Amazon know that we are going to stick together. We are going to work together and we are going to be one," said Bessemer worker Kristina Bell during a union-organized call last week.

A repeat of the election puts the spotlight back on Amazon and how it treats its workers. Pro-union employees at the Bessemer warehouse complain of 10-hour shifts on their feet with little time to take breaks.

Barbara Agrait, an Amazon spokeswoman, countered in an email to The Associated Press that full-time employees at the Bessemer facility earn at least \$15.80 an hour and have access to health care on the first day of work, and a matching 401(k) program with matching company contributions. In addition, Amazon will pay the full cost of employees' college tuition after three months on the job. Agrait further noted that more than 450 employees have been promoted since the opening of the warehouse in the spring of 2020.

"Our employees have always had the choice of whether or not to join a union, and our focus remains on working directly with our team to make Amazon a great place to work," Agrait said.

If organizers are successful, the Bessemer warehouse would be the first unionized Amazon facility in the U.S. The company is fighting a separate attempt by workers to unionize a New York City facility, where last week the nascent Amazon Labor Union lined up enough support to hold a vote.

The RWDSU still faces an uphill battle with Amazon, which hasn't relented on its anti-union stance. Workers say the company continues to rely on consultants and managers to hold mandatory staff meetings to talk about why unions are a bad idea.

Agrait defended the meetings: "If the union vote passes, it will impact everyone at the site, which is why we host regular informational sessions and provide employees the opportunity to ask questions and learn about what this could mean for them and their day-to-day life working at Amazon."

The company is also keeping a controversial U.S. Postal Service mailbox that was key in the NLRB's decision to invalidate last year's vote. Amazon had argued it wanted to make it more convenient for workers to vote but the NLRB said the mailbox gave the false impression that Amazon was running the election.

The mailbox has since been relocated from the entrance of the facility to another part of the parking lot. And, under the new election rules, it no longer contains the signage that Amazon erected last year.

But the union says that the mailbox is still under camera surveillance and can leave workers under the false impression that they can only drop off their ballots there as opposed to the post office or mailing their ballots from home.

"The whole election was overturned because of the mailbox. It needs to be removed," said Darryl Rich-

ardson, an Amazon worker in the Bessemer facility.

The NLRB declined to comment. The agency will begin to send ballots to workers on Friday; the ballots must be returned to the NLRB regional office by March 25. Vote counting starts on March 28.

For its part, Amazon reached a settlement with the NLRB pledging to refrain from activities such as threatening workers with discipline or calling the police when they're engaging in union activity in exterior non-work areas during a non-work environment.

But John Logan, director of Labor and Employment Studies at San Francisco State University, says the settlement only required Amazon to act within the labor law, which favors employers. He noted the current labor law allows companies lot of leeway, including holding mandatory meetings that can potentially intimidate workers and send a barrage of anti-union messages throughout the workers' day.

Appelbaum and some Amazon workers say they have pushed back at these mandatory meetings, correcting consultants or other managers on any false statements and sometimes even shutting the meetings down.

Still, Logan says while Amazon made missteps in the last election, it continues to get better at anti-union campaigns, figuring out what it can and cannot do.

"They're learning, and they're becoming more sophisticated," Logan said.

Arbery's shooter withdraws guilty plea on hate crime charge

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — The man convicted of murder for shooting Ahmaud Arbery withdrew his guilty plea on a federal hate crime charge Friday, electing to stand trial for a second time in the 2020 killing of a Black man that became part of a larger national reckoning over racial injustice.

Travis McMichael reversed his plan to plead guilty in the federal case days after a U.S. District Court judge rejected terms of a plea deal between defense attorneys and prosecutors that was met with passionate objections by Arbery's parents.

Asked by U.S. District Judge Lisa Godbey Wood for his decision, McMichael said: "I withdraw the plea."

That means all three white men convicted of Arbery's murder will return to court for the federal trial next week, after plea deals for McMichael and his father fell apart. Greg McMichael backed down from a plan to plead guilty in a legal filing late Thursday.

Wood has scheduled jury selection in the hate crimes trial will begin Monday.

The Friday plea hearing for Travis McMichael was so brief that Arbery's father missed it. He was standing by the elevators downstairs as reporters were leaving the courthouse.

"All we want is 100% justice for the Arbery family," Marcus Arbery Sr. said. "That's all we're looking for."

