

# Groton Daily Independent

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## UpComing Events

### 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).  
Boys C Game at 4 p.m. in the Cardinal Gym. Girls JV game starts at 4 p.m. in the main gym followed by Boys JV game, girls varsity game and then boys varsity game.

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, Feb. 24

Girls Basketball regions

**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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## Vendor Fair set for March 26

by Dorene Nelson

Ashley Bentz, owner and operator of Next Level Nutrition in downtown Groton, is setting up a vendor fair in Groton to be held on March 26, 2022. The purpose of this event is to offer a wide variety of crafters and vendors for local individuals.

In addition to a wide variety of crafters and vendors, shoppers can enjoy some lunch while they look at the individual booths. The vendor participants are being asked to donate items for an auction table. The proceeds from this auction will be donated to Make-a-Wish Foundation.

"I have twenty-five booths that will be set up for everyone to shop from," Bentz explained. "If businesses would like to donate an item to the Silent Auction, they can contact me at (605) 467- 1257.

"I have commitments from Pampered Chef, Mary Kay, 31, craft items, clothes, the U.S. Post Office, doTerra Oils, Tupperware, and Herbalife Nutrition," Bentz listed.

"I decided to organize this Vendor Fair to help other businesses who don't have storefronts to get their name out there! The last time there was an event like this was at the Pumpkin Fest last fall," Bentz explained. "The Vendor Fair is scheduled for March 26th from 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. at the Groton Community Center, 109 N. 3rd St., Groton, SD."

## Groton Prairie Mixed

**Team Standings:** Jackelopes 6, Coyotes 5, Shih Tzus 4, Chipmunks 4, Foxes 4, Cheetahs 1

**Men's High Games:** TJ Sperry 214, Mike Siegler 197, Brad Waage 194

**Women's High Games:** Nicole Kassube 197, Vicky Walter 179, 179, Darci Spanier 178

**Men's High Series:** Mike Siegler 566, Brad Waage 564, TJ Sperry 552

**Women's High Series:** Vicky Walter 489, Nicole Kassube 481, Darci Spanier 443

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## Lana's Annals-A report from Pierre

Greetings from the People's House. We had a busy week in the education committee. House Bill 1310, which sought to have public school educators put all of their lessons and extra activities online, proved to be a very unpopular one with both educators. We listened to a fair amount of testimony from both sides. The proponents stressed the need to be able to view each daily lesson in which their children would be involved in all subjects. It was alleged that some inappropriate surveys, for one, were being distributed at a certain school, and the parent thought this could be prevented if daily plans were placed online. On the flip side came an urgent plea from educators not to do this as it would be too time consuming and cumbersome. Our committee decided that the bill was unnecessary for one main reason: it is not up to the legislature to try to micromanage an area that is the responsibility of school boards and administrators. Along with that, if a teacher wanted to present subversive lessons in class, all of the online plans would not help. Complaints such as this have to go through a policy and procedure method as adopted by that particular school.

HB1207, which asked to clarify standards of open enrollment, proved to be emotional. A testifier said that her family moved out of a school district, but open enrolled their autistic child back into the old district immediately after the move. They were told that there was no room nor was there anyone to monitor the child so they should get services in their current, larger school. We really had a difficult time with this, but in the end, we voted "no" on the bill. Again, it is not the role of the legislature to change school policy and force the former school to take the child. According to current law, it is up to the two involved schools to have a meeting to arrive at the best solution to meet the child's needs. Had the family just stayed within the old district, this would not have been a problem, and the child would have felt more secure in his old environment and around the people with whom he had become comfortable. Such was not the case.

Our local government heard from several 911 dispatchers who sought to be labeled as class B workers in the SD Retirement System. It was testified that these people have important work to do and sometimes, they mean the difference between the life or death of a caller. Several examples were given of dispatchers having to talk people out of committing suicide or also diffusing domestics, especially where handguns were part of the mix. We had our chief retirement analyst testify that it would be up to the local department to look at the retirement issue and at the classifications. With that, we moved the bill to the 41st day.

Also in local government a campground issue was presented. It was stated that if a city-owned campground wanted to expand, officials of the city would have to get permission from private campground owners within a 15 mile radius before doing so. Wylie Park in Aberdeen wanted to expand but could not locate the owners of a local, now defunct campground less than 15 miles away (as the story went). We decided that the city owned campgrounds should not compete with private enterprises so voted it down. I had some frustration with this; while I am a huge believer in free enterprise and property rights, it is somewhat unfair to deprive a city owned campground from expanding if there is no one currently interested in building a private facility.

On the House floor HB1311 appeared to be the talker of the week. It mainly sought to prevent anyone from pre-contracting for a baby. Instead, a mother who wanted to relinquish rights to the baby had to wait until the baby was born, and it would have to go through the adoption steps. This bill, in essence, sought to stop surrogacy. A broad brush in this bill painted the picture as if to look like surrogates were baby sellers who made great profits off their "contract babies." We voted against this bill as was the feeling of the majority that we South Dakotans are not in the baby selling racket. I wondered why "contract babies" kept being said. If that is true, would not adopted babies go through a contract process with money being exchanged? I think so!

We heard HB1278, which sought to increase non-custodial parent child support. Although well-intentioned, it was defeated (motion to reconsider was made, however). I think the inflationary index is present and also petitioning the court for additional support is a possibility. One of our legislators is a non-custodial parent, and I felt that I would rather see him have the proposed increase in HIS pocket so he had money to take his children fishing, to movies, to the fair, etc. The time that both parents spend with their children is very important, and the memories the children will have by being able to do activities with both may always be cherished.

With that, I will conclude by mentioning this: the days are getting longer, and the bills are more contentious. Legislating is not for the feint of heart as we have a job to do and a process to follow. It would be far easier to vote with emotion than with logic!

Until next week, may you be well and stay informed.

Rep. Lana Greenfield

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## Northern State Rallies in Decisive Home Finale

Aberdeen, S.D. – Cole Bergan and Sam Masten led the Northern State University men's basketball team past Minot State in overtime Thursday evening. The Wolves battled back from a halftime deficit to secure their 18th victory of the season.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 84, MINOT 78 (OT)

Records: NSU 18-11 (12-9 NSIC), MINOT 15-8 (9-8 NSIC)

Attendance: 2112

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Minot State led by eight mid-way through the second half, however the Wolves rallied to send the game to overtime
- The Wolves went on a 30-22 run to close out regulation and out-scored the Beavers 10-4 in the overtime period to seal the victory
- Northern shot 47.7% from the floor, 34.6% from the 3-point line, and 68.4% from the foul line in the game
- They tallied 29 rebounds, 17 assists, nine made 3-pointers, seven steals, and four blocks
- NSU scored 36 points in the paint and 20 points off 17 turnovers in a game that saw 20 lead changes
- Four of the Wolves starting five scored in double figures led by Masten and Bergan with 25 points apiece
- The pair accounted for 23 of the team's points in the final minutes of regulation
- With the win, Northern moves to third in the NSIC North Division standings with one game remaining in the regular season

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Sam Masten: 25 points, 58.8 FG%, 5 rebounds, 5 assists
- Cole Bergan: 25 points (career high), 50.0 FG%, 6 rebounds, 2 assists
- Jordan Belka: 14 points, 3 rebounds, 2 steals
- Jacksen Moni: 12 points, 5 rebounds, 2 blocks

### UP NEXT

Northern travels to UMary on Saturday for the final contest of the regular season. Tip-off is set for 4 p.m. versus the Marauders.

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## Northern State Routes Minot State, 83-60

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State women's basketball team closed the regular season home schedule with a commanding 83-60 victory over Minot State. The Wolves led for all but the first minute of the game and would lead by as many as 35 points early in the second half.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 83, MINOT 60

Records: NSU 12-13 (9-11 NSIC), MINOT 8-17 (6-12 NSIC)

Attendance: 1752

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Minot State's only lead came when they took a 2-0 lead to open the game, Northern State responded with a 9-0 run and would not trail the remainder of the game
- Kailee Oliverson scored eight of Northern's first 14 points of the game, leading the Wolves to a 30-16 lead after the first quarter
- NSU used a 14-0 run midway through the second quarter to put the game away, the Wolves out-scored the Beavers 24-9 in the period to lead by 29 at the half
- Haley Johnson and Lexi Roe hit two 3-pointers to open the third quarter, giving Northern their largest lead of the game at 35 points
- Minot State chipped away at the lead in the fourth quarter, out-scoring Northern State 17-10 in period
- Northern State shot 47.2 percent from the field, 36.0 percent from 3-point range, and 75.0 percent from the free throw line
- The Wolves out-rebounded the Beavers 36-28, and dished out 19 assists for the second consecutive game

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Kailee Oliverson: 21 points, 7 rebounds, 1 block

Lexi Roe: 16 points, 3 rebounds, 7 assists

Laurie Rogers: 13 points, 6 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 blocks, 2 steals

### UP NEXT

Northern State will end their regular season on Saturday when they travel to Bismarck to face UMary. The Wolves and Marauders are scheduled to tip-off at 2 p.m. on Saturday afternoon.

## Gov. Noem Signs Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem signed nine bills into law:

[SB 13](#) repeals provisions permitting certain documents to serve as temporary registry cards for medical cannabis.

[SB 18](#) revises rulemaking authority related to medical cannabis.

[SB 87](#) updates the South Dakota Coordinate System to conform to national standards.

[SB 88](#) revises certain provisions regarding the State Conservation Commission and conservation districts.

[HB 1056](#) revises provisions related to medical cannabis data maintained by the Department of Health.

[HB 1069](#) includes out-of-state convictions as a basis of an enhanced penalty for certain drug crimes.

[HB 1075](#) modifies legal and official notice publication requirements.

[HB 1085](#) expands the eligibility for a small estate probate.

[HB 1103](#) provides a reimbursement schedule for chiropractic, dental, and optometric services under the Medicaid program.

Governor Noem has signed 49 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.

Guest Speaker  
Nicole J Phillips  
The Kindness Podcast

*You're  
Invited!*

## RESET

womens conference

SATURDAY, MARCH 5  
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

IT'S TIME TO RESET AND ENJOY A DAY OF  
FELLOWSHIP, WORSHIP, LUNCH, AND MORE!

**Rose Hill Evangelical Free Church**  
**12099 Rose Hill Rd, Langford SD**  
**Saturday, March 5, 2022**  
**10 am to 3 pm**

Women and girls of all generations are welcome.  
Childcare will be available.

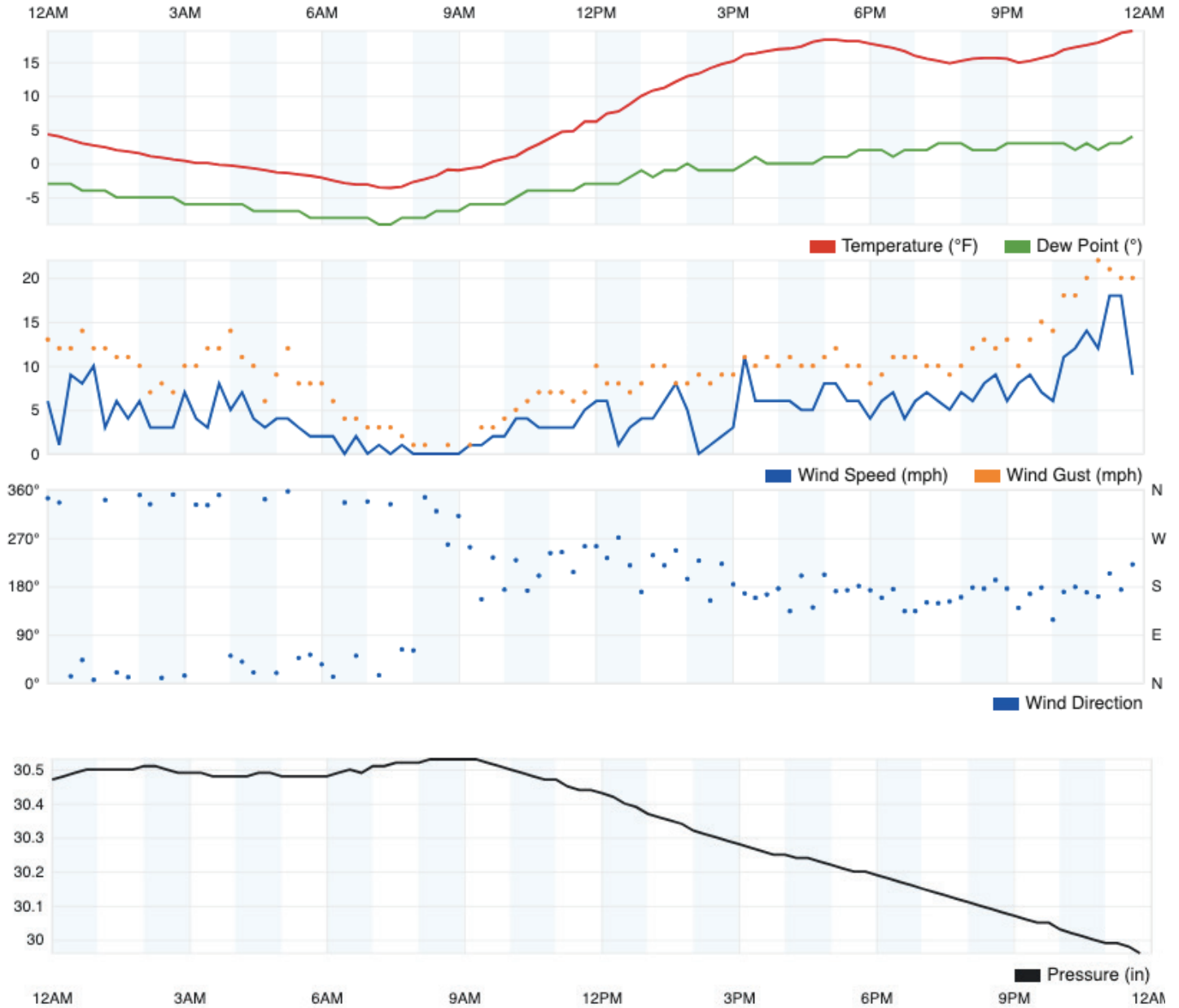
REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT  
ONLINE AT [ROSEHILLEFC.COM](http://ROSEHILLEFC.COM)



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



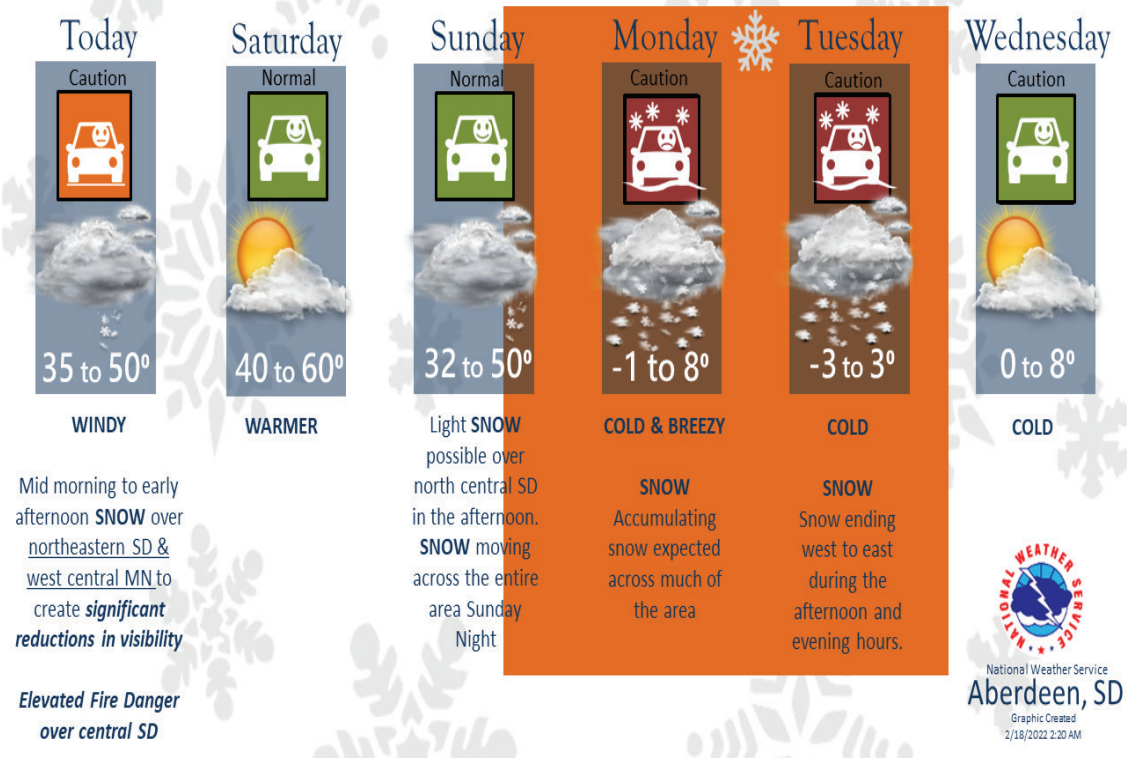


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## Warm & Windy Today Cold with Snow Monday & Tuesday

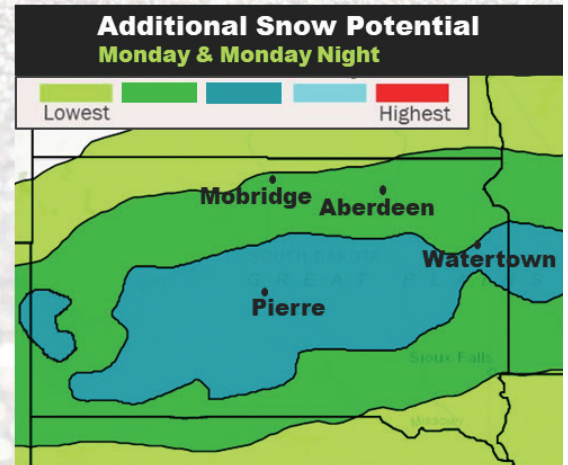
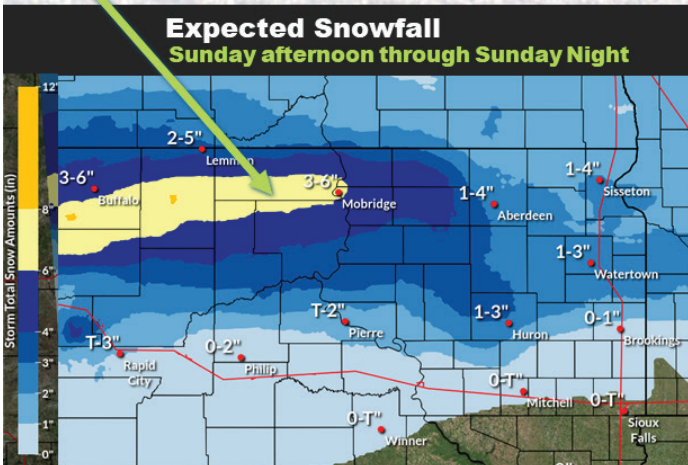


There are multiple weather concerns today ranging from windy conditions across the entire area this afternoon, elevated fire danger over central SD, to mid morning and early afternoon snow across north-eastern SD and west central MN that will create significant reductions in visibility. After a cold night to-night, warm air will return Monday. We're looking at the potential for a period of light to moderate snow to start as early as Sunday afternoon over north central SD before overspreading the entire area Sunday night. A band of heavy snow will be possible. Accumulating snow is expected Monday, along with breezy conditions and much colder air. Snow will likely end west to east across South Dakota and west central Minnesota Tuesday afternoon and evening. The cold air will remain in place through the week. At this point there is a lot of variability and lower confidence in the timing and specific snowfall amounts, so stay tuned to later forecast for more specifics as the time nears.



## Accumulating Snowfall Ahead

Prolonged period of light to moderate snow will be possible Sunday afternoon through Tuesday evening. **Confidence remains low on specific amounts and timing.** Don't focus on specific amounts, as the area of highest snowfall can easily shift north or south by 50+ miles. At this point, the bulk of the snow is expected late Sunday night through Monday night. Hazardous travel conditions are possible. Stay tuned to future forecasts!



**\*\*Significant variability on location & timing of snow\*\***

Visit [www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr) for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 2/18/2022 4:41 AM CT

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

A prolonged period of light to moderate snow will be possible Sunday afternoon through Tuesday evening. Confidence remains low on specific amounts and timing. So, don't focus on specific amounts, as the area of highest snowfall can easily shift north or south by 50+ miles. At this point, the bulk of the snow is expected late Sunday night through Monday night. Hazardous travel conditions are possible. Stay tuned to future forecasts, as our snowfall forecast will continue to be fine tuned as the time nears!

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## Today in Weather History

February 18th, 1962: It started raining during the afternoon of the 18th, and by evening temperatures dropped below freezing resulting in a glaze up to three-quarters of an inch on trees and power lines. Many utility lines were downed by the ice or by falling trees and branches. Temperatures continued to drop during the night, changing the rain to snow by the 19th. Strong winds accompanied this snow causing local blizzard conditions.

1965: A massive avalanche kills 26 men at the Granduc Copper Mine in British Columbia on this day.

1992: A thunderstorm spawned a powerful F4 tornado for so far north for the time of the year in southern Van Wert County in Ohio. The tornado touched down just west of US Route 127 and traveled northeastward for about 3 miles. One house was completely leveled, and nine others experienced severe damage. Six people were injured.

