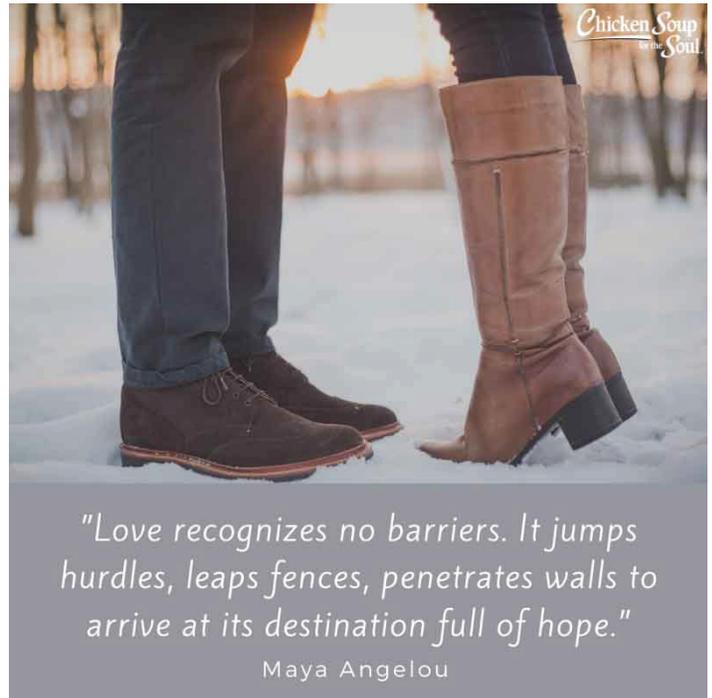


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*"Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope."*

Maya Angelou

## UpComing Events

### Monday, Feb. 14

**Canceled:** GBB at Flandreau Indian 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

Thursday, April 7: Groton CDE

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

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

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## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

### School Board Meeting

February 14, 2022 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

#### AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

#### POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

#### CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of January 10, 2022 school board meeting as drafted or amended.
2. Approval of January 2022 District bills for payment.
3. Approval of January 2022 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.
4. Approval of January 2022 School Lunch Report.
5. Approval of January 2022 School Transportation Report.

#### OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Program Overview Presentation
  - a. **Grades JK, K, and 1...**A. Schuring, L. DeHoet, A. Gibbs, J. Milbrandt, E. Eichler
3. Continued discussion and necessary action on District response to COVID-19.
  - a. Local COVID-19 Update
4. Continued discussion regarding athletics cooperative request from Doland School District.
5. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

#### NEW BUSINESS:

1. Approve specifications for bid for Groton Elementary roof replacement with bid opening at 2:00 PM on March 11, 2022.
2. Approve Planned Maintenance Program agreement from Architectural Roofing and Sheet Metal.
3. Approve specifications for bid for new school bus with bid opening at 2:00 PM on March 14, 2022.
4. Approve 2022-2023 School Calendar.
5. Consider SDHSAA Intent to Participate – Softball.
6. Approve bid for sale of surplus van.
7. Executive session pursuant SDCL 1-25-2(1) including Superintendent's evaluation.

#### ADJOURN

## Does All Back Pain Warrant Imaging?

Experts estimate that well over 80 percent of people will experience back pain at some point in their lives. Perhaps ten percent of adults experience it at any given moment. Back pain is extremely common, and people with back pain can be extremely miserable. It may hurt to move, sit, stand, lay, even breathe. No wonder back pain accounts for so many visits to the doctor!



**Debra Johnston, MD**

When people with acute back pain come to see me, they often have a preconceived notion of what will happen. They anticipate I will talk with them, examine them, and many expect x-rays or an MRI. They are often surprised, and sometimes worried, when I stop short of ordering imaging.

My first goal when I see someone with acute back pain is to rule out rare conditions that threaten life and limb. Could this be a fracture? Cancer? Infection in the bone or spinal cord? Severe and rapidly progressing compression of the nerves? These conditions could require imaging for diagnosis and urgent treatment. However, they are uncommon, and unless specific “red flags” are revealed during the patient history and exam, it is extremely unlikely a rare condition is responsible for the pain.

Most acute back pain gets better in four to six weeks. Unwarranted imaging only increases medical costs and the likelihood of invasive treatment like surgery or injections but doesn’t get people better any faster. For most people, the best approach for relieving back pain is to stay as active as you can, take an anti-inflammatory pain medicine if you don’t have a reason to avoid them, use a heating pad, and perhaps have manipulation by a chiropractor, osteopathic doctor, or physical therapist.

When imaging is used, it is important to realize that something seen on an x-ray or MRI might not actually be responsible for the back pain. Indeed, it has been found that as we age, it becomes more likely that, even with no back symptoms, we will have abnormalities on imaging. This is true in about ten percent of people in their 30s; among the very old, the likelihood approaches 100 percent.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to chronic back pain. It takes a knowledgeable clinician to tease out what might be causing the problem and which treatment might help. I urge caution if anyone tries to sell you a treatment without careful analysis of your individual situation. Your money might be better spent on a heating pad, and a gym membership.

Debra Johnson, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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## Weekly Vikings Roundup

### Super Bowl Recap

By Duane & Jack Kolsrud

#### Super Bowl LVI

An improbable matchup at the beginning of the season, the Los Angeles Rams and Cincinnati Bengals did not disappoint in Super Bowl XVI.

The game started in a Hollywood-like fashion. Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson was on-field to pontificate like his wrestling alter ego while the players nervously waited for the game to begin.

After stopping the Bengals on fourth down in the first quarter, the Rams take advantage of the Bengal aggressiveness. The Rams scored the first touchdown on a beautiful corner route from Matthew Stafford to Odell Beckham Jr. Beckham started red-hot only to go out late in the second quarter with a knee injury and never returned to the game.

After a Bengals field goal, the Rams connect with the top QB-WR duo of the year on a Stafford pass to Cooper Kupp from 11-yards out. The Bengals used a mix of running and passing plays on their next possession, scoring on a halfback pass from Joe Mixon to Tee Higgins.

The Rams march the ball down the field only to have Matthew Stafford remind Detroit fans that he can still force a throw into tight coverage and gets intercepted in the endzone. The score at halftime ends with the Rams leading the Bengals 13-10.

The second half started with a bang. On the first play of the half, Joe Burrow tosses a 75-yard touchdown pass to Tee Higgins down the left sideline. The replay showed that Higgins could have been penalized for a facemask on defensive back Jalen Ramsey. On the very next drive for the Rams, Stafford gets intercepted at the 30-yard line and the Bengals convert the turnover into a 25-yard field. The Rams were quickly down by seven points.

But this was going to be a night for Cooper Kupp and Aaron Donald- the best offensive and defensive players in the NFL this season. For most of the fourth quarter, it was a chess match between the two teams. With seven minutes left to go in the game, the Rams go on a 15 play drive, and Kupp scores again on a 1-yard pass from Stafford. Joe Burrow drives the Bengals to mid-field but Donald ends the game in All-Pro fashion, hitting Burrow on the final Bengal offensive play of the game.

The Rams win the Super Bowl, 23-20.

The 2021 season may go down as one of the best playoff seasons of all time. The final seven games all came down to the wire. Luckily for the Viking faithful, we didn't have to endure the pain of another heartbreaking loss.

It's all about the commercials:

Over 50 new commercials debuted during the Super Bowl. Here are our top 5 in 2022- we had some help voting as the lovely Gayle Kolsrud(Jack's mom) helped in choosing the best ads.

1. Toyota Tundra- Keeping up with the Jones'
2. ETrade with the return of baby Benny
3. Lay's Potato Chips Zombie Wife with Paul Rudd and Seth Rogan
4. Uber Eats and Don't Eats new delivery options
5. Michelob Ultra bowling with Peyton Manning and Serena Williams

Final note:

Thank you to everyone for reading our weekly recaps this season. Jack and I had a blast doing this for the first time and hope to be doing it again next year. It was a labor of love for some diehard lifelong Viking fans to report on their favorite team in purple. Hopefully, we'll get to report on more wins next season as Kevin O'Connell from the Rams takes over the reign as the Mike Zimmer era has come to an end. SKOL!!

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## No. 21 Northern State Defeats Third Ranked Opponent of 2021-22

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 21 Northern State University wrestling team closed out the regular season on Sunday with a win over No. 20 University of Mary. The Wolves won six of the ten wrestled weights, as well as one exhibition match.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 19, MARY 13

Records: NSU 10-3 (6-3 NSIC), MARY 10-3 (4-3 NSIC)

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Landen Fischer opened the dual with a big 12-9 victory over Jaden Verhagen in the 125-pound bout
- The University of Mary took their only lead of the dual in the following match with a 9-0 major decision
- Kolton Roth and No. 8 Wyatt Turnquist tallied back-to-back wins for the Wolves at 141 and 149 pounds
- Roth defeated Laken Boese in an 8-6 decision and Turnquist tallied a 9-0 major decision over Lincoln Turman
- The Marauders cut in to the Wolves lead with a decision win at 157, however Kelby Hawkins got things back on track with a 6-2 decision victory over Leo Mushinsky
- Treyton Cacek and Cole Huss sealed the match win for Northern at 184 and 197 pounds
- Cacek tallied a 6-2 win over Phillip Springsteen and Huss notched an upset victory over No. 10 Matt Kaylor, 9-4
- The win is the Wolves 15th over the Marauders all time and fourth in the Burkett-era

### FULL RESULTS

125: Landen Fischer (Northern State) over Jaden Verhagen (Mary) (Dec 12-9)  
133: Reece Barnhardt (Mary) over Teagan Block (Northern State) (MD 9-0)  
141: Kolton Roth (Northern State) over Laken Boese (Mary) (Dec 8-6)  
149: #8 Wyatt Turnquist (Northern State) over Lincoln Turman (Mary) (MD 9-0)  
157: #10 Braydon Huber (Mary) over #8 James Burks (Northern State) (Dec 5-4)  
165: Kelby Hawkins (Northern State) over Leo Mushinsky (Mary) (Dec 6-2)  
174: #9 Max Bruss (Mary) over Tanner Wiese (Northern State) (Dec 5-2)  
184: Treyton Cacek (Northern State) over Phillip Springsteen (Mary) (Dec 6-2)  
197: Cole Huss (Northern State) over #10 Matt Kaylor (Mary) (Dec 9-4)  
285: Gerardo Jaime (Mary) over Joshua Trumble (Northern State) (Dec 8-4)  
149: Exhibition: Adam DeBoer (Northern State) over Ryan Scherber (Mary) (Fall 4:10)  
285: Exhibition: Levi Malcolm (Mary) over George Bolling (Northern State) (Dec 7-1)

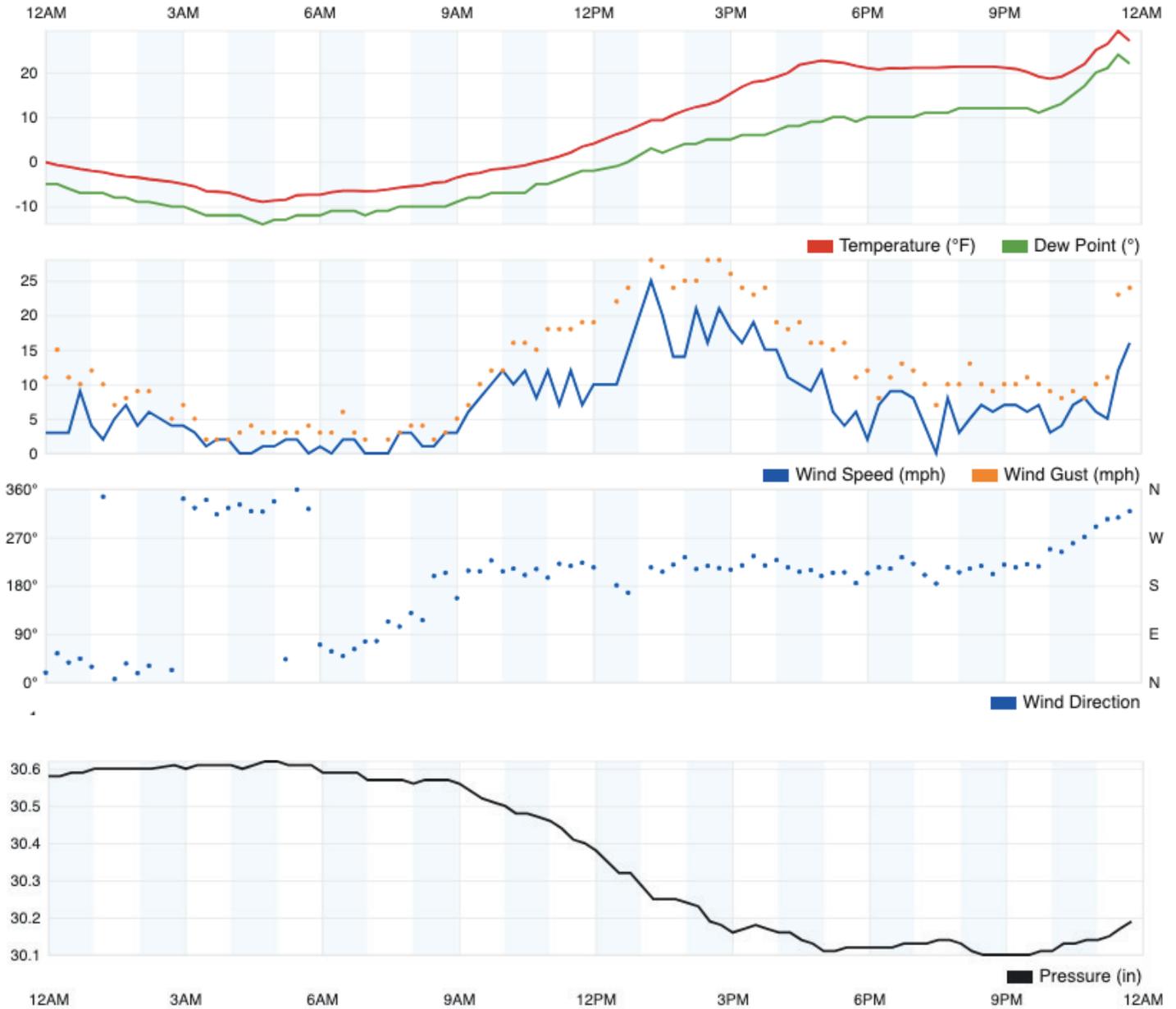
### UP NEXT

Northern State returns to action on Saturday, February 26 from the NCAA Super Region 5 Tournament, hosted by MSU Moorhead.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Increasing  
Clouds

High: 16 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 11 °F

Tuesday



Mostly Cloudy  
and Breezy

High: 37 °F

Tuesday  
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 12 °F

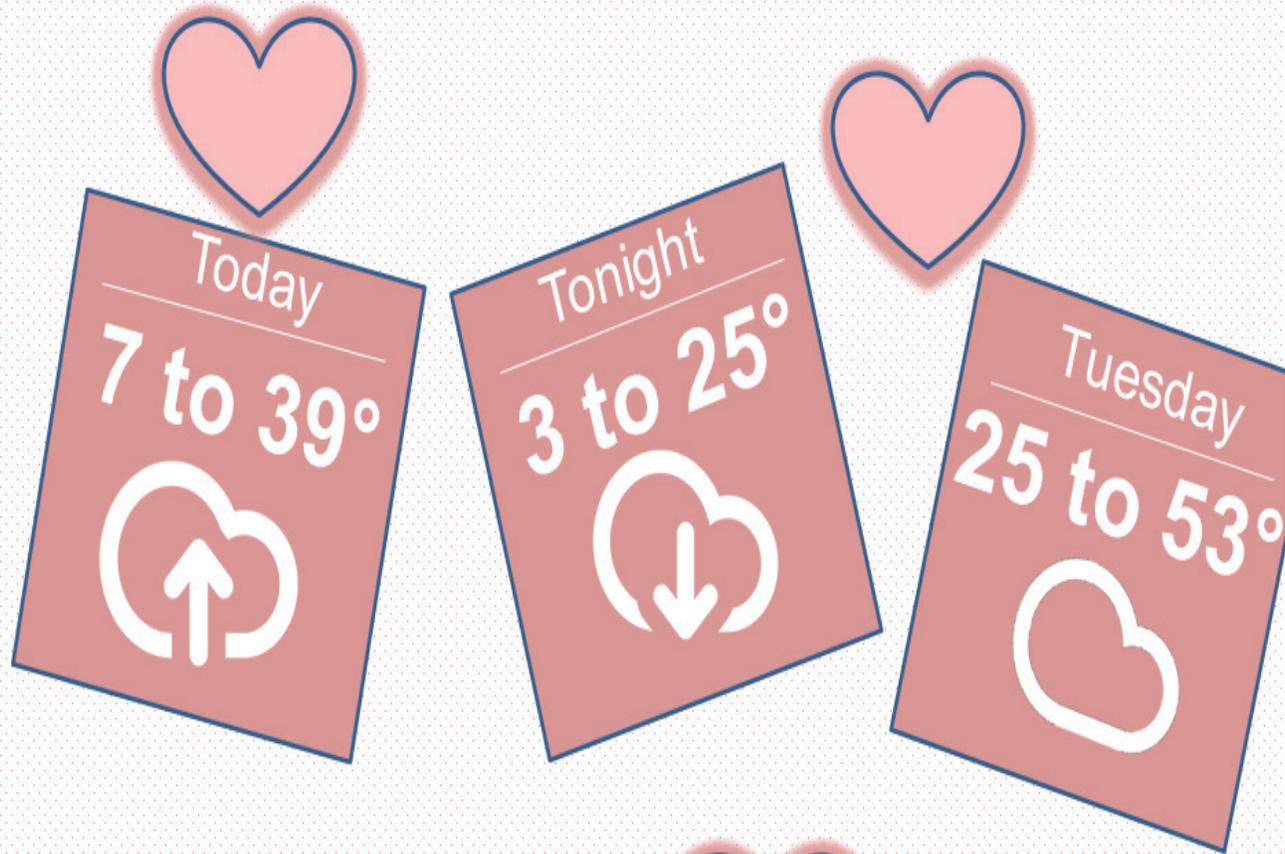
Wednesday



Mostly Sunny  
then Partly  
Sunny and  
Blustery

High: 20 °F

## Early Week Outlook



Overall quiet weather with increasing clouds today. Temperatures will range from the single digits across northeastern South Dakota into western Minnesota to the upper 30s in parts of central SD. Dry weather for tonight with clouds on the decrease. More clouds move in for Tuesday with overall warmer temperatures ranging from the mid-20s to the lower 50s!

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## Today in Weather History

February 14th, 1967: The heaviest snow fell in the central part of the state, with Pierre receiving 10 inches with 14 inches reported near Harrold. Elsewhere, 1 to 4 inches of snow was typical. Winds of 20 to 30 mph with gusts over 40 mph caused extensive drifting and blowing snow reducing visibilities to near zero. As a result, many schools were closed, and other activities were canceled. Temperatures of 5 to 15 degrees below zero were typical on the morning of the 15th. A farmer died in the storm near Yale, where his car stalled, and he attempted to walk.

February 14th, 1979: High winds of 50 mph or greater and snow from a half-inch to more than 14 inches moved through the state late on the 14th, with winds slowly subsiding on the 16th. Visibility was reduced to near zero at the height of the storm, and no travel was advised. Temperatures fell to 25 degrees below zero, with wind chills to 80 to 90 below on the 15th. One man suffered frostbite after being stranded in his truck for seventeen hours. In addition, power was lost at Wall due to high winds snapping power lines together.

1895: The most significant snowfall in the history of Houston, Texas, occurred on the 14th and 15th. The Houston area saw 20 inches of snow.

1899 - A great blizzard struck the eastern U.S. Washington D.C. received 20.5 inches of snow to bring their total snow depth to nearly three feet. The storm produced 36 inches of snow at Cape May NJ. (David Ludlum)

1940: A St. Valentine's Day Blizzard blankets New England with up to 18 inches of snow. Gale force winds associated with the storm strand many in downtown Boston.

1982: A "meteorological bomb" exploded in the Atlantic southeast of Newfoundland. The term is used to describe a storm that rapidly intensifies. The intense cyclone off the Atlantic coast capsized a drilling rig killing 84 persons and sank a Soviet freighter resulting in 33 more deaths. The cyclone produced 80 mph winds that whipped the water into waves fifty feet high.

1987 - A powerful storm spawned severe thunderstorms in Texas and Oklahoma, and produced heavy snow in the Rocky Mountain Region. Snowfall totals in Colorado ranged up to 27 inches at Telluride. Straight line winds gusting to 104 mph howled through Guadalupe Pass in West Texas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong northerly winds ushered arctic air into the north central U.S. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in Minnesota and the Dakotas. Winds gusted to 56 mph at Rapid City SD, and reached 65 mph at Cody WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990: Valentine's Day was a snowy one for many parts of Iowa and Illinois. Five to ten inches of snow fell across Iowa. Six to 12 inches of snow blanketed northern Illinois, and strong northeasterly winds accompanied the heavy snow. Air traffic came to a halt during the evening at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, where 9.7 inches of snow was reported. More than 250 traffic accidents were reported around Des Moines, Iowa, during the evening rush hour. In addition, an ice storm glazed east central sections of Illinois, causing twelve million dollars damage in Champaign County alone.

2004 - Dallas receives 3 inches of snow, wreaking havoc with Valentine's Day flower deliveries. The greatest snowfall since 1978 caused numerous traffic accidents, power outages and flight cancellations at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

2007: Light snow fell on Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, for the first time in over 60 years. They also saw light snow on February 28th, 2019.

2010: Vancouver struggled with above average, non-winter-like temperatures during the first weekend of the 2010 Winter Olympics. In fact, Vancouver was warmer, 48 degrees, than Miami, Florida, 45 degrees!



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## One - Yet Everyone

There is an ongoing argument in society that is contradictory and even confusing. There are those who say, "One size fits all. We are all the same." In other words, there are no differences in our needs. What affects me affects everyone else and what matters to me matters to everyone else.

The others say, "I'm different and cannot be compared to anyone else, and no one can understand me or my needs but me. So, don't try to force me into someone else's box!"

Who's right? Both. Each of us are different from everyone else, yet, in the eyes of God we all have the same needs.

The Psalmist cried, "May Your unfailing love come to me, Lord, Your salvation according to Your promises." There can be little doubt that when he looked at his life and his particular issues, he wanted God to recognize him. Perhaps he saw his sins as being more hideous and harmful than everyone else's and the problems he created for himself as more difficult to solve and more painful than anyone else's. So, he singled himself out and wanted the Lord to be sure that His "unfailing love" would include even him.

And, of course, it did. When Jesus said that "God so loved the world," He was as much a part of that world as anyone else. We sometimes forget that the cross of Christ is the great "leveler" of mankind. No one is above His cross and certainly no one is beyond it.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for a love that has no limits or favorites. Thank You for including each of us. Thank You for salvation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: May your unfailing love come to me, LORD, your salvation, according to your promise. Psalm 119:41

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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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## News from the Associated Press

### **South Dakota program aims to make it easier to feed tribes**

By RICHARD TWO BULLS South Dakota Public Broadcasting

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — The Sicangu Community Development Corporation is a grassroots organization on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation that is working to change the narrative of Western colonialism and broken policy at the hands of the U.S. government with community-driven, Lakota-based solutions.

One of these solutions is fulfilling the notion of food sovereignty. There are 20 communities spread across the Rosebud Sioux Reservation, meaning tribal members have to travel 20 to 30 miles or more to get groceries.

According to Matthew Wilson, Sicangu CDC's food sovereignty director, choices for food are often subpar. "Looking at the quality of food here, the produce isn't the best. It's inaccessible, it's unaffordable and leaving many people to rely on the grocery stores who are currently marketing towards an EBT market," said Wilson. "So a lot of processed foods, people you see getting ramen, frozen pizzas and things like that."

Many tribal members rely on the Commodity Supplemental Food Program under the U.S. Department of Agriculture for sustenance. Commodities are often compared to the rations that were once given to Native Americans when they were forced to live on reservations. This reason alone is why food sovereignty is important in addressing that dependency, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

"We kind of had a vibrant food system and that was taken away from us, leaving us to rely on government subsidies and commodity food programs," said Wilson. "And so there's just been a history of that disconnection with our food and having that power to clearly control our own food system again. And so our goal is really just to create that for ourselves again, a modern Indigenous food system here on Rosebud that's independent and regenerative."

Sicangu CDC's farm, Keya Wakpala Gardens, is a 1 acre production and teaching site where most of their produce is grown and used for their seasonal farmers market in Mission.

"I think looking at our community now there's so many people wanting to start their own gardens, start their own backyard chickens, learning how to identify different wild plants and using them in food and medicine," said Wilson. "And that wasn't really the case just for myself growing up. I wasn't exposed to that. I didn't even know what food sovereignty was growing up. And so that's something that I have been seeing more and more of, even our young people wanting to do this work and learn about this. I think food sovereignty builds a sense of cultural identity as well."

Sicangu CDC's food initiative is not only helping with regaining that cultural identity, but they also hope to engage youth in becoming interested in agriculture with a farm apprenticeship program.

"In Lakota we call it Waicahya Icacapi Kte (They Will Grow Into Producers)," said Wilson. "And so we've been doing that. This is going to be our third year now. And our goal really is to increase the amount of local food producers and tribal food producers here, which will ultimately result in more food production here on Rosebud."

Sicangu CDC's food initiative is giving their people the opportunity to choose the kind of food that they consume that is sustainable and regenerative. They recently partnered with South Dakota State University to integrate Lakota knowledge into agriculture and science curriculum in schools.

"Our goal is really just to work with SDSU to co-develop a Lakota based science and teaching curriculum for K-12 students here on Rosebud," said Wilson. "And so some of that is providing workshops and trainings for teachers and how to implement that curriculum in their classrooms, but also having stuff for youth like career fairs, with careers in regenerative agriculture."

Food sovereignty is a long term goal for Sicangu CDC and they hope that it can not only promote interest in self-sustainability, but also create jobs and potential entrepreneurial ventures for tribal members.

### **Authorities investigating shooting, fight in Hill City**

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HILL CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities are investigating a shooting and fight involving several people in Hill City.

The Pennington County Sheriff's Office responded to a report of shots fired early Saturday morning at a residence on Allen Gulch Road in Hill City.

Authorities say several people had minor injuries that were sustained in a physical fight but it did not appear that anyone had been shot.

Multiple people were detained in connection to the shooting, and one man was arrested.

Authorities say charges are pending for others.

## German leader in Ukraine as fears of Russian invasion grow

By YURAS KARMAU and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — More NATO troops headed to Eastern Europe and some nations worked to move their citizens and diplomats out of Ukraine on Monday, as Germany's chancellor made a last-ditch attempt to head off a feared Russian invasion that some warn could be just days away.

With the world already on high alert, U.K. Armed Forces Minister James Heapey said a Russian attack could "effectively now happen with no notice." That follows a warning from U.S. officials that an invasion could come this week — leading to a flurry of diplomacy but also deterrence measures.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Ukraine on Monday and plans to continue on to Moscow, where he will try to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin to stand down. Moscow denies it has any plans to invade but has massed well over 130,000 troops near Ukraine and, in the U.S. view, has built up enough firepower to launch an attack on short notice.

"We are experiencing a very, very serious threat to peace in Europe," Scholz wrote on Twitter as he arrived in Kyiv. "From Moscow, we urgently expect signals of de-escalation."

With concerns rising that war could be imminent, Germany's military said the first of some 350 extra troops it is sending to bolster NATO forces in Lithuania were en route Monday. Six howitzer guns were also being loaded onto trucks for transport to the alliance's eastern flank.

Meanwhile, Lithuania moved diplomats' families and some nonessential diplomatic workers out of Ukraine; the U.S. is already pulling most of its staff from the embassy in Kyiv. And the Greek Foreign Ministry joined several Western nations in urging its citizens to leave the country.

The moves were the latest preparations for a possible war. On Sunday, some airlines canceled flights to the Ukrainian capital and troops there unloaded fresh shipments of weapons from NATO members. Ukraine's air traffic safety agency Ukraerorukh declared the airspace over the Black Sea to be a "zone of potential danger" because of Russian naval drills and recommended that planes avoid flying over the sea Feb. 14-19.

The U.S. and its NATO allies have repeatedly warned that Russia will pay a high price for any invasion — but they have sometimes struggled to present a united front. Scholz's government, in particular, has been criticized for refusing to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine or to spell out which sanctions it would support against Russia, raising questions about Berlin's resolve to stand up to Moscow.

The chancellor's visits this week will thus be closely watched for a signs of deviating from the message delivered by Washington and other NATO allies.

So far, those warnings appear to have had little effect: Russia has only beefed up troops and weapons in the region and launched massive drills in its ally Belarus, which also neighbors Ukraine. The West fears that the drills, which will run through Sunday, could be used by Moscow as a cover for an invasion from the north.

Russia has repeatedly brushed off Ukrainian and Western concerns about the military buildup, saying it has the right to deploy forces wherever needed on its territory. On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Ukraine of fueling tensions by beefing up its forces near the territories controlled by Russia-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow wants guarantees from the West that NATO won't allow Ukraine and other former Soviet coun-

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tries to join as members, and that the alliance will halt weapons deployments to Ukraine and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe. The U.S. and NATO have flatly rejected those demands.

Some observers expect Moscow to eventually accept a compromise that would help avoid hostilities and allow all sides to save face. While NATO refuses to shut the door to Ukraine, the alliance also has no intention of embracing it or any other ex-Soviet nation anytime soon. Some experts have floated ideas such as a moratorium on NATO expansion or a neutral status for Ukraine to defuse the tensions.

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.K., Vadym Prystaiko, seemed to suggest just such a middle path, telling the BBC on Sunday that the country could abandon its goal of joining NATO — an objective that is written into its constitution — if it would avert war with Russia.

"We might — especially being threatened like that, blackmailed by that, and pushed to it," Prystaiko told BBC Radio 5.

On Monday, however, Prystaiko appeared to back away from that, saying that "to avoid war we are ready for many concessions ... but it has nothing to do with NATO, which is enshrined in the constitution."

Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko also played down Prystaiko's statement.

Asked about Prystaiko's comment, Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said that Russia would welcome such a move.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Sunday that Kyiv requested a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the next 48 hours to discuss the Russian deployments near the country's borders. Russia has argued that it's not obliged to account for its buildup before the OSCE, and such a meeting would be unlikely to defuse tensions.

With the region on edge, the Russian Defense Ministry summoned the U.S. Embassy's military attache on Saturday to protest what it said was a U.S. submarine in Russian waters near the Kuril Islands in the Pacific. The Russian military said the submarine initially ignored orders to leave, but left after the navy used unspecified "appropriate means." The U.S. has denied that its ship ever entered Russian waters.

Asked by lawmakers Monday if the military could strike foreign warships that enter Russian waters, deputy chief of the Russian military's General Staff Stanislav Gadzhimagomedov said the military stands ready for it, but added that such decisions are only made on the highest level.

High-level diplomacy has also continued — but with little results so far. In an hourlong Saturday call with Putin, U.S. President Joe Biden said that invading Ukraine would cause "widespread human suffering" and that the West was committed to ending the crisis but "equally prepared for other scenarios," the White House said.

Biden also spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for about an hour Sunday, agreeing to keep pushing both deterrence and diplomacy to try to stave off a Russian offensive.

As he has before, Zelenskyy sought to play down the idea that a conflict was imminent, noting that Kyiv and other cities of Ukraine "are safe and under reliable protection."

His office's readout of the call also quoted him suggesting that a quick Biden visit would help deescalate the situation — a possibility was not mentioned in the White House summary of the call.

Russia and Ukraine have been locked in a bitter conflict since 2014, when Ukraine's Kremlin-friendly leader was driven from office by a popular uprising. Moscow responded by annexing the Crimean Peninsula and then backing a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine, where fighting has killed over 14,000 people.

A 2015 peace deal brokered by France and Germany helped halt large-scale battles, but regular skirmishes have continued, and efforts to reach a political settlement have stalled.

## Ukraine-Russia crisis: What to know as diplomacy steps up

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Diplomatic efforts to head off what U.S. officials have warned could be an imminent Russian attack on Ukraine are going into a new round on Monday as Germany's chancellor heads for Kyiv.

Over the weekend, some airlines canceled flights to the Ukrainian capital and troops there unloaded new shipments of weapons from NATO members Sunday, as its president sought to project confidence in the

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face of U.S. warnings of possible invasion within days.

As political leaders look for a way to defuse spiraling tensions, Ukraine's ambassador to Britain clarified comments appearing to suggest that his country could consider dropping its ambition to join NATO to avoid war with Russia.

Here's a look at what is happening where and why:

## WHAT IS THE GERMAN LEADER BRINGING?

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's first visit to Kyiv since taking office in December comes before his first visit to Moscow on Tuesday. It's part of a flurry of in-person and remote diplomacy by Western leaders.

Scholz is taking a message of solidarity to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy after criticism of Germany for its refusal to join some allies in sending lethal weapons to the country.

