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UpComing Events

Friday, Feb. 11

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

Saturday, Feb. 12

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

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

Monday, Feb. 14

GBB at Flandreau Indian - JV at 5 p.m. followed by varsity

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 15

Boys Basketball at Sisseton

C game at 5 p.m. in the Practice Gym; JV at 5 p.m. in the varsity gym followed by Varsity game

Junior High Boys Basketball hosts Tiospa Zina. 7th Grade at 5:30 p.m. followed by 8th grade game.

City Council meeting, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 16

Band Trip to Orlando, Fla.

Thursday, Feb. 17

Parent-Teacher Conference, 4-8 p.m.

Band Trip to Orlando, Fla.



Friday, Feb. 18

NO SCHOOL

Parent-Teacher Conferences, 8 a.m. to Noon
Basketball Double-Header at Deuel (Clear Lake).

JV games start at 4 p.m.

Band Trip to Orlando, Fla.

Saturday, Feb. 19

Region Wrestling at Britton

Band Trip to Orlando, Fla.

Sunday, Feb 20

Band Trip to Orlando, Fla.

Monday, Feb. 21

NO SCHOOL - President's Day

Band Trip to Orlando, Fla. - RETURNING

Boys Basketball hosts Tiospa Zina - C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity

Junior High Basketball vs. Warner. 7th grade game at 4 p.m. followed by 8th grade game

Tuesday, Feb. 22

Girls Basketball regions begin

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

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

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Girls Varsity Stat Sheet

VISITOR: Groton

NO PLAYER	P	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS							S	MIN	
		FG	FGA	FG	FGA			OFF	DEF	TOT	PF	TP	A	TO			BK
4 Leicht, Sydney	*	3	5	0	0	2	2	0	2	2	3	8	1	2	0	1	19:41
11 Locke, Alyssa	*	3	11	1	3	0	0	0	3	3	1	7	2	2	0	2	26:19
21 Johnson, Aspen	*	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	5	8	3	2	1	0	0	1	23:31
23 Thaler, Alyssa	*	1	11	1	7	1	2	0	1	1	3	4	0	3	0	0	27:03
25 Gengerke, Brooke	*	3	6	2	4	0	0	2	1	3	0	8	1	0	0	0	18:41
5 Hansen, Kennedy		0	5	0	0	4	4	1	1	2	3	4	0	1	0	0	15:36
13 Locke, Jerica		0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	4	0	1	10:27
41 Penning, Jaeclyn		0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	0	0	18:42
TEAM REBOUNDS								1	11	12				5			
Team Totals		11	42	4	15	9	10	8	25	33	15	35	5	20	0	5	160

Total FG% - 1st: 5/21 0.238 2nd: 6/21 0.286 Game: 0.262 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 2/7 0.286 2nd: 2/8 0.250 Game: 0.267 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 6/6 1.000 2nd: 3/4 0.750 Game: 0.900 (1,0)

HOME: Milbank Bulldogs

NO PLAYER	P	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS							S	MIN	
		FG	FGA	FG	FGA			OFF	DEF	TOT	PF	TP	A	TO			BK
5 Anderson, Isabella	*	4	11	2	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	10	0	5	0	1	32:00
10 Berry, Tyra	*	3	11	3	7	5	7	0	3	3	0	11	2	3	0	2	32:00
12 Berry, Tatum	*	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	2	0	0	3	0	2	16:24
20 Snaza, Claire	*	1	3	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	5	5	0	0	1	0	21:47
32 Street, Maurina	*	3	9	0	1	3	6	4	6	10	2	9	2	4	1	1	32:00
4 Wenzl, Siera		0	4	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	15:36
24 Riveland, Josie		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2:13
50 Engebretson, Averie		0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	8:00
TEAM REBOUNDS								3	9	12				1			
Team Totals		11	40	5	14	11	20	9	21	30	11	38	5	17	2	6	160

Total FG% - 1st: 6/21 0.286 2nd: 5/19 0.263 Game: 0.275 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 4/8 0.500 2nd: 1/6 0.167 Game: 0.357 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 3/6 0.500 2nd: 8/14 0.571 Game: 0.550 (5,0)

SCORE BY PERIODS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOTAL
Groton	9	9	7	10	35
Milbank Bulldogs	12	7	8	11	38

Last FG: Groton 4th- 0:29, Milbank Bulldogs 4th- 0:25
 Largest lead: Groton by 4 2nd- 4:33, Milbank Bulldogs by 5 1st- 2:37
 Score tied: 3 times, Lead changed: 10 times

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Boys Varsity Stat Sheet

VISITOR: Groton Tigers ()

NO	PLAYER	TOT-FG		3-PT		REBOUNDS										MIN		
		P	FG	FGA	FG	FGA	FT	FTA	OFF	DEF	TOT	PF	TP	A	TO		BK	S
3	Zak, Jayden	*	2	5	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	5	3	0	0	1	25:49
10	Tietz, Lane	*	6	12	1	4	1	3	0	1	1	2	14	1	2	0	3	27:58
20	Kurtz, Kaden	*	6	9	2	5	2	2	0	1	1	1	16	0	4	0	2	24:42
22	Zak, Jacob	*	1	2	0	0	3	7	0	4	4	3	5	2	2	0	3	24:37
40	Larson, Tate	*	7	9	1	1	1	1	1	6	7	2	16	0	1	0	0	25:42
4	Hearnen, Wyatt		1	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	0	1	0	0	9:30
11	Simon, Cole		2	5	1	2	0	2	1	2	3	1	5	1	0	0	0	11:21
14	Abeln, Dillon		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1:04
30	Larson, Cade		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1:38
34	Dunker, Colby		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2:33
42	Ringgenberg, Logan		0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2:33
55	Diegel, Teylor		1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	2:33	
TEAM REBOUNDS										2	3	5			2			
Team Totals			26	46	6	17	8	17	5	20	25	13	66	7	12	0	18	160

Total FG% - 1st: 15/25 0.600 2nd: 11/21 0.524 Game: 0.565 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 5/8 0.625 2nd: 1/9 0.111 Game: 0.353 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 3/7 0.429 2nd: 5/10 0.500 Game: 0.471 (5,0)

HOME: Milbank Bulldogs ()

NO	PLAYER	TOT-FG		3-PT		REBOUNDS										MIN		
		P	FG	FGA	FG	FGA	FT	FTA	OFF	DEF	TOT	PF	TP	A	TO		BK	S
0	Osborn, Justus	*	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	0	0	4	0	0	15:47
2	Ash, Stevie	*	1	5	1	5	0	0	0	2	2	1	3	0	2	0	1	26:31
5	Mertens, Garrett	*	4	12	0	2	1	3	1	2	3	3	9	3	3	1	1	22:01
13	Schwenn, Bennett	*	3	8	1	2	0	0	0	2	2	0	7	3	6	0	0	26:56
23	Mursu, Wylie	*	6	6	1	1	0	0	0	6	6	1	13	0	0	0	0	26:15
3	Hoeke, Kellen		1	2	1	1	2	2	0	2	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	10:20
4	Weber, Karson		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	9:18
10	Wildung, Jaxson		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2:33
11	Schulte, Joe		3	4	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	15:13
15	Schulte, Isaac		0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	2:33
32	Mursu, Tice		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2:33
TEAM REBOUNDS										0	1	1			2			
Team Totals			18	38	5	12	4	7	2	19	21	10	45	7	18	1	10	160

Total FG% - 1st: 10/22 0.455 2nd: 8/16 0.500 Game: 0.474 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 4/6 0.667 2nd: 1/6 0.167 Game: 0.417 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 0/0 0.000 2nd: 4/7 0.571 Game: 0.571 (1,0)

Technical Fouls: GHS (0)
 : MHS (0)

OFFICIALS :
 ATTENDANCE : 0

SCORE BY PERIODS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOTAL
Groton Tigers	19	19	11	17	66
Milbank Bulldogs	10	14	8	13	45

Last FG: Groton Tigers 4th- 1:20, Milbank Bulldogs 4th- 0:08
 Largest lead: Groton Tigers by 25 4th- 1:20, Milbank Bulldogs by 3 1st- 6:09
 Score tied: 1 times, Lead changed: 2 times

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Tigers go 3-3 in full round of basketball at Milbank

It was a full round of basketball Thursday in Milbank as six games took the courts starting at 4 p.m. and ending just before 10 p.m. The boys varsity team won, 66-45, The boys C team lost, 39-35, the girls varsity team lost, 37-35, the girls JV team lost, 25-20, the girls C team won, 27-18, and the boys JV team won in overtime, 55-53.

Special thanks to Shane and Laura Clark for assisting with the livestream as they followed the girls junior varsity and C games. Both C games were played in the newly built elementary gym while the junior varsity and varsity games were played in the main high school gym. Steve and Betty Dunker were the sponsors of the girls C game and junior varsity game; Rutgear605 sponsored the boys C game, Vander-Hemmel Construction of Woonsocket sponsored the boys junior varsity game, and the varsity games were sponsored by Dacotah Bank, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors and Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls.

Milbank led for most of the C game, leading at the quarterstops at 13-5, 27-24 and 28-26 en route to a 39-35 win. Groton Area closed to within two, 37-35, but couldn't close the gap down the end. Blake Pauli, Ryder Johnson and Turner Thompson each had eight points, Keagan Tracy had five, Gage Sippel four and Carter Simon had two points. Mason Meister led the Bulldogs with 12 points and Graham Lightfield had 10.

Rylee Dunker led the Lady Tigers in the 27-18 win in the C game. Elizabeth Flihs had six points, Brooklyn Hansen had five, and adding two points apiece were Faith Traphagen, Laila Roberts and Mia Crank.

Faith Traphagen led the Lady Tigers in the junior varsity game with seven points while Mia Crank had four and adding three points each were Kennedy Hansen, Brooklyn Hansen and Jaedyn Penning. Milbank won, 25-20.

The boys junior varsity game was a battle to the end with Cole Simon powering in 23 points to lead the Tigers to a 55-53 overtime win. Groton Area held a 12-10 first quarter lead while the Bulldogs held the lead at halftime, 21-18. Groton Area scored 10 unanswered points to take a 36-34 lead in the second half. Down the stretch Milbank caught back up and took a 46-45 lead. The Tigers held a 48-46 lead in the closing seconds but Milbank would tie the game before time ran out at 48. Milbank scored first in the overtime, but the Tigers captured a 54-51 lead and hung on for the 55-53 win. Logan Ringgenberg added 11 points while Teylor Diegel had eight, Colby Dunker seven, and Dillon Abeln, Cade Larson and Holden Sippel each had two points. Joe Schulte led the Bulldogs with 19 points and Jaxson Wildung added 10.

The Lady Tigers did miss teammate Gracie Traphagen who is out on concussion protocol, but the Tigers battled all the way to the end, falling just short of the win, 37-35. The game was tied three times and the lead changed sides 10 times. Milbank held a 12-9 first quarter lead and a 19-18 lead at half time. The Bulldogs held a 27-25 lead at the end of the third quarter. Groton took the lead, 33-32, with 2:56 left in the game. The lead changed sides three more times in the remaining time with Milbank getting the win. Brooke Gengerke and Sydney Leicht each had eight points to lead the Tigers followed by Allyssa Locke with seven, Kennedy Hansen and Alyssa Thaler each had four points and Aspen Johnson and Jaedyn Penning each added two points. Tyra Berry led the Bulldogs with 14 points, Isabella Anderson had 12, Maurina Street seven and Claire Snaza five.

Groton Area made seven of 25 in field goals for 28 percent, four of 15 three-pointers for 27 percent, nine of 11 free throws for 82 percent, Aspen Johnson had eight of the team's 27 rebounds, Allyssa Locke had three of the team's eight assists, Locke, Brooke Gengerke and Johnson each had two of the team's eight steals and the Tigers had 12 teams fouls and 19 turnovers.

Milbank made 11 of 32 in field goals for 34 percent, 11 of 20 in free throws for 55 percent, had 11 team fouls and 13 turnovers.

The Groton Area boys dominated the varsity game, leading at the quarterstops at 19-10, 38-24 and 49-32 en route to the 66-45 win.

Three players hit double figures for the Tigers with Kaden Kurtz and Tate Larson each having 16 points, Lane Tietz had 14, Jayden Zak, Jacob Zak and Cole Simon each had five points, Wyatt Hearnen and Taylor Diegel each had two points and Logan Ringgenberg added one free throw.

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Groton Area made 20 of 29 in field goals for 69 percent, six of 17 in three-pointers for 35 percent, made eight of 17 free throws for 47 percent, Larson had seven of the team's 22 rebounds, Jayden Zak had five of the team's 17 assists, Tietz had three of the team's 10 steals, the Tigers had 13 fouls and 10 turnovers.

Wylie Mursu led the Bulldogs with 13 points followed by Garrett Mertens with nine, Joe Schulte and Bennett Schwenn each had seven, Kellen Hoeke had five and Stevie Ash had three points.

Milbank made 17 of 39 in field goals for 44 percent, four of seven in free throws for 57 percent, had 18 turnovers and 10 team fouls.

The boys varsity team is now 13-2 on the season while Milbank falls to 8-8. The girls varsity team is 9-8 and Milbank goes to 8-9.

The Tigers will engage another doubleheader on Saturday as the Moberidge-Pollock Tigers come town.

- Paul Kosel

#514 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Trends continue. Our seven-day new-case average is down to 205,004, and the rate of decline makes me think next time we talk we'll be below 200,000. For the record, 100 percent of those cases were caused by the Omicron variant; the latest data from the CDC indicates there was no other variant circulating between January 30 and February 5, which is the newest sequencing data we have. It's looking like the original subvariant, BA.1, accounts for the lion's share of these: Just 3.6 percent of specimens sequenced yielded BA.2, which is triple the prior week. In Western states, BA.2 appears to be more prevalent, around five percent. We'll see what it does as time goes on. The Delta variant is considered to be extinguished in the US. We did manage to pass 77 million this week, and we're now at 77,356,725.

January 9 – 60 million – 2 days
January 10 – 61 million – 1 day
January 11 – 62 million – 1 day
January 12 – 63 million – 1 day
January 13 – 64 million – 1 day
January 14 – 65 million – 1 day
January 17 – 66 million – 3 days
January 18 – 67 million – 1 day
January 19 – 68 million – 1 day
January 20 – 69 million – 1 day
January 21 – 70 million – 1 day
January 24 – 71 million – 3 days
January 25 – 72 million – 1 day
January 27 – 73 million – 2 days
January 29 – 74 million – 1 day
February 1 – 75 million – 3 days
February 4 – 76 million – 3 days
February 9 – 77 million – 5 days

Everything isn't great; we do have some states, especially those in the South, still in a fair amount of trouble. Oklahoma, Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia are hurting. Some of this may be because they hit the Omicron variant later than others, but we should note all of them are well below the national

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average for fully vaccinated people—all south of 60 percent. Hospitals also remain under great stress, more in some places than others. Nationally, the average hospitalization number is down to 103,455, another big drop.

Seven-day average deaths are at 2575, which is pretty much flat. The increase in deaths seems to have leveled off; now we'll wait to see when it starts to turn downward. They're not low; some states are reporting very high numbers yet. And I don't think you can simply dismiss close to 20,000 deaths each week as no big deal. Our pandemic total is now up to 911,072 lost.

As nearly as I can determine, my first mention of the risks of pregnancy in SARS-CoV-2 infection was in July 2020, just a few months into the pandemic. Evidence began to gather after that. The first time I reported on a study of the risks was months later in my Update #403 posted April 1, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4580634761952894>. That was followed with further mentions in Update #475 posted October 14 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5200779619938402>, Update #488 posted November 19 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5320879111261785>, and Update #506 posted January 15, 2022, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5538246669525027>. The work continues.

I've read a new NIH-funded study of Covid-19 in pregnancy published Monday in the Journal of the American Medical Association. I do not have access to the paper, so I'm working here from a summary on the NIH website. The work was done at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, and NICHD Maternal-Fetal Medicine Units Network and involved more than 13,000 pregnant participants from 17 hospitals. 2400 of these participants were infected with SARS-CoV-2. Pregnancy outcomes were compared between uninfected patients and infected ones: "whether the patient had died from any cause or had a serious illness or condition related to common obstetric complications" as well as "secondary outcomes, including cesarean delivery, preterm birth, and fetal and newborn death." In addition to death, the primary outcomes included things like hypertensive (high blood pressure-related) disorders of pregnancy, postpartum hemorrhage, and other (non-Covid) infections.

Findings were that "those with moderate to severe COVID-19 were more likely to experience the primary outcome, (26.1 vs 9.2%). They were also more likely to deliver by cesarean (45.4 vs 32.4%) or preterm (26.9 vs 14.1%) or to have a fetal or newborn death (3.5 vs 1.8%)." They did not note an association between mild or asymptomatic infection and any of the adverse outcomes, so moderate to severe disease seems to be the problem here. Yes, it makes sense to be vaccinated if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

We started talking about white-tailed deer as an animal susceptible to infection with SARS-CoV-2 in February last year. This was followed up by reporting on a study finding infections in wild deer populations in Michigan, Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania in my Update #456 posted July 31, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4959567854059581>, in Iowa in late 2020 in my Update #483 posted November 4, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5269631853053178>, and in Ohio in early 2021 in my Update #498 posted December 24, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5459941567355538>. Since then, we've had confirmed infections in deer in Kansas, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Arkansas, Tennessee, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Virginia, and North Carolina. All of these had infections with earlier variants. We have a good reason to think these animals were infected by contact with humans and spread it to other deer. So far, there is no evidence they are transmitting it back to humans, but the concern remains that the virus will mutate in deer, giving rise to new variants and then spill into other animals or back into humans. Vivek Kapur, veterinary microbiologist at Penn State, told the New York Times, "The circulation of the virus in deer provides opportunities for it to adapt and evolve; and it's likely to come back and haunt us in the future." Great. Just what we needed.

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Now we have a report on deer on Staten Island, New York, carrying the Omicron variant, which is the first time this variant has been reported in any wild animal. The research is the result of a partnership among Penn State; White Buffalo, a conservation organization; and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, conducted between mid-December and the end of January on blood samples, nasal swabs, and tonsillar swabs from captured animals. (I am not even going to speculate on the difficulty of collecting nasal and tonsillar swabs from wild deer: "Open up, and say, 'Ahhh.'") I'm looking at a preprint, so the work has not yet been peer-reviewed. Seven of 68 animals were actively infected, and almost 15 percent of the deer had antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 which suggests earlier infection; the pattern of mutations seen in these specimens suggests the Omicron variant was the cause of their infections with follow-up sequencing confirming Omicron in four of them. One deer had high titers which suggests a much earlier infection, but we cannot be sure that the high titer did not develop during the current infection. This is not unexpected, but it is a concern because repeated infections increase the risk that these animals will become a reservoir of infection. We do not want to see that. We very much do not want that.

What we're not yet sure of is how transmission from humans to deer is occurring. Maybe it's people hand-feeding deer in parks, or maybe it's through wastewater or trash. The deer will need to be followed over time to see how the virus evolves, whether it spills over into other species, and whether the deer become ill; so far, they appear to be asymptomatic. There is work underway to identify the variant with which each animal is infected and how protective their antibodies will be. Meanwhile, public health authorities recommend some care with wild deer. Among these are keeping a safe distance from wild animals and avoiding head, lungs, and digestive tract when butchering animals. Dr. Suresh Kuchipudi, veterinary microbiologist at Penn State who was involved in the research, said the best way to prevent deer becoming a reservoir is to reduce its spread in humans. That would be nice, but is probably largely a dream.

We've talked about Tonga's situation before, most recently in my Update #512 posted February 2 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5618279998188360>. An island nation, Tonga had kept this virus out for the duration of the pandemic: as of early November, just one case in a returning traveler which was caught on arrival. The traveler was quarantined, and that was the end of it. But then, almost a month ago, they suffered a tsunami consequent to an undersea volcanic eruption and needed help to meet its people's needs. Three people were killed in the eruption and tsunami, and a layer of volcanic ash covered Tongatapu, the main island, contaminating drinking water and damaging crops. The only fiberoptic cable that serves the country with various communication and Internet resources was severed by effects of the eruption, and so communication has been interrupted as well. That is expected to take at least another week to repair. Because of a shutdown to prevent further viral spread, the Education Ministry has had schools providing instruction for children via FM radio. So they needed food and water as well as a whole lot of other supplies to recover. The aid arrived, and Covid-19 arrived with it. Despite the effort to make unloading supplies from ships contactless, two port workers tested positive last week followed by cases in the community. Now there are aid workers on the ground as well as SpaceX workers to install antennas connecting to satellites so they can reestablish communication while waiting for cable repairs. Now case numbers are rising fast: The number of active cases has doubled two days in a row, putting them at 66 cases today with cases turning up in an increasing area. This is very bad news for the residents. The virus involved has been confirmed as the Omicron variant. No surprise there since Omicron is just about the only variant being seen anywhere in the world these days. The good news is that all of the recent cases have been mild and all infected adults have been vaccinated. That's going to matter. Ninety-eight percent of the eligible population 12 and over has received at least one dose of vaccine, and 88 percent are fully vaccinated. Some booster doses have gone out. Overall, more than 67 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated. Let's hope that's enough; these folks don't have any margin for error.

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A huge study was just published in Nature Medicine from Washington University in St. Louis and the Veterans Affairs (VA) St. Louis health Care System. The team had access to VA records for more than 153,760 veterans who survived at least 30 days after Covid-19 and two comparison groups: 5,637,647 contemporary controls, people who used the VA medical system during the pandemic, and 5,859,411 historical controls, people who used the system in 2017 before the pandemic. They used these groups "to estimate risks and 1-year burdens of a set of pre-specified incident cardiovascular outcomes," calculating hazard ratios and an estimated excess burden of cardiovascular outcomes due to Covid-19 per 1000 persons at 12 months. Burden of disease is an epidemiologic concept that focuses on a unit called disability-adjusted life years (DALYs); one DALY is one lost year of healthy life. This loss could be because of premature death or because of disease or disability.

Here's what they found: There was an increased risk for many categories of disease including cerebrovascular disorders (strokes and transient ischemic attacks or TIAs), dysrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms: too rapid, too slow, irregular), ischemic heart disease ("heart attack" and related disorders), non-ischemic heart disease (heart failure and related disorders), pericarditis (inflammation of the membrane around the heart), myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle itself), and thromboembolic disease (associated with abnormal clot formation). They assessed these outcomes in two large categories, (1) major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE), which includes myocardial infarction (heart attack), stroke, and mortality, and (2) "any cardiovascular outcome." They found the risk ratio for MACE was 1.55, which means there is a 55 percent increased risk of these outcomes in the 12 months after a SARS-CoV-2 infection, and the burden was a whopping 23.48 (DALY per 1000). The risk ratio for any of these outcomes was 1.63 with a burden of 45.29. Some specific outcomes have particularly elevated risks: stroke at a ratio of 1.52, acute coronary disease at 1.72, myocardial infarction at 1.63, and heart failure at 1.72.

They did look at subgroups based on age, race, sex, obesity, smoking, hypertension, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, hyperlipidemia ("high cholesterol"), and preexisting cardiovascular disease; the risks were increased in all subgroups. Findings using the historical controls were consistent with findings using the contemporary controls. The authors pointed out that these risks and burdens were found even in people who had not been sick enough with Covid-19 to land in the hospital at all, then increasing with severity of disease. And they end with a warning that the health care system should be preparing to encounter a significant increase in the need for care as a result of these cardiovascular outcomes over the years to come in the tens of millions of people who have recovered from Covid-19 in the US.

We've talked about famotidine, a commonly-used over-the-counter drug used for heartburn; it showed early promise for treatment of Covid-19. I wrote about it in my Update #4 posted April 28, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3545879782095069>. Early trials in severely ill hospitalized patients showed some benefit, and it was administered intravenously in these patients in the early, desperate days of the pandemic. Evidence of benefit never materialized, however, and it is no longer recommended for use in hospitalized patients.

More recently, the drug has been administered orally to outpatients with moderate disease; preliminary trials showing it is well-tolerated and appeared to be associated with improvement encouraged such use. Now there's been a phase 2 randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial of an 80 mg three-times-a-day 14-day regimen conducted early last year by researchers primarily in New York in an attempt to provide evidence of effectiveness to support this use. The work was published in the journal Gut late last month. Unfortunately, this doesn't look like the Holy Grail of Covid treatments. The results were underwhelming: modest improvement at best. In the 55 participants in the trial, those taking famotidine had 50 percent reduction in symptoms at 8.2 days while those taking placebo had 50 percent reduction at 11.4 days. That's not a thrilling result. We should note that at two weeks half as many still had symptoms as

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those taking placebo and that 35 of the participants resolved their inflammation more quickly, so there's that. There's talk of a larger trial because, if this does offer some benefit, it's a very cheap drug that could be supplied to much of the world where the expensive and staff-intensive monoclonal antibodies are not going to be feasible. I'm not sure whether funding will be available, but we'll wait and see.

Last item for the day: It's pretty likely you live in a state where mask rules are changing—unless, of course, you live in a state like mine where there never were any rules. And you've probably noticed a lot of public health officials aren't exactly thrilled that rules are changing now while we still have close to a quarter-million new cases and well over 2500 deaths every day. So at this point, it seems reasonable to wonder whether it's time to ditch the masks or, if not now, how you'll know when it is time. I read a list of considerations and opinions today provided by experts consulted by the Washington Post. Here are their names: Robert Murphy, professor of infectious diseases at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine; David Souleles, University of California at Irvine's Covid-19 response team director; Robert Wachter, chair of the department of medicine at the University of California at San Francisco; and Philip Chan, Brown University associate professor of medicine. Here's a summary of those considerations and advice.

Environment: size of the space, crowding, ventilation, indoor/outdoor, vaccination status of those around you. It should not be a surprise that these are all things we've talked about for months; it's the same virus now as it ever was, just more transmissible.

Your health: age, underlying medical conditions, whether you're compromised.

Community rate of transmission: The CDC rates transmission as low, moderate, substantial, or high.

Whether you're vaccinated: I know. If you're not vaccinated, you're probably not paying any attention to masking (or me, for that matter) either, but if you are not, then you really want to think carefully about risk. Most of those people who are dying these days are not vaccinated.

Who lives with you: same health considerations here as for yourself above—age, underlying conditions, immunocompromise.

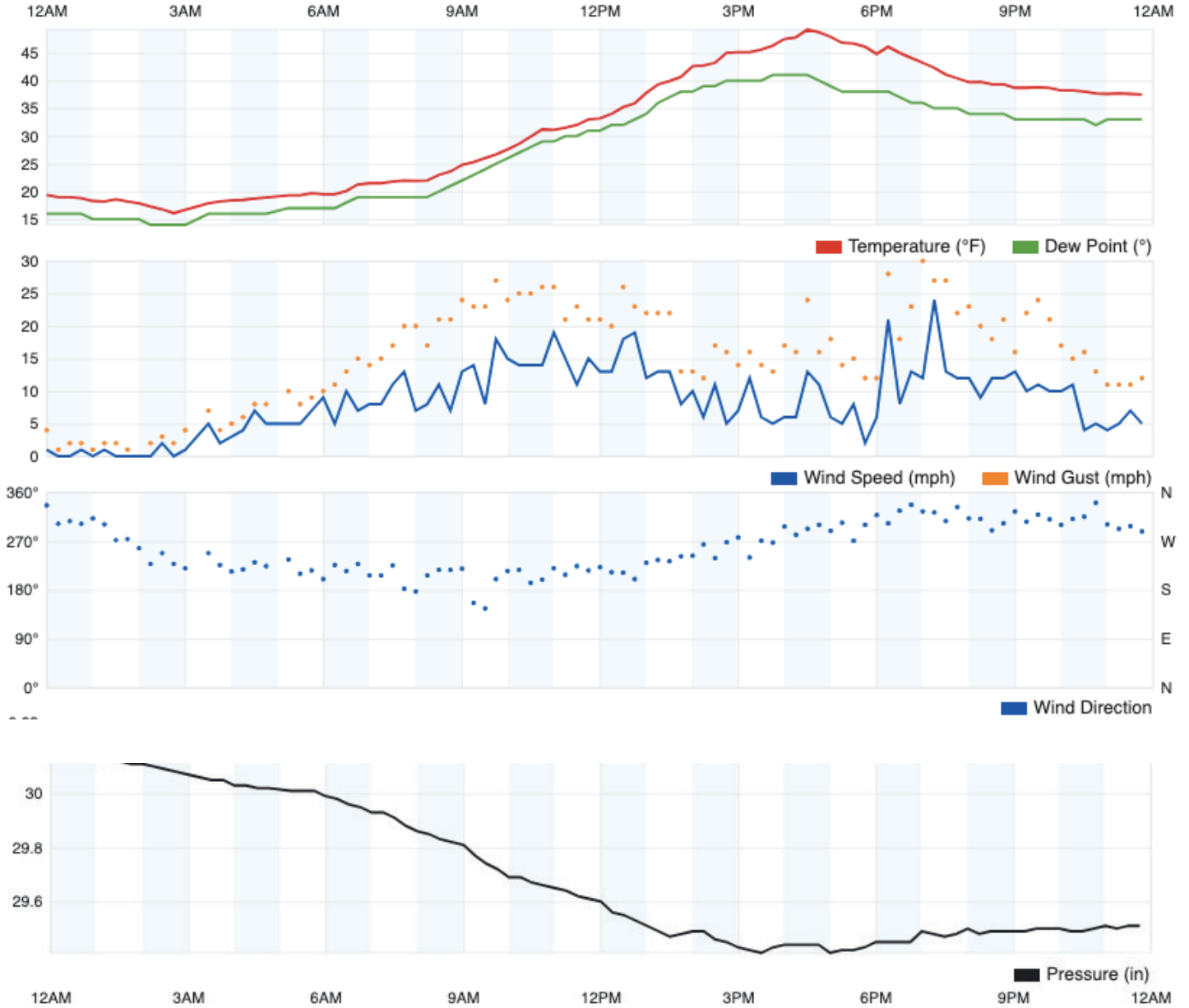
If you are or live with a high-risk or immunocompromised person, you do need to continue masking until levels of transmission are very low in your community; there's nowhere like that in the US at the moment. Now that we all have access to high-quality masks, these can be a game-changer to protect the vulnerable. It is still recommended for all of us to mask up in large indoor gatherings, especially ones where people have come from many different places to the gathering, while transmission is still so high. Same recommendation for public transit where you're in enclosed spaces that may be crowded. Grocery stores are listed as places where it might be smart to wear a mask. The experts do say that there should come a time when you will not need to mask, but warn this could fluctuate as the virus ebbs and flows in the future. We are going to have to learn to live with this thing; but Wachter put it this way: "If I get to the point where I list my top 10 worries in life and it's not on the list, then I probably will forget the mask." I'm not there yet, but I do look forward to the day.