1899 - While much of the central and eastern U.S. was recovering from the most severe cold wave of modern history, the temperature at San Francisco soared to 80 degrees to establish a record for month of February. (David Ludlum)

1959 - Some of the higher elevations of California were in the midst of a five day storm which produced 189 inches of snow, a single storm record for North America. (13th-19th) (David Ludlum)

1987 - A small but intense low pressure system combined with northerly upslope winds to produce eight inches of snow in five hours at Meeteetsie WY, located southeast of Cody. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms soaked the Central Gulf Coast Region with heavy rain. Totals in southern Louisiana ranged up to 8.50 inches near the town of Ridge, with 6.55 inches at Plaquemine. Thunderstorms in northern Florida drenched Apalachicola with 5.41 inches of rain in 24 hours, and produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Mayo. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure off the coast of North Carolina brought freezing rain and heavy snow to Virginia and the Carolinas. Snowfall totals in Virginia ranged up to 18 inches at Franklin. Freezing rain reached a thickness of two inches around Charlotte NC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - An intense but slow moving Pacific storm worked its way across Utah over a two day period. The storm blanketed the valleys with 4 to 12 inches of snow, and produced up to 42 inches of snow in the mountains. Heavy snow also fell across northern Arizona. Williams received 22 inches of snow, and 12 inches was reported along the south rim of the Grand Canyon. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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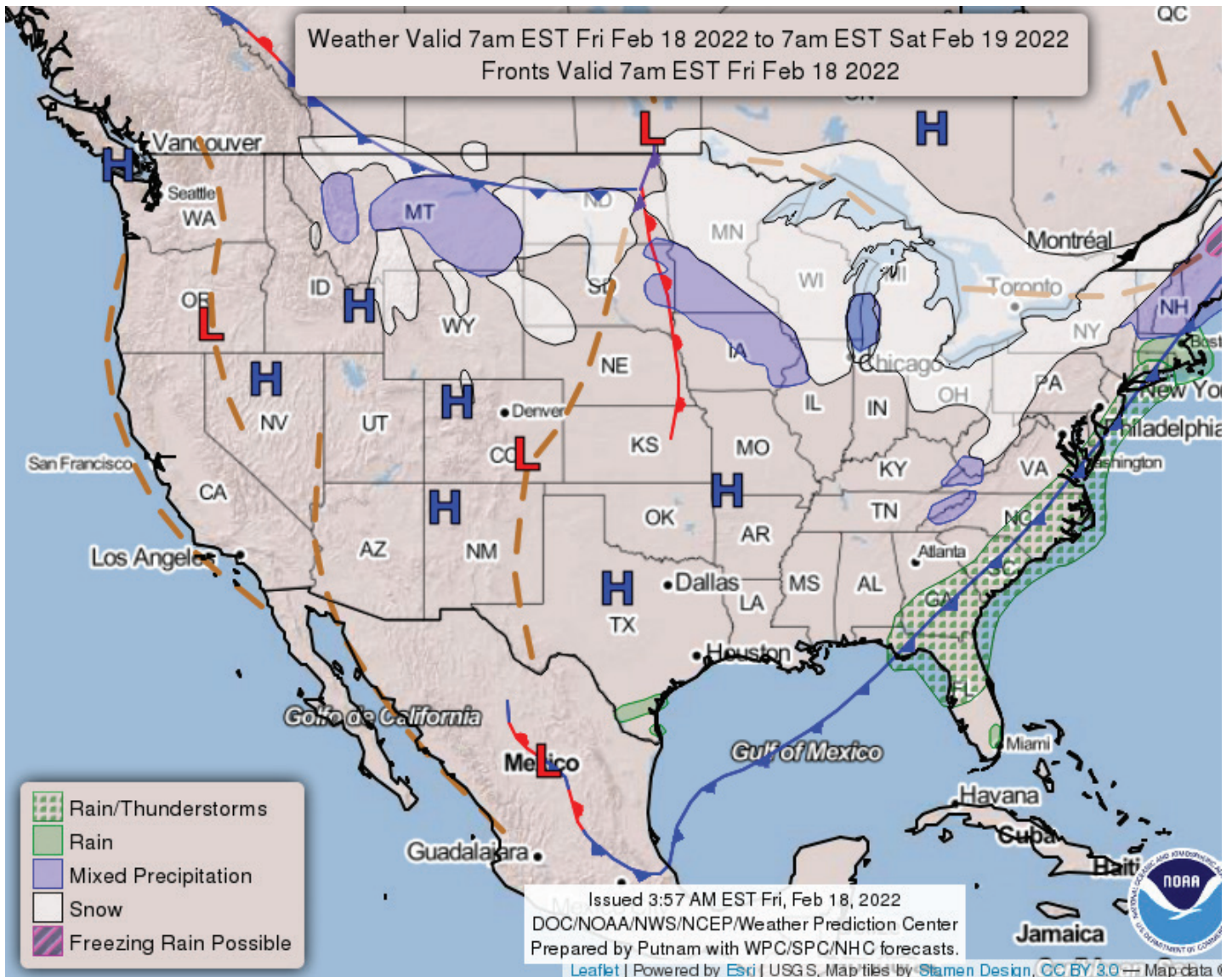
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 20 °F at 11:34 PM**  
**Low Temp: -4 °F at 7:27 AM**  
**Wind: 23 mph at 11:33 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 67 in 1913  
Record Low: -32 in 1903  
Average High: 29°F  
Average Low: 7°F  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.37  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 0.92  
Precip Year to Date: 0.59  
Sunset Tonight: 6:05:21 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:25:33 AM



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## NOTHING IS BEYOND HIM

When God calls us to do something, He will give us the skills and ability to do whatever He calls us to do. It may seem to be impossible and unreal at the time of His call, but He will never allow us to embarrass Him. If He calls us, He will equip us.

This is an important fact for Christians. There may be times when we "think" God has called us to do some "thing" because it is "attractive" or "appealing" or "glamorous" or "may give us power over people" or "no one else can do it." But it's not God calling us at all. It is our "ego" wanting attention, and we "put it on" or "blame God" for whatever we may want to do and then try to "obligate Him" to make it work.

The Psalmist made an interesting observation when he said, "For I delight in Your commands because I love them." When God calls us to serve Him, He puts a love in our heart that will not be diminished when the days seem longer than usual, or the tasks are seemingly unbearable, or the demands far beyond us. When God calls us to serve Him, He will give us whatever strength we need to do whatever He has called us to do.

Do you remember the story of a tall, well-built boy carrying a smaller child, who was unable to walk, on his back? A stranger asked, "Do you carry him to school each day?" "Yes, I do," he replied. "Isn't that a heavy burden for you to carry?" "Oh no, Sir. He's not a burden, he's my brother." God's commands are not a burden - they are a delight when we truly love them!

Prayer: Father, give us hearts that delight in serving You because we love the privilege we have to serve You. Your love for us teaches us to love You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For I delight in your commands because I love them. Psalm 119:47

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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

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White ..... \$41.54/year
- Colored ..... \$74.55/year
- Colored ..... \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly\* ..... \$21.30/year

\* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

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State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

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Groton, SD 57445-0034

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[www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com)

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This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month ..... \$15.98
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- 9 Months ..... \$31.95
- 12 Months ..... \$42.60

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News from the  Associated Press

## Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 58, Aberdeen Christian 37  
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 37, Kimball/White Lake 29  
Belle Fourche 40, New Underwood 29  
Brandon Valley 45, Spearfish 35  
Castlewood 51, Estelline/Hendricks 31  
Deubrook 51, Elkton-Lake Benton 32  
Dupree 47, Newell 28  
Ethan 58, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 30  
Freeman 55, Gayville-Volin 28  
Gregory 48, Burke 42  
Hamlin 47, Florence/Henry 44  
Hanson 52, Chamberlain 34  
Harding County 61, Hulett, Wyo. 23  
Highmore-Harrold 43, Miller 39  
Irene-Wakonda 70, Canistota 38  
Jones County 49, Lyman 35  
Kadoka Area 54, Bennett County 38  
Lead-Deadwood 58, Custer 35  
McCook Central/Montrose 62, Madison 42  
Menno 55, Freeman Academy/Marion 31  
Mobridge-Pollock 64, Stanley County 45  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 53, Parkston 42  
Northwestern 57, Herreid/Selby Area 48  
Potter County 54, Ipswich 25  
Red Cloud 67, Sturgis Brown 25  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 60, Mitchell Christian 33  
Sioux Falls Lincoln 45, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 33  
Sioux Valley 45, Garretson 44  
Sisseton 80, Clark/Willow Lake 56  
Tea Area 57, Yankton 45  
Viborg-Hurley 47, Howard 39  
Wolsey-Wessington 59, Hitchcock-Tulare 30

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 58, Aberdeen Christian 37  
Brandon Valley 77, Spearfish 50  
Britton-Hecla 42, Langford 34  
Burke 68, Wagner 60, OT  
Canistota 49, Irene-Wakonda 40  
Crazy Horse 71, Tiospaye Topa 28  
Dakota Valley 71, Sioux City, East, Iowa 53  
Deubrook 58, Elkton-Lake Benton 54  
Dupree 73, Newell 53



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Ethan 53, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 27  
Faulkton 57, Sully Buttes 42  
Freeman Academy/Marion 65, Menno 38  
Gayville-Volin 61, Freeman 45  
Great Plains Lutheran 67, Waverly-South Shore 58  
Hamlin 61, Florence/Henry 52  
Harrisburg 70, Sioux Falls Christian 64  
Howard 67, Viborg-Hurley 41  
Kimball/White Lake 64, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 60  
Lemmon 70, Bison 28  
Lower Brule 83, Philip 64  
Parkston 69, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 50  
Pierre 71, Brookings 45  
Potter County 69, Ipswich 35  
Rapid City Christian 59, Hill City 50  
Redfield 70, Webster 50  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 53, Mitchell Christian 38  
Sioux Valley 57, Garretson 36  
Sturgis Brown 57, Red Cloud 54  
Tea Area 55, Yankton 53  
Tiospa Zina Tribal 68, Milbank 54  
Wolsey-Wessington 67, Hitchcock-Tulare 23

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

## Archambault lifts South Dakota past St. Thomas (MN) 81-60

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Mason Archambault had 21 points as South Dakota routed St. Thomas (MN) 81-60 on Thursday night.

Kruz Perrott-Hunt had 19 points for South Dakota (16-10, 9-6 Summit League). Hunter Goodrick added 10 points and seven rebounds. Tasos Kamateros had 11 rebounds.

Riley Miller had 17 points for the Tommies (8-18, 2-12), whose losing streak stretched to 11 games. Parker Bjorklund added 11 points. Dom Martinelli had 10 points.

Anders Nelson, whose 15 points per game entering the contest ranked second on the Tommies, scored two points. He shot 0 of 4 from beyond the arc.

## Wilson lifts S. Dakota St. over W. Illinois 91-66

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Douglas Wilson had 21 points as South Dakota State extended its win streak to 15 games, romping past Western Illinois 91-66 on Thursday night.

Charlie Easley had 19 points and seven rebounds for South Dakota State (24-4, 15-0 Summit League). Baylor Scheierman added 19 points, eight rebounds and eight assists.

KJ Lee had 15 points for the Leathernecks (15-12, 6-9). Trenton Massner added 14 points and eight rebounds. Cameron Burrell had 10 points.

The Jackrabbits improve to 2-0 against the Leathernecks this season. South Dakota State defeated Western Illinois 93-75 on Jan. 22.

## SD House passes election audit bill amid false fraud claims

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota House Republicans, spurred by baseless claims that the 2020 presidential election was subject to widespread fraud, pushed through a bill on Thursday to require in-depth

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audits of ballots and voting equipment in close presidential elections.

Republican Rep. Taffy Howard, who is also mounting a Republican primary campaign for the U.S. House, told the House chamber that other states had seen fraud in the 2020 election and South Dakota's elections also had "irregularities." Her bill would require a "forensic audit" of ballots, voting equipment, and voter verification processes to verify federal office results if two presidential candidates come within 10 percentage points of each other.

An Associated Press review of every potential case of voter fraud in the six battleground states disputed by former president Donald Trump has found that the actual number of fraud cases was far fewer than he has alleged and would have made no difference in the election. Also, officials from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency have said that the election was the most secure in American history.

Gov. Kristi Noem, a Republican, bragged about the state's election systems shortly after Trump carried the state with 62% of the vote in 2020.

But Howard's bill, which passed the Republican-controlled House on a 36 to 31 vote, demonstrated how Trump's baseless insistence that the election was stolen has reverberated into statehouses that are shaping election laws.

House Democrat Leader Rep. Jamie Smith pointed out that his caucus was reduced to just eight seats after the election, and yet he had no reason to blame fraud or irregularities.

"This is partisanship," he said. "This is not good policy for the state of South Dakota."

Other Republicans avoided alleging fraud outright, but argued that checking up on election results was a good safeguard.

"I just can't see why we fight having an audit," said Republican Rep. Kevin Jensen.

The bill does not stipulate how audits would be funded, but allows the State Board of Elections to contract with outside organizations "with experience in forensic audits."

Both Howard and Jensen attended a conference held by MyPillow chief executive Mike Lindell in Sioux Falls last year during which he attempted to prove that voting equipment had been hacked.

The bill will next be considered in the Senate.

## Survey: farm prices, equipment sales soar across 10 states

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The strength of the economy in rural parts of 10 Plains and Western states continues to drive farmland prices and farm equipment sales higher, according to a new monthly survey of bankers in the region released Thursday.

The overall economic index for the region grew to 61.5 in February from January's 61.1. Any score above 50 suggests a growing economy, while a score below 50 suggests a shrinking economy.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey, said that on average the bankers expect corn and soybean prices to slip over the next six months, which would hurt the rural economy.

But for now, farmland prices and farm equipment sales continue growing.

The farmland price index dipped in February but remained at a high level of 78.8. That's down from 88.5 last month.

The farm equipment sales index also remained high at 72 in February even though it slipped from January's 72.4.

Bankers from Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming were surveyed.

## South Dakota House passes Super Tuesday presidential primary

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House on Thursday passed a proposal to move the state's presidential primary elections to Super Tuesday in hopes of gaining the state greater attention from White House hopefuls.

The bill passed the Republican-controlled chamber on a 41 to 26 vote and will next proceed to the Senate. It would move the state's presidential primaries to "the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March,"

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better known as Super Tuesday when the greatest number of states hold their primaries and caucuses. Republican Rep. Drew Dennert, who brought the proposal, pointed out that South Dakota's presidential primaries, which are currently held in June, have little consequence because a nominee has usually run away with the nomination by that point.

"We aren't even giving our voters a voice," he said.

He faced objections from fellow Republicans that separating the presidential primary from other primary elections would dampen turnout in those elections.

## South Dakota pot legalization bill cleared for Senate vote

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A bipartisan proposal to legalize recreational marijuana in South Dakota survived its first test in the Legislature on Thursday as a Senate committee recommended the proposal for a vote in the full chamber next week.

With a 54% majority, voters approved recreational pot legalization through a ballot measure in 2020. However, Republican Gov. Kristi Noem challenged its constitutionality and the state Supreme Court ruled it should be nullified last year.

Marijuana legalization advocates are mounting a campaign to bring it back to voters in November, putting pressure on Republican lawmakers to legalize it this year. Even some who previously opposed legalizing recreational marijuana say it should get serious consideration now.

Republican lawmakers who favor legalization say they owe it to voters and that the Legislature would be smart to take control of the process.

A bill known as Senate Bill 3 emerged from a committee of lawmakers that studied the issue for months last year. It would legalize recreational possession of up to an ounce of marijuana by people ages 21 and older, and reduce other penalties for possession. The bill also would allow it to be grown, processed and sold. Currently, possession of two ounces or less is a class 1 misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and \$2,000 in fines.

Republican Sen. Michael Rohl, who sponsored the bill, presented a choice to the Senate Commerce and Energy committee on Thursday: pass a bill that legalizes up to one ounce of pot possession for adults over 21 but keeps the growing of cannabis plants at home illegal, or stand by as voters likely pass a ballot measure in November that allows the drug to be grown at home in some cases.

"It would be one of the more restrictive recreational programs in the country," he told the committee.

Rohl said those who are pushing the ballot measure have promised to drop their campaign if the bill becomes law.

Law enforcement groups and the state medical association oppose the bill, but it got the Republican-controlled committee's recommendation on a five to three vote.

Rohl said that when the bill goes to the Senate floor next week, he will tell the chamber that "the voters of South Dakota clearly expressed their will" in 2020, adding that upholding that "is our complete responsibility. That's why we're here."

However, several top Republicans, including Noem and the Senate's Republican leader, are not convinced.

"At this stage of the game, it's just not going to happen," Republican Sen. Gary Cammack said at a news conference earlier Thursday, arguing that lawmakers already had enough to tackle besides legalizing recreational pot.

Noem also reaffirmed her opposition, saying that instead of focusing on recreational pot, she would rather push stricter vetting on people obtaining medical marijuana.

"We basically already have recreational marijuana," she said, referring to Native American tribes setting up medical pot retail sites where people can also get a doctor's recommendation.

The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, which set up the state's first medical marijuana retail site, told the Sioux Falls Argus Leader that more than 100 people have been arrested by non-tribal law enforcement after obtaining medical marijuana identification cards from the tribe.

The Senate will also consider a bill that would set up a 15% tax on the manufacture of recreational pot if it becomes legalized, while the House next week is set to consider a separate bill that would tax sales of pot if voters approve legalization.

## Noem endorses Jackley's AG bid, Jackley returns favor

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Thursday endorsed former attorney general Marty Jackley, her one-time political rival, as he campaigns to unseat the current Republican attorney general.

Jackley returned the favor for Noem's reelection bid.

The mutual endorsements represented a potential political alliance between the two Republicans, who in 2018 competed for their party's nomination in a bitter primary. Jackley eventually endorsed Noem late in the 2018 general election campaign.

Jackley is running for his old job as current Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg faces a House impeachment investigation for his conduct surrounding a 2020 fatal car crash.

If he is removed from office, Noem would get to name his replacement. She has applied maximum pressure for him to resign, but Ravnsborg has shown no sign of stepping down.

He has also been contacting state Republican party delegates, who will decide the party's nominee at a convention in June. However, Ravnsborg has not yet made an announcement on whether he will mount a reelection bid.

"South Dakota needs an Attorney General that believes in the constitution, has the confidence of law enforcement and the legal community, and understands the law," Noem said in a statement.

## Wyoming school bus driver accused of DUI, open container

CHEYENNE undefined

Police arrested a Wyoming school bus driver taking high school students to an activity in South Dakota on suspicion of driving under the influence and having an open container of alcohol.

The Wyoming Highway Patrol got a report that the bus wasn't keeping within its lane on U.S. 85 around 5 p.m. Wednesday, patrol spokesman Sgt. Jeremy Beck said Thursday.

A trooper pulled the Laramie County School District No. 1 bus over near Hawk Springs, about 60 miles (97 kilometers) northeast of Cheyenne, and arrested driver David Williams, according to Beck.

Williams was booked into the Goshen County jail but was no longer there Thursday morning, according to a person at the jail who said they couldn't provide more information.

It wasn't clear if Williams had an attorney who could speak on his behalf. Information about Williams' case could not be provided remotely, according to a person who answered the phone at Goshen County Circuit Court.

School officials sent another driver to the bus and activity sponsors made sure the South High School and East High School students from Cheyenne remained safe and warm, Superintendent Margaret Crespo said in a statement Thursday.

School officials didn't immediately respond to a request for more information Thursday including whether the students went ahead to the unspecified activity in Spearfish, South Dakota, or returned home.

"We will be readdressing the importance of student safety with all of our transportation personnel," Crespo said in the statement.

## Affidavits help return ancestral tribal remains to Dakotas

AGENCY VILLAGE, S.D. (AP) — Descendants of Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate tribal leaders will sign the necessary paperwork Saturday to help bring home the remains of their ancestors.

Relatives of Amos LaFramboise and Edward Upwright plan to gather with South Dakota tribal leaders at the Dakota Magic Casino Convention Center across the state line in Hankinson, North Dakota to sign affidavits that will allow the remains of the two young boys to be removed from the Carlisle Indian School

cemetery in Pennsylvania and moved to the Dakotas, Aberdeen American News reported.

LaFramboise's father helped found the Lake Traverse Reservation government in South Dakota after the Sisseton Wahpeton treaty was signed in 1867. LaFramboise died in 1879 and he was initially buried at the county cemetery and later moved to the school cemetery, according to historians.

Upwright died in 1881 from the measles and is the son of Waanatan II, an early tribal chief.

The school cemetery is on property owned by the U.S. military which in recent years has given tribes the opportunity to claim the remains of the 188 Native American children buried there. Part of that process includes gathering signed affidavits from living relatives of those buried in the cemetery.

Spirit Lake Nation chairman Douglas Yankton Sr. said signing the affidavits moves the tribes closer to bringing home the remains so they can be buried with their families. The next hurdle is deciding how many people will participate in this process and what expenses the U.S. government will pay.

But, at least with the affidavits, Yankton said, the disinterment can be scheduled, hopefully in the spring or summer.

## Single license plate proposal rejected by Senate committee

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota won't be switching to single license plates any time soon.

The Senate Transportation Committee on Wednesday rejected a proposal for a rear-only plate for passenger cars, vans and pickup trucks.

Republican Sen. Jim Bolin, of Canton, says he offered the proposal because some of his constituents in Union County requested it.

Thomas Frisch, of North Sioux City, testified in favor of the change. Frisch said newer vehicles are more aerodynamic with rounded fronts that have fewer places for mounting license plates. He said manufacturers often provide only rear mounts for plates, KELO-TV reported.

Five people spoke against going to one plate, including Jason Husby, assistant superintendent for the South Dakota Highway Patrol.

Husby said rear plates often become covered by dust or snow. Reading a rear plate in the rear-view mirror at 80 mph on the interstate is "almost impossible" for a trooper, he said.

Other opponents included lobbyists for convenience stores, police chiefs and insurers, as well as 3M, the company that sells the reflective material for license plates that inmates make at the State Penitentiary.

Senator Larry Zikmund, R-Sioux Falls, was the only committee member to speak in favor, saying a single plate is more cost effective.

The committee voted 5-1 to kill the bill.

## Olympics Live: Meyers Taylor to carry US flag at closing

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

Elana Meyers Taylor has been picked to be a flagbearer again. And this time, she'll be able to take the job. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee announced Friday night that the four-time Olympian bobsledder will carry the American flag into Sunday night's closing ceremony of the Beijing Games.

The announcement was synched to Meyers Taylor's first run in the women's bobsled event. As soon as she crossed the line in the first heat, the USOPC revealed that she was the flagbearer pick.

Meyers Taylor was chosen to be one of the flagbearers for the U.S. at the opening ceremony on Feb. 4 but could not participate because she was in isolation following a positive COVID-19 test. That spot went to speedskater Brittany Bowe instead, who led the U.S. delegation into the opening alongside curler John Shuster.

The last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics has been rescheduled for an hour earlier than planned because of strong wind in the forecast.

The mixed team parallel event is now set to start at 10 a.m. on Saturday Beijing time, instead of 11 a.m.

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The wind is supposed to top 20 mph (30 kph.)

The team event involves men and women from each participating country and is the last chance for American Mikaela Shiffrin to pick up a 2022 Winter Games medal.

Only one of the 10 athletes who earned individual Alpine golds in Beijing was listed on the team rosters released Friday: Austria's Johannes Strolz. He won the men's combined last week and also picked up a silver in slalom on Wednesday.

There is a 16-team bracket but only 15 nations entered, so top-ranked Austria will get a first-round bye.

The first-round matchups are United States vs. Slovakia, Switzerland vs. China, Italy vs. Russia, Norway vs. Poland, France vs. Czech Republic, Germany vs. Sweden, and Slovenia vs. Canada.

Johannes Thingnes Boe looked like his old self again, dominating from the start and holding his composure through the four shooting stages to win the Olympic gold medal Friday in the biathlon mass start race.

The Norwegian great threw his arms in the air as he crossed the line in 38 minutes, 14.4 seconds.

Martin Ponsiluoma of Sweden only missed one target in the last shooting and left the range chasing Boe. He earned silver, 40.3 seconds behind Boe. Vetle Sjåstad Christiansen of Norway shot clean in the last shooting and took bronze, finishing 1:12.5 behind.

Thomas Krol has won gold in the 1,000 meters, giving the Netherlands its third straight Olympic speed-skating title in the event.

Krol was timed in 1 minute, 7.92 seconds.

Laurent Dubreuil of Canada took silver. Haavard Lorentzen, the 2018 silver medalist, earned bronze.

The Netherlands earned its fifth gold medal in 12 events in Beijing with one day of competition remaining. In 2014, Stefan Groothuis won the 1,000 and Kjeld Nuis followed with a victory in 2018.

Sixteen years after he won the Olympic curling gold medal, Brad Gushue is going back to Canada with bronze.

The Canadians capitalized on a missed final shot by American — and reigning Olympic champion — John Shuster in the second-to-last end that turned a one-point edge into an insurmountable 8-5 lead.

Gushue won gold in Turin in 2006. Back then, he shared a podium with Shuster, who won bronze.

This time, the Canadian skip knocked his American counterpart off of it.

The Americans took a 5-4 lead with two points in the sixth, then Canada scored two in the eighth to take the lead. With the United States holding the last-rock advantage in the ninth, Shuster tried to knock loose two Canadian rocks in the scoring area but missed.

That gave Gushue two points, with one end to go. Canada's third-to-last shot cleared all of the American rocks out of the target area, leaving no chance for the U.S. to tie the match, and Shuster immediately conceded.

Justine Braisaz-Bouchet moved to the front with strong, patient shooting and stayed there with her cross-country skiing to win the women's biathlon mass start race at the Olympics.

A bitter wind affected the field as they lined up each time to shoot, but Braisaz-Bouchet only missed once in the last standing shooting and skied out of the range in first place. She held on and crossed the line carrying a French flag in 40 minutes, 18 seconds.

Norwegian teammates Tiril Eckhoff and Marte Olsbu Roiseland missed two targets each in that last bout and left the range together, 48 seconds behind the Frenchwoman. Eckhoff chased hard and crossed the line for the silver, trailing Braisaz-Bouchet by 15.3 seconds.

Roiseland took bronze — her fifth medal at the Beijing Games.

Roiseland is the second biathlete, male or female, to win a medal in all four individual events at an Olympics, matching Norwegian great Ole Einar Bjoerndalen. She also won gold in the mixed relay.

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Ryan Regez led a 1-2 finish by Switzerland in the Olympic skicross final at Genting Snow Park. Regez grabbed the lead early and never relinquished it along a course filled with bumps, jumps and rolling terrain. He raised his arms in triumph shortly after crossing the finish line.

His teammate, 36-year-old Alex Fiva, finished with the silver medal and Russian athlete Sergey Ridzik grabbed the bronze.