The McMichaels and a neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, were convicted of murder in a Georgia state court last fall and sentenced to life in prison. Georgia lacked a hate crimes law at the time of the killing. The U.S. Department of Justice had them indicted on charges that the three white men violated Arbery's civil rights and targeted him because he was Black.

The McMichaels armed themselves and chased Arbery in a pickup truck after spotting the 25-year-old man running past their home just outside the port city of Brunswick on Feb. 23, 2020. Bryan joined the pursuit in his own truck and recorded cellphone video of Travis McMichael blasting Arbery with a shotgun.

The father and son had planned to plead guilty to a hate crime charge after prosecutors and defense attorneys agreed to propose a 30-year sentence that would include a request to transfer the McMichaels from Georgia's state prison system to federal custody. The deal would have required the McMichaels to admit to racist motives and forfeit the right to appeal their federal sentence.

Wood rejected the deal Monday after Arbery's parents argued that conditions in federal prison wouldn't be as harsh. Wood said she ultimately denied the deal because it would have locked her into a specific sentence.

Prosecutors asked the judge to approve the plea deals despite the objections from Arbery's family. Prosecutor Tara Lyons said that attorneys for Arbery's parents had told the U.S. Justice Department that

the family wouldn't object.

But Lee Merritt, an attorney for Arbery's mother, said the slain man's family had previously rejected the same terms and "no longer wanted to engage" with prosecutors, who "took that as a deferral."

During the murder trial in state court, defense attorneys argued the McMichaels were justified in pursuing Arbery because they had a reasonable suspicion that he had committed crimes in their neighborhood. Travis McMichael testified that he opened fire with his shotgun after Arbery attacked him with fists and tried to grab the weapon.

Beijing excited, dismisses controversy as Olympics begin

By HUIZHONG WU and SAM McNEIL Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — As the lights flashed on the Bird's Nest, the stadium designed for the previous Olympics in China, 63-year old Liu Wenbin was just one of many excited Beijing residents eager for the Games to begin.

It didn't matter that Beijing had just held the Olympics 14 years ago, or that the country had to artificially construct snow, or that the U.S. and several other Western countries were staging a diplomatic boycott over Beijing's internment of a large part of its minority Uyghur population.

Many Chinese were filled with pride — like Liu, who filmed the opening ceremony on his phone as he watched from home in western Beijing.

"As a Chinese person, I feel incomparably proud," Liu said. "Our great China really is No. 1. Even when the pandemic is so severe, we're still able to hold this highly anticipated international event, the Winter Olympics."

Liu, a retiree from Beijing, was unable to see the event up close this year as tickets were only available to select groups owing to pandemic prevention measures. In 2008, he was too busy at work to snag tickets to Beijing's Summer Games, he said with some regret.

Even though the Olympics are being held with strict COVID-19 prevention measures, there was still a festive air in the capital city.

At the Winter Olympics Culture Plaza in Beijing, neighborhood dance troupes performed as families gathered to join in the excitement.

"This Winter Olympics, it's like an international festival, and as a volunteer, it's a hugely important thing for me as a college student, and even in my life," said Zhang Xinrui, a college senior who was volunteering at the event. "You can hear from my voice how excited and how happy I am."

"I hope that our athletes do well, and together show the world our future," said Liu Jingyun, 69, who was part of a group of dancers performing with flat taiping drums, decorated with snowflakes.

The Chinese government, in hosting the Winter Olympics, has actively promoted winter sports, and that has successfully spread to some of the population.

Liu, who is from Beijing and unrelated to the dancer, said he sometimes takes his grandson to go skiing or ice skating. The family even went to Zhangjiakou, where part of the competition will be held, to see the ski trails, made with artificial snow from an intricate irrigation project.

And all the fervor and controversy abroad didn't bother him in the slightest.

"I think some countries are biased, and that's very natural," he said of the diplomatic boycott. "When you are living well, of course there will be someone who's jealous."

The Latest: Dutch VJ manhandled during Olympic live shot

BEIJING (AP) — The latest on the Beijing Olympics:

A correspondent in Beijing for Dutch national broadcaster NOS was manhandled away from his camera during a live news show shortly before the Winter Olympics opening ceremony.

Sjoerd den Daas, the NOS correspondent in China, was speaking to the camera when security officials

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pushed him away.

Den Daas remained calm and told the anchor in the Netherlands, "I fear we will have to come back to you later."