And that's a wrap on the day. Keep yourself healthy, and I'll see you in a few days.

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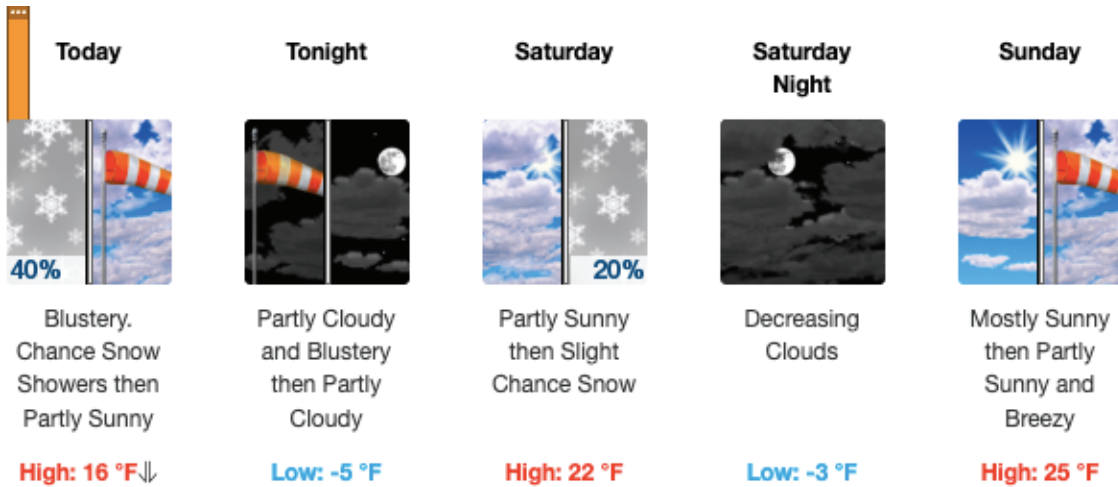
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Windy Morning Then Colder

Morning Snow Showers

Temperatures Falling
through the Day



A cold front will move through this morning bringing strong, gusty winds and some light snow showers. Winds and snow showers may cause locally reduced visibilities this morning. Temperatures in the 30s early this morning will fall as low as the negative single digits by late afternoon.

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Today in Weather History

February 11, 2002: High winds of 35 to 45 mph gusting to 60 to 65 mph affected central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota through the afternoon and into the evening hours. The high winds caused some spotty tree and roof damage, along with a few power outages. In addition, a few downed power lines in Aberdeen resulted in a short power outage for some people. Some wind gusts included 55 mph at Wheaton, 58 mph at McLaughlin, 59 mph at Pierre, 61 mph at Sisseton and Aberdeen, 62 mph at Mobridge, and 63 mph at Graceville, Minnesota.

1895: The low temperature was 11 degrees below zero at Moline, Illinois, marking the last of 16 consecutive days on which the low temperature was at or below zero. During the first 11 days of February, Moline's highest temperature was only 13 degrees above zero. Their current average high temperature for early February is in the lower 30s.

1899 - Perhaps the greatest of all arctic outbreaks commenced on this date. The temperature plunged to 61 degrees below zero in Montana. At the same time a "Great Eastern Blizzard" left a blanket of snow from Georgia to New Hampshire. The state of Virginia took the brunt of the storm, with snowfall totals averaging 30 to 40 inches. (David Ludlum)

1935: The lowest recorded temperature on the continent of Africa occurred on this date in 1935. A bitterly cold 11 degrees below zero was registered at the Atlas Mountains village of Ifrane, Morocco.

1962: A powerful F3 tornado struck Holstebro in Denmark, causing devastating damage. More than 100 houses were severely damaged or destroyed, making this event the most devastating tornado in Denmark's history. The tornado could have been a low-end F4.

1983: Called the "Megalopolitan blockbuster snowstorm," this major snowstorm impacted the Mid-Atlantic and southern New England. Snowfall up to 25 inches fell at Allentown, Pennsylvania. Snowfall amount of 35 inches occurred in parts of the Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia at Glen Cary. Windsor Locks, Connecticut, recorded a record 19 inches in 12 hours. A ship sunk off the Virginia/Maryland coast, killing 33. There were 46 total storm-related fatalities. New 24-hour snowfall records were set in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Allentown, Pennsylvania, and Hartford, Connecticut. Five inches of snow in one hour was recorded at Allentown and Hartford.

1987 - Denver, CO, reported only their third occurrence of record of a thunderstorm in February. Ten cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Huron SD reported February temperatures averaging 19 degrees above normal. Williston ND reported readings averaging 24 degrees above normal for the month. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Bitter cold air gripped the north central U.S. Morning lows of 35 degrees below zero at Aberdeen SD, Bismarck ND and International Falls MN were records for the date. Bemidji MN was, officially, the cold spot in the nation with a low of 39 degrees below zero, however, a reading of 42 degrees below zero was reported at Gettysburg SD. In the Northern High Plains Region, Baker MT warmed from 27 degrees below zero to 40 above. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - While much of the continental U.S. enjoyed sunshine and seasonable temperatures, a strong weather system over the Hawaiian Islands deluged Honolulu with 2.5 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A winter storm produced up to ten inches of snow in Vermont, and up to nine inches of snow in Aroostook County of northeastern Maine. A three day snowstorm began to overspread Oregon, and the winter storm produced 29 inches of snow at Bennett Pass. Mild weather continued in the central U.S. La Crosse WI reported a record forty-seven consecutive days with temperatures above normal. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - North Dakota Governor John Hoeven declares a snow emergency as winds gusting over 70 mph along with heavy snow produces low visibilities and drifts up to 20 feet in northwestern North Dakota. Amtrak train service is interrupted in the region. The Weather Doctor

2006 - Snowfall records fell in Philadelphia and Allentown, Pennsylvania, Bridgeport and Hartford, Connecticut, Newark, New Jersey, and Worcester and Boston, Massachusetts. The highest total reported was 30.2 inches at Fairfield, CT. New York City set a record one-day snowfall record of 26.9 inches in Central Park.

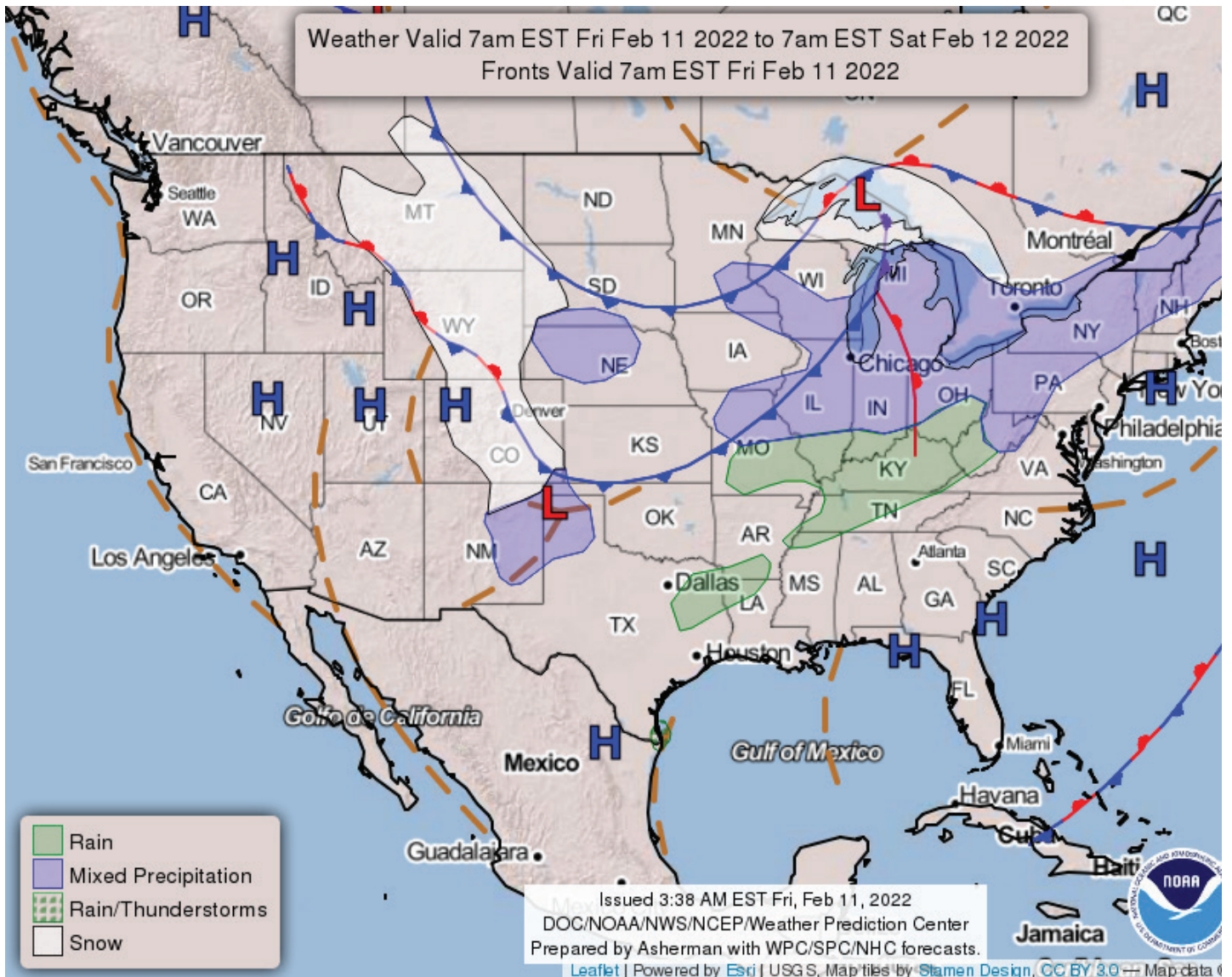
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 49 °F at 4:28 PM
Low Temp: 16 °F at 2:42 AM
Wind: 30 mph at 6:53 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 58 in 2005
Record Low: -35 in 1988
Average High: 27°F
Average Low: 5°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.22
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.77
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 5:55:17 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:36:26 AM



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RUNNING WITH GOD

It's not often that we read of a treasurer reading the Word of God. But we do read of one from Ethiopia who was doing exactly that. He'd been on a trip and was on his way home sitting in his chariot. We are told that he was reading it out loud and having a tough time understanding its message. God knew he was confused and said to Phillip, "Go and talk with him in his chariot."

As soon as the Holy Spirit spoke to him, Phillip did not hesitate for one moment. He knew that God had something important for him to do. So, he ran as fast as he could to the chariot and began to talk to him about the Lord. As they rode along, they came to a small body of water.

"Look," exclaimed the treasurer, "here is some water. What is there that could possibly keep me from being baptized?" Phillip answered, "You can - if you believe with all your heart." The official replied, "I do believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!" So, Phillip baptized him.

Imagine how this story might have ended if his heart was not sensitive to the Holy Spirit, or if doing the Lord's work was not important to him, or, if he had walked and not run to the man. That man may never have come to know the Lord as his Savior. But, none of that matters. When God called - he answered. Immediately!

Perhaps he read Psalm 119:32 for his devotions that morning: "I run in the path of Your commands, for You have broadened my understanding."

Prayer: At all times, Father, - no matter the cost - I want to be open to Your voice and obedient to Your call. I choose to pursue You so You can teach me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding. Psalm 119:32

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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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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 41, Freeman Academy/Marion 28

Avon 49, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 30

Baltic 37, Alcester-Hudson 34

Centerville 35, Menno 26

Custer 46, Spearfish 41

Edgemont 44, Hulett, Wyo. 30

Gayville-Volin 62, Lake Preston 35

Hamlin 65, Sisseton 55

Hitchcock-Tulare 67, Iroquois/Doland 53

James Valley Christian 63, Arlington 57

Kadoka Area 53, Todd County 49

Leola/Frederick 49, Sunshine Bible Academy 17

Milbank 38, Groton Area 35

Northwestern 41, Great Plains Lutheran 31

Parkston 57, Freeman 34

Philip 53, Lyman 39

Potter County 60, Timber Lake 54

Redfield 45, Clark/Willow Lake 41

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 49, Sioux City, East, Iowa 33

Sully Buttes 61, Mobridge-Pollock 50

Tri-Valley 49, Lennox 47

Warner 54, Wessington Springs 52

Wilmot 45, Ipswich 23

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 62, Britton-Hecla 58, OT

Baltic 40, Alcester-Hudson 28

Burke 52, Kimball/White Lake 34

Centerville 44, Menno 35

Chamberlain 48, Bridgewater-Emery 41

Corsica/Stickney 58, Freeman 34

DeSmet 56, Wolsey-Wessington 32

Dell Rapids St. Mary 54, Howard 38

Deuel 67, Florence/Henry 40

Douglas 67, Hill City 58

Elkton-Lake Benton 67, Sioux Falls Lutheran 25

Faith 75, McIntosh 42

Freeman Academy/Marion 74, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 52

Groton Area 66, Milbank 45

Hamlin 69, Sisseton 48

Harding County 77, Tiospaye Topa 28

Hitchcock-Tulare 61, Iroquois/Doland 42

Hulett, Wyo. 52, Edgemont 20

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James Valley Christian 72, Arlington 65
Jones County 89, Dupree 57
Lakota Tech 79, Lower Brule 73
Lyman 62, Philip 42
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 63, Ethan 52
Oelrichs 90, Takini 17
Potter County 70, Faulkton 58
Spearfish 63, Custer 58, OT
St. Thomas More 56, Red Cloud 36
Sully Buttes 52, Mobridge-Pollock 40
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 84, Avon 54
Waubay/Summit 54, Waverly-South Shore 29
Western Christian, Iowa 67, Sioux Falls Christian 59
White River 88, Stanley County 57

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

South Dakota State beats Denver 84-61

DENVER (AP) — Douglas Wilson had 18 points as South Dakota State won its 13th consecutive game, rolling past Denver 84-61 on Thursday night.

Baylor Scheierman registered 11 points and nine assists for South Dakota State (22-4, 13-0 Summit League). Matt Mims added 15 points. Alex Arians had 11 points and six rebounds.

Coban Porter had 18 points for the Pioneers (9-18, 5-9). Taelyr Gatlin added 11 points. Michael Henn had seven rebounds.

The Jackrabbits improve to 2-0 against the Pioneers for the season. South Dakota State defeated Denver 80-62 on Jan. 15.

Kamateros scores 20 to lead South Dakota past Omaha 91-69

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Tasos Kamateros had 20 points as South Dakota rolled past Omaha 91-69 on Thursday night.

Kruz Perrott-Hunt had 17 points for South Dakota (14-10, 7-6 Summit League) as did Erik Oliver. Boogie Anderson had 12 points and six rebounds.

Frankie Fidler had 22 points for the Mavericks (4-21, 3-11). Felix Lemetti added 18 points and six rebounds.

The Coyotes improve to 2-0 against the Mavericks this season. South Dakota defeated Nebraska Omaha 105-70 on Jan. 15.

Capitol dispute slows aid checks to child care providers

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — When day care director Heidi Fink checked her email Thursday morning, she was shocked to find a message from South Dakota's Department of Social Services informing her that the facility was receiving a \$217,000 grant.

The award for Blue Dragons Academy childcare in Garretson was part of Gov. Kristi Noem's \$100 million plan to send federal money received under the American Rescue Plan Act to child care centers. The money — which was more than triple what she was expecting — would be used for bonuses and raises for her employees, as well as supplies.

Fink said the boost in pay was well-deserved for staff that "worked all through COVID and got very little in return."

Growing demand for child care and the stresses on providers during the pandemic has placed those child

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care centers licensed by the state among the list of recipients of over \$1 billion in federal funds lawmakers are deciding how to spend this year.

Fink's day care, which already cares for over 100 children who come from surrounding towns, is hoping to expand in the coming months.

"There definitely is a child care crisis," she said, adding that she has tried to stress the importance of early child care education to lawmakers as well as the need to ensure employees gain adequate compensation.

But getting the money out the door of the state Capitol had also turned into a political fight this week as House lawmakers asserted that the governor needed the Legislature's authorization before sending out the grants.

The House was set to consider a pair of bills Monday that would do just that, but the governor did not wait for the House's permission. She authorized the payment to be sent out Wednesday.

"Those bills aren't necessary. I already have the authority," Noem said during a news conference Thursday, adding that the Senate had Wednesday passed a resolution opining that she had legal authority to use federal funds.

The governor added she didn't think she needed the Senate's resolution, but it showed they "wanted to send a clear message that they agree with me."

However, Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg sided with the House lawmakers, issuing a memorandum later Thursday that the governor couldn't spend the money without lawmakers' authorization.

Noem responded by saying in a statement that she had "no confidence in the attorney general or his judgment," and noted that he is facing a House impeachment investigation for his conduct surrounding a 2020 fatal car crash. Noem and Ravnsborg are both Republicans, but have become political enemies.

"This wrongly-reasoned memo from Jason Ravnsborg doesn't get the basic facts right and doesn't change anything," she said.

The Department of Social Services had delayed sending out the grants amid the political grappling. Fink said she initially expected Blue Dragons Academy to get the grant last week on Friday, but is now expecting the funds to be deposited in the coming days.

While the delay did not cause any major problems, she said, "It made me a little nervous whether we were going to get them or not."

The last-minute scramble on the decision to send the grants this week left some lawmakers suggesting Noem's office had not communicated with House lawmakers who are ironing out the state budget.

"When you have a big sum of dollars that come into the state, before they can go out they need to go through the legislative process to get it appropriated," said Republican Rep. Chris Karr, chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

Meanwhile, Democratic Rep. Jamie Smith, who is running for governor, said that the child care providers had "got stuck in the middle" of the dispute between the governor and the House.

"It was sad that we were using such an important population in our state, the daycare providers, as a political pawn," he said.

Currently, only child care centers licensed with the state are eligible for the grants, leaving out providers only licensed through cities or those who are unlicensed. Noem said she was "streamlining" how day cares can get registered while making sure they meet the state's safety requirements.

"We have safe day care centers and have more than available in some of our communities," she said.

High energy prices send Europe's businesses, homes reeling

By AYSE WIETING and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Mehmet Bogday says his jaw dropped when he saw his electricity bill — it was higher than the rent he pays for his Istanbul restaurant selling traditional Turkish wraps, and more than double what he paid a month ago.

"This is unsustainable," said Bogday, who owns the Asmali Mescit Durumcusu restaurant. "If it continues this way, we will have to lay off staff. If it continues this way, we won't be able to make this work. We'll

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either downsize, or close and go sit at home.”

Spiking energy prices are raising utility bills from Poland to the United Kingdom, leaving people struggling to make ends meet and small businesses uncertain about how much longer they can stay afloat. In response, governments across Europe are rushing to pass aid to ease the hit as energy prices drive a record rise in inflation.

Nowhere is that squeeze felt more acutely than in Turkey, where inflation has soared to nearly 50% and exorbitant electricity bills are stirring protests and fears about how small businesses, like Bogday's restaurant, can survive.

Protests over electricity price hikes broke out across Turkey this week, including some where police fired tear gas to disperse crowds. People are posting their electricity bills on social media to show how costs are untenable. Shopkeepers are displaying notices decrying high bills on shop windows, while others have gathered outside electric companies and set their bills on fire.

Like the rest of Europe, electricity generation in Turkey requires energy sources that have surged in price, including natural gas, whose supply is low. A huge drop in the value of Turkey's currency is driving the price spike in imported gas.

As Europe's energy demand roared back from the depths of the coronavirus pandemic, it ran up against gas reserves sapped by a cold winter last year, a lack of renewable energy generation over the summer and Russia not selling as much gas as usual to Europe.

Utilities are passing the costs along to customers, and people are getting hit twice: with higher bills at home and rising prices from businesses also paying more for energy.

It's led to a cost-of-living crisis in some places, but especially in Turkey, where households and businesses were already reeling from eye-watering inflation and a currency that lost some 44% of its value last year, eating away savings and making it difficult to buy even basics like food. Authorities then raised electricity tariffs on Jan. 1, spiking prices by 50% for many people and as much as 127% for businesses and high-consumption households.

The leader of Turkey's main opposition party this week joined a torrent of demands to withdraw the price hikes, saying he would not pay his electricity bill until the tariffs are lowered. Kemal Kilicdaroglu also called for reducing taxes on electricity rates.

Faced with mounting criticism, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan made changes this month so the price rises kick in when households use more energy, but it's failed to provide relief. With price hikes threatening to hurt Erdogan ahead of elections next year, his administration has said it's working on a possible readjustment or other measures to help people.

It's something that governments through Europe are doing as rising utility costs draw widespread outcry.

In Britain, energy prices are set to go up by a record 54% — some 700 pounds (\$940) per year — starting in April. The government says customers will get a discount on their bills to be paid back in small installments over the next few years, and most also will get money off another local tax. In total, the government said most people will get about half of the extra cost shaved off.

Likewise, Italian households are bracing for a record 55% increase in electricity and 42% in gas in coming weeks, energy regulators say.

To draw attention to the issue, mayors plunged the historic city halls of Rome and Florence into darkness Thursday night. The Italian mayors' association said the government's response so far has been insufficient to help cities confront hundreds of millions in additional energy costs, making them choose between balancing budgets or cutting services.

Premier Mario Draghi this week said Italy's government was determined to draw up broad measures soon that will provide relief to families and businesses.

Polish regulators approved energy prices going up by 37% this year, pinching bakeries and other businesses to the point many had to close.

The right-wing government temporarily lowered taxes on electricity, gas, engine fuels, some food staples and fertilizer. That's expected to cut energy costs for a family of four by some 120 zlotys (26.5 euros) this

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year. The government also is introducing a bonus to households, ranging from 20 to 1,450 zlotys (4.5 to 320 euros) annually, depending on income.

Businesses say it's not enough to balance their increased costs.

A majority of left-leaning lawmakers in Denmark agreed Friday to spend 1 billion kroner (\$153 million) for a temporary program to help the most affected households cope with high electricity bills. Roughly 320,000 households in Denmark will be eligible for 3,750 kroner (\$576).

In Turkey, energy woes are aggravated by the president's policies. Erdogan has shunned conventional economic thinking and pressured the central bank to lower interest rates despite inflation at a 20-year high, further pushing up prices.

Numan Kurtulmus, a deputy leader of Erdogan's ruling party, said government support for energy placed "an extraordinary burden" on the treasury, making the price hikes inevitable.

"It has been a heavy bill, we are aware of this," he said, adding that the government was working to bring down inflation.

Kazim Iscen, a painter and decorator in Ankara, said he already has fallen behind on his utility costs and would not be able to pay his electricity bill, which came in "two or three times higher" this month. "I call on the government to have mercy on us," he said.

Cengiz Sur, owner of a bar and restaurant in Istanbul, said he has been unplugging refrigerators and heaters and turning off lights after his power bill this month surpassed his rent.

"We've forgotten about rent and are now trying to figure out how to deal with our electricity bills," he said.

Bendevis Palandoken, head of the Turkey Tradesmen and Artisans Confederation, warned that many businesses will shut down unless the price hikes are withdrawn and special tariffs are set help small businesses.

"I think there will be some retreat from the price hikes," said economist Ozlem Deric Sengul, founder of the Istanbul-based Spinn Consultancy. "I think that to curb the public tension, we may see some action from" government officials.

Olympics Live: Santos qualifies fastest for 1000M final

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

American Kristen Santos qualified fastest for the 1,000-meter final in short track speedskating at the Beijing Olympics.

Santos' time Friday of 1 minute, 26.783 seconds topped defending champion Suzanne Schulting of the Netherlands. Schulting was timed in 1:28.108.

Schulting set the world and Olympic record of 1:26.514 earlier in the quarterfinals.

Also making the A final later Friday are 10-time Olympic medalist Arianna Fontana of Italy, Choi Minjeong of South Korea and Hanne Desmet of Belgium.

American teammates Maame Biney and Corinne Stoddard made the B final.

Defending Olympic champion Wu Dajing of China has easily qualified in the heats of 500-meter short track speedskating.

Also moving on to the quarterfinals on Sunday are Ren Ziwei of China, Steven Dubois of Canada and Hwang Daeheon of South Korea. Liu Shaolin Sandor and his brother, world champion Liu Shaoang, of Hungary moved on. Their American-born teammate, John-Henry Krueger, qualified, too.

Lee Juneseo of South Korea crashed and was penalized in his heat.

American Ryan Pivrotto was eliminated.

Defending Olympic champion Suzanne Schulting of the Netherlands has advanced to the semifinals of the 1,000 meters in short track speedskating.

Schulting broke the 10-year-old world record in her quarterfinal, winning in 1 minute, 26.514 seconds. She also lowered her own Olympic record set in the heats two days ago.

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Arianna Fontana of Italy moved on in pursuit of her 11th career medal. She already won the 500 in Beijing and earned a silver in the mixed team relay.

Also moving on were Americans Kristen Santos, Maame Biney and Corinne Stoddard.

Nils van der Poel of Sweden has broken his own world record and captured his second gold medal of the Beijing Olympics with a dominating victory in men's 10,000-meter speedskating.

Van der Poel added to his victory in the 5,000, which was a much closer affair. On Friday, it was just him against the clock.

He crossed the line in 12 minutes, 30.74 seconds, easily breaking the world mark of 12:32.95 he set in February 2021, and was more than nine seconds ahead of the Olympic record set four years ago by Canada's Ted-Jan Bloemen.

The silver medal went to Patrick Roest of the Netherlands (12:44.59), the same spot he took behind van der Poel in the 5,000. The bronze went to Italy's Davide Ghiotto in 12:45.98.

Defending champion Bloemen finished eighth.

Van der Poel's victory came after he ripped the Dutch federation over a report that it was trying to influence ice makers at the oval to set up conditions that benefit its skaters.

While saying he had nothing against athletes from the Netherlands, van der Poel called the report a sign of "corruption" that needed to be investigated by the IOC and the International Skating Union.

Dutch officials shrugged off the complaints.

Finland's Iivo Niskanen maintained his classic skiing dominance, winning gold in the 15-kilometer cross country race at the Beijing Olympics.

Niskanen crossed the line and collapsed, spread eagle, with a time of 37 minutes, 54.8 seconds. It was his third Olympic gold. He won the 50-kilometer classic race in Pyeongchang and the classic team sprint at the 2014 Sochi Games.

Alexander Bolshunov of Russia won silver 23.2 seconds back, while Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo of Norway secured the bronze 37.5 seconds behind the Finn.

Both Bolshunov and Klaebo have won gold medals at the Beijing Olympics — Bolshunov in the skiathlon and Klaebo in the sprint.

Niskanen had a 28.8 second lead over Bolshunov at the 10.5-kilometer mark and was 52.5 seconds faster than Klaebo at that point in the race, and held it to the finish.

The defending champion U.S. women's hockey team rallied to defeat the Czech Republic 4-1 in the quarterfinals of the Beijing Olympics on Friday.

The Americans survived what would have been a major upset in a game where their offense continued to struggle.

The U.S., whose only losses in six previous Olympics have been against Canada (six times) and Sweden (once), managed just four goals on 59 shots.

Hilary Knight had a goal and assist, and Savannah Harmon and Kendall Coyne Schofield also scored for the Americans. Alex Cavallini stopped five shots.

Czech goalie Klara Peslarova was the star of the game, stopping 55 shots, including the first 22 she faced.

The Russian Olympic Committee says it will fight to keep the figure skating gold medal won by a team that included Kamila Valieva, who failed a doping test in December.

An urgent hearing at the Court of Arbitration for Sport will decide whether the 15-year-old can compete next week in the women's event at the Beijing Olympics, where she is the heavy favorite.