As a kid, Regez always thought his future was in Alpine skiing, more specifically the downhill. When that didn't pan out, he started an apprenticeship as a structural draftsman before discovering skicross.

It paid off in gold.

In the small final, Italian skicross racer Simone Deromedis won the heat with a little bit of flair. He was coming off the last jump and did the splits before crossing the finish line.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach has criticized Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva's entourage for their "tremendous coldness" toward the 15-year-old skater after her mistake-filled free skate at the Beijing Olympics.

Bach says it was "chilling" to see on television. Valieva, who has been at the center of a controversy over a positive doping test, finished fourth overall despite placing first in the women's short program earlier in the week.

The IOC president did not name Valieva's coach, Eteri Tutberidze, who was seen on camera telling a visibly upset Valieva "Why did you let it go? Why did you stop fighting?"

Bach says "you could feel this chilling atmosphere, this distance."

Tutberidze and other members of Valieva's entourage will be investigated over the teenager's positive test for a heart medication ahead of the Olympics.

Bach says the pressure on Valieva was "beyond my imagination."

Eileen Gu captured gold in the women's ski halfpipe final on a breezy and cold morning to become the first action-sports athlete to earn three medals at the same Winter Olympics.

Gu warmed up with a score of 93.25 on her first run, before going even higher and even bigger to post a 95.25 her second. For her third and final pass, and with the contest locked up, she took a nice leisurely stroll.

The standout American-born freestyle skier who represents China already possessed a gold from big air and a silver from slopestyle.

Defending Olympic champion Cassie Sharpe of Canada finished second and her teammate Rachael Karker earned the bronze. Teenager Hanna Faulhaber was the top American finisher in sixth place.

Germany's Francesco Friedrich took part in the final day of four-man bobsled training at the Beijing Olympics on Friday, one day after suggesting he might skip the session.

Friedrich was the first sled down the hill on Friday for the final training session. That may have played a role in his decision to take part. Friedrich was one of the last sleds to get on the ice Thursday during four-man training and afterward the three-time Olympic champion expressed concerns about the conditions of the track.

He likely enjoyed what he saw Friday. Friedrich started the day with a run of 58.98 seconds. That was his fastest in five trips down the Yanqing Sliding Center ice in his four-man sled this week.

He's the overwhelming favorite for gold in the four-man event that starts on Saturday.

Some top sliders did choose to skip training Friday, including Canadian teammates Justin Kripps and Chris Spring, Germany's Christoph Hafer and Latvian veteran Oskars Kibermanis. It's not unusual for veterans to opt out of a training session, in order to preserve their bodies and sleds for the looming two days of competition.

Eileen Gu posted the highest score in her first run of the women's ski halfpipe final as she bids to become the first action-sports athlete to capture three medals at the same Winter Games.

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The standout American-born freestyle skier who represents China already possesses a gold from big air and a silver from slopestyle.

On a blustery and cool day, Gu turned in a solid run and scored a 93.25 to easily lead the way. Defending Olympic champion Cassie Sharpe of Canada sits in second place after the opening run of three and her teammate Rachael Karker was in third. American teenager Hanna Faulhaber was in fourth.

The temperature hovered around 3 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 16 Celsius) with an 11 mph wind.

The judges who let Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva compete at the Beijing Olympics despite a positive test for a banned substance blamed anti-doping officials for a "failure to function effectively."

The Court of Arbitration for Sport, in a newly published 41-page document explaining their decision, cited an "untenable delay" at the testing laboratory in Sweden.

It meant Valieva's positive test for a heart medication was only revealed during the Olympics despite her urine sample arriving in Stockholm on Dec. 29. The lab's staffing was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Her lawyers suggested she was contaminated because her grandfather uses the banned heart medication she tested positive for.

The judges' full verdict was published early Friday, hours after the 15-year-old Valieva's mistake-filled free skate dropped her from the lead to finish fourth in the Olympic women's individual event.

The International Testing Agency says Ukrainian bobsledder Lidiia Hunko has tested positive for an anabolic steroid at the Beijing Games.

The ITA says she failed a drug test after competing Monday. She placed 20th in women's monobob.

Hunko is the third athlete to test positive for doping at the Beijing Olympics and the second from Ukraine, after cross-country skier Valnetyna Kaminska.

All three ITA cases in Beijing have detected a steroid.

The 28-year-old Hunko placed second in the 2016 World's Strongest Woman contest, according to her official Beijing Olympics athlete biography.

## Russia to stage nuclear drills with Ukraine tensions high

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, YURAS KARMANAU and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia announced massive nuclear drills while Western leaders grasped Friday for ways to avert a new war in Europe amid soaring East-West tensions, after unusually dire U.S. warnings that Moscow could order an invasion of Ukraine any day.

Immediate worries focused on the volatile front lines of eastern Ukraine, where an upsurge of recent shelling tore through the walls of a kindergarten and basic communication was disrupted. Western officials, focused on an estimated 150,000 Russian troops posted around Ukraine's borders, fear the long-simmering conflict could provide the spark for a broader war.

The drumbeat of warnings that a larger conflict could start at any moment continued Friday after U.S. President Joe Biden warned that Washington saw no signs of a promised Russian withdrawal — but instead saw more troops moving toward the border with Ukraine.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the U.S. believes Russia could launch an attack "any time" and also said he still had seen no sign of the promised Russian pullback. He will hold a call Friday with Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Even as Russia claimed to be pulling back troops from extensive military exercises that had sparked fears of invasion, the Kremlin sent a reminder to the world that it has one of the world's biggest nuclear arsenals, by announcing drills of its nuclear forces for the weekend. The muscle-flexing overshadowed Russian offers this week of continued diplomacy to defuse the Ukraine crisis.

NATO allies are also flexing their might, beefing up military forces around eastern Europe, but insist the actions are purely defensive and to show unity in the face of Russian threats.



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The U.S. announced the \$6 billion sale of 250 tanks to Poland, a NATO member that has been occupied or attacked by Russia over past centuries. Announcing the deal, Austin said Russia's military buildup had only reinvigorated NATO instead of cowing it, as Moscow had hoped.

Meanwhile, world leaders meeting at the Munich Security Conference warned that Europe's security balance is under threat. Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said that the situation is "calling into question the basic principles of the European peace order."

"Even steps, millimeters toward peace are better than a big step toward war," she said.

Moscow has denied any intention of attacking its neighbor, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov mocked the Western warning of an imminent invasion as "fakes" that "cause a smile" in remarks broadcast Friday.

Despite the Russian denials, Washington and its allies are concerned the longtime separatist conflict simmering in eastern Ukraine could provide an excuse for an invasion, though they have not provided details.

With tensions already at their highest level since the Cold War, the Russian military announced that President Vladimir Putin will monitor a sweeping exercise of the country's nuclear forces Saturday that will involve multiple practice missile launches — a stark reminder of the country's nuclear might amid the showdown with the West.

While the Kremlin insists it has no plans to invade, it has urged the West to keep Ukraine out of NATO and roll back alliance forces from Eastern Europe — demands roundly rejected by Western allies.

Biden planned to speak by phone Friday with trans-Atlantic leaders about the Russian military buildup and continued efforts at deterrence and diplomacy.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken revealed some conclusions of U.S. intelligence in Thursday's speech at the U.N. Security Council, warning that Russia could create a false pretext for an invasion with a "so-called terrorist bombing" inside Russia, a staged drone strike, "a fake, even a real attack ... using chemical weapons." He charged that invasion would open with cyberattacks, along with missile strikes and bombs across Ukraine, describing the entry of Russian troops and their advance on Kyiv, a city of nearly 3 million, and other key targets.

Despite the stark U.S. warnings, Ukrainian officials sought to project calm, with Oleksii Danilov, head of the National Security and Defense Council, saying late Thursday that there were no signs a massive Russian invasion was imminent.

"We don't undermine the threat in any case, but the possibility of escalation is considered to be relatively low regarding large-scale invasion of Ukraine," Ukraine's Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov told lawmakers Friday.

Nevertheless, U.S. and European officials were on high alert for any Russian attempts at a so-called false flag operation, according to a Western official familiar with intelligence findings. Ukrainian government officials shared intelligence with allies that suggested the Russians might try to shell the areas in the Luhansk region controlled by Moscow-backed separatists on Friday morning as part of an effort to create a false reason to take military action, according to the official who was not authorized to comment publicly.

The area saw a sharp spike in shelling Thursday, with monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe reporting more than 500 explosions before the tensions eased in the evening. Ukrainian authorities and separatists traded accusations of violations of a shaky truce in the nearly 8-year-old conflict in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, called Donbas. The conflict erupted shortly after Russia's 2014 annexation of the Ukrainian Crimean Peninsula and has killed 14,000.

The Ukrainian military command said shells hit a kindergarten in Stanytsia Luhanska, wounding three people, and cut power to half the town. The rebels said nearly 19 houses were damaged by Ukrainian fire.

Early Friday, separatist authorities in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions reported more shelling by Ukrainian forces along the tense line of contact and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the situation is "potentially very dangerous."

Ukrainian officials charged that the rebels intensified the shelling in the hopes of provoking a retaliatory attack by government forces.

The Ukrainian military chief, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, said that it's "not planning any offensive operations or

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shelling of civilians," adding that "our actions are purely defensive."

But amid the fears a wider conflict could still come, a flurry of diplomacy is expected this week.

In addition to the call between the Russian and American defense chiefs, Blinken is expected to meet his Russian counterpart next week.

Meanwhile, Putin met Friday with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko to discuss the ongoing joint drills in Belarus that borders Ukraine to the north. The massive exercise involving Russian forces moved from the Far East fueled Western fears that they could use it to cut a short way to the Ukrainian capital.

## Families of American captives frustrated with Justice Dept.

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When relatives of American oil executives jailed in Venezuela met virtually with a senior Justice Department official this month, it didn't take long for their frustrations to surface.

They pressed the official on the prospects of a prisoner exchange that could get their loved ones home but were told that was ultimately a White House decision and not something the U.S. government was generally inclined to do anyway. And they vented about the extradition to the U.S. of an associate of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, an action that inflamed tensions with Caracas and resulted in the American captives being returned to jail from house arrest that day.

The meeting, not previously reported and described by a person who participated in it, ended without firm commitments. But it underscored the simmering frustrations directed by some hostage and detainee families toward the Justice Department, an agency they see as unwilling to think creatively about ways to bring their relatives home from abroad and stubbornly resistant to the possibility of exchanging prisoners.

"The question remains of how to get the Department of Justice to fully engage in the process of recovering hostages and wrongful detainees," said Everett Rutherford, whose nephew, Matthew Heath, is being held in Venezuela on what the Tennessee man's family says are bogus weapons charges. "And there hasn't yet been an answer given to that yet — except for the fact that we've been told that the president himself can direct them to do so."

The Justice Department isn't typically thought of as a lead agency in hostage matters. The State Department, after all, has diplomatic tools at its disposal and is home to the government's chief hostage negotiator, while the Pentagon has authority to launch military raids to free hostages from captivity. The three agencies' interests aren't always necessarily in sync on hostage issues, which can be overshadowed by broader national security or diplomatic concerns — or, in the case of the Justice Department, what the government thinks is best for holding criminals accountable.

The Justice Department said in a statement that it "recognizes that families are put in an extraordinarily difficult circumstance, with unimaginable pain" when Americans are wrongfully detained and that it works with other federal agencies to bring them home in a manner consistent with the government's "no-concessions" policy in hostage matters.

From the U.S. government's perspective, a prisoner swap risks creating a false equivalency between a wrongfully detained American and a justly convicted felon, and could also encourage additional captures by foreign countries.

Mickey Bergman, who as vice president of the Richardson Center for Global Engagement has worked on hostage cases, said he's heard that argument but thinks "the framing is wrong."

"Because it's not about the guilty people that get released, it's about the innocent Americans that come back home," Bergman said. "And so I reverse the question and say: Is leaving ... innocent Americans to rot in prisons around the world worth the insistence of us having criminals, foreign criminals, serve their full time in the American system?"

The issue is newly relevant as several countries or groups holding Americans, including Russia and the Taliban, have floated the names of prisoners in the U.S. they want released.

The families' frustration is less with current political leadership of the Justice Department than with the nature of the institution itself, an agency that across administrations has prioritized its independence and

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its prerogative to make prosecutorial decisions and sentencing recommendations free from political considerations. The instinct is crucial for democracy, but it can also result in actions that hostage families see as dismissive of their interests.

The October extradition to Miami of Colombian businessman Alex Saab, presented by U.S. officials as a close Maduro associate, agitated relatives of six Citgo executives who've been jailed for years in Venezuela over a never-executed plan to refinance billions in the oil company's bonds. It was a tension point in this month's Justice Department call and in a December meeting between hostage families and national security adviser Jake Sullivan, though the situation may be complicated by the revelation this week that Saab was signed up by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration as a source in 2018.

The reticence to swaps predates the Biden administration, and some of the deals the families seek didn't gain traction under former President Donald Trump, either. Even so, there is a precedent for arrangements that serve a diplomatic purpose.

The Trump administration, seen as more willing to flout convention in hostage affairs, brought home Navy veteran Michael White in 2020 in an agreement that spared an American-Iranian doctor prosecuted by the Justice Department any more time behind bars and that permitted him to return to Iran. Even before then, the Obama administration pardoned or dropped charges against seven Iranians in a prisoner exchange tied to the nuclear deal with Tehran. Three jailed Cubans were sent home in 2014 as Havana released American Alan Gross after five years' imprisonment.

There are roughly 60 Americans known to be held hostage or wrongfully detained, a definition that covers Americans believed innocent or jailed for the purpose of exacting concessions from the U.S.

Families of at least some see fresh opportunities to cut deals.

The Taliban, whose Haqqani network is believed to be holding hostage Navy veteran Mark Frerichs of Illinois, has told the U.S. it seeks the release of imprisoned drug lord Bashir Noorzai. Russia has locked up Marine veteran Trevor Reed, sentenced to nine years on charges he assaulted police officers in Moscow, and Michigan corporate security executive Paul Whelan, imprisoned on espionage charges. Officials there have floated at various times the names of citizens it would like home, including international arms dealer Viktor Bout and drug smuggler Konstantin Yaroshenko, both imprisoned in the U.S.

The U.S. considers Whelan and Reed to be wrongfully detained.

Nine Americans, including Heath and the so-called Citgo 6, are detained in Venezuela at a time when the U.S. is holding two nephews of Venezuela's first lady on drug charges.

Some hostage and detainee families say they're heartened by the access they've had to senior administration officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Sullivan. But the resistance to a trade has remained constant.

Charlene Cakora, Frerichs' sister, met with White House and Justice Department officials last August and says she was told that Noorzai, a convicted Afghan drug lord, was a "bad guy." She said in an interview that if the government won't "trade for my brother, then I want to know what other ideas are out there."

Paula Reed and Joey Reed, Trevor's parents, say U.S. officials have told them that they'd seek the same outcome if they were their shoes. But though the Granbury, Texas, couple has urged Justice Department officials during meetings to seek a deal now, the officials have said only that they're "considering everything," said Paula Reed.

"They didn't say: 'Oh, we agree with you, that's a great deal. That's a good point.' They didn't say anything like that. They just said: 'We hear you. Thank you very much,'" she said. "They didn't give us indication one way or the other."

Elizabeth Whelan, Paul's sister, said she's been grateful for the U.S. government's attention. She said she's not entirely sure what Russia wants for her brother and said demands by it and other countries seem "stupid" and "over the top."

"But," she added, "I feel my brother is worth whatever Russia is asking for."

**In Ukraine's volatile east, a day of shelling, outages, fear**

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By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Shells struck by the hundreds along the tense front lines in eastern Ukraine, drones monitoring a fragile cease-fire lost their way when the GPS signal they rely on was jammed, and then the cellphone network went dark.

In a sliver of land where pro-Russian separatists have battled for years against Ukrainian government forces, a group of international monitors tasked with keeping the peace reported more than 500 explosions in the the 24 hours ending Thursday midday, around four times as many as an average day over the past month.

As the world warily watches Russian troops massing near Ukraine's borders for signs they're preparing to invade, Western officials have warned that the spark could come from the volatile east: Repeatedly in recent weeks, the U.S. has said the simmering conflict there could provide cover or an excuse for Russia to roll across the border.

The number of explosions eased as the day went on, but by then the village of Stanytsia had already suffered more than its share. One shell crashed into a kindergarten, blasting a hole in the wall that sent soccer balls flying off the classroom shelves just as the school day started. Others blasted craters into the schoolyard and shattered windows of nearby homes.

"We heard the sound of broken glass. The children were very scared. Some kids started crying immediately, and the explosions continued for the next 20 minutes," said Olena Yaryna, the school director.

At Valentyna Melnychenko's nearby home, the explosions filled her living room and hall with smoke.

"I switched off the TV, and there were seven more shellings and then it stopped," she said as she surveyed the damage outside, her hair covered in a bright pink scarf that contrasted with the gray debris behind her.

Three people were wounded and half the village lost power. Oleksandr Pavliuk, a Ukrainian army commander, said the explosions were intended to provoke a response and ultimately a counter-response, echoing the warnings from the United States. Russia denies any plans to attack.

"Our task is to control this abnormal situation in order to avoid a pretext for escalation," Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said Friday.

Monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have been in place in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions since 2014 to try and maintain the cease-fire. It's never been easy, but that task was made harder this week as they found their access repeatedly blocked.

"The gradual fraying of the cease-fire ... has regrettably accelerated," Yaşar Halit Çevik, the mission's chief monitor, told the U.N. Security Council on Thursday. He said daily cease-fire violations had doubled since the beginning of the year

In addition to the explosions, the organization recorded nearly 600 cease-fire violations over the course of a day, more than double the average for the past month. And three of the organization's small surveillance drones went astray after the GPS signal was jammed; a fourth couldn't make it off the ground without a signal.

Electronic interference went further overnight, when the cellphone network went down in Luhansk for hours, for the second night in a row, according to an Associated Press journalist working in the area.

And Stanytsia Luhanska was struck yet again as night fell.

## 'No-COVID' policy drags on Hong Kong economy as cases surge

By ALICE FUNG and DAVID RISING Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong's Fung Shing Restaurant was bustling this week as customers came for one last taste of the traditional Cantonese dim sum that has made it famous.

With COVID-19 restrictions cutting too deeply into its bottom line, the restaurant will shut its doors for good on Sunday, another economic victim of the pandemic.

Many fear the worst is yet to come with Hong Kong experiencing its most severe outbreak, and fret the authorities' determination to stick to mainland China's "zero-tolerance" strategy may prevent it from

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recovering as a financial and travel hub.

"Even though maybe zero-COVID can be reached, there is still uncertainty on how long it can be maintained and what the cost is of maintaining it," said Natixis senior economist Gary Ng.

"The biggest risk of Hong Kong in 2022 is that it may be entering the path of basically, if not recession, at least a downward drag in economic growth again while the world begins to normalize," Ng said.

Hong Kong has seen banks close branches and movie theaters have shut down. The streets of popular shopping and dining districts are lined with shops displaying "for rent" signs. Its international airport is nearly devoid of travelers.

A ban on onsite dining after 6 p.m., imposed last month, is depriving restaurants of critical dinner and banquet revenues.

Daily new coronavirus cases exceeded 2,000 for the first time on Monday; on Thursday, 6,116 new cases were reported.

Hospitals are becoming overwhelmed so the city is looking into converting hotels and even unoccupied public housing into quarantine areas. But it shows no sign of backing away from matching mainland China's stringent policies even as the rest of the world learns to live with the coronavirus.

As part of its zero-tolerance strategy, China has locked down entire cities, literally keeping people sequestered in their homes and providing them with food and supplies as they are isolated during extensive testing and contact tracing to quell outbreaks.

But China has many cities. Hong Kong, a former British colony and semi-autonomous region of China, lacks the resources for such a complete lockdown, which would halt virtually all economic activity in the city of about 7.5 million.

And people living in Hong Kong, which was handed over to Communist-ruled China in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" approach, are used to greater freedoms than residents of the mainland. Lockdowns of single buildings or city blocks have raised vehement criticism.

Regional rival Singapore faces a similar wave of coronavirus infections caused by the highly contagious omicron variant. But it has opted for a strategy of "living with COVID." That calls for very high vaccination rates and widespread testing. Unlike Hong Kong, which is requiring people who test positive to quarantine in hospitals or other government facilities, Singapore lets COVID-19 patients with mild or no symptoms isolate at home.

So while Singapore's health care system is not in jeopardy of becoming overwhelmed, Hong Kong hospitals are at 90% capacity and some have had to treat patients outdoors for lack of room inside.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam shows no sign of retreating from the "zero-COVID" stance, saying Thursday that fighting the pandemic is her "paramount task" and the city would "not be distracted by other things."

"We will impose any measures that we should," she said. "The aim is to make sure Hong Kong people's lives and health are protected and to uphold Hong Kong's stability."

On Friday, Lam announced she was postponing the city's election for chief executive for six weeks to May 8 due to "public health risks" it would pose at this stage in the pandemic. It's not yet clear if Lam will run for reelection.

To relieve some pressure on hospitals, officials now say some patients with mild symptoms will be able to leave hospitals after just seven days — half the current requirement — if they test negative and are not living with any high-risk individuals.

At the current rate of spread of infections, new daily cases could rise to 28,000 by March, so it's unclear that will be enough.

On the other hand, relaxing the zero-COVID strategy would hinder travel between the city and the mainland, where authorities require three weeks of quarantine or more. Beijing will not reopen Hong Kong's border with the mainland until the city reaches and maintains zero COVID-19 cases.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping said this week that Hong Kong's "overriding task" is to get control of the situation. Some health experts from the mainland arrived Thursday to help with testing. Beijing also sent antibodies and other resources.

Customers at the Fung Shing Restaurant said they feel powerless.

"I feel so helpless for this restaurant under the pandemic," said customer Mo Wan, a 78-year-old who has been a regular for the past decade. "I have established a deep friendship with the staff members."

Up to 3,000 of Hong Kong's 17,000 restaurants could end up closing if current restrictions continue through March, said Michael Leung, chairman of the Association for Hong Kong Catering Services Management, which represents 800 restaurant owners.

Leung has temporarily shuttered his own restaurant, the Lucky Dragon Palace.

It's a sprawling establishment that would normally seat 1,000 before the pandemic. Leung hopes to hold on, paying the rent and saving on labor and utilities until he can reopen.

"The pandemic is very serious, there's barely anyone on the street," he said. "With fewer people going out, it means no business for restaurants. This fifth wave really impacts us terribly. It's really an ice age for the catering business."

## **From Turkish jail, French woman accuses Greece of 'pushback'**

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — A French woman is accusing Greek authorities of forcing her and other migrants back across the border into Turkey, violating her rights both as a person fleeing persecution and as a European citizen.

In court documents seen by The Associated Press, the 32-year-old woman, who has Turkish as well as French citizenship, claims she and her husband were trying to flee Turkey to escape prison sentences that were politically motivated.

They crossed the Evros River by boat into Greece on the way to France, where the woman was born and raised. But she says Greek officials mistreated her and turned her back; she is now in prison in Turkey. From her cell, the woman, who asked to remain anonymous for her safety, plans to file a lawsuit against Greece on Friday at the European Court of Human Rights.

While so-called "pushbacks" of migrants have become increasingly common despite violating European and international law, experts say the French woman's story appears to be the first such case brought to court involving a European citizen.

"We have moved from allegations to it being a public secret that pushbacks are engaged in by the Greek authorities on a regular basis," said Hanne Beirens, director of Migration Policy Institute Europe. "This would be quite a unique case...Because it would show how indiscriminately the Greek authorities are acting and how it affects people from all backgrounds."

For years, journalists, lawyers and human rights organizations have documented pushbacks by Greece of migrants and refugees across sea or land borders, denying them the right to asylum procedures. Under the principle of non-refoulement in European and international human rights law, people cannot be returned to a country where they would face torture, punishment or harm.

Greek authorities did not respond to multiple requests for comment sent by the AP to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, the Ministry of Citizen Protection and the Greek embassy in Paris. However, Greece released a statement Thursday evening after a joint-media investigation alleged a separate pushback involving two asylum seekers later found dead on the Aegean coast.