The broadcaster says in a tweet that "sadly, this is increasingly the daily reality for journalists in China." It adds that Den Daas is fine and was able to "complete his story a few minutes later."

The Olympic flame has now officially arrived at the Beijing Games.

An opening ceremony on a frosty night had a fiery conclusion Friday, when the flame was placed inside a giant snowflake to give China's first Winter Olympics the symbolic opening — followed by the third major fireworks show of the night.

The snowflake was composed of placards used to introduce the athletes from the 91 different nations that will compete in China through Feb. 20. There was no cauldron to light, the traditional ending to most opening ceremonies.

Competition in some events started Wednesday and Saturday is the first full day of events at the games, with the first medals to be awarded.

It took the flame more than three months to finally make its way to the games. It was lit on Oct. 18 in Ancient Olympia, Greece, the official start of its journey to China.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach has spoken at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Games, thanking those around the globe who he says have gone "beyond the call of duty" to make the events happen as a global pandemic continues raging.

These Olympics are the second to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic, after the Tokyo Games last summer.

Bach talked about how the Olympics highlight "ambition, courage and strength." He likened those qualities to what China has done to grow Olympic winter sports to its residents.

Bach also addressed the athletes of the Beijing Games directly, saying: "Dear fellow Olympians, your Olympic stage is set. You have arrived here after overcoming so many challenges. ... But now your moment has come, the moment you have been longing for, the moment we all have been longing for. Now your Olympic dream is coming true."

Bach's remarks immediately preceded the games being officially opened by Chinese President Xi Jinping, his words prompting the setting off of fireworks that lit up the sky over the Bird's Nest.

President Xi Jinping stood and waved as the Chinese delegation entered the Bird's Nest to complete the parade of athletes at the opening ceremony for the Beijing Games.

The host nation always is the last team announced in the parade, and there were loud roars and flag-waving throughout the stadium as the Chinese athletes made their way into the event.

The Chinese have about 175 athletes expected to compete in the Olympics. They are traditionally not a winter-sports power, though are expected to have opportunities in Beijing to add to the nation's all-time total of 13 winter golds.

Saudi Arabia has made its first appearance at the Winter Olympics opening ceremony after alpine skier Fayik Abdi qualified to compete.

Its small delegation hoisted the Middle East kingdom's green and white flag while wearing what appeared to be cold-weather versions of the country's traditional ankle-length national dress.

Also making its first appearance is the Caribbean island nation of Haiti. It is being represented by alpine skier Richardson Viano, who was adopted by Italian parents and raised in France.

It has become an Olympic tradition: the shirtless athlete in the opening ceremony.

And Tonga's Pita Taufatofua now has some company.

Meet Nathan Crumpton. Born in Kenya, resident of Utah, graduate of Princeton, skeleton athlete formerly

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with the U.S. and now competing for American Samoa — and he grabbed attention Friday night at the Beijing Games, by walking in shirtless and underterred by a temperature of minus 5 C (23 F).

Taufatofua wasn't at these Olympics, ending his streak of three consecutive games — both summer and winter — representing Tonga. He is currently trying to lead relief efforts there after a tsunami caused catastrophic damage.

Crumpton carried the (shirtless) flag. He also competed for American Samoa in track and field at the Tokyo Games last summer. His mother's family background allowed him to switch his athletic allegiance to American Samoa in 2019.

Russian President Vladimir Putin cheered on his nation's athletes at the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics, making the trip to Beijing as tens of thousands of Russian troops are poised for a possible invasion of Ukraine.

Putin is one of the most prominent world leaders attending Friday's ceremony. The United States and Japan, as well as some other nations, staged a diplomatic boycott of the games.

The Russian leader stood and waved to his nation's athletes as they entered the stadium. Chinese President Xi Jinping, who met with Putin earlier Friday in Beijing, also clapped for the Russian team.

The athletes from Russia, a winter sports powerhouse, were introduced and are competing again at the Olympics as the "Russian Olympic Committee" — part of the sanctions levied after numerous doping scandals. Any Russian athlete who wins a gold medal at the games will hear the Olympic anthem instead of that of their home nation.

At least two of the women who would have been flagbearers at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics were not in the parade of athletes on Friday night because of virus-related issues.

U.S. bobsledder Elana Meyers Taylor had to give up her spot to speedskater Brittany Bowe. Meyers Taylor remains in isolation after a positive test.