The decision about whether the team keeps its medal is a separate process that could take months.

The International Testing Agency confirmed reports that Valieva tested positive for the banned substance trimetazidine at the Russian national championships in St. Petersburg six weeks ago.

Valieva will likely be disqualified from her Russian national title in December but could still be cleared to

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compete in the individual Olympic competition.

"The Russian Olympic Committee will take comprehensive measures to defend the rights and interests of the ROC team and to keep the honestly-won Olympic gold medal (in the team event)," the ROC said in a statement. It added that a doping test Valieva took while at the Olympics came back clean.

After winning a gold medal at the Beijing Olympics, U.S. figure skater Nathan Chen said he's looking forward to going back to school and is undecided about what's next for him in the sport.

Chen said at a Friday press conference that his immediate next step after the Winter Games is getting ready to resume his studies in August at Yale University, where he is majoring in statistics and data science. He's been on leave since the fall of 2020, when the pandemic began.

The "Quad King" said he's unsure if he'll compete at the world championships next month in France, and undecided on whether or not he'll set goals to master even more difficult jumps after landing five quads in his winning free skate program Thursday.

It's not uncommon for figure skaters to skip the world championships in an Olympic year, choosing to take a break from a long grind that begins early in the fall and continues with the Grand Prix season rather than continuing to train.

Chen will skate next in the Figure Skating Gala Exhibition on the closing day of the Winter Games on Feb. 20.

The Czech Republic became the sixth women's hockey team, and first since Italy at the 2006 Torino Games, to fail to register a shot on net in a period at the Winter Games.

The Czech Republic, making their Olympics debut, was out-shot 18-0 by the United States in the opening period of their quarterfinal playoff game. Despite the lopsided edge in shots, Czech goalie Klara Peslarova stopped all 18 shots to keep the game scoreless through 20 minutes.

The Czech team scored on their second shot on goal 4:59 into the second period. Hilary Knight tied it 48 seconds later.

Italy was held without a shot twice in a period during the 2006 Games, once in the third period of an 11-0 loss to Sweden on Feb. 13, and also two days earlier against Canada

Japan was held without a shot in a period twice, and China once during the 1998 Nagano Games.

Lara Gut-Behrami of Switzerland is in first place in the women's super-G at the Beijing Games and on the brink of capturing her first Olympic gold medal with only lower-ranked skiers remaining.

Two-time Olympic champion Mikaela Shiffrin is out of the medal places in ninth. The American failed to finish in either of her two previous races in Beijing.

It would be Gut-Behrami's first Olympic gold and comes after two successive fourth-place finishes in super-G at the Winter Games.

The 30-year-old has two bronze medals from the Olympics, including one from Monday's giant slalom.

Mirjam Puchner of Austria is 0.22 seconds behind in second in her first Olympic race and Michelle Gisin is 0.30 behind her Swiss teammate in third.

Defending champion Ester Ledecka of the Czech Republic failed in her bid to win an unprecedented back-to-back double. She is 0.43 behind in fifth.

An urgent hearing at the Court of Arbitration for Sport will decide whether Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva can compete in the women's event at the Beijing Olympics, where she is a heavy favorite.

The International Testing Agency said Friday it will lead an appeal on behalf of the IOC against a decision by Russia's anti-doping agency to lift a provisional ban imposed on the 15-year-old Valieva for failing a doping test in December.

The ITA confirms reports that Valieva tested positive for the banned substance trimetazidine at the Russian national championships in December.

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The ITA says the positive test was flagged by a laboratory on Tuesday after Valieva helped the Russians win the team event but before the medal ceremony, which was then postponed. Whether the Russians will lose their gold medal in the team event will be decided later.

Valieva has been continuing to practice in Beijing. For the second straight day, she worked out early at Capital Indoor Stadium as if nothing was amiss. She was flanked during the 45-minute session by Russian teammates Alexandra Trusova and world champion Anna Shcherbakova, both of whom are also coached by Eteri Tutberidze.

Despite missing on that combo at the Rostelecom Cup last fall, when she did a quad-double, Valieva still set a world record there for her free skate. She also set the world record for the short program and total score at the same Grand Prix event in Russia.

Mikaela Shiffrin completed the super-G at the Beijing Olympics way out of medal contention — but for the first time in three races at the 2022 Games, she made it across the finish line.

The two-time Olympic Alpine gold medalist crossed the line at the bottom of a course known as The Rock in an unofficial time of 1 minute, 14.30 seconds. That left the 26-year-old American more than a half-second behind early leader Lara Gut-Behrami of Switzerland.

That put Shiffrin in eighth place after only 11 of the 44 entrants had taken their turns down the slope.

Shiffrin had never entered a super-G at an Olympics before, although she did win a gold in the event at the 2019 world championship and a bronze at last year's worlds.

She failed to finish her opening run in the two-run events that preceded the super-G in Beijing: the giant slalom and the slalom. She has won both at past Olympics.

Japan's Ayumu Hirano has won gold with a boundary-pushing run in the men's halfpipe at the Beijing Olympics. Three-time gold medalist Shaun White was fourth in what he has said would be his final competition.

There was no doubt over the winner after Hirano's electric performance as the last rider to go. His run included an intricate and unprecedented series of flips and spins that pushed a sport obsessed with progression to new heights. His score of 96 reflected that and the two-time Olympic silver medalist moved past Scotty James of Australia. Jan Scherrer of Switzerland took bronze.

White fell on the final run of a career that's seen the American star win three Olympic titles. He lifted up his goggles and waved to the crowd on his way down the halfpipe. He teared up as the sparse crowd bid adieu and his fellow riders lined up to hug him.

"I wanted it," White said. "My legs were giving out on me every hit."

The stage was being set for some controversy after the second run. James took over the lead with his second attempt. Hirano followed with an impressive run that included the difficult-to-do triple cork, but wasn't rewarded by the judges. The crowd booed and social media was buzzing.

Shaun White remained in fourth place after his second run in his final Winter Games as Scotty James of Australia jumped into the lead.

The three-time Olympic champion White scored an 85 and was momentarily in second before strong runs by James and Ayumu Hirano of Japan. There's one run to go.

The 35-year-old White executed his same run as he did in the opening, including his patented Double McTwist 1260 and then a frontside 1260 at the end, but this time made no mistakes. He pumped his board in excitement after finishing.

Hirano turned in the most difficult run but couldn't surpass James. The sparse crowd booed over the scoring by the judges. The announcer called it one of the greatest runs ever.

First-run leader Taylor Gold fell to fifth.

American snowboarder Taylor Gold grabbed the lead after the first run of the Olympic halfpipe competition, with Shaun White sitting in fourth place in his final Winter Games appearance.

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Gold score an 81.75, earning the judge's respect with his stylistic performance in the first of three runs. He may not have gone as big as other riders but was technically solid all the way through his run.

White started off strong in his bid for a fourth Olympic gold medal. The 35-year-old executed his patented Double McTwist 1260 and then a frontside 1260 at the end. His only real mistake was landing on his heel edge after his second trick, which slowed him down.

Ayumu Hirano of Japan set the bar high by landing his difficult-to-do triple cork 1440, which would've been good enough for first, but he fell later on the run. Hirano sat in ninth place.

Many of the top riders struggled on their opening run, including Scotty James of Australia. Wearing his trademark red boxing-glove mittens -- he views competitions as a title fight -- he fell on his first run.

Mikaela Shiffrin is ready to have some "fun" when she returns to Olympic action in the super-G.

Shiffrin posted on Twitter early Friday morning in China to say she's grateful "to have the opportunity to refocus on a new race, in the sport that I love so much."

The two-time Olympic gold medalist is off to a rough start at the Beijing Games.

She went off-course within about 10 seconds in the giant slalom on Monday and after about half as much time in the slalom on Wednesday.

"I've had a lot of support over the last 48 hours," Shiffrin wrote Friday, "and I have to thank everyone for that."

The 26-year-old American won each of those events at past Games.

She has never entered an Olympic super-G before but did win that race at the 2019 world championships.

Doping hearing to decide Russian skater's Olympic fate

By GRAHAM DUNBAR and JAMES ELLINGWORTH AP Sports Writers

BEIJING (AP) — Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva's right to compete in the women's event at the Beijing Olympics will be decided at an urgent hearing at the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Both the World Anti-Doping Agency and the International Testing Agency — on behalf of the IOC — said Friday they would fight the decision by Russia's anti-doping agency to allow the 15-year-old Valieva to skate. The Russian agency provisionally banned Valieva on Tuesday because she failed a doping test in December. After an appeal, the agency lifted the ban Wednesday.

Valieva is the heavy favorite in her event, which begins Tuesday. She set world record scores this season and landed the first quad jump by a woman at an Olympics as the Russian athletes competing as ROC, short for Russian Olympic Committee, won the team event. The ROC said it will fight to keep that gold medal, and Valieva has passionate support from the Kremlin.

The ITA confirmed reports that Valieva tested positive for the banned substance trimetazidine at the Russian national championships in St. Petersburg six weeks ago.

The positive test was flagged by a laboratory in Sweden only on Tuesday — the day after Valieva helped the Russians win the team event and just hours before the medal ceremony, which was then postponed. Whether the Russians will lose that gold medal will be decided later.

The hospital that oversees the Swedish lab said in an emailed statement that "the laboratory is not allowed in any way to comment on a pending case," when asked by The Associated Press to explain the weeklong delay in testing the sample. It is not clear when Russian anti-doping officials sent the sample or when it arrived at the lab.

Valieva was hit with an immediate interim ban from the Beijing Olympics by the Russian anti-doping agency known as RUSADA, which oversaw testing at the national championships. On Wednesday, a RUSADA disciplinary panel upheld her appeal and overturned the skater's interim ban.

The rushed hearing at CAS will only consider the question of the provisional ban at these Olympics, said the International Testing Agency, which is prosecuting on behalf of the IOC. The ITA was formed by the IOC in 2018 in the wake of the Russian doping scandal to manage international testing and to design the

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anti-doping program for the Olympics.

"The IOC will exercise its right to appeal and not to wait for the reasoned decision by RUSADA, because a decision is needed before the next competition the athlete is due to take part in," the testing agency said.

As a 15-year-old, Valieva has protections in the World Anti-Doping Code. Under the guidelines, she could ultimately receive just a simple reprimand.

When a minor is implicated in doping rules violations, the rules say her entourage, such as coaches and team doctors, must be investigated, too. That isn't typically the case for athletes 18 and over.

"Such cases are not helpful to the Games," IOC spokesman Mark Adams said. "These cases need to be prosecuted properly, taken care of properly and due process needs to be gone through. Otherwise I think the confidence of people would be even less. So I think it's very important for everybody concerned, not least the 15-year-old athlete that's concerned, that we have due process, that it's seen to be done properly and that people can have confidence in the decisions that are taken."

Valieva will likely be stripped of her Russian national title from December.

The Russian Olympic Committee said it would defend Valieva and fight to keep the team event gold she contributed to. It added that a doping test Valieva took while at the Olympics came back clean. All medalists are tested at the Olympics.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was vocal in calling for support for Valieva.

"We're waiting for the proceedings to end. And infinitely, absolutely infinitely, and completely and in any case we are supporting our Kamila Valieva," he told reporters Friday.

"And we call on everyone to support her. And we say to Kamila: 'Kamila, do not hide your face, you are a Russian woman, walk proudly everywhere and most of all, compete and win against everyone.'"

For the second straight day, Valieva worked out early at the main rink inside Capital Indoor Stadium as if nothing was amiss. She was flanked by Russian teammates Alexandra Trusova and world champion Anna Shcherbakova, both of whom are also coached by Eteri Tutberidze.

During the 45-minute session, Valieva threw down four quad jumps, including one in a potentially high-scoring combination with a triple salchow. She returned later in the day for another practice.

Despite missing on that combo at the Rostelecom Cup in November, when she did a quad-double, Valieva still set a world record there for her free skate. She also set the world record for the short program and total score at the same Grand Prix event in Russia.

A ruling on the Olympic team event likely will take much longer, preventing any medals from being awarded in Beijing. RUSADA will first investigate the full merits of the doping case and give a judgment. That verdict would lead to an appeal and could also end up at CAS.

"The decision on the results of the ROC team in the Team Figure Skating event can be taken by the ISU only after a final decision on the full merits of the case has been taken," the ITA said.

The latest doping case involving a Russian athlete could have broader implications for the country's sports program.

Russia is competing in the Beijing Olympics as ROC without its anthem or flag. That's because of the fallout from years of doping disputes including steroid use and cover-ups at the 2014 Winter Olympics, which Russia hosted.

Another scandal could extend its two-year ban beyond the scheduled December end.

Beijing punishes traders in Olympic souvenir crackdown

BEIJING (AP) — Police are punishing Chinese traders for cashing in by reselling scarce dolls of Olympics mascot Bing Dwen Dwen at up to 10 times retail price.

Buyers stood in line overnight in freezing weather and emptied store shelves after the Winter Games opened Feb. 4. News reports say factory employees were called back from their Lunar New Year holiday to make more panda mascots.

Three people in Beijing were sentenced to unspecified "administrative penalties" for reselling souvenirs at prices deemed too high, police announced. Punishment can include detention, fines and confiscation

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of goods.

Plush toys of Bing Dwen Dwen, a panda in a clear plastic suit, sold for 192 yuan (\$30) at the Gongmei Emporium in central Beijing. The shop on the Wangfujing pedestrian mall and other authorized outlets also sell Olympics-themed pens, badges and other souvenirs.

Customers standing in line included traders who bought for clients or to resell at higher prices.

"It started to be sold a long time ago but didn't generate a buzz," said a customer at Gongmei who would give only her surname, Zhu. "Now the media are promoting it."

Gongmei and other shops posted signs saying they had as a few as 300 Bing Dwen Dwen dolls per day and buyers were allowed one each. Shoppers said they sold out in as little as 30 minutes.

"The secondhand market is hot," said the newspaper Beijing News. "Bing Dwen Dwen has surged to 10 times the original price."

One afternoon, employees walked along a line of customers asking them not to stay overnight, when temperatures fall below freezing.

Reporters saw a trader taken away by police on Wangfujing after a teenager complained he was reselling an Olympic keychain for 20 yuan (\$3) above retail price.

Merchants online offer unauthorized Olympics-themed keychains, mobile phone cases and other goods with Bing Dwen Dwen's image.

Authorities have tried to calm frenzied buying by promising there will be adequate supplies and Olympics souvenirs will be on sale through June.

Some customers complain they paid deposits for souvenirs but traders disappeared with their money, according to news reports.

"Please consume rationally and do not buy at high prices from scalpers," the Beijing police department said on its social media account.

One of three companies identified by the press as being licensed to make Bing Dwen Dwen dolls, Beijing Yuanlong Yatu Culture Communication Co., referred questions to the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. Phone calls to the other two producers weren't answered.

The organizing committee didn't respond to questions about how many dolls it planned to sell and whether any would be exported.

Trump turns to endorsements to keep bending GOP to his will

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump spent months persuading a longtime ally to challenge Georgia's sitting Republican governor. This week, he gave David Perdue another boost, orchestrating a deal for a rival to drop his campaign and instead run for Congress with the former president's coveted endorsement.

"He said, 'Listen, you have an opportunity. (What you could) do in the state level, you can do for this country,'" the candidate, Vernon Jones, said in an interview recalling his conversation with Trump. "And obviously he said I would have his support, because we share the same agenda."

Trump is attempting a similar strategy in other states. In North Carolina, for instance, he has pressed another Senate candidate to drop out and run for Congress. He is shopping for a Senate hopeful to back in New Hampshire. In Ohio's Republican Senate race, one contender withdrew last week after Trump made clear he would not offer his endorsement.

The moves are a reminder of the power Trump wields over the GOP on the eve of what could be a tumultuous primary season. The former president remains the most popular figure with the GOP base as he considers another bid for the White House. He isn't hesitating to leverage that pull to exact revenge on his enemies and further bend the party to his will.

In the process, some Republicans say, Trump is injecting chaos into an election year that should otherwise be favorable to the GOP.

In Georgia, for example, Trump's effort to remove Jones from the governor's race was an attempt to prevent a potential runoff election. But in heading off that problem, he created another by pointing Jones

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to the race to succeed Rep. Jody Hice.

The primary field for Hice's seat was already crowded and the congressman, along with several Trump allies, had already made endorsements.

"It's a mess. It's just a mess," said Chip Lake, a GOP strategist in the state who warned that Trump endorsing so many candidates meant some were likely to lose.

"Everyone in Georgia wants to have Trump's endorsement, but Trump's endorsement is certainly being stretched thin," he said, "We all know that when you throw stuff on the wall only some of it sticks."

A Trump spokesman did not respond to questions, but Trump has continued to tout his endorsement record as a measure of his political strength.

"We're endorsing some fantastic people," he said in a call-in interview to Fox Business Network on Tuesday morning. "We want people that are going to put America first."

Trump and his aides had hoped his endorsements would clear the field in many races, avoiding costly and messy primary contests that might weaken the eventual Republican nominees. That worked in some cases.

In Wyoming, a slew of candidates dropped out after he announced his support for Harriet Hageman's bid against a top Trump critic, Rep. Liz Cheney.

In Georgia, retired football star Herschel Walker is the leading contender for the GOP's Senate nomination after Trump encouraged him to run. Walker's commanding position is particularly notable because, after some initial hesitation and troubling allegations that could hurt him in the general election, the Republican establishment, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, also backed him in a rare alliance with the Trump wing of the party.

But Trump's interventions in the primaries threaten to deepen tensions within the GOP at a particularly sensitive point.

The party is reeling from the Republican National Committee's decision last week to censure two lawmakers who have repeatedly crossed Trump. The RNC also blasted the Democrat-led House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection as leading a "persecution of ordinary citizens engaged in legitimate political discourse." Many Republican senators and other party officials in Washington bemoaned the move as ill-advised, both substantively and politically.

Trump is not the first president to engage in politics after leaving the White House. Barack Obama has endorsed slates of candidates and stumped alongside some of them. George W. Bush has kept a lower profile but has supported Cheney, the daughter of his vice president and one of the lawmakers targeted by the RNC censure.

The volume of Trump's endorsements and the granularity of his work, however, is notable. In some instances, he began laying the groundwork for some of the arrangements when he was still in the White House.

In North Carolina, Trump has tried for several years to persuade Rep. Mark Walker to opt against a Senate run to clear a path for Rep. Ted Budd, whom the former president endorsed in June to the surprise of many.

Walker said Trump made his pitch in person twice — once in the Oval Office in 2019, with then-Vice President Mike Pence sitting to his left and acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney to his right. He reupped the effort at his Mar-a-Lago resort in December.

"He did promise if we ran for the House that we would have the endorsement," Walker said. "And, look, I'm not an anti-Trump guy ... but with all due respect, I have to do what I believe in my heart to do."

Budd continues to trail the race's frontrunner, former Gov. Pat McCrory, despite Trump's endorsement and the backing of the conservative Club for Growth's super PAC, which has poured more than \$4.3 million into the race.

Walker is staying in the race, regardless of Trump's pressure.

"I don't want to give the impression that someone's outside with a crowbar, slicing my tires if we don't do the right thing," he said. "They've been respectful about it."

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Meanwhile, frustrations are mounting among some Trump allies about his foot-dragging in other primaries, including Ohio's crowded Senate race, where military and overseas absentee voting is set to begin next month.

Trump didn't offer an endorsement but succeeded in culling the field last week when candidate Bernie Moreno announced he was dropping out after a meeting with Trump in which he asked for an endorsement. Trump declined.

Elsewhere, Trump is still searching for favored candidates. In New Hampshire, where the 2016 primary helped propel his presidential campaign, Trump is struggling to find a candidate he wants to back in the closely watched Senate race.

Longtime Trump lieutenant Corey Lewandowski, who was removed from his role overseeing Trump's super PAC amid allegations of sexual harassment, said he's been asked to identify a strong Republican candidate, and, so far, it's not going well.

"It's clear there is no standout America First candidate in the race," he said. "But it's a very winnable seat for the GOP in 2022."

And in some races, Trump's endorsement has sent sparks flying.

In Tennessee, some Trump allies have been seething at his endorsement of former State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus before she even announced her congressional candidacy. The move frustrated high-profile supporters who had already endorsed Robby Starbuck, a longtime Trump supporter.

"Typically when President Trump makes an endorsement, people jump on ... and they're generally very supportive. So it's interesting to see the reaction be so wildly in a different direction," Starbuck said of the backlash. "It's not that his endorsement doesn't matter. It's that people can see mistakes can happen and he's human and he made a mistake on this one."

Biden to split frozen Afghan funds for 9/11 victims, relief

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is expected to issue an executive order on Friday to move \$7 billion of the Afghan central bank's assets frozen in the U.S. banking system to fund humanitarian relief in Afghanistan and compensate victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, according to a U.S. official familiar with the decision.

The order will require U.S. financial institutions to facilitate access to \$3.5 billion of assets for Afghan relief and basic needs. The other \$3.5 billion would remain in the United States and be used to fund ongoing litigation by U.S. victims of terrorism, the official said. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because the decision had not been formally announced.

International funding to Afghanistan was suspended and billions of dollars of the country's assets abroad, mostly in the United States, were frozen after the Taliban took control of the country in August.

The country's long-troubled economy has been in a tailspin since the Taliban takeover. Nearly 80% of Afghanistan's previous government's budget came from the international community. That money, now cut off, financed hospitals, schools, factories and government ministries. Desperation for such basic necessities has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as health care shortages, drought and malnutrition.

The lack of funding has led to increased poverty, and aid groups have warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe. State employees, from doctors to teachers and administrative civil servants, haven't been paid in months. Banks, meanwhile, have restricted how much money account holders can withdraw.

The official noted that U.S. courts where 9/11 victims have filed claims against the Taliban will also have to take action for the victims to be compensated.

The Justice Department had signaled several months ago that the Biden administration was poised to intervene in a federal lawsuit filed by 9/11 victims and families of victims in New York City by filing what's known as a "statement of interest." The deadline for that filing had been pushed back until Friday because the department said the administration needed to resolve "many complex and important" issues that re-

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quired consultation with “numerous senior officials and executive agencies and components.”

The executive order is expected to be signed by Biden later on Friday. The New York Times first reported on the coming order.

The Taliban have called on the international community to release funds and help stave off a humanitarian disaster.

Afghanistan has more than \$9 billion in reserves, including just over \$7 billion in reserves held in the United States. The rest is largely in Germany, the United Arab Emirates and Switzerland.

The Taliban are certain to oppose the split.

As of January the Taliban had managed to pay salaries of their ministries but were struggling to keep employees at work. They have promised to open schools for girls after the Afghan new year at the end of March, but humanitarian organizations are saying money is needed to pay teachers. Universities for women have reopened in several provinces with the Taliban saying the staggered opening will be completed by the end of February when all universities for women and men will open, a major concession to international demands.

In recent months, Afghans have been able to withdraw only \$200 weekly and that only in Afghani, not in U.S. currency. Afghanistan’s economy has teetered on the verge of collapse.

Under the previous U.S.-backed government, 80% of Afghanistan’s economy was financed by international money. That evaporated when President Ashraf Ghani fled Kabul on Aug. 15 and the government disappeared, leaving the door open for the Taliban to walk in.

The United Nations last month issued an appeal for nearly \$5 billion, its largest ever appeal for one country, predicting nearly 90% of the country’s 38 million people were surviving below the poverty level of \$1.90 a day. The U.N. also warned that upward of 1 million children risked starvation.

David Miliband, head of the International Rescue Committee, urged release of the funds to prevent famine, at a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee hearing on the matter Wednesday.

“The humanitarian community did not choose the government, but that is no excuse to punish the people, and there is a middle course — to help the Afghan people without embracing the new government,” Miliband said.

Black NFL coaches lament hiring policies that fall short

By WILL GRAVES AP Sports Writer

Veteran NFL coach Anthony Lynn appreciates the league policy that requires teams to interview minority candidates for their top jobs, and he has even benefited from it.

Like many of his peers, though, the assistant head coach for the San Francisco 49ers believes the policy has fallen short of its good intentions: There were three non-white head coaches when the rule went into effect in 2003; today, there are five.

The figure has risen and fallen slightly over the past 20 years, but skepticism about NFL hiring practices has remained steady among minority job candidates even after the league introduced the so-called Rooney Rule, named after former Steelers owner Dan Rooney, who oversaw the league’s diversity committee.

Lynn, who is Black, long ago added his own personal amendment to the Rooney Rule: As his star rose as one of the league’s top assistants in the mid-2010s, Lynn would only meet with teams to discuss a head coaching vacancy if they had already brought in at least one other minority candidate, something the Rooney Rule didn’t require until 2021.

“I just didn’t want to be a token interview,” Lynn told The Associated Press. “I really believe in the spirit of the Rooney Rule, but I just saw how people were abusing it and I didn’t want to be a part of that.”

The racial discrimination lawsuit filed this month against the NFL and several teams by former Miami Dolphins head coach Brian Flores has magnified attention on the league’s hiring practices and stirred up long-simmering frustrations with the Rooney Rule. It has also prompted comparisons from Lynn and others to corporate America, which has also struggled to diversify its leadership ranks.

Lynn’s perseverance paid off in 2017 when the Los Angeles Chargers made him the first Black head

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coach in team history.

The candidates Lynn beat out for the job included Teryl Austin, who is now a defensive coordinator for the Pittsburgh Steelers. Austin's interview with the Chargers was one of 11 occasions where he earned a face-to-face meeting, but failed to land the head coaching job.

There were times when Austin felt like he was really in contention, and others when he felt he "was one of those guys where they were checking a box" to comply with the mandate.

Austin's personal journey is included in Flores' lawsuit as evidence of a discriminatory system that is failing qualified job candidates.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell partially pushed back on Wednesday, saying the league has made a "tremendous amount of progress in a lot of areas." He acknowledged, though, that the league is lagging when it comes to head coaches.

"We have more work to do and we've got to figure that out," Goodell said in Los Angeles ahead of Sunday's Super Bowl at SoFi Stadium. Goodell said the NFL has already engaged "outside experts" to help it review hiring policies and he didn't rule out the possibility of eliminating the Rooney Rule.

The two teams playing in this year's Super Bowl — the Cincinnati Bengals and the Los Angeles Rams — are led by offensive-minded, white head coaches in their 30s. There is considerable diversity, however, among the dozens of coaches that oversee their offenses, defenses and special teams. Half of the coaches working for Rams head coach Sean McVay are Black.

Art Rooney II — Dan's son and the current Steelers president — defended the impact of his father's eponymous hiring policy.

"While I acknowledge that we have not seen progress in the ranks of head coaches, we have seen marked improvement in the hiring of women and minorities in other key leadership roles," he said.

In many cases, there was nowhere to go but up.

The NFL is running in place in terms of diversifying its most visible leadership positions. While over a third of assistant coaches are Black, only two teams employed Black offensive coordinators this season, considered the final rung of the ladder before becoming a head coach. Nearly 85% of the league's general managers and player personnel directors are white, according to a report by the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.

"This is a willingness and heart issue," said Troy Vincent, a former player who is now the league's executive vice president of football operations. "You can't force people, so we have to continue to educate and share with those in the hiring cycle."

Players also have a role in promoting change, says Richard Lapchick, the director of the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.

Lapchick points to the NBA, where players have taken an increasingly public role in social activism. Nearly half of the NBA's 30 teams are led by Black coaches and over a quarter employ Black general managers.

"I don't think that the (NFL) office can do it on their own," Lapchick said. "The impact will only take place ... when the athletes themselves raise their voice and say it's important." Roughly 70% of NFL players are Black.

Corporate America has run into many of the same diversity challenges as the NFL, and the same legal problems.

"The NFL is no different than the rest of society," said Lynn of the 49ers. "Look at the top Fortune 500 companies. How many minority CEOs do you have in that industry versus ours? Our percentage may be higher."

Over 90% of Fortune 500 presidents and CEOs are white and only 3% are Black, according to the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.

Former Morgan Stanley chief diversity officer Marilyn Booker sued the bank in 2020 for racial discrimination and retaliation. She alleged that the company's overwhelmingly white executives stymied her plans to diversify its management structure. The two sides eventually settled out of court.

Last year, five of the largest banks — J.P. Morgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup, U.S. Bancorp and

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Wells Fargo — agreed to make public commitments to policies that echo the Rooney Rule, according to a spokesman at the AFL-CIO, which helped secure the agreements.

But experts say many of the biggest companies still have further to go.

"Many companies are engaging in these types of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) efforts as performance-art theatrics," said Nicholas Pearce, clinical professor of management and organizations at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management.

Whether in sports or business, Pearce says one easy way for hiring managers to reduce the effects of implicit bias would be to require more diverse panels to conduct job interviews.

With the exception of Jacksonville's Shad Khan and Buffalo co-owner Kim Pegula, all NFL teams are privately owned by white men, with the exception of the Green Bay Packers, which is publicly owned.

Jerod Mayo, a 35-year-old linebackers coach for the New England Patriots, has ambitions of one day becoming a head coach. And Mayo, who is Black, is optimistic that by the time he's ready, many of the challenges that veterans such as Lynn, Austin and Flores have faced, will be a thing of the past.

"You know, that's a beautiful day where we don't need the Rooney Rule."