Scholz said Sunday that Ukraine could "be sure that we will show the necessary solidarity, as we did in the past," pointing to financial aid to Kyiv in the past.

He renewed his warning that Russian military aggression against Ukraine "will lead to tough responses and sanctions that we have carefully prepared and that we can make effective immediately, together with our allies in Europe and in NATO."

Scholz will meet Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday.

## WHAT ELSE IS GERMANY SAYING?

Germany's finance minister says the Group of Seven industrial powers would make a tough joint response to any Russian violation of Ukraine's "political and territorial borders."

Christian Lindner said in Berlin on Monday that "it must be clear to Russia that the G-7 countries would react together, quickly and hard, to a violation of international law, a violation of Ukraine's borders."

He said the group has "assured Ukraine that we will continue to support its economic development and also will keep in sight the financial stability of Ukraine in this crisis."

Germany currently chairs the G-7 and Lindner said there would be sanctions "including in the area of finances," but didn't offer details.

## WHAT'S WITH UKRAINE'S NATO AMBITIONS?

Ukraine's ambassador to Britain has clarified comments appearing to suggest that his country could consider dropping its ambition to join NATO to avoid war with Russia.

Vadym Prystaiko told BBC radio on Sunday that "we might" drop the ambition, which is enshrined in Ukraine's constitution, because Ukraine was being "blackmailed."

"What I'm saying here is that we are flexible, trying to find the best way out," the ambassador said. "If we have to go through some serious concessions, that's something we might do."

On Monday, Prystaiko said there had been a misunderstanding. He said that "to avoid war we are ready for many concessions."

"But it has nothing to do with NATO, which is enshrined in the constitution," he said.

## HOW IS UKRAINE'S PRESIDENT FARING?

Zelenskyy was elected as president in a landslide victory in 2019. As a political novice making an unlikely bid for the job, he had vowed to reach out to Russia-backed rebels in the east who were fighting Ukrainian forces and make strides toward resolving the conflict.

But Zelenskyy is watching his once-enormous support dissolve as Ukraine faces fears of a Russian invasion that could not only take the rebel regions but possibly the rest of the country.

To make matters worse, the incumbent whom Zelenskyy defeated in 2019 has boldly returned to the country to face charges of treason and stir up opposition to him. Analysts suggest that Moscow is seeking to bolster support among pro-Russia politicians in Ukraine and that the buildup of Russian forces near Ukraine's border is aimed partly at destabilizing the country's politics.

## WHAT'S THE SITUATION ON THE MILITARY FRONT?

U.K. Armed Forces Minister James Heappey said a Russian attack on Ukraine could "effectively now happen with no notice."

Heappey told Sky News on Monday that "there's 130,000 combat troops around Ukraine's land borders"

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and that "there's thousands more on amphibious shipping in the Black Sea."

He said Russia has concentrated artillery missile systems and other weapons in the area, but more importantly, key "combat enablers" including logistics, fuel and medical supplies are also now in place.

Meanwhile, the German military said the first of some 350 extra troops it is sending to a NATO battle-group it leads in Lithuania were in route Monday, bolstering the 600 already deployed there. Six tank howitzers were being loaded onto trucks in Munster, Germany for transport to the alliance's eastern flank. The reinforcement was announced last week.

## On Parkland anniversary, Biden urges Congress on gun control

By ZEKE MILLER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Four years after 17 people were gunned down at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, President Joe Biden says his administration stands with the advocates working to end gun violence and urges the nation to uphold the "solemn obligation" to "keep each other safe."

"Out of the heartbreak of Parkland a new generation of Americans all across the country marched for our lives and towards a better, safer America for us all," Biden said in a statement obtained by The Associated Press ahead of Monday's anniversary of the deadly shooting of 14 students and three staff members.

"Together, this extraordinary movement is making sure that the voices of victims and survivors and responsible gun owners are louder than the voices of gun manufacturers and the National Rifle Association," Biden said.

Since the Parkland shooting, gun violence at schools has only risen. There were at least 136 instances of gunfire on school grounds between Aug. 1 and Dec. 31, according to a tally last week by the gun control advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety.

Biden has acted to crack down on "ghost guns," homemade firearms that lack serial numbers used to trace them and that are often purchased without a background check. He has worked to tighten regulations on pistol-stabilizing braces like the one used in a Boulder, Colorado, shooting that left 10 people dead. He's also encouraged cities to use their COVID-19 relief dollars to help manage gun violence.

But these efforts fall far short of major change.

In his first year in office, Biden's efforts to pass legislation to tighten gun laws haven't left the drawing board. He also was forced to pull his nominee to lead the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

There are limits to what the president can do when there is no appetite in Congress to pass gun legislation. The strongest effort in recent years failed, even after 20 children and six adults were killed in the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. Parkland happened six years later.

Biden said he's asked members of Congress to provide funding to help reduce violent crime and said they must pass legislation requiring background checks on all gun sales, banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and eliminating immunity for gun manufacturers.

"We can never bring back those we've lost," Biden said. "But we can come together to fulfill the first responsibility of our government and our democracy: to keep each other safe. For Parkland, for all those we've lost, and for all those left behind, it is time to uphold that solemn obligation."

The U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center studied school attacks nationwide from 2006-18 and reported that most attackers were bullied and that warning signs were there. Most important, the researchers said, about 94% talked about their attacks and what they intended to do in some way, whether orally or electronically, and 75% were detected because they talked about their plots. About 36% were thwarted within two days of their intended attacks.

## At Olympics, the line between photo and painting can blur

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

BEIJING (AP) — A photograph is not a painting. A painting is not a photograph. Yet in the right situa-

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tion, in the right hands, the two can approach each other and, in the best circumstances, seem to merge.

Add to that the unremitting scenes of dynamic motion that the Olympics provide — dramatic backdrops, unexpected moves, impossibly fit bodies performing at the height of their capacities — and you have a recipe for the arresting collision of news and aesthetics, of photography and art.

In short: Through the eyes and lenses of Associated Press photographers who are training their eyes on the arenas of competition at the Beijing Games, sometimes true magic can happen.

“Some of these photos, you can’t get around it, they look like paintings,” says Denis Paquin, who would know. He has overseen AP’s Olympic photo report for more than a decade and has viewed thousands of images over the past two weeks.

Photography is sometimes called “painting with light.” With these images, that’s truer than usual.

So slow yourself down. Spend some time looking at these five images from the Beijing Winter Games and hearing from the photojournalists who made them. And think about what art is, what news is — and what photography can be when undertaken at the most thoughtful of levels.

**THE SILHOUETTED SNOWBOARDER**, by Gregory Bull

What it shows: China’s Su Yiming competing during the men’s slopestyle finals last Monday.

Why it grabs you: Creates a dreamlike relationship between the sharply focused snowboarder and the blurry mesh barrier, all backed by a blistering, blown-out sun. Has something of the elemental feel of a 19th-century tintype — the world seen through a glass, darkly.

What Bull was thinking: “That frame took a while to make. I had been relying on very standard compositions for most of that day. Using the lovely fixtures of the slopestyle course, I would leave a spot for the athlete to perform, among the backdrop of the ice Great Wall or house. So for this picture I wanted to deconstruct, tear down my planned composition. I used the sun to kind of burn a hole in the middle of the picture, and let the snowboarder tear into the lines in the composition. With our cameras, the autofocus is amazing but it will track to lines, so I had to switch to manual, and prefocus at the distance where the snowboarder would fly into the frame. As luck would have it, the snowboarder also won a medal that day, which was also nice.”

**THE SKATER IN THE RINGS**, By Ashley Landis

What it shows: Viktor Hald Horup of Denmark warming up during a light show before the start of the men’s speedskating 5,000-meter race on Feb. 6.

Why it grabs you: The colors, so saturated and dappled with shadow and light. The dark grooves along the ice. Horup’s presence, smack in the middle of the red ring, caught mid-stride with his left leg in the air and his hand up, fingers visible. The diagonals, straight horizontal lines and circles that pull the image together. And the Beijing 2022 right in the middle of it all. The sense that this photo could stand in for the entire Winter Games.

What Landis was thinking: “It’s a really beautiful venue, but the light is very even all the way across. So it makes it very difficult to get artistic images, like silhouettes. However, before every session, there’s about a 30-second light show. And the first few days there weren’t any skaters on the ice warming up during the light show and I was like, ‘Wouldn’t it be great if we had someone warming up and they could go across the logo across the rings?’ So I went out to the highest point that we can go to see the light show, hoping that someone would be on the ice warming up. Someone was, and they happened to go right through the rings at the perfect time.”

**THE LUGE BLUR**, by Pavel Golovkin

What it shows: Natalie Maag of Switzerland sliding during the luge women’s singles last Monday.

Why it grabs you: Scale, first of all — the tiny, sharply focused, brightly colored athlete moving through a vast apparatus. The contrast of colors and the complementary curves that work with the blur to create a pleasing sense of motion.

What Golovkin was thinking: “You have to create more than simple pictures of athletes steering down the track, and one idea is to use a long shutter speed. It’s also good if your object of focus separates from the background not only by moving effect but by contrast as well. Natalie Maag’s brightly colored suit helps with this.”

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THE HOCKEY HUDDLE, by Petr David Josek

What it shows: Canada's players huddling before a women's quarterfinal hockey game between Canada and Sweden on Friday.

Why it grabs you: The vantage point, of course. But also the painterly almost-symmetry anchored by the hockey net and ramped up by the red numbers and names on the black jerseys. Plus the contrast between the matte uniforms and the shiny black helmets — and the single white one.

What Josek was thinking: "Almost all teams huddle before each match and we take a photo of it using a remote overhead camera. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not. I cropped this image tighter to get a bit different frame than in previous matches. Also, this time the Canadian ladies had their black uniforms, which I think really works in contrast with the white rings and the white goalie's helmet."

THE UPSIDE-DOWN SUN SEEKER, by Francisco Seco

What it shows: Canada's Mark McMorris competing during the men's slopestyle qualifying on Feb. 6.

Why it grabs you: Something feels off — in the best of ways — because of the athlete being upside down. The eye is drawn back and forth from the sun to the silhouette, and the entire frame feels frozen in time — even more than most photographs. It feels like a moment that could last forever.

What Seco was thinking: "I love silhouettes. Basically I was after this photo since we started covering snowboard. On that particular day, I shot the first round of qualifying from another position to secure one pic of each rider. Then I saw location of the sun and I thought it could be a good chance to try silhouettes. I moved to the right side of the track, just after the last jump. I roamed a bit before I found the good spot to shoot. Then I shot few riders during the second round. I was lucky with Mark McMorris. (I would really like to mention that our photo editor, Kiichiro Sato, did nice work editing it. So I would like to share with him any credit for the photo.)"

THE MOTION MACHINE, by Matthias Schrader

What it shows: Matthew Soukup of Canada speeding down the hill during a men's large hill training session on Thursday.

Why it grabs you: The diagonals. The splash of red in the corner that complements the middle of Soukup's outfit. The jagged fragments around him, some sharp and some blurry. The utter sense of trajectory that the whole image conveys.

What Schrader was thinking: "I took this picture at the start on the ski jump tower. Besides the action pictures in the air and the landing, we also need some long time exposures and features to break up the photo galleries. That's the moment, captured on a 16-35mm with 1/10 at f 5.6. Everything blurs a bit, and nice effects can be created."

## Russian skater can compete, but medal ceremony won't be held

By JAMES ELLINGWORTH and GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writers

BEIJING (AP) — Russian teenager Kamila Valieva has been cleared to compete in the women's figure skating competition at the Winter Olympics despite failing a pre-Games drug test, setting her up for an attempt at a second gold medal.

Whatever happens on the ice, Valieva will not get a medal ceremony moment in Beijing. Nor will any skater who finishes in the top three with her.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport cleared Valieva to skate less than 12 hours after a hastily arranged hearing that lasted into early Monday morning. A panel of judges ruled that the 15-year-old Valieva, the favorite for the women's individual gold, does not need to be provisionally suspended ahead of a full investigation.

The court gave her a favorable decision in part because she is a minor, known in Olympic jargon as a "protected person," and is subject to different rules from an adult athlete.

"The panel considered that preventing the athlete to compete at the Olympic Games would cause her irreparable harm in the circumstances," CAS Director General Matthieu Reeb said.

Now, Valieva and her fellow Russian skaters can aim for the first podium sweep of women's figure skat-

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ing in Olympic history. The event starts with the short program Tuesday and concludes Thursday with the free skate.

The International Olympic Committee said Monday afternoon that if Valieva finishes in the top three, there will be no medal ceremony during the Games. There will also be no ceremony for the team event won by Valieva and the Russian team a week ago.

"It would not be appropriate to hold the medal ceremony," the IOC said.

Valieva landed the first quadruple jumps by a woman at the Olympics as the Russian team won gold in a dominant performance.

The decision not to award medals also affects Nathan Chen and the rest of the second-place American team, who will leave Beijing unsure if they won silver or gold. It would be Chen's second gold of the Games. If Valieva and Russia are disqualified, Japan moves up to silver and Canada wins bronze.

"We are devastated that they will leave Beijing without their medals in hand, but we appreciate the intention of the IOC to ensure the right medals are awarded to the right individuals," the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee said in a statement.

The IOC decision also means the fourth-place finisher in the women's event will have a good chance to move into the bronze position.

Shortly after the CAS ruling, Valieva skated at practice, watched by her coach, Eteri Tutberidze. She completed her program without a fall, drawing a smattering of applause from the Russian media watching.

Reaction around the world ranged from support of the young skater to complaints that Russian doping had once again damaged a sporting event.

In addition to her status as a minor, the CAS ruling cited fundamental issues of fairness, the fact she tested clean in Beijing and that there were "serious issues of untimely notification" of her positive test.

Valieva tested positive for the heart drug trimetazidine on Dec. 25 at the Russian nationals, but the result from a Swedish lab didn't come to light until a week ago, after she helped the Russian Olympic Committee win the team gold.

Reasons for the six-week wait for a result from Sweden are unclear. In a statement, WADA suggested RUSADA slipped up by not signaling to the Stockholm lab that Valieva's sample was a priority to be analyzed so close to the Olympics.

Her case has caused havoc at the Olympics since last Tuesday when the team event medal ceremony was pulled from the schedule because of the positive test.

The Russian anti-doping agency (RUSADA) immediately suspended her, then lifted the ban a day later. The IOC and others appealed, and an expedited hearing was held Sunday night. Valieva testified via video.

Athletes under 16 like Valieva have more rights under anti-doping rules and typically aren't held responsible for taking banned substances. The focus of any future investigation will be on her coaches, doctors, nutritionists, etc.

This ruling only addresses whether Valieva can keep skating before her case is resolved. It doesn't decide the fate of the one gold medal she has already won.

Those issues will be dealt with in a separate, longer-term investigation led by RUSADA, which took the sample in St. Petersburg.

The World Anti-Doping Agency will have the right to appeal any ruling by RUSADA, and also said it wants to independently investigate Valieva's entourage.

The Valieva case means Russian doping has been a major theme for a six straight Olympic Games.

"This appears to be another chapter in the systematic and pervasive disregard for clean sport by Russia," US Olympic and Paralympic Committee CEO Sarah Hirshland said in a statement.

Hirshland said the USOPC was "disappointed by the message this decision sends" and suggested athletes were denied the confidence of knowing they competed on a level playing field.

At the rink Tuesday, the ice dance competition was decided as the CAS prepared its verdict.

Gold medalists Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron of France and American bronze medalists Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue offered, "No comment."

Nikita Katsalapov, who along with Victoria Sinitsina won the silver medal for the Russians, said simply:

"Go Kamila!"

Hubbell and Donohue could have their silver medals upgraded to gold in the team competition.

"There's no done deal yet, but I know all the people in the team want to receive the medals here as a team" Hubbell said. "If we miss that opportunity, it's huge disappointment."

The IOC now says it will "organize dignified medal ceremonies once the case of Ms Valieva has been concluded," whenever that may be.

## Olympics Live: No ceremony if Valieva wins skating medal

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

The International Olympic Committee says there will be no medal ceremony in Beijing if 15-year-old Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva places in the top three in the women's individual event.

There will also be no medal ceremony for the team event, where Russia won gold a week ago with help from Valieva. The U.S. won silver and Japan won bronze.

Valieva was cleared Monday by Court of Arbitration for Sport judges to compete starting Tuesday, despite failing a drug test ahead of the Olympics.

But a separate investigation of that possible doping offense must be done in Russia and could take several months to resolve.

In the meantime, if Valieva wins an individual medal when the competition concludes Thursday, there won't be even a flower ceremony on the ice.

The IOC says its executive board decided "in the interest of fairness to all athletes" not to award medals this week.

It will "organize dignified medal ceremonies once the case of Ms. Valieva has been concluded."

Nordic combined star Jarl Magnus Riiber of Norway has tested negative for COVID-19, leaving open the chance of him competing at the Beijing Games. The three-time world champion was in isolation for more than 10 days.

Nordic combined has two medal events left on Tuesday and Thursday. Four of the top seven athletes in the sport, which combines ski jumping and a cross-country ski race, missed the first event last Wednesday. Germany's Vinzenz Geiger won.

Estonia's Kristjan Ilves was released from isolation after 11 days on Saturday and has been training to compete.

Germany, meanwhile, has ruled out Terence Weber and says Manuel Faisst traveled to China to potentially replace him in its Nordic combined lineup. The team is still holding out hope that three-time Olympic gold medalist Eric Frenzel will be cleared to compete in Beijing.

American freestyle skier Marin Hamill won't compete in the slopestyle final after hurting her right leg in a crash during qualifying. She's headed back to the United State for further evaluation, the team announced.

Hamill, a 20-year-old from Utah, earned a spot in the final with her score of 69.43 on her first run through a course filled with rails and jumps.

She was finishing her final run when she crashed on the last jump. Hamill slid to the bottom of the hill and was treated by medical personnel. She was taken off the course in a sled and placed into an ambulance.

Hamill was second in a World Cup skiing slopestyle competition in France last month.

A Norwegian biathlete who collapsed after crossing the finish line in the women's 10-kilometer pursuit race will be heading home instead of competing again at the Beijing Olympics.

Ingrid Landmakr Tandrevold, who said she has had heart issues in the past, was in position to win a medal at the end of Sunday's race. But she stalled as she approached the line and then fell to the ground

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after crossing it. She ended up finishing 14th.

Dropping to the ground at the end of a biathlon race is common for skiers who push themselves on the ski tracks and shooting range, but several other competitors noticed that Tandrevold appeared to be in trouble and alerted medical staff.

On Monday, Tandrevold said she is feeling better but is done with competing for now. She says she needs to be careful because of her past heart issues.

The World Anti-Doping Agency suggests officials in Russia are at least partly to blame for the six-week wait to produce a doping test result for figure skater Kamila Valieva.

Court of Arbitration for Sport judges have cleared Valieva to continue skating at the Beijing Olympics. One reason cited was "serious issues" with the time between when Valieva took the test and when the sample was flagged.

Valieva's urine sample was taken Dec. 25 in St. Petersburg by Russia's anti-doping agency and sent to a laboratory in Stockholm, Sweden. That laboratory flagged the result just a week ago, hours after Valieva helped the Russians win team gold in Beijing.

WADA says it expects bodies like Russian agency RUSADA to tell labs when faster testing is needed ahead of major championships like the Olympics, which it says didn't happen in this case.

Though Valieva can skate in Beijing, a separate longer-term investigation of the doping case by RUSADA could yet result in a ban and disqualification from the Olympics.

WADA can appeal against the eventual Russian ruling if it thinks a stricter punishment is needed.

Mikaela Shiffrin has confirmed that she will race a downhill at the Winter Olympics for the first time Tuesday.

She says she's changing how she thinks about what is at stake as she prepares for her fourth event in Beijing.

She finished a second training session at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center with the 15th-fastest time among the women who didn't miss a gate.

The two-time gold medalist in Alpine skiing did not finish her opening runs in either of her initial two events, the two-leg giant slalom and slalom, before coming in ninth in the super-G, another race she hadn't previously entered at an Olympics.

As someone who specialized in the technical disciplines of slalom and giant slalom, the speed events of downhill and super-G are still new and works-in-progress for Shiffrin.

Reigning Olympic gold medalist Sebastien Toutant of Canada crashed hard during qualifying at men's snowboarding big air and won't defend his title.

Toutant needed to land a big trick on his third run to crack the top 12, but he slammed into the icy landing attempting a triple cork 1620 -- three off-axis flips with 4 1/2 rotations.

The 29-year-old fell on his back, and his head whipped back hard enough to knock his goggles off entirely. He remained down for several minutes before being helped up and walking away.

Max Parrot, the Canadian who took gold in slopestyle last week, leads after qualifying, followed by Japan's Takeru Otsuka and American Red Gerard, who won gold at slopestyle in 2018.

Defending champion Sofia Goggia says she "can be in there" competing for a medal in Tuesday's Olympic downhill despite not competing since badly injuring her left knee and leg in a crash three weeks ago. The Italian placed fourth in the final training session.

Joana Haehlen of Switzerland led the session and was 0.61 seconds ahead of Goggia.

Mikaela Shiffrin placed 17th and said she will race the downhill after indicating following the opening training session that she wasn't sure. The two-time Olympic champion is still seeking her first medal in Beijing.

Former overall World Cup champion Federica Brignone did not qualify for a downhill starting spot on Italy's team.

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Tamara Tippler appeared to grab the final starting spot for Austria.

Tricia Mangan of the United States and Jasmine Flury of Switzerland crashed, but both appeared to avoid serious injury.

Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva is on the ice practicing less than an hour after learning she'll be allowed to compete in the women's individual event at the Beijing Olympics.

She's skating along with teammate Alexandra Trusova and four other competitors. Her coach, Eteri Tutberidze, is at the side of the rink.

Valieva appeared intently focused on her warm up. She's the favorite for the gold medal in the individual event, which starts Tuesday.

When it was her turn to run through her practice program, she didn't appear to stumble or falter. Her skating elicited a smattering of applause from Russian press watching from an area designated for media.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled that the 15-year-old should not be provisionally suspended. She tested positive for a banned heart drug before the Olympics, on Dec. 25.

The ruling doesn't decide the fate of the gold medal she won as part of the team competition.

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee says it's disappointed Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva will be allowed to compete for a second gold medal despite failing a pre-Olympics drug test.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled that the 15-year-old Valieva, the favorite for the women's individual gold, should not be provisionally suspended ahead of a full hearing into her positive test for a banned heart drug on Dec. 25.

USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland says the committee is disappointed by the message the ruling sends. She says athletes are being denied the right to know they're competing on a level playing field. She says it's part of a systemic and pervasive disregard for clean sport by Russia.

The ruling means Valieva can compete starting Tuesday in the women's individual competition, where she's a favorite for gold.

It doesn't decide the fate of the gold medal she won as part of the team competition. The U.S. won silver and would be in line for gold if the Russian medal is revoked.

Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva will be allowed to compete for a second gold medal at the Winter Olympics despite failing a pre-Games drug test.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled Monday that the 15-year-old Valieva, the favorite for the women's individual gold, does not need to be provisionally suspended ahead of a full hearing into her positive test for the heart drug trimetazidine. The positive test was Dec. 25.

The Russian team can still aim for the first women's figure skating podium sweep in Olympic history. The event starts with the short program Tuesday and concludes Thursday with the free skate. Valieva is the favorite to win gold.

The ruling only addresses whether Valieva can keep skating before her case is resolved. It doesn't decide the fate of the one gold medal that she has already won.

Olympic champion Jamie Anderson says life in Beijing's pandemic bubble has been difficult for her mental health, leaving her "a little bit tapped out" and "excited to go home."

The American snowboarder failed to qualify for the finals in women's big air Monday. She said the Beijing Games have been a draining slog for her and her teammates.

"We've been here for so long and I feel like our whole crew is just over it," Anderson said. "Just barely hanging on by a fricking strand of hair. Just like, tired of the food, homesick, tired of the pressure."

The 31-year-old Anderson came to China a two-time defending champion in slopestyle and won silver in big air at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games. She finished ninth trying to defend her slopestyle titles last week, then said on Instagram that she "straight up couldn't handle the pressure" and that her "mental

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health and clarity just hasn't been on par."

Anderson says she's not ready to retire, but she's not sure what's next for her as far as competitive snowboarding. She plans to take some time and free ride, then reset and see how she feels.

The International Olympic Committee says it wanted the entire investigation of Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva's doping case to be completed during the Olympics.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport is expected to announce Monday afternoon Beijing time whether Valieva can compete in the women's figure skating event that starts Tuesday, where she would be a heavy favorite.

But they won't decide now whether Valieva is guilty of doping, nor whether the Russian skaters can keep the gold team medal they won with Valieva's help. Those questions will be answered by a separate investigation led by the Russian anti-doping agency.

Valieva is the strong favorite for gold if CAS lets her compete in the individual competition despite a positive doping test from before the Olympics. It was only revealed last week after she competed in the team competition.

IOC spokesman Mark Adams says it wanted all legal issues "settled once and for all before this competition starts."

Adams says the parties – which include the IOC, World Anti-Doping Agency and the Russian team – could not agree on a process.

Adams says "it's a deeply concerning situation for us and of course for all athletes" affected.

Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron of France broke their own ice dance world record to win the Olympic gold medal that narrowly eluded them four years ago in Pyeongchang.

The last figure skaters on the ice for the free dance, Papadakis and Cizeron scored 136.15 points to "Elegie" by the early 20th century French composer Gabriel Faure.

That gave them 226.98 points, beating their previous mark of 226.61 set at the 2019 NHK Trophy in Japan. It was enough to hold off Victoria Sinitsina and Nikita Katsalapov.

The Russian world champions took silver with 220.51 points while the American duo of Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue claimed bronze in their final Olympics. The two have already announced they plan to retire.

Another pair of Americans, Madison Chock and Evan Bates, finished fourth.

Eileen Gu has made it through to slopestyle finals in freestyle skiing. She overcame a number of bobbles in her first qualifying run to nail down a solid second trip down the mountain and secure her spot in the top 12.

The 18-year-old American-born freestyler is competing for her mother's home country of China at the Beijing Games. She won the gold medal in big air last week, and will also compete in the halfpipe contest later this week.

While Gu awaited her score after the second run, she stood at the bottom and ate a dumpling. Then, she rushed off to the halfpipe, where practice had begun about an hour earlier.

The slopestyle final is set for Tuesday.

Kaillie Humphries has captured a third Olympic gold medal, and her first for the U.S.

The former Canadian bobsledder was an easy winner of the inaugural women's monobob event. It's the first sliding medal for the U.S. in seven events so far -- the others being four in luge and two in skeleton -- at the Beijing Games.

Elana Meyers Taylor of the U.S. was second. It was the fourth medal of Meyers Taylor's career, the most won by anyone in USA Bobsled history.

Humphries has four medals now as well, the first three of those for Canada. She began sliding for the U.S. in 2019 and got her citizenship in December. That allowed her to represent the U.S. in Beijing.

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Christine de Bruin of Canada won bronze.

Canadian forward Melodie Daoust has returned to the lineup for the women's hockey semifinal game against Switzerland at the Beijing Olympics.

Daoust missed four games after being sidelined with an upper-body injury sustained in the second period of a 12-1 preliminary round-opening win over the Swiss. She is taking part in the semifinal pre-game skate and listed back at her familiar spot on Canada's second line alongside center Sarah Fillier and winger Natalie Spooner.

Canada entered the playoffs as the Olympic tournament's top seed and is seeking to make its seventh consecutive gold-medal game appearance on Thursday.

For Switzerland, forward Lisa Ruedi returns after missing a 4-2 quarterfinal win over the Russian team while spending two days in COVID-19 isolation. The Swiss team honored her during the game by hanging her No. 12 jersey behind their bench.

The defending Olympic champion United States faces Finland in the other semifinal later Monday.

Slopestyle silver medalist Julia Marino of the United States has dropped out of the Olympic snowboard big air contest after a fall in practice.

The 24-year-old Marino was set to jump 23rd in the 30-snowboarder field during qualifying Monday, just ahead of 2018 gold medalist Anna Gasser of Austria. It was a surprise when she didn't appear.

Team USA snowboarding said in a statement that Marino fell during practice a few days ago and is "prioritizing her health."

Marino's scratch appears to have been a late decision. The Connecticut resident shared video of herself practicing at Big Air Shougang on Instagram about 12 hours before qualifying began, encouraging followers to tune in.

The embattled coach of Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva, whose future at the Olympics will be announced later Monday by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, showed up to watch her daughter compete in the ice dance competition in Beijing.

Eteri Tutberidze stood against the wall in an inconspicuous corner of Capital Indoor Stadium to watch Diana Davis compete with partner Gleb Smolkin in the free dance. Davis and Smolkin finished well out of medal contention.

Tutberidze has come under fire after Valieva's drug test from December was flagged last week for traces of a banned heart medication. The case was referred to CAS, which met for about 5 1/2 hours at a Beijing hotel late Sunday, to decide whether to allow the 15-year-old gold medal favorite to compete in the women's competition beginning Tuesday night.

Their decision is expected Monday afternoon in Beijing, just when Valieva is next scheduled to practice.

## What to know about Super Bowl 56, from Cooper Kupp to Eminem

The Associated Press undefined

From a thrilling late touchdown drive that gave the Rams a 23-20 win over the Bengals, to Eminem taking a knee and Meadow Soprano driving an electric Chevy, here's what happened Sunday at Super Bowl 56.

HERE'S WHY THE RAMS WON THE SUPER BOWL: Down 20-16, the Rams went on a 15-play drive capped by Matthew Stafford's 1-yard touchdown pass to Super Bowl MVP Cooper Kupp for the go-ahead score with 1:25 left.

Kupp's touchdown catch came after three costly penalties on the Bengals' defense.

After both teams were flagged only twice in the first 58 minutes, the Bengals were called for penalties on three consecutive plays.

Read more on the key penalties on the game-winning drive.

HERE'S HOW ADS MIXED CELEBRITIES AND NOSTALGIA : Advertisers shelled out up to \$7 million for

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30-seconds during the Super Bowl, and they used their time to try to entertain with humor, star power and nostalgia.

T-Mobile reunited "Scrubs" stars Zach Braff and Donald Faison, while Verizon recreated the 1996 movie "The Cable Guy" to tout its high-speed 5G network.

And Chevrolet recreated the opening sequence to "The Sopranos" to tout its all-electric Chevy Silverado.

This time, however, Jamie-Lynn Sigler, who played Meadow Soprano on the show that ran from 1999 to 2007, is in the driver's seat instead of the Sopranos patriarch played by the late James Gandolfini.

HERE'S WHO PERFORMED AT HALFTIME: 50 Cent made a surprise upside-down entrance at the Super Bowl halftime show, and Eminem dramatically took a knee.

Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige, Eminem and Kendrick Lamar spit a fiery medley of their hits.

As his rendition of "Lose Yourself" ended, Eminem took a knee and held his head in his hand in apparent tribute to former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who took a knee during the national anthem to protest police brutality during the 2016 season.

The NFL denied reports that it was attempting to stop Eminem from making the gesture.

HERE'S WHY THE OVER HIT ON THE PREGAME NATIONAL ANTHEM: Mickey Guyton told The Associated Press this week that she'd earned the nickname "Quickie Mickey" for singing "The Star Spangled Banner" in a tight 1:30. She sang it in about 1:50 Sunday, 15 seconds over the projected mark of 1:35 set by oddsmakers.

HERE'S WHO ELSE PERFORMED PREGAME: About 40 minutes before kickoff, the Rams and Bengals lined the end zones and looked up at the big screen while outside, next to SoFi Stadium's lake, gospel duo Mary Mary and the LA Phil's Youth Orchestra Los Angeles performed "Lift Every Voice and Sing," a song that's known as the unofficial Black national anthem.

Singer Jhené Aiko brought a novel combination of R&B and harp to her rendition of "America the Beautiful."

And The Rock grabbed a mic on the field and put on his old wrestling persona to introduce the teams just before kickoff, in the style of an announcer before a big fight.

## Tunisian women's posts glamorize risky migrant crossings

By FRANCESCA EBEL Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — In a photo posted in November, 18-year-old Sabee al Saidi is shown wearing bright-pink lipstick as she leans from the side of a rickety wooden boat, a calm blue sea stretched out behind her. In a video, she smiles alongside a dozen other migrants, gesturing to a popular rap song.

A month later, Chaima Ben Mahmoud, 21, posted a similar video, waving as she made the crossing from Tunisia to Italy with her fiance in a boat crowded with migrants.

The two Tunisian women have sparked controversy with their posts — which show them on seemingly carefree trips across the Mediterranean, landing in Lampedusa, Italy, and then traveling around European cities taking selfies next to landmarks as they sport popular fashion brands. Many criticized them for "normalizing" a journey that leaves thousands dead each year.

According to the Missing Migrants Project, 2,048 people went missing in the Mediterranean in 2021, with 23,000 missing since 2014. Experts warn that al Saidi and Ben Mahmoud — social media influencers in Tunisia, with nearly 2 million followers on TikTok and Instagram between them — could inspire others to make the dangerous crossing.