"Greece protects the external borders of the European Union, in full compliance with international law and in full respect of the charter of fundamental rights," said Notis Mitarachi, Greece's Minister of Migration and Asylum.

The French woman's story is laid out in court statements from her, her husband and her sister, including illustrations she did from prison. The AP also drew on interviews with her sister in Paris and one of her lawyers; documents including her French passport, French national ID and French marriage papers; emails, call logs, and screen shots of texts and GPS data the woman shared in real time with a lawyer.

Born to Turkish parents, the woman left France in 2013 to pursue undergraduate studies in Turkey. In April 2018, she and her now-husband were among dozens of students rounded up and accused of belonging to the "Fethullahist Terror Organization" or FETO. The couple deny all accusations.

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At the time, Turkey had launched a massive crackdown against followers of U.S.-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen, after a failed military coup in 2016. The government designated the network as a terrorist organization and sentenced close to 5,000 people to prison, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency.

The French woman was detained for 11 days but released on parole. A few months later, she was sentenced to more than six years in prison, which she appealed. In June last year, her prison sentence and her husband's were confirmed by the Supreme Court. They ultimately decided to flee, selling the family jewelry to pay smugglers to get to Greece.

The woman's family trusted that once she stepped foot in Greece, a European Union country and part of the Schengen area, Europe's visa-free travel zone, she would be safe. As the couple crossed Greece's eastern border on the morning of Oct. 19, 2021, her family anxiously awaited news from their home 90 km outside Paris. They followed the woman's movements on a real-time location tracking app.

At 9:38 a.m., the woman sent a text message on WhatsApp: "We have passed."

Her family proceeded to contact both French and Greek authorities, saying the couple needed help.

"They are victims of persecution by the current Turkish government," read their email, which they followed up with phone calls. "We are VERY VERY worried for them!"

Shortly after, Greek officials stopped the couple, the lawsuit alleges. After they presented her French ID, a copy of her French passport and the French family booklet that proved their marriage, the officers asked them to kneel. They then took the couple's telephones, power bank, clothes and food and cut their shoelaces, according to the statement.

The woman says they were taken in the back of a truck to a "closed box" inside a gated area and kept there for hours with other migrants, some from Afghanistan who were barefoot. She says officers slapped one of them.

Meanwhile, in France, her family had lost contact with her and was getting increasingly worried. Her sisters scrambled to call and email both Greek and French authorities.

After they shared their concern that their sister would be returned to Turkey, an official at the Greek embassy in Paris sent a text message in French: "Since she has a French passport, there is no problem(...) Calm down. There is no danger in Greece."

The man confirmed to the AP that he had been in contact with the woman's family but said he was not authorized to speak to the press. Requests for comment to the Greek embassy in Paris were not answered. The woman's family say they also exchanged several phone calls with the French consulate in Thessaloniki, and sent an email with the woman's last known location and a copy of her passport.

After being detained for several hours, the migrants were rounded up onto a truck and taken to the Evros river, the woman says. They were made to board an inflatable boat without life vests.

"We continued to beg them not to send us back, explaining to them I was French and that we were persecuted in Turkey," she says in her statement.

She spoke to officials in French and English, to no avail. They were caught by Turkish soldiers on the other side and taken to a police station, she says. The next day, they were in prison.

"We are totally disappointed with Greek authorities," her sister told the AP in Paris, asking to remain anonymous to protect her safety. "We didn't think they would return a persecuted person back to the persecutor."

"We are equally disappointed with French authorities because we were abandoned," she said.

Since then, she said, her family has written countless letters to French and European Union lawmakers and officials, and even to French President Emmanuel Macron, asking for help. The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs told the AP in a written statement that officials in Paris, Greece and Turkey "had maintained a close relationship with (the woman's) family from the moment they were alerted to her situation."

They said they are also seeking a consular visit to the woman in prison in Turkey. There, she told her sister, she has been stripped naked for searches three times. In the first prison she was taken to, she said, she shared a cell with mice.

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Catherine Briddick, a lecturer in International Human Rights and Refugee Law at Oxford University, said the woman's case "shows the absurdity of Fortress Europe."

"(It) should give pause to European citizens everywhere to think about what these policies are doing to us, as well as to the people we're trying to keep out," she said.

Omer Shatz, a lawyer representing the French woman along with Violeta Moreno-Lax and Francesco Gatta, argues their client was a victim of increasing racial discrimination at the borders of Europe.

"She was really begging to them, showing them her (French) IDs and travel documents but was ignored," said Shatz, legal director of Front-Lex, which challenges EU migration policies. "Why? Because the way she looks. Probably Muslim, probably looking like a refugee, probably not white."

Migration has been brought to the center stage of the French presidential campaign, with both Macron and his opponents on the right and far-right taking ever stronger stances against irregular crossings. European countries have spent billions on surveillance technology at their borders, despite growing accusations of human rights violations.

A European Commission spokesperson said it doesn't comment on ongoing legal proceedings but is "concerned about any reports of pushbacks and mistreatment....Efficient border management must be firmly rooted in the respect of human dignity and the principle of non-refoulement." The French woman's family says they received a similar response to a letter they sent the commission.

"The EU, unfortunately, has declared that Greece was the shield of Europe...it frees the Greek authorities from many constraints," said Francois Crepeau, a professor at McGill University in Canada and a former UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. While in public many European officials will condemn pushbacks as illegal, he said, "in fact, they're quite happy that Greece is doing the dirty job for everyone else."

## Raising age limit for skating would end the age of the quad

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — One by one the Russian teen figure skaters took the ice for the free skate at the Beijing Games, and one by one they attempted the four-revolution jumps that are common in the men's competition.

Beijing may be the last Olympics any woman attempts a quad.

The quadruple jumps that sent Russian world champ Anna Shcherbakova to the gold medal and teammate Alexandra Trusova to the silver — much to her chagrin — along with the failed attempts that dumped 15-year-old Kamila Valieva out of the medals altogether could be a thing of the past by the 2026 Games in Italy.

That's because more and more people are pushing for the age limit figure skating to be raised above 16 following Valieva's monumental collapse Thursday night. The maturing bodies of women make it much more difficult to land a jump that they could do in their teens. No woman older than 17 has ever landed a quad in competition.

Take the case of Alysa Liu. The 16-year-old American, who finished seventh at the Beijing Games, was able to land the four-revolution jumps until two years ago, but stopped attempting them following a growth spurt.

Even the diplomatic president of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, said Friday he was "very disturbed when I watched the competition on TV. I saw the pressure on (Valieva), it was beyond my imagination for a girl of 15.

"To see her struggling, trying to compose herself, you can see the immense mental stress," Bach continued. "Perhaps she would have preferred to leave this story behind her."

Perhaps she shouldn't have been there in the first place.

Shcherbakova and Trusova are both 17, and some have suggested that be the requirement for figure skating at the Olympics. Others are pushing for 18, the age at which men and women are legally adults in the U.S. and much of the world, and when their bodies are more fully developed and capable of handling the pounding of quadruple jumps.



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As it stands, that's the age most of Russia's quad queens are hitting retirement.

Asked whether Trusova would continue to compete after the Beijing Games, she merely replied: "We'll see."

Not that it probably matters for her coach, Eteri Tutberidze, who's come under fire during these Olympics first for Valieva's failed drug test from December and then for her callous treatment of her teenage prodigy Thursday night.

All three Russian women who competed in Beijing are about to hit "Tutberidze expiration date," the age at which the controversial coach historically casts aside older students with an eye toward the future. She will now turn her attention to 14-year-olds Sofia Akateva and Adeliia Petrosian, both of whom have already landed quads in competition.

Or more likely, an 11- or 12-year-old in Tutberidze's camp that nobody has heard about yet, but who will turn the current age limit of 15 just in time to compete at the next Winter Games in Italy.

Unless the age limit gets changed, of course.

There are no official age limits to compete at the Olympics, and 13-year-old skateboarders even competed at the Tokyo Games last summer. But many other sports at the Winter Games have higher age limits: Alpine skiers must be 17 or older to compete, and biathlon competitors must turn 22 in the same year as the competition.

Perhaps the closest comparison to figure skating, though, is gymnastics, due to the pounding on developing bodies from repeated jumps in practice. The International Gymnastics Federation ruled in 2000 that female gymnasts must turn 16 or older in the year of the Olympics to compete, a limit now in place for world championships, too.

By bumping up the age limit in figure skating, it would throw a wrench into the Russian factory of teen-age Olympians. It also may extend the careers of figure skaters whose developing bodies are incapable of landing a quad.

Kaori Sakamoto earned the bronze medal at the Beijing Games without a quad in her arsenal. Instead, the 21-year-old from Kobe, Japan, relied on experience, artistry and precision — not just daring-do — to complete a clean free skate and pass Valieva.

"In terms of my expressions and my skating skills, perhaps they are finally being recognized. But that alone has its limits," Sakamoto said. "In terms of the technical merit, I do need to win as many points as I can. Unless I do that, I won't be able to compete against the ROC skaters. That's what I felt on the Olympic stage this time around."

Maybe it won't be the case next time around.

Raising the age limit, particularly to 18, would virtually eliminate the quad from senior-level competition. And without them in competition, coaches such as Tutberidze would no longer have incentive to push the young and developing bodies of their students to the point of physical breakdowns to learn them.

It also would open the door for Sakamoto and others to continue performing well into their 20s, allowing fans — those that will have survived the scandal-marred Beijing Games — a chance see them compete at more than one Olympics.

"In four years time I am going to be 25. Even when I am 25, I feel I will still be able to jump," Sakamoto said. "Even before I qualified for these Olympic Games, I told myself that I am going to work hard so I can go to the next Olympic Games as well. So when it comes to the Milano-Cortina Games in four years' time, yes, that's in my sights."

Maybe another medal, and a golden one at that, could be within her sights by then, too.

## **EXPLAINER: Why would world leaders balk at giving Putin DNA?**

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

If knowledge is power, knowing the intimate secrets of one's DNA could be a powerful weapon. That might explain why the world leaders who hastened to Moscow in recent days for diplomatic talks seemed to balk at Russian-administered coronavirus tests.

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But this may be a case where imagination is getting a bit ahead of what science is actually capable of. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz refused to let Russia conduct a PCR test — while French officials said President Emmanuel Macron balked at some of the requirements to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, leading to speculation he didn't want the Russian swab either.

Neither leader is known for opposition to COVID-19 countermeasures, so speculation arose that they were trying to keep genetic material out of Russia's hands.

In the high-stakes world of national security and international espionage, global powers are always looking for an edge, and increasingly those new fronts are less tangible than the battlefield.

So gene science may one day be a useful addition to the arsenal, intelligence experts say. But scientists say that day might still be a long way away.

Here's a look at what may be — but probably isn't — afoot:

**HAVE THE LEADERS ACTUALLY ACCUSED RUSSIA OF TRYING TO USE THEIR DNA FOR NEFARIOUS MEANS?**

Well, no. But that hasn't stopped the rampant speculation.

French officials bristled at questions and dismissed any idea that the Russians were trying to secretly get Macron's DNA.

A French official said Russia's conditions for Macron to get close to Putin were "not acceptable" and "not compatible" with the French president's agenda. Hence: the absurdly long marble table that Macron and Scholz shared with the Russian president and which spawned many memes.

German government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit said he was "reluctant" to comment after the Macron stir. But he told reporters in Berlin that Scholz followed the same procedure Germany applies to foreign dignitaries: They can submit their own PCR tests and, if there's any doubt, a doctor can come on board the plane to observe the testing.

"The Russian side saw it differently and said: if there's a test it needs to be a Russian one. And the chancellor decided he wouldn't be available for that," said Hebestreit, adding: "But I wouldn't interpret too much into that."

**WHY WOULD FRANCE AND GERMANY HAVE REASON TO MISTRUST RUSSIA?**

Both countries are members of NATO, which also includes the United States and Britain. NATO was formed during the Cold War by Western allies as a bulwark against the Soviet Union.

Russia has expressed concern that NATO is using Ukraine as a pawn to undermine Russia and has cited that as the reason for its military buildup along Ukraine's borders.

**WHAT CAN YOU ACTUALLY LEARN FROM DNA?**

DNA is inside every cell in the body and could be extracted from multiple methods — like a nasal swab — even though a coronavirus test swab is after different genetic material: RNA from the virus.

"Those samples have tons of human DNA," said Kenny Beckman, who directs the University of Minnesota Genomics Center. "You could definitely take that sample, extract the DNA and do whatever kind of full workup you'd want to do on that person."

Your DNA has the instructions that you need to survive and grow. Every person's DNA is unique. It can be used to find where your ancestors might have come from, whether you have any unknown relatives floating in the ether, and also whether you have certain genetic diseases or genetic abnormalities associated with diseases or medical conditions.

In forensic science, DNA can be used to physically connect someone to a piece of evidence or eliminate someone as a suspect in a crime.

**HOW COULD DNA BE USED AGAINST WORLD LEADERS?**

"You can use DNA to identify disease risk, so (the world leaders) might be at risk for a disease," said Howard McLeod, a genetics expert and director of precision medicine at the Florida-based Geriatric Oncology Consortium. "You could look and see if there could be some ancestry elements that could be exploited."

But in general, he said, the idea of learning more about someone like a world leader through DNA probably "seems a lot more scary than it is in reality."

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Beckman said it seemed “farfetched” to think that the information gathered could be politically damaging. “What are you going to do, say that Macron has a slightly higher risk of blood pressure?” Beckman asked. “But then I don’t spend a lot of time trying to dream up ways to weaponize someone’s genetic information.”

George Annas, a bioethicist who has written extensively about the importance of genetic privacy, wants to make one thing clear: “DNA is not magic. It’ll give you some information, but it’s not going to tell you how you can assassinate somebody.”

But even without the capability to build an individually targeted bioweapon, the power of suggestion can be enough to compromise world leaders, and Russia has been known to employ kompromat — blackmailing someone by threatening to release embarrassing information about them.

**WHY CAN’T PUTIN AND HIS GUESTS JUST WEAR MASKS?**

Putin has largely eschewed masks throughout the pandemic — but is otherwise hypervigilant about COVID-19 measures. The 69-year-old appeared to work mostly remotely and was rarely seen in public before he was fully vaccinated with Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine (which still has not been approved by the European Union).

**DOES THE UNITED STATES INSIST ON TESTING WORLD LEADERS?**

When dignitaries visit U.S. President Joe Biden, they are required to be tested, according to an official. The White House makes itself available as a testing option, but most leaders arrange for their own, which the White House is fine with.

When Biden himself is tested at home and abroad, samples are taken and processed exclusively by the White House Medical Unit.

The U.S. government has allegedly dabbled in collecting the DNA of foreign leaders. Obama-era diplomatic cables revealed by Wikileaks instructed U.S. diplomats in select African countries to collect “fingerprints, facial images, DNA, and iris scans” from “key and emerging” officials, including religious and business leaders.

**I AM A NORMAL PERSON WHO GETS COVID TESTS OFTEN. DO I HAVE ANYTHING TO BE WORRIED ABOUT?**

This shouldn’t deter you from testing.

In the U.S., federal law bars medical providers and laboratories from using patient samples for any purpose other than the original test administered. In certain cases, people can consent to make their results available for research, as with health and ancestry services like 23andMe. Use caution with those services, though; even if tests comply with U.S. law, data can still end up in the hands of another country.

Annas says the right to privacy is paramount, no matter who you are: “Even presidents have the right to medical privacy, and they should not have their information disclosed to the public without their consent.”

**SO DO WORLD LEADERS REALLY HAVE ANYTHING TO BE WORRIED ABOUT?**

The consensus is the most that a bad actor could do with DNA is generate scandal — not a presidential clone.

But you never know where your DNA might end up: a few years ago, an anonymous group calling themselves the Earnest Project claimed to have grabbed DNA from a bunch of world leaders who attended the Davos summit. The group said they would put the samples up for auction as a statement about the perils of surveillance capitalism, but the auction was delayed because of legal concerns and seemingly never rescheduled. The group did not respond to a request for comment made through its website.

## **EXPLAINER: Why is Libya sliding back to political division?**

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — A year ago, Libya looked to be on a fragile path toward democracy, after more than a decade of civil war. Now, it appears to be sliding back toward strife and division.

After tentative steps towards unity, the country is once again being pulled apart, with two rival prime ministers claiming power.

The first signs of serious trouble emerged late last year, when presidential elections scheduled for Dec.

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24 were postponed indefinitely. Underlying the delay was disagreement over eligible candidates and the ground rules for holding the vote.

The election had been intended to replace a transitional government formed a year ago and headed by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah. On Feb. 10, the parliament appointed Fathi Bashagha, a former interior minister, to form a new government. It said elections should be held within 14 months.

Dbeibah refused to step aside, vowing to hold on to power until elections take place.

For many Libyans and observers, it looks like a return to parallel governments is imminent, with the possibility of more fighting. Libya has been wrecked by conflict since the NATO-backed Arab Spring uprising toppled autocratic ruler Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. The country was for years split between rival administrations in the east and west, each supported by militias and foreign governments.

Attempts by the international community to help unify the country were thwarted as powerful Libyan parties and their foreign backers refuse to compromise. Elections were delayed after a failure to reach a consensus on election laws or even on who should be eligible to run. A series of U.N. envoys to the country left office frustrated at Libyan parties' unwillingness to cede power and funds accumulated during the war.

Bashagha and Dbeibah could both portray the situation as a struggle "between legitimate and illegitimate," said Wolfram Lacher, a Libya expert with the Berlin-based SWP research institute.

"In reality, it is a struggle between two sides that both seek to exercise power indefinitely and without accountability," he said.

Here's a look at the main players in the country:

## TWO PRIME MINISTERS

Both Bashagha and Dbeibah hail from Misrata, a city in western Libya. Its well-armed militias were crucial in the U.S.-backed fight against the Islamic State group in 2016, and most recently in fending off a 2019 offensive on the capital of Tripoli by east-based forces of commander Khalifa Hifter.

Bashagha, 59, is a former air force pilot and businessman. He served as interior minister in the U.N.-supported administration in Tripoli from 2018 until March 2021, when U.N.-led talks led to the formation of the transitional government.

He has positioned himself as one of the most powerful figures in western Libya, though he has clashed with some local militias. He has cultivated ties with Turkey, France, and the U.S., but also with Egypt and Russia — his nominal rivals during the offensive on Tripoli.

Bashagha sought to lead the transitional government, but was beaten by Dbeibah in a U.N.-brokered process marred by allegations of corruption. He had also planned to run for president, hoping to compete against Hifter, Dbeibah and Gadhafi's son, Seif al-Islam, before the December race was called off.

Dbeibah, who has a university degree in engineering from Canada, is a relative political novice. He is believed to rely on the wealth of a relative, Ali Dbeibah, one of the richest people in Libya, who was a politician in Gadhafi's time.

After the 2011 uprising, the Dbeibahs allied themselves with a powerful militia known as the Misrata brigades.

As head of the transitional government, Dbeibah, 59, has made some political enemies. He had pledged not to run for president, but then went back on his promise and announced his candidacy, alienating some of his most powerful supporters. Dbeibah was often at odds with powerful parliament speaker Aguila Saleh and Hifter.

## DIVISIVE STRONGMAN IN THE EAST

Hifter was a senior military officer under Gadhafi but defected in the 1980s during Libya's war with Chad. He later spent more than two decades in Washington, during which he is widely believed to have worked with the CIA.

He returned and joined the 2011 anti-Gadhafi uprising. In 2014, his self-styled Libyan Arab Armed Forces battled extremists and other rival factions across eastern and southern Libya. They now control Libya's east and much of the south, including vital oil fields and terminals.

In April 2019, he tried to capture Tripoli. His 14-month military campaign failed, leading to U.N.-mediated cease-fire and political talks that formed Dbeibah's interim government.

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Hifter, a dual U.S. and Libyan citizen, has the support of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, as well as France and Russia. His rivals are aided mainly by Turkey and Qatar.

He announced his bid for the presidency, building his campaign on his ability to bring security and stability to areas he controls. Hifter's critics accuse him of seeking to establish autocratic rule.

Hifter's forces welcomed the appointment of Bashagha, forming an alliance against Dbeibah.

But such a partnership could prove costly for the designated prime minister. It will likely complicate his efforts to preside over genuine law enforcement and security sector reform, said Jalel Harchaoui, a Libya researcher.

Bashagha also faces other challenges, said Harchaoui. He needs to find a way to work with Sadiq al-Kabir, the governor of the Central Bank of Libya, which recently announced steps towards unifying its branches in the east and west. The bank is the repository for billions of dollars annually in revenue from Libya's large oil deposits, as well as foreign reserves.

Another major concern for Bashagha is the deep mistrust of Hifter shared by many in the west.

"The crisis may well worsen if those questions are not handled tactfully," said the analyst.

## GADHAFI'S ONE-TIME HEIR APPARENT

When Seif al-Islam Gadhafi emerged after years in hiding in mid-November to announce his bid for the presidency, he sent shock-waves across Libya.

The one-time heir apparent was released from a militia-run prison in 2017, but is still wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity during the 2011 uprising. He has slowly engineered a political return, capitalizing on the dysfunction created by war. He depends largely on links to tribes across the country, and reconciled with militias that were once his fiercest foes. His candidacy proved threatening enough to unite otherwise rival factions against him.

Harchaoui said that recent developments have sidelined Seif al-Islam despite his apparent popularity, because he does not command the loyalty of enough armed men.

"The opinion of the populace is largely ignored, and the electoral process is in very poor shape," he said. "In this kind of environment, Seif is barely relevant."

## In GOP embrace of truckers, some see racist double standard

By COREY WILLIAMS and SARA BURNETT Associated Press

Former President Donald Trump, who repeatedly called Black Lives Matter protesters "thugs" and "anarchists," said there's "a lot of respect" for the overwhelmingly white truckers who blocked streets in the Canadian capital and shut down border crossings with the U.S. to oppose COVID-19 restrictions.

To Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, the truckers who parked bumper to bumper are "heroes" fighting for a righteous cause. Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity sent "solidarity, love and support" to the drivers, who also defied police orders to clear Ottawa's streets and ignored a court order forbidding them from blaring their horns. GOP Sen. Rand Paul encouraged them to head south and "clog" streets in the U.S.

The embrace of the truckers by some of the nation's most prominent conservative voices has drawn new accusations of hypocrisy and allegations that GOP leaders apply a racist double standard to large protests, including the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol involving a mostly white crowd of Trump supporters.

Earlier this month, the Republican National Committee called the Jan. 6 attack "legitimate political discourse." But only months before the insurrection, Trump, Cruz and other conservatives excoriated protests against police brutality and racial injustice that were largely peaceful, with some instances of looting and unrest.

"This shows again that there is just an unequal right to express dissent in the United States," said Karen Pita Loor, a professor at Boston University's School of Law. She called conservatives' support "two-faced," saying that conservatives appear to support a white, conservative rights movement, but "when you have Black Lives Matter protesters on the street that are 'thugs,' they scare you."

Conservatives counter that there's a double standard on the other side — that liberals support the idea of protesting, until they disagree with the cause.

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The Canadian protests known as the Freedom Convoy were declared a national emergency and an illegal occupation of the capital. For weeks, the drivers blocked streets to oppose vaccine mandates for truckers in Canada and other pandemic restrictions. They also blocked U.S. border crossings, inflicting economic damage on both countries.

On Thursday, hundreds of truckers in Ottawa stood their ground as police poured in, threatening to break up the demonstration. Workers put up extra fences around government buildings, and officers began sealing off much of the downtown area to outsiders to prevent them from coming to the aid of the protesters.

Conservatives say there is a clear distinction between the Canadian protests and instances of violence during protests over the killing of George Floyd by a white officer in Minneapolis, including buildings set on fire in that city and Portland, Oregon.

"All Americans have the right to peacefully protest. But there's a stark contrast between civil disobedience — which has been a time-honored tradition in our country — and burning down buildings, looting businesses, and violently attacking actual peaceful protesters and innocent bystanders," Paul said. The Republican from Kentucky was surrounded and confronted in 2020 by people protesting the death of Breonna Taylor, a Black woman fatally shot by police.