Shiffrin relieved to finish Olympic race; 9th in super-G

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP National Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Laying in bed ahead of her third race of the Beijing Olympics, Mikaela Shiffrin could not stop dreaming about what awaited, envisioning a sequence that unfolded like her initial two over-in-a-blink events.

"Just repetitive. The whole night long. And I kept kind of waking up from it and then going back to sleep. And it just kept happening: I skied out on the fifth gate. Surprise!" she said with a laugh. "It really felt pretty awful."

Who among us can't relate to the concept of work-related anxiety? We still must get back on the clock — and that's precisely what the American did Friday, competing in the super-G at the Winter Games and placing ninth behind winner Lara Gut-Behrami of Switzerland in a field of 44 ski racers.

Still, Shiffrin was pleased to say she made it to the end this time.

"It's a really big relief to be here now in the finish, having skied a run well. I wasn't skiing safe or anything. But I also did get to the finish and that's really nice for my heart to know," she said, tapping her chest with fingers on her right hand, "that it's not totally abandoning everything I thought I knew about the sport."

Hard to believe as it might be that someone as accomplished as Shiffrin is — she has won three medals, two gold, from past Olympics; she owns three World Cup overall titles and six world championship golds — would harbor such doubts, they were there.

"You start to dwell on yourself, (ask) if your skills are good enough to even do it," said Norwegian ski racer Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, Shiffrin's boyfriend and a two-time medalist in Beijing, who watched her compete Friday. "So that's the most challenging part."

That's because of her surprisingly poor outings in the giant slalom on Monday and slalom on Wednesday. Those are both two-leg events, but she never even made it past five gates in the first run of either.

They also are her best events: She won the slalom at the 2014 Sochi Games, the giant slalom at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games.

"I failed twice to do the job that I am supposed to do," is how she put it.

Those two performances — including her first "Did Not Finish" in a giant slalom since Jan. 23, 2018, a streak of 30 races — weighed on her.

Made her unsure whether she wanted to take part in the super-G for the first time at an Olympics (she was the 2019 world champion in the event).

Made her unclear on whether she was "up to the challenge," to use her phrase.

"After the last week, there's been a lot of emotional fatigue, and I feel emotionally weary right now. There's definitely a sense of dullness and you can't have that (in) racing — especially not racing speed," said Shiffrin, who was undecided about entering the super-G until taking training runs on the race hill

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Thursday afternoon. "But when we got out today, I just feel a little bit more settled. A little bit quieter. Trying to keep some calmness and just trying to focus on the task at hand, so I could put my attention where I wanted and ski the hill and the course properly."

Now Shiffrin has a few days to practice the downhill and figure out whether she wants to enter that on Tuesday.

About 4 1/2 hours before Friday's super-G, Shiffrin posted a note on Twitter saying how grateful she was "to have the opportunity to refocus on a new race" and thanking people for their support during a tough 48 hours for her.

Then, a little more than two hours before she would leave the start hut for real under a bright blue sky, Shiffrin took an inspection run down the hill, stopping a little past the finish to lean forward with her red ski poles tucked under the tops of her arms.

Maroon helmet bowed, Shiffrin appeared to be visualizing the course known as The Rock at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center. She placed her gloves together in front of her and swayed them back and forth, as if recreating in her mind the turns and swerves necessary to navigate the path.

When it was go time, Shiffrin actually started well enough, reaching the initial check point in 12.66 seconds — ahead of Gut-Behrami's pace. But from there, Shiffrin lost touch with the leader, losing hundredths, then tenths, of seconds along the way, before closing in 1 minute, 14.30 seconds, which was 0.79 behind Gut.

Shiffrin was not attacking the course at full-force — "a little careful, here and there," is the way Kilde described the skiing.

"Getting up on the horse again. Get a good run. Get a good feeling. Have some fun skiing. She really enjoyed it. ... She's back," Kilde said, then added: "She was never gone, I would say."

The two of them found each other after the race and walked side by side along the snow-covered path from the race course to the athletes' lounge.

As for the result, Shiffrin acknowledged afterward she hadn't considered herself a true medal contender. And she sounded just fine with that.

"It's possible to feel both proud of a career and sad for the moment you're in," Shiffrin said. "But ... there was nothing sad about today."

At Olympics and beyond, getting away with it is Russia's way

By BRIAN CAROVILLANO and TED ANTHONY Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Be it sports, politics, hacking or war, the recent history of Russia's relationship with the world can be summed up in one phrase: They get away with it.

Vladimir Putin's Russia has perfected the art of flouting the rules, whether the venue is the Olympic arena, international diplomacy or meddling in other countries' elections from the comfort of home. And it has suffered little consequence for its actions.

At the Beijing Winter Olympics, Russia the country isn't here — technically. Its athletes are competing under the acronym ROC, for Russian Olympic Committee, for the third time. The national colors and flag are banned by the International Olympic Committee because of a massive state-sponsored doping operation during the 2014 Sochi Games, which Russia hosted.

And yet the 2022 Games' first major scandal has managed to involve a 15-year-old figure skater who has tested positive for using a banned heart medication that may cost her Russia-but-not-really-Russia team a gold medal in team competition.

Her provisional suspension, like the so-called ban on Russia's official participation in these Games, isn't doing much. Kamila Valieva continues to train even as her final disposition is considered, and she may yet compete in the women's individual competition, in which she is favored.

Those who have watched the country's interactions with others in recent decades aren't entirely surprised at the developments.

"In Russia, the culture is generally that the ends justify the means, and the only thing that matters is the outcome," said Dmitri Alperovitch, the chairman of the Silverado Policy Accelerator think tank, who

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grew up in the former Soviet Union.

Doping in particular has been a longstanding tradition in the Soviet Union and Russia, Alperovitch said. But Putin frequently operates with impunity in other arenas, including when the stakes are much higher than bronze, silver and gold.

More than 100,000 Russian troops are currently massed along the Ukrainian border preparing for a possible invasion. Despite weeks of diplomacy, Putin still seems to hold all the cards, pushing Europe to the brink of war and prompting British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to call this the continent's "most dangerous moment" in decades.

Many have accused the Russian government of dabbling in poisoning with little consequence. Among those poisoned after criticizing the Kremlin: investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who fell severely ill after drinking a cup of tea in 2004 and recovered, only to be shot to death two years later; and Russian opposition politician and vocal Putin critic Alexei Navalny, who fell gravely ill from poison in 2020. He recovered and is currently in a Russian prison. Neither poisoning was explicitly linked to the Russian government.

Putin's efforts to upend U.S. elections included hacking the Democratic National Committee in 2016 in an effort to aid then-candidate Donald Trump and damage his rival, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, U.S. federal investigations showed. Russian government hackers were also blamed last year for a massive hacking campaign that breached vital federal agencies.

The current Ukraine standoff isn't the first time Russian militarism has threatened to upend the so-called "Olympic truce," an agreement among nations to set aside their conflicts during the Games.

In 2014, while hosting the Sochi Olympics, Putin seized control of the Crimean peninsula and its strategic Black Sea ports from Ukraine. And during the 2008 Summer Olympics, also held in Beijing, Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two breakaway regions of neighboring Georgia, as independent nations and bolstered its military foothold there following a five-day war.

Economic sanctions and other punishments imposed by the United States and its allies after various Russian transgressions seem to have had little effect as a deterrent against future bad behavior by Putin.

In 2020, the U.S. Justice Department charged six current and former Russian intelligence officers in a hacking campaign targeting the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea. They were accused of unleashing a devastating malicious software attack during the opening ceremony of those Games, in apparent retaliation for the IOC's decision to ban Russia from future Games for doping.

"Time and again, Russia has made it clear: They will not abide by accepted norms, and instead, they intend to continue their destructive, destabilizing cyber behavior," then-FBI Deputy Director David Bowdich said at the time the indictment was announced.

And time and again, Russia presses on unchastened. So there was Putin last Friday, waving from his luxury box to Russian athletes entering Beijing's Bird's Nest stadium during the Games' opening ceremony.

Even though it is banned on Russian uniforms at these Games, Russian flags waved in the stands as the ROC men's hockey team, clad in their traditional red, shut out Switzerland in their inaugural match.

"I don't know why the Russians are competing as they are given their history of doping," said Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, who helmed the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. "I think it is a huge mistake."

Russian athletes' involvement in the Games, Romney said, "is something which I think is leaving a great stain on the Olympic movement."

Back home, Valieva's positive test has been met with outrage, fueling a sense that when it comes to sports, politics and international relations, it's Russia vs. the world.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the scandal has been fueled by "those who did not have the appropriate information." And other prominent Russian skaters, including Tatiana Navka, former Olympic ice-dancing gold medalist and Peskov's wife, spoke out in support of Valieva.

"This is some kind of a fake," said Russia's top figure skating coach, Tatiana Tarasova. "She's only 15, what do you mean doping?"

Ordinary Russians questioned the allegations as well. Nikolai Stashenkov, 88, blamed the scandal on the "impudence of European and Western politicians."

"This is not nice," he said. "This is not sport. This is dirty politics."

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Politics were also to blame, according to Russian officials, in the doping scandal that resulted in a reduced squad of Russian athletes being allowed to compete in the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

"This has become one of the most compelling evidence of direct political interference in sports," Putin would later say in a meeting with Russian Paralympians.

Polling has shown the tactic is working with the Russian public. A 2016 poll by the Levada Center, Russia's top independent pollster, showed 76% of Russians viewed the decision to bar the Russian track and field team from the Rio Olympics as "politicized" and "aimed at discrediting Russia."

But Russia has often done an able job of discrediting itself.

For the Sochi Games in 2014, Russian medal contenders handed over samples of clean urine months in advance before taking a cocktail of steroids dissolved in alcohol, according to Grigory Rodchenkov, then the director of the drug-testing lab for the Games. He later fled to the United States.

During the Olympics, Rodchenkov said he swapped out samples via a hole in the wall of the laboratory to a person from the Russian security services who opened the urine sample bottles and replaced the contents with the stored, clean urine.

Russia has admitted some individual lapses on doping, but strenuously denies it formed part of an organized program or that the Russian state writ large supported doping.

In Beijing this week, events are moving fast. Urgent hearings are being convened about Valieva, and lots of officials are saying lots of things behind lots of closed doors. It remains to be seen whether her case becomes a new chapter in Russia's twin track records of operating with impunity in both sport and geopolitics, or a footnote to the rise of another Olympic superstar.

Either way, Alperovitch, who is also the co-founder and former chief technology officer of the CrowdStrike cybersecurity firm, sees all of it as of a piece — evidence of a facet of Russian culture that prizes outcomes above everything else and will do what it takes to achieve them.

"The thing in Russia is that cheating is acceptable if you don't get caught," Alperovitch said. "Shame on you if you do. But if you think you can get away with it, go for it."

On the ice, a question: Where are the Black figure skaters?

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Before her own Olympic career began, Canadian figure skater Vanessa James had seen Black Girl Magic on the ice. It was on display at the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics, when French skater Surya Bonaly leapt into the air, kicked into a backflip and landed on one leg.

The thrilling move has neither been widely attempted since nor accepted by judges for international competitions, such as the Olympic Games, and thus "the Bonaly flip" has never become a big thing. Yet despite the move being controversial at the time, Bonaly's tenacity in attempting it has inspired many who have followed her.

"I wanted to do a backflip, but I was always really too scared to try it," says James, who is skating in Beijing in her fourth Winter Games after representing France in Vancouver and Pyeongchang.

The Salchow, the Biellmann, the Charlotte spiral — these figure skating standards are named after white people from the 20th century. And in a century-old sport that was largely European until just a few decades ago, some wonder: How can more Black athletes make the same lasting imprint on it?

"If you don't see yourself in the sport, how can you believe that you belong, how can you believe that you can be the best, how do you know that you can be creative or that you'll be accepted for your uniqueness?" says James, who in 2010 was one half of the first Black French pairs skating duo with Yannick Bonheur.

There are no Black athletes competing in figure skating for the Americans this year, though the U.S. team includes five Asian American skaters, an openly LGBTQ skater and the first gender-nonbinary skater. Mexico's figure skating team consists of Donovan Carrillo, the lone representative from Latin America.

Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan came to define Asian American representation at the Olympics in the 1990s, while China, Japan and South Korea became more prominent in the early 2000s. And with Nathan Chen clinching a gold medal, and Alysa Liu and Karen Chen on the American team, the pipeline of figure

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skaters has yet to show signs of slowing.

James, who skates in the pairs event with teammate Eric Radford, is the only Black figure skater competing for any nation in Beijing. She carries not just the hopes of Canadian and French skaters, but also Black girls and women, boys and men across the world who strain to see themselves represented on the ice and slopes during the Winter Games.

Part of the reason, says Elladj Baldé, a Black and Russian professional figure skater from Canada, is that “Black skaters weren’t allowed to be in figure skating clubs (or) in figure skating competitions” during the sport’s early years.

Whether it was Europe’s blonde-haired, blue-eyed and petite figure skating standard or a period of racial segregation at rinks in the U.S., Black skaters who broke barriers in the sport did so with metaphorical weights chained to their skates.

“That doesn’t leave a lot of room and a lot of time for Black skaters to innovate,” Baldé says, “especially if a sport is confining everyone to a certain style.”

Baldé’s unconventional, hip-hop-inflected dancing style has gone viral on social media in recent years, allowing him to leverage the attention to push for both change and diversity. The Stake Global Foundation, which he cofounded last year, works to build or rehabilitate ice rinks and exposes Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) in Canada to figure skating.

For consecutive Winter Olympics, the Canadian and French Olympic teams have included Black skaters, which some say is a reflection of Bonaly’s influence. But the American team has struggled to establish a strong pipeline of Black talent.

Historians trace the problem to the stories of Black American skaters such as Joseph Vanterpool, a World War II veteran from New York City who took up professional skating after seeing an ice show in England but was rarely featured outside of all-Black showcases. Mabel Fairbanks, a pioneer whose Olympic dreams were dashed by racist exclusion from U.S. Figure Skating in the 1930s, was by far the most successful of the sport’s Black trailblazers.

Fairbanks later opened doors that were closed to her for generations, including one of her mentees, Debi Thomas. In the 1988 Calgary Games, Thomas became the first Black American to medal at the Winter Olympics. But few others have come close to appearing in Olympic competition after her.

“How did somebody like Debi Thomas have the success that she had, break down the barriers that she did, but yet didn’t that lead to further influx of BIPOC skaters following in her footsteps?” wonders Ramsey Baker, the executive director of U.S. Figure Skating.

It’s a question the governing body had wrestled with for years, in addition to the socioeconomic barriers associated with elite competition. Then, diversity in figure skating became an even bigger focus following the 2020 murder of George Floyd by American police, amplifying the Black Lives Matter movement’s calls for racial justice and equity.

As protests over police brutality erupted across the world, the figure skating associations in Canada and the U.S. responded with pledges to answer protesters’ cries and make changes from within. However, both also have faced some criticism from Black athletes who felt the pledges were a ploy for media attention.

Last year, U.S. Figure Skating hired Kadari Taylor-Watson, a Black woman, as its first director of diversity, equity and inclusion. Her work has included its first diversity census of skaters, judges and other sport officials. Through a working group, the association plans to put tangible action behind the pledge to be even more inclusive of Black skaters.

“We have to think about the 100 years of not just U.S. figure skating history, but the 100 years of U.S. history,” Taylor-Watson says, “and all of the racial turmoil that has been going on in our society that created those barriers.

“We don’t want to invite BIPOC skaters into a community that is not welcoming for them or ready for them.”

James’s participation in the Winter Games coincides with Black History Month, an annual observance that originated in the United States but has been recognized in Canada, Britain and increasingly in other

parts of Europe.

Former French Olympic figure skater Maé-Bérénice Méité, who is Black, gave James a shoutout over Instagram ahead of the first day of the figure skating team competition in Beijing last week.

"So to all of you who'd like to support an example of what Black excellence looks like, I encourage you to support my best friend," Méité wrote to her more than 52,000 followers.

James says the two came up in the sport together. "It's important to have her support because we see each other when we look in the mirror," James says. "When she's on the ice, I see me."

She and Méité know they are beacons of inspiration for young, aspiring Black skaters. James says she imagines that somewhere, young Black girls are watching the Winter Games and thinking, "I look like her. I wanna be just like her. I can do that. I can be better than that."

"That's the key to excellence," James adds. "It's not just seeing it once. It's recreating it and repeating it. We need that. We need to grow."

Beijing's ambitious Olympic COVID bubble: So far, so good

By HUIZHONG WU and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — For a country determined to keep out the virus that first emerged within its borders, bringing in more than 15,000 people from all corners of the world was a serious gamble. It appears to be working.

One week into the 17-day event, China seems to be meeting its formidable COVID-19 Olympic challenge with a so-called "bubble" that allows Beijing Games participants to skip quarantine but tightly restricts their movement so they don't come in contact with the general population. There have been 490 confirmed cases — many of them positive tests on symptomless visitors — and no reports of any leaking out to date.

Inside the bubble, Olympic organizers are employing a version of the government's zero-tolerance approach. Everyone is tested daily for the virus, and anyone who tests positive is rapidly isolated to prevent any spread. Athletes and others are required to wear N95 face masks when not competing.

"Arguably the riskiest thing they've done so far is to host the Games, and if they can get through that, then they can continue to use this strategy to keep localized outbreaks under control for a long time," said Karen Grépin, a public health expert at the University of Hong Kong.

China has tight restrictions on who can enter China and requires those who do to quarantine at designated hotels for two to three weeks. It responds to even the smallest outbreaks with lockdowns of buildings and neighborhoods, followed by mass testing of all residents to root out and isolate positive cases.

The strategy is not without costs. In the run-up to the Olympics, China expanded its lockdowns to entire cities of more than 10 million people to stamp out outbreaks, forcing factories and nonessential shops to close and restricting people to their residential compounds.

A southwestern area of about 4 million people bordering Vietnam has been locked down this week because of an outbreak that has infected about 180 people. In Beijing, two residential neighborhoods remain locked down because of a handful of cases two weeks ago.

The closed loop, as the Olympics bubble is officially called, has created two separate worlds. Athletes and other participants aren't able to visit Beijing's tourist sites or restaurants and bars in their downtime. Their only glimpses of the city are from the windows of buses that shuttle them from lodging to venues and back.

Both their hotels and the competition venues are fenced off with temporary walls; guards are posted to keep people from going out or coming in.

Outside, life goes on as normal for most in the nation's capital. Select groups — school children, corporate sponsors, winter sports groups, foreign diplomats and journalists among others — are being invited to fill the stands partially, but most follow the Games on their smartphones or TV.

"We don't feel the Winter Olympics are far from our life," said Yi Jianhua, a retiree from Hunan province visiting his daughter in Beijing. "We can watch it on TV and mobile phone. Although we cannot be there in the venue, we still pay close attention to it, because this is a grand event. Yes, there are regrets but

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it's acceptable."

China has had scattered outbreaks in the past month, but none related to the Olympics. On Friday, health authorities reported 22 new cases in an outbreak in Liaoning province, east of Beijing.

None of the 450 confirmed infections inside the loop have spread to others in the bubble, Huang Chun, a pandemic control official, said earlier this week. And there have been no reports of anything medically serious.

The possibility of a large outbreak inside the bubble, potentially sidelining athletes from competitions, has been a greater fear than any leakage into the rest of China.

"I feel all the protective measures are well in place," said Fang Yanmin, a tourist taking photos with her friend in front of a statue of Bing Dwen Dwen, the Games' panda mascot. "There is no need to panic."

Guo Haifeng, waiting for friends at a nearby subway station, applauded the closed loop, saying it prevents the athletes and public from interrupting each other's lives. Even if he were offered tickets, he said he wouldn't go.

"Because of the pandemic, we should try to avoid going to the scene," he said. "We should restrain ourselves and not affect others."

The final test will come after the Games, when thousands of Olympic staff and volunteers from China exit the bubble. They are expected to be required to quarantine for a week or more before leaving to try to forestall the effects of any latent infections they might have.

China's zero-tolerance policy has kept the virus at bay. Health authorities have reported 4,636 deaths since the start of the pandemic, a tiny fraction of those in other major nations. Most date from the initial outbreak in early 2020 that overwhelmed the health system in the city of Wuhan.

"For us, we achieved the goal of zero cases so we can travel with ease," said Yi, the retiree.

Grépin believes the health and economic benefits of China's approach have outweighed the costs, borne by those caught up in lockdowns and industries such as tourism, which has been damaged by on-and-off pandemic-related travel restrictions. Economic growth slowed to 4% at the end of last year but exports remain strong.

"They've had incredibly low mortality by any standard, and most of the country has lived a relatively normal life for the last two years," she said.

China's relative success may make exiting its zero tolerance strategy more difficult. Most of the nation's 1.4 billion people have not been exposed to the virus, so they haven't developed antibodies that way. And while the vaccination rate is high, the emergence of new variants such as omicron may make the vaccines in use less effective.

For at least the near future, that means anyone caught in an outbreak could face lockdowns and repeated testing — and those coming to China will be isolated in a hotel room for two weeks or more. The repercussions from the 2-year-old pandemic keep marching on.

US conservative figures cheer on Canadian trucker protest

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Several conservative media figures in the U.S. have taken up the cause of Canadian truckers who have occupied parts of Ottawa and blocked border crossings to protest COVID-19 restrictions and vaccine mandates.

Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity cheered the truckers on while showing three live reports from Ottawa this week, while Tucker Carlson's online store is selling "I (heart) Tucker" t-shirts edited to say "I (heart) Truckers."

"Please tell these truckers that the American working people, people in this country, stand in solidarity with what they are doing and for the freedom movement that they're leading," Hannity told reporter Sara Carter on his show Wednesday. She delivered his message to protesters in Ottawa.

In a bulletin to local and state law enforcement officers, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security warned that it has received reports of similar protests being planned in the United States.

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The agency said the protest could begin in Southern California as early as this weekend and potentially spread to Washington around the State of the Union address in March.

COVID-19 vaccines, usually administered in two doses and supplemented with a booster shot, are considered highly effective in preventing serious illness and death. Some people can still get the coronavirus, particularly the Omicron variant, while vaccinated, but most cases are mild. The vast majority of people who get serious cases of the disease are unvaccinated.

Between Jan. 18 through Wednesday, Fox News Channel has devoted 8 hours, 43 minutes of airtime to the story, according to the liberal watchdog Media Matters for America, which frequently criticizes the network.

But it's not just Fox.

Ben Shapiro of The Daily Wire said on his show, sitting in front of a headline that said Canadians were "fed up" with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, that mandates had to stop. The protesters are particularly upset about a requirement that all truck drivers entering the country be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus. An estimated 90 percent of Canadian truckers already are.

"Nobody wants giant bridges shut down," Shapiro said. "Obstructing traffic is bad no matter what you are protesting for. However, the cause of this protest happens to be righteous."

The lead story on the Red State website for a time Thursday was headlined, "East Bound and Down: US Truck Convoy is Being Planned, Could Be Headed to DC." Reporter Sarah Lee mocked a "very silly" piece in Politico that quoted an analyst, who works for a think tank that tracks extremism, that she sees worrying parallels to the buildup before the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection.

Hannity's support for what Ontario Prime Minister Doug Ford has called an occupation comes after months where he decried violence and destruction of property at some Black Lives Matter protests in the United States.

The difference, he said, is the Canadian "Freedom Convoy" is peaceful. On Monday, Hannity interviewed a reporter from the conservative website Rebel News, who described the Ottawa protest site as a "family environment" and "like a Canada Day festival every day."

The protests have been largely peaceful, although some residents have complained of harassment and there is an arson investigation tied to one incident. Shapiro said critics of the truckers are guilty of "nut-packing," or focusing on a crazed person and linking them to the entire protest movement.

It's a familiar tactic in politics: pointing to a more extreme position held by a member of an opposition party and saying it represents everyone.

Lara Trump, the former U.S. president's daughter-in-law and a Fox News contributor, offered her support for the truckers on Hannity's show Tuesday.

"Right here in America, people are cheering them on, because this is about freedom," she said.

In a lengthy monologue on his show this week, Carlson suggested that it was inconsistent for the "intellectual elite" to largely support protest movements started by workers yet oppose this one. He said that many time trends start in the United States and move to Canada, but this time the opposite could happen.

"The trucker convoy in Canada is pretty cool," he said. "People getting together to promote human rights. Who's against that?"

EXPLAINER: Putin's Ukraine strategy mixes threats, diplomacy

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — With Russia carrying out a massive military buildup near Ukraine and the West roundly rejecting Moscow's security demands, a window for diplomacy in the crisis appears to be closing.

But even as Moscow continues to bolster its forces and holds sweeping war games, President Vladimir Putin is keeping the window open for more negotiations in a calculated game of brinkmanship intended to persuade Washington and its allies to accept Russia's demands.

The West fears that a Russian invasion of Ukraine may be imminent, while Russia maintains it has no plans to do so but wants its security concerns addressed.

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Here is a look at the Kremlin's strategy in the standoff:

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

Russia wants the U.S. and its allies to keep Ukraine and other former Soviet nations from joining NATO, refrain from putting any weapons near Russia, and roll back alliance forces from Eastern Europe.

Washington and NATO reject those demands as "nonstarters," but they also are offering to discuss possible limits on missile deployments, a greater transparency of military drills and other confidence-building measures.

Putin has yet to deliver Moscow's formal response to the Western proposals, but he has already described them as secondary and warned that he wouldn't take "no" for an answer on his main demands. He countered the Western argument about NATO having an open-door policy by arguing that it threatens Russia and violates the principle of the "indivisibility of security" enshrined in international agreements.

MILITARY MUSCLE-FLEXING

With the West rejecting its key demands, the Kremlin has raised the stakes by massing over 100,000 troops near Ukraine and carrying out a series of military maneuvers from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea.

As part of the show of force, Moscow has moved trainloads of troops, tanks and weapons from the Far East and Siberia to Belarus for joint war games, drawing Western concerns that Russia could use them as a cover for an invasion.

Washington and its allies are raising the prospect of unprecedented sanctions in the event of an invasion, including a possible ban on dollar transactions, draconian restrictions on key technology imports like microchips, and the shutdown of a newly built Russian gas pipeline to Germany.

President Joe Biden's administration also has deployed additional U.S. troops to Poland, Romania and Germany in a show of Washington's commitment to protect NATO's eastern flank. The U.S. and its allies have delivered planeloads of weapons and munitions to Ukraine.

CALCULATED ESCALATION

By concentrating troops that could attack Ukraine from many directions, Putin has demonstrated a readiness to escalate the crisis to achieve his goals.

"Putin appears overconfident and is exhibiting a high level of risk-tolerance," said Ben Hodges, who served as commanding general of the U.S. Army Europe and now works at the Center for European Policy Analysis. "He seems intent on applying maximum pressure on the West in this self-manufactured crisis, in hopes that Ukraine or NATO will eventually make concessions."

Some observers expect Putin to further ratchet up tensions by expanding the scope and area of the military drills.

Fyodor Lukyanov, head of the Moscow-based Council for Foreign and Defense Policies who closely follows the Kremlin's thinking, predicted a Western refusal to discuss Russia's main demands would trigger a new round of escalation.

"Logically, Russia will need to raise the level of tensions," Lukyanov said. "If the goals set are not being achieved, then you need to increase pressure -- first of all through a demonstration of force."

Lukyanov said that while invading Ukraine is not what Putin wants, he may challenge the West by other means.

"The whole idea as envisaged by Putin ... was not to solve the Ukrainian crisis by means of war, but to bring the West to the negotiations table about principles of European security arrangements," Lukyanov noted. "The moment Russia starts a war against Ukraine, the whole previous game will be over and the new game will happen at an absolutely different level of risk. And all we know about Mr. Putin is that he is not a gambler. He is a calculated player."

POTENTIAL PATHS FOR COMPROMISE

While Putin and his officials have insisted they expect the U.S. and NATO to bow to Russia's demands — a prospect that looks all but impossible — some Kremlin-watchers expect Moscow to eventually accept a compromise that would help avoid hostilities and allow all sides to save face.

Even though Western allies won't renounce NATO's open-door policy, they have no intention to embrace Ukraine or any other ex-Soviet nation anytime soon. Some analysts floated an idea of a potential morato-

rium on expanding the alliance.

Gwendolyn Sasse, a Carnegie Europe fellow who heads the Centre for East European and International Studies in Berlin, voiced skepticism, saying that "the worst would be to signal that there are divisions in NATO," noting that Putin might not be satisfied with it either.

Another possibility is the "Finlandization" of Ukraine, meaning that the country would acquire a neutral status, the way Finland did after World War II. The policy helped it maintain friendly ties with the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War.

Such a move would represent a sharp revision of Kyiv's course toward NATO membership and likely fuel strong domestic criticism, but the Ukrainian public could eventually welcome the policy twist as a lesser evil, compared with a Russian invasion.

Asked about the "Finlandization" idea, French President Emmanuel Macron told reporters Monday that "this is one of the models on the table," but he backtracked the next day when he visited Kyiv.

Another potential compromise would likely include steps to defuse tensions in eastern Ukraine, which has been controlled by Russia-backed separatists since a rebellion flared up there in 2014 shortly after Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

Russia has urged the West to press Ukraine to fulfill its obligations under a 2015 peace deal that was brokered by France and Germany and required Kyiv to offer self-rule to the rebel-held territories. The deal has been seen by Ukrainians as a betrayal of the country's national interests and its implementation has stalled.