"Social media is putting out a vision of Europe that is not accurate," said Matt Herbert, research manager at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

In the past, he said, the driver for migration was "the diaspora coming home for the summer. People would see their cousins wearing new, expensive clothes and aspire to be like that."

"With social media, it's much more in your face and more accessible to everybody," Herbert said.

Tunisia is one of the main departure points for migrants setting off from North Africa to Europe, with thousands of Tunisians joining those making the journey from elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East each year. While Tunisia was once a popular tourist destination with a burgeoning middle class, as the

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country's economy deteriorated — with an 18% unemployment rate exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 — migration attempts have soared.

In 2021, authorities intercepted more than 23,000 migrants trying to leave Tunisian shores. This number is starkly higher than in 2019, when around 5,000 people were intercepted, and dwarfs numbers recorded over the last decade.

A report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime pins the surge on rising unemployment and pessimism about Tunisian leaders' ability to improve the situation. Last July, following nationwide anti-government protests, President Kais Saied suspended parliament and took on sweeping powers, raising fears of democratic backsliding.

The journey across the Mediterranean is known locally as the "harka" — a reference to the figurative "burning" of borders and the destruction of personal documents before undertaking the perilous crossing. The clandestine intrigue once surrounding the harka has faded in recent years as more people have migrated, and it is widely discussed on social media, in music and on TV.

While Ben Mahmoudé's and al Saidi's posts sparked criticism, many also came to their defense, a reflection of how some see the harka as their only option to escape a country in crisis amid growing frustration over European Union visa restrictions. France recently slashed visas given to Tunisians by 30% — and to Algerians and Moroccans by half — accusing the countries of failing to cooperate over the return of their nationals who were in the country illegally.

"Shame on her? More like, it's a shame for us!" posted one TikToker in response to criticism of al Saidi's video. "She managed to make it to Italy, while we're all stuck here in Tunisia."

As she underwent two weeks' COVID-19 quarantine at a detention center in Italy, Ben Mahmoudé told The Associated Press she understood the risks of the journey. But financial difficulties and her inability to get a visa had "forced" her to do the harka.

"I didn't find anything for myself in Tunisia," she said in the interview conducted through Zoom. "I have a diploma in hairdressing and I couldn't get any work in this field. ... When I did, the monthly salary was really hopeless — around 350 dinar (\$120). You cannot do anything with that. You can just use public transport and buy your lunch — that's it."

Ben Mahmoudé, who like al Saidi grew up in a lower middle-class family in the coastal Tunisian city of Sfax, said all it took was a call to a friend of a friend. She paid 4,500 dinar (\$1,560) for a place in the boat alongside 23 others.

Despite her smiles in the posts, Ben Mahmoudé said the journey was terrifying. She described a moment when the boat rocked violently.

"I was so scared, I saw death right in front of me," she said. "The fear was extraordinary, the sea was really agitated and there were lots of high waves. In the boat, we said a prayer and prepared ourselves for death. When they told us we had arrived in Italian waters, we couldn't believe it."

Still, Ben Mahmoudé says she was prepared to risk death for the chance at a better life.

"I have lots of friends who did the harka and they found opportunities in Europe. They put hope in my heart that there is work, that there is a lot of money," she said. "I want to change my life like they did."

Wael Garnaoui, a psychologist researching the harka, says this hope is largely based on "the migration lie," a phenomenon that he says has been intensified by social media.

According to Garnaoui, people see others go to Europe and observe their apparent success. They think that once in Europe, they can easily get papers, work and money. The reality is often very different: 2020 data from the European Commission showed that the unemployment rate for inhabitants from outside the EU was nearly 14%, compared to about 6% for the native-born population.

"So they go to the Eiffel Tower and take a selfie in a Lacoste T-shirt, take photos of expensive cars. ... They tell their family back home that everything is going well," Garnaoui said. "If they say the opposite, everyone will mock them. They will point to other people and say: 'If they did it, why can't you?'"

"There is so much social pressure," he said.

In the weeks since Ben Mahmoudé and al Saidi made it to Europe, they have documented their shop-

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ping sprees, rides in BMWs and picture-perfect lattes. A photo of al Saidi riding an electric scooter in the historic French village of Le Puy-Notre-Dame got nearly 6,000 likes, while one of Ben Mahmoudé beneath the Eiffel tower had 8,000. The photos and videos of their crossings garnered hundreds of thousands of likes and shares.

Although both women secured sponsorships in Tunisia that paid them for their social media endorsements of beauty products and local businesses, it's unclear if they are making money from their posts in Italy and France.

But their posts do have influence in Tunisia, experts say.

Posts like theirs "demystify" a journey that might otherwise be too terrifying to undertake, said Herbert of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

"One of the bars to migration is the fear of stepping out on the journey. ... It's scary. What these videos do, especially the videos of men and women at sea describing their journey, it confronts their fear with a visual reality that people can replace it with," he said. "It lowers the mental bar to leaving."

Ayla Bonfiglio, an expert on migration at the Mixed Migration Centre, said rather than focusing on the draw posed by glowing social media posts like al Saidi's and Ben Mahmoudé's, the real controversy should be "the fact that few legal pathways exist for youth to move."

Citing France's recent visa cuts, she said: "This use of migration as a political bargaining chip further limits legal pathways and it doesn't reduce the demand for migration."

As for Ben Mahmoudé, she insists she's not trying to encourage others to do the harka.

"I posted those videos because I always document my life on Instagram. Whether it's at my house, when I'm out, when I'm at a cafe," she said. "For me it was totally normal to publish stuff when I was doing the harka."

For many, however, the harka has spelled only tragedy.

Chamseddine Marzouk, a volunteer for the Red Crescent in Zarzis, a coastal Tunisian town, has been burying the bodies of those trying to reach Europe for years. By building a makeshift cemetery, Marzouk wanted to raise awareness about the dangers of migration.

Then last summer Marzouk woke to find a letter from his wife saying that after multiple failed attempts to get visas, she and their grandchildren had left by boat for Europe. "Forgive me, I'm going to Italy. I have no other solution but the sea," read the note.

"I found myself living the same situation that I'd been fighting for years," Marzouk said.

If an accident happened, "I could be burying my family without knowing whose bodies they were. I was in shock for two nights, and felt such relief when they called and told me they had arrived."

## In Russia's Ukraine plans, how much does the mud matter?

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Russian expression "tanks don't fear mud" is common enough that it's been the title of a short-lived Russian television series and can be found stenciled on car windows.

And it's yet another reason why any Russian decision to invade Ukraine is likely to depend very little upon fears that a spring thaw will hinder tanks from crossing boggy ground. Russia's military has, in addition to tanks and other armored vehicles that are well equipped for mud, a range of fighter jets and missiles that are the hallmarks of any modern military.

U.S. President Joe Biden has said that Russia is essentially in position for an invasion of Ukraine "assuming that the ground is frozen above Kyiv," the Ukrainian capital that is only 75 kilometers (47 miles) from the border of Belarus, a key Russian ally. It's not the first time an American official has invoked Russia's need for frozen ground to stage an invasion.

But analysts trying to figure out how Russia could invade say any assault would start with air and missile strikes, likely targeting Ukrainian military sites.

"If (Russian President Vladimir) Putin agrees to an invasion, then it won't be tanks or ships in the vanguard, but rather aircraft and missile forces. The first targets for them will be air defense systems and the

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missile defense force, command posts, critical infrastructure, after which the advantage of Russian forces in the air and upper hand on land and sea are guaranteed," said Mykola Sunhurovskyi, a military analyst at the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center think tank.

Some Ukrainian analysts have acknowledged that the country's air defenses are insufficient in case of a massive Russian assault. Kyiv has prodded its Western allies to provide the country with modern air defense systems in addition to ground combat weapons provided by the U.S., Britain and others.

Sunhorovskyi said "the only deterrent is the West's position and the readiness of millions of Ukrainians to fight to the end."

The Kremlin, which has denied having any Ukraine invasion plans, has scoffed at an argument that it wants to see the ground frozen to launch an attack on Ukraine. Ukrainian officials agree that frozen ground or mud isn't an issue.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pointed at the argument to taunt British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss following their icy talks in Moscow on Thursday.

"They say that Russia is waiting for the ground to freeze like a stone so that tanks could easily roll into Ukrainian territory," Lavrov told reporters. "The ground was like that with our British colleagues, with numerous facts we cited bouncing off them."

Konstantin Sivkov, a Russian military analyst, said even if there were a ground incursion, Russian battle tanks are significantly lighter than Western armored vehicles and don't get bogged down.

"Our tanks are much better suited for advancing on muddy terrain, there is nothing to worry about," Sivkov said in remarks carried by the FAN news outlet. "A thaw can only stop Western tanks."

## At Winter Olympics, virus fight waged with worker sacrifices

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — In her mind, Cathy Chen pictures a scene that she herself says could be drawn from a TV drama: Falling into the arms of her husband after long months apart, when he meets her off the plane from Beijing. Scooping up their two young daughters and squeezing them tight.

"I just imagine when we're back together," the Olympic Games worker says, "and I just can't control myself."

So athletes from countries where the coronavirus has raged can compete in the Olympic host nation with few infections, China's workforce at the Winter Games is making a giant sacrifice.

Severing them from lives they were busy living before the Olympic circus came to town, more than 50,000 Chinese workers have been hermetically sealed inside the Great Wall-like ring-fence of virus prevention measures that China has erected around the Games, locked in with the athletes and Olympic visitors.

The Olympians jet in for just a few weeks with their skis, skates, sleds and other gear. Chinese workers who cook, clean, transport, care for them and otherwise make the Winter Games tick are being sequestered inside the sanitary bubble for several months. As Olympians bank memories to cherish for a lifetime, their Chinese hosts are putting family life on ice.

The sacrifice has been made larger by its timing: the Olympic run-up overlapped with the ushering in on Feb. 1 of the Lunar New Year, the biggest and most precious annual holiday in China. As their loved ones feted the advent of the Year of the Tiger, Olympic workers hooked up with them as best they could via video calls from inside the "closed loop."

That is the soft-sounding name Chinese authorities have given to the anti-viral barrier they've built with high walls, police patrols, thickets of security cameras, mandatory daily tests and countless squirts of disinfectant — separating the Winter Games from the rest of China.

Chen found a spot in the workers' underground canteen of the main Olympic press center for a New Year video-call with her husband, Issac, and their two daughters, Kiiara, aged six, and 18-month-old Sia. They were gathering with extended family for a celebration dinner. Chen keeps a screen grab from the call on her phone. She also has a photo of the four of them posing together on Dec. 26, the day Chen flew from their home in southern China to take up her Olympic job in Beijing.

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She works at a Chinese medicine exhibition space in the Olympic press center. Initially hesitant about the prospect of months apart from her family, Chen subsequently decided that the opportunity to mingle with overseas visitors and promote the pharmaceutical company she works for couldn't be turned down. She is also hoping for triple pay for having worked through the Lunar New Year holiday.

"My boss is happy," she said. "Because it's tough work."

Her Games will end with the closing ceremony next Sunday. Like all Chinese workers when they exit the bubble, she will then be quarantined in Beijing for a week or two. Only then, a full two months after she kissed them goodbye, will come the much-anticipated reunion with her family.

"I can't wait one more day," she said. "I miss my younger baby most."

Because China's ruling Communist Party does not allow workers to organize independently and with no free trade unions, there's not a whisper of public complaint about labor conditions inside the bubble.

Many are doing mundane and repetitive tasks and working weeks without days off. Battalions of cleaners constantly wipe and disinfect surfaces. Hospital doctors have been re-tasked to the relatively unskilled job of taking oral swabs for the daily coronavirus tests that are mandatory for all games participants. Volunteers and guards count people in and out of venues, tracking numbers with ticks on sheets of paper. But none will be heard griping publicly about the Olympic endeavor that the Communist Party is using to showcase its rule.

The bubble has been in force from Jan. 4, a month before President Xi Jinping declared the games open. After five weeks of loop life, the most critical things workers will say is that they're losing track of time, that days resemble each other, and that they're longing for a break from canteen food: too bland for those from regions with cuisine laced with fiery chili peppers, too unvaried for the many who long for home cooking and comforts.

Publicly, on the other hand, everyone agrees how privileged they are to be doing their bit, no matter how small. And all say that locking them in is a small sacrifice to prevent the coronavirus from jumping the barrier to their families, friends and everyone else outside. More than 1.3 million tests had turned up 432 positives by Day 10, but there were no reports of contamination leaking from the Olympic bubble.

Volunteer worker Dong Jingge misses her grandparents and has an unglamorous Olympic task: She guards the door of a walled-off dining space for Olympic visitors subject to extra health monitoring because they previously tested positive. She counts them in and out, and asks them to disinfect their hands.

The interactions are improving her English, the 21-year-old student enthuses. Her highlight so far was bumping into International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach. He gave her a small metal lapel pin of the Olympic rings.

Her mother, outside the loop, was thrilled. "Such a rare opportunity, an unforgettable moment," she messaged when Dong posted a photo of her prize. Scheduled to also work through the Paralympic Games in March that follow the Olympics, Dong expects that her total stay inside the loop and post-loop quarantine will together add up to nearly three months.

Olympic driver Li Hong says he's living his "dream" ferrying visitors and workers from venues on his overnight shift. He has been told to expect the equivalent of just under US\$80 per day, which should add up to a tidy sum when he gets home by the end of February, after two months in the bubble.

But he's in it for the experience, he says, not the money nor the expectation that Olympic service might look good on his membership application if he tries to join the Communist Party.

"I said to myself, I'm over 50. In my lifetime, I should serve the country," he said. "It feels great."

## Police filter Brussels traffic to dilute trucker protests

BRUSSELS (AP) — Belgian police were filtering traffic around the Brussels capital region during Monday's morning rush hour in an attempt to keep a vehicle protest against coronavirus restrictions in check.

Police narrowed some highways and imposed go-slow traffic to keep control of what it feared could otherwise turn into a choking demonstration like those by horn-honking truckers in Canada. Early indications didn't show a groundswell of support for the action but police took extensive precautions in and around

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European Union headquarters in central Brussels.

Many trucks were expected from France, where Paris police fired tear gas Saturday against a handful of demonstrators on the Champs-Élysées Avenue who defied a police order by taking part in a vehicle protest.

A threatened blockade of Paris failed to materialize over the weekend, despite days of online organizing efforts.

In the Netherlands, dozens of trucks and other vehicles — ranging from tractors to a car towing a camping van — arrived in The Hague for a similar virus-related protest Saturday, blocking an entrance to the historic Dutch parliamentary complex.

## **New Zealand's PM signals harsher stance on vaccine protest**

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — New Zealand's prime minister on Monday said protesters who oppose coronavirus mandates were using "intimidation and harassment," as authorities appeared to take a harsher stance toward the convoy of demonstrators that has disrupted the capital of Wellington for nearly a week.

Police initially let the protesters set up tents and camp on the grounds of New Zealand's Parliament before arresting 122 people on Thursday and then backing off again. The size of the protest dropped to a few hundred last week but increased again to around 3,000 over the weekend.

Speaking with reporters, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern signaled the thinning patience of authorities.

"I very clearly have a view on the protesters and the way that they've conducted their protest because it has moved beyond sharing a view to intimidation and harassment of the people around central Wellington," she said. "That cannot be tolerated."

Parliament Speaker Trevor Mallard tried to make the protesters uncomfortable last week by turning on lawn sprinklers and blasting out decades-old Barry Manilow songs and the 1990s hit "Macarena" on a repeat loop.

Police on Monday told protesters to move their illegally parked vehicles as soon as possible, offering them alternative parking at a nearby stadium.

"Wellingtonians have the right to move freely and safely around the city so all roads being clear is a top priority," said Superintendent Corrie Parnell, the Wellington district commander.

The protesters, who oppose coronavirus vaccine mandates and were inspired by similar protests in Canada, appear fairly well organized after trucking in portable toilets, crates of donated food, and bales of straw to lay down when the grass turned to mud.

Despite the arrests and scuffles with police last week, dozens of tents remain on Parliament's grounds, with cars and trucks blocking surrounding streets. Protesters lined up on Monday for a breakfast of barbecued sausages and schnitzels after surviving a weekend of torrential rain.

Kacheeya Scarrow drove her van about 380 kilometers (235 miles) from the town of Taupo to join the camp out.

"All I want is the mandates lifted, and freedom of choice," she said. "I'm not anti-vax, I'm not pro-vax. Everybody should have the right to choose what they want to do with their own body."

Another protester, 70-year-old Joanna Plows, said the government had usurped the right "to choose whether or not we have medical intervention."

New Zealand has mandated that certain workers get vaccinated against COVID-19, including teachers, doctors, nurses, police and military personnel. A vaccine pass is also required to enter most stores and restaurants.

The protests come just as New Zealand experiences its first widespread outbreak of COVID-19, after keeping its borders closed for much of the pandemic. Daily case numbers jumped to a new high of nearly 1,000 on Monday, up from about 200 per day just five days earlier.

However, not a single patient was in intensive care, thanks in part to a vaccination rate of 77% and what experts have described as the comparatively less severe symptoms of the omicron variant.

New Zealand was spared the worst of the pandemic after it closed its borders and implemented strict

lockdowns, limiting the spread of the virus. The nation has reported just 53 virus deaths among its population of 5 million.

Ardern said the timing of the mass camp out couldn't be worse.

"At the very point where we are seeing an increase in cases, and an increase in risk to the public health and wellbeing of New Zealand, they want to see removed the very measures that have kept us safe, well and alive," she said.

## Ukraine president's ratings fall as crisis with Russia brews

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — As a political novice making an unlikely run to be Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed to reach out to Russia-backed rebels in the east who were fighting Ukrainian forces and make strides toward resolving the conflict. The assurances contributed to his landslide victory in 2019.

But after 2½ years in office, Zelenskyy is watching his once-enormous support dissolve as Ukraine stands on what many fear is the verge of a Russian invasion that would not only take the rebel regions but possibly the rest of the country.

To make matters worse, the incumbent whom Zelenskyy defeated in 2019 has boldly returned to the country to face charges of treason and stir up opposition to him. Analysts, meanwhile, suggest that Moscow is seeking to bolster support among pro-Russia politicians in Ukraine and that the buildup of Russian forces near Ukraine's border is aimed partly at destabilizing the country's politics.

Britain's intelligence services claimed last month that Russia was seeking to overthrow Zelenskyy's government and replace him with the leader of a small party that opposes Ukraine's ambitions to join NATO and the European Union.

Zelenskyy tried to calm the political turbulence Sunday by downplaying the stepped-up warnings from the U.S. about the imminent possibility of a Russian invasion.

"We understand all the risks," Zelenskyy said, adding that if anyone has any "information regarding a 100% certain invasion, beginning on the 16th," they need to come forward.

The maneuverings and the dismay among ordinary Ukrainians present a significant challenge for a country where democracy has been shambolic for decades. In the past 20 years, Ukraine has endured two significant uprisings — one that forced the rerun of a fraud-ridden presidential election and the mass, bloody protests that drove the Kremlin-friendly president to flee the country in 2014. Fistfights have broken out in parliament. Political alliances often shift and parties transmute into new entities.

"The biggest risk for Ukraine and the biggest risk for the sovereignty of our state ... is destabilization within our state," Zelenskyy said last month.

But Ukrainians have little confidence that Zelenskyy can ensure that stability. According to a January poll by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, only 30% of the country's people want Zelenskyy to run for a second term and even fewer — 23% — would vote for him.

The continuing conflict in the rebel east and the prospect of a full-scale war aren't the only factors in his declining support.

"Zelenskyy promised to end the war and defeat corruption, but this did not happen," said Anatoly Rudenko, a 48-year-old driver in Kyiv. "Prices are rising, corruption has not gone away and we have begun to live even poorer."

"The miracle did not happen. The situation is only getting worse," said Tatyana Shmeleva, a 54-year-old economist.

Zelenskyy initially made his name in Ukraine as a comic actor portraying on television a teacher who inadvertently becomes president after railing against corruption. In one analyst's view, he erred as president by taking a similar path.

"Zelenskyy made a mistake by starting a confrontation with all the oligarchs of Ukraine at once, who control the main political forces, parties, TV channels. This is a very dangerous, very risky game," said Vladimir Fesenko, head of the Penta analytical center.

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Among the oligarchs Fesenko mentioned are Petro Poroshenko, the confectionary tycoon who preceded Zelenskyy as president and now faces treason charges for allegedly facilitating coal sales that financed the eastern rebels; industrialist Rinat Akhmetov, from Ukraine's east who controls an opposition faction; and Viktor Medvedchuk, the country's most prominent pro-Russia politician, whose three TV stations have been blocked for allegedly spreading misinformation and who is close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, the godfather of one of his daughters.

These oligarchs are not unified — Medvedchuk and Akhmetov are affiliated with rival opposition factions, while Poroshenko's presidency was marked by strong antipathy toward Russia. But many observers believe Moscow is trying to exploit any opposition to Zelenskyy.

"There are no open pro-Russia forces that are able to legally come to power in elections, which means that the Kremlin must look for hidden allies and conduct secret negotiations with several Ukrainian players at once," Fesenko said. Russia "is pulling economic, energy, political strings, trying to find 'flexible' political forces."

"What does Putin want? His task is very simple — it is the destabilization of our state. Can he do it militarily? No, he cannot. To do this, he needs internal destabilization," Ukrainian Security Council head Oleksiy Danilov said.

However, analyst Volodymyr Sidenko of the Razumkov Center said "the scenario of collusion between one of the Ukrainian oligarchs and the Kremlin looks unlikely, since there are no conditions for the formation of stable Russian-Ukrainian business chains."

Ukraine's next parliamentary election will be held in 2023 and all opinion polls show that the ruling pro-presidential Servant of the People party may lose control of parliament. This would complicate Zelenskyy's ambitions for another term in 2024, so the political landscape could change drastically.

But the current tensions may even work in his favor in the long term.

"Threats from Russia can paradoxically help Zelenskyy — he is just trying to unite everyone who stands for an independent and European Ukraine," said Grigory Khoronenko, a programmer in Kyiv. "There may not be a war but Zelenskyy has already received military and financial assistance from the West, which will go to support morale."

The British intelligence report that claimed Russia could seek to install politician Yevheniy Murayev as Ukraine's president gave no scenario about how that plan might work. Murayev once was part of Medvedchuk's opposition party, but split and formed a party of his own that has no seats in parliament.

The U.K. report sparked wide speculation about Russia's possible nefarious intent, but many Ukrainians brushed it off as far-fetched.

"I perceive the British version about Murayev with skepticism; this may be something Russia deliberately threw in ... to create a fake smokescreen and hide the real players that the Kremlin is oriented toward," Fesenko said.

On Friday, Ukraine's national security council imposed a five-year sanction against a television channel owned by Murayev.

## Super Bowl: Eminem takes a knee, 50 Cent hangs upside down

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — 50 Cent made a surprise upside-down entrance at the Super Bowl halftime show, and Eminem dramatically took a knee.

The show brought about as much hip-hop as a stadium can hold, with Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige, Eminem and Kendrick Lamar spitting a fiery medley of their hits.

As his rendition of "Lose Yourself" ended, Eminem took a knee and held his head in his hand in apparent tribute to former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who took a knee during the national anthem to protest police brutality during the 2016 season. Other players followed suit, and the move created widespread cultural controversy. Kaepernick would be out of the league soon after.

The NFL denied reports that it was attempting to stop Eminem from making the gesture.

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"We watched all elements of the show during multiple rehearsals this week and were aware that Eminem was going to do that," league spokesman Brian McCarthy said.

It was a rare Super Bowl halftime show performed in the daylight, but it still had a feeling of a nightclub at SoFi Stadium on Sunday, with a set made up to look like the houses of nearby Compton and South LA. Dre and Snoop opened the show with "Next Episode" and "California Love."

50 Cent, not among the announced performers, started his "In Da Club" while hanging upside inside one of the rooms.

Blige was decked out in silver sparkles and surrounded by backup dancers as she sang a medley of her hits.

The set was surrounded by what looked like a lit-up cityscape from above, with classic convertibles and replicas of the Tam's Burgers stand and the sculpture outside the Compton Courthouse.

The crowd had lanyards with LED lights that flashed in coordination with the show's beats, turning the whole stadium into a light show.

An explosion of fireworks lit up the sky as the sun set outside and the show ended, with Snoop and Dre performing "Still DRE."

## AN AVERAGE ANTHEM, IN LENGTH ONLY

"Quickie Mickey" slowed it down for the Super Bowl.

Mickey Guyton, who told The Associated Press this week that she'd earned the nickname for singing "The Star Spangled Banner" in a tight 1:30, sang it in about 1:50 on Sunday before the Los Angeles Rams and Cincinnati Bengals took the field.

Odds makers had put the over/under on the anthem length at 1:35.

"I don't want to ruin anybody's sports bets, but let's just say it's the Super Bowl, so it most likely won't be as fast," the Grammy-nominated country singer told the AP.

She delivered a soaring, emotive version of the anthem with a minimum of frills that was largely a cappella at first before a small choir and piano joined her.

She was still faster than the average Super Bowl anthem of around two minutes.

Guyton did not appear to drop or flub a word, another propositional bet that was offered. And those who bet on her outfit being blue can cash in. She wore a royal blue gown.

The 38-year-old Texas native, best known for her hit "Black Like Me," made history as the first Black woman to earn a Grammy nomination in a country category and first Black solo woman to host the ACM Awards. She's a four-time Grammy nominee — up for three at the upcoming ceremony in April.

## ROCK ROLLS OUT THE KICKOFF

Dwayne Johnson brought out "The Rock."

Standing on the field, the actor grabbed a mic and put on his old wrestling persona to introduce the teams just before kickoff, in the style of an announcer before a big fight.

"Finally! The Super Bowl has come back to Los Aaaaangelesssss!" Johnson said, cocking his eyebrow as he did when he was WWE star before he became a movie star.

He introduced the Rams as a team with a "a soul-crushing, unrelenting defense" and "a head-spinning onslaught of an offense," and the Bengals as "a team that has risen from the ashes to become one of the most feared, dominant, absolutely electrifying teams in the NFL."

Johnson played football himself for the University of Miami, where he won a national championship in 1991.

"It is time for all of us here and millions around the world to bear witness to these incredible players, who will leave every ounce of sweat, guts, pride and legacy out here on this hallowed field, because that is what champions do," he said. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to say: 'Finally, it is time for the Suuuper Boooooowww!'"

## OTHER ANTHEMS

Guyton's "Star Spangled Banner" was really the final part of a trilogy of anthemic pregame songs.

About 40 minutes before kickoff, the Rams and Bengals lined the end zones and looked up at the big screen while outside, next to SoFi Stadium's lake, gospel duo Mary Mary and the LA Phil's Youth Orchestra

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Los Angeles performed "Lift Every Voice and Sing," a song that's known as the unofficial Black national anthem.

The duo, sisters Erica Campbell and Trecina Atkins-Campbell, grew up in the same neighborhood as the Super Bowl stadium.

And down the field from Guyton, singer Jhené Aiko brought a novel combination of R&B and harp to her rendition of "America the Beautiful."

NBC's telecast briefly misidentified Guyton as Aiko just as Aiko began singing.

Actress Sandra Mae Frank performed both "The Star Spangled Banner" and "America the Beautiful" in American sign language.

## STARS ON THE BIG SCREEN

Celebrities in the stands of the first Hollywood-adjacent Super Bowl in nearly 30 years provided much of the entertainment at SoFi Stadium during commercial breaks.

The crowd cheered as Kevin Hart blew kisses, Chris Tucker and Charlize Theron danced and Doja Cat and Danny Trejo waved.

Jennifer Lopez didn't seem to notice she was on the huge 360-degree screen at all.

And a shot of a man in a hoodie whose face was fully covered by a black mask who was seated with NFL player Antonio Brown set off social media speculation on his identity.

The loudest cheers came for local Los Angeles sports heroes, including Dodgers pitcher Clayton Kershaw and former Lakers Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Shaquille O'Neal, who wagged his tongue at the camera.

## Egypt steps up Gaza role after brokering last year's truce

By FARES AKRAM Associated Press

After years of behind-the-scenes activity in the Gaza Strip, Egypt is going public.

Since mediating a cease-fire between Israel and Gaza's ruling Hamas militant group, Egypt has sent crews to clear rubble and is promising to build vast new apartment complexes. Egyptian flags and billboards praising President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi have sprung up across the Palestinian territory.

It is a new look for the Egyptians, who have spent years working quietly to encourage Israel-Hamas truce talks and reconciliation between rival Palestinian factions.

The shift could help prevent — or at least delay — another round of violence. By presenting itself as a Mideast peacemaker, Egypt could also blunt efforts by the Biden administration and some U.S. lawmakers to hold the country accountable for human rights abuses.

The 11-day Gaza war last May "allowed Egypt to once again market itself as an indispensable security partner for Israel in the region — which it is — which in turn makes it an indispensable security partner for the U.S.," said Hafsa Halawa, an expert on Egypt at the Middle East Institute, a Washington think tank.

"Gaza is a reminder to everybody, effectively, that you can't really do anything without Egypt," she said.

The expanded aid, along with its control over Rafah — the only Gaza border crossing that bypasses Israel — gives Egypt leverage over Hamas, the Islamic militant group that has ruled Gaza since driving out forces loyal to the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority in 2007.

Egypt joined Israel in imposing a crippling blockade on the territory after the Hamas takeover, but both countries have recently taken steps to ease the restrictions, tacitly acknowledging that Hamas rule is here to stay.

After negotiating the informal cease-fire that ended the Gaza war, Egypt pledged \$500 million to rebuild the territory and sent work crews to remove rubble.

While it remains unclear how much of that money has been delivered, Egypt is now subsidizing the construction of three towns that are to house some 300,000 residents, according to Naji Sarhan, the deputy director of the Hamas-run Housing Ministry. Work is also under way to upgrade Gaza's main coastal road. Sarhan said the projects will take a year and a half to complete.

"We hope there will be large bundles of projects in the near future, especially the towers that were destroyed in the war," he said.

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Israel leveled four high-rises during the fighting, saying they housed Hamas military infrastructure. It has not publicly released evidence backing up the claims, which Hamas denies. The construction materials will be shipped through Rafah.

Alaa al-Araj, of the Palestinian contractors' union, said nine Palestinian companies will take part in the Egyptian projects, which would generate some 16,000 much-needed jobs in the impoverished territory.

The Egyptian presence is palpable. Nearly every week, Egyptian delegations visit Gaza to inspect the work. They have also opened an office at a Gaza City hotel for permanent technical representatives.

Egyptian flags and banners of Egyptian companies flutter atop bulldozers, trucks and utility poles. Dozens of Egyptian workers have arrived, sleeping at a makeshift hostel in a Gaza City school.

Five days a week, Egyptian trucks filled with construction materials flow into Gaza through the Rafah crossing — a visible contrast to the intermittent shipments arriving through an Israeli-controlled crossing.

Suhail Saqqa, a Gaza contractor involved in the reconstruction, said the steady flow of Egyptian materials is critical.

"The goods are not restricted by Israeli crossings, and this makes them momentous," Saqqa said.

The projects are part of a broader realignment after years in which Gaza was caught in a tug-of-war among Arab states following the upheaval of the 2011 Arab Spring protests.

A short-lived elected Islamist government in Egypt was closely allied with the Gulf country of Qatar and sympathetic to Hamas. It eased the blockade and brokered the end of a brief Gaza war in 2012. But the following year it was overthrown by the Egyptian military.

The Egyptian leader, el-Sissi, who led the overthrow, initially adopted a hard-line stance against Hamas, ordering the destruction of a vast network of smuggling tunnels that had sustained Gaza's economy.

Qatar, which supports Islamist groups across the region, meanwhile stepped in to provide humanitarian aid, including cash-filled suitcases shipped to Gaza with Israel's permission.

The rivalry escalated, with Cairo joining the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in blockading Qatar from 2017 until a year ago. But relations have improved, and Egypt and Qatar are now cooperating to deliver aid that helps the Hamas government pay its civil servants.

The growing Egyptian role gives Cairo a powerful tool to enforce Hamas' compliance with the truce. It can close Rafah whenever it wants, making it nearly impossible for anyone to travel into or out of Gaza, which is home to more than 2 million Palestinians.

Egypt "can suffocate Gaza in a moment" if its demands are not met, said Maged Mandour, an Egyptian political analyst.

That might be enough to prevent another outbreak of hostilities in the near term. But it doesn't address the underlying conflict that has fueled four wars between Israel and Hamas and countless skirmishes over the last 15 years.

Israel and most Western countries consider Hamas a terrorist organization because of its refusal to accept Israel's existence and its long history of deadly attacks.

Israel has enforced a policy of separation between the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza, which flank Israel and under an internationally endorsed proposal would one day be part of a Palestinian state.

Israel's current government has ruled out any major peace initiatives — even with Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank — but it has taken steps to improve living conditions, including issuing some 10,000 permits for Gazans to work inside Israel.