A Cruz spokesperson echoed those comments, saying that the senator "has been very clear" about the right to nonviolent protest. "What people don't have the right to do is assault another person, loot and firebomb buildings — those actions are not exercising a constitutional right no matter the circumstance."

Hannity said this week that the difference between the Black Lives Matter protests and the truckers is that the demonstrations in Canada have been peaceful.

At the Alberta border town of Coutts, across from Montana, where a blockade disrupted trade for more than two weeks, police arrested 13 people and seized guns and ammunition earlier this week. Four men also face a charge of conspiracy alleging that they plotted to kill Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers.

The support from conservatives in the U.S. goes beyond the words of politicians. Right-wing activists who oppose pandemic mandates and Canada's liberal prime minister, Justin Trudeau, have also donated money to the demonstrations, hoping that the protests will help motivate American voters ahead of this year's midterm elections.

Mario Morrow, a Black political consultant who has served both GOP and Democratic governors in Michigan, called Republicans' support for the Canadian protests "hypocrisy at its highest level."

The protests included a blockade of the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit and Windsor, Canada, and carries 25% of all trade between the two countries. The demonstrations also forced the shutdown of a Canadian Ford plant last week. Shortages due to the blockade forced General Motors to cancel a shift last week at its midsize-SUV factory near Lansing, Michigan.

Police broke the blockade at the bridge — the border's busiest and most important crossing — last weekend, arresting dozens of demonstrators.

"There is no way that the supporters, especially Republicans, can justify the funding support, the moral support and the political statements they are making by supporting these tactics," Morrow said. He also said the protesters would not get the same support if they were "anything other than conservative white individuals."

"They would have been locked up — day one," he said.

Cruz last week praised the truckers for standing up against liberals who imposed mandates they "have no right to impose." He said the protesters spoke not just for Canadians, but also for Americans.

"I think it is powerful to watch," he said.

## Take the 5th? The choice could soon be Trump's in NY probe

By JIM MUSTIAN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — To plead the Fifth, or not to plead the Fifth?

That is the question Donald Trump may face after a New York judge ordered the former president to testify in a long-running state civil investigation into his business practices.

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Trump's lawyers are almost certain to appeal Judge Arthur Engoron's ruling Thursday that Trump and his two eldest children, Ivanka and Donald Trump Jr., have 21 days to comply with a subpoena seeking their testimony in a probe by New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Barring a successful legal challenge, Trump would face a decision between answering questions under oath or remaining silent and invoking his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination — a tactic he has equated with evidence of guilt.

"The mob takes the Fifth," Trump told a campaign crowd in Iowa when running for president.

"If you are innocent, do not remain silent," Trump tweeted in 2014, offering free advice as Bill Cosby faced a flurry of sexual assault accusations. "You look guilty as hell!"

Aside from any legal considerations, refusing to answer James' questions carries political risks.

"For a former president and potential candidate for the office to take the Fifth would really be remarkable," said Stephen Gillers, a law professor at New York University. "The problem with appearing — at least as his lawyers will see it — is that Trump can't be controlled and he's likely to say things that will cause more trouble for him and his family."

Trump's own lawyers acknowledged during a court hearing Thursday that the former president faces risks by sitting down with attorneys heading up an investigation he long has derided as a "witch hunt."

James, a Democrat, says her investigation has uncovered evidence Trump's company used "fraudulent or misleading" valuations of his assets to get loans and tax benefits.

Manhattan's district attorney is also investigating, and if Trump were to testify in the civil probe, anything he says could be used against him in a criminal proceeding. Last year, the district attorney's office charged Trump's company and longtime finance chief in what prosecutors called a "sweeping and audacious" tax fraud scheme.

But even remaining silent could hurt a potential criminal defense, Trump's attorneys said.

"If he goes in and follows my advice, which will be you cannot answer these questions without ... immunity because that's what the law provides, and take the Fifth Amendment, that'll be on every front page in the newspaper in the world. And how can I possibly pick a jury in that case?" attorney Ronald Fischetti said during Thursday's hearing.

Trump would not be afforded "a blanket assertion" of his Fifth Amendment right but be required to invoke it "individually for each question that's being asked," said David S. Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor. "It's a very long and drawn-out process," he said.

That was the case in 1990, when Trump refused to answer 97 questions in a divorce deposition.

But he seemed to relish such questioning on many other occasions throughout his career as a real estate developer, sitting for hours of depositions as part of lawsuits over contracts, defamation and other legal disputes. He frequently used the platform to expound on his wealth or popularity, defend his penchant for exaggeration and deflect blame onto others, particularly when it came to facts and figures that later fell under scrutiny.

He also has shown flashes of irritability or condescension, including once deriding an attorney for what he said were "very stupid questions."

One subject Trump became especially accustomed to was questions about assessments of his wealth and the value of his properties — areas of particular interest in the New York civil inquiry.

Under questioning, he has defended his businessman's instinct of giving the public the rosiest, most optimistic outlook possible.

"You always want to put the best possible spin on a property that you can," Trump said in a 2007 deposition involving a lawsuit in which he'd accused a journalist of understating his wealth. "No different than any other real estate developer, no different than any other businessman, no different than any politician."

In trying to get the subpoenas from James voided, Trump's lawyers argued she was engaging in an unfair trick.

Her plan, they claimed, was to use the civil investigation as a ruse to gather evidence that would then be used in the ongoing criminal grand jury investigation. And if Trump cites his Fifth Amendment right not to testify, the attorney general might use that refusal to hurt Trump in a civil lawsuit.

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The Trumps' lawyers said any testimony should be delayed until after the criminal investigation is complete, thus allowing the president to avoid having to invoke his Fifth Amendment right.

The judge, Engoron, refused to issue a delay.

The target of an investigation, he said, "cannot use the Fifth Amendment as both a sword and a shield; a shield against questions and a sword against the investigation itself," he wrote.

When Trump and his children are deposed, Engoron said, they "will have the right to refuse to answer any questions that they claim might incriminate them, and that refusal may not be commented on or used against them in a criminal prosecution. However, there is no unfairness in allowing the jurors in a civil case to know these refusals and to draw their own conclusions."

## Satellite photos give a bird's-eye view of Ukraine crisis

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Widely available commercial satellite imagery of Russian troop positions bracketing Ukraine provides a bird's-eye view of an international crisis as it unfolds. But the pictures, while dramatic, have limitations.

High-resolution photos from commercial satellite companies like Maxar in recent days showed Russian troop assembly areas, airfields, artillery positions and other activities on the Russian side of the Ukrainian border and in southern Belarus as well as on the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

The images confirmed what U.S. and other Western officials have been saying: Russian forces are arrayed within striking distances of Ukraine. But they could not provide conclusive information about net additions or subtractions of Russian forces or reveal when or whether an invasion of Ukraine would happen. In such a fluid crisis, even day-old satellite photos might miss significant changes on the ground.

Western officials, citing their own sources of information, have disputed Moscow's claim that it pulled back some forces, and they asserted that the Russians added as many as 7,000 more troops in recent days. Commercial satellite images alone cannot provide that level of detail in real time or allow broader conclusions about the Russian buildup, such as the total number of its deployed troops.

"What you get out of an outfit like Maxar is very good information but not as precise or as timely as that provided to U.S. national leadership" through the government's own classified collection systems, said James Stavridis, a retired Navy admiral who served as the top NATO commander in Europe from 2009 to 2013. "Therefore I would strongly bias my views toward what is being reported by the U.S. government."

Before commercial satellite imagery became widely available and distributed online, Russia, the United States and other powers could largely hide their most sensitive military movements and deployments from near real-time public scrutiny. Although the public now can obtain a better view, this imagery is not nearly as precise, comprehensive or immediate as what the U.S. military can collect.

The U.S. military and intelligence agencies can piece together a better picture of what's happening by combining satellite imagery with real-time video as well as electronic information scooped up by aircraft such as the Air Force's RC-135 Rivet Joint, not to mention information gathered from human sources. The U.S. government also contracts with commercial satellite firms for imagery as a supplement and to ease the strain on imagery collection systems needed for other top-priority information.

Commercial satellite images, as a snapshot in time, do not provide indisputable evidence of exactly what the Russian military is doing or why.

"You can see something on a base, that looks like a base that has a lot of activity," and reach some broad conclusions. "But in terms of what's being done there, and what the units are — that takes a lot more intel," said Hans Kristensen, who has extensively analyzed commercial satellite imagery to study nuclear weapons developments in China and elsewhere in his position as director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists.

## California adopts nation's 1st 'endemic' virus policy



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By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California became the first state to formally shift to an “endemic” approach to the coronavirus with Gov. Gavin Newsom’s announcement Thursday of a plan that emphasizes prevention and quick reaction to outbreaks over mandated masking and business shutdowns.

The milestone, nearly two years in the making, envisions a return to a more normal existence with the help of a variety of initiatives and billions in new spending to more quickly spot surges or variants, add health care workers, stockpile tests and push back against false claims and other misinformation.

“We are moving past the crisis phase into a phase where we will work to live with this virus,” he said during a news conference from a state warehouse brimming with pandemic supplies in Fontana, east of Los Angeles.

The first-term Democrat, who last year survived a recall election driven by critics of his governance during the pandemic, promised the state’s nearly 40 million residents that as the omicron surge fades, “we’re going to keep them safe and we’re going to stay on top of this.”

A disease reaches the endemic stage when the virus still exists in a community but becomes manageable as immunity builds. But there will be no definitive turn of the switch, the Democratic governor said, unlike the case with Wednesday’s lifting of the state’s indoor masking requirements or an announcement coming Feb. 28 of when precisely schoolchildren can stop wearing face coverings.

And there will be no immediate lifting of the dozens of remaining executive emergency orders that have helped run the state since Newsom imposed the nation’s first statewide stay-home order in March 2020.

“This pandemic won’t have a defined end. There’s no finish line,” Newsom said.

The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020, and with omicron fading in many parts of the world some countries have begun planning for the endemic stage. But no state has taken the step Newsom did and offered a detailed forward-looking plan.

Republicans have been frequent critics of Newsom’s handling of the coronavirus and were quick to disparage his latest effort. State GOP Chairwoman Jessica Millan Patterson called it “an extra-large helping of word salad” and renewed the call to “follow the lead of other blue states and end his state of emergency or lift his school mask mandate.”

Newsom’s plan sets specific goals, such as stockpiling 75 million masks, establishing the infrastructure to provide up to 200,000 vaccinations and 500,000 tests a day in the event of an outbreak, and adding 3,000 medical workers within three weeks in surge areas.

Newsom’s administration came up with a shorthand acronym to capsulize key elements of its new approach: SMARTER. The letters stand for Shots, Masks, Awareness, Readiness, Testing, Education and Rx, a reference to improving treatments for COVID-19.

Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, an epidemiologist at the University of Southern California, said while some may argue these should have come sooner, he believes “the timing is right on.”

“Surveillance, testing, vaccination and treatment make the context very different and make it appropriate to shift our response from a pandemic response of trying to do everything possible, to a more rational response to try to implement things that we have strong evidence that work,” Klausner said.

The plan includes increased monitoring of virus remnants in wastewater to watch for the first signs of a surge. Masks won’t be required but will be encouraged in many settings.

If a higher level of the virus is detected, health officials will determine if it is a new variant. If so, state and federal officials have a goal to within 30 days determine if it responds to existing tests, treatments and immunities from vaccines or prior infections.

California’s health secretary, Dr. Mark Ghaly, said one of the goals is to avoid business closures and other far-reaching mandates. However, he said the state’s requirement that schoolchildren be vaccinated against coronavirus by fall remains in effect.

The plan includes new education, including “myth-buster videos” to fight misinformation and disinformation and help interpret ever-evolving precautions for a confused public whiplashed by safeguards that seemingly shift by the day and vary across county lines.

In coordination with the federal government, it calls for a first-in-the-nation study of the pandemic's direct and indirect impacts long-term on both people and communities.

All this will cost billions, much of it already outlined in the pandemic response package Newsom sought as part of his budget last month. That includes \$1.9 million that lawmakers already approved to boost staffing at hospitals and increase coronavirus testing and vaccine distribution, as well as existing money and anticipated federal funds.

His proposed budget also includes \$1.7 billion to beef up the state's health care workforce, with more investment in increased laboratory testing capacity, data collection and outbreak investigation.

Newsom, who has faced criticism for sometimes failing to follow his own rules, defended keeping in place some of his executive emergency orders, which he said most recently have allowed the state to quickly bring in temporary medical workers and to quickly distribute more than 13 million home test kits to schools.

Those orders have dwindled from 561 to fewer than 100 in recent months, he said, and his administration is working with legislative leaders to eventually make them unnecessary.

## Whisper campaigns grow as Biden nears choice for high court

By COLLEEN LONG and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Too progressive. Too moderate. Bad for workers.

The whispers and background chatter about top contenders for the Supreme Court are growing as President Biden zeroes in on a nominee to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer. And while the president is eager for input, the White House insists he's not going to be swayed by any sniping.

"He is going to pick an eminently qualified Black woman to nominate to the Supreme Court and he has a number of potential candidates that he's very excited about," promises White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

There's a long history of lobbying campaigns for and against Supreme Court candidates, the former sometimes launched by those who try to catch the ear of presidential advisers to extol a potential nominee's virtues.

In one famous example, Ruth Bader Ginsburg's husband Marty was widely credited with making a massive behind-the-scenes effort to get his wife on the court.

"Yes, he was my campaign manager," the late justice later said of her husband.

Advocacy groups, legal groups, scholars and lawmakers also weigh in. Today, anyone on Twitter can, too.

Biden, expected to make his choice this month, has promised to nominate a Black woman. That alone has drawn criticism from some conservatives who claim that he's being unfair to other qualified judges by narrowing his choices. The conservative Club for Growth, which went all-out in support of Amy Coney Barrett's nomination to the court by President Donald Trump, has been running an ad that highlights Hispanic judges who won't be on the list and claiming Biden's decision to narrow the field is racist.

The Supreme Court was made up of white men for two centuries. There has never been a Black woman named to the court. Justice Sonia Sotomayor is the first Hispanic. There has also never been an Asian, Native American or Pacific Islander on the court.

Biden has solicited input from lawmakers and legal groups as he makes his decision. The White House sent out a photo Wednesday of former Sen. Doug Jones, Biden's team leader on the nomination, at work "making calls to senators from both parties."

But the president, who was deeply involved in plenty of Supreme Court nominations during his decades as head of the Senate Judiciary Committee and as vice president, is "not going to be swayed by public campaigns or public sniping or lobbying efforts," Psaki said.

The three top contenders for the job are federal appeals court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, 51, California state Supreme Court judge Leandra Kruger, 45, and U.S. District Court Judge J. Michelle Childs, 55. Each finalist has a long set of bona fides and powerful backers, as well as some critics.

Jackson, thought to be the favorite, has been touted by top civil rights attorneys and lawyer associations. She's also been criticized as potentially too progressive by some. A former federal judge wrote to

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the president to tell him Jackson's decision on a lawsuit involving Lockheed Martin and Black workers was unjust to the workers.

Kruger would be the first person in more than 40 years to move from a state court to the Supreme Court. High-level attorneys and at least one former solicitor general have praised her. Some of her critics claim she's too moderate for a Democrat.

Childs specialized in employment law before she left private practice to work for South Carolina's department of labor. She has a powerful backer in Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., and South Carolina Republican Sens. Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham also have expressed support for her.

It is Childs who has taken the most public heat, drawing criticism from labor groups over her work on employment cases, and from others who say she's too moderate to fill Breyer's shoes.

Our Revolution, a progressive political action organization created after Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders's 2016 presidential campaign, sees her potential nomination as very problematic.

Executive director Joseph Geevarghese called it "highly concerning" that Clyburn and others were pushing for Childs, given Biden's pro-union stance.

"Workers do not need another anti-labor justice actively opposing the very labor protections this administration is working to uphold and expand," Geevarghese said this week. "It would be nonsensical to nominate a union-busting justice to the nation's highest court."

At issue is her work with the law firm Nexsen Pruet Jacobs & Pollard in Columbia, S.C., where she practiced from 1992 until 2000. The left-leaning publication The American Prospect called her a "management-side" attorney and pointed to the firm's criticism of a unionization bill that has been backed by the White House. And they highlighted her work defending companies against race, sex and pregnancy discrimination claims.

But she's also won the endorsement of some labor groups, including the South Carolina chapter of the AFL-CIO. President Charles Brave Jr. said in a letter to Biden earlier this month that Childs would "represent all of us well."

Childs was recruited away from her firm to work for the state's Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, overseeing workplace safety. And she later was appointed to South Carolina's Workers Compensation Commission, tasked with adjudicating grievances made by both public and private employees.

Ann Mickle, an attorney who served on the commission for six years ahead of Childs' tenure, said Childs was sought after by lawyers for workers making claims because she had a reputation for being "intelligent, intuitive, pragmatic."

Mickle said that if people really understood Childs' work on the commission, "they would be knocking down the door to get her into the Supreme Court."

## Moneyrock: Olympic curlers crunch data to get edge on ice

KELVIN CHAN and JIMMY GOLEN Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Rocks and ice, meet mobile devices and big data.

The 500-year-old sport of curling is sliding into the digital age at the Winter Olympics, with modern technology helping teams sift through game stats and performance data to maximize their chances at a medal.

Major pro sports like baseball and football are increasingly crunching numbers to identify undervalued players and better inform coaching decisions. Now the trend toward analytics is coming to curling, a sport more often thought of as a pastoral pastime played by amateurs with dad bods and day jobs.

"Data is king," said Nigel Holl, executive performance director of the British curling team, an early adopter of curling tech.

"The only advantage we can possibly have is: Can we learn quicker and move faster than the opposition and get an advantage in?" Holl said. "And data is a key part of how you can move faster and be ahead of the game."

In curling, teams take turns sliding 42-pound rocks down a sheet of ice toward a scoring area. Players furiously sweep the ice along the way to help speed up the stone or curl it around an opponent's on its way to the target.

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The intricate strategy — successful teams must plan several throws in advance — has earned the sport the nickname “chess on ice.” And that strategy is now driven by data and technology that gives the players real-time insights into the best shot to take.

During play at Beijing’s Ice Cube Olympic venue, the British coaches punched game stats into their tablets and other devices that have been preloaded with match data for their curlers and the opponents.

The British and U.S. teams also employ performance analysts who sit at the end of the ice sheet filming the action for match intelligence. The goal: to get a better picture of each side’s strengths and weaknesses — information that can be relayed to players during breaks.

“It’s the future,” said U.S.A. curling’s director of coaching, Phill Drobnick. “It’s doing everything you can do to give ourselves that little bit of an edge.”

The U.S. curling team has been filming matches for years, but Drobnick said now it’s wringing more information out of video to help with tactics for each play and to scout out the opposition.

“You’ve got to use the information that’s out there to try to give yourself the best chance to win it,” said American John Shuster, a five-time Olympian and the reigning gold medalist. “I feel like it’s put us in a position where we’ve got some wins.”

Curling powerhouse Canada also uses video and data analytics, team spokesman Kyle Jahns said.

“It’s common for teams (not just Canada) to collect this kind of data not only at the Olympics, but other events in order to create game plans that will be most efficient at international events,” he said by email.

An Olympic curling match has 10 ends, like innings in baseball. Teams throw eight rocks apiece in each round. Much of the in-end strategy involves protecting one’s own rocks from an opponent’s takeout, but the end-game management often centers around the significant advantage of throwing last.

For example, even in a tie game entering the ninth end, it has long been smart strategy to intentionally miss — and score zero points — to hang onto the last-rock advantage, known as the hammer, in the 10th.

Now players have the numbers to back that up, along with more complex decisions.

In Thursday night’s medal round game against Britain, with a fairly easy chance to score one point and tie the game, the United States deliberately threw the ninth-end hammer into the side of the sheet — and gave up a point to fall behind by two — in order to have the last rock in the 10th.

“I know it looks funny and you don’t realize, like, ‘Why did they do it?’” American Matt Hamilton said. “But the sports are analytic now. We know all the numbers, where your armchair curler — who doesn’t watch it year-in and year-out, and all the championships — might not necessarily realize it.”

NFL coaches have become more aggressive about going for it on fourth down, or going for two points after a touchdown, based on similar statistical analysis.

The British team, one of just two to reach the medal round in all three Olympic curling disciplines in Beijing, uses data analytics platform Tableau to present the information in a more easily digested visual form.

It’s got to be “obvious and intuitive” so the coach can relay it to the athletes in as little as one syllable, Holl said.

“They’ve got 20 seconds to get information across to an athlete to influence the game,” Holl said.

Some purists scoff.

“I think there’s a place for it, but I think analytics in a lot of situations, it seems to be trending towards overuse,” said Canadian Brad Gushue, a 2006 Olympic gold medalist.

“We try and use a little bit of it,” Gushue said, “but still go a little old school and use that instinct.” \_\_\_\_\_

AP Sports Writer Jimmy Golen is in Beijing covering Olympic curling for the third time. Follow him on Twitter at [twitter.com/jgolen](https://twitter.com/jgolen). AP Business Writer Kelvin Chan writes about technology from London and is covering a range of Olympic stories in Beijing. Follow him on Twitter at [twitter.com/chanman](https://twitter.com/chanman).

## Border agency chief faces challenges from within and outside

By BEN FOX, ANITA SNOW and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

YUMA, Ariz. (AP) — One agent protested that he didn’t join the Border Patrol to look after children in custody. Another asked why a policy to make asylum-seekers wait in Mexico for court hearings wasn’t

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being used more. And one turned his back on the senior officials who had come to listen.

Unsurprisingly for anyone who's been tracking migration along the United States' southern border, the recent showdown happened in Yuma, Arizona, where encounters with migrants illegally crossing into the country from Mexico jumped more than 20-fold in December from a year earlier.

Discontent among the ranks is only one of the challenges Chris Magnus faces as the new leader of the United States' largest law enforcement agency. Magnus, who was sworn in this month as commissioner of the Border Patrol's parent agency, Customs and Border Protection, also faces persistent allegations that his agency is mistreating migrants, failing to recruit more women and is at the mercy of a broken asylum system.

Magnus might seem like an unconventional pick. When he was the police chief in Tucson, Arizona, he rejected federal grants to collaborate on border security with the agency he now leads and kept a distance from Border Patrol leaders in a region where thousands of agents are assigned.

In his first interview as commissioner, Magnus acknowledged morale problems and outlined some initial steps meant to fix them. He had no simple answer to address migration flows.

"There have always been periods of migrant surges into this country for different reasons, at different times," he said last week. "But I don't think anybody disputes that the numbers are high right now and that we have to work as many different strategies as possible to deal with those high numbers."

Magnus noted the growing number of migrants who from countries outside of Mexico and Central America, a trend that has been especially strong in Yuma.

Under a public health order known as Title 42 that was designed to limit spread of COVID-19, Mexico takes back migrants from the U.S. who are from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras or El Salvador and are denied a chance to seek asylum. Other nationalities are eligible for expulsion, but the U.S. often won't fly them home due to the expense or strained diplomatic relations with their home countries. Instead, they are often quickly released in the U.S. to pursue asylum.

"There's a lot of frustration," said Rafael Rivera, president of the National Border Patrol Council Local 2595, a union that represents agents in the patrol's Yuma sector, which has seen a huge increase in such migrants. "They feel like there's no consequences, that we have an open border."

In December, U.S. officials stopped Venezuelans at the border nearly 25,000 times, which was more than double September's count and more than a hundred times the roughly 200 they made in December 2020. Venezuelans trailed only Mexicans in the number stopped at the U.S. border in December.

In the Yuma sector, which stretches from California's Imperial Sand Dunes to western Arizona's desert and rocky mountain ranges, Venezuelans were stopped nearly 10 times more than Mexicans in December. Colombians, Indians, Cubans and Haitians also outnumbered Mexicans.

Mexico began requiring visas for Venezuelans on Jan. 21, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas noted during his contentious Jan. 26 meeting with Yuma agents, according to a recording leaked to the website Townhall, which publishes conservative viewpoints. He said the U.S. was pressing Mexico to accept more nationalities under Title 42 authority and to increase immigration enforcement within its own borders.