Macron this week described the agreement as "the only path allowing to build peace ... and find a sustainable political solution."

Sudan's military rulers step up crackdown, arrest activists

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Amira Osman, a Sudanese women's rights activist, was getting ready for bed a few minutes before midnight when about 30 policemen forced their way into her home in Khartoum last month.

The men, many in plainclothes and armed with Kalashnikov rifles, pistols and batons, banged on her bathroom door, ignoring her mother's pleas to at least allow her to get dressed before they took her away.

"It was like they were engaging in a battle or chasing a dangerous terrorist, not a disabled woman," said Osman's sister, Amani, a rights lawyer.

Osman, who uses crutches since a 2017 accident, was imprisoned twice under Sudan's former autocratic President Omar al-Bashir for violating strict Islamic laws governing women's behavior and dress. This time, she was detained for speaking out against military rule.

With her Jan. 22 arrest, Osman joined hundreds of activists and protest leaders targeted since a military coup last October removed a transitional government from power.

The detentions have intensified in recent weeks as Sudan plunged into further turmoil with near-daily street protests, sparking fears of an all-out return to the oppressive tactics of al-Bashir. The coup upended Sudan's transition to democratic rule after three decades of international isolation under al-Bashir, who was removed from power in 2019 after a popular uprising.

"The military delivers one message to international diplomats, that they are interested in a political dialogue and fundamental reform of the state, but then they do nothing to hide their blatant efforts to maintain the status quo and undermine efforts to unseat them," said Cameron Hudson, a former U.S. State Department official and Sudan expert at the Atlantic Council's Africa Center.

Following the coup, security forces launched a deadly crackdown on protesters. They fired live ammunition and tear gas at crowds on the streets and knocked the country's internet and mobile signal offline — all in efforts to keep people from gathering. Around 80 people, mostly young men, have been killed and over 2,200 others injured in the protests, according to a Sudanese medical group.

Sudanese security forces have also been accused of using sexual violence against women taking part in the demonstrations. The ruling, military-led Sovereign Council said a probe was launched into the allegations of rape and gang rape on Dec. 19, after the United Nations called for an investigation. It is not the

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first time security forces have been accused of using rape — such attacks occurred under al-Bashir and also under the military during the transitional period.

The U.S., U.K., and Norway, along with the European Union, Canada and Switzerland, called the recent pattern “troubling,” and urged the release of “all those unjustly detained.”

“We remind Sudan’s military authorities of their obligations to respect the human rights and guarantee the safety of those detained or arrested and the need to ensure that due process is consistently followed in all cases,” the group said in a statement released by the U.S. State Department.

Osman’s detention drew condemnation and concern internationally. She was finally released on Sunday.

But for nearly a week after the arrest, her family didn’t know where she was held. Then, they received a phone call asking them to send clothes to a prison in Khartoum’s twin city, Omdurman, according to her sister, who also is her lawyer.

Osman said she spent the first three days in solitary confinement in “very bad and humiliating conditions.” Then another activist, Eman Mirghani, joined her in the cell. Mirghani remains in detention.

Authorities accused Osman of possession of illegal weapons and ammunition — the “five old bullets” found in her wardrobe, she said, souvenirs from the 2016 national shooting championship in which she competed.

It’s unclear who the officers are who stormed Osman’s house. During the raid, they said they were from a drug-combating force, but Amani Osman, the sister-lawyer, said she believes they were actually from the country’s feared General Intelligence Service.

Formerly known as the National Intelligence and Security Service, the agency was for decades a tool used by al-Bashir’s government to clamp down on dissent. After the coup, the military reinstated the agency’s powers, which include detaining people without informing their families. They are known to keep many of their detainees in secret prisons called “Ghost Houses.”

Gibreel Hassabu, a lawyer with the Darfur Bar Association, a legal group that focuses on human rights, said the exact number of those detained across the county is still unknown — a situation reminiscent of al-Bashir’s rule.

Hassabu says he knows of over 200 activists and protest leaders detained in the Sudanese capital alone. Many activists were taken from their homes or snatched from the streets, according to documents he provided to The Associated Press.

At least 46 activists are held in Khartoum’s Souba Prison, the documents show. Some female activists — including Amira Osman — are sent to the women’s prison in Omdurman.

The wave of arrests has expanded following the killing of a senior police officer during a Jan. 13 protest close to the presidential palace in Khartoum. The officer was stabbed to death, according to local media. Security forces raided a Khartoum hospital and arrested six, including an injured protester and women who were visiting him, accusing them of being responsible for the killing.

And on Jan. 29, paramilitary troops from the Rapid Support Forces, another security body with a reputation for brutality, grabbed Mohamed Abdel-Rahman Naqdalla, an activist and physician, from a Khartoum street, his family said.

A spokesman for the RSF did not answer requests for comment. The force is largely comprised of former militiamen and has been implicated in atrocities under al-Bashir in the the western region of Darfur. It is headed by the country’s second most powerful general, Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, and runs its own detention centers in Khartoum and elsewhere in the country.

This week, authorities rearrested Khalid Omar, a minister in the ousted transitional government. Omar had been detained in the Oct. 25 coup and was released a month later as part of a deal between the military and civilian leaders. His party, the opposition Sudanese Congress Party, said he was taken Wednesday at the party’s headquarters.

Also arrested Wednesday was Wagdi Saleh, a member of a government-run agency tasked with dismantling the legacy of al-Bashir’s regime, according to the pro-democracy Forces of Freedom and Change alliance.

The trend has frustrated diplomats working to bring the military and civilian leaders to some sort of an agreement.

"Arbitrary arrests and detention of political figures, civil society activists and journalists undermine efforts to resolve Sudan's political crisis," said Lucy Tamlyn, U.S. chargé d'affaires in Sudan.

Emotional support or hogwash? Man fights to keep his pet pig

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

CANAJOHARIE, N.Y. (AP) — Ellie the potbellied pig snuggles up to Wyverne Flatt when he watches TV and sometimes rolls over to let him pet her belly. The 110-pound pig is "family," Flatt says, an emotional support animal who helped him through a divorce and the death of his mother.

Officials in his upstate village of Canajoharie see it very differently. To them, the pig is a farm animal Flatt is harboring in the village illegally.

The case could soon be headed to a criminal trial. But it has already caught the attention of pig partisans who believe the animals should be respected more as companions instead of just a food source.

"I could never dream of giving away somebody who's part of my family," Flatt said recently as he patted the pig in his kitchen. "She's very smart. She's more intelligent than my dogs. I think she can kind of hone in on you when you're feeling bad because she'll want to come in and snuggle with you."

Ellie is a knee-high Vietnamese potbellied pig with a black coat and hooves that clack on the floor as she walks from her kitchen food dish. Flatt was living in South Carolina when he got the pig in 2018, when she was "about as big as a shoe."

She came north with Flatt in 2019 when he moved to Canajoharie, a modest village on the Mohawk River dominated by the husk of the old Beech-Nut food plant.

Flatt, 54, bought a fixer-upper near the business center of the village with plans to remodel it and maybe open restaurant on part of the ground floor. He also has two dogs and two cats.

A village code officer told Flatt he was housing Ellie illegally in October 2019 during a visit for a building permit request. When the village noticed Ellie was still there six months later, Flatt was formally notified he was violating the local code barring farm animals in the village. Violation of a zoning code is a misdemeanor under state law, according to court filings.

Both sides have dug in since then.

Flatt says the village is picking on his pig, which he says is clean and smart. Several of his neighbors have signed affidavits saying they like Ellie.

Village Mayor Jeff Baker said the board has no comment while the court case is pending. But an attorney for the village wrote in a court filing that the pig is a potential public health hazard. She argued that if "every citizen were to openly scoff at the Village zoning codes ... we would live in a lawless society."

Ellie's fate could hinge on federal housing guidance that says municipalities should provide a "reasonable accommodation" when a person can demonstrate an animal provides emotional support for a disability-related need. Flatt's attorney argues that his client meets that test, saying that Ellie allowed Flatt to get off his medication and cope with his anxiety.

The village has argued in court filings it is willing to make reasonable accommodations, but that Flatt never met the standard.

A note from a nurse practitioner saying Ellie helped Flatt get off of medication is in dispute. And while he keeps in his wallet a laminated card illustrated with a headshot of Ellie saying she is a "registered emotional support animal," the village's attorney said it was obtained online for a fee with no formal legal process.

"Defendant provided no legitimate proof that he is a person under disability, and no proof that his disability was remedied by having an emotional support animal, nor that the particular animal — a pig — was the only suitable remedy for his condition," attorney Kirsten Dunn wrote in a filing last year.

A trial was scheduled to start March 22, but has been delayed. If found guilty, Flatt could face jail time or have the pig taken from him, according to his attorney.

Emotional support animals have become common in recent decades. After years of passengers bringing

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pigs, rabbits, birds and other animals on airplanes, federal transportation officials in 2020 said airlines no longer had to accommodate emotional support animals.

And Flatt is not the first pig owner seeking emotional support to run afoul of local housing laws.

In 2019, a family in the Buffalo suburb of Amherst were not allowed to keep a potbellied pig, named Pork Chop, they said was an emotional support animal for their daughter-in-law. An Indiana woman was told in 2018 to get rid of her emotional support pig for similar reasons.

Although people in the United States have been keeping smaller pigs as pets for decades, their advocates say they're still viewed by some people as little more than livestock.

"There's a disconnect in most people's minds that even though these animals were imported originally as pets, they were never intended to be food. There's still a lot of people who do that equation: Pig equals food," said Kathy Stevens, founder of the Catskill Animal Sanctuary for rescued farm animals and a supporter of Flatt.

Still, many municipalities around the country allow residents to keep pigs as pets. Some local laws sometimes specify pet pigs must be under a specified weight. Other laws allow only pot-bellied pigs.

Canajoharie approved a new law in January clarifying its laws on keeping animals, citing a surge in violations. Farm animals are still barred under the law, which spells out rules for residents seeking a reasonable accommodation.

Flatt said he's received offers from people to house Ellie outside the village, but he wants to fight to keep her.

"I'm hoping this sets a precedent that people start understanding that these are pets," he said. "These are not something you go home and slaughter and eat."

Records obtained by Jan. 6 panel don't list Trump's calls

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — White House call logs obtained so far by the House panel investigating the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol do not list calls made by then-President Donald Trump as he watched the violence unfold on television, nor do they list calls made directly to the president, according to two people familiar with the probe.

The lack of information about Trump's personal calls presents a new challenge to investigators as they work to create the most comprehensive record yet of the attack, with a particular focus on what the former president was doing in the White House as hundreds of his supporters violently beat police, broke into the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory. The people were granted anonymity to discuss records that have not yet been released by the committee.

There are several possible explanations for omissions in the records, which do not reflect conversations that Trump had on Jan. 6 with multiple Republican lawmakers, for example. Trump was known to use a personal cell phone, or he could have had a phone passed to him by an aide. The committee is also continuing to receive records from the National Archives and other sources, which could produce additional information.

The gaps in the records of Trump's calls on Jan. 6, first reported by The New York Times and CNN, come as a separate House committee said Thursday that it is investigating whether former Trump violated the Presidential Records Act after boxes of presidential records were discovered at his Florida estate.

House Oversight and Reform Committee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney, a Democrat from New York, said in a statement Thursday that she was "deeply concerned that these records were not provided to the National Archives and Records Administration promptly at the end of the Trump administration and they appear to have been removed from the White House."

The committee is focused on Trump's actions that day because he waited hours to tell his supporters to stop the violence and leave the Capitol. The panel is also interested in the organization and financing of a rally that morning in Washington where Trump told his supporters to "fight like hell." Among the unanswered questions is how close organizers of the rally coordinated with White House officials.

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In many cases, the committee may not need direct confirmation from the White House about Trump's calls. Lawmakers have already interviewed more than 500 witnesses, including several people in Trump's inner circle who may be able to fill in those gaps. They are hampered, though, by the former president's claims of executive privilege over his personal conversations, which have prompted many witnesses to refuse to answer some questions.

The oversight panel is seeking communications between the National Archives and Trump's aides about the missing boxes and information on what they may have contained. Maloney wrote a letter to the archivist, David Ferriero, seeking information on 15 boxes of records the National Archives recovered from Trump at his Mar-a-Lago resort, in Palm Beach, Florida.

The Presidential Records Act mandates that records made by a sitting president and his staff be preserved in the archives, and an outgoing leader is responsible for turning over documents to the National Archives at the end of the term. Trump tried and failed to withhold White House documents from the Jan. 6 committee in a dispute that was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The former president said in a statement that following "collaborative and respectful discussions," the National Archives arranged for the transport from Mar-a-Lago "of boxes that contained Presidential Records in compliance with the Presidential Records Act."

"The papers were given easily and without conflict and on a very friendly basis," Trump said in the statement, which added that the records will one day become part of the Donald J. Trump Presidential Library.

The oversight panel wrote to the archivist in December 2020, as Trump's term was winding down, detailing concerns that Democrats had about his destroying records in office.

The Washington Post has reported that Trump "tore up" data that was both "sensitive and mundane" and that the archivist has referred the matter to the Justice Department to investigate whether Trump violated the Records Act. The Justice Department, which would review the referral and decide whether to prosecute, did not comment.

The National Archives, in its own statements earlier this week, acknowledged that Trump representatives had been cooperating with it and had located records "that had not been transferred to the National Archives at the end of the Trump administration." The agency arranged for the documents to be transported to Washington, D.C., and did not travel to Florida.

The archivist's office said the former president's representatives are continuing to search for additional records that belong to the archives.

"Whether through the creation of adequate and proper documentation, sound records management practices, the preservation of records, or the timely transfer of them to the National Archives at the end of an Administration, there should be no question as to need for both diligence and vigilance," Ferriero said. "Records matter."

Biden doing 'deep dive' on 'about 4' high court candidates

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, COLLEEN LONG and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden appears to be narrowing his list of candidates for the Supreme Court, saying he's looking at "about four people" as Democrats who met with him Thursday say he wants a "persuasive" nominee in the mold of retiring Justice Stephen Breyer.

In an interview Thursday, Biden told NBC the White House is doing a "deep dive" on the candidates to see if there's anything in their background that would disqualify them. Biden has said his nominee will be a Black woman and he will decide by the end of February.

The comments came just before a meeting with 10 Democratic members of the Senate Judiciary Committee in which he told the senators, many of them his former colleagues, that he wants to nominate a woman in the mold of Breyer who will not only be able to persuade her colleagues but will write "stirring, compelling, lasting arguments," according to Delaware Sen. Chris Coons, one of the committee members who attended the meeting.

The senators said Biden would meet soon with candidates. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick

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Durbin, D-Ill., said the meeting was half “friendly and light” and half serious as the president prepares to make history by nominating the first Black woman for the court.

The weeks-long vetting process, and a gradual narrowing of candidates, is routine for Supreme Court nominations. In his NBC interview, Biden did not mention the names of any of the candidates but said he believes his eventual pick will get Republican votes.

“I’m not looking to make an ideological choice here,” he said, adding that he wants someone like Breyer, “with an open mind, who understands the Constitution, interprets it in a way that is consistent with the mainstream interpretation of the Constitution.”

Biden and Senate Democrats have said they want his nominee to have significant Republican support.

Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal, another Democratic member of the Judiciary panel, said after the meeting that he thinks Biden’s pick will be a “reset” after partisan Supreme Court battles and the court’s shift to the right under former President Donald Trump. Democrats vigorously opposed his three nominees, but they all now sit on the high court.

“This choice is historic not only because it will bring historic diversity of the court, but also the quality of the person whom the president will appoint, I think, will be historic, and will really help unite the country as well as the court,” Blumenthal said.

Despite the Democrats’ lofty bipartisan goals, it’s unclear if Biden’s nominee will be able to win any GOP votes. Most Senate Republicans have consistently voted against his lower court nominees.

One Republican who has voted for some of the lower court judges is South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham. He has said he is open to supporting Biden’s nominee and is pushing a judge from South Carolina — U.S. District Court Judge J. Michelle Childs, who the White House said was under consideration for the job earlier this month.

Also under consideration are Ketanji Brown Jackson, who serves on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, and California Supreme Court Justice Leandra Kruger.

Other possible candidates include U.S. District Court Judge Wilhelmina Wright from Minnesota; Melissa Murray, a New York University law professor who is an expert in family law and reproductive rights justice; and Leslie Abrams Gardner, a U.S. district judge for the Middle District of Georgia and the sister of Stacey Abrams, a powerful voting rights activist and nominee for Georgia governor.

Biden told NBC his short list includes nominees who are “incredibly well qualified and documented. They are the honor students that come from the best universities they have experience, some on the bench, some in the practice of law.”

Graham has said Childs is a good candidate partly because she did not go to Harvard or Yale, unlike all the justices currently on the bench.

After the meeting, Blumenthal predicted Biden will nominate someone “of such compelling personal story, of character and intellect that Republicans will have no choice but to support her in some number.”

US urges Canada to use federal powers to end bridge blockade

By ROB GILLIES and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — The Biden administration urged Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s government Thursday to use its federal powers to end the truck blockade by Canadians protesting the country’s COVID-19 restrictions, as the bumper-to-bumper demonstration forced auto plants on both sides of the border to shut down or scale back production.

For the fourth straight day, scores of truckers taking part in what they dubbed the Freedom Convoy blocked the Ambassador Bridge connecting Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit, disrupting the flow of auto parts and other products between the two countries.

The White House said Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg spoke with their Canadian counterparts and urged them to help resolve the standoff.

Federal Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino said Royal Canadian Mounted Police reinforcements are being sent to Windsor, Ottawa and Coutts, Alberta where another border blockade is happening.

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Trudeau met virtually with leaders of Canada's opposition late Thursday and said he spoke with Windsor's mayor. Trudeau's office said there is a willingness to "respond with whatever it takes" to end the blockades.

Conservative Ontario Premier Doug Ford, meanwhile, moved to cut off funding for the protests by successfully asking a court to freeze millions of dollars in donations to the convoy through crowd-funding site GiveSendGo. Ford has called the protests an occupation.

Canadian officials previously got GoFundMe to cut off funding after protest organizers used the site to raise about 10 million Canadian dollars (\$7.8 million). GoFundMe determined that the fundraising effort violated the site's terms of service due to unlawful activity.

With political and economic pressure mounting, Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens announced the city will seek a court injunction to end the occupation.

"The economic harm is not sustainable and it must come to an end," he said.

In the U.S., authorities braced for the possibility of similar truck-borne protests inspired by the Canadians, and authorities in Paris and Belgium banned road blockades to head off disruptions there, too.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security said in a bulletin to local and state law enforcement agencies that it has received reports that truckers are planning to "potentially block roads in major metropolitan cities" in a protest against vaccine mandates and other issues.

The agency said the convoy could begin in Southern California as early as this weekend, possibly disrupting traffic around the Super Bowl, and reach Washington in March in time for the State of the Union address, according to a copy of Tuesday's bulletin obtained by The Associated Press.

The White House said the department is "surging additional staff" to the Super Bowl just in case.

The ban on road blockades in Europe and the threat of prison and heavy fines were likewise prompted by online chatter from groups calling on drivers to converge on Paris and Brussels over the next few days.

The Ambassador Bridge is the busiest U.S.-Canadian border crossing, carrying 25% of all trade between the two countries, and the effects of the blockade there were felt rapidly.

Ford said its Windsor engine plant reopened Thursday after being shut down on Wednesday because of a lack of parts. But the factory and the company's assembly plant in Oakville, Ontario, near Toronto, were operating at reduced capacity, the automaker said.

On the U.S. side, GM sent the first shift home two hours early Thursday at its Flint, Michigan, heavy-duty pickup truck plant due to parts shortages.

Stellantis cut short the first shift Friday at its Jeep plant in Toledo, Ohio, due to parts shortages.

Also, Honda will temporarily stop production on one assembly line during the day shift Friday at its plant in Alliston, Ontario. It's because of border delays. U.S. plants are scheduled to run normally Friday.

Toyota said three of its plants in Ontario closed for the rest of the week because of parts shortages, and production also had to be curtailed in Georgetown, Kentucky.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer urged Canadian authorities to quickly resolve the standoff, saying: "It's hitting paychecks and production lines. That is unacceptable."

Hundreds of demonstrators in trucks have also paralyzed the streets of downtown Ottawa for almost two weeks now, and have now closed three border crossings: at Windsor; at Coutts, Alberta, opposite Montana; and at Emerson, Manitoba, across from North Dakota.

The protesters are decrying vaccine mandates for truckers and other COVID-19 restrictions and are railing against Trudeau, even though many of Canada's precautions, such as mask rules and vaccine passports for getting into restaurants, theaters and other places, were enacted by provincial authorities, not the federal government, and are already rapidly being lifted as the omicron surge levels off.

Trudeau continued to stand firm against lifting vaccine mandates, including a requirement that all truck drivers entering the country be fully vaccinated. But because an estimated 90% of the nation's truckers are already inoculated, some conservatives have called on the prime minister to drop the mandate.

The convoy has been promoted and cheered on by many Fox News personalities and attracted support from the likes of former President Donald Trump and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz.

The Associated Press identified more than a dozen Facebook groups encompassing roughly a half-million

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members that are being used to drum up support for the Canadian protests or plan similar ones in the U.S. and Europe.

To get around the blockade and into Canada, truckers in the Detroit area have had to drive 70 miles north to Port Huron, Michigan, and cross the Blue Water Bridge, where there was a two-hour delay leaving the U.S.

The blockade is happening at a bad time for the U.S. auto industry. Supplies of new vehicles already are low across the nation because of the global shortage of computer chips, which has forced automakers to temporarily close factories.

"The disruptions we are seeing at the U.S.-Canada border — at the Detroit-Windsor Ambassador Bridge and at other crossings — are adding to the significant supply chain strains on manufacturers and other businesses in the United States," the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers and Business Roundtable said in a joint statement.

"We respectfully urge the Canadian government to act swiftly to address the disruption to the flow of trade and its impact on manufacturers and other businesses on both sides of the border."

Packers QB Aaron Rodgers earns 4th MVP award, 2nd in a row

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A four-time MVP, three Super Bowl players and the beginning of a brother act.

The Associated Press 2021 NFL awards had a bit of everything, starting with Aaron Rodgers becoming the fifth player to repeat as Most Valuable Player.

"It is kind of surreal sitting here," Rodgers said. "Being a four-time MVP is crazy.

"They're all different. They've all unique in their own ways and this one feels the sweetest."

Despite the turmoil of training camp and the headlines created by the Green Bay quarterback when he misled the public on his COVID-19 vaccination, Rodgers' play on the field was superb. So much so that he earned 39 votes from a nationwide panel of 50 media members who regularly cover the NFL. Not even one of Tom Brady's best performances — in his final season — came close in the MVP race, with the Buccaneers quarterback getting 10 votes.

Only Peyton Manning with five MVP awards is ahead of Rodgers, who said no announcement on his future in the NFL is imminent.

"There was something to how I felt walking off the field," he said. "I had great conversations with the Packers before I left town. There have been changes to the staff. Just comes down to weighing where I am at mentally and what the commitment is.

"I don't fear retirement and moving on. I'm very proud of what I have accomplished over being in Green Bay for 17 years. Also still highly competitive and bitter taste from the NFC game. I was frustrated about things during the offseason and I feel like there's so much growth. There were some things voiced privately, and I am thankful for the response. There were things done to make me feel special and important."

Rams wide receiver Cooper Kupp got one vote for MVP, but he easily took top offensive player honors. Kupp and Cincinnati quarterback Joe Burrow (Comeback Player) and wideout Ja'Marr Chase (Offensive Rookie) will face off in Sunday's Super Bowl.

Kupp led the NFL with 138 receptions, 1,829 yards receiving and 15 touchdown catches while leading Los Angeles to the NFC West title. A unanimous All-Pro, he received 35 votes, far in front of Colts running back Jonathan Taylor (10).

Kupp was so productive while working with a new passer, Matthew Stafford, that he had 14 games with at least 10 catches, no games with fewer than seven. Though he isn't the fastest nor strongest wideout, he had 100 yards receiving in 11 contests.

Steelers edge rusher T.J. Watt, a unanimous All-Pro like Kupp, led the NFL in sacks with a record-tying 22 1/2. He joined brother J.J., a three-time winner of Defensive Player of the Year.

"I'm not huge on individual awards," said Pittsburgh's Watt, "but it's tough not to want that when I saw my brother at the height of his career win that award three times. And I always just thought to myself

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why can't I do that?"

You have, T.J.

"Some moments are just special. Couldn't be more proud of you," older brother J.J. tweeted after he'd announced the winner on stage.

Dallas linebacker Micah Parsons, who came in second to Watt for top defensive player — but 37 votes behind — was a unanimous choice for Defensive Rookie of the Year. Parsons not only helped the Cowboys turn around their defensive performance this season, but he was so dynamic he helped coordinator Dan Quinn win the assistant coach award.

Parsons promised he would get next what Watt has now.

"It's an honor, and I'm still hungry, you now what I mean?" he said. "I'm coming for him next year. ... But I guess it'll be something for me to have ... for next year."

In the Bengals' worst-to-first AFC North rise, and then deep into the playoffs, Chase was a major contributor. The fifth overall pick in last April's draft despite skipping the 2020 season at LSU due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Chase had 81 receptions for 1,455 yards with 13 touchdowns.

His quarterback, of course, was Burrow, two years after they helped LSU win the national championship. Burrow's rookie season was cut short by a knee injury in his 10th game with a 2-7-1 record. The Bengals quarterback sure made up for that in 2021. He smashed single-season franchise records for passer rating (108.3), yards (4,611), TDs passing and 300-yard games (six). His precision passing ranked first in the league at a 70.4% completion percentage, and despite being sacked a league-high 51 times, Burrow had an 8.9 yards per attempt that also led the NFL.

Mike Vrabel's work with the Titans earned him Coach of the Year. Despite using a record for a non-strike season 91 players, and losing his very best, running back Derrick Henry, for half the schedule, Vrabel led Tennessee to the AFC South crown and the conference's top seed.

"It is a reflection of our football team and staff," Vrabel explained. "They make a connection with our players. Players will come and go, I played for 14 years. You can still make a connection and care for your guys."

"I'm excited about it because we have had adversity and been able to persevere through that."

Rams veteran tackle Andrew Whitworth, who also played for the Bengals, won the league's Walter Payton Man of the Year award.

EXPLAINER: Olympics show complexity of sustainability claims

By CANDICE CHOI and KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — To stage the Winter Games in the Chinese capital, organizers embarked on a massive public works campaign, constructing new venues and piping millions of gallons of water up into the arid surrounding mountains to create fake snow for ski competitions.

And then they proclaimed these to be the most sustainable Olympics in history.

How can both these things be true?

The seeming contradiction shows the difficulties of sorting spin from genuine achievements as countries and companies seek to burnish their environmental credentials.

Even as organizations make notable progress on reducing the harmful effects of their operations, experts say sustainability claims can be overstated and mask underlying problems. In China, verifying claims can be especially difficult because of the lack of transparency.

A look at what sustainability claims can and can't tell us.

HOW IS SUSTAINABILITY MEASURED?

Sustainability is a broad term generally referring to environmental, economic and social effects. But experts say a lack of clear, consistent measures can make it hard to know whether to trust claims around the term.

In the early 2000s, the International Olympic Committee sought to create a comprehensive evaluation to help track how organizers were progressing on sustainability goals, according to a study published last year. But the effort was eventually abandoned by host cities, in part because collecting all the necessary

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information was too cumbersome, the report noted.

The researchers sought to create their own method for rating the sustainability of the Games using publicly available information. Comparisons were difficult because of the lack of consistent data, but they found that sustainability actually declined with recent Olympics due to factors including the growth of the event. The 2022 Beijing Games were not included in the study.

WHAT ABOUT CARBON FOOTPRINT?

As organizations face pressure to cut back on the emissions that contribute to global warming, one measure of sustainability getting more attention is carbon footprints.

The IOC, for example, says the Beijing Olympics will be carbon neutral and that future games will be carbon positive. That might seem to defy logic when considering the massive scale of the events. But groups can claim carbon neutrality by paying to offset the emissions they create, often with the planting of trees.

Experts say offsets can be problematic because there's no guarantee they'll deliver on reducing emissions. Trees might be wiped out by wildfire or extreme weather.

"Forestation projects literally go up in smoke," said Daniel Scott, a climate researcher at the University of Waterloo.

Many organizations are making meaningful changes to reduce their footprints. But the simplicity of carbon neutrality claims can make it hard to know what they really signify, said Harry Fearnough, a policy analyst at NewClimate Institute, which works to fight global warming.

"It's almost impossible for consumers — but also for regulators, shareholders, investors — to digest this easily," he said, adding that government guidelines could give people guidance.

WHAT IS BEIJING DOING?

Beijing organizers note the many measures they've taken to reduce the impact of the Games. Several arenas from the city's 2008 Summer Games are being reused for this month's competitions, and venues are being powered by renewable energy. Most the vehicles shuttling participants between sites will also be fuel-efficient.