Relations between Hamas and Abbas' Fatah party plunged to a new low last year after he called off the first elections in more than 15 years. Repeated attempts at reconciliation — many brokered by Egypt — have failed.

But for Egypt and Israel, and for a U.S. administration focused on larger crises elsewhere — preserving the status quo in Gaza might be enough.

"Egypt wants understandings or even pressure on Hamas so the situation won't explode," said Talal Oukal, a Gaza-based political analyst.

**Ivan Reitman, producer, 'Ghostbusters' director, dies at 75**

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By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Ivan Reitman, the influential filmmaker and producer behind many of the most beloved comedies of the late 20th century, from "Animal House" to "Ghostbusters," has died. He was 75.

Reitman died peacefully in his sleep Saturday night at his home in Montecito, Calif., his family told The Associated Press.

"Our family is grieving the unexpected loss of a husband, father, and grandfather who taught us to always seek the magic in life," children Jason Reitman, Catherine Reitman and Caroline Reitman said in a joint statement. "We take comfort that his work as a filmmaker brought laughter and happiness to countless others around the world. While we mourn privately, we hope those who knew him through his films will remember him always."

Known for bawdy comedies that caught the spirit of their time, Reitman's big break came with the raucous, college fraternity sendup "National Lampoon's Animal House," which he produced. He directed Bill Murray in his first starring role in the summer camp flick "Meatballs," and then again in 1981's "Stripes," but his most significant success came with 1984's "Ghostbusters."

Not only did the irreverent supernatural comedy starring Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis, Ernie Hudson, Sigourney Weaver and Rick Moranis gross nearly \$300 million worldwide, it earned two Oscar nominations, spawned a veritable franchise, including spinoffs, television shows and a new movie, "Ghostbusters: Afterlife," that opened this last year. His son, filmmaker Jason Reitman directed.

Paul Feig, who directed the 2016 reboot of "Ghostbusters" tweeted that he was in shock.

"I had the honor of working so closely with Ivan and it was always such a learning experience," Feig wrote. "He directed some of my favorite comedies of all time. All of us in comedy owe him so very much."

"A legend," comedian and actor Kumail Nanjiani said on Twitter. "The number of great movies he made is absurd."

Among other notable films he directed are "Twins," "Kindergarten Cop," "Dave," "Junior" and 1998's "Six Days, Seven Nights." He also produced "Beethoven," "Old School" and "EuroTrip," and many others, including his son's Oscar-nominated film "Up in the Air."

He was born in Komárno, Czechoslovakia, in 1946 where his father owned the country's biggest vinegar factory. His mother had survived Auschwitz and his father was in the resistance. When the communists began imprisoning capitalists after the war, the Reitmans decided to escape, when Ivan Reitman was only 4. They traveled in the nailed-down hold of a barge headed for Vienna.

"I remember flashes of scenes," Reitman told the AP in 1979. "Later they told me about how they gave me a couple of sleeping pills so I wouldn't make any noise. I was so knocked out that I slept with my eyes open. My parents were afraid I was dead."

The Reitmans joined a relative in Toronto, where Ivan displayed his show biz inclinations: starting a puppet theater, entertaining at summer camps, playing coffee houses with a folk music group. He studied music and drama at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and began making movie shorts.

With friends and \$12,000, Reitman made a nine-day movie, "Cannibal Girls," which American International agreed to release. He produced on a \$500 budget a weekly TV revue, "Greed," with Dan Aykroyd, and became associated with the Lampoon group in its off-Broadway revue that featured John Belushi, Gilda Radner and Murray. That soon led to "Animal House."

Reitman seized the moment after "Animal House's" massive success and raised money to direct "Meatballs," which would be tamer than the hard-R "Animal House."

He hand picked Murray to star, which would prove to be a significant break for the comedian, but Ramis later said that Reitman didn't know if Murray would actually show up until the first day of the shoot. But it was the beginning of a fruitful and longrunning partnership that would produce the war comedy "Stripes," which Reitman said he thought up on the way to the "Meatballs" premiere, and "Ghostbusters."

Reitman also put Schwarzenegger in his first major comedy, opposite Danny DeVito in "Twins." There was such uncertainty around the project that all forfeited their fees for a share of the profits, which would prove to be a lucrative deal when the film earned \$216 million against an \$18 million production budget. In Sept. 2021, it was announced that a sequel, "Triplets" was in the works with Reitman directing his original

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cast, plus Tracy Morgan as their long lost brother.

By the time 1990's "Kindergarten Cop" came around, Reitman had established himself as the most successful comedy director in history. Though not even being the father of three children could have prepared him for the arduous task of directing 30 children between the ages of 4 and 7 in the Schwarzenegger comedy.

The political comedy "Dave," starring Kevin Kline as an ordinary man who has to double for the US President, provided a bit of a departure for Reitman. Roger Ebert wrote at the time that "The movie is more proof that it isn't what you do, it's how you do it: Ivan Reitman's direction and Gary Ross' screenplay use intelligence and warmhearted sentiment to make Dave into wonderful lighthearted entertainment."

Reitman slowed down as a director after "Six Days, Seven Nights," the 1998 adventure comedy with Harrison Ford and Anne Heche — only four films would follow "Evolution," "My Super Ex-Girlfriend," "No Strings Attached" and "Draft Day," from 2014.

But he continued producing. His company, the Montecito Picture Co., produced Todd Phillips' first movie, "Road Trip." And with "Ghostbusters: Afterlife," even found himself on the press circuit with his son, providing emotional moments for both with the passing of the baton. Jason Reitman, who was only 7 when the original came out, included some nods to his father's films like "Beethoven" and "Cannibal Girls" in "Afterlife."

"Directing 'Ghostbusters Afterlife' was completely intimidating," Jason Reitman said last year. "I was lucky enough to do it sitting next to my dad."

When asked why the 1984 film continued to fascinate, Reitman told the AP that it was hard to define.

"I always had a sort of sincere approach to the comedy," he said. "I took it seriously even though, it was a horror movie and a comedy, I felt you had to sort of deal with it in a kind of realistic and honest way."

He always took comedy and the power of laughter seriously.

"The great cliché is about how damn tough comedy is. But of course, nobody really gives that any respect," he told the Los Angeles Times in 2000. "It's such a visceral thing, laughing. So getting to the point where you can get an audience of 600 people laughing is really precise and intricate work. ... My sense is we're laughing at the same things we've always laughed at, but the language of the filmmaker and the performer shifts."

## Key US-Canada bridge reopens as Ottawa protest persists

By ROB GILLIES and COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

WINDSOR, Ontario (AP) — The busiest U.S.-Canada border crossing was open Monday after protesters demonstrating against COVID-19 measures blocked it for nearly a week, but a larger protest in the capital, Ottawa, persisted as city residents seethed over authorities' inability to reclaim the streets.

Demonstrations against COVID-19 restrictions and other issues have blocked several crossings along the U.S.-Canada border and hurt the economies of both nations. They also inspired similar convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security warned that truck convoys may be in the works in the United States.

Police in Windsor, Ontario, arrested 25 to 30 protesters and towed several vehicles Sunday near the Ambassador Bridge, which links Windsor — and numerous Canadian automotive plants — with Detroit. The bridge reopened to traffic late Sunday night, a spokeswoman for bridge owner Detroit International Bridge Co. confirmed. Canada Border Services also confirmed that the bridge is open.

After protesters began blocking bridge access Feb. 7, automakers began shutting down or reducing production — at a time when the industry is already struggling with pandemic-induced shortages of computer chips and other supply-chain disruptions. The crossing sees 25% of all trade between the two countries.

"Today, our national economic crisis at the Ambassador Bridge came to an end," said Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens. "Border crossings will reopen when it is safe to do so and I defer to police and border agencies to make that determination."

About 470 miles (750 kilometers) northeast of Windsor, the protest in Ottawa has paralyzed downtown,

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infuriated residents who are fed up with police inaction and turned up pressure on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

A senior government official said Trudeau will meet virtually with the leaders of Canada's provinces on Monday morning. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The city had appeared to have reached a deal in which protesters, who have jammed downtown streets for more than two weeks, would move out of residential areas, but those prospects soon faded.

Mayor Jim Watson said Sunday that he agreed to meet with demonstrators if they confined their protest to an area around Parliament Hill and moved their trucks and other vehicles out of residential neighborhoods by noon Monday. He shared a letter from one of the protest's organizers, Tamara Lich, in which she said demonstrators "agree with your request" to focus activities at Parliament Hill.

But Lich later denied there was an agreement, saying in a tweet: "No deal has been made. End the mandates, end the passports. That is why we are here."

In a letter Watson wrote to protesters, he said residents are "exhausted" and "on edge" due to the demonstrations, and he warned that some businesses are teetering on the brink of permanent closure because of the disruptions.

In Surrey, British Columbia, police arrested four demonstrators Sunday, and officers in Alberta said they intercepted and disabled three excavators that were being brought to a border blockade in the town of Coutts.

While the protesters are decrying vaccine mandates for truckers and other COVID-19 restrictions, many of Canada's public health measures, such as mask rules and vaccine passports for getting into restaurants and theaters, are already falling away as the omicron surge levels off.

Pandemic restrictions have been far stricter in Canada than in the U.S., but Canadians have largely supported them. The vast majority of Canadians are vaccinated, and the COVID-19 death rate is one-third that of the United States.

A judge on Friday ordered an end to the blockade at the Ambassador Bridge, and Ontario Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency allowing for fines of 100,000 Canadian dollars and up to one year in jail for anyone illegally blocking roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure.

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on Sunday acknowledged the resolution to the bridge demonstration, which it said had "widespread damaging impacts" on the "lives and livelihoods of people" on both sides of the border.

The Windsor protest began to dwindle Saturday after police persuaded many protesters to remove vehicles blocking the road to the bridge. But in Ottawa, Saturday's crowd swelled to what police said were 4,000 demonstrators, and a counter-protest of frustrated Ottawa residents attempting to block the convoy of trucks from entering downtown emerged Sunday.

Clayton Goodwin, a 45-year-old military veteran who was among the counterprotesters, said it was time for residents to stand up against the protesters.

"I'm horrified that other veterans would be down there co-opting my flag, co-opting my service," said Goodwin, who is the CEO of the Veterans Accountability Commission, a nonprofit advocacy group. "It's a grift. The city was free. We're 92% vaccinated. We're ready to support our businesses."

Colleen Sinclair, another counterprotester, said the demonstrators have had their say and need to move on — with police force, if necessary.

"They're occupiers," she said. "This is domestic terrorism and we want you out of our city. Go home."

Trudeau has so far rejected calls to use the military, but has said "all options are on the table" to end the protests. Trudeau has called the protesters a "fringe" of Canadian society. Both federal and provincial politicians have said they can't order police what to do.

Major-General Steve Boivin, commander of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, said Sunday that two of his special forces soldiers were supporting the protests in Ottawa and were in the "process of being released" from service. Boivin said the activity goes against the military's values and ethics.

## Land rights, environment top election agenda in India's Goa

By VINEETA DEEPAK Associated Press

GOA, India (AP) — India's undisputed tourist hot spot, and the tiniest state in the world's largest democracy, is voting Monday to elect a new government with an eye toward restoring an economy ravaged by the pandemic and saving the environment threatened by an unbridled real estate boom.

More than 1.1 million voters in the western Goa state will decide who among the 301 contestants can help save their ecologically fragile coastal land that is struggling to cope with uncontrolled tourism.

It's one of five Indian states voting in phases in February and March in what is seen as a test for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party ahead of general elections expected in 2024. Results will be declared on March 10.

"The locals can't afford an apartment or a house or a plot of land in Goa anymore since the real estate prices have been driven sky high by those who want a slice of this paradise," said Atish Fernandes, who runs the popular Joseph Bar in capital Panjim.

The state has a population of less than 2 million but hosted more than 8 million tourists in 2019, before the pandemic shuttered restaurants and rendered thousands jobless. Hundreds died last year due to frequent disruptions in oxygen supplies at the Goa Medical College COVID-19 facility.

The travel and tourism industry, the lifeline of Goa's economy, is slowly recovering but not all jobs have come back.

Goa has also emerged as a preferred second home destination for India's affluent middle class, fueling frenetic construction activity. Fernandes said land rights are a major issue for every Goan since the new wealth is mostly being generated from the sale of ancestral lands, real estate development or brokerage to feed a growing demand.

At a campaign rally in the heart of Goa on Thursday, Modi offered voters his vision of a "Golden Goa" with prosperity fueled by tourism and infrastructure. The opposition Congress and the Delhi-based Aam Aadmi Party are promising sustainable development, jobs and a corruption-free government, while the Trinamool Congress, from West Bengal, has plans for generous welfare programs for the unemployed.

The two prominent regional parties joined the fray to explore their national ambitions.

For Goa's native communities like farmers and fishermen, what is at stake is a distinct way of life that for centuries has been in sync with its lush green environment and coastal biodiversity.

The state has witnessed intense political turmoil over the last few months, with popular candidates including former chief ministers — the top elected officials — switching sides in their pursuit to secure nominations, often shifting loyalties between parties with conflicting ideologies.

Goa has set a record, "unparalleled" in the history of Indian democracy, with 24 lawmakers in the 40-member state assembly switching parties in the last five years, according to a report by the Association of Democratic Reforms, a non-governmental group working for electoral reforms.

To ensure its nominees don't go party-hopping after the polls, the Congress party has made them take a pledge of loyalty.

"Here, in just a few weeks, every party has disgraced itself by making a mockery of their own stated platforms and ideals," writer Vivek Menezes opined in the Outlook weekly magazine.

Goa's turbulent politics is a microcosm of India's chaotic political landscape, where a diverse mix of religious and caste identities shape the elections.

The BJP under Modi has emphatically won twice on the national stage with its Hindu-first politics that has alienated Muslims and other minorities as well as secular parties. But its grip on power has been challenged, most recently by rising unemployment and a year-long farmers' protest on the outskirts of New Delhi.

In Goa, which is often portrayed by Bollywood as a westernized enclave with foreign tourists partying on sandy beaches and vistas dominated by its historical Catholic churches, Christians constitute only 25% of the population. More than 66% of Goans are Hindu.

Despite controversial statements on rebuilding Hindu temples destroyed by the Portuguese, the Hindu majoritarian agenda of the BJP has had to accommodate the minority Christian community in its quest

to win elections.

The BJP in Goa has fielded 12 Catholic candidates in Monday's election, while the Congress party has nominated 17.

In the quaint Fontainhas area of Panjim, the narrow, winding streets are lined with Portuguese-style homes and bars. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Fontainhas is steeped in the colonial history of Goa, a Portuguese territory until 1961.

At the Joseph Bar, tucked between Fontainhas's ancient buildings, many rue the inevitable change that free market brings, especially in an economy where every third person is engaged in tourism.

"The local people who are the stakeholders and voters here are always looking back at what they had and what they have lost," said Fernandes. "If you ask an average Goan what he wants, he wants a life he had 15-20 year ago."

## Kupp's late TD lifts Rams over Bengals 23-20 in Super Bowl

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Their defense laying siege to the Bengals, the Rams needed something — anything — from their slumbering offense.

How about a precise 79-yard drive to the Lombardi Trophy?

It wasn't a classic march, aided by three successive Bengals penalties and mired by some bad throws. No matter: When Cooper Kupp caught a 1-yard pass from Matthew Stafford with 1:25 remaining, LA's offense indeed had awakened just in time for a 23-20 Super Bowl victory Sunday.

"That's hard work, that's hours together," Stafford said. "I just thank coach (Sean McVay) for putting it ... 'Hey, Matthew, you and Coop go get this thing done.' He kept calling plays for him, kept finding ways to get him the ball. He made unbelievable plays; that's what he does."

What Los Angeles did on that drive finally measured up to what its defense was doing most of the night: overwhelming Cincinnati's blockers, sacking Joe Burrow a Super Bowl record-tying seven times. The pressure, led by Aaron Donald and Von Miller, was nonstop.

"You got to be relentless," said Donald, who added a crowning achievement to his certain Hall of Fame career. "You want something bad enough you've got to go get it. You know it was right in front of us ... all offseason you work, you train, you got camp, you got a long season just for this one game. You know we the last team standing."

Standing in a venue built for champions, with the Rams (16-5) earning their first NFL title since the 1999 season — and their first representing Los Angeles since 1951.

They did so in their home, the \$5 billion SoFi Stadium, making the Rams the second consecutive host to win the championship after Tampa Bay became the first a year ago.

"As far as building this stadium," said Rams owner Stan Kroenke, the man who moved them back from St. Louis in 2016, "I think it turned out all right."

The winning series, during which game MVP Kupp's 4-yard touchdown reception was negated by offsetting penalties, ended soon after with the NFL Offensive Player of the Year easily beating Eli Apple in the right corner of the end zone for the winning score.

Kupp had four receptions for 39 yards, and a 7-yard run on fourth-and-1 from the Rams 30 on the championship drive.

Cincinnati (13-8) was penalized the second-fewest times (72) for the fewest yards (620) in the regular season but flags hurt badly — including pass interference on Kupp in the end zone.

"I've said it all year, whatever is asked of me whatever my job is gonna be, I just want to execute to the best of my abilities," said Kupp, who won the triple crown of receiving in 2021, leading in catches, yards and touchdowns. "I trust as the game goes on I'll have opportunities as well, and I just want to stay ready for those things stay locked in."

As locked in as that pass rush.

Fittingly, Burrow was under pressure on fourth-and-1 and threw incomplete, setting off a football fiesta

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this city has not seen since the LA Raiders won the 1983 championship.

A tearful Donald said after the game, "I wanted it so bad. I dreamed this."

Added McVay, at 36 the youngest Super Bowl-winning head coach: "For the offense to be able to find a way, and then Aaron to be able to finish it off, it's poetic, man."

Ten points because of two plays in a span of 22 seconds at the outset of the third quarter put Cincinnati ahead for the first time.

Tee Higgins' 75-yard score made it 17-13 and was followed one play later by Chidobe Awuzie's pick. Evan McPherson tied Adam Vinatieri's postseason record with his 14th field goal, a 38-yarder. The rookie didn't miss in the postseason.

Higgins beat All-Pro cornerback Jalen Ramsey on the first play of the second half — the receiver clearly tugged Ramsey's face mask on the play. After Stafford was intercepted on the next play, the Bengals got McPherson's field goal.

They tried to hold on as all of southwest Ohio held its breath.

"I was disappointed in my performance overall," said Burrow, the NFL Comeback Player of the Year who was 22 of 33 for 263 yards and a touchdown. That's going to propel us into next year ... we're not satisfied with what we did this year."

Not after the 15-play march in which Kupp also converted a fourth down with his run.

"We wanted to be in attack mode and pressure them as much as possible," Bengals coach Zac Taylor said. "Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't."

Kupp even earned the MVP honor despite often being double-teamed after fellow wideout Odell Beckham Jr. — who had a touchdown catch on Los Angeles' second drive for the game's first score — went out with a knee injury in the second period. Kupp finished with eight receptions for 92 yards.

One fear for Rams followers was ill-advised throws by Stafford, and he had two. His deep pass moving left was picked in the end zone late in the first half by Jessie Bates III. On his second interception, rookie Ben Skowronek could only deflect it — directly to Awuzie.

Other than Matt Gay's 41-yard field goal later in the third quarter, it was all defense until the Rams' decisive drive.

"World champs, baby!" McVay proclaimed.

Energized from the outset, the crowd of 70,048 at the stadium that opened in 2020 roared to introductions of each team by The Rock. Then the Bengals fans, far louder than their Rams counterparts early on, got to rocking when Trey Hendrickson sacked Stafford, leading to a punt.

LA's defense responded by holding on third and fourth downs with a yard to go at midfield. Ernest Jones knocked down a pass for Ja'Marr Chase to turn over the ball, and the excellent field position set up the first touchdown.

Beckham, who joined the Rams in Week 10 after being exiled from Cleveland, easily beat Mike Hilton on a corner pattern for the 17-yard score. Then Beckham showed off his moonwalk in the end zone.

Kupp's first touch was a short throw from Stafford he turned into a 20-yard gain when Bates III fanned on a tackle. That would not be the last whiff by the Bengals, and it cost them mightily at the end.

The most intriguing matchup, Offensive Rookie of the Year receiver Chase against All-Pro Ramsey, got real juicy late in the opening quarter. Chase brilliantly tracked Burrow's throw and made a one-handed grab over Ramsey for a 46-yard gain to the LA 11. The drive went no further and McPherson made a 29-yarder.

Beckham took advantage of two defenders colliding to pick up 35 yards on the next drive, Darrell Henderson got 25 while covered by Hendrickson dropping back — huh? — and Kupp was wide open in the right corner of the end zone for his 11-yard score.

"It just comes down to this team and the way we prepared, they way we loved on each other, trusted each other," Kupp said.

As has been their wont when behind in the playoffs, though, the Bengals responded with a 75-yard drive capped by the trickery of Joe Mixon. He was so efficient running that the secondary was sucked in when Burrow handed off, and Mixon lobbed a 6-yard TD pass to Higgins.

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It remained 13-10 until halftime, with Beckham's left knee injury most notable; he had to be helped off the field and didn't return.

Thanks greatly to Kupp, though, the Rams finished it off.

"We always talk about there's something special about being a part of something bigger than yourself," McVay said. "These guys play for one another."

## Key US-Canada bridge reopens after police clear protesters

By ROB GILLIES and COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

WINDSOR, Ontario (AP) — The busiest U.S.-Canada border crossing reopened late Sunday after protests against COVID-19 restrictions closed it for almost a week, while Canadian officials held back from a crackdown on a larger protest in the capital, Ottawa.

Detroit International Bridge Co. said in a statement that "the Ambassador Bridge is now fully open allowing the free flow of commerce between the Canada and US economies once again." Esther Jentzen, spokeswoman for the company, said in a later text to The Associated Press that the bridge reopened to traffic at 11 p.m. EST.

The crossing normally carries 25% of all trade between the two countries, and the blockade on the Canadian side had disrupted business in both countries, with automakers forced to shut down several assembly plants.

Police in Windsor, Ontario, said earlier in the day that more than two dozen people had been peacefully arrested, seven vehicles towed and five seized as officers cleared the last demonstrators from near the bridge, which links the city — and numerous Canadian automotive plants — with Detroit.

The protest in Ottawa, meanwhile, has paralyzed downtown, infuriated residents who are fed up with police inaction and turned up pressure on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who presided at a Cabinet meeting late Sunday.

A senior government official said Trudeau planned to meet virtually with the leaders of Canada's provinces Monday morning. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The demonstrations have reverberated across Canada and beyond, with similar convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security warned that truck convoys may be in the works in the United States.

The Ambassador Bridge had remained closed for most of the day despite the break up of the protest as a heavy snowstorm blanketed the area. Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens had said the span would open once authorities determined it was safe to do so.

Canada's industry minister, François-Philippe Champagne, welcomed the development, saying on Twitter: "Good news. Glad to see that the Ambassador Bridge is now reopened."

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on Sunday acknowledged the seemingly peaceful resolution to the demonstration, which it said had "widespread damaging impacts" on the "lives and livelihoods of people" on both sides of the border.

"We stand ready to support our Canadian partners wherever useful in order to ensure the restoration of the normal free flow of commerce can resume," Homeland Security Advisor Dr. Liz Sherwood-Randall said in a statement.

In Ottawa, which is about 500 miles northeast of Windsor, Mayor Jim Watson said Sunday the city struck a deal with protesters who have jammed downtown streets for more than two weeks that will see them move out of residential areas in the next 24 hours.

Watson said he agreed to meet with demonstrators if they confined their protest to an area around Parliament Hill and moved their trucks and other vehicles out of residential neighborhoods by noon Monday.

The mayor shared a letter from one of the protest's organizers, Tamara Lich, in which she said demonstrators "agree with your request" to focus activities at Parliament Hill. But Lich later denied there was an agreement, saying in a tweet: "No deal has been made. End the mandates, end the passports. That is why we are here."

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Watson added in his letter to protesters that residents are "exhausted" and "on edge" due to the demonstrations and warns that some businesses are teetering on the brink of permanent closure because of the disruptions.

The ranks of protesters had swelled to what police said were 4,000 demonstrators by Saturday, and a counter-protest of frustrated Ottawa residents attempting to block the convoy of trucks from entering the downtown emerged Sunday.

Clayton Goodwin, a 45-year-old military veteran who was among the counter-protesters, said it was time for residents to stand up against the protesters.

"I'm horrified that other veterans would be down there co-opting my flag, co-opting my service," said Goodwin, who is the CEO of the Veterans Accountability Commission, a nonprofit advocacy group. "It's a gift. The city was free. We're 92% vaccinated. We're ready to support our businesses."

Colleen Sinclair, another counter-protester, said the demonstrators have had enough time to have their discontent heard and need to move on -- with police force, if it comes down to it.

"They're occupiers. People are scared to go to work, too scared to leave their homes," she said. "This is not how you get your voice heard. This is domestic terrorism and we want you out of our city. Go home."

The city has seen similar expansions of the protest on past weekends, and loud music played as people milled about downtown where anti-vaccine demonstrators have been encamped since late January, to the frustration of local residents.

"It just feels like I'm living in a different country, like I'm in the States," said Shannon Thomas, a 32-year-old teacher. "It just makes me really sad to see all these people waving Canadian flags and acting like patriots when it's really the most sad and embarrassing thing I've ever seen."

Trudeau has so far rejected calls to use the military, but had said that "all options are on the table" to end the protests. Trudeau has called the protesters a "fringe" of Canadian society. Both federal and provincial politicians have said they can't order police what to do.

Major-General Steve Boivin, commander of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, said Sunday that two of his special forces soldiers were supporting the protests in Ottawa and were in the "process of being released" from service. Boivin said the activity goes against the military's values and ethics.

On Friday, a judge ordered an end to the blockade at the crossing in Windsor and Ontario Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency allowing for fines of 100,000 Canadian dollars and up to one year in jail for anyone illegally blocking roads, bridges, walkways and other critical infrastructure.

Partial closures at the bridge started on Feb. 7 and by midweek the disruption was so severe that auto-makers began shutting down or reducing production. The standoff came at a time when the industry is already struggling to maintain production in the face of pandemic-induced shortages of computer chips and other supply-chain disruptions.

"We are protesting the government taking away our rights," said Windsor resident Eunice Lucas-Logan. "We want the restrictions removed. We have to wait to find out."

The 67-year-old has been out supporting the protest for the past four days. She said she appreciated that police have been patient.

On the other side of the country, a major truck border crossing between Surrey, British Columbia, and Blaine, Washington, was closed Sunday, a day after Canadian authorities said a few vehicles had breached police barricades and a crowd entered the area by foot.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said Sunday afternoon four people had been arrested for "mischief" during the protest. Some people who stayed overnight had packed up and left, but the border crossing and roads in the area remained closed.

A border blockade that began in Coutts, Alberta, north of Sweet Grass, Montana, on Jan. 29 remained in place as well. Police issued more than 50 traffic tickets Saturday and continued issuing them Sunday, RCMP Cpl. Troy Savinkoff said.

Officers also intercepted and disabled three excavators that were being brought to the protest, Savinkoff said.

"Had those made their way to the blockade, it would only have compounded the unfortunate situation we're facing at the border," he said.

While the protesters are decrying vaccine mandates for truckers and other COVID-19 restrictions, many of Canada's public health measures, such as mask rules and vaccine passports for getting into restaurants and theaters, are already falling away as the omicron surge levels off.

About 90% of truckers in Canada are vaccinated, and trucker associations and many big-rig operators have denounced the protests. The U.S. has the same vaccination rule for truckers crossing the border, so it would make little difference if Trudeau lifted the restriction.

Pandemic restrictions have been far stricter there than in the U.S., but Canadians have largely supported them. The vast majority of Canadians are vaccinated, and the COVID-19 death rate is one-third that of the United States.

Meanwhile, Biden, in an interview with NBC's Lester Holt on Sunday ahead of the Super Bowl, struck a critical tone when asked about those likely to object to the mask mandate at the NFL championship game.

"I love how people talk about personal freedom," he said. "If you're exercising personal freedom, but you put someone else in jeopardy, their health in jeopardy, I don't consider that being very good with freedom."

## Tripwire for real war? Cyber's fuzzy rules of engagement

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — President Joe Biden couldn't have been more blunt about the risks of cyberattacks spinning out of control. "If we end up in a war, a real shooting war with a major power, it's going to be as a consequence of a cyber breach of great consequence," he told his intelligence brain trust in July.

Now tensions are soaring over Ukraine with Western officials warning about the danger of Russia launching damaging cyberattacks against Ukraine's NATO allies. While no one is suggesting that could lead to a full-blown war between nuclear-armed rivals, the risk of escalation is serious.

The danger is in the uncertainty about what crosses a digital red line. Cyberattacks, including those that cripple critical infrastructure with ransomware, have been on the rise for years and often go unpunished. It's unclear how grave a malicious cyber operation by a state actor would have to be to cross the threshold to an act of war.

"The rules are fuzzy," said Max Smeets, director of the European Cyber Conflict Research Initiative. "It's not clear what is allowed, what isn't allowed."

The United States and other NATO members have threatened crippling sanctions against Russia if it sends troops into Ukraine. Less clear is whether such sanctions, whose secondary effects could also hurt Europe, would be imposed if Russia were to seriously damage Ukrainian critical infrastructure — power, telecommunications, finance, railways — with cyberattacks in lieu of invading.

And if the West were to respond harshly to Russian aggression, Moscow could retaliate against NATO nations in cyberspace with an intensity and on a scale previously unseen. A major cyberattack on U.S. targets would almost certainly unleash a muscular response. But what of lesser cyberattacks? Or if Russian President Vladimir Putin restricted them to a NATO member in Europe?

Under Article 5 of the organization's treaty, an attack on any of its 30 members is considered an attack on all. But unclear is what it would take to unleash full-scale cyber retaliation. Or how bad an attack would have to be to trigger retaliation from NATO's most potent cyber military forces, led by the U.S. and Britain.

Cyberspace is exceptionally unruly. No arms control treaties exist to put guard rails on state-backed hacking, which is often shielded by plausible deniability as it's often difficult to quickly attribute cyberattacks and intelligence-gathering intrusions. The technology is cheap and criminals can act as proxies, further muddying attribution. Freelancers and hacktivists compound the problem.

In 2015, the major powers and others agreed on a set of 11 voluntary norms of international cyber behavior at the United Nations. But they are routinely ignored. Russia helped craft them only to knock Ukraine's power grid offline that winter and set in motion its hack-and-lead operation to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

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Hacking is now a core component of great power conflict. In 2016, NATO formally designated cyberspace a "domain" of conflict, alongside land, sea and air.

Nowhere has the militarization of cyberspace been more clear than in Putin's bid to return Ukraine to Moscow's orbit.

To Serhii Demediuk, the No. 2 official on Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, a noisy cyberattack last month was "part of a full-scale Russian operation directed at destabilizing the situation in Ukraine, aimed at exploding our Euro-Atlantic integration and seizing power."

The attack damaged servers at the State Emergency Service and at the Motor Transport Insurance Bureau with a malicious "wiper" cloaked as ransomware. The damage proved minimal, but a message posted simultaneously on dozens of defaced government websites said: "Be afraid and expect the worst."

Such attacks are apt to continue as Putin tries to "degrade" and "delegitimize" trust in Ukrainian institutions, the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike said in a blog on Russian military cyber wreckage in the former Soviet republic: Winter attacks on the power grid in 2015 and 2016 were followed by NotPetya, which exacted more than \$10 billion in damage globally.

Michele Markoff, the U.S. State Department's deputy coordinator for cyber issues, thinks "muscular diplomacy" is the only way to end such "immoral, unethical and destabilizing behavior."

But how? Unlike nuclear arms, cyberweapons can't easily be quantified, verified and limited in treaties. Nor are violators apt to be held accountable in the United Nations, not with Russia and China wielding veto power on its Security Council.

"We've wallowed kind of in a quagmire for years now on making transgressors accountable," said Duncan Hollis, a Temple Law professor and former State Department legal adviser.

Members endorsed in May an update to the 2015 U.N. norms that further delineates what should be out of bounds: including hospitals, energy, water and sanitation, education and financial services. That has hardly deterred Russian-speaking ransomware crooks, who are at the very least tolerated by the Kremlin. Nor have U.S. indictments of Russian and Chinese state hackers and the blacklisting of tech companies accused of aiding them helped much.

Under a new policy NATO adopted last year after U.S. lobbying, an accumulation of lower-level cyberattacks — far below, say, blacking out the U.S. East Coast — could be enough to trigger Article 5. But NATO is vague on what a tipping point might be.

NATO's doctrinal shift followed a pair of seismic cyberespionage shocks — the highly targeted 2020 SolarWinds supply chain hack by Russia that badly rattled Washington and the reckless March 2021 Microsoft Exchange hack attributed to Chinese state security that set off a criminal hacking free-for-all.

A cluster of wholesale data pilfering in the mid-2010s attributed to China — from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, United Airlines, Marriott hotels and the health insurer Anthem — inflicted a deep national security wound. And U.S. officials have worried for more than a decade about rivals — Russia especially — quietly "pre-positioning" enough malware in U.S. critical infrastructure including the energy sector to cause considerable chaos in an armed conflict.