And Friday, U.S. Virgin Islands skeleton athlete Katie Tannenbaum revealed that she, too, has tested positive for COVID-19. The Virgin Islands flag was being carried into the stadium by a volunteer.

Tannenbaum is the only athlete representing the Virgin Islands in Beijing at these games. Her coach, Alex Auer, and the nation's Chef de Mission, Ansen Siglar, were walking to represent the team.

At the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, no detail is overlooked.

Every nation is being led into the stadium by someone carrying a glowing snowflake-shaped placard bearing that country's name. And each of the snowflakes, when put back together, would form a larger snowflake.

The placard bearers' costumes has an ice-and-snow pattern, and their hats have a tiger motif — because this year is the year of the tiger in China.

The parade of athletes at the opening ceremony for the Beijing Olympics has started.

It's expected to take about an hour. Representatives from 91 nations are taking part, including about 80% of the U.S. delegation of athletes.

As always at an Olympics, Greece is the first nation to enter the stadium. From there, it goes alphabetically — but by the language of the host country.

That's why Greece will be followed by, in order, Turkey, Malta, Madagascar, Malaysia, Ecuador, Eritrea, Jamaica, Belgium and then Japan.

The U.S. is 56th in the order, which would be confusing to those thinking it'll go according to the English alphabet. The U.S. group will be between Bulgaria and American Samoa.

The team of Russian athletes will be the official midpoint of the parade. They're here competing under the Olympic emblem and not the Russian flag, part of the sanctions handed down to that nation's Olympic committee for doping scandals such as the one that overshadowed the 2014 Sochi Games.

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Tradition also dictates who the last two teams in the parade are. Italy — the host of the next Winter Games in 2026 — will enter next-to-last, and then China will close the parade with its delegation.

In China, Friday was “Lichun” — which translates to the beginning of spring.

And in this case, the start of the Winter Olympics.

“Beginning of Spring” is the first of the 24 solar terms of the year, and that number — 24 — carried significance in the early moments of the opening ceremony of these Beijing Games. Organizers say it reflects “the Chinese people’s understanding of time,” also noting that these were the 24th Winter Olympics.

The celebration of the lunar terms was punctuated by the first of what will be multiple pyrotechnic displays at the Bird’s Nest — including using fireworks to spell out the word “Spring.”

It’s also a Chinese belief that extreme cold breeds new life. Temperatures fell below the freezing mark as the ceremony went along; perhaps not extreme cold, but certainly a chilly start to the Beijing Games.

The opening ceremony for the Beijing Olympics is set to begin, with Chinese President Xi Jinping and International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach now having entered the Bird’s Nest.

The Chinese officially refer to the place as National Stadium — it’s the ‘Bird’s Nest’ because of its design, the web of steel resembling the way branches would be turned into a nest. It becomes the first facility to ever play host to the opening of both a summer and winter games, after it also was where the 2008 Olympics began.

Track and field was contested at the Bird’s Nest then, those games being the ones where Usain Bolt’s reign as the greatest Olympic sprinter began with his world-record times in both the 100- and 200-meter dashes.

Athletes from 91 nations are expected to march in the ceremony, including four from the island of Taiwan — which, for the Olympics and most international sporting events, is referred to as Chinese Taipei.

Nordic combined superstar Eric Frenzel and teammate Terence Weber have tested positive for COVID-19 twice in Beijing, landing them in an isolation hotel.

Frenzel won gold on the normal hill at the 2018 Olympics — as he did at the Sochi Games — and also earned gold in the team competition as well as a silver on the large hill, giving him six Olympic medals in his career.

Frenzel is one medal away from matching the Nordic combined record of seven set by Felix Gottwald of Austria. He is tied for the all-time lead in the sport with three golds, matching Gottwald, Finland’s Samppa Lajunen and Ulrich Wehling of Germany.

Frenzel is No. 5 in World Cup standings, and Weber is seventh. “Both still have the chance to come back!” team spokesman Florian Schwarz wrote in an email Friday night.

Norway’s Jarl Magnus Riiber, ranked No. 2 in the world, also tested positive for COVID-19 and seemed to indicate he was out for the Beijing Games. Riiber posted on Instagram “the (gold) is yours guys.”

The first Nordic combined event at the Beijing Games is Wednesday.

Finland women’s hockey coach Pasi Mustonen is leaving the Beijing Winter Games to return home and attend to a family emergency.