But to achieve carbon neutrality, organizers are still relying on carbon offsets.

Marie Sallois, director of sustainability at the IOC, noted the difficulties of reducing emissions and that organizers are working to keep improving.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER IMPACTS?

The focus on carbon footprints in recent years could obscure other environmental and social issues, such as the use of natural resources and displacement of local residents for construction.

"We can get carbon blinders," said Rob Jackson, a climate researcher at Stanford University.

In a sustainability report last month, Beijing organizers addressed some of the Games' other impacts. To build the ski jump venue and the Olympic Village in Hebei province, for example, they said about 1,500 villagers who had to be relocated were given the choice of new apartments or cash.

To ensure the production of fake snow wouldn't stress regional water supplies, the report cited measures including the recycling of wastewater and the use of reservoirs to collect rain and snowmelt. This week, organizers also noted that fake snow has become common at ski resorts. It's a practice experts say could become more common as climate change endangers winter sports.

BEIJING SNAPSHOT: Local fans allowed inside Olympic bubble

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Some local fans are getting to watch the Beijing Games in person, though it's not clear exactly how they were selected for a visit inside the tightly controlled Olympic bubble.

As part of the strict measures intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the Games, athletes, reporters and others are being limited to a "closed loop" of dedicated Olympic venues and hotels.

Plans to sell tickets to the general public were scrapped before the Games began. But organizers announced that about 150,000 local spectators including school children and foreign embassy staff would be allowed in some venues.

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How they are selected is a bit of a mystery. Jiarong Yan, a representative for Beijing organizers, said they apply and are invited by community organizations, educational institutions and other groups. They're subject to protocols, including testing before they enter and health monitoring after they leave, but quarantining isn't required. They are kept separate from others inside the bubble.

On Thursday, some fans sat spaced apart inside the Capital Indoor Stadium to watch the men's figure skating free skate. Cheers erupted for China's Jin Boyang and again when Nathan Chen of the U.S. delivered a free skate performance that won him the gold.

US files 1st USMCA environment case on Mexico over porpoise

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The U.S. Trade Representative's Office filed the first environmental complaint against Mexico Thursday for failing to protect the critically endangered vaquita marina, the world's smallest porpoise.

The office said it had asked for "environment consultations" with Mexico, the first such case it has filed under the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade pact. Consultations are the first step in the dispute resolution process under the trade agreement, which entered into force in 2020. If not resolved, it could eventually lead to trade sanctions.

Mexico's government has largely abandoned attempts to enforce a fishing-free zone around an area where the last few vaquitas are believed to live. Nets set illegally for another fish, the totoaba, drown vaquitas.

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai said that "USTR is committed to protecting the environment and is requesting this consultation to ensure Mexico lives up to its USMCA environment commitments," adding "We look forward to working with Mexico to address these issues."

Sarah Uhlemann, international program director at the Center for Biological Diversity, said "this is a big move that could save these little porpoises from extinction."

"Illegal fishing is out of control in Mexican waters, and the vaquita is paying the highest possible price," Uhlemann said in a statement. "We're glad the U.S. government is taking Mexico to task for violating its environmental obligations and threatening the vaquita's existence."

Mexico's Economy Department said after the complaint was announced Thursday that "The Mexican government reaffirms its commitment to the proper implementation of the USMCA and the responsibilities it has within it."

It was the second stinging rebuke in less than a week for Mexico, which has done a poor job controlling the environmental practices of its fishing boats.

On Monday, Mexican fishing boats in the Gulf of Mexico were "prohibited from entering U.S. ports, will be denied port access and services," the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said, in response to years of Mexican boats illegally poaching red snapper in the Gulf.

Mexico's foreign relations secretary, Marcelo Ebrard, said incidents of fishing by Mexican boats in U.S. waters were mistakes, saying it can be difficult to locate the dividing line between the two countries' territorial waters.

But critics say it seems more likely that Mexican boats are going where the fish are, rather than making the same navigational error over and over again. The U.S. Coast Guard has apprehended many repeat offenders, with some Mexican fishermen being caught in U.S. waters over 20 times since 2014.

But the plight of the vaquita marina — of which perhaps as few as 10 survive in the Gulf of California — that has made Mexico look the worst.

For example, Mexican authorities allowed the environmentalist group Sea Shepherd to return to the Gulf, also known as the Sea of Cortez, to help in conservation efforts, but no longer allows the group to remove illegal gill nets.

It was the latest instance in which the Mexican government appeared to give more weight to sovereignty and fishing concerns than to protecting the species.

For years, Mexico has relied on Sea Shepherd boats to remove most of the illegal nets that trap and

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drown vaquitas, while doing relatively little to combat violent attacks by poachers on the environmentalists' ships. The group estimates it has removed about 1,000 of the long, heavy nets over the last six years.

But the environmentalists were forced to leave the Gulf in January 2021 after a New Year's Eve attack in which fishermen rammed a Sea Shepherd vessel with their boat; one of the fishermen later reportedly died of injuries sustained in that attack.

Since then, the job of locating and removing nets has been largely left to Mexico's navy, which has done little to stop fishermen setting nets to catch totoaba, a fish whose swim bladder is a delicacy in China and sells for thousands of dollars per pound (kilogram).

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has expressed his dislike of foreign interference, and his desire to balance the interests of fishermen and endangered species.

"We don't need foreigners telling us what to do or placing sanction on our country's fishermen," López Obrador said in June. He insisted that "we can reach an agreement that seeks an equilibrium between fishing and productive activities, and taking care of species."

That attitude appeared to be behind the government's decision in July to abandon the policy of maintaining a fishing-free zone around the small area holding the last remaining vaquitas.

The measure announced replaces the fishing-free "zero tolerance" zone in the upper Gulf with a sliding scale of punishments if more than 60 fishing boats are seen in the area on multiple occasions.

Police solve 1964 rape, murder of girl with DNA, volunteer

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM Associated Press

HAZLETON, Pa. (AP) — DNA and a 20-year-old genealogy expert helped state police identify the man who abducted, raped and murdered a young girl in a case that rattled a Pennsylvania coal town nearly six decades ago, officials announced Thursday.

State police exhumed the long-dead assailant's body last month and said his DNA precisely matched DNA left on the jacket of the victim, 9-year-old Marise Ann Chiverella, who was snatched on the morning of March 18, 1964, as she walked to school in Hazleton, about 80 miles (129 kilometers) north of Philadelphia.

Her body was found that afternoon in a nearby waste coal pit. Authorities say she was raped and strangled.

Police identified her killer as James Paul Forte, a bartender with a record of violent sexual assault, who died of natural causes in 1980 at age 38. Police said Forte, who was 22 at the time of the murder, had no known connection to the little girl or her family.

Generations of state police investigators pursued Marise's killer — more than 230 members of the department were involved in the probe at one time or another — but Forte's name did not come up until 2020.

By that time, new DNA technology had established a distant family connection to Forte, and Eric Schubert, a college student and expert in genetic genealogy who had volunteered to work the case, put together an extensive family tree that helped investigators narrow their suspect list.

State police made the announcement at a news conference packed with current and retired investigators — including the trooper who first probed Marise's murder — and the little girl's four siblings and extended family.

Her siblings called Marise a sweet and shy girl who was learning to play the organ and aspired to be a nun.

"We have so many precious memories of Marise. At the same time, our family will always feel the emptiness and sorrow of her absence," said her sister, Carmen Marie Radtke. "We will continue to ask ourselves, what would have been, what could have been?"

She said their deceased parents never sought revenge, but justice.

"Thanks to the Pennsylvania State Police, justice has been served today," she said.

Thanks to Schubert, as well.

A history major at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania and proprietor of ES Genealogy, Schubert developed an interest in the discipline as a young boy and had helped other police agencies crack their cold cases using genetic genealogy, which blends the use of DNA testing with traditional genealogical research.

He was looking for a new case to work on when he ran across Marise's story, and offered his services

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to the normally insular Pennsylvania State Police. He was pleasantly surprised when they accepted and spent the next two years on the case, working side by side with investigators.

"The investigation that went into all of this work was probably the hardest genealogy task that I've ever faced. This was probably the hardest thing that I've ever done in my entire life," he said. "And it means so much to me that I was able to be on the team that could provide answers to the Chiverella family."

At a certain point, he said, "I knew we were going to find the assailant."

State police Cpl. Mark Baron, the lead investigator, said it was believed to be the fourth-oldest cold case in the U.S. to be solved using genetic genealogy, and the oldest in Pennsylvania.

Baron, who choked up as he spoke, called it an important day for Marise's family and for a community that had long been haunted by her slaying.

"It's a vivid memory for everybody who lived through this, and it's a vivid memory for everybody who grew up in this area," he said. "What happened to her ushered in a change in this community. Whether you like it or not, the way you lived changed after March 18 of 1964 in Hazleton."

Cop safety cited in no-knock warrant ahead of Locke's death

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Authorities searching the Minneapolis apartment where Amir Locke was killed by a SWAT team member said a no-knock search warrant was necessary to protect the public and officers as they looked for guns, drugs and clothing worn by people suspected in a violent murder, according to documents made public Thursday.

The applications for the search warrants executed at the apartment complex on Feb. 2 were released the same day that Locke's family renewed a call for a ban on no-knock warrants.

Although some names are redacted, Minneapolis police have said the 22-year-old Locke, who was Black, was not named in the warrants. Locke's 17-year-old cousin, Mekhi Camden Speed, was named and was arrested this week and charged with two counts of second-degree murder.

In the search warrant applications, St. Paul police Officer Daniel Zebro asked that officers be allowed to conduct the search without knocking, and outside the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 p.m., because the suspects being sought in the Jan. 10 murder of Otis Elder had a history of violence. Zebro also noted that Elder was killed with a .223 caliber firearm, which he said could pierce body armor.

"A no-knock warrant enables officers to execute the warrant more safely by allowing officers to make entry into the apartment without alerting the suspects inside," Zebro wrote. "This will not only increase officer safety, but it will also decrease the risk for injuries to the suspects and other residents nearby."

The warrant was signed by Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill, who presided last spring over former Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin's murder trial in George Floyd's killing. A court spokesman said Cahill could not comment on the warrant because the case is pending.

Locke was killed seconds after the SWAT team entered the apartment where his family said he was staying. Body camera video shows an officer using a key to unlock the door and enter, followed by at least four officers in uniform and protective vests, time-stamped at about 6:48 a.m. As they enter, they repeatedly shout, "Police, search warrant!" They also shout "Hands!" and "Get on the ground!"

The video shows an officer kicking a sectional sofa, and Locke is seen wrapped in a comforter, holding a pistol. Three shots are heard and the video ends.

Minneapolis police say Locke was shot after he pointed his gun in the direction of officers, but Locke's family has questioned that.

Locke's death has sparked protests and an immediate reexamination of no-knock arrest warrants. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey last week announced a moratorium on such warrants while the city brings in outside experts to study its policy. Some lawmakers are pushing for a statewide ban except in rare circumstances.

Locke's parents and relatives of others who died in encounters with police appeared at Minnesota's Capitol in St. Paul on Thursday to press lawmakers to ban no-knock warrants statewide. Locke family attorney Ben Crump recalled how he and others thought things would change after Floyd's killing focused

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new attention on police brutality.

"Even though we thought we were being heard, our proclamations were ringing hollow when we were calling for better policing, more restraint, constitutional protections against the excessive use of force," Crump said. He also called on President Joe Biden to ban the use of no-knock warrants by federal agents "in the name of Amir Locke" and said states should follow suit.

Crump, who also represented Floyd's family and reached a \$27 million settlement with the city of Minneapolis in Floyd's death, led those who were gathered at the Capitol to shout: "If the no-knock ban were in force, let's be clear, Amir Locke would still be here." They also chanted: "Pass the Amir Locke law now!"

The search warrants were carried out as part of an investigation into Elder's death. Elder, a 38-year-old father, was found shot and laying in the street on Jan. 10 in what police believe was an apparent robbery. Drugs and money were found in Elder's SUV, according to court documents.

As they were investigating the murder, police sought warrants that would have required them to knock at multiple locations, as well as warrants that would have allowed them to enter unannounced. In the application for the no-knock warrants, Zebro said it was necessary to "prevent the loss, destruction or removal of the objects of the search or to protect the searchers or the public."

To support the no-knock entry, Zebro said Elder's killing was violent and that the suspects, including Speed, were later seen entering the Minneapolis apartment complex. He also said surveillance video captured Speed trying to conceal an item, which Zebro believed was the murder weapon.

The warrant applications say Speed and others — some who are named and some who are not — also have a history of violent crimes, including robberies, incidents involving guns and fleeing police. He wrote that investigators also monitored their "Instagram and Facebook social media accounts, where the suspects are posting videos and pictures while holding various firearms."

Here's why mask mandates are falling across the US

By DAVE KOLPACK and SARA BURNETT Associated Press

As the omicron wave of the coronavirus subsides, several U.S. states including Nevada, New York and Illinois ended mask mandates this week for indoor settings, while others lifted requirements at schools. The White House says talks are underway about how and when to move the country out of the emergency phase of the pandemic, but in the meantime people are advised to keep following guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommending mask use in indoor settings in places with high transmission rates.

Here's a look at what happened with mask rules this week:

WHY ARE MANY PLACES LIFTING MANDATES NOW?

Mainly it's the drop in hospitalizations and case counts, even in states that have enacted the most stringent rules. This week's epidemiological report from the World Health Organization showed that case counts fell 50% in the United States and 17% worldwide. Across the U.S., COVID-19 hospitalizations have dropped nearly 30% over the past three weeks.

Others have cited the protections offered by vaccines as well as the increased availability of at-home testing kits and therapeutics for those who catch the virus.

The risk has also fallen dramatically for health care workers, many of whom have either been exposed to the virus or are fully vaccinated and boosted, said Dr. Craig Spencer, a New York City emergency room physician. He said medical workers have been dealing with COVID long enough that treating it has become "run-of-the-mill," akin to dealing with heart attacks or other conditions typically seen in an ER.

"Honestly, for us right now, COVID isn't hard to treat. We know what to do," Spencer said. "With this latest wave, we haven't seen a huge amount of severe disease, and those we do see, we have gotten so much better at managing it."

Even so, the head of the WHO issued a warning Wednesday stressing that "COVID isn't through with us," although its focus was more on vaccinations than masks. There's also a new urgency in finding ways to

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protect up to 7 million Americans with severely weak immune systems who are at greater risks as mask mandates fall.

WHERE ARE MASK RULES EASING?

Nevada on Thursday became the latest state to end indoor mask mandates, following announcements the previous day in New York and Illinois, though school mandates remain in those states.

Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak said the requirement for masks in public places would be lifted "effective immediately." State casino regulators quickly followed with an order eliminating the mandate for casinos "unless a local jurisdiction still imposes such a requirement."

Sisolak said he knows some people think it's too early to lift the mandate, but he said school districts and employers may still set their own policies.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said infection rates have declined to a level where it is safe to rescind the broader mask order, and the state will revisit in early March whether to continue requiring them in schools.

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker said that state's indoor mask requirement will end Feb. 28 assuming a continued drop in hospitalizations — which his office said are declining faster than at any point in the pandemic.

Other places have announced similar plans to ease mask rules, including Juneau, Alaska, and Orange County, California.

Not everyone is following suit. The mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, said they will soon end vaccine-or-test requirements instituted last month for restaurants, bars and other entertainment venues, but neither has talked about scrapping mask mandates.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said a mandate for large outdoor events will be lifted next but indoor requirements will remain for now: "I agree with CDC that today is not the day to totally eliminate masks, but it is a day that is rapidly approaching."

WHAT ABOUT SCHOOLS?

About a dozen states require face coverings in schools. At least six of them said this week they plan to lift statewide mandates this month or next.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, who last month reinstated a public emergency due to the omicron wave, said the end of his state's mandate on March 7 represents "a huge step back to normalcy for our kids." Individual school districts can still make their own decisions.

Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Oregon and Rhode Island have made similar announcements on easing restrictions for schools.

Hemi Tewarson, executive director of the National Academy for State Health Policy, said states rescinding or relaxing school mask mandates is a reflection of the country's desire to move to the next phase of the pandemic after roughly two years. It's also a sign of progress, she said, from vaccine availability to finding ways to safely return to in-person schooling.

"You see this hope," Tewarson said. "I think we all hope we are on the other side right now."

Pritzker and Illinois health officials said they want masks to be mandatory in schools for a while longer because of the potential "spillover" effect: At any given school, you might have hundreds or thousands of young people, who are vaccinated at lower rates than adults, coming together for six to eight hours a day, five days a week, and then going back out into the community — including sometimes coming into contact with vulnerable family members. That could increase community spread and force schools back online.

"Nobody wants kids to be back in remote learning," said Dr. Emily Landon, executive medical director of Infection Prevention and Control at University of Chicago Medicine.

WHAT DO THE WHITE HOUSE, SCIENTISTS AND HEALTH OFFICIALS SAY?

The CDC has not changed its recommendation that people mask up in indoor public settings in areas where there is high transmission.

Last month it updated its guidance to recommend N95 or KN95 masks — those used by health care workers — rather than cloth ones. N95s have a tighter fit and are made with material designed to block 95% of harmful particles. Their fibers are pressed close together and have an electrostatic charge that attracts molecules to stick to the mask rather than passing through.

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The CDC added that it's most important to pick something you'll wear consistently — any mask is better than no mask. Masks are generally not necessary in most outdoor settings.

Despite growing pressure to ease restrictions, President Joe Biden is waiting for fresh guidance from federal health officials.

Press secretary Jen Psaki acknowledged that people are tired of masks and "we understand where the emotions of the country are," but said the administration is following the advice of medical experts who rely on scientific evidence: "That doesn't move at the speed of politics; it moves at the speed of data."

Mikaela Shiffrin says she is ready for 'fun' Olympic super-G

BEIJING (AP) — Mikaela Shiffrin is ready to have some "fun" when she returns to Olympic action in the super-G.

Shiffrin posted on Twitter early Friday morning that she is grateful "to have the opportunity to refocus on a new race, in the sport that I love so much."

The two-time Olympic gold medalist's third race of the Beijing Games was scheduled to begin at 11 a.m. Friday in China.

Shiffrin is off to a rough start so far at the 2022 Olympics. The 26-year-old American went off-course about 10 seconds into the giant slalom on Monday and after about half as much time in the slalom on Wednesday.

"I've had a lot of support over the last 48 hours," Shiffrin wrote Friday, "and I have to thank everyone for that."

She won the slalom at the 2014 Sochi Olympics and the giant slalom at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics. Shiffrin never has entered an Olympic super-G before but did win that race at the 2019 world championships.

Judge restores protections for gray wolves across much of US

By MATTHEW BROWN and JOHN FLESHER Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont (AP) — A judge restored federal protections for gray wolves across much of the U.S. on Thursday, after their removal in the waning days of the Trump administration exposed the predators to hunting that critics said would undermine their rebound from widespread extermination early last century.

U.S. District Judge Jeffrey White in Oakland, California, said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had failed to show wolf populations could be sustained in the Midwest and portions of the West without protection under the Endangered Species Act. The service also didn't adequately consider threats to wolves outside those core areas, White said.

Wildlife advocates had sued the agency last year. The ruling does not directly impact wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming and portions of several adjacent states. Those animals remain under state jurisdiction after federal protections in that region were lifted by Congress last decade.

Attorneys for the Biden administration defended the Trump rule that removed protections, arguing wolves were resilient enough to bounce back even if their numbers dropped sharply due to intensive hunting.

At stake is the future of a species whose recovery from near-extinction has been heralded as a historic conservation success. That recovery has brought bitter blowback from hunters and farmers angered over wolf attacks on big game herds and livestock. They contend protections are no longer warranted.

Interior Department spokesperson Melissa Schwartz said the agency was reviewing Thursday's decision and offered no further comment.

Wildlife advocacy groups said the judge's order would most immediately put a stop to hunting in the Great Lakes region, where Wisconsin officials had come under criticism after a wolf hunt last year blew past the state's quotas, killing 218 wolves in four days.

"Wolves in the Great Lakes region have a stay of execution," said John Horning with the environmental group WildEarth Guardians.

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Wolf attacks on livestock are uncommon but can cause significant economic damage to farmers when their cows or sheep are killed.

And wolves in some places have reduced the size of elk and deer herds, their natural prey. That has stirred anger among hunters who target the big game animals.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, National Rifle Association and other industry groups had urged the judge not to restore federal protection, keeping the wolves under the control of state officials who allow wolf hunting.

Zippy Duvall, president of the Farm Bureau, said he was "extremely disappointed" with the ruling and that it ignored wolves' recovery beyond government population goals.

"It's really frustrating and outrageous that some judge thousands of miles away is suddenly telling us that our own scientific management of the species can't be trusted," said Ed McBroom, a Republican state senator from Michigan's Upper Peninsula. "They're simply forcing citizens to take matters into their own hands."

None of the Great Lakes states with established wolf populations — Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin -- had scheduled additional wolf hunts prior to the judge's ruling. All three were updating their wolf management programs and officials said that work would continue.

A state judge in Wisconsin in October had blocked a hunt two weeks before it was to begin, responding to a lawsuit that claimed it was illegally scheduled.

In Michigan, where the wolf population numbers about 700, Republican legislators introduced pro-hunting resolutions but no formal proposal was before the wildlife commission that sets hunting seasons.

Before hunting is considered, Michigan officials want their legal status more permanently settled "given the long history of legal challenges to delisting decisions and the resulting shifting status of wolves," said Ed Golder with the state Department of Natural Resources.

The status of northern Rockies wolves was not challenged in the lawsuit decided Thursday. However, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in September began a separate review of whether protections should be restored for the region's wolves, after Republican state lawmakers in Montana and Idaho passed laws last year intended to drive down wolf numbers by making it easier to kill them.

Under the loosened rules, hunters and trappers primarily in Montana have killed a record 23 wolves that wandered outside Yellowstone National Park this winter. That's sparked public outrage due to the popularity of Yellowstone's wolf packs among tourists who visit from around the world.

Following the killings, Interior Sec. Deb Haaland published an op-ed this week saying federal officials could give northern Rockies wolves emergency protection if the species is put at significant risk.

"Recent laws passed in some Western states undermine state wildlife managers by promoting precipitous reductions in wolf populations, such as removing bag limits, baiting, snaring, night hunting and pursuit by dogs — the same kind of practices that nearly wiped out wolves during the last century," Haaland wrote.

Wolves once ranged most of the U.S. but were wiped out in most places by the 1930s under government-sponsored poisoning and trapping campaigns.

A remnant population in the western Great Lakes region has since expanded to some 4,400 wolves in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. And more than 2,000 wolves occupy six states in the Northern Rockies and Pacific Northwest.

Yet wolves remain absent across most of their historical range. Wildlife advocates argue that continued protections are needed so they can continue to expand in California, Colorado, Oregon and other states.

Democratic and Republican administrations alike, going back to former President George W. Bush, have sought to remove or scale back federal wolf protections first enacted in 1974.

Black members of Biden's Cabinet mark Black History Month

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The six Black members of President Joe Biden's Cabinet on Thursday celebrated Black History Month by discussing their roles, some of which are historic firsts.

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Actor Taraji P. Henson and athletes Sloane Stephens and Nneka Ogwumike also took part in a separate discussion on the importance of mental health and wellness among Blacks.

Cedric Richmond, a former congressman who also is Black and is a top adviser to the president, moderated a conversation about Black leadership with the Cabinet members who advise Biden on everything from the military to foreign affairs to the economy.

Michael Regan, the first Black man to lead the Environmental Protection Agency, said during the livestreamed event that Black leadership is "extremely important."

"Diverse leadership is extremely important because this is a democracy and, in order for a democracy to work, its leadership should reflect the people that it represents," he said.

Other participants included Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, the first Black person in the post; Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge; U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield; and Cecilia Rouse, chair of the Council of Economic Advisers. Rouse is the first Black woman to lead the council.

Also present was Shalanda Young, acting director of the White House Office of Management and Budget. Young is awaiting a Senate vote on her nomination to become the agency's director. She would be the first Black woman to lead the office if confirmed, which is expected.

Biden promised the most diverse Cabinet in U.S. history.

The conversation with Cabinet members was followed by a separate livestreamed event on the importance of mental health and wellness in the Black community, hosted by Susan Rice, Biden's domestic policy adviser, and Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, head of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Henson, tennis pro Stephens and Ogwumike of the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks shared stories of their challenges with mental health and wellness.

Henson opened the Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation, named for her late father, to help eliminate the stigma around mental health issues among African Americans and to provide resources.

The singer-actor said the foundation was borne "out of my own necessity" after her son's father died when the child was 9, followed soon after by the loss of her father, a Vietnam veteran who had struggled with his own issues.

"There's trauma there," she said. "When it came time to address it, I didn't know where to go."

Stephens, who won the U.S. Open title in 2017, has been the target of racist abuse on social media after losing matches.

Biden designated February as National Black History Month, writing in a proclamation that the observance "serves as both a celebration and a powerful reminder that Black history is American history, Black culture is American culture, and Black stories are essential to the ongoing story of America — our faults, our struggles, our progress, and our aspirations."

Biden and his wife, Jill, and Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, and Cabinet members will host commemorative events throughout February focused on the theme of "Black Health and Wellness," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

The U.S. Secret Service hustled Emhoff out of a Black History Month event at Dunbar High School in Washington on Tuesday because of a bomb threat.

Abortions in Texas fell 60% in 1st month under new limits

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Abortions in Texas fell by 60% in the first month under the most restrictive abortion law in the U.S. in decades, according to new figures that for the first time reveal a full accounting of the immediate impact.

The nearly 2,200 abortions reported by Texas providers in September came after a new law took effect that bans the procedure once cardiac activity is detected, usually around six weeks of pregnancy and without exceptions in cases of rape or incest. The figures were released this month by the Texas Health

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and Human Services Commission.

In August, there had been more than 5,400 abortions statewide. State health officials said more data will be released on a monthly basis.

The numbers offer a fuller picture of the sharp drop in patients that Texas doctors have described in their clinics over the past five months, during which time courts have repeatedly allowed the restrictions to stay in place. It has left some Texas patients traveling hundreds of miles to clinics in neighboring states or farther, causing a backlog of appointments in those places.

Planned Parenthood issued a statement calling the numbers “the very beginning of the devastating impact” of the law.

The Texas law conflicts with landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings that prevent a state from banning abortion early in pregnancy. But it was written in a way that has essentially outmaneuvered those precedents.

Under the law, any private citizen is entitled to collect \$10,000 or more if they bring a successful lawsuit against someone who performed or helped a woman obtain an abortion after the limit — which opponents have condemned as a bounty. So far, no anti-abortion supporters have filed any suits.

With few options left, Texas abortion providers have acknowledged the law is likely to stay on the books for the foreseeable future.

Since the Texas law took effect, similar measures have been introduced in GOP-controlled statehouses nationwide, but none have passed. Arizona Republicans this month continued moving swiftly to outlaw abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

It comes as the U.S. Supreme Court has signaled a willingness to weaken or reverse the landmark *Roe v. Wade* precedent in a ruling that is expected later this year. If that happens, as many as 26 states would institute abortion-access restrictions within a year if permitted by the court, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports abortion rights.

At least 12 states have “trigger bans” on the books, with restrictions that would kick in automatically if the justices overturn or weaken federal protections on abortion access.

For many asylum-seekers, flying to Mexico is ticket to US

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SOMERTON, Ariz. (AP) — Seated on a metal folding chair in the front row among dozens of asylum-seekers awaiting COVID tests in Arizona, Gloria Estela Vallora reaped the benefits of her Colombian passport.

She and eight family members, ranging in age from 4 to 63, flew to Cancun for two nights in the Mexican beach resort town, caught another flight to Mexico’s border with the U.S., walked 20 minutes to U.S. agents and spent a night in custody. Within hours, they would be with a friend in Utah.

For Colombians and other nationalities that don’t need a visa, flying to Mexico can be a ticket to seeking asylum in the United States. Once arriving at a Mexican border city, they can walk across the border in broad daylight and surrender to U.S. agents. In doing so, they avoid the dangers of traversing Mexico and other countries over land and circumvent sweeping U.S. asylum restrictions.

The U.S. has expelled migrants more than 1.5 million times under a public health order in effect since March 2020 to address the coronavirus, but it hasn’t been applied across the board.

Mexico accepts back its own migrants and those from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador under the order, known as Title 42. Other nationalities are eligible for expulsion, but the U.S. frequently won’t fly them out due to the expense and strained diplomatic relations with their home countries, notably Cuba and Venezuela. Instead, they are often quickly released in the U.S. to pursue asylum.

The biggest beneficiaries are people from Colombia and other nations who can enter Mexico visa-free, allowing them to fly to the U.S. border and walk across.

“At my weight, it’s not as easy to get around as it used to be,” said a smiling Vallora, 59, who fled violence in the city of Bucaramanga. She spoke in a warehouse outside Yuma where a health-care provider tests released migrants for COVID-19 before driving them to Phoenix’s Sky Harbor International Airport in chartered buses.

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Under U.S. pressure, Mexico is requiring visas from more nationalities, delaying or potentially eliminating the option of flying to the border. Their only alternative may be traveling illegally over land.