In response, U.S. Cyber Command developed a strategy in 2018 it calls "persistent engagement" to counter rivals who "operate continuously below the threshold of armed conflict to weaken institutions and gain strategic advantages."

The aim: deny foes the chance to breach U.S. systems by operating "across the interconnected battlespace, globally, as close as possible to adversaries," Cybercom commander Gen. Paul Nakasone wrote.

That has sometimes meant penetrating not just adversaries' networks but also those of allies — without asking permission, said Smeets, the European cyber conflict analyst.

Disinformation campaigns have also muddied the definition of a "cyber threat." No longer do they merely encompass malware like NotPetya or the the Stuxnet virus that wrecked Iranian nuclear centrifuges, an operation widely attributed to the U.S. and Israel and discovered in 2010.

During the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, Cybercom temporarily knocked offline a key Russian disinformation mill.

Most major powers have the equivalent of a U.S. Cyber Command for both offense and defense.

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Also active are terrorists, criminals working as state proxies, begrudged freelancers and hacktivists like the Cyber Partisans of Belarus.

Hollis compares the current messy cyber moment to the early 19th century when U.S. and European navies were so small they often relied on privateers — we know them now as pirates— for high-seas dirty work.

The U.S. and other NATO partners are, meantime, helping Ukraine stand up a separate cyber military unit, said Demediuk, the Ukrainian security official. Since Russia seized Crimea in 2014, NATO has closely and systematically coordinating cyber actions with Ukraine, including joint missions, he said.

In November, Ukraine exposed an eight-year espionage operation by agents of Russia's FSB in Crimea involving more than 5,000 attempted hacks. The main goal: to gain control over critical infrastructure, including power plants, heating and water supply systems, Ukraine's state news agency said.

This month, Microsoft said the operation, dubbed Armageddon, persists with attempts to penetrate Ukraine's military, judiciary and law enforcement. Microsoft detected no damage, but that doesn't mean Russian cyber operators haven't gained undetected footholds.

That's where hackers hide until they are ready to pounce.

## Democrats eye key governors' races as backstop against GOP

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers was in a familiar spot earlier this month when Republican legislators sent him a bill that would have banned anti-racist teachings in schools. For the 66th time since taking office in 2019, he pulled out his veto pen.

The rejection was the latest reminder of the crucial role Evers and a select group of fellow Democratic governors play in some of the most politically divided states. They are the only backstop against a wave of GOP-backed legislation targeting everything from abortion rights and school curricula to access to voting.

"I have to prevent some really bad things from happening," Evers said in an interview. "It is a bit lonely, but I know I'm representing the people of Wisconsin."

Wisconsin is one of four states emerging as top priorities for Democrats in an election year when the party is facing fierce political headwinds. In those states — Kansas, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — Republicans control the state Legislatures and Democratic-held governorships are on the ballot in the fall.

If the governorships switch parties, a flood of GOP legislation that has so far been blocked would likely become law. That's especially concerning for Democrats when it comes to voting rights. The four incumbents — Evers, Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf — have vetoed more than a dozen bills aimed at restricting voting.

Those moves were particularly important in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan, all narrowly divided states that could decide the 2024 presidential election. If Republicans win the governor's race in any of those states, they will almost certainly approve voting restrictions that have so far been rejected.

In Wisconsin, for example, the Legislature is fast-tracking a host of bills changing election administration and voting rules, all of which Evers is expected to veto but that other Republican candidates for governor support.

Governors also have an important role in the mechanics of presidential elections — under federal law, the electors they say reflect the winners of their state get extra weight in any congressional fight over certifying the choice of the next president. That means in more extreme scenarios, GOP governors may seek to reject Democratic electors in a presidential race, a step then-President Donald Trump pressed some Republicans to take in 2020.

Many GOP candidates running for governor this year have expressed support for Trump's lie that the last election was stolen. In Wisconsin last week, state Rep. Timothy Ramthun, a conspiracy theorist who was disciplined by Republican leadership over false election claims, filed paperwork to run for governor.

Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence the election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected

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by courts, including by judges Trump appointed.

Gov. Roy Cooper of North Carolina, the head of the Democratic Governors Association, said the four governors are "standing in the breach against Republican state legislatures' attacks on voting rights."

Cooper, who also contends with a Republican legislature, said the governors are "protecting the foundation of our democracy."

Republicans argue that Democrats are being obstructionist and simply refusing to work with the party that controls the legislatures in their states.

"An inability to work effectively with their legislature, regardless of party control, will ultimately be viewed by voters as a failure of leadership," said Phil Cox, a Republican strategist and former executive director of the Republican Governors Association.

Democrats aren't limiting their work this year to protecting their position in the four states in question. They are also hoping to pick up Republican-held seats in states like Georgia, Massachusetts and Maryland.

But the DGA is stepping up its opposition research efforts on Republican candidates in Kansas, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. And the Democratic candidates themselves are sitting on sizable campaign accounts.

At the end of 2021, Evers had about \$10 million while Josh Shapiro, the likely Democratic nominee for governor in Pennsylvania, had \$16 million, according to state campaign records. In Kansas, Kelly is expected to have a more difficult bid for reelection than in 2018, when she won in a three-way race. She had \$2 million at the end of last year.

And in Michigan, Whitmer was sitting on \$10 million. An independent expenditure group affiliated with the DGA also ran a pro-Whitmer ad in Michigan worth roughly \$200,000 during December and January.

Whitmer has vetoed multiple bills that would make it harder to vote, rejecting nine such measures in October alone.

"Gov. Whitmer is the backstop in a world where, if Republicans were to control legislative chambers and the governor's office in any of these states, stripping voting rights would just automatically become law," said Patrick Schuh, Michigan director of the Democratic-leaning voter access advocacy group America Votes.

One measure would have tacked on extra identification requirements for absentee ballot requests and blocked the state's top election official from sending vote-by-mail requests out widely. Republicans have been forced to try to end-run Whitmer by attempting a ballot initiative, one that Schuh's group hopes to counter with its own.

In Pennsylvania, Wolf blocked similar efforts, vetoing a massive bill that also would have reduced the days drop boxes for absentee ballots would be open. Wolf, finishing his second four-year term, is not seeking reelection, but Shapiro supports his vetoes.

Those Democrats have some advantages that could help them politically this year, including robust budget surpluses, state revenue that outperformed dire pandemic forecasts and billions in federal COVID-19 relief and incoming infrastructure money.

In Wisconsin, Evers has plans for the state's largest budget surplus, \$3 billion, including child care tax credits for working families and similar credits for full-time volunteer caregivers for the elderly and homebound, moves he sees as smart use of extra money at a time of need. With the flatness of low expectations, the mild-mannered former state school superintendent said he hopes Republicans "take a look at it."

"I think the Republicans will be hard-pressed to say no to this. But they've done it before," Evers said. "Whatever the number I've vetoed, it's paltry compared to the number I'm going to."

## Halftime Review: Dre, Snoop and friends deliver epic show

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Dr. Dre & Co. took the weight of the hip-hop culture on the Super Bowl stage, shouldered the pressure from skeptics and delivered a strong halftime show to prove that edgy rap can work at the world's biggest sporting events.

All it took was hip-hop's most controversial figures — and one knee taken by music's most prominent

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white rapper.

Dre, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige, Eminem and Kendrick Lamar were headliners along with 50 Cent as a special guest at the Super Bowl halftime show on Sunday. Their collective performance is one of the best since Beyoncé and Bruno Mars' halftime set in 2016.

Each performer offered their own element: Dre, Snoop Dogg and Lamar brought their West Coast flavor. Blige — known as the "Queen of Hip-Hop Soul" — sang and danced her heart out. 50 Cent hit the musical rewind button with "In Da Club."

When Eminem's turn came, he performed a couple of his hits starting with "Forgot About Dre" with Anderson .Paak playing the drums. He seemingly defied the NFL by kneeling after performing "One Shot," though the league says it knew it would happen.

Eminem stayed down on one knee for a moment while Dre sat in front of a piano and played Tupac's "I Ain't Mad at Cha."

Dre, a prolific producer, kicked off the performance standing behind a sound table on top of a makeshift white house. He introduced Snoop Dogg — wearing a blue bandana outfit — who performed a few classics such as "The Next Episode" and "California Love."

Afterward, Snoop Dogg yelled out "West Coast make some noise." The rapper's statement showed their unabashedly attempt to deliver a remarkable view of Southern California music — especially the lowrider cars posted on stage.

Like in his "In Da Club" music video, 50 Cent began his set upside downside wearing a white tank top.

Blige appeared on a rooftop with a slew of dancers jamming to her classic melodies "Family Affair" then performed "No More Pain." Her set seamlessly went to the black suit-wearing Lamar who was joined by other Black men sporting same outfits as him.

After Eminem's performance, all six joined together as Dre rapped "Still Dre." Their closing act had an array of dancers dressed in khaki outfits.

The six legendary performers — particularly Dre and Snoop Dogg — performed the clean versions of their songs for the PG crowd. It initially felt kind of weird at first, because there were several instances when a expletive word was replaced by a safer one.

On the NFL national stage, that worked to their advantage. Why? It shows that hip-hop can be performed in various versions and still be appealing to the ears.

## Doping decision imminent for Russian skater at Olympics

By JAMES ELLINGWORTH AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — After a marathon doping hearing that ended early Monday morning, 15-year-old Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva awaits to hear whether she can compete for the gold medal at the Beijing Olympics.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport didn't announce its hearing at a hotel in Beijing was over until after 3 a.m. local time Monday. The judges began to deliberate after nearly six hours of online testimony. An announcement is expected Monday afternoon, a day before Valieva's next competition begins.

Valieva is the heavy favorite for the gold medal when the women's event begins with the short program Tuesday. She has set world-record scores in her first season in senior competition and landed the first quadruple jump by a woman at the Olympics.

Her Olympic push was thrown into turmoil last week when a drug-testing lab in Sweden reported the sample she gave at the Russian nationals on Dec. 25 contained the heart medication trimetazidine, which is banned in sports.

The case has prompted concern for the welfare of Valieva and other child athletes, and questions over the Olympic status of Russia, which is already banned from having its anthem and flag at the Games because of past doping cases.

Valieva's two main rivals for gold are her own teammates, Alexandra Trusova and Anna Shcherbakova. All three share the same coach, Eteri Tutberidze, who is a focus of two investigations from the World Anti-Doping Agency and the Russian anti-doping agency to find out how a young athlete in her care tested

positive.

The ruling won't decide what happens to the gold medal Valieva has already won in the team event. That competition concluded Feb. 7 with a commanding victory for the Russian squad, but there's been no medal ceremony because of the ongoing uncertainty. CAS is only deciding whether Valieva can continue to skate until the Dec. 25 positive test can be resolved with a full investigation.

Valieva has the backing of the Kremlin and her teammates. After skating Monday in ice dance, Russian competitor Gleb Smolkin said he and his partner Diana Davis — Tutberidze's daughter — did not feel stressed by the controversy.

"We wish Kamila all the best and we're going to be very supportive," Smolkin said. "It doesn't matter what the decision is going to be."

## Super Bowl Live: Kupp named Super Bowl MVP after winning TD

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — The Latest on the Super Bowl:

Los Angeles Rams wide receiver Cooper Kupp has been named the Super Bowl's Most Valuable Player. Kupp had eight receptions for 92 yards and two touchdowns. He had a 1-yard reception from Matthew Stafford with 1:25 remaining to give the Rams a 23-20 lead that gave them to their second Vince Lombardi Trophy. Kupp had four catches for 39 yards on the final drive along with a 7-yard run on fourth-and-1 to keep the drive alive.

Kupp set a postseason record for receptions with 33.

Cooper Kupp caught a 1-yard touchdown pass from Matthew Stafford with 1:25 remaining and the Rams beat the Bengals 23-20 to win the Super Bowl on Sunday night.

Kupp had four receptions for 39 yards on that drive, including the last three. He also had a key 7-yard run off right end on fourth-and-1 from the LA 30-yard line.

Stafford completed 7 of 11 for 57 yards on the 15-play, 79-yard series.

The Los Angeles Rams offense has been stuck in neutral since late in the third quarter.

The Rams got within 20-16 of the Cincinnati Bengals on Matt Gay's 41-yard field goal but have gone three-and-out on three straight possessions. It is the second time in the playoffs the Rams have had three straight three-and-outs, but they had a 14-0 lead over the Arizona Cardinals in the wild-card round when it happened last time.

The Cincinnati Bengals are minutes away from the first Super Bowl championship in franchise history.

That is if the Bengals can keep Joe Burrow upright.

The Bengals lead the Los Angeles Rams 20-16 through three quarters despite Burrow getting sacked five times in the third alone. It was the first time since at least 2000 that a quarterback has been sacked at least five times in a quarter in the playoffs.

Burrow now has been sacked six times in this game. It's the fifth time in Burrow's short career and third time this season he has been sacked at least six times.

The No. 1 pick overall of the 2020 draft now has been sacked a record 18 times this postseason, and he has been sacked 69 times all season.

Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford has become the sixth player to throw for 6,000 yards in a single season.

He joins Drew Brees, who had 6,404 yards in 2011, Peyton Manning with 6,387 in 2013, Eli Manning had 6,152 and Tom Brady 6,113 in 2011 and Dan Marino with 6,085 in 1984. Stafford needed 209 yards to reach 6,000, and he got that with a 16-yard pass to Brycen Hopkins in the third quarter.

Three plays later, the Rams tried their version of the Philly Special with Cooper Kupp throwing to Stafford. But they didn't connect, and Matt Gay kicked a 41-yard field goal with 6:02 left in the third. That pulled

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the Rams within 20-16 of the Cincinnati Bengals.

Cincinnati rookie Evan McPherson has matched Adam Vinatieri for the most field goals in a single NFL postseason.

McPherson made his second of the Super Bowl with a 38-yarder with 10:15 left in the third quarter. That gave the Bengals a 20-13 lead over the Los Angeles Rams as they got points off Matthew Stafford's second interception.

The rookie the Bengals drafted with the fifth pick out of Florida now has 14 field goals this postseason. That matches the NFL record set by Vinatieri in 2006.

Super Bowl 56 has turned in favor of the Cincinnati Bengals with two big plays all in the span of the first 22 seconds of the third quarter.

The Bengals scored a touchdown on their first offensive play of the quarter. Joe Burrow moved to his right and then up before throwing deep to Tee Higgins, who caught the ball as Rams cornerback Jalen Ramsey fell. Higgins ran to the end zone to finish off the 75-yard TD for a 17-13 lead.

On the Rams' first play to start the next drive, a pass from Matthew Stafford intended for Ben Skowronek bounced to Bengals cornerback Chidobe Awuzie at the Los Angeles 32.

Evan McPherson hit a field goal to put the Bengals up 20-13.

That interception gives the Bengals eight this postseason, most since the Green Bay Packers had eight in 2010.

There was about as much hip-hop as a stadium can hold at Super Bowl halftime, with Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige, Eminem and Kendrick Lamar splitting a fiery medley of their hits as expected, and a surprise appearance by 50 Cent.

It was a rare Super Bowl halftime show performed in the daylight, but it still had a feeling of a nightclub at SoFi Stadium on Sunday, with a set made up to look like the houses of nearby Compton and South LA.

Dre and Snoop opened the show with "Next Episode" and "California Love."

50 Cent, not among the announced performers, started his "In Da Club."

Blige was decked out in silver sparkles and surrounded by backup dancers as she sang a medley of her hits.

Eminem was surrounded by a rock band as he performed "Lose Yourself," at one point taking a knee in apparent tribute to Colin Kaepernick's protests.

The set was surrounded by what looked like a lit-up cityscape from above, with classic convertibles and a replica of the sculpture outside the Compton Courthouse.

The crowd had lanyards with LED lights that flashed in coordination with the show's beats.

Rams coach Sean McVay isn't ready to talk about playing the second half of Super Bowl 56 without wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr.

McVay was asked during his halftime interview about playing without Beckham. The receiver hurt his left leg late in the second quarter, the same leg he tore the ACL in during the 2020 season. McVay didn't say anything about Beckham's status, which has been announced as questionable to return.

The Rams coach says they have to make some adjustments and have got to be able to make some plays. McVay said the Rams had some opportunities they didn't capitalize on.

Los Angeles leads the Bengals 13-10 at halftime. Cincinnati gets the ball first to start the third quarter after winning the coin toss and deferring to the second half.

The Los Angeles Rams lead the Cincinnati Bengals 13-10 at halftime of Super Bowl 56.

Matthew Stafford has thrown for 165 yards and two touchdowns. He may be without one of his top targets in the second half with Odell Beckham Jr. questionable to return after hurting his left leg with 3:50

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left in the second quarter. That's the same knee Beckham tore his ACL in during the 2020 season. The wide receiver went to the locker room, and he has two catches for 52 yards and a touchdown.

Cooper Kupp has three catches for 40 yards and the Rams' other TD.

Joe Burrow has thrown for 114 yards for Cincinnati. Running back Joe Mixon threw for the Bengals' lone TD on a pass to Tee Higgins.

Cincinnati safety Jessie Bates got the game's first turnover, working his way in front of Rams wide receiver Van Jefferson in the end zone. Stafford rolled out left on third-and-14 and threw deep from around midfield. Officials flagged Cincinnati for unsportsmanlike conduct, not for taunting but for a player wearing a hoodie not in uniform who ran into the end zone to celebrate. That forced Cincinnati to start at its own 10 with 2 minutes left in the half.

Stafford tied for the most interceptions in the regular season with 17. He now has two in the postseason. The only quarterback to have the most interceptions in the regular season and win a Super Bowl was Eli Manning in the 2007 season with the Giants.

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Los Angeles Rams receiver Odell Beckham Jr. suffered an injury to his left leg on a noncontact play with 3:50 remaining in the second quarter.

Beckham was running toward the right side of the field on a crossing route, but it appeared as though his foot got caught in the turf. He dropped a pass thrown by Matthew Stafford and clutched his leg as he fell to the turf.

Beckham was looked at by trainers on the field before being helped off. He was looked at briefly in the medical tent on the Rams' sideline before heading to the locker room.

Beckham, who was signed by the Rams after being released by Cleveland at midseason, had two receptions for 52 yards. He scored Los Angeles' first touchdown when he beat Mike Hilton in the right corner of the end zone for a 17-yard score.

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The Cincinnati Bengals have answered the Los Angeles Rams with their first touchdown to pull within 13-10 in the second quarter.

Running back Joe Mixon got the ball and ran to his right before throwing to a wide-open Tee Higgins in the end zone for a 6-yard TD with 5:47 left.

That capped a 12-play, 75-yard drive by the Bengals that chewed up 7:04 off the clock.

After the extra point, Bengals' fans celebrated loudly chanting "Who Dey!"

Mixon joined some exclusive company as only the fifth non-quarterback to throw a TD pass in the Super Bowl. He joins Trey Burton for Philadelphia against the Patriots in 2018, Antwaan Randle El in 2006 for Pittsburgh against Seattle, Lawrence McCutcheon in 1980 for the then-St. Louis Rams against the Steelers and Dallas' Robert Newhouse in 1978 versus Denver.

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Matthew Stafford is off to a nearly perfect start, and the Los Angeles Rams have a 13-3 lead over the Cincinnati Bengals.

Stafford capped a 75-yard drive with an 11-yard TD pass to Offensive Player of the Year Cooper Kupp with 12:51 left in the second quarter. None of the Bengals even touched Kupp coming off the line as he was wide open for his 21st TD catch this season, including the playoffs.

That puts him in exclusive company. Jerry Rice had 22 TDs in both 1987 and 1989. Randy Moss has the NFL record with 24 TD catches in 2007.

Stafford is 9 of 10 for 127 yards and two TD passes. His passer rating is perfect at 158.3.

Stafford is just the second quarterback with a perfect passer rating through four drives of the Super Bowl since 2000. Matt Ryan also was perfect for the Falcons against the Patriots in 2017.

A botched snap by the Rams on the extra point led to a flurry with the Bengals recovering the ball.

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The Los Angeles Rams lead Super Bowl 56 and the Cincinnati Bengals 7-3 after the first quarter. Bengals rookie Evan McPherson kicked a 29-yard field goal with 28 seconds left to keep Cincinnati from

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going scoreless through the first 15 minutes. The field goal was McPherson's 13th made field goal this postseason, putting him one off the NFL record of 14 set by Adam Vinatieri in 2006.

Cincinnati had first-and-10 at the Rams 11 after an amazing one-handed catch by Pro Bowl receiver Ja'Marr Chase. The Offensive Rookie of the Year tracked the ball as he ran downfield covered by three-time All-Pro cornerback Jalen Ramsey and caught Joe Burrow's pass with his right hand for a 46-yard reception.

But the Bengals couldn't pick up even a yard on three plays before sending McPherson out for the field goal.

This is the third straight Super Bowl where both teams scored in the opening quarter. That had happened twice in the previous 12 Super Bowls.

Playing a Super Bowl anywhere near Hollywood means the stars will come out, and they certainly have with the hometown Los Angeles Rams trying to win their first championship in 22 years.

Charlize Theron danced in her seat wearing a Rams ballcap, while Jennifer Lopez sat regally in her seat watching.

LeBron James is at SoFi Stadium with the Los Angeles Lakers having an off day along with Lakers legend Kareem-Abdul Jabbar. Pitcher Clayton Kershaw, who helped the Los Angeles Dodgers win the 2020 World Series, is on hand watching his high school buddy Matthew Stafford play quarterback for the Rams.

The crowd also includes country singer Kenny Chesney and actors Sean Penn, Matt Damon, Andy Garcia, Chris Tucker and Kevin Hart.

The Los Angeles Rams have the first score of Super Bowl 56.

Matthew Stafford capped the Rams' second drive with a 17-yard touchdown pass to Odell Beckham Jr. with 6:22 left in the first quarter. Beckham caught the ball over Bengals cornerback Mike Hilton, then the wide receiver celebrated his TD with a quick moonwalk. Beckham signed with Los Angeles on Nov. 11 after being cut by the Cleveland Browns.

Stafford is 4 of 4 for 47 yards and a 155.2 passer rating to start the game.

The Rams only had to go 50 yards in six plays over 3 minutes, 35 seconds because the defense forced the Bengals to turn the ball over on downs to end Cincinnati's opening possession.

Make it nine straight Super Bowls where neither team has scored on its opening drive.

The Los Angeles Rams started on offense and finished with 1 yard thanks to a sack by Pro Bowl defensive end Trey Hendrickson of Matthew Stafford.

Cincinnati went for it on fourth-and-1 at midfield, and linebacker Ernest Jones broke up Joe Burrow's pass to turn the Bengals over on downs.

The Bengals are looking to score their first touchdown in the first half of a Super Bowl after being shut out in the franchise's two previous Super Bowls. Cincinnati scored only 17 points on the opening drive all season, which tied for second fewest in the NFL. They had scored 10 points in the playoffs.

The Cincinnati Bengals have won the coin toss and have deferred to put the Los Angeles Rams on offense to start Super Bowl 56.

It just may not be the omen Bengals' fans want.

The last seven coin-toss winners wound up losing the Super Bowl. The last team to win the coin toss and the Super Bowl? Seattle beat Denver in 2014.

Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford called tails with Los Angeles technically the visiting team. The coin tossed by Billie Jean King came up heads.

King was on hand for the coin toss as the NFL recognized the 50-year anniversary of Title IX enacted in 1972 as part of the Education Amendments providing equal funding for men and women for the first time at high schools, colleges and universities receiving federal funding.

She was joined by the team captains for the California School for the Deaf Riverside Cubs, members of

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the high school girls flag league of champions and girls youth tackle football players from the Inglewood Chargers and Watts Rams.

King tweeted out video of her practicing the coin toss before kickoff. King wrote "Pressure is a privilege" and she noted the tip to bend her knees actually helped a lot.

Quickie Mickey" slowed it down for the Super Bowl.

Mickey Guyton, who told The Associated Press this week that she'd earned the nickname for singing "The Star Spangled Banner" in a tight 1:30, sang it in about 1:50 on Sunday before the Los Angeles Rams and Cincinnati Bengals took the field.

Odds makers had put the over/under on the anthem length at 1:35.

"I don't want to ruin anybody's sports bets, but let's just say it's the Super Bowl, so it most likely won't be as fast," the Grammy-nominated country singer told the AP.

She was still faster than the Super Bowl average of around two minutes.

It's hot at SoFi Stadium for Super Bowl 56. Just not the hottest ever for this game.

The temperature is 82 ahead of kickoff between the Los Angeles Rams and Cincinnati Bengals after having cooled off from 85 a couple hours before kickoff. California has been dealing with a heat wave over the past week with temperatures reaching into the low 90s in the region.

That's short of the record of 84 set on Jan. 14, 1973, at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

Getting into this Super Bowl at the last minute will mean a big hit to the wallet.

StubHub says the get-in price Sunday was \$3,800, a jump of 10% from Saturday, and the average price for tickets sold was \$6,136. That's a dip of 8% from Saturday.

The site still had more than 1,400 tickets available Sunday morning.

Fans from California have bought nearly 40% more tickets over the last 24 hours and also nearly 35% of new tickets sold in that span.

The Cincinnati faithful have been busy with buyers from Ohio accounting for 8% of sales.

Kickoff at Super Bowl 56 is less than an hour away with both teams warming up on the field at SoFi Stadium.

Joe Burrow is leading the Cincinnati Bengals with Matthew Stafford all decked out in the Rams' modern throwback white jerseys. This is the first Super Bowl berth for each.

Burrow is the fastest to go from No. 1 overall pick to starting in this game.

Stafford had never won a playoff game before this postseason after the Rams traded for him. Stafford comes in with 49,995 yards passing and 323 TD passes. That's the most ever for a quarterback making his first Super Bowl appearance. Stafford needs only 209 yards passing to become the sixth player to reach 6,000 in a single season.

The "Who Dey!" fans are making themselves known inside SoFi Stadium.

The concourses are packed with people with Bengals jerseys and they are outnumbering Rams jerseys by almost a 4-to-1 margin. The most popular jersey is that of Joe Burrow's No. 9.

The Bengals faithful aren't waiting for kickoff either. They're walking around breaking into chants of "Who Dey!" inside the house of their opponent.

Super Bowl 56 could make history at kickoff before either the Los Angeles Rams and Cincinnati Bengals begin the opening drives.

The temperature two hours before kickoff was 85 degrees with the chance for the gauge to go even higher by the time the ball is kicked off. That would make this the hottest Super Bowl ever, topping the record of 84 set on Jan. 14, 1973, at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

California has been dealing with a heat wave with eight locations in the region posting record tempera-

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tures in the upper 80s and low 90s earlier this week.

## Super Bowl ads go heavy on nostalgia and star power

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — On the field, the Los Angeles Rams and Cincinnati Bengals played a nail biter during Super Bowl 56, with the Rams emerging victorious.

Off the field, Super Bowl advertisers were in a tough competition of their own. Advertisers shelled out up to \$7 million for 30 seconds of airtime during the Super Bowl, so they pulled out all the stops to win over the estimated 100 million people that tune into the game. Big stars, humor and a heavy dose of nostalgia were prevalent throughout the night.

"The Super Bowl featured positive, up-beat advertising," said Northwestern University marketing professor Tim Calkins. "For the most part there was no mention of the pandemic, COVID or masks."

Chevrolet recreated the opening sequence to "The Sopranos" to tout its all-electric Chevy Silverado — one of several auto ads promoting electric vehicles. This time, however, Jamie-Lynn Sigler, who played Meadow Soprano on the show that ran from 1999 to 2007, is in the driver's seat instead of the Sopranos patriarch played by the late James Gandolfini.

"As soon as they started playing the music from 'The Sopranos' they had me riveted," said Kelly O'Keefe, managing partner of Brand Federation. "Great link to a well-loved favorite with music that can silence a crowd. When it played you could hear a pin drop."

FTX, a cryptocurrency exchange, enlisted Larry David of "Curb Your Enthusiasm" to convey that cryptocurrency is ready for the mainstream. Toyota enlisted three famous "Joneses" -- Leslie Jones, Tommy Lee Jones and Rashida Jones -- in its ad for the 2022 Tundra. And Verizon's ad had Jim Carrey revisit his 1996 role as "The Cable Guy" to promote its ultrafast 5G wireless network.

"This is one of the most engaging set of ads I've seen in several years," said Kimberly Whitler, professor of marketing at the University of Virginia. "Almost all focus on light-hearted entertainment."

Cryptocurrency exchanges made a splash during the game, with FTX, Crypto.com, eToro and Coinbase all airing ads, leading some to dub the game the "Crypto Bowl." They're all aiming to make cryptocurrency more mainstream.

Coinbase's ad just showed a QR code that changed colors while electronic music played. The QR code led to Coinbase's web site. University of Virginia's Whitler said the ad might drive signups but could fall flat for some.

"A floating QR code without a brand name may not be sufficient to drive interest," Whitler said. "They are likely hoping that curiosity will inspire people to put down the beer and pick up their phone ... but that is a tall order without any other 'reason why'."

"(Cryptocurrency exchanges) have a lot of money and they need to create a lot of change," said Mark DiMassimo, founder and creative chief of marketing agency DiGo. "They want to get crypto assets into as many hands as possible so people can start feeling comfortable playing that game."

In a moment of bad timing, Avocados from Mexico aired an ad that showed Julius Caesar and a rough bunch of gladiator fans outside what appears to be the Colosseum, enjoying guacamole and avocados. But the ad came after news that the U.S. government has suspended all imports of Mexican avocados after a U.S. plant safety inspector in Mexico received a threat.

The association did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the ban, which hits an industry with almost \$3 billion in annual exports. Avocados for this year's Super Bowl had already been exported in the weeks prior to the event.

General Motors, BMW, Kia, and Polestar all advertised electric vehicles. BMW showed Arnold Schwarzenegger as Zeus, the god of the sky (or in this commercial, the god of lightning) whose wife, Salma Hayek Pinault, gives him the EV BMW iX to spice up retirement. And Kia showcased its Kia EV6 electric vehicle in its ad along with a cute "robo dog." Nissan's ad also gave a nod to its all-electric 2023 Nissan Ariya.

Nostalgia for the past was everywhere as well.

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In an ad for Rocket Mortgage, Anna Kendrick tells kids about the competitive housing market by using examples of classic kid toys like Barbie's Dream House and Skeletor's Castle Grayskull. GM enlisted Mike Myers for an "Austin Powers"-themed ad that features a reprise of his role as Austin Powers' nemesis, Dr. Evil.

T-Mobile reunited Zach Braff and Donald Faison, stars of the sitcom "Scrubs" that aired from 2001 to 2010. And canned cocktail brand Cutwater Spirits harkened back to an iconic 1997 Apple campaign, "Here's to the Crazy Ones," with a twist. The black-and-white ad that honors its drinkers with the salute, "Here's to the Lazy Ones."

## US suspends Mexican avocado imports on eve of Super Bowl

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico has acknowledged that the U.S. government has suspended all imports of Mexican avocados after a U.S. plant safety inspector in Mexico received a threat.

The surprise, temporary suspension was confirmed late Saturday on the eve of the Super Bowl, the biggest sales opportunity of the year for Mexican avocado growers — though it would not affect game-day consumption since those avocados had already been shipped.

Avocado exports are the latest victim of the drug cartel turf battles and extortion of avocado growers in the western state of Michoacan, the only state in Mexico fully authorized to export to the U.S. market.

The U.S. government suspended all imports of Mexican avocados "until further notice" after a U.S. plant safety inspector in Mexico received a threatening message, Mexico's Agriculture Department said in a statement.

"U.S. health authorities ... made the decision after one of their officials, who was carrying out inspections in Uruapan, Michoacan, received a threatening message on his official cellphone," the department wrote.

The import ban came on the day that the Mexican avocado growers and packers association unveiled its Super Bowl ad for this year. Mexican exporters have taken out the pricey ads for almost a decade in a bid to associate guacamole as a Super Bowl tradition.

This year's ad shows Julius Caesar and a rough bunch of gladiator fans outside what appears to be the Colosseum, soothing their apparently violent differences by enjoying guacamole and avocados.

The association did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the ban, which hits an industry with almost \$3 billion in annual exports. However, avocados for this year's Super Bowl had already been exported in the weeks prior to the event.

The U.S. Embassy wrote that "facilitating the export of Mexican avocados to the U.S. and guaranteeing the safety of our agricultural inspection personnel go hand in hand."

"We are working with the Mexican government to guarantee security conditions that would allow our personnel in Michoacan to resume operations," the embassy wrote in its social media accounts.

Because the United States also grows avocados, U.S. inspectors work in Mexico to ensure exported avocados don't carry diseases that could hurt U.S. crops.

It was only in 1997 that the U.S. lifted a ban on Mexican avocados that had been in place since 1914 to prevent a range of weevils, scabs and pests from entering U.S. orchards.

The inspectors work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services.