Magnus, who reports to Mayorkas, told the AP that migration flows are "increasingly complex" and that the U.S. was "doing our best to build and take advantage of relationships with these different countries that migrants are coming from."

Although President Joe Biden faces many of the same challenges as his predecessors, Donald Trump visited the border often, spent massively on enforcement and got an early endorsement from the agents' union in 2016.

As a Biden appointee and an outsider who had a chilly relationship with Border Patrol leaders in Tucson, Magnus might struggle winning over agents.

Roy Villareal, chief of the Border Patrol's Tucson sector from early 2019 until late 2020, said he sought an introductory meeting with Magnus, who was then Tucson's police chief, but that he never heard back, calling their lack of interaction "a telling sign." Villareal could recall speaking to Magnus only three times

during their overlapping tenures — each one a courtesy call from Magnus to inform him that Tucson police were about to arrest one of his agents.

“He’s the wrong person for the Border Patrol,” said Villareal, who retired after 32 years in the agency. “His knowledge and understanding of border enforcement just isn’t there. ... Agents will challenge him.”

Others consider Magnus a good fit.

“He is very respected among his colleagues,” said Gil Kerlikowske, a former Seattle police chief whose focus on use of force rankled some agents when he held Magnus’ job from 2014 to 2017. “Chris’ background on holding people accountable is pretty extensive.”

Magnus, 61, was born and raised in Lansing, Michigan, where he served stints as an emergency dispatcher, paramedic, sheriff’s deputy and police captain. He was police chief in Fargo, North Dakota, and Richmond, California, before he took the job in Tucson in January 2016. In that latest role, he took orders from elected leaders in the liberal city of more than 500,000 people.

In Tucson, Magnus created a program to steer people away from drugs, worked with nonprofits helping homeless people and overhauled the department’s use-of-force policy. He openly criticized Trump policies for making migrants more reluctant to share information about crimes with police.

CBP critics in Tucson give Magnus mixed reviews. Vicki Gaubeca, of the Southern Border Communities Coalition, said he championed “some very progressive policies,” but that the Border Patrol needs a visionary who will change what she calls a deep-seated “culture of impunity.”

In his final weeks as police chief, Magnus called for the firing of an off-duty officer who shot and killed a suspected shoplifter in a motorized wheelchair, saying it was “a clear violation of department policy.” The officer left the department last month.

And in 2020, Magnus offered to resign over an in-custody death that the department failed to make public for two months, but the city manager asked him to stay.

One longstanding issue Magnus faces is allegations of agents using excessive force. Agents have been involved in an increasing number of use-of-force incidents and there have been more fatalities involving Border Patrol agents, though the number of encounters surged at an even higher rate.

Magnus said the use of force is a “very serious concern” and that he believes the overwhelming majority of agents act responsibly. He also defended specialized teams that collect evidence in incidents that might involve agents’ excessive use of force. Democratic congressional leaders have expressed serious concerns about the Critical Incident Teams, which some activists allege are shadowy cover-up operations.

“This is really not unusual in most police agencies,” Magnus told the AP. “There’s absolutely no reason why trained investigators in the field can’t be gathering this kind of critical evidence.”

## Ex-cop who killed Daunte Wright to learn sentence

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The former suburban Minneapolis police officer who said she confused her handgun for her Taser when she killed Daunte Wright will be sentenced Friday for manslaughter.

Kim Potter was convicted in December of both first-degree and second-degree manslaughter in the April 11 killing of Wright, a 20-year-old Black motorist. She’ll be sentenced only on the most serious charge of first-degree murder, which carries a presumptive penalty of just over seven years in prison.

Prosecutors have said the presumptive sentence is proper, while the defense is asking for a lesser sentence, including one of probation only.

Potter is expected to make a statement at her sentencing hearing before Judge Regina Chu, and her attorneys also plan to read statements from others who support her. The state is planning to present victim-impact statements, in which victims and family members can talk about how Wright’s death affected them.

Wright was killed after Brooklyn Center officers pulled him over for having expired license tags and an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror. The shooting, which came in the midst of Derek Chauvin’s trial on murder charges in George Floyd’s killing, sparked several days of demonstrations outside the

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Brooklyn Center police station marked by tear gas and clashes between protesters and police.

Evidence at Potter's trial showed officers learned he had an outstanding warrant for a weapons possession charge and they tried to arrest him when he pulled away. Video showed Potter shouted several times that she was going to tase Wright, but she had her gun in her hand and fired one shot into his chest.

For someone with no criminal history, such as Potter, the state sentencing guidelines for first-degree manslaughter call for a penalty ranging from slightly more than six years to about 8 1/2 years in prison, with the presumptive sentence being just over seven years.

Prosecutors initially argued that aggravating factors warranted a sentence above the guideline range. They said Potter abused her authority as an officer and that her actions caused a greater-than-normal danger to others.

There is no indication in the court record that they have formally withdrawn that argument, but in a new document they say the presumptive sentence is proper and "takes into account the main elements of the conviction: the death of Daunte Wright and Defendant's recklessness."

Defense attorneys, in seeking a lighter sentence, have argued that Wright was the aggressor and that he would be alive if he had obeyed commands. Their argument for probation said she has no prior record, is remorseful, has had an exemplary career and has the support of family and friends. They also said her risk of committing the same crime again is low because she is no longer a police officer, and they said she would do well on probation.

Prosecutor Matt Frank disagreed, but wrote that if the court finds prison isn't warranted, Potter should get 10 years of probation and be required to spend a year in jail, speak to law enforcement about the dangers of weapons confusion, and speak to Wright's family about their loss if they want her to do so.

Frank also disagreed with defense arguments that Potter should be given a sentence that goes below the guideline range. If the court finds that Potter's case is less serious than the typical first-degree manslaughter case, he wrote, the court should issue a sentence between four and slightly over seven years, the presumptive sentences for second-degree and first-degree manslaughter.

In Minnesota, it's presumed that inmates who show good behavior will serve two-thirds of their sentence in prison and the rest on supervised release, commonly known as parole. That means if Potter gets the roughly seven-year presumptive sentence, she would serve about four years and nine months in custody, with the rest on parole.

Potter has been at the state's women's prison in Shakopee since the guilty verdict.

## Sources: 19 Austin police officers indicted in protest probe

By ACACIA CORONADO, PAUL WEBER and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press/Report for America  
AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Texas grand jury indicted 19 Austin police officers on charges of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon for their actions during 2020 protests over racial injustice that spread nationwide following the killing of George Floyd, according to people familiar with the matter.

Multiple people spoke to The Associated Press Thursday on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the case publicly. Austin Police Association President Ken Cassidy confirmed 19 officers are facing charges but did not have details.

It ranks among the most indictments on a single police department in the U.S. over tactics used by officers during the widespread protests — methods that led to the resignation or ouster of several police chiefs across the country.

Word of the indictments came hours after Austin city leaders approved paying \$10 million to two people injured by police in the protests, including a college student who suffered brain damage after an officer shot him with a beanbag round.

Combined, the charges and settlements amounted to conservative Texas' liberal capital of 960,000 people taking some of its biggest actions as criticism still simmers over its handling of the protests, which intensified pressure on then-Police Chief Brian Manley to eventually step down.

Jose Garza, the district attorney for Travis County, which includes Austin, spoke to journalists Thursday

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afternoon about the grand jury investigation but gave no specifics about it, including how many officers are facing charges, and for what crimes.

"Our community is safer when our community trusts enforcement. When it believes law enforcement follows that law and protects the people who live here," Garza said. "There cannot be trust if there is no accountability when law enforcement breaks the law."

A spokesperson for the Travis County District Attorney's office, Ismael Martinez, declined to comment on the number of officers charged and referred reporters to Garza's comments.

Prosecutors have not identified any of the officers facing charges. Texas law requires that an indictment remain secret until an officer has been arrested. Aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, when committed by a public servant, could carry a sentence of up to life prison.

Cassidy, the president of the Austin Police Association, called the move "devastating" for law enforcement in the city, but also said he's confident that no officer will be convicted. He criticized Garza, calling the investigation politically motivated.

"DA Garza ran on a platform to indict police officers and has not missed the opportunity to ruin lives and careers simply to fulfill a campaign promise," Cassidy said.

Garza said his office prosecutes anybody who causes harm "regardless of who causes it."

Austin Chief of Police Joseph Chacon, who took the job after Manley left, said he respects the grand jury process but was "extremely disappointed" to hear the district attorney announce anticipated indictments of his officers.

Chacon stressed that his command staff had prepared officers to face hundreds of people when thousands actually showed up to protests that he said were at times "righteous and violent."

"I am not aware of any conduct, that given the circumstances that the officers were working under, would rise to the level of a criminal violation by these officers," Chacon said.

But beanbag rounds fired by officers did not always perform "in the manner anticipated," Chacon said, and his agency now prohibits the use of "less lethal munitions in crowd-control situations."

The settlements approved Thursday are among the largest paid to people who were injured by police across the U.S. during massive protests that followed Floyd's death.

The largest of the Austin settlements gives \$8 million to Justin Howell, who was 20 years old when police shot him with a beanbag round. Family members told the AP following the incident that Howell suffered a cracked skull and brain damage, leaving him in critical condition for multiple days.

The city will also pay \$2 million to Anthony Evans, who was 26 when an Austin police officer shot him with a beanbag round in a separate incident, which resulted in extensive medical treatment in his jaw.

Austin Mayor Steve Adler said the settlements "remind us of a real difficult and painful moment in our city." A representative for the Howell family did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

It is the latest reflection of how, two years after the protests that swept across the country, cities are still addressing the injuries and tactics used by police. Earlier this month, prosecutors announced charges against two Dallas police officers accused of injuring demonstrators after firing less lethal munitions.

After the protests in Austin, then-police Chief Manley later said Howell was not the intended target after an altercation in a crowd, which he said involved people who threw objects at a line of officers. Authorities have said that led to the officers firing at the mass of protestors from above.

David Frost, who captured on video the moments after Howell was shot, told the AP that he saw protesters throwing fist-sized rocks and water bottles at the line of police on an overpass. Then he saw Howell fall. He was bleeding heavily and went into a seizure, Frost said at the time.

The settlements are the second and third payments awarded among a dozen lawsuits filed in Austin that have claimed injuries from the protests. Earlier this month, The Austin American-Statesman reported that a \$150,000 settlement was approved for a woman named Ariana Chavez, who was shot in the head with less lethal munition resulting in a concussion.

At least 19 people were hospitalized in Austin following the protests.

Eleven officers were disciplined for their actions in the early summer protests, with seven additional of-



ficers placed on administrative duty.

## 'I hate this sport!': Rage, teen tears and Olympic collapse

By JAMES ELLINGWORTH AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — The gold medalist said she felt empty. The silver medalist pledged never to skate again. The favorite left in tears without saying a word.

After one of the most dramatic nights in their sport's history, Russia's trio of teenage figure skating stars each enter an uncertain future.

Her Olympics and life turned upside down by a doping case, world record holder Kamila Valieva faces a possible ban and a coach whose first response to her disastrous skate Thursday was criticism.

"Why did you let it go? Why did you stop fighting?" cameras caught Eteri Tutberidze — the notoriously strict coach who will be investigated over Valieva's failed drug test — telling the 15-year-old after she fell twice and dropped out of medal contention.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said he was disturbed by the intense pressure on the young skaters, particularly Valieva, and criticized her coaches without naming Tutberidze.

"When I afterwards saw how she was received by her closest entourage, with such, what appeared to be a tremendous coldness, it was chilling to see this," he said at a news conference Friday. "Rather than giving her comfort, rather than to try to help her, you could feel this chilling atmosphere, this distance."

Some in skating have pushed to raise the minimum age for participation at the Olympics from 15 to 17 or 18.

As Valieva placed fourth and left in tears, she received a message of support from 2018 silver medalist Evgenia Medvedeva.

"I am so happy that this hell is over for you," Medvedeva posted on Instagram. "I really value you and love you and I'm happy that you can relax now, sweetie. I congratulate you on the end of the Olympics and I hope that you can live calmly and breathe."

Unfortunately for Valieva, she can't relax just yet. The failed drug test which turned her life upside down still hangs over her head.

While she was allowed to keep skating in Beijing by the Court of Arbitration for Sport to avoid "irreparable harm," that ruling is valid only until a full investigation of her Dec. 25 test for the banned substance trimetazidine is resolved. The case could take months and still cost Valieva and her Russian teammates the gold medal they won in last week's team event.

Runner-up Alexandra Trusova was also in despair after her history-making five quadruple jumps proved not enough to beat teammate Anna Shcherbakova to the gold medal. "I hate this sport," she shouted at the side of the rink. "I won't go onto the ice again."

Trusova said she was happy with the skate but not with the result, an apparent jab at the judging that gave Shcherbakova enough extra points for artistry to keep her ahead.

Trusova could be heard crying that she was the only one without a gold medal. The Russians won the team event using Valieva twice instead of allowing Shcherbakova or Trusova to skate one of the women's programs. That win could be stripped because of Valieva's doping case.

Trusova later said her comments about not skating again had been "emotional", the result of missing her family and her dogs, but didn't commit to compete at next month's world championships.

Of the three teenagers, Trusova has had the most fractious relationship with Tutberidze. She switched coaches briefly, returning to the Tutberidze camp in May of last year. And her music selection seemed to send a message. She danced her long program to "Cruella" from the movie soundtrack.

Shcherbakova seemed unsure how to react the drama unfolding around her, and said she felt sorry for Valieva. "I still don't comprehend what has happened. On the one hand I feel happy, on the other I feel this emptiness inside."

Shcherbakova arrived in Beijing as the world champion from 2021, but Valieva's record-breaking scores and Trusova's all-or-nothing quads turned her into an underdog to her younger teammates. Being called

an Olympic champion was "unreal," Shcherbakova said. "I don't feel like it's me they're talking about."

Russian skaters' careers are typically so short that at the age of 17, Shcherbakova almost immediately faced questions over whether she would retire.

"I have the desire to skate, and I can't even imagine being without figure skating," she said. The 2026 Olympics are a long way off, and no Tutberidze-trained woman has ever stayed in elite skating long enough to become a two-time Olympian. The last woman to retain the gold was Katarina Witt of East Germany in 1988.

What happens next for Shcherbakova and her teammates-turned-rivals depends on many factors — the eventual doping verdict, any further punishment for Tutberidze and the rest of her entourage and the myriad of injuries which can plague young skaters performing quads.

As she tries to recover from a failure on the sport's biggest stage, Valieva remains at the center of a confrontation between Russia and international institutions. About six hours before she took to the ice, Russian Olympic Committee president Stanislav Pozdnyakov said he would not give up the team event gold medal "under any circumstances, regardless of the results of the disciplinary investigation into the athlete."

Just one of many unresolved questions for the three young Russian skaters.

## **S. Korea keeps crowd limits as omicron causes 25-fold spike**

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea will extend restaurant dining hours but maintain a six-person limit on private social gatherings as it wrestles with a massive coronavirus wave driven by the highly infectious omicron variant.

The 109,831 new cases reported on Friday was another record and about a 25-fold increase from the levels seen in mid-January, when omicron became the country's dominant strain. The more than 516,000 infections counted in the past seven days alone raised South Korea's caseload to over 1.75 million.

Long lines snaked around public health offices and testing stations in the densely populated capital Seoul, where health workers in hazmat suits distributed rapid antigen test kits and collected throat and nasal samples from senior citizens and other high-risk groups.

There's also concern that campaigning for the March 9 presidential election could worsen transmissions. Thousands of supporters packed a rally in the southwestern city of Suncheon by ruling party candidate Lee Jae-myung, where they clapped, shouted and chanted his name. Lee's conservative opponent Yoon Suk Yeol also drew huge crowds during a rally in the southeastern city of Sangju.

Omicron has so far seemed less likely to cause serious illness or death than the delta variant, which hit the country hard in December and January. But cases are growing much faster and appear to be putting the country on a verge of a possible hospital surge.

Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum, Seoul's No. 2 official behind President Moon Jae-in, acknowledged people's frustration with extended virus restrictions and the shock on service sector businesses, but said officials couldn't afford to ease social distancing significantly when hospitalizations and deaths are starting to creep up.

Officials did extend the curfew on restaurants and other businesses from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. but private social gatherings of seven or more people will continue to be prohibited at least through March 13.

People will continue to be required to show their vaccination status through smartphone apps or documents to enter potentially crowded spaces like restaurants, coffee shops, gyms and karaoke venues.

"Experts are expecting the (omicron outbreak) to peak sometime between late February and March," Kim said during a meeting on anti-virus strategies. "When we reach a point where we could confirm the (outbreak) has peaked and was in decline, we will start meaningfully easing social distancing measures like other nations so that people could go back to their precious normal lives."

The Health Ministry said about 30% of intensive care units designated for COVID-19 treatment are currently occupied. The ministry said 385 virus patients were in serious or critical condition, which was 100 more than a week earlier but still lower than the levels of around 1,000 seen in late December during a

delta outbreak.

While omicron more easily infects those who have been vaccinated or had COVID-19 previously, experts say vaccination and booster shots still provide strong protection from serious illness and death.

More than 86% of South Koreans have been fully vaccinated and 58% have received booster shots. Health officials started offering fourth vaccination shots at nursing homes and other long-term care settings this week.

## Canadian police arrest 2 leaders of protesting truckers

By ROB GILLIES, WILSON RING and ROBERT BUMSTED Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — Hundreds of truckers clogging Canada's capital stood their ground and defiantly blasted their horns Thursday, even as police arrested two protest leaders and threatened to break up the nearly three-week protest against the country's COVID-19 restrictions.

Busloads of police arrived near Ottawa's Parliament Hill, and workers put up extra fences around government buildings. Police also essentially began sealing off much of the downtown area to outsiders to prevent them from coming to the aid of the protesters.

"The action is imminent," said interim Ottawa Police Chief Steve Bell. "We absolutely are committed to end this unlawful demonstration."

Police arrested organizers Tamara Lich and Chris Barber around Parliament Hill, but officers were not moving in force on the demonstrators. Police took Lich into custody late Thursday.

Police continued negotiating with the protesters and trying to persuade them to go home, Bell said. "We want this demonstration to end peacefully," he said, but added: "If they do not peacefully leave, we have plans."

Many of the truckers in the self-styled Freedom Convoy appeared unmoved by days of warnings from police and the government that they were risking arrest and could see their rigs seized and bank accounts frozen.

"I'm prepared to sit on my ass and watch them hit me with pepper spray," said one of their leaders, Pat King. As for the trucks parked bumper-to-bumper, he said: "There's no tow trucks in Canada that will touch them."

King later told truckers to lock their doors.

Amid the rising tensions, truckers outside Parliament blared their horns in defiance of a court injunction against honking, issued for the benefit of neighborhood residents.

Ottawa represented the movement's last stronghold after weeks of demonstrations and blockades that shut down border crossings into the U.S., inflicted economic damage on both countries and created a political crisis for Trudeau.

The protests have shaken Canada's reputation for civility and rule-following and inspired similar convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands.

"It's high time that these illegal and dangerous activities stop," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared in Parliament, not far from where the more than 300 trucks were parked.

"They are a threat to our economy and our relationship with trading partners," he said. "They are a threat to public safety."

Ottawa police began locking down a wide swath of the downtown area, allowing in only those who live or work there after they pass through one of more than 100 checkpoints, the interim chief said.

Police were especially worried about the children among the protesters. Bell said police were working with child-welfare agencies to determine how to safely remove the youngsters before authorities move in.

Early this week, the prime minister invoked Canada's Emergencies Act, empowering law enforcement authorities to declare the blockades illegal, tow away trucks, arrest the drivers, suspend their licenses and take other measures.

On Thursday, Trudeau and some of his top ministers took turns warning the protesters to leave, in an apparent move by the government to avert a clash, or at least show it had gone the extra mile to avoid one.

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Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said the government began freezing truckers' accounts as threatened. "It is happening. I do have the numbers in front of me," she said.

Ottawa police likewise handed out leaflets for the second straight day demanding the truckers end the siege, and also helpfully placed notices on vehicles informing owners how and where to pick up their trucks if they are towed.

The occupation has infuriated many Ottawa residents.

"We've seen people intimidated, harassed and threatened. We've seen apartment buildings that have been chained up. We have seen fires set in the corridors. Residents are terrorized," said Canadian Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino.

The protests by demonstrators in trucks, tractors and motor homes initially focused on Canada's vaccine requirement for truckers entering the country but soon morphed into a broader attack on COVID-19 precautions and Trudeau's government.

The biggest, most damaging of the blockades at the border took place at the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit. Before authorities arrested dozens of protesters last weekend and lifted the siege, it disrupted the flow of auto parts between the two countries and forced the industry to curtail production.

The final blockade, in Manitoba, ended peacefully on Wednesday.

The movement has drawn support from right-wing extremists and veterans, some of them armed — one reason authorities have hesitated to move against them.

Fox News personalities and U.S. conservatives such as Donald Trump have egged on the protests. Trudeau complained on Thursday that "roughly half of the funding to the barricaders here is coming from the United States."

Some security experts said that dispersing the protest in Ottawa could be tricky and dangerous, with the potential for violence, and that a heavy-handed law enforcement response could be used as propaganda by antigovernment extremists.

Trucks were parked shoulder-to-shoulder downtown, some with tires removed to hamper towing.

"There is not really a playbook," said David Carter, a professor at Michigan State University's School of Criminal Justice and a former police officer. "I know there are police chiefs in the U.S. looking at this and developing strategic plans and partnerships to manage a protest like this if it should occur in their cities."

The presence of children also complicated the planning. As a showdown seemed to draw near, Canadian Emergency Preparedness Minister Bill Blair said: "To those who have children with them, this is no place for children. Take them home immediately."

## **Biden: Russian threat to invade Ukraine still 'very high'**

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, YURAS KARMANAU, DARLENE SUPERVILLE and LORNE COOK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Fears of a new war in Europe resurged Thursday as U.S. President Joe Biden warned that Russia could invade Ukraine within days, and violence spiked in a long-running standoff in eastern Ukraine that some worried could provide the spark for wider conflict.

World dignitaries raced for solutions, but suspicions between East and West only seemed to grow, as NATO allies rejected Russian assertions it was pulling back troops from exercises that had fueled fears of an attack. Russia is believed to have built up some 150,000 military forces around Ukraine's borders.

Concerns escalated in the West over what exactly Russia is doing with those troops, which included an estimated 60% of Russia's overall ground forces. The Kremlin insists it has no plans to invade, but it has long considered Ukraine part of its sphere of influence and NATO's eastward expansion an existential threat.

The U.S. government issued some of its starkest, most detailed warnings yet about what could happen next.

Speaking at the U.N. Security Council, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken revealed some conclusions of U.S. intelligence in a strategy that the U.S. and Britain have hoped will expose and pre-empt any invasion planning. The U.S. has declined to reveal much of the evidence underlying its claims.

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He told the diplomats that a sudden, seemingly violent event staged by Russia to justify invasion would kick it off. Blinken mentioned a "so-called terrorist bombing" inside Russia, a staged drone strike, "a fake, even a real attack ... using chemical weapons."

The assault would open with cyberattacks, along with missiles and bombs across Ukraine, he said. Painting the U.S. picture further, Blinken described the entry of Russian troops, advancing on Kyiv, a city of nearly 3 million, and other key targets.

U.S. intelligence indicated Russia also would target "specific groups" of Ukrainians, Blinken said, again without giving details.

In an implicit nod to Secretary of State Colin Powell's appearance before the Security Council in 2003, when he cited unsubstantiated and false U.S. intelligence to justify the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Blinken added: "Let me be clear. I am here today not to start a war, but to prevent one."

Biden's own comments on the Russian threat were unusually dire.

Speaking at the White House, he said Washington saw no signs of a promised Russian withdrawal, and said the invasion threat remains "very high" because Russia has moved more troops toward the border with Ukraine instead of pulling them back.

"Every indication we have is they're prepared to go into Ukraine, attack Ukraine," Biden told reporters. He said the U.S. has "reason to believe" that Russia is "engaged in a false flag operation to have an excuse to go in," but did not provide details.

The White House said Biden planned to speak by phone Friday with trans-Atlantic leaders about Russia's military buildup and continued efforts at deterrence and diplomacy.