General manager Tuula Puputti tells The Associated Press that assistant coach Juuso Toivola will assume head-coaching duties. The switch comes a day after Finland opened the tournament with a 5-2 loss to the United States.

Finland is scheduled to play Canada on Saturday.

Mustonen took over in 2014 and coached the Finns to a bronze medal at the 2018 Winter Games. The nation then won its first silver medal at the 2019 world championships on home soil following a 2-1 shoot-out loss to the Americans.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has arrived in Beijing for the opening of the Olympic Games. He'll also hold talks with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping as the two leaders look to project themselves as a counterweight to the U.S. and its allies.

The Russian leader's visit comes amid growing Chinese support for Moscow in its dispute with Ukraine that threatens to break out into armed conflict.

Putin's presence makes him the highest-profile guest at the event following the decision by the U.S., Britain and others not to send officials in protest over China's human rights abuses and its treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

The discussions mark the first in-person meeting between Putin and Xi since 2019.

The U.S. leads after the opening day of the team figure skating event at the Beijing Games, with winning performances from Nathan Chen and ice dancers Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue helping them edge the heavily favored Russians.

Alexa Knierim and Brandon Fraizer did their part, too. They had a season-best score in their pairs short program, helping the Americans amass 28 points. That leaves them two clear of the Russians and seven ahead of third-place China.

The Chinese were helped by a record score in the pairs short program by Sui Wenjing and Han Cong.

The team event resumes Sunday with the women's short program. The top five nations after that will advance to the round of free skates later Saturday and concluding Monday night.

U.S. women's hockey star Brianna Decker will miss the rest of the Olympics after injuring her left leg in the Americans' tournament-opening victory against Finland.

Decker is expected to remain in Beijing rather than fly back to the U.S. immediately.

The forward was hurt when she was tripped from behind by Ronja Savolainen midway through the first period Thursday night. Decker was unable to put any weight on her left leg. She was taken off the ice on a stretcher.

Decker's injury was the second to a key player on the first day of women's hockey in Beijing. Canadian forward Melodie Daoust was injured after being checked hard into the boards by Switzerland's Sarah Foster.

The third round of training for women's ski jumpers at the Beijing Olympics has been cancelled due to windy conditions.

Wind gusts were measured at 7 meters per second (16 mph.) To make the conditions even more brutal, it was minus 9 degrees Celsius (16 degrees Fahrenheit) on the sunny afternoon. The 40 women in the field had two jumps each, a day after having three rounds of training.

Practice for the men's ski jumpers later in the day started on time.

Defending Olympic champion Maren Lundby of Norway and top-ranked Marita Kramer of Austria will not vie for medals on Saturday, creating a wide-open competition.

Lundby is taking the season off after gaining weight and refusing to stress her body and mind enough to jump in a sport plagued by eating disorders. Kramer tested positive for COVID-19, knocking her out of the Beijing Games.

Germany's Katharina Althaus and Japan's Sara Takanashi are among the contenders to win gold after finishing second and third behind Lundby at the 2018 Olympics.

High winds delayed the start of men's downhill training earlier in the day and about 100 kilometers (60 miles) away.

The U.S. men's hockey team has held its first pre-Olympic practice in Beijing without two top defenseman and a veteran forward because they tested positive for the coronavirus.

Defenseman Jake Sanderson remains in Los Angeles. Defenseman Steven Kampfer and forward Andy Miele are isolating in the Olympic Village in Beijing.

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USA Hockey hopes all three players will be available for the tournament, which begins Wednesday. The U.S. opens against host China on Thursday.

Players and coaches arrived just after midnight. Three goaltenders and 23 skaters were on the ice for practice with coach David Quinn and his assistants.

Canada canceled practice for a second consecutive day. No reason was given.

Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue have delivered a season-best performance in rhythm dance at the Beijing Olympics, giving Team USA a second straight win on the opening day of figure skating.

Nathan Chen won the men's short program with a dynamic, high-flying program that featured a pair of quads. Hubbell and Donohue followed up with a near-flawless performance to music from Janet Jackson at Capital Indoor Stadium.

In the team event, 10 points are awarded to first place in each discipline, which means the Americans have a perfect 20 so far. The Russian Olympic Committee is second with 17 after Mark Kondratiuk's third-place finish and a shaky second-place performance by ice dance world champions Victoria Sinitsina and Nikita Katsalapov.