It is not the first time that the violence in Michoacan — where the Jalisco cartel is fighting turf wars against a collection of local gangs known as the United Cartels — has threatened avocados, the state's most lucrative crop.

After a previous incident in 2019, the USDA had warned about the possible consequences of attacking or threatening U.S. inspectors.

In August 2019, a U.S. Department of Agriculture team of inspectors was "directly threatened" in Ziracuaretiro, a town just west of Uruapan. While the agency didn't specify what happened, local authorities say a gang robbed the truck the inspectors were traveling in at gunpoint.

The USDA wrote in a letter at the time that, "For future situations that result in a security breach, or

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demonstrate an imminent physical threat to the well-being of APHIS personnel, we will immediately suspend program activities.”

Many avocado growers in Michoacan say drug gangs threaten them or their family members with kidnaping or death unless they pay protection money, sometimes amounting to thousands of dollars per acre.

On September 30, 2020, a Mexican employee of APHIS was killed near the northern border city of Tijuana.

Mexican prosecutors said Edgar Flores Santos was killed by drug traffickers who may have mistaken him for a policeman and a suspect was arrested. The U.S. State Department said investigations “concluded this unfortunate incident was a case of Mr. Flores being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

The avocado ban was just the latest threat to Mexico’s export trade stemming from the government’s inability to rein in illegal activities.

On Thursday, the U.S. Trade Representative’s Office filed an environmental complaint against Mexico for failing to stop illegal fishing 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 in the Gulf of California, also known as the Sea of Cortez. Nets set illegally for another fish, the totoaba, drown vaquitas.

And 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 U.S. waters in the Gulf.

## Olympic doping case ruling to be announced Monday afternoon

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Figure skater Kamila Valieva testified by video at an appeal hearing that will decide if the 15-year-old Russian star can still compete at the Beijing Olympics despite an ongoing doping case.

The hearing started Sunday evening in Beijing and lasted until after 3 a.m. Monday morning. Court of Arbitration for Sport director general Matthieu Reeb said a ruling in the case that has caused havoc with one of the Olympics marquee events will be announced Monday afternoon after 1 p.m. in China.

Three CAS judges heard arguments in a closed-door session in a conference room at a Beijing hotel. Lawyers and officials for the parties connected to the case in the Winter Games host city and from Switzerland.

The International Olympic Committee, World Anti-Doping Agency and International Skating Union have challenged a decision by the Russian anti-doping agency to lift an interim ban and try so Valieva can compete in her main event.

Valieva’s positive test for a banned heart medication was flagged a week ago — after she helped the Russians win the team event — by a laboratory in Sweden six weeks after the sample was taken in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The verdict will be announced just over 24 hours ahead of Valieva’s scheduled next Olympic event — the women’s individual competition. She will be the strong favorite if cleared to skate, and her main challengers will be two Russian teammates.

Earlier Sunday, the teenager at the center of Russia’s latest doping scandal seemed to be the only person without a word to say about it.

Valieva continued to practice amid a sea of media and camera crews as the court prepared the expedited hearing.

Valieva has yet to miss a scheduled practice since word of her positive drug test emerged. On Feb. 7, the reigning European champion helped the Russian skaters win team gold with a dynamic free skate in which she became the first woman to land a quad jump in Olympic competition.

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On several occasions, the stress appeared to have rattled Valieva, including during Saturday's practice when she fell and tearfully hugged her embattled coach, Eteri Tutberidze.

"Kamila is a strong girl," offered Russian ice dancer Nikita Katsalapov, who along with her partner, Victoria Sinitsina, have tried to provide Valieva some much-needed support.

On Sunday, Valieva drew the 26th starting spot among the 30 competitors.

"Victoria had a few minutes to share some words with her," Katsalapov said. "(Victoria) asked her to, like, calm down just a little bit, even if it's a hard situation around her right now."

Valieva has yet to speak to the media since the news conference following the Russians' team gold, when the seemingly unbeatable star looked every bit the precocious teenager. Between questions, she was snapping photos and texting, while squeezing the plush mascot given to each medalist.

"We all did such a good job," she gushed. "I'm very proud of my team."

Now, all their gold medals hang in the balance, unlikely to be decided until long after the Olympics end.

Most critics taking to social media have largely supported Valieva, leveling their ire instead at Russian coaches and administrators responsible for her well-being. That includes Tutberidze, who also coaches teammates Alexandra Trusova and Anna Shcherbakova, and who has earned a reputation for using up and discarding her young athletes.

"Let's be kind to the 15-year-old who produced a positive drug test because she lives in an institutionalized system where she was most likely guided and trusted the adults around her," tweeted Mirai Nagasu, a member of the U.S. figure skating team four years ago at the Pyeongchang Games.

Ashley Wagner, another American figure skater who competed at the 2014 Sochi Games, was appalled that Russia is at the center of another doping scandal yet seems to continually get a pass from the International Olympic Committee.

Wagner also took aim at a skating culture that often champions teenagers with little regard for their long-term health.

"Yes, a 15-year-old can be mature, and have a life that is already full of incredible experiences, but still, she is a kid," Wagner said. "She's not the first kid put in this position and she won't be the last unless we start taking this seriously."

At the center of the firestorm is Valieva, a high schooler with fuzzy pink skate guards and a beloved Pomeranian puppy back home. She did a perfect run-through of her record-setting short program during Sunday's early practice at the main rink, then returned for a second session at the nearby practice rink a few hours later.

At one point, as dozens of cameras clicked for pictures, Valieva reached down and touched the ice.

The wait is on to see whether she can again at the Olympics.

"It's always bad when something like that happens, so we're very sorry for any athlete," Russian ice dancer Gleb Smolkin said. "I think like everyone else, we are just waiting for the results of this story. We wish Kamila all the best. She's a great athlete, she's a great skater. She has a bright future."

## US: Over 130,000 Russian troops now staged outside Ukraine

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, JIM HEINTZ and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some airlines canceled flights to the Ukrainian capital and troops there unloaded fresh shipments of weapons from NATO members Sunday, as its president sought to project confidence in the face of U.S. warnings of possible invasion within days by a growing number of Russian forces.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke to President Joe Biden for about an hour, insisting that Ukrainians had the country under "safe and reliable protection" against feared attack by a far stronger Russian military, aides said afterward. The White House said both agreed to keep pushing both deterrence and diplomacy to try to stave off a feared Russian military offensive.

The Biden administration has become increasingly outspoken about its concerns that Russia will stage an incident in the coming days that would create a false pretext for an invasion of Ukraine.

U.S. and European intelligence findings in recent days have sparked worries that Russia may try to target

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a scheduled Ukrainian military exercise slated for Tuesday in eastern Ukraine to launch such a "false-flag operation," according to two people familiar with the matter. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about it.

American intelligence officials believe targeting the military exercise is just one of multiple options that Russia has weighed as a possibility for a false-flag operation. The White House has underscored that they do not know with certainty if President Vladimir Putin has made a final determination to launch an invasion.

Moscow's forces are massing on Ukraine's north, east and south in what the Kremlin insists are military exercises.

A U.S. official updated the Biden administration's estimate for how many Russian forces are now staged near Ukraine's borders to more than 130,000, up from the more than 100,000 the U.S. has cited publicly in previous weeks. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the administration's conclusions.

Zelenskyy has repeatedly played down the U.S. warnings, questioning the increasingly strident statements from U.S. officials in recent days that Russia could be planning to invade as soon as midweek.

"We understand all the risks, we understand that there are risks," he said in a broadcast Saturday. "If you, or anyone else, has additional information regarding a 100% Russian invasion starting on the 16th, please forward that information to us."

But while Zelenskyy has urged against panic that he fears could undermine Ukraine's economy, he and his civilian and military leaders also are preparing defenses, soliciting and receiving a flow of arms from the U.S. and other NATO members.

A military cargo aircraft carrying U.S.-made Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and ammunition from NATO member Lithuania landed Sunday, bolstering the country's defenses against any attack by air.

Zelenskyy wore military olive drab at a drill with tanks and helicopters near Ukraine's border with Russian-annexed Crimea this weekend. In the nearby city of Kalanchak, some expressed disbelief that Putin would really send his troops rolling into the country.

"I don't believe Russia will attack us," said resident Boris Cherepenko. "I have friends in Sakhalin, in Krasnodar," he said, naming Russian regions. "I don't believe it."

In Kyiv, others expressed uncertainty whether any Russian move would be economic, military, or happen at all. One woman, Alona Buznitskaya, speaking on a central street of the capital bearing a few signs declaring, "I love Ukraine," said she was calm.

"You should always be ready for everything, and then you will have nothing to be afraid of," she said.

The U.S. largely has not made public the evidence it says is underlying its most specific warnings on possible Russian planning or timing.

"We're not going to give Russia the opportunity to conduct a surprise here, to spring something on Ukraine or the world," Jake Sullivan, the U.S. national security adviser, told CNN on Sunday, about the U.S. warnings.

"We are going to make sure that we are laying out for the world what we see as transparently and plainly as we possibly can," he said.

The Russians have deployed missile, air, naval and special operations forces, as well as supplies to sustain an invasion. This week, Russia moved six amphibious assault ships into the Black Sea, augmenting its capability to land on the coast.

Putin denies any intention of attacking Ukraine. Russia is demanding that the West keep former Soviet countries out of NATO. It also wants NATO to refrain from deploying weapons near its border and to roll back alliance forces from Eastern Europe — demands flatly rejected by the West.

Biden and Putin spoke for more than an hour Saturday, but the White House offered no suggestion that the call diminished the threat of an imminent war in Europe.

Reflecting the West's concerns, Dutch airline KLM has canceled flights to Ukraine until further notice, the company said. The Ukrainian charter airline SkyUp said Sunday its flight from Madeira, Portugal, to Kyiv was diverted to the Moldovan capital.

And Ukraine's air traffic safety agency Ukraerorukh issued a statement declaring the airspace over the Black Sea to be a "zone of potential danger" and recommended that planes avoid flying over the sea Feb.

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14-19.

The Putin-Biden conversation, following a call between Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron earlier in the day, came at a critical moment for what has become the biggest security crisis between Russia and the West since the Cold War. U.S. officials believe they have mere days to prevent an invasion and enormous bloodshed in Ukraine.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will fly to Kyiv on Monday to meet with Zelenskyy and Moscow on Tuesday to meet with Putin.

While the U.S. and NATO have made clear they do not intend to send troops to Ukraine to fight Russia, any invasion and resulting punishing sanctions promised by the U.S. and other countries could reverberate far beyond the former Soviet republic, affecting energy supplies, global markets and the power balance in Europe.

The United States was pulling most of its staff from the embassy in Kyiv and urged all American citizens to leave Ukraine immediately. Britain joined other European nations in telling its citizens to leave.

Biden has bolstered the U.S. military presence in Europe as reassurance to allies on NATO's eastern flank. The 3,000 additional soldiers ordered to Poland come on top of 1,700 who are on their way there. The U.S. Army also is shifting 1,000 soldiers from Germany to Romania, which like Poland shares a border with Ukraine.

Russia and Ukraine have been locked in a bitter conflict since 2014, when Ukraine's Kremlin-friendly leader was driven from office by a popular uprising. Moscow responded by annexing the Crimean Peninsula and then backing a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine, where fighting has killed over 14,000 people.

A 2015 peace deal brokered by France and Germany helped halt large-scale battles, but regular skirmishes have continued, and efforts to reach a political settlement have stalled.

## Canada protests sound common refrain: 'We stand for freedom'

By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER, TED SHAFFREY and KATHLEEN FOODY The Associated Press

WINDSOR, Ontario (AP) — Canadians who have occupied downtown Ottawa, disrupted travel and trade with the U.S. and inspired copycat protests from New Zealand to the Netherlands sound a common note when asked about their motivation: Decisions about their health shouldn't be made by the government.

"We stand for freedom," said Karen Driedger, 40, who home-schools her kids and attended protests in Ottawa and Windsor. "We believe that it should be everyone's personal decision what they inject into their bodies."

The refrain isn't new to a pandemic-weary world, two years after the COVID-19 virus prompted curfews and closures, mask mandates, and debates over vaccine requirements. Still, the timing of the protests has raised some eyebrows, since they began just as many of the toughest pandemic-era restrictions were being lifted across Canada, the U.S. and Europe; experts say antipathy toward Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is a significant underlying force.

The in-your-face protests that have fueled frustrations around the country and world have been aided by publicity and support from far-right and anti-vaccine groups. And influential Americans such as former U.S. President Donald Trump and billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk have rallied behind the protesters.

Most Canadians have been supportive of the pandemic restrictions, which health officials have stressed are necessary to protect the public from a virus that has killed at least 5.8 million people globally. The vast majority of Canadians are vaccinated, and the COVID-19 death rate is one-third that of the United States.

Trudeau has labeled the protesters a "fringe," and authorities have braced for violence because some have expressed hope that the rally will become the Canadian equivalent of last January's riot at the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters.

The Canadian "freedom convoy" was announced last month by a group founded by a QAnon conspiracy theory supporter and other organizers, and includes the ex-leader of Alberta's far-right Maverick Party.

Protesters who spoke to The Associated Press this week defended their actions and argued that they represent many more frustrated residents.

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Don Stephens, a 65-year-old retired graphic designer, said he's come into Ottawa twice to show support for protesters there. He views them as representatives of a "silent majority that had been longing to have their voice heard."

Mat Mackenzie, a 36-year-old trucker from Ontario, said he's been among the protesters in Ottawa for 15 days, feeling "a duty" to show his opposition. Citizens should be in charge of making decisions around masks, vaccines and other COVID mitigation efforts, not government officials, he said.

"I can tell you 90% of truckers here are likely vaccinated. We're here for freedom of choice," Mackenzie said. "And that's what we're here to fight for."

Michael Kempa, a criminology professor at the University of Ottawa, said there are two faces of the protest. It isn't just about vaccine mandates and other COVID restrictions; organizers have said they want to oust Trudeau's Liberal government and be part of forming a new one, he said.

"In many ways, the friendly face protesters are acting as the foot soldiers of the organizers," Kempa said. "We are seeing a huge amount of misinformation. People who are legitimately angry are being manipulated by the protest leadership."

Many Canadians have been outraged over the crude behavior of some demonstrators. Some urinated on the National War Memorial and danced on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, while others carried signs and flags with swastikas and used the statue of Canadian hero Terry Fox to display an anti-vaccine statement, sparking widespread condemnation.

The images of protests across Canada have ignited copycats elsewhere.

In Paris, police prevented a threatened blockade of the French capital on Saturday. But a few dozen vehicles were able to disrupt traffic on the famed Champs-Elysees, prompting police to fire tear gas to disperse the crowd.

"The convoys are for the restoring of our liberties," said Pierre-Louis Garnier, a 64-year-old who attended a protest in Paris on Friday to welcome an anticipated convoy that never materialized.

In the Netherlands, dozens of trucks and other vehicles, some waving Canadian flags, have descended on The Hague, the historic Dutch parliamentary complex.

"We are living now in police state," said Hans Evenstain, a 76-year-old protester said Sunday. "That's not a good life anymore. We want to move freely and that's why we are here for us and for our children and our grandchildren."

In Belgium, federal police were urging people to avoid Brussels on Monday, when a convoy is expected to gather in the country's capital, and the headquarters of the 27-nation European Union.

In the New Zealand capital of Wellington, authorities tried blasting Barry Manilow songs and the 90s dance hit "Macarena" on loop in an unsuccessful attempt to break up a convoy of protesters that has been encamped outside Parliament for nearly a week.

"All I want is the mandates lifted, and freedom of choice," said Kacheeya Scarrow, who drove her van about 380 kilometers (235 miles) from the city of Taupo to support the protest. "I'm not anti-vax, I'm not pro-vax. Everybody should have the right to choose what they want to do with their own body."

In Windsor, where protesters had blocked the entrance to the Ambassador Bridge that is a crucial conduit for the auto industry in both the U.S. and Canada, police moved to end the demonstration Sunday, arresting about a dozen protesters and beginning to tow vehicles.

Before Sunday's crackdown, the shutdown often had the feel of a block party.

Protesters milled about, carrying Canadian flags affixed to the ends of hockey sticks while music blared and food was handed out. They put up signs bearing slogans such as "Freedom Is Essential," "Say No To Mandatory Vaccines" and "End Mandates."

Troy Holman, a 32-year-old Windsor resident who has been at the protest every day since its start on Monday, said he believes the government overreached with its COVID-19 restrictions, which negatively impacted his wife's small business.

"If we weren't doing something such as this, no one would pay attention to us," he said Friday. "Unfortunately, we have to be here, because this is what's going to get the attention of the government."

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## War, peace, stalemate? Week ahead may decide Ukraine's fate

By MATTHEW LEE and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even if a Russian invasion of Ukraine doesn't happen in the next few days, the crisis is reaching a critical inflection point with European stability and the future of East-West relations hanging in the balance.

A convergence of events over the coming week could determine whether the stalemate is resolved peacefully or Europe is at war. At stake are Europe's post-Cold War security architecture and long-agreed limits on the deployment of conventional military and nuclear forces there.

"This next 10 days or so will be critical," said Ian Kelly, a retired career diplomat and former U.S. ambassador to Georgia who now teaches international relations at Northwestern University.

The Biden administration on Friday said an invasion could happen at any moment, with a possible target date of Wednesday, according to intelligence picked up by the United States, and Washington was evacuating almost all of its embassy staff in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital.

A phone call between President Joe Biden and Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Saturday did nothing to ease tensions. Biden and Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, spoke on Sunday.

Even before the latest U.S. warnings and diplomatic moves, analysts saw this as a critical week for the future of Ukraine.

"Russia and the United States are approaching a peak of the conflict of their interests regarding a future shape of the European order," Timofei Bordachev, said head of the Center for European Research at Moscow's Higher School of Economics. "The parties may take action against each other that will go much farther than what was considered admissible quite recently," he said in a recent analysis.

In the week ahead, Washington and NATO are expecting Moscow's formal response after they rejected its main security demands, and major Russian military drills in Belarus, conducted as part of a deployment near Ukraine, are to end. The fate of the Russian troops now in Belarus will be key to judging the Kremlin's intentions.

At the same time, the Winter Olympics in China, often cited as a potential deterrent to immediate Russian action, will conclude Feb. 20. Although U.S. officials have said they believe an invasion could take place before then, the date is still considered important.

And an important international security conference is taking place in Munich next weekend, with Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and top European officials planning to attend.

Putin has warned the West that he will not back down on his demand to keep Ukraine out of NATO. While Ukraine has long aspired to join, the alliance is not about to offer an invitation.

Still, he contends that if Ukraine becomes a member and tries to use force to reclaim the Crimean Peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014, it would draw Russia and NATO into a conflict.

His foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, has asked Western nations to explain how they interpret the principle of the "indivisibility of security" enshrined in international agreements they signed. The Russian Foreign Ministry said on Friday that it would not accept a collective response from the European Union and NATO, insisting on an individual response from each country.

Seeking to counter NATO's argument that every nation is free to choose alliances, Moscow has charged that NATO violated the principle and jeopardized Russia's security by expanding eastward.

"Russia's bold demands and equally blunt U.S. rejection of them have pushed the international agenda toward the confrontation more than ever since the height of the Cold War," Bordachev said.

He argued that closer relations with China have strengthened Moscow's hand. "Whatever goals Russia could pursue now, it can plan its future in conditions of a full rupture of ties with the West," Bordachev said.

Russian officials have emphasized that negotiating a settlement over Ukraine depends squarely on the United States and that Western allies just march to Washington's orders.

In the past, Russia had sought to build close contacts with France and Germany in the hope that friendly ties with Europe's biggest economies would help offset the U.S. pressure. But those ties were strained by the poisoning in 2020 of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who spent five months in Germany convalescing from what he described as a nerve agent attack he blamed on the Kremlin. Russia has de-

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nied its involvement.

More recently, Russian officials have criticized the position of France and Germany in the deadlocked peace talks on eastern Ukraine, holding them responsible for the failure to persuade Ukrainian authorities to grant broad self-rule to the Russia-backed separatist region, as required by a 2015 agreement.

In a break with diplomatic rules, the Russian Foreign Ministry last fall published confidential letters that Lavrov exchanged with his French and German counterparts in a bid to prove their failure to help make progress in talks.

Speaking after the latest fruitless round of those talks, Kremlin representative Dmitry Kozak bemoaned the failure by French and German envoys to persuade Ukraine to commit to a dialogue with the separatists, as the agreement stipulated.

Despite the tensions with both Paris and Berlin, Putin spent more than five hours talking to French President Emmanuel Macron last Monday and will host German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday. Putin said he was grateful to Macron for trying to help negotiate a way to ease the tensions and said they would talk again.

Moscow also just reopened a window for diplomatic contacts with Britain, hosting the foreign and defense secretaries for the first round of talks since ties were ruptured by the 2018 poisoning in Britain of former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

Lavrov's meeting with Liz Truss was frosty, but British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace's talks with Russia's defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, appeared more businesslike, with the parties emphasizing the need to maintain regular contact to reduce the threat of military incidents.

## For Asian American women, Olympics reveal a harsh duality

By SALLY HO Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Across two pandemic Olympics set in Asian countries, Asian American women fronting the Games have encountered a whiplashing duality — prized on the global stage for their medal-winning talent, buffeted by the escalating crisis of racist abuse at home.

The world's most elite and international sporting event, which pits athletes and countries against each other, underscores along the way the crude reality that many Asian women face: of only being seen when they have something to offer.

"It's like Asian American women can't win," says Jeff Yang, an author and cultural critic. "Asian American female athletes, like most Asian American women in many other spaces, are seen as worthy when they can deliver ... and then disposed of otherwise."

The issue is playing out at the Beijing Winter Games, the third straight Olympics set in Asia and the second held during the unrelenting global coronavirus crisis — and playing out, too, during a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans.

Here, U.S. snowboarder Chloe Kim and China's freestyle skier Eileen Gu are the latest additions to the list of American women of Asian descent who have been "It Girls" of the Winter Games, joining icons like American figure skaters Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan.

When Kim and Gu earned their gold medals in Beijing, it was the perfect bow on professional narratives that have been covered incessantly leading up to the actual event. Their star power and talent made them two of the de facto spokeswomen for the Olympics.

Meanwhile, other Asian American women like figure skaters Karen Chen and Alysa Liu of the U.S. team and Zhu Yi of the China team have also been promoted by their national teams and scrutinized — sometimes harshly — by Olympic fans.

Commentators have mocked Yi for falling in the team event, as if she deserved the mistake after giving up her U.S. citizenship to compete for her ancestral homeland. Others are angry that she "stole" the Olympic spot from an actual China-born athlete.

Even the winners struggle to feel fully embraced in America.

Kim, who won the halfpipe at the Beijing and Pyeongchang Olympics, has revealed she was tormented online daily. She says she was consumed by fear that her parents could be killed whenever she heard news

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about another brutal assault on an Asian person.

There have been more than 10,000 reported anti-Asian incidents — from taunts to outright assaults — between March 2020 and September 2021, according to Stop AAPI Hate, a national coalition that gathers data on racially motivated attacks related to the pandemic.

“The experience of hate is withering, and it takes a huge mental health toll,” says Cynthia Choi, the coalition’s co-founder. “When we think about the Olympics, it’s really incredibly powerful to have taken place in Asia three times in a row. That context is very significant, and to have Asian Americans and Asians representing the United States in these games is more than symbolic.”

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the country have endured racist verbal, physical and sometimes deadly attacks for two years now, fueled by the pandemic.

Some perpetrators have based their hate on the fact that the virus was first detected in Wuhan, China. Adding to the mix: former President Donald Trump, who regularly talked about COVID-19 in racial terms.

Gu, the daredevil freestyle skier who placed first in the big air competition, said she’d never been as scared as when a man directed a tirade about the coronavirus’ Chinese origins against her and her immigrant grandmother at a San Francisco pharmacy.

The San Francisco native, fashion model and social media figure has also been criticized with anti-China rhetoric for switching from the U.S. team to the China team. Conservative Fox News personalities Tucker Carlson and Will Cain even dedicated a segment to berating Gu, saying she was “ungrateful” and is “betraying her country.”

Those racially charged denunciations have been called out on social media for being hypocritical. Phil Yu, who runs the popular Angry Asian Man blog, tweeted succinctly: “Oh sure, it’s always ‘go back to your country’ but not ‘go back to your country and win a gold medal.’”

The dichotomy of the Asian American woman’s existence is not limited to Winter Olympians, though. In October, Hmong American gymnast Sunisa Lee said she was pepper sprayed by someone shouting racist slurs while driving by in a car. At the time, she was standing outside with a group of Asian American friends in Los Angeles while filming the “Dancing with the Stars” TV show.

Lesser-profile Olympians from the Tokyo Games like golfer Danielle Kang and karateka Sakura Kokumai spoke about their experiences with anti-Asian hate last summer.

Kang said she’s fought racism all her life and urged for a broader social studies curriculum that could better capture today’s multicultural America.

“I’ve been told to go back to China. I don’t know why they think China is the only Asian country,” said the Korean American athlete. “I also have heard, ‘Do you eat dogs for dinner?’ It’s nothing new to me. However, the violence was very upsetting. But the violence also has been around. I’ve gotten into fist fights. I’ve grown up like this.”

Kokumai, who is Japanese American, was angry to discover that the same man who had harassed her in April with racist slurs also assaulted an elderly Asian American couple.

Equally painful: colleagues’ silence when the incident was reported. She said Japan’s coach called her about it before members of her U.S. team did.

“It was really hurtful that it took so long for my side of the federation to address it,” Kokumai said last summer.

In July, when Lee became the surprise breakout star of the Tokyo Olympics by winning gold in the all-around event and bronze on uneven bars, Sung Yeon Choimorrow, executive director of the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum, said she felt conflicted about seeing Lee on a pedestal given the way Hmongs have been marginalized.

“I’m really wrestling with this idea that we’re all ‘American’ only when it comes to us being excellent and winning medals for the country,” Choimorrow said. “Asian American women are hyper-visible in ways that dehumanize us and completely invisible in the ways that humanize us.”

**From campus to Congress, colleges urged to end legacy boost**

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By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

America's elite colleges are facing growing calls to end the decades-old tradition of giving an admissions boost to the children of alumni — a practice that critics say is rooted in racism and bestows an unfair advantage to students who need it least.

Fueled by the national reckoning with racial injustice, opponents say they are gaining momentum in the battle over the contentious policy of legacy preferences.

Ivy League students are pressing administrators to abandon the policy. Yale's student government took a stance against the practice in November. A recent vote of Harvard students found that 60% oppose it. Hundreds of students and alumni across 30 colleges have promised to withhold financial donations over the issue.

Civil rights groups are increasingly adding their support, including the American Civil Liberties Union, which is tackling legacy preferences as part of a campaign against systematic racism.

And a bill in Congress aims to eliminate the practice.

The proposal from Democrats would outlaw preferences for children of alumni or donors at colleges that receive federal money. It's being pushed by the party's progressive wing but has gained support from some conservative activists who want college admissions to be based on merit alone.

Legacy preferences give an extra boost to predominantly white and wealthy legacy students, while "leaving out millions of Black and brown kids," said Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-N.Y., a sponsor.

"There has been a shift in the consciousness of the country around issues of inequity and inequality," Bowman said in an interview. "There's a real yearning to right the wrongs of our past."

In the heavily guarded world of college admissions, it's hard to know exactly how many legacy students get a nudge. But at some of the most selective colleges, students with family ties make up 10% to 20% of the latest incoming class, according to data released by colleges in response to an Associated Press request.

On many campuses, the opposition is being led by students of color and those who are the first in their families to attend college. They say legacy status is one more advantage for students who are already more likely to have access to tutoring, test prep and other help applying to college.

Zoe Fuad, a junior at Brown University, said it reinforces a "cycle of inequity" that was designed to serve wealthy white men.

"By perpetually giving advantages to their descendants, we're ensuring that those who were systemically favored continue to be favored," said Fuad, 20, who leads a student group that's challenging the practice at Brown.

Many prestigious colleges defend legacy admissions, saying it helps build an alumni community and encourages donations. Officials at Harvard and other schools argue that legacy status is just one of many factors considered in admissions, along with grades, test scores and pursuits outside school. At most, they say, it can provide a slight tip in a student's favor.

Still, two colleges have ended the practice recently, giving opponents hope that others will follow.

Amherst College in Massachusetts dropped the policy in October, saying it "inadvertently limits educational opportunity." Johns Hopkins University announced in 2020 that it had phased out legacy preferences. Since then, the school has drawn growing numbers of Black and Hispanic students, along with those from low-income families.

The pushback against legacy preferences is advancing amid a broader debate over fairness in college admissions.

Last month the Supreme Court agreed to review whether colleges can consider applicants' race as a way to expand diversity. The court will take up lawsuits alleging that Harvard University and the University of North Carolina discriminate against Asian American applicants in favor of Black and Hispanic students.

In a rare moment of bipartisan unity, the conservative strategist behind those suits voiced support for the Democrats' bill against legacy benefits. In a statement, Edward Blum said too many colleges "lower the admissions bar for the children of their alumni."

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Most schools are not required to disclose how many legacy students they enroll, and many keep it private. Among the nation's 30 most selective colleges, only eight provided basic data on the subject in response to an AP request.

At those colleges, the share of legacy students in this year's freshman class averaged 12%. The lowest share was at Rice University in Houston, where 4% of this year's first-year class had legacy status. The University of Notre Dame said legacy students have averaged 23% of the student body over the past decade.

Legacy students outnumbered Black students in freshman classes at four schools: Notre Dame, Cornell, Dartmouth and the University of Southern California. At Brown, the share of legacy and Black students was about even.

Harvard refused to disclose details, but data made public during its trial over affirmative action showed that family ties carry outsize weight. From 2014 to 2019, the acceptance rate for legacy applicants was 34%, compared with 6% for applicants without legacy status, according to an analysis by the suit's plaintiffs.

Critics of the practice say it contributes to persistently low numbers of Black students at top colleges. During the racial reckoning following the killing of George Floyd by police, hundreds of students at Georgetown University signed a letter calling for an end to legacy preference, saying it "relegates qualified Black students to second-tier status."

Historians have traced legacy preference to the 1920s as elite colleges sought to limit the number of Jewish students. It continued for decades at a time when the vast majority of college students in the U.S. were white men.

At many schools with legacy preferences, Black students were not admitted until the 1960s, said Michael Dannenberg, a vice president at the Education Reform Now think tank.

"White applicants have between eight and 16 generations of ancestors on which to establish an alumni connection," said Dannenberg, who has opposed the practice since he was an aide to Sen. Ted Kennedy, the late Massachusetts Democrat, two decades ago. "For the vast majority of Black and Latino applicants, there's maybe one or two generations."

On college campuses, student activists say they continue to face resistance from school leaders who defend the policy. But at a time of rising populism in the United States, colleges are unlikely to find allies in Congress and other halls of power, said Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, a progressive think tank in Washington.

Especially in the wake of the Varsity Blues admissions scandal, he said, it's becoming more difficult for colleges to defend policies that benefit the wealthy.

"They are clearly vulnerable on this issue," he said.

In the wake of that scandal, Colorado became the first state in the nation to outlaw legacy preferences at public colleges. California lawmakers required colleges to disclose how many legacy students get accepted.

Among campus activists, there's a driving desire to change the perception that top colleges are ivory towers reserved for the wealthy. When Viet Andy Nguyen applied to Brown University as a low-income, first-generation student, he knew he was competing against wealthier students with alumni connections. It made him question whether Brown was really a place for people like him.

After graduating from Brown in 2017, he launched the nonprofit EdMobilizer with the goal of expanding access to college and ending legacy preferences. He has orchestrated a donation boycott at schools across the U.S., and he's helping students fight the practice on scores of campuses.

It isn't lost on him that he's challenging a policy that could benefit his future children. He has faced resistance from some students of color who wonder why he wants to end it now, when campuses are more racially diverse than ever. But to him, the goal is to open doors for students who have been excluded, not to create "an elite lineage of people of color."

"My kids will be fine," he said. "They don't need an additional bump just for being my offspring."

**Luján plans return to Senate in weeks for Supreme Court vote**

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic Sen. Ben Ray Luján, who is recovering from a stroke in January, says he plans to be back at work in “just a few short weeks” to vote on President Joe Biden’s forthcoming Supreme Court nominee.

In a video released Sunday by his office, the New Mexico senator said he is at the University of New Mexico Hospital after surgery to relieve pressure on his brain and soon will go to an inpatient rehabilitation facility for “a few more weeks.”

“I’m doing well. I’m strong. I’m back on the road to recovery, and I’m going to make a full recovery,” the 49-year-old Luján said in the video, which showed him seated next to two of his doctors. “I’m going to walk out of here, I’m going to beat this, and I’m going to be stronger once I come out.”

“Now I’m proud to report, then I’ll be back on the floor of the United States Senate in just a few short weeks to vote on important legislation and to consider a Supreme Court nominee,” he added.

According to his office, the Luján began experiencing dizziness and fatigue on Jan. 27 and checked himself into a hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Luján was transferred to the hospital in Albuquerque for further evaluation and treatment.