Last year, Mexico began requiring visas for Brazilians and Ecuadoreans and, on Jan. 21, did the same for Venezuelans. Mexico's Interior Department said the latest move responded to a tenfold increase in Venezuelans traveling "in an irregular manner to a third country," a clear reference to the United States.

In December, U.S. officials stopped Venezuelans nearly 25,000 times on the border, more than double September's count and up from only about 200 times the same period a year earlier. Venezuelans were the second-largest nationality encountered in December, behind Mexicans.

A WhatsApp group named "Venezuelans to the United States" has been buzzing with people wanting to know how to get a Mexican visa and which consulates have the soonest appointments. Some posts offer help for a fee, while others warn against scams.

A WhatsApp post on Jan. 23 advertises a guide on a flight to the Mexican border city of Mexicali and across the border for \$1,800, with food and lodging. It says Mexican authorities will seize their passports at the airport and return them for \$100.

Groups of about 75 to 125 migrants gathered at sunrise several days this month at an opening in the border wall in Yuma, the Border Patrol sector where more than one of three Venezuelans was stopped in December. Venezuelans were virtually absent, as were Mexicans and Central Americans. They were largely Colombian, Cuban, Indian, Haitian and Russian.

Venezuelans still being released said they squeaked into Mexico before the visa requirement took effect and condemned the measure.

"It's quite a journey," said Daniel Sandrea, who flew to Mexico Jan. 19 with his 13-year-old son and planned to settle in Chicago with a friend.

Sandrea, 42, said he left Venezuela because he could no longer obey orders to threaten and harass opponents of President Nicolas Maduro as a police officer in the city of Merida. "We are fleeing a dictatorship," he said while waiting for a bus to Phoenix at the Regional Center for Border Health's warehouse in Somerton, a sunbaked Yuma suburb of 14,000 people whose old Main Street buildings hint at its 19th-century roots.

U.S. authorities stopped Colombians — many of them relatively well-off — nearly 4,100 times in December, up from 73 times a year earlier.

Alejandro Pizza, 34, came with an extended family of 16 this month after deciding his business selling imported farm equipment in Bogota couldn't survive extortion threats. They vacationed four days on Cancun beaches before flying to the border city of Mexicali, where they hired four Uber drivers to bring them to an opening in the border wall in Yuma.

Flights often arrive after 10 p.m. in Mexicali, where migrants find a hotel before taking a bus or taxi about an hour east to Los Algodones, a town full of dentists and optometrists who cater to American and Canadian snowbirds.

From there, they walk about 10 minutes on a concrete ledge of the Morelos Dam to U.S. agents in Yuma. Others hike a bit longer to another opening further south. The two hot spots are connected by a dirt road, with the border wall on one side and the other lined with date palm trees and canals that water bright fields of lettuce, grasses and other crops.

Migrants who pile into vans for a short stay in a Border Patrol tent include many from countries who don't enjoy visa-free travel and travel surreptitiously over land to reach the border. Cubans often start in Nicaragua, the closest country to the U.S. that they can fly to.

Haitians are worse off. Love Bre, who came by bus and on foot from Chile, made the mistake of allowing a Mexican man guide him, his wife and daughter down a hill to the concrete path across the dam to Yuma.

"He even took my watch," said Bre, 35, holding up his wrist as he entered the Somerton warehouse for a COVID-19 test and bus ride to the Phoenix airport. The bandit also took \$180.

U.S. authorities have released about 15,000 migrants to the Regional Center for Border Health since last February, said Amanda Aguirre, chief executive of the health-care provider. About nine of 10 are quickly on a bus to the Phoenix airport, with others taken to shelters.

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It's too soon to say if travel restrictions will stop Venezuelans and may depend on how easily Mexico issues visas.

The U.S. doesn't even recognize the Maduro government in Venezuela, making flights nearly impossible. Last month, the U.S. began flying Venezuelans to Colombia without an opportunity to claim asylum and said it would do so "on a regular basis."

Karla Macaveo, 28, arrived in Mexico City from Venezuela six days before the visa requirement took effect. She flew to Mexicali, took a taxi to the Yuma border crossing and planned to fly to Delaware. It couldn't compare to having to travel over land.

"This was so much easier," she said with a smile, as she waited to board one of four charter buses going to the Phoenix airport that day.

EXPLAINER: Why US inflation is so high, and when it may ease

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Last year, it was a nasty surprise. And it wasn't supposed to last. But now, inflation has become an ongoing financial strain for millions of Americans filling up at the gas station, lined up at a grocery checkout lane, shopping for clothes, bargaining for a car or paying monthly rent.

For the 12 months ending in January, inflation amounted to 7.5% — the fastest year-over-year pace since 1982 — the Labor Department said Thursday. Even if you toss out volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation jumped 6% over the past year. That was also the sharpest such jump in four decades.

Consumers felt the price squeeze in everyday routines. Over the past year, prices rose 41% for used cars and trucks, 40% for gasoline, 18% for bacon, 14% for bedroom furniture, 11% for women's dresses.

The Federal Reserve didn't anticipate an inflation wave this severe or this persistent. In December 2020, the Fed's policymakers had forecast that consumer inflation would stay below their 2% annual target and end 2021 at around 1.8%.

But after having been an economic afterthought for decades, high inflation reasserted itself last year with brutal speed. In February 2021, the government's consumer price index was running just 1.7% ahead of its level a year earlier. From there, the year-over-year price increases accelerated steadily — 2.7% in March, 4.2% in April, 4.9% in May, 5.3% in June.

By October, the figure was 6.2%, by November 6.8%, by December 7.1%.

For months, Fed Chair Jerome Powell and others characterized higher consumer prices as merely a "transitory" problem — the result, mainly, of shipping delays and temporary shortages of supplies and workers as the economy rebounded from the pandemic recession much faster than anyone had anticipated.

Now, many economists expect consumer inflation to remain elevated well into this year, with demand outstripping supplies in numerous areas of the economy.

"Inflation remains the single largest near-term challenge to the economy," said Jim Baird, chief investment officer at Plante Moran Financial Advisors. "Although price pressures are expected to ease as the year progresses, inflation will remain above the Fed's 2% target for some time to come."

So the Fed has radically changed course. Last month, the central bank signaled that it will begin a series of rate hikes in March. By doing so, the Fed is moving away from the super-low rates that helped revive the economy from 2020's devastating pandemic recession but that also helped fuel surging consumer prices.

WHAT'S CAUSED THE SPIKE IN INFLATION?

Good news — mostly. When the pandemic paralyzed the economy in the spring of 2020 and lockdowns kicked in, businesses closed or cut hours and consumers stayed home as a health precaution, employers slashed a breathtaking 22 million jobs. Economic output plunged at a record-shattering 31% annual rate in 2020's April-June quarter.

Everyone braced for more misery. Companies cut investment and postponed restocking. A brutal recession ensued.

But instead of sinking into a prolonged downturn, the economy staged an unexpectedly rousing recovery, fueled by vast infusions of government aid and emergency intervention by the Fed, which slashed interest

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rates, among other things. By spring of last year, the rollout of vaccines had emboldened consumers to return to restaurants, bars, shops and airports.

Suddenly, businesses had to scramble to meet demand. They couldn't hire fast enough to fill job openings — a near record 10.9 million in December — or buy enough supplies to meet customer orders. As business roared back, ports and freight yards couldn't handle the traffic. Global supply chains became seized up.

With demand up and supplies down, costs rose. And companies found that they could pass along those higher costs in the form of higher prices to consumers, many of whom had managed to sock away a ton of savings during the pandemic.

But critics, including former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers, blamed in part President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, with its \$1,400 checks to most households, for overheating an economy that was already sizzling on its own.

The Fed and the federal government had feared an agonizingly slow recovery like the one that followed the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Elevated consumer price inflation will likely endure as long as companies struggle to keep up with consumers' demand for goods and services. A recovering job market — employers added a record 6.7 million jobs last year and tacked on 467,000 more in January — means that many Americans can continue to splurge on everything from lawn furniture to electronics.

Many economists foresee inflation staying well above the Fed's 2% target this year. But relief from higher prices might be coming. Jammed-up supply chains are beginning to show some signs of improvement, at least in some industries. The Fed's sharp pivot away from easy-money policies toward a more hawkish, anti-inflationary policy could slow the economy and reduce consumer demand. There will be no repeat of last year's COVID relief checks from Washington.

Inflation itself is eating into household purchasing power and might force some consumers to shave back spending.

Omicron or other COVID' variants could cloud the outlook, either by causing outbreaks that force factories and ports to close and disrupt supply chains even more or by keeping people home and reducing demand for goods.

"It's not going to be an easy climb down," said Sarah House, senior economist at Wells Fargo. "We're expecting CPI to still be roughly 4% at the end of this year. That's still well above what the Fed would like it to be and, of course, well above what consumers are used to seeing."

HOW ARE HIGHER PRICES AFFECTING CONSUMERS?

A strong job market is boosting wages, though not enough to compensate for higher prices. The Labor Department says that hourly earnings for all private-sector employees fell 1.7% last month from a year earlier after accounting for higher consumer prices. But there are exceptions: After-inflation wages were up more than 10% for hotel workers and more than 7% for restaurant and bar employees in December from a year earlier.

Partisan politics also colors the way Americans view the inflation threat. With a Democrat in the White House, Republicans were nearly three times as likely as Democrats (45% versus 16%) to say that inflation is having a negative effect last month on their personal finances, according to a University of Michigan survey.

Congress approves sex harassment bill in #MeToo milestone

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Congress on Thursday gave final approval to legislation guaranteeing that people who experience sexual harassment at work can seek recourse in the courts, a milestone for the #MeToo movement that prompted a national reckoning on the way sexual misconduct claims are handled.

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The measure, which is expected to be signed by President Joe Biden, bars employment contracts from forcing people to settle sexual assault or harassment cases through arbitration rather than in court, a process that often benefits employers and keeps misconduct allegations from becoming public.

Significantly, the bill is retroactive, nullifying that language in contracts nationwide and opening the door for people who had been bound by it to take legal action.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, who has spearheaded the effort, called it "one of the most significant workplace reforms in American history."

Gillibrand, D-N.Y., said the arbitration process is secretive and biased and denies people a basic constitutional right: a day in court.

"No longer will survivors of sexual assault or harassment in the workplace come forward and be told that they are legally forbidden to sue their employer because somewhere in buried their employment contracts was this forced arbitration clause," she said.

Gillibrand, who has focused on combating sexual harassment and sexual misconduct in the military, originally introduced the legislation in 2017 with Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.

The legislation had uncommonly broad, bipartisan support in a divided Congress. That allowed the bill to be passed in the Senate by unanimous consent — a procedure almost never used for significant legislation, especially one affecting tens of millions of Americans. The House passed the bill this week on a robust bipartisan basis in a 335- 97 vote.

Former Fox News anchor Gretchen Carlson, who accused the now-deceased network CEO Roger Ailes of making unwanted advances and harming her career when she rejected him, testified in support of the legislation. Some employee contracts at the network included binding arbitration clauses.

Carlson, who appeared with Gillibrand and other senators at a news conference after Senate passage of the bill, said she could never have imagined, after coming forward with her allegations five years ago, that it would lead to a change in the law that both Democrats and Republicans would get behind.

"Marching in the streets can inspire us. Editorials can open our minds. Hashtags can galvanize, but legislation is the only thing that lasts," Carlson said.

An estimated 60 million American workers have clauses tucked into their employment contracts forcing them to settle any allegations of sexual misconduct in private arbitration proceedings, rather than in court. The widespread practice has come under fire in the wake of the #MeToo movement for forcing employees to seek recourse without a jury, a chance to appeal a decision or the sunlight of a public court process.

"If you could ever say any legislation was long overdue, this is it," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. He called it "almost medieval" to force victims of harassment and assault "to shut up, not tell anyone about it and not seek justice."

The secretive nature of binding arbitration protects companies and perpetrators, critics contend, and allows corporations to avoid changing any policies or removing serial abusers.

The clauses barring lawsuits are not just limited to employment contracts but have been found in other service agreements, preventing those who were sexually assaulted at nursing homes or massage parlors from taking their claims to court.

Defenders of the arbitration process, including business groups, have contended it is a faster and less costly way to resolve disputes than through lengthy courtroom proceedings.

Graham said on the Senate floor that it does not harm businesses to ensure people who are harassed at work are treated fairly.

"This is not bad for business. This is good for America," he said.

Many workers don't realize they're bound by forced arbitration rules and how the process can disproportionately benefit employers, with companies typically paying out smaller sums to settle claims, Gillibrand said.

In a sign of the power of the #MeToo movement and wide-ranging support behind the change, the legislation's co-sponsors included senators who are ideologically polar opposites, such as New Jersey Democrat Cory Booker and Missouri Republican Josh Hawley.

Graham said at the news conference that things can be "pretty screwed up" in Washington but the legislation signals "that there's some hope, as long as we listen to each other and try to make life better

where we can find common ground.”

The White House released a statement earlier this month in support of the bill.

Most vulnerable still in jeopardy as COVID precautions ease

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Two years into the pandemic Jackie Hansen still left home only for doctor visits, her immune system so wrecked by cancer and lupus that COVID-19 vaccinations couldn't take hold.

Then Hansen got a reprieve — scarce doses of the first drug that promises six months of protection for people with no other way to fend off the virus.

“This is a shot of life,” Hansen said after getting injections of Evusheld at a University of Pittsburgh Medical Center clinic. She can't wait to “hug my grandkids without fear.”

Up to 7 million immune-compromised Americans have been left behind in the nation's wobbly efforts to get back to normal. A weak immune system simply can't rev up to fight the virus after vaccination like a healthy one does. Not only do these fragile patients remain at high risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19, they can harbor lengthy infections that can help spark still more variants.

With more of the country now abandoning masks and other precautions as the omicron wave ebbs, how to keep this forgotten group protected is taking on new urgency.

This is “quickly transitioning into an epidemic of the vulnerable,” said Dr. Jacob Lemieux, an infectious disease specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital. While healthy vaccinated people may return to pre-pandemic activities with little worry about severe consequences, “the immunocompromised -- despite vaccination, despite taking all precautions -- cannot, and remain at risk.”

“We're going to have to navigate this as a society and it's going to be a really difficult societal conversation,” he added.

Indeed, amid all the talk about omicron being less severe for many people, the most contagious variant so far laid bare how the immune-compromised need more defenses.

“The pandemic has not spared them yet,” said Dr. Ghady Haidar, an infectious disease specialist at UPMC, where people hospitalized with serious COVID-19 over the past month have been a mix of the immune-compromised and the unvaccinated.

Hansen, a retired nurse, has had to have tough conversations about why she can't be around anyone who's not vaccinated.

“Other people's behaviors really affect and jeopardize the lives of people like myself,” said Hansen, who nearly died from the flu shortly before the pandemic began.

“We're all tired of wearing a mask, everybody just wants to put it behind us,” Hansen said. But while for most people “it's an annoyance to put a mask on to go to the grocery store,” she's had to fight to get her cancer care scheduled during COVID-19 surges.

There aren't many options for the immune-compromised as community-wide COVID-19 precautions wane. Health authorities are pushing a fourth vaccine dose for these vulnerable patients, since some get at least a little protection from repeat vaccinations. The immune-compromised are supposed to get three up-front doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines followed by a booster, one more shot than the U.S. recommends for everyone else.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also is considering if the immune-compromised need their booster a little sooner -- three months after their last shot rather than five months.

But many patients are anxiously awaiting AstraZeneca's Evusheld, the first set of antibodies grown in a lab to prevent COVID-19 -- rather than treat it -- in people who can't make their own virus-fighters. Evusheld contains two types of antibodies, given in two shots at the same appointment, that are expected to last for six months.

The problem: There's not nearly enough to go around. A federal database shows nearly 500,000 of the 1.2 million doses the government has purchased have been distributed, and an AstraZeneca spokesperson says the rest should arrive before April.

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Without enough for everyone deemed immune-compromised, many hospitals used a lottery system to dispense doses to their highest-risk patients -- and no one knows what will happen later in the year when those people need another dose.

A study found Evusheld cut by 77% the chances of a COVID-19 infection, although that was before omicron appeared.

While that's not perfect protection, one organ transplant recipient credits his Evusheld dose with preventing him from becoming seriously ill.

Just getting to the Evusheld appointment at a University of Washington clinic in Seattle, over an hour from his home, made Ray Hoffman nervous. He takes strong immune-suppressing drugs after recent liver and kidney transplants and never ventures out without his mask — but wound up with a masked but coughing cab driver. The next day Hoffman developed cold-like symptoms that turned out to be mild COVID-19, and his worried doctors told him the protective antibody injections likely made the difference.

"I'm just really happy that, fortunately for me, it was just a couple of days of feeling pretty bad and then that was the worst of it," he said.

As long as Evusheld helps weakened patients avoid a severe infection, "that is definitely a win," said UPMC's Haidar. "I'm cautiously optimistic."

Hansen, the suburban Pittsburgh patient, knows she can't completely let down her guard but says Evusheld has eased her crippling fear.

"Maybe I can go out for lunch, maybe my husband and I can go do something instead of just sitting here in the house," she said. "This drug needs to be made more available. It's a great victory for me but until everybody else that's compromised gets it, it's hard for me to celebrate."

Police records complicate Herschel Walker's recovery story

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One warm fall evening in 2001, police in Irving, Texas, received an alarming call from Herschel Walker's therapist. The football legend and current Republican Senate candidate in Georgia was "volatile," armed and scaring his estranged wife at the suburban Dallas home they no longer shared.

Officers took cover outside, noting later that Walker had "talked about having a shoot-out with police." Then they ordered the 1982 Heisman Trophy winner and onetime Dallas Cowboy to step out of the home, according to a police report obtained by The Associated Press through a public records request.

Much of what happened that day at the \$1.9 million mansion remains shrouded from view because the report, which Irving police released to the AP only after ordered to do so by the Texas attorney general's office, was extensively redacted.

What is clear, though, is that Walker's therapist, Jerry Mungadze, a licensed counselor in Texas with a history of embracing practices that experts in the field say are outside the mainstream, played a pivotal role in extracting the former player from the situation.

The incident adds another layer to Walker's already turbulent personal history, which includes his acknowledged struggles with mental health, violent outbursts and accusations that he repeatedly threatened his ex-wife. And it will test voters' acceptance of Walker's assertion that he has long since been a changed person.

After calling police to the gated subdivision where Walker's wife lived, Mungadze rushed to the scene and talked to Walker for at least 30 minutes to calm him down, according to the Sept. 23, 2001, report. In the end, police confiscated a 9mm Sig Sauer handgun from Walker's car and placed his address on a "caution list" because of his "violent tendencies." But they declined to seek charges or make an arrest. Walker's wife filed for divorce three months later.

Though causing some initial misgivings, Walker's past has done little to deter Republican support for his candidacy. He has been championed aggressively by former President Donald Trump, a longtime friend, with other top Republicans eventually joining the fold.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and his No. 2, Sen. John Thune, both endorsed Walker in Octo-

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ber after early concerns about his history of domestic violence. Last week, Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor who served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations during the Trump administration, tweeted that Walker would be a champion of conservative values and is "living proof that hard work and determination pay off."

Walker's campaign dismissed the newly surfaced information and blamed the media for highlighting it. "The very same media who praised Herschel for his transparency nearly two decades ago are now running ... stories, stereotyping, attacking, and going so far as to question his diagnosis," Mallory Blount, a Walker spokesperson, said in a statement. "It's shameful and is why people don't trust the media."

The campaign declined to offer an updated health assessment or grant a request for an interview. There have been no reports of violence involving Walker in the past decade.

Mungadze, too, declined to comment, but has indicated that he is no longer treating Walker. Still, their relationship is part of the story as the former University of Georgia and NFL football star turns to politics.

Walker and Mungadze first met in the early 1980s when both ran college track. They didn't become friends until after Mungadze, who holds a doctorate in philosophy, diagnosed Walker with dissociative identity disorder following a separate 2001 episode in which Walker says he sped around suburban Dallas, hearing voices and fantasizing about executing a man who was late delivering a car he had purchased. Psychologists and counselors generally do not have medical degrees.

A former pastor, Mungadze has held a counselor's license in Texas for over three decades and offers himself as an expert in treating dissociative identity disorder, which was once known as multiple personality disorder.

His professional and academic writings lean heavily into the occult, exorcism and possession by demons, which he called a "theological and sociological reality" in a 2000 article "Is It Dissociation or Demonization?" that was published in the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*.

In one method of analysis he has pioneered, which experts have singled out as unscientific, patients are asked to color in a drawing of the brain, with Mungadze drawing conclusions about their mental state from the colors they choose. In 2013, he told the televangelist Benny Hinn that he can use the drawings to tell whether someone has been "demonized."

"I can tell them what spirit they have and what it's doing in their life," he said on Hinn's television show.

His 1990 doctoral thesis for the University of North Texas argues that traditional healers in his native Zimbabwe are better positioned to treat those who claim to be possessed by "ancestral spirits" than providers of Western medicine.

And he was also featured in a 2014 British TV documentary as a practitioner of gay conversion therapy, a scientifically discredited practice that attempts to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ people.

"It's really disturbing that a prominent individual like Walker would be seeing someone who just looks like the most dubious caregiver in terms of using methods that I've never heard of and never seen any published literature on," Arthur Caplan, a professor of bioethics at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine, said while referring to Mungadze's practice of diagnosing patients based on how they colored in a drawing of the brain.

Walker has at times been open about his struggle with mental illness, writing at length about it in his 2008 book, "Breaking Free." Mungadze, whom Walker has called "one of my best friends," wrote the book's foreword.

The book details years of struggle before an eventual diagnosis by Mungadze. Walker describes himself dealing with as many as a dozen personalities — or "alters" — that he had constructed as a defense against bullying he suffered as a stuttering, overweight child.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness describes the disorder as "alternating between multiple identities," leaving a person with "gaps in memory of everyday events." It notes that men with the disorder often "exhibit more violent behavior rather than amnesia."

"It's very intensive treatment," said Bethany Brand, a clinical psychologist and professor at Towson University, who helped write guidelines for diagnosing the disorder. "They are often quite symptomatic and

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can relapse, even after a successful course of treatment, if they are under enough stress.”

Comparing his condition to a “broken leg,” Walker wrote that Mungadze assured him “it was possible to achieve emotional stability based on the approach and methods he had developed.”

By Mungadze’s account it wasn’t easy. In a 2011 Playboy Magazine profile of Walker, Mungadze said he had to call police to his office during one therapy session with Walker and his wife.

“He threatened to kill her, myself and himself. I called 911, and the police came,” Mungadze said. According to the article, the incident ended with Walker hitting a door and breaking his fist.

A review of court records and police reports documents a far more turbulent path than portrayed in Walker’s book, which was framed as a turnaround story.

About a year into his treatment, a former Dallas Cowboys cheerleader told Irving police in May 2002 that she believed Walker had been lurking outside her house. The woman said she had a “confrontation” with him roughly a year earlier, which led to Walker making threatening phone calls and “having her house watched,” according to a police report. The threats subsided, but after Walker spotted her outside a Four Seasons resort in Irving, she told police that he followed her as she drove home. The woman told police she was “very frightened” of Walker, but asked them not to contact him because it would “only make the problem worse.” She declined to comment for this story.

Walker’s ex-wife has said that she was a repeated target of his abuse.

Now going by the name Cindy Grossman, she described violent outbursts in their divorce proceedings, telling of “physically abusive and threatening behavior.” When his book was released, she told ABC News that at one point during their marriage, her husband pointed a pistol at her head and said, “I’m going to blow your ... brains out.”

Mungadze served as a court approved mediator after Grossman filed for divorce in December 2001.

She returned to court in 2005 for a protective order after Walker repeatedly voiced a desire to kill her and her boyfriend, according to court records.

Walker “stated unequivocally that he was going to shoot my sister Cindy and her boyfriend in the head,” her sister later said in an affidavit, which the AP first reported last July. Not long after making the threat, Walker confronted Grossman in public, according to court filings, which indicate he “slowly drove by in his vehicle, pointed his finger at (Grossman) and traced (her) with his finger as he drove.”

A judge granted the protective order and stripped Walker of his right to carry firearms for a period of time. Grossman did not respond to a request for comment at a number currently listed for her.

In 2012, a woman named Myka Dean told Irving police that Walker “lost it” when she tried to end an “on-off-on-off” relationship with him, which she said had lasted for 20 years. Walker, she told officers, threatened to wait outside her apartment and “blow her head off,” according to a January 2012 police report.

Dean, who died in 2019, told police she didn’t want to get Walker in trouble. But the officer decided to document the incident because of the “extreme threats.”

Records filed with the federal Securities Exchange Commission show she was once part of a business venture with Walker, holding an ownership stake in a company he led called Renaissance Man Inc., which sold an aloe-based health drink. Her mother and stepfather also served on the company’s board.

Walker’s campaign said that he “emphatically denies these false claims” and is on good terms with Dean’s parents, who support his campaign.

“This is the first any of us knew about this. We are very proud of the man Herschel Walker has become,” Diane McKnight, Dean’s mother, said in a statement provided by Walker’s campaign. “We love him, pray for him and wish we lived in Georgia so we could vote him into the United States Senate.”

US inflation highest in 40 years, with no letup in sight

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation soared over the past year at its highest rate in four decades, hammering American consumers, wiping out pay raises and reinforcing the Federal Reserve’s decision to begin raising borrowing rates across the economy.

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The Labor Department said Thursday that consumer prices jumped 7.5% last month compared with a year earlier, the steepest year-over-year increase since February 1982.

When measured from December to January, inflation was 0.6%, the same as the previous month and more than economists had expected. Prices rose 0.7% from October to November and 0.9% from September to October.

Shortages of supplies and workers, heavy doses of federal aid, ultra-low interest rates and robust consumer spending combined to send inflation leaping in the past year. And there are few signs that it will slow significantly anytime soon.

Wages are rising at the fastest pace in at least 20 years, which can pressure companies to raise prices to cover higher labor costs. Ports and warehouses are overwhelmed, with hundreds of workers at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the nation's busiest, out sick last month. Many products and parts remain in short supply as a result.

The latest inflation data suggested to some economists that the Fed could raise its key rate in March by one-half a percentage point, rather than its typical quarter-point hike.

James Bullard, the president of the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank, told Bloomberg News that he supported a sharp increase of a full percentage point in the benchmark short-term interest rate by July.

Over time, higher rates will raise the costs for a wide range of borrowing, from mortgages and credit cards to auto and business loans. That could cool spending and inflation, but for the Fed, the decision to steadily tighten credit could also trigger another recession.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell signaled two weeks ago that the central bank would likely raise its benchmark short-term rate multiple times this year.

Stock prices declined after the inflation report was released and fell further after Bullard's remarks. The broad S&P 500 index fell 1.3% in afternoon trading. The yield on the 10-year bond jumped to 2.03%, a sign that investors see more Fed rate hikes ahead.

Prices for a broad range of goods and services accelerated from December to January — and not just for items directly affected by the pandemic. Apartment rental costs rose 0.5% in January, the fastest pace in 20 years. Electricity prices surged 4.2% in January alone, the sharpest rise in 15 years, and are up 10.7% from a year earlier. Last month, household furniture and supplies rose 1.6%, the largest one-month increase on records dating to 1967.

Food costs, driven by pricier eggs, cereal and dairy products, increased 0.9% in January. New car prices, which have jumped during the pandemic because of a shortage of computer chips, were unchanged last month but are up 12.2% from a year ago. The surge in new-car prices has, in turn, accelerated used-car prices; they rose 1.5% in January and are up a dizzying 41% from a year ago.

"Just as price pressures in some areas ease, inflation in other parts of the economy" is picking up, said Sarah House, an economist at Wells Fargo. "The upshot is that inflation is likely to remain uncomfortably high."

The steady rise in prices has left many Americans less able to afford food, gas, rent, child care and other necessities. More broadly, inflation has emerged as the biggest risk factor for the economy and as a serious threat to President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats as midterm elections loom later this year.

Among the Americans who are struggling with pricier food and gas is Courtney Luckey, who has changed her shopping habits and taken on additional work shifts at a grocery store in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she lives.

Luckey, 33, used to be able to fill up a grocery cart for \$100. Now, she said, \$100 barely fills half the cart. Tomatoes have reached nearly \$5 a pound, "which I think is ridiculous." Luckey has switched to canned tomatoes and has begun using coupons for Family Dollar and Food Lion.

To help pay bills, she's also picked up more hours at a Harris Teeter grocery store. But the store is 30 minutes from her house, so she's had to spend more on gas.

All her forced additional spending has caused Luckey to pull back on the family activities, such as bowling, with her daughter, her brother and his two sons. Those outings now typically happen once a month,

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rather than every week or two.

In the past year, sharp increases in the costs of gas, food, autos and furniture have upended many other Americans' budgets, too. In December, economists at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School estimated that the average household had to spend \$3,500 more than in 2020 to buy an identical basket of goods and services.

Small businesses have also struggled to deal with higher costs for supplies and labor.

Julio Ortiz, the owner of Gaspachos, which sells fruit cups, smoothies and coffee in Sacramento, said he had to raise prices by about 6%, on average, in November. For some items, prices rose 10%.