Italy is in third place with 14 points heading into the pairs discipline later Friday.

The second men's downhill ski training session is underway at the Beijing Olympics after a delay due to strong winds.

Overall World Cup leader Marco Odermatt of Switzerland was first to set off down the slope an hour after originally scheduled Friday.

The world's best skiers only got the chance to see the Rock course up close for the first time on Thursday. There is a third training session scheduled Saturday before the men's downhill opens the Alpine competition the following day.

Three-time men's figure skating world champion Nathan Chen has delivered a strong short program to open the team competition at the Beijing Games. That gets the Americans off to a good start in their pursuit of a third straight medal in the event.

Chen, who struggled in the team event in Pyeongchang, opened with a big quad flip and hit his difficult quad lutz-triple toe loop combination to deliver the highest score among the men Friday and give the U.S. the maximum 10 points.

Reigning Olympic silver medalist Shoma Uno was second to give Japan nine points. Eighteen-year-old Mark Kondratiuk was third for the Russian Olympic Committee, which is favored to win the team event.

The short program for ice dance and pairs are later Friday, then the teams get a day off before the women's short program on Sunday. The top five teams after that advance to free skates for the medals Sunday and Monday.

Organizers say nine more athletes and officials tested positive for COVID-19 in cases confirmed on Thursday, raising the total to 111 since the Beijing Olympic period started on Jan. 23.

Seven cases were detected at the Beijing airport, making it 77 out of 5,255 athletes and officials who arrived through Thursday. The other two cases came from daily PCR testing that all people inside the Olympic bubbles must undergo.

Organizers say 12 more positive cases were detected among "stakeholders" — mostly workers at the Games including media. Seven of those were at the airport and five in daily tests.

The overall total of positive cases is 308 through Thursday. Almost 12,000 people have arrived in Beijing from outside China.

Organizers have delayed the start of the second men's downhill training session at the Beijing Olympics due to strong winds.

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The session had been scheduled to start at 11 a.m. Beijing time, but organizers will only make a decision then whether it can start at the new scheduled time of noon.

The world's best skiers only got the chance to see the Rock course up close for the first time on Thursday. There is a third training session scheduled Saturday before the men's downhill opens the Alpine competition the following day.

Weather is yet another source of stress for competitive skiers who can do nothing to control changing conditions on the slopes.

Chinese figure skating judge Huang Feng, who was suspended in 2018 for biased judging at the Pyeongchang Olympics, was among the three officials on the technical panel for the team event to start the Beijing Games.

Huang served a one-year suspension after he was accused of biased judging in the pairs event in Pyeongchang.

The International Skating Union, which assigns the judges and technical panel, said in a statement that Huang was cleared to work the Olympics after serving his suspension provided he continues to abide by the organization's code of ethics. The technical panel is responsible for identifying all the elements that skaters execute during their programs.

Huang received a round of applause from the several hundred fans, all Chinese citizens, who were allowed into Capital Indoor Stadium for the start of Friday's program. He stood and gave a brief wave before sitting back down.

A hopeful sign? Despite Russian warning, Ukraine talks go on

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — When the U.S. and NATO rejected the Kremlin's security demands over Ukraine last week, fears of an imminent Russian attack against its neighbor soared.

But instead of sending armored armadas across the Ukrainian border as the U.S. and its allies worried, Moscow bombarded Western capitals with diplomatic letters about an international agreement that the Kremlin sees as a strong argument for its position in the standoff.

Even though President Vladimir Putin said a month ago that he wanted a quick answer to the Russian demands and warned that Moscow would not accept "idle talk," earlier this week he signaled an apparent readiness for more talks with Washington and NATO.

And that offers a glimmer of hope. Although more than 100,000 Russian troops still hover near Ukraine and weeks of talks have led to no major concessions by either side, at least Russia and the West keep talking, and for some experts that's a reason for cautious optimism.

"On the one hand Putin did fire rhetorical barbs against the West and emphasized perceived slights; on the other hand he also did leave open the possibility of talking in more detail about at least some of the issues where the West has been willing to engage," said Jeff Rathke, a former U.S. diplomat and president of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

"We're kind of where we were a few weeks ago," Rathke said. "Putin has kept his options open. He's not ruled out talks but also not reduced his strident rhetoric."