His absence from the Senate came as Biden considers a nominee to replace the retiring Justice Stephen G. Breyer. Biden has said he wants to announce a pick by the end of February.

In a 50-50 Senate, Luján’s vote would be critical if Democrats wanted to confirm Biden’s nominee without the help of Republicans.

“Rest assured, New Mexicans can know they will have a voice and a vote during this process,” Luján said in the video. “That has never changed.”

## Young workers give unions new hope

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

After decades of decline, U.S. unions have a new reason for hope: younger workers.

Workers in their 20s \_\_\_ and even in their teens \_\_\_ are leading ongoing efforts to unionize companies large and small, from Starbucks and REI to local cannabis dispensaries. The Alphabet Workers Union, formed last year and now representing 800 Google employees, is run by five people who are under 35.

Multiple polls show union approval is high \_\_\_ and growing \_\_\_ among the youngest workers. And U.S. union membership levels are even ticking upward for workers between 25 and 34, even as they decline among other age groups.

Between 2019 and 2021, the overall percentage of U.S. union members stayed flat. But the percentage of workers ages 25-34 who are union members rose from 8.8% to 9.4%, or around 68,000 workers, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Young workers say they see unions as the best way to combat wage inequality and poor working conditions. For some, personal heroes like Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders \_\_\_ a vocal labor advocate \_\_\_ have piqued their interest in unions. Others say the coronavirus pandemic caused them to rethink what they deserve from their jobs.

“Whatever this is isn’t working,” said Adriana Alvarez, 29, a McDonald’s employee in Chicago. “We obviously need change.”

When a union organizer first approached Alvarez in 2014, she was skeptical of his goal to raise her pay to \$15 per hour. At the time, she was making \$8.50 per hour and hadn’t gotten a raise in three years.

But she got involved with the Fight for \$15 labor group, organizing protests and learning about her rights. McDonald’s workers still aren’t unionized, but she says her managers are more respectful and have stopped illegal practices, like making workers reimburse the restaurant if they accidentally accept counterfeit money. She now makes \$16.70 per hour.

Like many of her peers, Alvarez didn’t grow up in a union household. U.S. union membership peaked in 1954, when 35% of workers belonged to unions. By last year, that had fallen to 10.3%.

Some of that decline is due to shrinking numbers in sectors with high unionization rates, like the auto industry. But states and courts have also steadily chipped away at unions’ power.

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Twenty-seven states now have "right-to-work" laws, which prohibit a company and a union from signing a contract that requires workers to pay dues to the union that represents them. And last year, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a 1975 California regulation that had allowed union organizers to meet with agricultural workers on company property.

Against that backdrop, unions last year saw some of their biggest increases among young workers in utilities, the motion picture industry and the federal government, said Hayley Brown, a research associate with the Center for Economic and Policy Research, a nonpartisan think tank.

Brown said there are signs those numbers will continue to rise this year under the labor-friendly Biden administration, which issued proposals this month aimed at increasing unionization rates for federal workers and contractors. In January, there were 170 petitions filed for union elections with the National Labor Relations Board; that was more than double the 83 filed in January 2021.

After two Starbucks stores in Buffalo, New York, voted to unionize late last year, workers at more than 70 Starbucks stores in 21 states petitioned the NLRB to hold their own union elections, according to Workers United, the union organizing the effort.

College student and part-time Starbucks worker Joseph Thompson \_\_\_ who uses they/them pronouns \_\_\_ is trying to unionize their store in Santa Cruz, California. Thompson, 18, had never heard of "collective bargaining" until a few months ago, but was inspired by colleagues in Buffalo and progressive politicians like Sanders. Thompson says their store is often understaffed despite security problems.

Derrick Pointer, an electrical lineman in Talladega, Alabama, wasn't convinced he should join the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers when he started working for Halliburton Co. in 2015. At a previous job in food service, his union reps weren't responsive, he said.

But he joined to take advantage of the union's training. Pointer now makes \$42.30 per hour and has generous benefits, including COVID sick leave. The \$60 he pays in union dues each month is well worth it, Pointer said.

Sheree Allen was hoping for benefits like that when she joined the food service company Chartwells last August. Chartwells says it offers health care, paid time off and a 401 (k) plan to its workers, but Allen says she has never been given information about those benefits despite asking her superiors. When she tested positive for COVID in January, she had to stay home without pay.

Allen, who lives in Durham, North Carolina, started attending Fight for \$15 meetings with her sister. Now she's trying to convince her co-workers to organize.

"You have rights, you have a say-so, you don't have to put up with whatever your manager says to you," Allen said.

For younger workers, unions no longer have the communist associations that tarred them 40 years ago, said Anibel Ferus-Comelo, who directs the labor studies department at the University of California, Berkeley. Young people lived through the great recession of 2009 and the pandemic, and economic insecurity is a very real fear, she said.

Many young people are also discovering what veterans already know: Forming a union can be difficult. Even when workers vote to unionize, it can take years for companies and unions to hammer out a contract.

"One of our organizers always says, 'It's not a sprint. It's a marathon.' It takes a lot of time and a lot of energy," said Sylvia Soukup, 19, who helped win a union election at Half Price Books in Roseville, Minnesota, in December.

Soukup said workers at her location and three others haven't yet heard when contract negotiations will begin. Still, she's hopeful a contract will ensure better staffing and livable wages. Booksellers' pay is currently capped at \$14 an hour, she said.

"I feel like all of the frustration, all of the energy that I've used, all of the anger and the hurt... were absolutely worth it," Soukup said. "I know that we're taking steps that are needed for our voices to be heard."

## Erin Jackson of US 1st Black woman to win speedskating gold

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP National Writer

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BEIJING (AP) — Erin Jackson has never viewed herself as some sort of trailblazer. She just likes to skate really, really fast, whether it's on wheels or blades.

Yet the 29-year-old from balmy Ocala, Florida knew this moment was special, her chance to really make an impact on the generations that follow.

She'll forever be known as the first Black woman to win a speedskating medal at the Winter Olympics — and a gold one, at that.

"Hopefully, this has an effect," Jackson said. "Hopefully, we'll see more minorities, especially in the USA, getting out and trying these winter sports."

Jackson won the 500 meters Sunday with a time of 37.04 seconds, giving the American speedskating program its first medal of the Beijing Games and first individual medal since 2010.

But this was much more than a needed boost to a sport that has produced more medals than any other for the U.S. in the history of the Winter Games.

The 29-year-old Jackson, a former inline skater who switched to the ice shortly before the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, joined fellow American Shani Davis as the only Black athletes to win long-track speedskating medals at the Olympics.

Now, she wants others to follow their path into a sport that draws scant attention in the United States.

"I just hope it will do something for the sport," she said. "I always try to be a good example."

The silver went to Miho Takagi of Japan, while Angelina Golikova of the Russian team took the bronze.

Jackson's gold came after she slipped at the U.S. trials and shockingly finished third, putting her spot on the Olympic team in jeopardy.

But teammate Brittany Bowe, another Ocala skater who finished first at the trials, gave up her spot in the 500 to ensure Jackson would get to compete in Beijing.

"She made a really big sacrifice for me," Jackson said. "I'll be grateful to her forever."

As it turned out, the Americans received a third slot in the 500 when the final allocations were made, so Bowe got to skate as well. She finished 16th.

The two close friends embraced after Jackson clinched the gold.

"She hugged me and we cried," the winner said. "She said she's really proud of me and I said a lot of thank yous."

Jackson skated in the next-to-last of 15 pairs with Takagi's time of 37.12 — set about a half-hour earlier in the fourth pairing — in her sights.

She didn't think at all about that slip at the U.S. trials.

"It's not something to really focus on," Jackson said. "That was a fluke."

Jackson bolted off the line and was under Takagi's time as she veered powerfully into the first turn. She kept up her speed through the crossing straight and into the final turn, swinging both arms furiously as she came to the finish of speedskating's shortest race.

As soon as her skates crossed the line, Jackson's head turned toward the scoreboard.

She broke into a big smile when she saw the "1" beside her name. Her coach, Ryan Shimabukuro, pumped his arms and slapped hands with her as she glided by.

There was still one pairing left, but Jackson knew she could do no worse than bronze.

A few minutes later, the gold was hers.

"You're an Olympic champion," Shimabukuro told her.

Jackson sat on the padding along the infield, shedding a few tears with her head bowed.

She was no doubt reflecting, too, on her remarkable journey.

The inline and roller derby skater knew she would have to trade her wheels for blades if she wanted to go for Olympic glory.

Making the switch just months before the Pyeongchang Games, she was such a fast study that she earned a spot on the U.S. team. She finished 24th in the 500, but it was clear that she had barely tapped into her potential.

During the current World Cup season, Jackson suddenly emerged as one of the world's best sprinters.

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She won four of eight 500 races — the first Black woman to earn one of those titles, as well — and came to the Olympics as one of the favorites.

"When I won the first World Cup, I was like, 'OK that's strange. Let's see where it goes,'" Jackson recalled. "Then I won another and I was like, 'Well, maybe I can do this.'"

She lived up to the billing in Beijing, becoming the first American woman to win an individual Olympic medal since 2002.

"Words cannot explain how proud I am of her," Bowe said. "I knew she had the chance to do something really special, and she just showed the world why she deserved to be here."

Jackson grabbed an American flag and did a victory lap around the Ice Ribbon oval, the stars and stripes fluttering above her head.

"It's been a wild ride," she said, "but that makes it even sweeter."

## Macron not a candidate yet but campaigning for reelection

By SYLVIE CORBET The Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — He has a full campaign team that's fanning out around France, meeting with voters. He makes speeches about his future plans for the country. The problem? French President Emmanuel Macron hasn't officially declared that he's a candidate for April's presidential election yet.

Critics say he's unfairly using his taxpayer-funded presidential pulpit to campaign for a second term while dragging out his widely expected announcement as long as possible.

Less than two months before April 10's first round, Macron's intention is no mystery. He said last month that he has "the desire" to run for a second term, but he wanted to wait for the COVID-19 situation to improve before making a decision. The deadline to formally declare candidacy is March 4.

Far-right presidential contender Eric Zemmour accused Macron of trying to use the pandemic to make French voters forget about what he considers France's decline.

"Is Emmanuel Macron using the health crisis to start campaigning? The answer is yes," Marine Le Pen, the other far-right candidate, charged. Like the U.S. and most European countries, France recently started easing most virus restrictions as the infection rate slows down.

Macron also explained he wanted to focus on the Ukraine-Russia crisis first. On the flight between Moscow and Kyiv last week, he told reporters that he will "think about" declaring his candidacy later.

"Everything comes in due time," he said.

Yet his recent trips across French regions tend to increasingly look like campaign events.

A visit this month to northern France, during which he announced an additional 100 million euros (\$113 million) to boost the economy in a former mining area, was followed by dozens of journalists from national and international media. A meeting with local officials included a key political rival from The Republicans party, Xavier Bertrand, who is actively campaigning with conservative candidate Valérie Pécresse.

So close to the election, "that visit is a candidate's visit, with lies and untruths. The hypocrisy must stop. An electoral trip cannot be paid for by the Republic," Bertrand said after listening to Macron's plans for the region.

The head of The Republicans' party, Christian Jacob, denounced "misuse of public money" and said he reported the issue to the National Commission on Elections Financing.

France has strict rules about financing a presidential campaign. The amount of money a presidential contender is allowed to spend for the first round is 16.8 million euros (\$19.1 million), with an additional 5.6 million euros (\$6.4 million) for those who qualify for the runoff. After the election, France reimburses candidates who won at least 5% of the votes half of their campaign costs.

In 2012, conservative former President Nicolas Sarkozy announced his bid for a second term — which he lost to Socialist Francois Hollande — just over two months before the election. The National Commission on Election Financing later ruled that some expenses he incurred months before to organize a rally in southern France were to be included in campaign counts, even though he had not formalized his candidacy at that time.

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Sarkozy was last year sentenced to a year of house arrest for illegal campaign financing. He has appealed the ruling.

Macron's party has already launched a "campaign of the presidential majority" that is being deployed across the country via posters and leaflets promoting a website called "With You." The website doesn't mention Macron's name but invites internet users to subscribe to follow "campaign news."

The Constitutional Council recently announced that Macron was the first to receive the 500 signatures from elected officials that are required under French law to allow someone to run in the presidential election. The rule is meant to limit the number of candidates.

Since Jan. 1, French television and radio broadcasters are also required by law to provide "fair" exposure to all candidates and would-be candidates — based on their estimated weight in the campaign. The rule includes Macron himself, yet its implementation is complex because all comments considered part of the political debate are to be counted but those attributed to the role of president are not.

The difference can sometimes be subtle. On Thursday, Macron went to the eastern town of Belfort to announce the construction of six new nuclear reactors. It is up to the president to decide France's energy strategy.

In his speech, he also harshly criticized "those who say we don't need nuclear (energy)," in a reference to the Greens and far-left presidential candidates' campaign platforms.

"Can you imagine France in 30 years time with 40,000 windmills instead of 8,000 now?" he asked. "That's what supporters of phasing out nuclear power are proposing today to the French. It's not serious."

Rivals also said Macron, a pro-European, is using France's six-month presidency of the European Union as a springboard toward reelection.

## **Barely in job, new chief feels heat from Amir Locke shooting**

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

Minneapolis Police Chief Amelia Huffman was taking questions about the fatal shooting of 22-year-old Amir Locke when a reporter challenged the police account that Locke's gun was pointed toward officers serving a search warrant. Huffman's attempt to explain was too much for one local activist.

"This is what I would call the anatomy of a cover-up," Nekima Levy Armstrong said, striding forward to confront Huffman and Mayor Jacob Frey at the news conference. "Amelia, you're saying you want to be the chief. Then act like it. ... Don't cover up for what those cops did."

The exchange underscores the fraught situation that Huffman — named interim chief just weeks ago and a candidate to take the job permanently — faces as she attempts to steer a department in tatters since George Floyd's killing 20 months ago shattered community trust.

Huffman, who joined the department in 1994, built a wide-ranging resume before Frey tapped her to replace the retiring Medaria Arradondo. Huffman investigated financial crimes, crimes against children and Internal Affairs cases, served as a department spokeswoman and commanded units including Homicide.

A police spokesman didn't respond to a request to interview Huffman. In a 2019 interview with a Minneapolis weekly, Huffman, of Springfield, Ohio, described studying constitutional law at Smith College before joining the police department.

"Minneapolis was looking to hire people who had backgrounds in things other than law enforcement," Huffman told the paper. "I wanted to do something that would make a difference — not just pushing meaningless papers from one place to another."

John Swenson, the director of public safety in Lino Lakes, Minnesota, worked with Huffman in Minneapolis' Internal Affairs division for about a year in the early 2000s. Both sergeants, they handled investigations within the department and for agencies that needed an outside perspective.

He recalled teaming with her on an investigation into an allegation of sexual assault against a police officer in rural Minnesota. Huffman's compassion while interviewing both the victim and the suspect as well as her attention to detail stuck out, he said.

"She's an incredibly smart individual who cares a tremendous amount about her work product and being

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professional, and wants to see the organization and our profession continue to move forward," Swenson said.

While homicide chief in 2007, Huffman, who is white, clashed with a high-profile Black investigator over her public suggestion that a man's murder was connected to a drug purchase — upsetting the victim's family and the investigator.

Then-Chief Tim Dolan backed Huffman and transferred the sergeant to another department. Dolan said in an interview that the investigating sergeant undermined Huffman by going public with his opposition to her comments and had been warned before.

"But you have to decide whether you back the commander or you back the sergeant," Dolan said. (Huffman) "is bright, fair and capable. She deserves my support."

Arradondo, who is Black, had worked with Frey on a raft of policy changes aimed at overhauling the department's policies and culture following Floyd's death. He also came out publicly against a voter referendum in November to replace the department with a new public safety unit, which was defeated. But soon after, he announced he would retire anyway.

Reaction to Huffman's interim appointment was largely muted, with Levy Armstrong and other activists saying they didn't know her well. Much of the anger since Locke's death has focused on the department for executing a no-knock warrant — Locke's parents said body-camera video suggested Locke had been startled awake and then "executed" by officers swarming into the apartment — and for its initial account of events, including a news release that called Locke a "suspect" even though he wasn't named in the search warrants.

For the activists, those actions fit the pattern of a department focused on protecting its own.

"She stepped into that role knowing that we are still grappling with the impacts of the murder of George Floyd ... knowing the expectations for accountability and transparency," Levy Armstrong said this week. "That is the standard you are held to. I don't feel that she rose to the occasion."

Michelle Gross, president of Communities United Against Police Brutality, said she initially questioned whether Huffman had the ability to transform the department and considers the interim chief's handling of Locke's death confirmation of that fear.

"Own the mistake, apologize for it and tell us it's not going to happen again," Gross said. "She did none of that."

When Huffman was made inspector of the Fifth Precinct spanning southwest Minneapolis, the city was still reeling from the 2017 fatal shooting of Justine Ruszczyk Damond by a police officer. In the 2019 interview on taking that new position, Huffman pledged that she and officers in the area would focus on being out in the community, creating low-pressure opportunities to get to know people.

"Healing that chasm is going to take time and work," Huffman said. "We need to engage with folks during the course of their regular life."

But she was also focused on bread-and-butter policing, saying residents were unlikely to see major changes in priorities and specifically listed a focus on drug and property crimes including burglary and theft.

Floyd's murder put the city's police force under a microscope again the following year. While many large protests in Minneapolis remained peaceful, some people looted and vandalized businesses in the Uptown neighborhood, within the precinct Huffman oversaw.

Jill Osiecki, executive director of the Uptown Association, said those attacks were "catastrophic" for some businesses and credited Huffman for making one-on-one visits to each affected place and never rushing those conversations.

"It was so impressive to see somebody rise to that occasion in such a difficult time," Osiecki said. "For many reasons, it's very difficult to be a police officer in Minneapolis. I truly feel she is a compassionate human being."

Huffman became part of Arradondo's leadership team in February 2021 as a deputy chief overseeing professional standards, including training. Her interim chief appointment was announced in December and she took over on Jan. 15.

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Frey credited her with steering the department's adoption of training that emphasizes officers' responsibility to intervene when a coworker is putting someone in danger and reforming its field training officer program.

"She has an encyclopedic knowledge of policy, procedure, and training — the building blocks of enacting a culture shift across the department and keeping our city safe," Frey said when he announced Huffman as interim chief.

Asked about activists' calls to fire Huffman, Frey stood by her this week without any commitment for the future.

"I didn't appoint interim Chief Huffman to serve as interim chief only in good times," he told Minnesota Public Radio News, adding that the city is "moving forward with a national search to make sure we end up with the best possible person in our police department."

## **xOlympics Live: US clinches men's hockey tournament top seed**

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

The United States has clinched the top seed in the Olympic men's hockey tournament.

The young Americans beat Germany 3-2 on Sunday to finish the preliminary round a perfect 3-0-0. The U.S. is the only team to win all three of its group stage games in regulation.

The U.S. moves directly to the quarterfinals Wednesday along with second-seeded Finland, the third-seeded Russians and fourth-seeded Sweden. Canada is seeded fifth and will again play host China in the qualification round Tuesday.

The U.S. has the youngest team in the tournament with an average age of 25 and eight players under 21.

Erin Jackson has become the first Black woman to win a speedskating medal at the Winter Olympics. And a gold one, at that.

Jackson won the 500 meters with a time of 37.04 seconds Sunday, giving the Americans their first speedskating medal of the Beijing Games.

This one carried much more than national pride. The 29-year-old Jackson joins fellow American Shani Davis as the only Black athletes to win speedskating medals at the Olympics. Davis won gold in the men's 1,000 meters and silver in the 1,500 meters at the 2006 Olympics in Turin.

Defending Olympic champion Norway has advanced to the semifinals of team pursuit speedskating along with the United States, Russian Olympic Committee and the Netherlands.

The Norwegian trio of Hallgeir Enggebraaten, Peder Kongshaug and Sverre Lunde Pedersen posted the fastest time in the quarterfinals Sunday at 3 minutes, 37.47 seconds.

Ethan Cepuran, Casey Dawson and Emery Lehman put up the second-fastest time of 3:37.50 for the Americans, who came into the event as the world-record holders.

The Russians were third at 3:38.67, and the Dutch also advanced in 3:38.90. The semifinals and medal races are set for Tuesday.

Canada and South Korea were relegated to the C final. Italy and Japan will meet in the D final.

Liu Shaoang of Hungary has won Olympic gold in 500-meter short track speedskating.

He led all the way and crossed the line in 40.338 seconds at Capital Indoor Stadium on Sunday. Liu had earned bronze medals in the 1,000 and the mixed team relay.

Russian Konstantin Ivliev took silver. Steven Dubois of Canada earned bronze.

The A final was missing some of the biggest names. Defending champion Wu Dajing of China was relegated to the B final, which he won. Ren Ziwei of China and Liu Shaoang's brother Liu Shaolin Sandor of Hungary were eliminated in the quarterfinals.

Hwang Daeheon of South Korea went out in the semifinals after getting a penalty for a late pass that

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caused contact with Dubois. The Canadian was advanced to the A final and won his second medal in Beijing. He took silver in the 1,500.

Led by Suzanne Schulting, the Netherlands won Olympic gold in the 3,000-meter relay in short track speedskating.

Schulting collected her second gold and third medal overall in Beijing. She earned silver in the 500 and gold in the 1,000.

The Dutch team of Schulting, Selma Poutsma, Xandra Velzeboer and Yana van Kerkhof lowered its own Olympic record with a time of 4 minutes, 3.40 seconds at Capital Indoor Stadium.

South Korea rallied to take silver. China earned bronze.

Schulting screamed and raised her arms in triumph after crossing the finish line.

There were no crashes in the four-team final. Canada finished fourth.

In the B final, Italy won with Arianna Fontana skating. The Russians were penalized and the U.S. team was penalized for a lane change that caused an obstruction.

There will be a new Olympic champion in men's 500-meter short track speedskating.

Defending champion Wu Dajing of China failed to advance to the A final. He'll skate in the B final against three others.

Liu Shaoang of Hungary won his semifinal that included Wu, Steven Dubois of Canada and Hwang Daeheon of South Korea.

Hwang was penalized for a late pass that caused contact with Dubois, who was advanced to the A final by the referee. Hwang ended up in the rinkside padding and was eliminated.

Also making the A final are Konstantin Ivliev of ROC, Pietro Sighel of Italy and Abzal Azhgaliyev of Kazakhstan.

Quentin Fillon Maillet of France hit all 20 of his targets despite howling wind, and he skied to his second gold and fourth medal of the Beijing Games, winning the 12.5-kilometer biathlon pursuit.

Johannes Tingnes Boe of Norway had started off first after winning gold in the sprint, but he missed two targets in his first standing shooting. Fillon Maillet passed him and stayed out front.

Tarjei Boe of Norway was second in the sprint and went off second Sunday. He missed only one target and finished 28.6 seconds behind the Frenchman for the silver medal.

Russian Eduard Latypov also only missed one target and won the bronze.

Fillon Maillet also won gold in the individual race and two silvers, one in the mixed relay and one in the sprint.

Ren Ziwei of China is out of the men's 500 meters in Olympic short track speedskating.

Ren finished third in his quarterfinal on Sunday night, and that wasn't enough to advance to the semifinals. He earlier won the 1,000 in Beijing.

Most of the other big names moved on: defending champion Wu Dajing of China, 2018 silver medalist Hwang Daeheon of South Korea, 1,500 silver medalist Steven Dubois of Canada and Liu Shaoang of Hungary.

American Ryan Pivrotto was eliminated, along with John-Henry Krueger of Hungary and Liu's older brother, Liu Shaolin Sandor.

There was just one crash in the quarterfinals, with Jordan Pierre-Gilles of Canada going down.

Marte Olsbu Røiseland earned her third gold medal of the Beijing Olympics, and fourth medal overall, by winning the women's biathlon 10-kilometer pursuit race Sunday.

The Norwegian started the race with a lead because of her win in the sprint race and hit 19 of her 20 targets. Despite strong winds and blowing snow, Røiseland held her focus and shot cleanly in the last standing stop to win in 34 minutes, 46.9 seconds.

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Elvira Oeberg of Sweden, who was second in the sprint race and started 31 seconds behind Roeiseland, had three misses in her second and third shooting bouts, but cleaned the last standing to finish 1:36.5 behind for silver.

Tiril Eckhoff of Norway also missed three targets but came in 1:48.7 behind her teammate for the bronze medal.

Roiseland previously won gold in the mixed relay as well as the sprint. She also won bronze in the individual race.

Just like in the women's cross-country ski race, the Russian team opened a lead on the first leg of the men's relay on Sunday and then held on for the Olympic gold medal.

Sergey Ustiugov maintained more than a minute lead on the last lap over the two-man chasing group of Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo of Norway and Maurice Manificat of France.

Ustiugov grabbed a flag on his way to the finish line and won the 10-kilometer relay in 1 hour, 54 minutes, 50.7 seconds. Klaebo pulled away from Manificat for the silver, 1:07.2 back. France took third, 1:16.4 behind the Russians.

Snowy conditions made the ski tracks slow, especially on the first two classic ski legs. Leaf-blowers were used to clear the snow out of the ski tracks. By contrast, the winning time in the four-man relay at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics was more than 20 minutes quicker.

Alexey Chervotkin led off for the Russians, with Alexander Bolshunov skiing the second classic leg. Denis Spitsov and Ustiugov took the two freestyle legs.

Ukraine's Olympic team has issued a statement calling for peace against the backdrop of a Russian military build-up on the border between the countries.

So far no other athletes have followed the lead of slider Vladyslav Heraskevych. He held up a sign with the Ukrainian flag and the message "No War in Ukraine" after finishing a run in the skeleton competition.

The Ukrainian team issued a statement Saturday night Beijing time expanding on his gesture.

"The Olympic Team of Ukraine that is competing at the XXIV Olympic Winter Games in Beijing expresses a unanimous call for peace together with the native country," the Ukrainian Olympic Committee wrote on social media.

"Being thousands of kilometers away from the Motherland, mentally we are with our families and friends." The statement doesn't mention Russia or the military situation.

The International Olympic Committee bans most protest gestures at the Games. It isn't taking action against Heraskevych because "No war" is a message we can all relate to," executive director of the Olympic Games Christophe Dubi said Sunday.

But IOC spokesman Mark Adams says that doesn't mean the IOC wants other athletes to join in.

Marco Odermatt of Switzerland has won gold in the men's giant slalom at the Beijing Olympics.

The 24-year-old Swiss skier plowed through snow and poor visibility Sunday to win.

It was the first time snow fell during an Alpine skiing race at this year's Olympics and the bad weather conditions caused the second run to be postponed by 1 hour, 15 minutes.

Odermatt coped with the conditions and the delay — and a first-run mistake — to post an unofficial combined time of 2 minutes, 09.35 seconds.

Zan Kranjec of Slovenia took silver, 0.19 seconds behind, and world champion Mathieu Faivre of France earned bronze, 1.34 behind.

The skiers had been racing and training on artificial snow until the real thing started to fall on Saturday at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center. A second women's downhill training run was canceled because of the conditions on Sunday.

Slalom gold medalist Petra Vlhova is leaving the Beijing Olympics early due to an inflamed left ankle

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tendon. She'll miss the Alpine combined event in which she would have been a challenger to Mikaela Shiffrin, the favorite in the race.

Mauro Pini, Vlhova's coach, tells The Associated Press that they didn't want to risk making things worse by trying for a medal in the combined.

By winning the slalom four days ago, Vlhova became Slovakia's first Olympic medalist in Alpine skiing. Pini added that Vlhova also wants to make sure she has time "to go home and share this medal with those closest to her."

Vlhova had already sat out the super-G and the opening downhill training session.

The Alpine combined is scheduled for Thursday. Vlhova finished second behind Shiffrin in the combined at last season's world championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy.

The second run of the men's giant slalom has been postponed amid heavy snowfall and low visibility at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center.

Marco Odermatt of Switzerland has a lead of 0.04 seconds over Stefan Brennsteiner of Austria and 0.08 over world champion Mathieu Faivre of France after the first run.

It is the first time snow has fallen during an Alpine skiing race at the Beijing Olympics.

Snow has been falling since Saturday at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center, where athletes had been racing and training on artificial snow. A second women's downhill training run scheduled for Sunday was canceled.

The skiers say it is tough to see but good enough to race in.

Fourth-placed Henrik Kristoffersen of Norway says "the light is more than skiable" but adds "it just makes it difficult."

The women's Olympic skiing slopestyle qualifying event has been moved to Monday with the final the following day.

The competition was postponed Sunday due to wind, snow and low visibility.

The men's slopestyle qualification has switched from Monday to Tuesday. The final will now be Wednesday.

Eileen Gu, who lives in the United States and represents China, will be going for a second gold medal. She won big air last Tuesday.

Kaillie Humphries has a big lead in the first part of the monobob competition at the Beijing Olympics. Humphries is competing for the first time as an American citizen. It's also the first time monobob, a one-woman bobsled, has been an Olympic event.

The reigning world monobob champion finished two runs Sunday in 2 minutes, 9.10 seconds, giving her a massive lead of 1.04 seconds over second-place Christine de Bruin of Canada. De Bruin's time was 2:10.14.

Laura Nolte of Germany was third in 2:10.32, and three-time Olympic medalist Elana Meyers Taylor of the U.S. is right in the medal hunt — her time of 2:10.42 putting her fourth.

Barring a big mistake by somebody, it looks like four women remain in the mix for the three medals. They'll be decided on Monday morning in Beijing, late Sunday night in the United States. The gap between Meyers Taylor and fifth-place Huai Mingming of China is nearly a half-second.

Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva remains on the preliminary start list for the short program at the Olympic Games, drawing a spot in the final group among 30 figure skaters due on the ice Tuesday night at Capital Indoor Stadium in Beijing.

Valieva will start 26th if the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which is meeting later Sunday, allows her to perform. Valieva's status was thrown into question this past week following a flagged drug test taken in December. She's favored to win if she's allowed to compete.

The starting order for the short program is determined by splitting the field in half according to world rankings. The lowest-ranked skaters then draw for the first 15 starting positions and the highest-ranked skaters draw for the second 15, meaning those who have legitimate medal chances will be last to take the ice.

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Young You of Korea will follow Valieva before her two Russian teammates, Alexandra Trusova and world champion Anna Shcherbakova. Kaori Sakamota of Japan drew the final starting number.

Marco Odermatt of Switzerland is leading the first run of the Olympic men's giant slalom with only lower-ranked skiers remaining.

It's the first time snow has fallen on an Alpine ski race at the Beijing Games and visibility has been an issue for skiers.

Stefan Brennsteiner of Austria is 0.04 seconds behind in second and world champion Mathieu Faivre of France is 0.08 behind in third.

The 24-year-old Odermatt is a favorite for the victory, having won four of the five giant slalom races this season in the World Cup. It would be his first gold medal in his first Olympics.

Snow has been falling since Saturday at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center, where athletes have been racing and training on artificial snow until now. A second women's downhill training run scheduled for Sunday has been cancelled.

Italian Luca de Aliprandini said "you can't see anything" after his first run.

The Olympic skiing slopestyle qualifying event at the Beijing Olympics has been postponed due to high wind, snow and low visibility.

With the flags of different countries whipping in the wind at Genting Snow Park, the organizers made the decision to postpone the qualifying round. They did not immediately announce a plan for rescheduling. The final is currently set for Monday.

Eileen Gu, who lives in the United States and represents China, will be going for a second gold medal. She won big air last Tuesday.

Standout Eileen Gu and the rest of the slopestyle skiers at the Beijing Olympics will have to wait a little bit longer to start qualifying with the competition delayed by weather.

The wind was blowing and the snow falling at Genting Snow Park. The diminishing visibility made performing tricks off the jumps difficult as well. The competition is delayed at least two hours.

Gu, who was born in the U.S. and is competing for China, is trying to win her second gold medal at the Beijing Games. She's already won big air, which was held in Beijing.

The second women's downhill training run for American Mikaela Shiffrin, Italian Sofia Goggia and other Alpine skiers has been canceled because of snowfall.

The men's giant slalom race is still supposed to take place Sunday Beijing time.

A downhill has faster speeds than the giant slalom and so is more dangerous to ski when visibility is poor. Snow began falling Saturday at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center during the first women's downhill practice session and continued into Sunday morning.

There is another downhill training scheduled for Monday ahead of Tuesday's race.

Russian figure skating superstar Kamila Valieva was at a practice session Sunday, hours before the Court of Arbitration for Sport was scheduled to meet to decide whether she'll be allowed to compete.

The meeting of CAS is scheduled for 8:30 p.m. Sunday and a decision is expected sometime Monday, less than 24 hours before Valieva is scheduled to skate in the women's short program at the Beijing Games.

Valieva has been allowed to practice since Monday, when a drug test she took in December was flagged for traces of a banned heart medication. That was the same day Valieva helped Russia win the team gold medal with a dynamic free skate in which she became the first woman to land a quad lutz in Olympic competition.