"We've seen a spike in pricing for fruits, vegetables, cups, and plates," he said. His company uses compostable packaging, but much of it comes from overseas and has been stuck on ships that haven't been unloaded.

Even excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation jumped 0.6% from December to January and 6% from a year ago.

Many large corporations, in conference calls with investors, have said they expect supply shortages to persist until at least the second half of this year.

Chipotle said it's increased menu prices 10% to offset the rising costs of beef and transportation as well as higher employee wages. And the restaurant chain said it will consider further price increases if inflation keeps rising.

"We keep thinking that beef is going to level up and then go down, and it just hasn't happened yet," said John Hartung, the company's chief financial officer.

Executives at Chipotle, as well as at Starbucks and some other consumer-facing companies, have said their customers so far don't seem fazed by the higher prices.

Levi Strauss & Co. raised prices last year by roughly 7% above 2019 levels because of rising costs, including labor, and plans to do so again this year. Even so, the San Francisco-based company has upgraded its sales forecasts for 2022.

"Right now, every signal we're seeing is positive," CEO Chip Bergh told analysts.

Records obtained by Jan. 6 panel don't list Trump's calls

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — White House call logs obtained so far by the House panel investigating the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol do not list calls made by then-President Donald Trump as he watched the violence unfold on television, nor do they list calls made directly to the president, according to two people familiar with the probe.

The lack of information about Trump's personal calls presents a new challenge to investigators as they work to create the most comprehensive record yet of the attack, with a particular focus on what the former president was doing in the White House as hundreds of his supporters violently beat police, broke into the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory. The people were granted anonymity to discuss records that have not yet been released by the committee.

There are several possible explanations for omissions in the records, which do not reflect conversations that Trump had on Jan. 6 with multiple Republican lawmakers, for example. Trump was known to use a personal cell phone, or he could have had a phone passed to him by an aide. The committee is also continuing to receive records from the National Archives and other sources, which could produce additional information.

The gaps in the records of Trump's calls on Jan. 6, first reported by The New York Times and CNN, come as a separate House committee said Thursday that it is investigating whether former Trump violated the Presidential Records Act after boxes of presidential records were discovered at his Florida estate.

House Oversight and Reform Committee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney, a Democrat from New York, said in a statement Thursday that she was "deeply concerned that these records were not provided to the National Archives and Records Administration promptly at the end of the Trump administration and

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they appear to have been removed from the White House.”

The committee is focused on Trump’s actions that day because he waited hours to tell his supporters to stop the violence and leave the Capitol. The panel is also interested in the organization and financing of a rally that morning in Washington where Trump told his supporters to “fight like hell.” Among the unanswered questions is how close organizers of the rally coordinated with White House officials.

In many cases, the committee may not need direct confirmation from the White House about Trump’s calls. Lawmakers have already interviewed more than 500 witnesses, including several people in Trump’s inner circle who may be able to fill in those gaps. They are hampered, though, by the former president’s claims of executive privilege over his personal conversations, which have prompted many witnesses to refuse to answer some questions.

The oversight panel is seeking communications between the National Archives and Trump’s aides about the missing boxes and information on what they may have contained. Maloney wrote a letter to the archivist, David Ferriero, seeking information on 15 boxes of records the National Archives recovered from Trump at his Mar-a-Lago resort, in Palm Beach, Florida.

The Presidential Records Act mandates that records made by a sitting president and his staff be preserved in the archives, and an outgoing leader is responsible for turning over documents to the National Archives at the end of the term. Trump tried and failed to withhold White House documents from the Jan. 6 committee in a dispute that was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The former president said in a statement that following “collaborative and respectful discussions,” the National Archives arranged for the transport from Mar-a-Lago “of boxes that contained Presidential Records in compliance with the Presidential Records Act.”

“The papers were given easily and without conflict and on a very friendly basis,” Trump said in the statement, which added that the records will one day become part of the Donald J. Trump Presidential Library.

The oversight panel wrote to the archivist in December 2020, as Trump’s term was winding down, detailing concerns that Democrats had about his destroying records in office.

The Washington Post has reported that Trump “tore up” data that was both “sensitive and mundane” and that the archivist has referred the matter to the Justice Department to investigate whether Trump violated the Records Act. The Justice Department, which would review the referral and decide whether to prosecute, did not comment.

The National Archives, in its own statements earlier this week, acknowledged that Trump representatives had been cooperating with it and had located records “that had not been transferred to the National Archives at the end of the Trump administration.” The agency arranged for the documents to be transported to Washington, D.C., and did not travel to Florida.

The archivist’s office said the former president’s representatives are continuing to search for additional records that belong to the archives.

“Whether through the creation of adequate and proper documentation, sound records management practices, the preservation of records, or the timely transfer of them to the National Archives at the end of an Administration, there should be no question as to need for both diligence and vigilance,” Ferriero said. “Records matter.”

Super Bowl performers vow to open doors for more hip-hop

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Mary J. Blige, Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg said the NFL was late embracing hip-hop and vowed that their Super Bowl halftime show would create more opportunities for the genre.

“We’re going to open more doors for hip-hop artists in the future and making sure that the NFL understands that this is what it should have been long time ago,” Dre said at a moderated appearance the trio made Thursday without their Sunday co-headliners Kendrick Lamar and Eminem.

“It’s crazy that it took all of this time for us to be recognized,” Dre said. “I think we’re going to do a fantastic job. We’re going to do it so big that they can’t deny us anymore in the future.”

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No reporters were allowed to ask questions, unlike in previous years.

The five music icons will perform at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. Dre, Snoop Dogg and Lamar are Southern California natives. Snoop Dogg called it a "great moment" that combined "the biggest sporting event in the world" with hip-hop, "the biggest form of music in the world."

"We appreciate the NFL for even entertaining hip-hop because we know a lot of people that don't want hip-hop onstage," he said. "But we're here now and there's nothing you can do about it."

Other rap artists who have performed at previous Super Bowl halftime shows include Travis Scott, Sean "Diddy" Combs, Nelly and Big Boi of Outkast. Pop-rap group Black Eyed Peas performed during halftime as well.

Dre said there will be surprises during their show, but he's already added two deaf musicians — Warren "Wawa" Snipe and Sean Forbes. It'll be the first time deaf performers will take part in the halftime show.

Wawa and Forbes will use their hands, body and facial expressions to deliver unique renditions of the songs in American Sign Language as the superstar performers rap and sing on stage.

The five music artists set for Sunday's show have a combined 44 Grammys. Eminem has the most with 15. Blige is the only return performer among the group — she was part of an ensemble cast that featured Aerosmith, NSYNC, Britney Spears and Nelly back in 2001.

Dre emerged from the West Coast gangster rap scene alongside Eazy-E and Ice Cube to help form the group N.W.A., which made a major mark in the hip-hop culture and music industry with controversial lyrics in the late 1980s. Dre is responsible for promoting rap stars such as Snoop Dogg, Eminem, 50 Cent and Lamar. Dre also produced Blige's No. 1 hit song "Family Affair."

Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Blige and Lamar join a list of celebrated musicians who have played during Super Bowl halftime shows, including Beyoncé, Madonna, Coldplay, Katy Perry, U2, Lady Gaga, Michael Jackson, Jennifer Lopez, Shakira and most recently The Weeknd.

The game and halftime show will air live on NBC.

Lawmakers launch 'all levels' probe into Ronald Greene death

By JIM MUSTIAN and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

Declaring "no cover-up will be tolerated," Louisiana's House speaker announced a bipartisan legislative investigation Thursday into the deadly 2019 arrest of Black motorist Ronald Greene, an inquiry that will examine the state's response at "all levels," from troopers to the governor.

Republican Rep. Clay Schexnayder said he launched the probe in response to an Associated Press report last month that showed Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards was informed within hours that troopers arresting Greene engaged in a "violent, lengthy struggle," yet he kept quiet for two years as state police told a much different story to the victim's family and in official reports: that Greene died from a crash after a high-speed chase.

"These events have raised serious questions regarding who knew what and when," Schexnayder said in a statement. "The actions taken that night and the cryptic decisions and statements made every step of the way since then have eroded public trust."

Edwards, who was in the midst of a tight reelection campaign at the time of Greene's May 2019 death near Monroe, did not speak out in detail about the case until last May, after the AP obtained and published long-withheld body-camera video showing white troopers jolting Greene with stun guns, punching him in the face and dragging him by his ankle shackles as he wailed, "I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

After decrying the prospect of a legislative probe during a news conference last week as "an absolute witch hunt," Edwards said in a statement Thursday that he now welcomes "any and all legislative oversight."

"I am certain that any fair and impartial investigation will conclude that I made no attempt to impede or interfere with any investigation into Mr. Greene's death," the governor said. "Any allegation to the contrary is simply not true."

Edwards' news conference last week marked the first time he characterized the actions of the troopers involved in Greene's arrest as "racist." He said he was unaware Greene had been mistreated until Septem-

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ber 2020 and did not speak out about the troopers' actions — even after privately watching the footage — because of an ongoing federal civil rights investigation.

Schexnayder said a new investigative committee made up of four Democrats and four Republicans will begin public hearings in the coming weeks, with Edwards himself among the witnesses likely to be called. Lawmakers are also expected to request a range of documents, including text messages from Edwards that he has yet to release in response to a public records request by AP.

Edwards has denied Schexnayder's contention in the recent AP report that the governor met with him last June and sought to discourage a legislative inquiry into the case by blaming Greene's death on a car wreck.

Page Cortez, the Republican Senate president, said he was also at the meeting and recalled the governor making the argument that "nothing nefarious" happened in Greene's arrest; that Greene "ran into a tree" after a chase; and that no criminal charges were going to be brought in the case. Cortez also backed Schexnayder's account of the governor saying there was no need for lawmakers to take action.

Cortez said recent events have made clear that lawmakers — and the public — need more information. "The legislature, as a whole, feels like we need to get more answers and be more transparent about what took place," he said.

"I want to know exactly what happened to make sure the family gets justice," said state Rep. C. Denise Marcelle, a Baton Rouge Democrat appointed to the committee. "The governor should answer any questions we have but our focus has to be the entire, holistic view of the investigation."

The legislative action is playing out amid a more than 2-year-old federal civil rights probe into the deadly encounter and whether police brass obstructed justice to protect the troopers who arrested Greene.

An AP investigation found Greene's death was part of a pattern of state police violence shrouded in secrecy, and among at least a dozen cases over the past decade in which troopers or their bosses ignored or concealed evidence of beatings, deflected blame and impeded efforts to root out misconduct.

In a virtual news conference Thursday, the National Bar Association, which represents more than 66,000 mostly African American lawyers, joined Greene's mother and sister in calling on Edwards to step down over the Greene case.

"My family will never rest because my son was murdered by the Louisiana state troopers and it was condoned," said Greene's mother, Mona Hardin, adding later, "I'm disgusted that you are allowed to hold the office of governor."

EXPLAINER: The drug behind Russia's Olympic doping case

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — The first big doping case at the Beijing Olympics involves one of its biggest stars. And it seems far from straightforward, not least because she is just 15 years old and has protections as a minor in the anti-doping rule book.

The country at the center of it? Russia. Again.

Here's a look at the drug that Kamila Valieva of the ROC — short for Russian Olympic Committee and the name under which the country is competing because of previous doping violations — is suspected of taking, and how the situation might play out in coming days.

WHAT IS THE DRUG?

The medication trimetazidine is a metabolic agent that helps prevent angina attacks and treats the symptoms of vertigo, according to the European Union's medicines agency. It can increase blood flow efficiency and improve endurance — both crucial to any high-end athletic performance.

It is on the prohibited list managed by the World Anti-Doping Agency in the category of "hormone and metabolic modulators."

WHEN DID SHE TEST POSITIVE?

It is so far unclear when and where Valieva tested positive, and unclear which organization had responsibility for first handling the case and which WADA-accredited laboratories have been involved.

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At 15, she was mostly under the radar entering this season, even as a former junior world champion. Valieva won a world-level event in Sochi in November and then became national champion after competing on Dec. 24-25 in St. Petersburg. At that later event, the Russian national anti-doping agency, known as RUSADA, would have had the option to test her.

In January, she won again at the European Championships in Tallinn, Estonia, where the International Skating Union should have overseen collecting samples, especially from medalists.

On Jan. 27, the official Olympic period started and the IOC had authority for the anti-doping program, which it delegates to the International Testing Agency.

PREVIOUS DOPING CASES

The most famous case of trimetazidine in sports doping involved Chinese swimmer Sun Yang.

The three-time Olympic champion served a three-month ban in 2014 in a ruling that was initially not published by China's anti-doping agency. WADA did not use its right to challenge that Chinese judgment with an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Because it was Sun's first doping offense, he was punished more severely for his second, and more high-profile, offense of refusing to cooperate with a sample collections team at his home in China.

Russian bobsledder Nadezhda Sergeeva tested positive for trimetazidine at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics. She was disqualified from the two-woman bob event and served an eight-month ban.

WHO WILL HANDLE THE CASE?

The athlete-testing program for the Olympics is run by the International Testing Agency, based in the IOC's home city of Lausanne, Switzerland. The ITA also designed a pre-Olympic program of targeted testing of athletes or sports deemed high-risk or who its experts decided had undergone too few tests.

Typical doping cases during the Olympics are handled and announced by the ITA, which imposes a provisional suspension that removes an athlete from competition.

Athletes and their teams can challenge those decisions at CAS, which has representatives in Beijing to handle urgent cases. It has a Games-time panel of judges to specialize in doping cases.

Valieva's case could involve, as reported, a sample taken before the official Olympic period began — either at an international ISU event, the national championships or during a training period in an "out of competition" test.

At the Tokyo Olympics, Nigerian sprinter Blessing Okagbare was pulled from competing ahead of the 100-meter semifinals when a pre-Games test returned as positive. Her suspension was imposed by track and field's Athletics Integrity Unit.

RUSADA would likely manage the case against Valieva if the positive sample has been taken in Russia.

The agency is trying to re-establish credibility in world sports. During ongoing fallout in the scandal of state-backed Russian doping and cover-ups, RUSADA was ruled non-compliant by WADA.

The two-year slate of sanctions imposed by CAS — including the ban on Russia's team name, flag and anthem at the Summer Games in Tokyo and the Winter Games in Beijing — is due to expire in December. WADA could yet try to extend it.

Valieva's case also should eventually involve the International Olympic Committee because she and the ROC team already competed and won the figure skating team event.

Stripping titles and re-allocating medals could fall to an IOC disciplinary committee chaired by Denis Oswald, a Swiss lawyer and long-time member of the Olympic body.

AGE IS A FACTOR

Another complicating factor is Valieva's age, which can offer exemptions or leniency as a "protected person."

The World Anti-Doping Code definition of a "protected person" includes athletes who have not yet turned 16 at the time of a doping violation.

The circumstances of Valieva's case should also focus on the advice and decisions of her team officials and coaches.

An investigation of "athlete support personnel" is mandatory when a protected athlete is implicated in

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a doping case.

If doping is proven, a 15-year-old athlete like Valieva faces a maximum two-year ban instead of four. The minimum sanction is no ban and a reprimand "depending on the protected ... athlete's degree of fault."

While public disclosure of cases is mandatory for adult athletes, for minors the question of identifying them "shall be proportionate to the facts and circumstances of the case."

Biden seeking professional diversity in his judicial picks

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden spent a recent flight aboard Air Force One reminiscing with lawmakers and aides about his start as a young lawyer in Delaware working as a public defender in the late 1960s.

The flight from New York to Washington was short, and there wasn't much time to explore the president's brief time in the job during the civil rights era. But as Biden considers his first Supreme Court nominee, this lesser-known period in his biography could offer insight into the personal experience he brings to the decision. The account was relayed by a person familiar with the trip who insisted on anonymity to discuss it.

Biden has already made history by nominating more public defenders, civil rights attorneys and nonprofit lawyers to the federal bench during his first year in office than any other president, increasing not just the racial and gender diversity of the federal judiciary but also the range of professional expertise. And it's possible that theme will continue as he looks to make more history by nominating the first Black woman to the nation's highest court.

While three of the current justices have experience as prosecutors, none was a criminal defense attorney. The last justice with serious experience in defense was Thurgood Marshall, a civil rights attorney nominated about 55 years ago. He was the first Black person on the court and retired in 1991.

Some of the women on Biden's list of potential nominees have deep public defense or civil rights backgrounds: Ketanji Brown Jackson, 51, for example, worked as a public defender and served on the U.S. Sentencing Commission before she was nominated to the bench by President Barack Obama. Eunice Lee, 51, whom Biden named to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit in August, is the first former federal defender to serve on that court.

Biden's judicial appointments thus far make clear his interest in professional diversity.

Nearly 30% of Biden's nominees to the federal bench have been public defenders, 24% have been civil rights lawyers and 8% labor attorneys. By the end of his first year, Biden had won confirmation of 40 judges, the most since President Ronald Reagan. Of those, 80% are women and 53% are people of color, according to the White House.

"It's so important to have a diversity of perspectives and having the judiciary really reflect the diversity of lived experiences and perspectives of the folks who are coming before them," said Lisa Cylar Barrett, director of policy at the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund.

The Supreme Court hears only a fraction of federal cases filed each year. Federal judges are hearing most of the cases, with roughly 400,000 cases filed in federal trial courts a year. The high court hears only about 150 of the more than 7,000 cases it is asked to review annually.

Most of the judges appointed to the federal bench have worked as prosecutors, corporate attorneys or both. A survey three years ago found more than 73% of sitting federal judges were men, and more than 80% were white, according to the Center for American Progress.

A diversity of professional expertise makes for a more fair and just bench, advocates say. Judges draw on their personal histories to help them weigh arguments and decide cases, and they also learn from each other. Public defenders often represent the indigent and the marginalized, those who often can't afford their own attorneys.

"They represent the 80% percent of people in the criminal legal system too low-income to afford a lawyer," said Emily Galvin-Almanza, a former public defender who founded the nonprofit Partners for Justice. "So when you put a public defender on the bench, you're putting a person on who listens with a very different

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ear. You have a person on the bench with an experience of the realities of very, very disempowered people.”

Biden’s brief time as a public defender isn’t widely discussed, and it isn’t listed in his official biography on the White House website. He’s more prone to talk about his 36 years as a senator and his time as head of the Judiciary Committee, where he oversaw six Supreme Court nominations.

But the president has spoken at times about his brief time as a public defender before he became a U.S. senator at the age of 29. It’s informed some of his decisions in office, like directing federal grant money for public defense and expanding other federal efforts on public defense.

“Civil rights, the Vietnam War and President Nixon’s rampant abuse of power were the reasons I entered public life to begin with,” Biden said in a 2019 speech in South Carolina during the presidential campaign. “That’s why I had chosen at that time to leave a prestigious law firm that I had been hired by and become a public defender — because those people who needed the most help couldn’t afford to be defended in those days.”

In a 2007 memoir, he called the job “God’s work.”

The president promised during his campaign for president that he’d nominate a Black woman to the bench, and he spent his first year in office broadening his potential applicant pool through judicial appointments. Most Supreme Court justices have come from federal appeals courts, but it’s not a requirement. Among the current justices, only Justice Elena Kagan wasn’t a federal appeals court judge before joining.

Federal judges are often chosen from state courts, which also lack in diversity. But Biden’s very public push to diversify federal judges could have an impact on how judges in the states look, too.

“Neither state courts nor federal courts reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, or the diversity of the legal profession. Courts across the country are falling short,” said Alicia Bannon, the director of the Judiciary Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. “But we’re hoping that is slowly changing.”

Biden has promised a rigorous selection process for his Supreme Court nominee. His team, led by former Democratic Sen. Doug Jones, is reviewing past writings, public remarks and decisions, learning the life stories of the candidates and interviewing them and people who know them. Background checks will be updated and candidates may be asked about their health. After all, it’s a lifetime appointment.

The goal is to provide the president with the utmost confidence in the eventual pick’s judicial philosophy, fitness for the court and preparation for the high-stakes confirmation fight. Interviewing potential candidates comes later, but Biden has already spoken to some of the women who may be under consideration back when they were being appointed to other courts.

Biden will also continue to seek the advice of lawmakers. He was to host Senate Judiciary Committee Democrats on Thursday, a White House official said.

Jobless claims fall again for third straight week

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits declined for the third straight week.

Jobless claims fell by 16,000 to 223,000 last week, from 239,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The four-week average for claims, which compensates for weekly volatility, declined by 2,000 to 253,250 after rising for five straight weeks as the omicron variant of the coronavirus spread, disrupting business in many parts of the U.S.

Last week, the Labor Department reported a surprising burst of hiring in January, with employers adding 467,000 jobs. It also revised upward its estimate for job gains in November and December by a combined 709,000. The unemployment rate edged up to a still-low 4% from 3.9%, as more people began looking for work, but not all of them securing jobs right away.

In total, 1.6 million Americans were collecting jobless aid the week that ended Jan. 29, essentially flat from the previous week.

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Even as omicron variant spread quickly earlier this winter, employers have been eager to hire, a sign of a resilient economy. That winter spike in infections briefly tripped up the country's strong recovery from 2020's virus-caused recession, but employers appear confident in long-term growth.

Massive government spending and the vaccine rollout jumpstarted the economy as employers added a record 6.4 million jobs last year. The U.S. economy expanded 5.7% in 2021, growing last year at the fastest annual pace since a 7.2% surge in 1984, also coming after a recession.

An overheated U.S. economy has spawned inflation not seen in four decades, leading the Federal Reserve to ease its support for the economy. The Fed has signaled that it would begin a series of interest-rate hikes in March, reversing pandemic-era policies that have fueled hiring and growth but also stubborn inflation.

The government also reported Thursday that consumer prices rose 7.5% in the past 12 months, the steepest year-over-year increase since February 1982.

Historic Coretta Scott home where she wed MLK now forgotten

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

MARION, Ala. (AP) — Bullet holes pock a rusted mailbox outside the vacant home where Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott were married in 1953. Part of the old wooden structure has collapsed, as have nearby utility buildings.

Most anyplace connected to the best-known voice of the civil rights movement is a magnet for tourists, particularly around the January holiday honoring King's birthday and in February during Black History Month. His birthplace in Atlanta is a national historic park; the parsonage where he and his wife lived in Montgomery is part of the U.S. Civil Rights Trail.

Yet the spot where the Kings spent one of the most important days of their lives — the childhood home of Coretta Scott King, who went on to found the King Center in Atlanta following her husband's assassination in 1968 — sits all but unknown on the side of a two-lane highway in rural Perry County, one of Alabama's poorest places. Even some locals remain largely unaware of its historical importance.

"I don't really know anything about the house," said Kay Beckett, president of the Perry County Historical and Preservation Society.

An expert said the Scott home is one of many important Black historical sites that have been forgotten across the nation.

"It's actually more typical than you'd imagine. We pass by many Black heritage sites every day, standing in plain sight seemingly without history or meaning. Yet, these overlooked places hold exceptional cultural and educational value," said Brent Leggs, executive director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The action fund recently received a \$20 million donation to preserve Black churches, and it has raised more than \$70 million to assist with more than 200 preservation projects nationally since being started following the deadly "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. Yet the Scott and King families' wedding venue is all but off the radar.

There's no single reason why the place is a forgotten relic, officials say. One problem is that it's far off the beaten path for travelers, nowhere near a major highway and about 75 miles (121 kilometers) from Birmingham to the northeast or Montgomery to the east.

Also, it's privately owned and not open to the public. Tax records show the property is owned by Bernice King, the couple's youngest daughter, and not much has ever been done with it. Bernice King didn't respond to email messages about the home that were sent to aides at The King Center, where she works as chief executive.

"It is standing and they have a caretaker who cuts the grass," said Albert Turner Jr., a county commissioner whose father Albert Turner led civil rights activities in the region and advised King.

Cars and tour buses occasionally stop by, longtime neighbor William Carter said, but there's no sign or historic marker to tell the property's story. He still misses Coretta King's parents, Obie and Bernice M. Scott, who died in 1998 and 1996, respectively.

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"Him and his wife were the nicest people I ever met in my life," said Carter.

Coretta Scott, a Marion native, and King, who grew up in Atlanta, met in Boston in the early 1950s while he was attending Boston University and she was studying opera at the New England Conservatory of Music.

"She talked about things other than music. I never will forget, the first discussion we had was about the question of racial and economic injustice and the question of peace," King wrote in his autobiography.

The two wed in the front yard of the wood-frame home on June 18, 1953, with King's father performing the ceremony; a wedding photo showed him in a white jacket, her in a gown. Their marriage license is still at the county courthouse in Marion, logged in a book marked "COLORED" in keeping with the Jim Crow law at the time that required segregating everything by race, even marriage records.

Scott's parents remained at the white house with a broad front porch while the young couple lived in Boston and then Montgomery before settling in Atlanta. Obie Scott preached at the nearby Mt. Tabor A.M.E. Zion Church and operated a country store right beside the home; a cash register, scales and cigar boxes are among the items still visible through a broken front window.

It's not that the Kings are forgotten in Perry County. The home is located on Coretta Scott King Memorial Highway, and a bust of Coretta King erected following her death in 2006 stands outside the Mt. Tabor church.

But some believe more should be done. Perry County Probate Judge Eldora B. Anderson, who lives in suburban Birmingham, said she took her grandchildren to see the house and church.

"They had so many questions," she said.

Leggs, the preservationist, said in an email interview that the Scott home "is a cultural asset important to our nation's 20th century history."

"This home stands as the physical evidence and existence of a great American and a great family legacy," he said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Feb. 11, the 42nd day of 2022. There are 323 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 11, 2013, with a few words in Latin, Pope Benedict XVI did what no pope had done in more than half a millennium: announced his resignation. The bombshell came during a routine morning meeting of Vatican cardinals. (The 85-year-old pontiff was succeeded by Pope Francis.)

On this date:

In 660 B.C., tradition holds that Japan was founded as Jimmu ascended the throne as the country's first emperor.

In 1847, American inventor Thomas Alva Edison was born in Milan, Ohio.

In 1937, a six-week-old sit-down strike against General Motors ended, with the company agreeing to recognize the United Automobile Workers Union.

In 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin signed the Yalta Agreement, in which Stalin agreed to declare war against Imperial Japan following Nazi Germany's capitulation.

In 1963, American author and poet Sylvia Plath was found dead in her London flat, a suicide; she was 30.

In 1975, Margaret Thatcher was elected leader of Britain's opposition Conservative Party.

In 1979, followers of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (hoh-MAY'-nee) seized power in Iran.

In 1990, South African Black activist Nelson Mandela was freed after 27 years in captivity.

In 2006, Vice President Dick Cheney accidentally shot and wounded Harry Whittington, a companion during a weekend quail-hunting trip in Texas.

In 2008, the Pentagon charged Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (HAH'-leed shayk moh-HAH'-med) and five other detainees at Guantanamo Bay with murder and war crimes in connection with the Sept. 11 attacks.

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In 2011, Egypt exploded with joy after pro-democracy protesters brought down President Hosni Mubarak, whose resignation ended three decades of authoritarian rule.

In 2020, the World Health Organization gave the official name of COVID-19 to the disease caused by the coronavirus that had emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

Ten years ago: Pop singer Whitney Houston, 48, was found dead in a hotel room bathtub in Beverly Hills, California.

Five years ago: Yale University announced it would change the name of a residential college honoring 19th-century alumnus and former U.S. Vice President John C. Calhoun, who was an ardent supporter of slavery.

One year ago: At the Senate impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump, Democrats asserted that Trump had incited an attack on the U.S. Capitol, put his own vice president in danger and expressed solidarity with rioters who sought to overturn the 2020 election in his name. President Joe Biden ended the "national emergency" that Trump had declared in order to take money from the Pentagon for a wall along the Mexican border. California surpassed New York as the state with the most coronavirus deaths. An Alabama inmate won a reprieve from a lethal injection after the Supreme Court said the state could not proceed without his pastor in the death chamber. (Willie B. Smith III would be executed in October 2021.) Sister André, a French nun who was believed to be the world's second-oldest person, celebrated her 117th birthday at a care home in France after surviving COVID-19. A British judge ruled that a newspaper invaded the privacy of the Duchess of Sussex, the former Meghan Markle, by publishing a personal letter to her estranged father.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Conrad Janis is 94. Gospel singer Jimmy Carter is 90. Actor Tina Louise is 88. Fashion designer Mary Quant is 88. Bandleader Sergio Mendes is 81. Actor Philip Anglim is 70. Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush is 69. Actor Catherine Hickland is 66. Rock musician David Uosikkinen (aw-SIK'-ken-ihn) (The Hooters) is 66. Actor Carey Lowell is 61. Singer Sheryl Crow is 60. Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin is 58. Actor Jennifer Aniston is 53. Actor Damian Lewis is 51. Actor Marisa Petroro is 50. Singer D'Angelo is 48. Actor Brice Beckham is 46. Rock M-C/vocalist Mike Shinoda (Linkin Park) is 45. Singer-actor Brandy is 43. Country musician Jon Jones (The Eli Young Band) is 42. Actor Matthew Lawrence is 42. R&B singer Kelly Rowland is 41. Actor Natalie Dormer is 40. Singer Aubrey O'Day is 38. Actor Q'orianka (kohr-ee-AHN'-kuh) Kilcher is 32. Actor Taylor Lautner is 30.