U.S. and European officials were on high alert for any Russian attempts to create a pretext for invasion, according to a Western official familiar with intelligence findings. Ukrainian government officials shared intelligence with allies that suggested the Russians might try to shell the Luhansk area in the disputed Donbas region on Friday morning as part of an effort to create a false reason to take military action, according to the official who was not authorized to comment publicly.

Renewed fear of an invasion put global financial markets on edge. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell nearly 600 points, or 1.7%. More than 85% of the stocks in the benchmark S&P 500 were in the red.

Even without an attack, the sustained Russian pressure on Ukraine has further hobbled its shaky economy and left an entire nation under constant strain. Eastern Ukraine already has been the site of fighting since 2014 that has killed 14,000, and tensions soared again Thursday.

Separatist authorities in the Luhansk region reported an increase in Ukrainian government shelling along the tense line of contact. Separatist official Rodion Miroshnik said rebel forces returned fire.

Ukraine disputed the claim, saying separatists had shelled its forces but they didn't fire back. The Ukrainian military command said shells hit a kindergarten in Stanytsia Luhanska, wounding two teachers, and cut power to half the town.

The head of the monitoring mission for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Yasar Halit Cevik, said it reported 500 explosions along the contact line from Wednesday evening to Thursday. Cevik told the Security Council the tensions then appeared to ease, with about 30 blasts reported.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tweeted that the kindergarten shelling "by pro-Russian forces is a big provocation."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov countered with the same: "We have repeatedly warned that the excessive concentration of Ukrainian armed forces in the immediate vicinity of the line of demarcation, coupled with possible provocations, could pose a terrible danger."

A 2015 deal brokered by France and Germany helped end the worst of the fighting, but regular skirmishes have continued and a political settlement has stalled.

Western powers scrambled to avert, or prepare for, eventual invasion.

NATO's defense ministers discussed ways to bolster defenses in Eastern Europe, while EU leaders huddled over how to punish Russia if it invades. Blinken and Vice President Kamala Harris are among political, military and diplomatic leaders heading to the annual security conference in Munich that will see urgent

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consultations on the crisis.

China, a key Russian geopolitical ally, accused Washington of “playing up and sensationalizing the crisis and escalating tensions.” Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the U.S. should “take seriously and address Russia’s legitimate and reasonable concerns on security assurance.”

At NATO headquarters in Brussels, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin questioned the Russian troop pullout claims.

“We’ve seen some of those troops inch closer to that border. We see them fly in more combat and support aircraft,” he said. “We see them sharpen their readiness in the Black Sea. We even see them stocking up their blood supplies. You don’t do these sort of things for no reason, and you certainly don’t do them if you’re getting ready to pack up and go home.”

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said the West has seen “an increase of troops over the last 48 hours, up to 7,000.” That squared with what a U.S. administration official said a day earlier.

Maxar Technologies, a commercial satellite imagery company monitoring the Russian buildup, reported continued heightened military activity near Ukraine. It noted a new pontoon bridge and a new field hospital in Belarus.

Russia says the pullout, announced earlier this week, will take time. Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj.-Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Russian tank and infantry units holding drills in the Kursk and Bryansk regions neighboring Ukraine were returning to their bases in the Nizhny Novgorod region. He said some already were back after a 700-kilometer (435-mile) journey.

Troops on maneuvers in Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, have moved back to Russia’s North Caucasus, he said, and Russian troops in Belarus will return to their garrisons after war games end Sunday. Konashenkov didn’t mention how many were deployed and didn’t say how many returned.

Russia held out a new offer of diplomacy Thursday, handing the U.S. a response to offers to engage in talks on limiting missile deployments in Europe, restrictions on military drills and other confidence-building measures.

The response, released by the Foreign Ministry, deplored the West’s refusal to meet the main Russian security and demands and reaffirmed that Moscow could take unspecified “military-technical measures” if the U.S. and its allies continue to stonewall its concerns.

At the same time, it said Russia was ready to discuss limits on missile deployments, restrictions on patrol flights by strategic bombers and other confidence-building steps.

Meanwhile, Russia ordered the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Bart Gorman, to leave the country, in what the State Department called an “unprovoked” move. Russia said it was in response to the expulsion of a Russian diplomat. It appeared more linked to an ongoing U.S.-Russia battle over diplomatic staffing in Washington and Moscow than to Ukraine.

## Trump must testify in New York investigation, judge rules

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump must answer questions under oath in New York state’s civil investigation into his business practices, a judge ruled Thursday.

Judge Arthur Engoron ordered Trump and his two eldest children, Ivanka and Donald Trump Jr., to comply with subpoenas issued in December by New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Trump and his two children must sit for depositions within 21 days, Engoron said following a two-hour hearing with lawyers for the Trumps and James’ office.

“In the final analysis, a State Attorney General commences investigating a business entity, uncovers copious evidence of possible financial fraud, and wants to question, under oath, several of the entities’ principals, including its namesake. She has the clear right to do so.” Engoron wrote in his decision.

The eight-page ruling is almost certain to be appealed, but if upheld it could force the former president into a tough decision about whether to answer questions, or stay silent, citing his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination — something he’s criticized others for doing in the past.

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"THERE IS NO CASE!" Trump said in a statement, accusing James' office of "doing everything within their corrupt discretion to interfere with my business relationships, and with the political process."

Trump called the ruling "a continuation of the greatest Witch Hunt in history — and remember, I can't get a fair hearing in New York because of the hatred of me by Judges and the judiciary. It is not possible."

In her own statement, James said: "No one will be permitted to stand in the way of the pursuit of justice, no matter how powerful they are. No one is above the law."

James, a Democrat, said her investigation has uncovered evidence Trump's company, the Trump Organization, used "fraudulent or misleading" valuations of assets like golf courses and skyscrapers to get loans and tax benefits.

Trump's lawyers told Engoron that having him sit for a civil deposition now, while his company is also the subject of a parallel criminal investigation, is an improper attempt to get around a state law barring prosecutors from calling someone to testify before a criminal grand jury without giving them immunity.

"If she wants sworn testimony from my client, he's entitled to immunity. He gets immunity for what he says, or he says nothing," Trump's criminal defense lawyer, Ronald Fischetti, said in the hearing, which was conducted by video conference.

Anything Trump says in a civil deposition could be used against him in the criminal probe being overseen by the Manhattan district attorney's office. If Trump invokes the Fifth Amendment, Fischetti said it could still hurt a potential criminal defense.

"That'll be on every front page in the newspaper in the world," Fischetti said. "How can I possibly pick a jury in that case?"

A lawyer for the attorney general's office, Kevin Wallace, told Engoron that it wasn't unusual to have civil and criminal investigations proceeding at the same time. The judge rejected a request from lawyers for the Trumps to pause the civil probe until the criminal matter is over.

"Mr. Trump is a high profile individual, yes. That's unique," Wallace said. "It's unique that so many people are paying attention to a rather dry hearing about subpoena enforcement. But the legal issues that we're dealing with here are pretty standard."

In a previous legal spat arising from James' investigation, Engoron ordered another Trump son, Eric Trump, to testify in 2020 after his lawyers abruptly canceled a scheduled deposition. Eric Trump invoked the Fifth Amendment hundreds of times in his interview. Trump Organization finance chief Allen Weisberg did the same when he was questioned by James' lawyers.

Alan Futerfas, a lawyer for Ivanka and Donald Trump Jr., both of whom have been executives in their family's business, said in the hearing that he had no reason to believe either are targets of the district attorney's criminal investigation.

At Thursday's hearing, Trump lawyer Alina Habba accused James of "selective prosecution" and said the attorney general is "engaging in viewpoint discrimination" motivated by her political ambitions and disdain for the Republican former president, evinced by comments she made over the years about going after Trump.

"We have an extraordinary rare case where we can prove selective prosecution because she's put her words out there so much and taken every opportunity to voice her vendetta against Donald Trump and his family to take him down," Habba said.

Wallace noted the state attorney general's office was investigating Trump-related matters as far back as 2013, long before James was elected, including probes into his charitable foundation and the Trump University training program.

Engoron said the thousands of pages of evidence he's reviewed in the case shows there's sufficient basis for continuing the investigation and undercuts "the notion that this ongoing investigation is based on personal animus, not facts and law."

Engoron also seized on the revelation this week that Trump's longtime accounting firm sent a letter advising him to no longer rely on years of financial statements it prepared based on his company's valuations, given questions about their accuracy.

Engoron described the letter as a "red-flag warning that the Trump financial statements are unreliable"

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and criticized Trump's company for its contention, in a statement to the news media, that because the accounting firm did not conclude there were material discrepancies in the documents, James' investigation should be shut down. That claim, he wrote, "is as audacious as it is preposterous."

Last summer, spurred by evidence uncovered in James' civil investigation, the Manhattan district attorney's office charged Weisselberg and the Trump Organization with tax fraud, alleging he collected more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation. Weisselberg and the company have pleaded not guilty.

In a separate ruling on Thursday, a judge ordered Weisselberg to sit for a limited deposition in Washington, D.C., Attorney General Karl Racine's lawsuit accusing Trump's inaugural committee of grossly overspending at Trump's Pennsylvania Avenue hotel to enrich Trump's family.

## Senate sends Biden bill averting federal shutdown

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate gave final approval Thursday to legislation averting a weekend government shutdown, sending President Joe Biden a measure designed to give bipartisan bargainers more time to reach an overdue deal financing federal agencies until fall.

Final passage was by a bipartisan 65-27 vote, five more than the 60 votes needed. The House easily approved the legislation last week. Each party had concluded that an election-year shutdown would be politically damaging, especially during a pandemic and a confrontation with Russia over its possible invasion of Ukraine.

Yet as with virtually all must-pass bills, politics hitched a ride. Before passage, conservatives forced votes on amendments including on one of the year's hot-button issues, COVID-19 vaccine mandates. They were defeated mostly along party lines.

One by Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, and several colleagues would have blocked existing federal vaccine requirements for the military, government employees and contractors and health care workers. Another by Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, would have halted federal funds for school districts imposing their own vaccine requirements.

Sen. Mike Braun, R-Ind., proposed another requiring Congress' non-binding federal budgets to balance within 10 years.

United Democrats can defeat GOP proposals in the 50-50 Senate with Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote. But with Harris in Europe and some Democrats missing because of illness or ailing spouses, Democrats prevailed after several Republicans also left for travel or to begin the chamber's recess.

A separate GOP move to block federal spending on pipes used for crack faded away after the Biden administration said it never planned to do that and would not. The money is part of a program aimed at helping drug abusers avoid hurting themselves further.

Amending the bill would have caused complications because the House is also gone for recess but would have had to pass the revamped version before sending it to Biden.

Without Senate passage of the identical House bill, agencies would have had to stop functioning over the weekend. The legislation will finance government through March 11.

Both parties hope the short-term measure will be the last one needed as negotiators craft compromise bills financing agencies through Sept. 30. Since the government's budget year began last Oct. 1, federal agencies have functioned at spending levels approved in the waning weeks of Donald Trump's presidency.

The new spending bills will be bipartisan compromises but will let Biden and Democrats controlling Congress put more of a stamp on spending priorities. They also are expected to provide defense increases the GOP wants.

In recent decades Congress has routinely finished its budget work months late. Averting shutdowns prompted by partisan point-scoring has become an accomplishment, not a given.

## The AP Interview: Fiona Hill says Putin has host of options



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By TRACY BROWN and LYNN BERRY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even if the U.S. succeeds in deterring Russian President Vladimir Putin from ordering a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, he will remain determined to bring Ukraine to heel and has “a whole host of options of things that he can do,” said Fiona Hill, a Russia scholar who has served in the past three U.S. administrations.

Russia could hit Ukraine with paralyzing cyberattacks, hobble its economy or even poison the Ukrainian president, Hill said in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday.

Hill’s sober assessment of the Ukraine crisis, which she says is far from over, came as President Joe Biden warned that Russia could invade Ukraine within days. Russia is believed to have some 150,000 troops near Ukraine’s borders, and Western leaders say Russia has moved in thousands more troops despite announcing that some were returning to their bases.

Hill, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and co-author of a book about Putin, is considered one of the world’s leading experts on Russia. During her government service, she was a national intelligence officer in the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, and was the senior director for Russia on the National Security Council under former President Donald Trump. She testified in Trump’s first impeachment inquiry and was highly critical of his actions regarding Ukraine.

Ukraine has strong historical and cultural ties to Russia, but since the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union it has looked increasingly to the West, with aspirations of becoming a member of the European Union and NATO.

For Putin, who insists Ukrainians and Russians are “one people,” this would be a devastating loss.

“Just in the thinking of the Kremlin and Putin in particular, Ukraine belongs to Russia,” Hill said. “So by any kind of means ... Russia intends to make sure that Ukraine is completely and utterly surrounded and constricted in every possible way.

“So it is entirely possible that Russia will choose to invade.”

She said it’s clear the Russians have been trying to create a pretext for an invasion.

“So we have to be very mindful that any of the reports that we get about any kinds of shelling or operations that may be carried out by Ukrainian forces are very likely to be the beginning of a pretext,” she said.

On Thursday, Russian-backed separatists fighting in eastern Ukraine reported an increase in Ukrainian shelling and said they returned fire. Ukraine disputed the claim, saying separatists shelled its forces, and hit a kindergarten, but they didn’t fire back. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the kindergarten shell a “big provocation.”

The Russians created just such a pretext before invading Georgia in 2008. Hill, a national intelligence officer at the time, said the U.S. warned the Georgians that the Russians were looking to draw them into a conflict to give them a pretext to take military action. The Georgians still fell for the provocation.

She praised President Joe Biden’s handling of the Ukraine crisis, particularly his administration’s release of intelligence findings about Russian activity. U.S. officials have accused Russia of planning a “false-flag” operation to create a pretext for an invasion and detailed Russian preparations for a potential assault.

“I think he’s dealt with it as best he can, and I do think that it’s been quite smart and getting ahead of the Russian disinformation with information,” Hill said.

She said Biden is in a different position from other leaders who may be encountering Putin for the first time. Biden met with Putin as vice president and was involved in U.S. policy toward Russia during his decades in the Senate.

“Putin has basically outfoxed and outsmarted an awful lot of people over the 22 years” he’s been in power by using his experience as a KGB operative and “Biden’s well aware of that,” Hill said.

Trump “thought he could charm Putin, but it’s Putin who manipulates people, not the other way around,” she said.

She said Biden was right to repeat his warnings about potential Russian aggression as he tries to prepare the United States’ European allies to push back.

“If he doesn’t repeat them, they will all think that everything is fine because everyone is looking now for a way out. We’re all looking for a solution. There’s not going to be one. Putin has declared war on us.”

She said it's possible the Biden administration's actions will avert a full-scale invasion by convincing the Kremlin that the costs would be too high.

"But Putin might then choose other options that are before him: cyber operations, subversive activity. They could try to poison President Zelenskyy of Ukraine. They've certainly done that on plenty of occasions," she said, noting that a previous president of Ukraine was poisoned with dioxin when he was running for election against the Kremlin's preferred candidate.

Another option for Putin, she said, was to try "to squeeze the Ukrainian economy so that it collapses." An economic collapse would undermine Zelenskyy at home. "Then the Russians might hope that he's overthrown by internal forces. That's what happened in Georgia," Hill said.

Hill said Putin also could keep Russian forces along Ukraine's borders and position nuclear-capable missiles just across the border in Belarus to keep up the pressure.

"So things are very complicated, and the Russians know that if they keep the pressure up by hook or by crook, in their view, they'll find a way of getting what they want in Ukraine. So we have to be constantly vigilant and pushing back."

## **Brazil mudslide death toll is at 117, police say 116 missing**

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and DIARLEI RODRIGUES Associated Press

PETROPOLIS, Brazil (AP) — The death toll from floods and landslides that swept down on the mountain city of Petropolis rose to at least 117 on Thursday and local officials said it could still rise sharply, with 116 more still unaccounted for.

The Rio de Janeiro state government confirmed the rising loss of life, with many feared buried in mud beneath the German-influenced city nestled in the mountains above the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Torrents of floodwaters and mudslides dragged cars and houses through the streets of the city Tuesday during the most intense rainfall in decades. One video showed two buses sinking into a swollen river as its passengers clambered out the windows, scrambling for safety. Some didn't make it to the banks and were washed away, out of sight.

Survivors dug through the ruined landscape to find loved ones even as more landslides appeared likely on the city's slopes. A small slide Thursday prompted an evacuation but didn't cause injuries.

As evening came, heavy showers returned to the region, sparking renewed concern among residents and rescue workers. Authorities insisted those living in at-risk areas should evacuate.

Rosilene Virginia said her brother barely escaped, and she considers it a miracle. But a friend hasn't yet been found.

"It's very sad to see people asking for help and having no way of helping, no way of doing anything," Virginia told The Associated Press as a man comforted her. "It's desperate, a feeling of loss so great."

As some people tried to clear away mud, others began burying lost relatives, with 17 funerals at the damaged cemetery.

Rio police said in a statement Thursday that about 200 agents were checking lists of the living, the dead and the missing by visiting checkpoints and shelters, as well as the city's morgue. They said they managed to remove three people from a list of missing after finding them alive in a local school.

"Every detail is important so we can track people," said Rio police investigator Elen Souto. "We need people to inform the full name of the missing person, their ID, physical traits and the clothes that person was wearing."

Petropolis, named for a former Brazilian emperor, has been a refuge for people escaping the summer heat and tourists keen to explore the so-called "Imperial City."

Its prosperity has also drawn residents from Rio's poorer regions and the population grew haphazardly, climbing mountainsides now covered with small residences packed tightly together, often in areas made more vulnerable by deforestation and inadequate drainage.

The state fire department said 25.8 centimeters (just over 10 inches) of rain fell within three hours on Tuesday -- almost as much as during the previous 30 days combined. Rio de Janeiro's Gov. Claudio Castro

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said in a press conference that the rains were the worst Petropolis has received since 1932.

"No one could predict rain as hard as this," Castro said. More rain was expected through the rest of the week, according to weather forecasters.

Castro added that almost 400 people were left homeless and 24 people were recovered alive. They were fortunate, and they were few.

Lisa Torres Machado, 64, said "the hand of God" spared her family from tragedy.

"A little room was left at my mom's house and she hid there with my two sisters and brother," Machado, a resident of Petropolis for three decades, told the AP. "I can't sleep. I still can't believe what's happening. We lost all our friends."

The stricken mountain region has seen similar catastrophes in recent decades, including one that caused more than 900 deaths. In the years since, Petropolis presented a plan to reduce risks of landslides, but works have advanced only slowly. The plan, presented in 2017, was based on analysis determining that 18% of the city's territory was at high risk for landslides and flooding.

Local authorities say more than 180 residents who live in at-risk areas were sheltering in schools. More equipment and manpower was expected to help rescue efforts on Thursday.

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro expressed solidarity while on a trip to Russia. Petropolis' city hall declared three days of mourning for the tragedy.

Southeastern Brazil has been punished with heavy rains since the start of the year, with more than 40 deaths recorded between incidents in Minas Gerais state in early January and Sao Paulo state later the same month.

## **Sharpton: Without no-knock warrant, Locke would be alive**

By MOHAMED IBRAHIM and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Rev. Al Sharpton told the hundreds gathered Thursday for Amir Locke's funeral that the 22-year-old Black man would still be alive if Minneapolis had banned no-knock warrants.

Sharpton was among several speakers who paid tribute to Locke and other Black people who have died in encounters with police. Along with song and prayer, the service at Shiloh Temple International Ministries included strong condemnations of racism in policing and emphatic demands for change.

"Amir was not guilty of anything but being young and Black in America," Sharpton said. He said if Minneapolis had banned no-knock warrants "we wouldn't be at a funeral this morning."

Sharpton also noted that February is Black History Month and he spoke about the history of slavery, detailing how slaves had their names taken away from them and were forced to take the names of their masters. He said Black people for too long have been seen as "nameless suspects."

"Enough is enough. We are no longer going to be your nameless suspects," Sharpton said, as the crowd applauded.

Earlier in the service, funeral-goers were prompted to "Say his name." They responded: "Amir Locke."

Locke's aunt, Linda Tyler, denounced racism in policing and demanded that officers stop talking about the need for more training, and instead start using de-escalation techniques on white and Black people alike.

"If it is something you simply cannot do, we just ask that you resign today instead of resigning another brother or sister to her grave," she said. She also said she doesn't want to hear about how policing is a difficult job.

"If you think being a police officer is a difficult profession, try to be a Black man," she said, as the crowd cheered.

A large portrait of Locke was displayed at the front of the church, with a white casket topped with roses and bouquets of flowers nearby. Minnesota Democratic Gov. Tim Walz and St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter were among those in attendance.

Locke's death has prompted an outcry against no-knock warrants, with a push by his family and others to ban them in Minnesota and beyond.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, who has come under scrutiny for the city's use of such warrants, and

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Minneapolis Interim Police Chief Amelia Huffman did not attend. Shiloh Temple Bishop Richard Howell Jr. told the Star Tribune before the service that Frey would not attend without an invitation from the family.

As the service began, hundreds of people sang the hymn "Lift Every Voice and Sing" before Howell led the church in prayer. Members of the Grammy Award-winning group Sounds of Blackness also performed. They later sang their song, "Black Lives Matter."

The service was held in the same church where Daunte Wright was remembered after he was killed by a suburban Minneapolis police officer in April. Sharpton, while presiding over Wright's funeral, decried "the stench of police brutality."

Locke was shot by a SWAT team member shortly before 7 a.m. on Feb. 2 as officers served a no-knock search warrant in a St. Paul homicide case. Body camera video shows at least four officers using a key to quietly enter the downtown apartment where he was staying, then shouting their presence. The video shows Locke, wrapped in a comforter, stirring and holding a handgun right before an officer shot him.

Locke wasn't named in the warrant and did not live at the apartment. Family members called his killing an "execution," noting the video shows an officer kicking the sofa, and suggested Locke was startled awake and disoriented. They have also pushed back against police saying Locke was shot after he pointed his gun at officers.

Frey has imposed a moratorium on such warrants while the city reexamines its policy. The state Bureau of Criminal Apprehension is investigating Locke's shooting.

While the funeral was happening, the House Public Safety Committee heard legislation that would significantly limit the use of no-knock warrants.

The bill, authored by Rep. Athena Hollins of St. Paul, only allows such warrants in a handful of exigent circumstances, such as kidnapping and human trafficking. It goes further than measures passed last year, which made it more difficult for officers to seek no-knock warrants.

Last year's legislation requires that applications for no-knock warrants be approved by a chief law enforcement officer and another supervisor. It also requires officers to say whether the warrant can be executed in daytime hours and explain why officers can't detain a suspect or search a residence by other means.

Several activists who testified in support of the new bill urged lawmakers to pass it, calling last year's legislation a "watered down" version of what the state needs. When asked if they have spoken with Senate Republicans, they shook their heads "no."

"They patted themselves on the back and claimed that they had passed some police accountability bills," civil rights attorney Nekima Levy Armstrong said. "It's really laughable, it's an insult to our intelligence and now another Black family has lost their son, their nephew, their cousin, our community member through the nonsensical use of a no-knock warrant."

## Nearly half of US bald eagles suffer lead poisoning

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's national bird is more beleaguered than previously believed, with nearly half of bald eagles tested across the U.S. showing signs of chronic lead exposure, according to a study published Thursday.

While the bald eagle population has rebounded from the brink of extinction since the U.S. banned the pesticide DDT in 1972, harmful levels of toxic lead were found in the bones of 46% of bald eagles sampled in 38 states from California to Florida, researchers reported in the journal *Science*.

Similar rates of lead exposure were found in golden eagles, which scientists say means the raptors likely consumed carrion or prey contaminated by lead from ammunition or fishing tackle.

The blood, bones, feathers and liver tissue of 1,210 eagles sampled from 2010 to 2018 were examined to assess chronic and acute lead exposure.

"This is the first time for any wildlife species that we've been able to evaluate lead exposure and population level consequences at a continental scale," said study co-author Todd Katzner, a wildlife biologist at U.S. Geological Survey in Boise, Idaho. "It's sort of stunning that nearly 50% of them are getting repeatedly exposed to lead."