The practices have become increasingly uncomfortable, though, as Valieva continues to prepare with dozens of reporters and camera crews watching her every move. She briefly broke down in tears during her Friday session.

## Graham becomes early player to watch in Supreme Court drama

By KEVIN FREKING and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The list of Republicans willing to support President Joe Biden's forthcoming nominee to the Supreme Court "is longer than you would initially imagine," the Senate's second-ranking Democrat recently teased to reporters.

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin declined to name names. But it's clear that Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., is near the top of the list.

Graham, who tethered himself to former President Donald Trump, is among a handful of Republicans declaring their willingness to break party lines and vote for the yet-to-be-announced White House choice to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer.

Whether Graham or any Republican ends up backing Biden's eventual nominee in the 50-50 Senate will be a new test for the president's long stated and rarely achieved ambitions to see Washington embrace a more bipartisan approach after the bitterness of the Trump era.

Democrats say obtaining a bipartisan vote is a top priority during the upcoming confirmation battle. "It will be great for the Senate. It will be great for the Supreme Court," Durbin said after a White House meeting Thursday. "I hope we can achieve that goal."

That effort will make Graham a senator to watch.

Whether Democrats can win Graham's vote — and that of other Republicans such as Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska — remains to be seen. Enduring bitterness over the way Republicans steamrolled their way to a Supreme Court majority under Trump is still a dividing line.

Graham has at times signaling a willingness to partner initially with Democrats, only to retreat to a partisan corner.

Graham led efforts in the Senate to defend Brett Kavanaugh, a Trump nominee for the high court, from accusations of sexual assault, and it was Graham who brazenly abandoned a promise to refrain from confirming a justice in a presidential election year. As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, he helped to seat Amy Coney Barrett on the court just days before Biden's election win in November 2020.

But Graham also has a history of working with Democrats and has long said lawmakers should show deference to a president's picks. He was the only Republican on the committee to vote for two of President Barack Obama's Supreme Court nominees. Graham also has voted against only a handful of Biden's judicial nominees while supporting about 30.

"I'm playing the game different than everybody else," Graham told The Associated Press in explaining his votes.

While some in the GOP have mocked Biden's promise to nominate a Black woman, a historic first, Graham was quick to defend it. "Put me in the camp of making sure the court and other institutions look like America," he said.

But there's a catch. Graham wants the choice to be a fellow South Carolinian, U.S. District Judge Michelle Childs, and has said his vote will be "much more problematic" if it isn't her. He calls Childs someone "I can see myself supporting — if she does well here" and argues that she could win the most GOP support.

"She has a hell of a story, and she would be somebody I think that could bring the Senate together and probably get more than 60 votes," Graham said Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

The White House says Childs, who had been nominated for a federal appeals court at the time Breyer made his retirement announcement, is under consideration even as some liberal advocacy groups and labor unions question her record.

While Durbin has not endorsed a specific candidate, he said he appreciates Graham's strategy. "Starting off with one or two Republican votes is a good start for any nominee," he said, adding that "Lindsey is and will always be an independent."

Part of Graham's pitch on Childs is that — unlike all the current Supreme Court justices other than Barrett — she didn't go to an Ivy League school. Matt Moore, a GOP strategist who served as a consultant

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for Graham in his 2020 campaign, said promoting Childs also appeals to voters back home.

"There's a certain amount of state pride seeing someone from South Carolina considered for the Supreme Court," Moore said.

While Graham has supported many Democratic judicial nominees, he also has hewed to the party line in two critical moments — the first in blocking now-Attorney General Merrick Garland from even getting a hearing when he was nominated for the Supreme Court during the final year of Barack Obama's presidency. Then, four years later, he did an about-face as chairman of the Judiciary Committee and shepherded Barrett's nomination through just days before the presidential election.

Those stands helped secure a 6-3 conservative majority on the high court, an ideological balance of power that will remain in place even after Breyer's replacement is confirmed.

But it was Graham's defense of Kavanaugh that stands as perhaps the senator's defining moment. Graham erupted at Democrats during a hearing where Christine Blasey Ford accused Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her in high school. Kavanaugh denied the charges.

Anger in his voice, Graham upbraided Democrats for their treatment of Kavanaugh in a viral moment that was celebrated by conservatives.

"Boy, you all want power," Graham said, turning to the Democrats on the committee. "God, I hope you never get it. ... I hate to say it because these have been my friends."

Now, there are signs senators want a détente. Mindful of the vote to come once Biden makes his pick, Democrats are reluctant to focus on the times that Graham has angered them.

"I think he's looking at the merits of these individuals and their qualifications, which is to be commended," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who serves with Graham on the committee.

Democratic leaders also praised Graham this past week for his work on a bill ending forced arbitration for sexual assault and sexual harassment claims in the workplace. Durbin called him a "vital partner" on it. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., was even more effusive.

"When he gets behind something, it gets done," Schumer said. "So I want him behind more things with us in the future."

Still, some won't be surprised if Graham ends up opposing Biden's choice.

Hawaii Sen. Mazie Hirono, a Democrat on the Judiciary Committee who has worked with Graham in the past, said "pretty much whatever Lindsey does, the back and forth and all that, no longer shocks me, which is too bad. Because I think Lindsey is a far, far better person than these kinds of flip flops indicate."

Graham was first elected to the Senate in 2002, about a decade after the Senate had voted 96-3 for the liberal Ruth Bader Ginsburg for the Supreme Court, and about 16 years after the Senate voted 98-0 for the conservative Antonin Scalia. Graham said the overwhelming confirmation of ideological opposites shows what has been lost.

"One is very conservative, the other is very liberal, but they were clearly qualified," Graham said. "That's the way it used to be. Now, it's all about tribal politics and people are worried about primaries."

## Skiers struggle as real snow falls on Winter Olympics

By BERNIE WILSON AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — The Winter Olympics finally look like, well, the Winter Olympics.

Real snow fell in Beijing on Sunday for the first time since the Olympics began, giving the city the appearance and feel of a real Winter Games. There was fresh snow in the mountains as well, where all events have been contested on artificial snow.

While the snow was mostly a welcome sight, up in the mountains it affected visibility and made it tougher for ski racers to make it down the hill, especially in the first run of the two-leg giant slalom.

Marco Odermatt of Switzerland handled the snow and poor visibility better than anyone else and won his first Olympic gold medal.

"I really risked everything in the second run because I wanted not just the medal, I wanted the gold medal," Odermatt said. "It's difficult because you can lose everything but today it paid off."

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While a light snow fell Saturday, it came down a lot harder on Sunday, the first time it snowed during an Alpine race during the Beijing Olympics. The heavy snow forced the second run to be postponed by 1 hour, 15 minutes. During the delay, workers cleared snow from the course with snow blowers and shovels.

"It was a hard day, with the conditions, with such a long wait between the two runs," Odermatt said. "It was more than five hours for me, it was such a long time to re-think everything and it was hard to stay focused. I tried to sleep some minutes in between.

"I actually never dreamt about it but now it still feels like a dream."

Many other skiers had a rough day on the course known as The Ice River at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center.

"It's a shame what the weather is like. I was hoping for the sun, like on all the other days. Couldn't see anything," said Luca de Aliprandini of Italy, who was sixth after the first run but skied off course and didn't finish the second run. "When I was going down, the flakes were big."

American skier Tommy Ford came in 12th.

"It's great conditions on the course, but you can't see it," Ford said.

"It was difficult for everyone," said Henrik Kristoffersen of Norway, who was eighth overall.

A second women's downhill training run scheduled for Sunday was canceled.

## CROSS-COUNTRY RELAY

The snow affected the men's cross-country relay ski race so much that workers used leaf blowers to clear it out of the tracks. The snow made the ski tracks slow, especially on the first two classic ski legs.

Just like in the women's race, the Russian team opened a lead on the first leg and then held on for the gold medal. Sergey Ustiugov maintained more than a minute lead on the last lap over the two-man chasing group of Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo of Norway and Maurice Manificat of France.

Ustiugov grabbed a flag on his way to the finish line and won the 10-kilometer relay 1 hour, 54 minutes, 50.7 seconds. By comparison, the winning time in the four-man relay at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics was more than 20 minutes quicker.

## GU'S RACE ON HOLD

Freestyle skier Eileen Gu has to wait a day to try to win a second gold medal at the Beijing Games after gusty wind and snow postponed the qualifying round for women's slopestyle.

Qualifying was pushed back to Monday and the final to Tuesday. The switch avoids putting the gold-medal round directly against the Super Bowl, which is also being televised by NBC.

The men's slopestyle qualification also was switched from Monday to Tuesday, with its final now set for Wednesday.

The 18-old-year Gu was at the top of the hill stretching and getting ready for some warmup runs in the blustery conditions when qualifying was postponed. The snow was blowing sideways and the flags on the bottom of the course were whipping in all directions. Visibility also was low, which makes landing jumps off the massive kickers along the course dangerous.

Gu was born and raised in the United States but chose to compete for China, her mother's home country. Her victory in big air last Tuesday was hugely popular in China.

## RUSSIAN DOPING

Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva continued to practice in the hours before the Court of Arbitration for Sport was to decide whether she will be allowed to compete this week. An expedited hearing was scheduled for Sunday, with a ruling expected sometime Monday.

A decision by CAS is expected roughly 24 hours before the 15-year-old Valieva is due on the ice at Capital Indoor Stadium for the short program on Tuesday. The overwhelming favorite, she drew the 26th starting spot Sunday among the 30 in the event.

Valieva has yet to miss a scheduled practice since a drug test taken in December was flagged last Monday for traces of a banned heart medication. That was the same day the reigning European champion helped the Russian skaters win team gold with a dynamic free skate in which she became the first woman to land a quad in Olympic competition.

On several occasions since then, the stress appeared to have gotten to Valieva, including a moment during Saturday's practice session when she fell during a triple axel and eventually skated to the boards and tearfully hugged her embattled coach, Eteri Tutberidze.

## JACKSON'S HISTORIC GOLD

Erin Jackson won gold in the 500 meters to become the first Black woman to win a speedskating medal at the Winter Olympics. With a time of 37.04 seconds, she gave the Americans their first speedskating medal at the Beijing Games. The 29-year-old Jackson joins fellow American Shani Davis as the only Black athletes to win Olympic speedskating gold medals.

## ROEISELAND'S TRIPLE GOLD

Marte Olsbu Røiseland held her focus in the blowing snow and shot cleanly in the last standing stop to win the women's biathlon 10-kilometer pursuit race. It was her third gold medal of the Beijing Olympics and fourth medal overall.

The Norwegian started the race with a lead because of her win in the sprint race and hit 19 of her 20 targets. She won in 34 minutes, 46.9 seconds.

In the men's race, Quentin Fillon Maillet of France hit all 20 of his targets despite howling wind and skied to his second Olympic gold, and fourth medal overall, in the 12.5-kilometer pursuit.

## Black gay priest in NYC challenges Catholicism from within

By KWASI GYAMFI ASIYEDU Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Parishioners worshipping at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Harlem are greeted by a framed portrait of Martin Luther King Jr. -- a Baptist minister named after a rebellious 16th century German priest excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

The Rev. Bryan Massingale, who sometimes preaches at St. Charles, pursues his ministry in ways that echo both Martin Luthers.

Like King, Massingale decries the scourge of racial inequality in the United States. As a professor at Fordham University, he teaches African American religious approaches to ethics.

Like the German Martin Luther, Massingale is often at odds with official Catholic teaching -- he supports the ordination of women and making celibacy optional for Catholic clergy. And, as a gay man, he vocally disagrees with the church's doctrine on same-sex relations, instead advocating for full inclusion of LGBTQ Catholics within the church.

The Vatican holds that gays and lesbians should be treated with dignity and respect, but that gay sex is "intrinsically disordered" and sinful.

In his homily on a recent Sunday, Massingale -- who became public about being gay in 2019 -- envisioned a world "where the dignity of every person is respected and protected, where everyone is loved."

But the message of equality and tolerance is one "that is resisted even within our own faith household," he added. "Preach!" a worshiper shouted in response.

Massingale was born in 1957 in Milwaukee. His mother was a school secretary and his father a factory worker whose family migrated from Mississippi to escape racial segregation.

But even in Wisconsin, racism was common. Massingale said his father couldn't work as a carpenter because of a color bar preventing African Americans from joining the carpenters' union.

The Massingales also experienced racism when they moved to Milwaukee's outskirts and ventured to a predominately white parish.

"This would not be a very comfortable parish for you to be a part of," he recalled the parish priest saying. Thereafter, the family commuted to a predominantly Black Catholic church.

Massingale recalled another incident, as a newly ordained priest, after celebrating his first Mass at a predominantly white church.

"The first parishioner to greet me at the door said to me: 'Father, you being here is the worst mistake the archbishop could have made. People will never accept you.'"

Massingale says he considered leaving the Catholic Church, but decided he was needed.

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"I'm not going to let the church's racism rob me of my relationship with God," he said. "I see it as my mission to make the church what it says it is: more universal and the institution that I believe Jesus wants it to be."

For Massingale, racism within the U.S. Catholic Church is a reason for the exodus of some Black Catholics; he says the church is not doing enough to tackle racism within its ranks and in broader society.

Nearly half of Black U.S. adults who were raised Catholic no longer identify as such, with many becoming Protestants, according to a 2021 survey by the Pew Research Center. About 6% of Black U.S. adults identify as Catholic and close to 80% believe opposing racism is essential to their faith, the survey found.

The U.S. Catholic Church has had a checkered history with race. Some of its institutions, such as Georgetown University, were involved in the slave trade, and it has struggled to recruit African American priests.

Conversely, Catholic schools were among the first to desegregate and some government officials who opposed racial integration were excommunicated.

In 2018, U.S. bishops issued a pastoral letter decrying "the persistence of the evil of racism," but Massingale was disappointed.

"The phrase 'white nationalism' is not stated in that document; it doesn't talk about the Black Lives Matter movement," he said. "The problem with the church's teachings on racism is that they are written in a way that is calculated not to disturb white people."

At Fordham, a Jesuit university, Massingale teaches a class on homosexuality and Christian ethics, using biblical texts to challenge church teaching on same-sex relations. He said he came to terms with his own sexuality at 22, upon reflecting on the book of Isaiah.

"I realized that no matter what the church said, God loved me and accepted me as a Black gay man," he said.

His ordination in 1983 came in the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic that disproportionately affected gay men and Black Americans. Among his first funerals as a priest was that of a gay man whose family wanted no mention of his sexuality or the disease.

"They should have been able to turn to their church in their time of grief," Massingale said. "Yet they couldn't because that stigma existed in great measure because of how many ministers were speaking about homosexuality and AIDS as being a punishment for sin."

Pope Francis has called for compassionate pastoral care for LGBTQ Catholics. However, he has described homosexuality among the clergy as worrisome, and Vatican law remains clear: same-sex unions cannot be blessed within the church. Some dioceses have fired openly LGBTQ employees.

Massingale has a different vision of the church: one where Catholics enjoy the same privileges regardless of sexual orientation.

"I think that one can express one's sexuality in a way that is responsible, committed, life giving and an experience of joy," he said.

Massingale has received recognition for his advocacy from like-minded organizations such as Future-Church, which says priests should be allowed to marry and women should have more leadership roles within the church.

"He is one of the most prophetic, compelling, inspiring, transforming leaders in the Catholic Church," said Deborah Rose-Milavec, the organization's co-director. "When he speaks, you know very deep truth is being spoken."

Along with his many admirers, Massingale has some vehement critics, such as the conservative Catholic news outlet Church Militant, which depicts his LGBTQ advocacy as sinful.

At Fordham, Massingale is well-respected by colleagues, and was honored by the university with a prestigious endowed chair. To the extent he has any critics among the Fordham faculty, they tend to keep their misgivings out of the public sphere.

He says he receives many messages of hope and support, but becoming public about his sexuality has come at a cost.

"I have lost some priest friends who find it difficult to be too closely associated with me because if they're

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friends with me, 'what will people say about them?'" he said.

Massingale remains optimistic about gradual change in the Catholic Church because of Pope Francis and recent signals from bishops in Europe who expressed a desire for changes, including blessing same-sex unions.

"My dream wedding would be either two men or two women standing before the church; marrying each other as an act of faith and I can be there as the official witness to say: "Yes, this is of God," he said after a recent class at Fordham. "If they were Black, that would be wonderful."

## **BEIJING DIARY: A segmented city, ideal for pandemic Olympics**

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

BEIJING (AP) — At a hotel in Beijing's Olympic Park, two signs compete for attention, draped across a fence against a deep blue backdrop. "Together for a shared future," says one, trumpeting the 2022 Winter Games' official slogan. Directly to its left, in big white letters, another warns: "Closed loop area. Don't cross the line."

"You can't go that way," says a black-clad guard outside the China National Convention Center Hotel. "Everything's separate."

Visitors may find this ironic — hypocritical, even. It's not. For Beijing, the capital of a nation where the characters for "city" and "wall" can overlap, it has become part of the DNA.

It's the latest incarnation of something that has typified the Chinese capital for centuries, since the days emperors occupied the Forbidden City: At its core, Beijing is a compartmentalized metropolis of tiny gated, fenced and subdivided ecosystems that developed both organically and by design — but that made this town strangely appropriate as the site of a locked-down, tightly regulated, bubbled-in COVID Olympics.

Beijing, which can still feel like a smaller town in places, has lived out a modular existence for a long, long time. "The whole interior of the city is laid out in squares like a chessboard with such masterly precision that no description can do justice to it," wrote a 13th-century visitor from Italy, a man named Marco Polo.

And today, between the outsized architecture of commerce, ideology and Olympics, sits a city still in some ways a chessboard full of odd-sized squares.

Exhibit A, spotted from the in-the-bubble bus: Many of the hotels housing visitors during the Games are compact, fortified compounds, inside fences festooned with Olympic signage and guarded by both staff and a formidable police presence to keep occupants inside the closed-loop "bubble."

Like many urban Chinese hotels, they are intended to function as islands once the gates are shut. In such an ecosystem, you can almost forget that the rest of the city exists — the ideal sensibility for encouraging and enforcing Winter Games COVID protocols.

Everywhere you look in Beijing, you can spy evidence of such compartmentalization. It's an eclectic, economically and politically driven patchwork that tells the story of decades of overplanning and no planning, of chaos and control — of tight, fenced-in spaces that push in around the city's renowned open avenues and squares.

Begin with the ancient hutong — narrow, winding lanes full of courtyard residences called siheyuan whose roots date to the 1200s when informal encampments went up just east of the emperor's Forbidden City during the Mongol-ruled Yuan Dynasty. They grew into an intricate, sometimes hierarchical system around the city.

Though hutongs still dot Beijing today, some of them well preserved, many were demolished in the 21st century's first decade during a construction boom that preceded — and was partially caused by — the first Beijing Olympics in 2008.

The overall sensibility, though — self-contained Lego pieces that snapped into a larger whole, some meticulously controlled and others a bit renegade — runs very deep in the city.

For centuries, Beijing was governed by security concerns, fears of prying eyes and traditional Confucian notions about hierarchy. The city was surrounded by fortified gates and walls to separate itself from the countryside; inside town, things were divided into the outer and inner cities.

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Inside the inner city sat the Imperial City, essentially its own community that served the dynastic court. And at the very center was the Forbidden City, sequestered even more, where the most elite interacted with the palace and the emperor himself. A closed-loop bubble, if you will, with access determined by influence rather than credentials and negative PCR tests.

"Every wall, gate, temple, palace, street and courtyard had its specially designated place," historian Mingzheng Shi writes in "Rebuilding the Chinese Capital: Beijing in the Early 20th Century," a 1998 essay.

Old Beijing long ago gave way to new Beijing. And after more than a century of two governments struggling to impose order onto creeping planning incoherence, it's a very different city. Nevertheless, some key characteristics of today's Chinese capital — built and accrued over seven decades of Communist Party rule and, more recently, assertive capitalism — echo the old.

The layout of modern Beijing — arranged since the 1980s around a series of "ring roads" that segment it and control ingress and egress — functions as an unspoken callback to the old city's walls, to which the innermost ring corresponds. This approach continues; Seventh Ring Road, on Beijing's far outskirts and connecting it with other cities, opened less than four years ago.

Even as Beijing became a modern metropolis, compartmentalization and control stayed front and center, always competing with chaos. Main roads are crowded with various apparatus to prevent people from crossing where they're not supposed to; thanks to fences that look innocuous but are highly effective, jaywalking is not only illegal but operationally implausible.

In Beijing, even vast spaces that give the appearance of utter openness — parts of Olympic Park, for instance, and the iconic and politically sensitive Tiananmen Square — are equipped with features that carefully control entrance and exit. Beijingers remain accustomed to sudden rerouting based on strange fences, walls or even buildings that appear unexpectedly. Sometimes it's the government behind this stuff, sometimes not.

And some of the organizational sensibility of the "work unit," ubiquitous in Chinese society from the 1950s through the 1980s, remains, too — the notion of the workplace as a walled-off mini-community with its own ecosystem, sometimes complete with residences, medical clinics and distinctive rules.

Cap it off with the official Chinese position about Hong Kong, the "special administrative region" it got back from colonizer Britain in 1997 and is obligated on paper to treat differently than the rest of the country until 2047.

In China, that governing principle is called "one country, two systems" — a segmented approach to governing that echoes across the Beijing Olympics, where this month's juxtaposition of citizens outside the bubble with those within feels decidedly like one city, two systems.

Beijing's city walls belong to yesterday; only fragments of them remain. But for the capital of a country that built a Great Wall to keep invading outsiders on the other side, the Olympics offer a chance to dust off the chessboard-squares approach that has been part of the city since its earliest days.

Osvald Sirén, a Swedish art historian and author of "The Walls and Gates of Peking," said this about the capital in 1924: "The life of the whole city becomes concentrated at the gates; everything that goes out of or in to it must pass these narrow openings."

That's an apt characterization of the Beijing of centuries past. It also describes, perfectly, a swath of the city right now — pandemic Olympic Beijing, circa February 2022, a place of narrow openings, pledging to bring people together for a shared future but making sure, at every closed-loop juncture, that the wrong people don't cross the line.

## Once Lebanon's center of glamour, Hamra Street goes dark

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — From his small music shop on Beirut's Hamra Street, Michel Eid witnessed the rise and fall of Lebanon through the changing fortunes of this famed boulevard for more than 60 years.

Hamra Street was the center of Beirut's glamour in the 1960s and 1970s, home to Lebanon's top movie houses and theaters, cafes frequented by intellectuals and artists, and shops selling top international brands.

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It saw a revival the past decade, thriving with international chain stores and vibrant bars and restaurants. Now many of its stores are shuttered. Poverty-stricken Lebanese and Syrian refugees beg on its sidewalks. Trash piles up on its corners. Like the rest of Lebanon, the economic crash swept through the street like a destructive storm.

At 88 years old, Eid remembers the bad times, during Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war, when Hamra saw militias battling, assassinations at its cafes and, at one point, invading Israeli troops marching down the street. Nothing was as bad as now, Eid says.

"We have hit rock bottom," he said. Few customers come to his Tosca Music Shop and Electronic Supplies, which sells records and a variety of electronic clocks, calculators and watches. His business has dropped 75%.

Lebanon's economic meltdown, which began in October 2019, was the culmination of the country's post-war era. The war's militia leaders became the political leadership and have kept a lock on power ever since. They ran an economy that at times boomed but was effectively a Ponzi scheme riddled with corruption and mismanagement.

The scheme finally collapsed in what the World Bank calls one of the world's worst economic and financial crises since the mid 1800s.

The currency's value evaporated, salaries lost their buying power, dollars in banks became inaccessible, prices skyrocketed in a country where nearly everything is imported. As much as 82% of the population now lives in poverty, according to the U.N. Unemployment is estimated at 40%.

The crisis was made worse by the coronavirus pandemic and a massive explosion at Beirut's port that killed 216 people, wounded thousands and destroyed parts of the capital.

While the economic system collapsed, the political one hasn't. The same leadership, entrenched in power, has done virtually nothing to address the crisis. Refusing basic reforms, they have made no progress in talks with the International Monetary Fund.

A walk through Hamra Street shows the impact.

Many shops have shut down because owners could no longer afford high rents and huge monthly bills for private electricity generators. After nightfall, the shops that are still operating close early. Many streetlights don't work because of electricity cuts. Hamra, which used to stay lively into the night, feels deserted before midnight — even during the recent holiday season.

In Hamra's heyday, in the 1960s and 1970s, the street was lit up with colored lights during Christmas and New Year's, with Santa Clauses up and down the avenue offering candies to passers-by.

This was Lebanon's cosmopolitan pre-war era — and Hamra Street was its elegant heart, Beirut's Champs Elysees. Arab, European and American tourists flocked to its swanky shops, restaurants and bars.

Hamra had the capital's finest movie houses. At its Piccadilly Theater, Lebanon's most beloved singer Fayrouz performed. You might see the international diva Dalida strolling down the avenue before one of her shows at the Piccadilly. World stars held concerts in Lebanon, including Louis Armstrong and Paul Anka.

Located in the capital's western neighborhood of Ras Beirut, Hamra was — and still is — a place where Christians and Muslims live side by side. Its cafes were hangouts for artists, intellectuals and political activists, caught up in the leftist, secular Arab nationalist spirit of the times.

"Hamra Street is an international avenue," says Mohamad Rayes, who has worked on the street since the early '70s and owns three clothes and lingerie shops in the area.

He spoke sitting in a café that, in the 1970s, was called the Horse Shoe. He pointed to a corner where two of the greatest Arab singers of the time, Abdel-Halim Hafez and Farid el-Atrash, had a regular seat, along with Nizar Qabbani, an iconic romantic poet from Syria.

"It was dizzying, quite honestly, the number of people on Hamra. It was a vibrant, transient piece of life in the city," said David Livingston, an American who lived for decades in Lebanon, speaking from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A student in Beirut in the 1970s, he remembered how intimidated he was coming into ritzy Hamra Street to buy a leather belt from one of its shops.

The civil war ended that golden era. In 1982, invading Israeli troops marched through Hamra. After they

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left, militias seized the area in fighting that wreaked heavy damage. Hamra's Commodore Hotel became a popular base for foreign journalists covering the war.

After the war, the center of Beirut's international commerce and shopping moved to a newly renovated downtown. But Hamra Street saw a major facelift in the early 2000s when new water, sewage and electricity systems were installed, and the asphalt was replaced with cobblestones.

That fueled a revival the past 15 years. International chains like Starbucks and Nike opened stores. New restaurants flourished. Syrians fleeing their country's civil war opened restaurants of their own, along with sweets shops and popular shawarma stands.

The new wave pushed aside many of the Hamra area's pre-war icons. Its famed cafe Modca was replaced by a bank. A McDonald's stands in place of Faisal Restaurant, where Arab leftists once huddled over cigarettes, glasses of arak liquor and dishes of appetizers. The Piccadilly Theater was abandoned and recently was damaged by a fire.

But the street attracted a new generation of young people of all sects, bringing the progressive spirit of 2011's frustrated Arab Spring. Once again, the street rang with bars. One club, Metro Medina, drew young crowds with retro live shows of old Arabic music from the past century.

Hamra remains a busy thoroughfare during the day. Thousands come for treatment at its medical centers or to study at the nearby American University of Beirut, one of the Middle East's top educational institutions.

But "Hamra is not the Hamra of the past," said Elie Rbeiz.

The 70-year-old Rbeiz has been a hairdresser for the elite in Hamra since 1962. He counted among his regular clients the late Saudi businessman Adnan Khashoggi, who once flew Rbeiz to London on a private jet for a cut. Rbeiz expanded his business 20 years ago to include men's clothes.

Now in the economic crisis, his sales have plunged.

Still, Rbeiz believes Hamra will bounce back. He said his shop was blown up during the civil war and he renovated and reopened. "I did not surrender then and will not surrender now. Never."

Not everyone is so certain.

"I feel the pain every day because there is more suffering and more poverty," said Naim Saleh.

Saleh is a Hamra Street fixture, selling newspapers, magazines and books at his sidewalk kiosk for the past 52 years.

Now his business is ruined. Foreign magazines are a luxury few can afford. He sells a book or two a month, compared to 50 a day in the past. Saleh watched a young beggar chasing Iraqi tourists nearby. "Look how many beggars there are in the streets. It's like a curse."

Eid opened his music store in Hamra in 1958. He'll close it when he stops working, he said. His two sons live abroad; if they don't want his 4,500 records, many of which are collectors' items, he'll donate them to the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music.

Will Hamra Street flourish again? "Never, never. Impossible," he said. The Gulf tourists who once fueled its commerce won't come back, they'll turn to Europe.

But he won't leave.

"Hamra Street is the oxygen that I breathe," he said. "I grew up on Hamra Street and will end my life here."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Feb. 14, the 45th day of 2022. There are 320 days left in the year. This is Valentine's Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 14, 2018, a gunman identified as a former student opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School near Fort Lauderdale, Florida, killing 17 people in the nation's deadliest school shooting since the attack in Newtown, Connecticut, more than five years earlier. (Nikolas Cruz pleaded guilty to murder in October 2021; a jury will decide whether he is to be executed.)

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On this date:

In 1876, inventors Alexander Graham Bell and Elisha Gray applied separately for patents related to the telephone. (The U.S. Supreme Court eventually ruled Bell the rightful inventor.)

In 1912, Arizona became the 48th state of the Union as President William Howard Taft signed a proclamation.

In 1913, labor leader Jimmy Hoffa was born in Brazil, Indiana; college football coach Woody Hayes was born in Clifton, Ohio; sports broadcaster Mel Allen was born in Birmingham, Alabama.

In 1924, the Computing-Tabulating-Recording Co. of New York was formally renamed International Business Machines Corp., or IBM.

In 1929, the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre" took place in a Chicago garage as seven rivals of Al Capone's gang were gunned down.

In 1945, during World War II, British and Canadian forces reached the Rhine River in Germany.

In 1967, Aretha Franklin recorded her cover of Otis Redding's "Respect" at Atlantic Records in New York.

In 1979, Adolph Dubs, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, was kidnapped in Kabul by Muslim extremists and killed in a shootout between his abductors and police.

In 1984, 6-year-old Stormie Jones became the world's first heart-liver transplant recipient when the surgery was performed at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (she lived until November 1990).

In 1989, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini called on Muslims to kill Salman Rushdie, author of "The Satanic Verses," a novel condemned as blasphemous.

In 2013, double-amputee Olympic sprinter Oscar Pistorius shot and killed his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, at his home in Pretoria, South Africa; he was later convicted of murder and is serving a 13-year prison term.

In 2020, after being stranded at sea for two weeks because five ports refused to allow their cruise ship to dock, passengers cheered as they left the MS Westerdam in Cambodia; the Holland America Line had said no cases of the coronavirus had been confirmed among passengers and crew. (An 83-year-old American woman who was on the ship and flew from Cambodia to Malaysia was later found to be carrying the virus.)

Ten years ago: A fire broke out at a farm prison in Honduras, killing 361 inmates. "Linsanity" continued as Knicks sensation Jeremy Lin made a tiebreaking 3-pointer with less than a second to play and New York rallied to beat the Raptors 90-87, extending a winning streak to six games. Malachy the Pekingese won best in show at the Westminster Kennel Club in New York.

Five years ago: A former store clerk, Pedro Hernandez, was convicted in New York of murder in one of the nation's most haunting missing-child cases, nearly 38 years after 6-year-old Etan Patz (AY'-tahn payts) disappeared while on the way to a school bus stop. Authorities lifted an evacuation order for nearly 200,000 Northern California residents living below the Oroville Dam after declaring that the risk of catastrophic collapse of a damaged spillway had been significantly reduced.

One year ago: Japan formally approved its first COVID-19 vaccine and said it would start nationwide inoculations within days, but months behind the U.S. and many other countries. Vast numbers of people across Myanmar flouted orders against demonstrations to march again in protest against the military takeover that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Andrew Prine is 86. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg is 80. Jazz musician Maceo Parker is 79. Journalist Carl Bernstein is 78. Former Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., is 75. TV personality Pat O'Brien is 74. Magician Teller (Penn and Teller) is 74. Cajun singer-musician Michael Doucet (doo-SAY') (Beausoleil) is 71. Actor Ken Wahl is 65. Opera singer Renee Fleming is 63. Actor Meg Tilly is 62. Pro Football Hall of Famer Jim Kelly is 62. Singer-producer Dwayne Wiggins is 61. Actor Sakina Jaffrey is 60. Actor Enrico Colantoni is 59. Actor Zach Galligan is 58. Actor Valente Rodriguez is 58. Former tennis player Manuela Maleeva is 55. Actor Simon Pegg is 52. Rock musician Kevin Baldes (Lit) is 50. Rock singer Rob Thomas (Matchbox Twenty) is 50. Former NFL quarterback Drew Bledsoe is 50. Actor Danai Gurira is 44. Actor Matt Barr is 38. Actor Stephanie Leonidas is 38. Actor Jake Lacy is 36. Actor Tiffany Thornton is 36. Actor Brett Dier is 32. Actor Freddie Highmore is 30.