Russia and the West remain far apart on the most critical issues and it's unclear how a compromise could be reached. But the Kremlin's recent emphasis on diplomacy appears to reflect Putin's hope to achieve his goals through negotiations while using the deployment of the troops near Ukraine as leverage.

"Russia will maintain a tough stand while indicating that it's not shutting the door to talks," said Fyodor Lukyanov, who heads the Moscow-based Council for Foreign and Defense Policies and closely follows the Kremlin thinking. "Such complex agreements aren't reached in a relaxing atmosphere over a cup of tea, so all methods of persuasion are being used, including the demonstration of force."

Russia maintains it has no intention to attack its neighbor, but it demands that NATO bar membership to Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations and pledge not to deploy weapons there. It also wants NATO de-

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ploysments in Eastern Europe rolled back.

The U.S. and its allies flatly rejected those demands as "nonstarters" during a series of talks last month, but Moscow demanded a written reply, fueling suspicions that it wanted a formal rejection of its demands to use as an argument for sending troops into Ukraine.

The U.S. and NATO handed their response to Moscow on Jan. 26, ruling out any concessions on Russia's main demands but holding the door open for talks on other issues, including limits on offensive missile deployments, greater transparency of military drills and other confidence-building measures.

Putin has yet to formulate his response to the Western proposals, but his diplomats have warned it will be difficult to achieve any progress on those issues if the West continues to stonewall Moscow's main demands.

The deadlock has fueled fears of imminent hostilities, and in a phone call last week U.S. President Joe Biden warned Ukraine's president that there is a "distinct possibility" Russia will invade in February.

Moscow appears to have opted for a diplomatic track for now and U.S. officials in recent days have toned down their rhetoric about "imminence." But the U.S. has not backed away from the urgency of its concerns.

A week ago, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent new letters to his Western counterparts, countering NATO's argument that every country has the right to choose alliances. He charged that the alliance's expansion contradicts its obligation not to strengthen its security at Russia's expense.

Lavrov said the U.S. and its allies have pledged to respect the "indivisibility of security" in documents signed at summits of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the main trans-Atlantic security grouping.

"There must be security for all or there will be no security for anyone," Lavrov wrote, noting that his ministry would now wait for formal replies to his letter before advising Putin on next moves.

The exchange of letters could set the stage for a long series of arcane arguments about conflicting interpretations of the OSCE documents, and Putin expressed readiness for such discussions.

In his first public remarks on the standoff since late December, the Russian leader noted Tuesday that while the West rejects Russia's key demands, diplomatic efforts should continue. "I hope that we will eventually find a solution, although we realize that it's not going to be easy," Putin said.

The patient stand contrasted with Putin's statement in December that he wants a quick Western reply and could order unspecified "military-technical measures" if the U.S. and its allies continue to ignore Moscow's concerns.

Putin made no mention of any such measures in his comments this week, saying that "we need to find a way to ensure interests and security of all parties, including Ukraine, European nations and Russia."

Along with the talks with the U.S. and NATO, Russia also engaged in separate negotiations on a stalled 2015 peace deal for eastern Ukraine. A four-way meeting in Paris between presidential envoys from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany didn't produce immediate progress, but they will meet again in Berlin this month.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who has spoken to Putin three times since last Friday, will visit Moscow and Kyiv on Monday and Tuesday in a bid to help defuse tensions, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will also travel to both Ukraine and Russia on Feb. 14-15.

Lukyanov said Russia will likely keep flexing its military muscle to demonstrate its resolve. He noted that Russia could easily afford keeping troops near Ukraine for a long time and will continue a series of drills to maintain pressure on the West.

"Troops may come and go," Lukyanov said. "It's relatively cheap and within the funds already earmarked for combat training."

The drills include sweeping joint war games with Russia's ally Belarus, which borders Ukraine to the north, and Lukyanov predicted that Russia could further beef up its defense ties with the country.

Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, who has edged closer to Moscow after being hit with Western sanctions over his crackdown on dissent, already has offered to host Russian nuclear weapons.

"Belarus will be an important element in the game," Lukyanov said.

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Feb. 5, the 36th day of 2022. There are 329 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 5, 2020, the Senate voted to acquit President Donald Trump, bringing to a close the third presidential trial in American history, though a majority of senators expressed unease with Trump's pressure campaign on Ukraine that resulted in the two articles of impeachment. Just one Republican, Mitt Romney of Utah, broke with the GOP and voted to convict.

On this date:

In 1811, George, the Prince of Wales, was named Prince Regent due to the mental illness of his father, Britain's King George III.

In 1917, the U.S. Congress passed, over President Woodrow Wilson's veto, an act severely curtailing Asian immigration.

In 1918, during World War I, the Cunard liner SS Tuscania, which was transporting about 2,000 American troops to Europe, was torpedoed by a German U-boat in the Irish Sea with the loss of more than 200 people.

In 1922, the first edition of Reader's Digest was published.

In 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed increasing the number of U.S. Supreme Court justices; the proposal, which failed in Congress, drew accusations that Roosevelt was attempting to "pack" the nation's highest court.

In 1971, Apollo 14 astronauts Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell stepped onto the surface of the moon in the first of two lunar excursions.

In 1973, services were held at Arlington National Cemetery for U.S. Army Col. William B. Nolde, the last official American combat casualty before the Vietnam cease-fire took effect.

In 1983, former Nazi Gestapo official Klaus Barbie, expelled from Bolivia, was brought to Lyon (lee-OHN'), France, to stand trial. (He was convicted and sentenced to life in prison -- he died in 1991.)

In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act, granting workers up to 12 weeks unpaid leave for family emergencies.

In 1994, white separatist Byron De La Beckwith was convicted in Jackson, Mississippi, of murdering civil rights leader Medgar Evers in 1963, and was immediately sentenced to life in prison. (Beckwith died Jan. 21, 2001 at age 80.)

In 2008, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a guru to the Beatles who introduced the West to transcendental meditation, died at his home in the Dutch town of Vlodrop; he was believed to be about 90.

In 2014, CVS Caremark announced it would pull cigarettes and other tobacco products from its stores.

Ten years ago: Josh Powell, long identified as a person of interest in the 2009 disappearance of his wife, Susan, set fire to his home in Graham, Washington, killing himself and his two sons, 7-year-old Charles and 5-year-old Braden, who had been brought there by a social worker for a supervised visit. Eli Manning and the Giants one-upped Tom Brady and the Patriots again, coming back with a last-minute score to beat New England 21-17 for New York's fourth NFL title in Super Bowl XLVI (46).

Five years ago: Tom Brady led one of the greatest comebacks in sports history highlighted by a spectacular Julian Edelman catch that helped lift New England from a 25-point hole against the Atlanta Falcons to the Patriots' fifth Super Bowl victory, 34-28, the first ever in overtime.

One year ago: The Supreme Court told California it couldn't enforce a ban on indoor church services because of the coronavirus pandemic; the justices declined to stop the state from barring singing and chanting at services. New York's Yankee Stadium was opened as a COVID-19 mass vaccination site by officials trying to boost inoculation rates in surrounding Bronx neighborhoods hard hit by the pandemic. Christopher Plummer, who played Captain von Trapp in the film "The Sound of Music" and at 82 became

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the oldest Academy Award winner in history, died at 91. Former heavyweight champion Leon Spinks died at 67 after battling prostate and other cancers; he had beaten Muhammad Ali for the heavyweight title in 1978.

Today's Birthdays: Tony-winning playwright John Guare (gwayr) is 84. Financial writer Jane Bryant Quinn is 83. Actor David Selby is 81. Singer-songwriter Barrett Strong is 81. Football Hall of Famer Roger Staubach is 80. Movie director Michael Mann is 79. Rock singer Al Kooper is 78. Actor Charlotte Rampling is 76. Racing Hall of Famer Darrell Waltrip is 75. Actor Barbara Hershey is 74. Actor Christopher Guest is 74. Actor Tom Wilkinson is 74. U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm is 63. Actor-comedian Tim Meadows is 61. Actor Jennifer Jason Leigh is 60. Actor Laura Linney is 58. Rock musician Duff McKagan (Velvet Revolver) is 58. World Golf Hall of Famer Jose Maria Olazabal is 56. Actor-comedian Chris Parnell is 55. Rock singer Chris Barron (Spin Doctors) is 54. Singer Bobby Brown is 53. Actor Michael Sheen is 53. Actor David Chisum is 52. Country singer Sara Evans is 51. Country singer Tyler Farr is 38. Actor-singer Darren Criss is 35. Actor Alex Brightman is 35. Actor Henry Golding is 35. Rock musician Kyle Simmons (Bastille) is 34. Actor Jeremy Sumpter is 33. Drummer Graham Sierota (Echosmith) is 23.