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Lead is a neurotoxin that even in low doses impairs an eagle's balance and stamina, reducing its ability to fly, hunt and reproduce. In high doses, lead causes seizures, breathing difficulty and death.

The study estimated that lead exposure reduced the annual population growth of bald eagles by 4% and golden eagles by 1%.

Bald eagles are one of America's most celebrated conservation success stories, and the birds were removed from the U.S. Endangered Species List in 2007.

But scientists say that high lead levels are still a concern. Besides suppressing eagle population growth, lead exposure reduces their resilience in facing future challenges, such as climate change or infectious diseases.

"When we talk about recovery, it's not really the end of the story — there are still threats to bald eagles," said Krysten Schuler, a wildlife disease ecologist at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine, who was not involved in the study.

Previous studies have shown high lead exposure in specific regions, but not across the country. The blood samples from live eagles in the new study were taken from birds trapped and studied for other reasons; the bone, feather and liver samples came from eagles killed by collisions with vehicles or powerlines, or other misfortunes.

"Lead is present on the landscape and available to these birds more than we previously thought," said co-author Vince Slabe, a research wildlife biologist at the nonprofit Conservation Science Global. "A lead fragment the size of the end of a pin is large enough to cause mortality in an eagle."

The researchers also found elevated levels of lead exposure in fall and winter, coinciding with hunting season in many states.

During these months, eagles scavenge on carcasses and gut piles left by hunters, which are often riddled with shards of lead shot or bullet fragments.

Slabe said the upshot of the research was not to disparage hunters. "Hunters are one of the best conservation groups in this country," he said, noting that fees and taxes paid by hunters help fund state wildlife agencies, and that he also hunted deer and elk in Montana.

However, Slabe said he hopes the findings provide an opportunity to "talk to hunters about this issue in a clear manner" and that more hunters will voluntarily switch to non-lead ammunition such as copper bullets.

Lead ammunition for waterfowl hunting was banned in 1991, due to concerns about contamination of waterways, and wildlife authorities encouraged the use of nontoxic steel shot. However, lead ammunition is still common for upland bird hunting and big game hunting.

The amount of lead exposure varies regionally, with highest levels found in the Central Flyway, the new study found.

At the University of Minnesota's Raptor Center, veterinarian and executive director Victoria Hall said that "85 to 90% of the eagles that come into our hospital have some level of lead in their blood," and X-rays often show fragments of lead bullets in their stomachs.

Eagles with relatively low levels can be treated, she said, but those with high exposure can't be saved.

Laura Hale, board president at nonprofit Badger Run Wildlife Rehab in Klamath County, Oregon, said she'll never forget the first eagle she encountered with acute lead poisoning, in 2018. She had answered a resident's call about an eagle that seemed immobile in underbrush and brought it to the clinic.

The young bald eagle was wrapped in a blanket, unable to breathe properly, let alone stand or fly.

"There is something hideous when you watch an eagle struggling to breathe because of lead poisoning — it's really, really harsh," she said, her voice shaking. That eagle went into convulsions, and died within 48 hours.

Lead on the landscape affects not only eagles, but also many other birds — including hawks, vultures, ravens, swans and geese, said Jennifer Cedarleaf, avian director at Alaska Raptor Center, a nonprofit wildlife rescue in Sitka, Alaska.

Because eagles are very sensitive to lead, are so well-studied and attract so much public interest, "bald eagles are like the canary in the coal mine," she said. "They are the species that tells us: We have a bit of problem."

## 'Candy Bomber' who dropped sweets during Berlin airlift dies

By COLLEEN SLEVIN and KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — U.S. military pilot Gail S. Halvorsen — known as the "Candy Bomber" for his candy airdrops during the Berlin airlift after World War II ended — has died at age 101.

Halvorsen died Wednesday following a brief illness in his home state of Utah, surrounded by most of his children, James Stewart, the director of the Gail S. Halvorsen Aviation Education Foundation, said Thursday.

Halvorsen was beloved and venerated in Berlin, which he last visited in 2019 when the city celebrated the 70th anniversary of the day the Soviets lifted their post-World War II blockade cutting off supplies to West Berlin with a big party at the former Tempelhof airport in the German capital.

"Halvorsen's deeply human act has never been forgotten," Berlin Mayor Franziska Giffey said in a statement.

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox also praised Halvorsen, who was born in Salt Lake City but grew up on farms before getting his pilot's license.

"I know he's up there, handing out candy behind the pearly gates somewhere," he said.

After the United States entered World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Halvorsen trained as a fighter pilot and served as a transport pilot in the south Atlantic during World War II before flying food and other supplies to West Berlin as part of the airlift.

According to his account on the foundation's website, Halvorsen had mixed feelings about the mission to help the United States' former enemy after losing friends during the war.

But his attitude changed, and his new mission was launched, after meeting a group of children behind a fence at Tempelhof airport.

He offered them the two pieces of gum that he had, broken in half, and was touched to see those who got the gum sharing pieces of the wrapper with the other children, who smelled the paper. He promised to drop enough for all of them the following day as he flew, wiggling the wings of his plane as he flew over the airport, Halvorsen recalled.

He started doing so regularly, using his own candy ration, with handkerchiefs as parachutes to carry them to the ground. Soon other pilots and crews joined in what would be dubbed "Operation Little Vittles."

After an Associated Press story appeared under the headline "Lollipop Bomber Flies Over Berlin," a wave of candy and handkerchief donations, followed.

The airlift began on June 26, 1948, in an ambitious plan to feed and supply West Berlin after the Soviets — one of the four occupying powers of a divided Berlin after World War II — blockaded the city in an attempt to squeeze the U.S., Britain and France out of the enclave within Soviet-occupied eastern Germany.

Allied pilots flew 278,000 flights to Berlin, carrying about 2.3 million tons of food, coal, medicine and other supplies.

Finally, on May 12, 1949, the Soviets realized the blockade was futile and lifted their barricades. The airlift continued for several more months, however, as a precaution in case the Soviets changed their minds.

Memories in Germany of American soldiers handing out candy, chewing gum or fresh oranges are still omnipresent — especially for the older generation born during or right after the war.

Many fondly remember eating their first candy and fresh fruit during an era when people in bombed-out cities were starving or selling their family heirlooms on the black market for small amounts of flour, butter or oil just so they could get by.

Halvorsen's efforts to reach out to the people of Berlin helped send a message that they were not forgotten and would not be abandoned, Stewart said.

Despite his initial ambivalence about the airlift, Halvorsen, who grew up poor during the Great Depression, recognized a bit of himself in the children behind the fence and made a connection with them, he said.

"A simple person to person act of kindness can really change the world," Stewart said.

## Pelosi opens Biden State of the Union speech to full House

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By ZEKE MILLER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — All members of Congress are being invited to attend President Joe Biden's upcoming State of the Union address, crowding the House chamber for the first time since the outbreak of the pandemic as the White House tries to nudge COVID-19 toward the nation's rear-view mirror.

It's a further step toward normalcy, yet the big annual speech a week from next Tuesday could still turn into a new and disruptive display of national tensions and frustration over trying to move past the pandemic.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office released the guidelines Thursday from the Sergeant at Arms' office in consultation with the Office of the Physician.

Violations of the guidelines for social distancing and mask wearing during the event "will result in the attendee's removal," the memo said. Everyone will be required to be virus-tested ahead of time — rules that have been flouted by some lawmakers who have spurned pandemic guidelines. No guests will be allowed.

Some Biden allies are fretting that the Capitol scene could add fuel to the fire, or that anti-mask conservative Republicans could use the speech for some stunt or protest.

Biden's chief of staff Ron Klain, on Capitol Hill to meet Thursday with Senate Democrats, left the private lunch saying, "I think people are looking forward to the State of the Union."

Biden's address to Congress will play out against what Vice President Kamala Harris has called a "malaise" over the persistence of COVID and growing public impatience to get back to normal after two years of restrictions. Even Democratic-run state and local governments are lifting restrictions as cases, hospitalizations and deaths decline.

However, the State of the Union setting — Capitol Hill — remains one of the most significantly disrupted workplaces in the country, something of a ground zero for culture wars over the lingering pandemic restrictions and security concerns from the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection.

Pelosi indicated last week that lawmakers are aiming for "fuller participation" than last year, when attendance was limited. She said, "I think the people are ready to pivot in a way that shows to the American people we largely have been vaccinated here."

Seating for Biden's first address to a joint session of Congress last April was capped at about 200 — about 20% of usual capacity for a presidential presentation.

Though the Capitol and other federal properties set their own rules, the District of Columbia's indoor mask requirement for most indoor gatherings and businesses is to be lifted on the same day as Biden's address, the White House says it will be going by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance.

All year, the White House has taken extraordinary precautions to keep Biden from getting the virus, including requiring high-quality masks in his vicinity and limiting his travel and participation in large events.

In addition to members of Congress, the State of the Union audience traditionally includes Cabinet members, Supreme Court justices and military leaders. It's not yet clear if they will be invited. Thursday's memo included congressional staff and invited press.

A speech to a full House chamber would be by far the densest audience of Biden's presidency to date.

The debate over rules on wearing masks and getting vaccinated has become a major front in the nation's culture wars, breaking down along regional and political lines. Scenes of mask-less celebrities enjoying the Super Bowl — when schoolchildren in some jurisdictions are required to wear masks even when outside at recess — have drawn criticism for unfairness.

Federal officials are racing to finalize new, more flexible national guidance on mask-wearing and other policies before Biden steps up to the rostrum in the House chamber at 9:01 p.m.

"We want to give people a break from things like mask-wearing, when these metrics are better, and then have the ability to reach for them again, should things worsen," Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, said Wednesday.

She indicated the revised guidelines, to be coordinated with a broad administration plan for the "next phase" of the virus response, should come around the end of this month.

Administration officials expect that new strategy and message to figure prominently in Biden's speech as pandemic fatigue becomes more pronounced.

The White House sees his speech — in concert with the expected loosening of virus limits — as an op-

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portunity to help stem an erosion of public confidence in his leadership. According to an AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll last month, just 45% of Americans said they approved of Biden's handling of COVID-19, down from 57% in December and 66% in July.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell this week criticized the Democrats' approach, saying they only recently changed their tune because of shifting public opinion.

"The only science that's changed in the last two weeks is the political science," he said. "The only data that's changed in the last two weeks is Democrats' polling data."

As the Capitol remains largely off-limits to most visitors, shuttered from the start of the pandemic in 2020 and still closed in part for security reasons stemming from last year's insurrection, lawmakers have pushed for a re-opening.

Pelosi said at the start of the year she hoped to have it reopened soon.

But that's not fast enough for some. "It's remarkable that all 535 members of Congress and other government VIPs will be permitted to gather together for President Biden's State of the Union address, and yet the U.S. Capitol and Senate office buildings remain closed to the American people," said Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tenn., whose spokesman has been called for an interview by the committee investigating the attack on the Capitol.

## **EXPLAINER: How Trump testifying about his business hurts him**

The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — A judge's refusal Thursday to throw out a subpoena seeking former President Donald Trump's testimony in an investigation of his business affairs won't be the last word in the matter.

Trump's lawyers can appeal Judge Arthur Engoron's decision, a process that could take some time.

If the ruling holds up, though, Trump and two of his children, Donald Trump Jr. and Ivanka Trump, would have to meet with investigators from New York Attorney General Letitia James' office and answer (or refuse to answer) their questions.

Here's a look at what this is all about and why it is likely to be a headache for the Trumps, no matter what happens next:

### **WHAT IS THIS INVESTIGATION ABOUT?**

James, a Democrat, is considering whether to sue Trump or his company, the Trump Organization, over the way they have valued his assets over the years. Essentially, her investigators contend Trump and his company had a "fraudulent or misleading" pattern of saying properties they own such as golf courses and skyscrapers were worth more when they wanted better deals on loans, and less when they wanted tax breaks.

Earlier this month, Trump's longtime accounting firm cut ties with him, saying that a decade's worth of financial statements they'd prepared for his company, using information Trump and his people provided, were no longer reliable.

Trump has bristled at allegations that he lied about his wealth. He and his lawyers have pointed out that asset valuations can be subjective. They've repeatedly ripped the investigation as purely political, and even sued James to try to stop her probe.

### **IS THERE A CRIMINAL PROBE, TOO?**

Yes. The Manhattan district attorney is also investigating. A grand jury has been hearing testimony and reviewing documents covering much of the same subject material as James' civil probe.

### **WHAT IS A DEPOSITION?**

A deposition is like an interview, usually held in a law office or conference room, except witnesses must swear an oath and could be subject to penalties if they commit perjury. They're typically recorded.

Depositions, frequently depicted in legal dramas as pitting one side against the other across a table, are most common in civil litigation and are often used to obtain information or get someone's answers on the record.

### **WILL TRUMP HAVE TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS?**



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Since anything a person says in a civil deposition could also be used against them in a criminal investigation, witnesses are free to invoke their Fifth Amendment right to remain silent at any time.

So if he chooses, Trump could simply refuse to answer many questions.

This protection isn't absolute. A person's fear of prosecution has to be reasonable. And the fear must apply to the question that has been asked. For example, Trump likely couldn't refuse to answer a question like, "How old are you?"

Refusing to answer the toughest questions could hurt Trump in any civil trial. A jury is allowed to know if a person has refused to answer, and is also allowed to infer that if the person had answered the question, it might make them look bad.

**HAS TRUMP BEEN DEPOSED BEFORE?**

Yes, he's been involved in many lawsuits over his business career and has experience with depositions. He sat for one just last October in a lawsuit filed by protesters who claim they were roughed up by Trump security personnel.

Some Trump Organization executives have already given depositions in James' investigation, including the former president's son, Eric Trump, and the company's chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg. Trump Jr. and Ivanka Trump have also been executives in the family's business.

**IS THIS LIKE TESTIFYING BEFORE A GRAND JURY?**

There are some similarities, but in New York, anyone who testifies before a grand jury automatically gets immunity from prosecution for any crimes they discuss.

For this reason, New York prosecutors are unlikely to call Trump before a grand jury.

Trump's lawyers have complained that in seeking civil testimony, James is trying to get around those protections for potential criminal defendants.

**WHY IS THIS BAD FOR TRUMP?**

Experts say a fraud case against Trump is no slam dunk. For Trump, though, nothing good can come out of testifying, even if he has done nothing wrong.

At best, it generates embarrassing headlines about a former president having to answer questions about his business practices.

He could get further embarrassed if he refuses to answer questions on the grounds that it might incriminate him. Some people will assume — perhaps wrongly — that it means he's guilty.

For those loyal to Trump, the prospect of his being forced to submit to questioning by James' team will fuel the narrative he's long pushed that all of this amounts to a political persecution. On the other hand, it isn't likely to tamp down the growing pushback within a Republican Party he's ruled almost singlehandedly for years. And the longer this takes to play out, the closer it gets to primaries for this year's midterm elections.

The worst case scenario is that he reveals wrongdoing in the deposition that becomes the basis of either a lawsuit or a criminal charge. He could also get prosecuted for perjury if he lies.

## Satellite photos give a bird's-eye view of Ukraine crisis

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Widely available commercial satellite imagery of Russian troop positions bracketing Ukraine provides a bird's-eye view of an international crisis as it unfolds. But the pictures, while dramatic, have limitations.

High-resolution photos from commercial satellite companies like Maxar in recent days showed Russian troop assembly areas, airfields, artillery positions and other activities on the Russian side of the Ukrainian border and in southern Belarus as well as on the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

The images confirmed what U.S. and other Western officials have been saying: Russian forces are arrayed within striking distances of Ukraine. But they could not provide conclusive information about net additions or subtractions of Russian forces or reveal when or whether an invasion of Ukraine would happen. In such

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a fluid crisis, even day-old satellite photos might miss significant changes on the ground.

Western officials, citing their own sources of information, have disputed Moscow's claim that it pulled back some forces, and they asserted that the Russians added as many as 7,000 more troops in recent days. Commercial satellite images alone cannot provide that level of detail in real time or allow broader conclusions about the Russian buildup, such as the total number of its deployed troops.

"What you get out of an outfit like Maxar is very good information but not as precise or as timely as that provided to U.S. national leadership" through the government's own classified collection systems, said James Stavridis, a retired Navy admiral who served as the top NATO commander in Europe from 2009 to 2013. "Therefore I would strongly bias my views toward what is being reported by the U.S. government."

Before commercial satellite imagery became widely available and distributed online, Russia, the United States and other powers could largely hide their most sensitive military movements and deployments from near real-time public scrutiny. Although the public now can obtain a better view, this imagery is not nearly as precise, comprehensive or immediate as what the U.S. military can collect.

The U.S. military and intelligence agencies can piece together a better picture of what's happening by combining satellite imagery with real-time video as well as electronic information scooped up by aircraft such as the Air Force's RC-135 Rivet Joint, not to mention information gathered from human sources. The U.S. government also contracts with commercial satellite firms for imagery as a supplement and to ease the strain on imagery collection systems needed for other top-priority information.

Commercial satellite images, as a snapshot in time, do not provide indisputable evidence of exactly what the Russian military is doing or why.

"You can see something on a base, that looks like a base that has a lot of activity," and reach some broad conclusions. "But in terms of what's being done there, and what the units are — that takes a lot more intel," said Hans Kristensen, who has extensively analyzed commercial satellite imagery to study nuclear weapons developments in China and elsewhere in his position as director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists.

## Sexual assault reports increase at US military academies

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Reported sexual assaults at the U.S. military academies increased sharply during the 2020-21 school year, as students returned to in-person classes during the coronavirus pandemic.

The increase continues what officials believe is an upward trend at the academies, despite an influx of new sexual assault prevention and treatment programs.

Comparing the totals over the past three years, however, is tricky. The number of reports dropped at all the academies during the pandemic-shortened 2019-20 school year, when in-person classes were canceled and students were sent home in the spring to finish the semester online.

Although there were fewer reports that year than the previous year, one senior defense official said that based on trends the total likely would have shown an increase if students had not left early. In addition, the number of reported assaults in 2020-21 was also higher than the pre-pandemic school year of 2018-19.

According to the Pentagon report released Thursday, the overall jump in cases was driven by increases at the Air Force Academy and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. There were 131 assaults reported by cadets or midshipmen in 2020-21, compared with 88 the previous year and 122 a year earlier.

Of the 131, cadets at the Air Force Academy in Colorado reported 52 assaults, compared with 46 at West Point in New York and 33 at the U.S. Naval Academy in Maryland.

During a visit to West Point earlier this month, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth met with academy leaders, staff members and cadets and talked about the sexual assault problem. She said they talked about the so-called Trust Program, which is led by cadets and helps train them to address sexual assault and harassment and encourage intervention when they see questionable behavior.

"West Point is working hard to increase cadets' trust in their reporting system while at the same time preventing events from happening in the first place," Wormuth said, adding that West Point has increased

resources for victims “to ensure the academy handles each case with care.”

Victims at the academies are encouraged to report assaults, and at times students will come forward to talk about unwanted sexual contact that happened in the years before they started school there. If those episodes of unwanted sexual contact are included, as well as those involving students but reported by individuals outside the schools, the total sexual assault reports for 2020-21 is 161. That also is an increase over the pre-pandemic year, when there were 148.

The latest increase comes as Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and other leaders struggle to curb sexual assaults across the military, amid escalating criticism from Capitol Hill. Lawmakers are demanding better prevention efforts and more aggressive prosecutions.

Austin and others have acknowledged that while they continue to study what works and what doesn't, they haven't yet found the answers.

Nate Galbreath, acting director of the Pentagon's sexual assault prevention office, said the department is encouraged that students are more willing to come forward and report assaults, allowing victims to get help and perpetrators to be held accountable. But the leaders across the military said they are also very concerned that the trends are going in the wrong direction, and Galbreath said that while there is an unprecedented attention on the problem right now, there is “still much more work to be done.”

Galbreath acknowledged that prevention efforts have been underway for years, but he said programs that may have worked in the past do not necessarily work now. He said the department is using scientific studies to narrow down what programs actually are successful.

Officials also say it is difficult to determine what impact the pandemic may have had. Students returned to the academies in the fall of 2020 but faced widespread restrictions, random COVID-19 testing and a mix of online and in-person classes. In many cases bars, restaurants and other businesses around the campuses may have been closed or less accessible.

A planned anonymous survey of the students, which often can provide greater insight into the problem, was not conducted in 2020 due to the pandemic. The survey normally is done every two years, and officials believe it provides a more accurate picture of assaults, harassment and unwanted sexual contact. A survey will be conducted this spring, Galbreath said.

## How American cash for Canada protests could sway US politics

By RICHARD LARDNER, MICHELLE R. SMITH and ALI SWENSON The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Canadians who have disrupted travel and trade with the U.S. and occupied downtown Ottawa for nearly three weeks have been cheered and funded by American right-wing activists and conservative politicians who also oppose vaccine mandates and the country's liberal leader.

Yet whatever impact the protests have on Canadian society and the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, experts say the outside support is really aimed at energizing conservative politics in the U.S. Midterm elections are looming, and some Republicans think standing with the protesters up north will galvanize fund-raising and voter turnout at home, these experts say.

“The kind of narratives that the truckers and the trucker convoy are focusing on are going to be really important issues for the (U.S.) elections coming ahead,” said Samantha Bradshaw, a postdoctoral fellow at the Digital Civil Society Lab at Stanford University. “And so using this protest as an opportunity to galvanize their own supporters and other groups, I think it's very much an opportunity for them.”

Police poured into downtown Ottawa on Thursday, and work crews erected fences around Parliament, in what protesters feared was a prelude to a crackdown.

About 44 percent of the nearly \$10 million in contributions to support the protesters originated from U.S. donors, according to an Associated Press analysis of leaked donor files. U.S. Republican elected officials, including Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, have praised the protesters calling them “heroes” and “patriots.”

Fox News host Sean Hannity told two protest organizers on his show on Wednesday that “you do have a lot of support from your friends in America. That I can tell you.” He added: “We have a movement in

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America that's starting very soon."

Trudeau and other senior Canadian officials have been sharply critical of the financial support coming from other countries.

"What this country is facing is a largely foreign-funded, targeted and coordinated attack on critical infrastructure and our democratic institutions," Bill Blair, Canada's minister of public safety and emergency preparedness, said earlier this week.

Ian Reifowitz, professor of historical studies at the State University of New York, called the protests a "gift" for Republicans in the U.S., and he predicted they'll use the populist appeal of the demonstrations to raise money ahead of the midterm elections in November.

"They constantly need fresh outrages," said Reifowitz, the author of "The Tribalization of Politics: How Rush Limbaugh's Race-Baiting Rhetoric on the Obama Presidency Paved the Way for Trump."

"It's a terrific (issue) eight or nine months before the election for them," he said. "It allows you to bank money, bank volunteers and energize the base, which is what you want to do."

Demonstrators in Ottawa have been regularly supplied with fuel and food, and the area around Parliament Hill has at times resembled a spectacular carnival with bouncy castles, gyms, a playground and a concert stage with DJs.

GiveSendGo, a website used to collect donations for the Canadian protests, has collected at least \$9.58 million dollars, including \$4.2 million, or 44%, that originated in the United States, according to a database of donor information posted online by DDoSecrets, a non-profit group.

The Canadian government has been working to block protesters' access to these funds, however, and it is not clear how much of the money has ultimately gotten through.

Millions of dollars raised through another crowdfunding site, GoFundMe, were blocked after Canadian officials raised objections with the company, which determined that the effort violated its terms of service around unlawful activity.

The GiveSendGo database analyzed by AP showed more than 109,000 donations through Friday night to campaigns in support of the protests, with a little under 62,000 coming from the U.S.

The GiveSendGo data listed several Americans as giving thousands or tens of thousands of dollars to the protest, with the largest single donation of \$90,000 coming from a person who identified himself as Thomas M. Siebel.

Siebel, the billionaire founder of software company Siebel Systems, did not respond to messages sent to an email associated with a foundation he runs and to his LinkedIn account.

A representative from the Siebel Scholars Foundation, who signed her name only as Jennifer, did not respond to questions about whether he had donated the money. But she said Siebel has a record of supporting several causes, including efforts to "protect individual liberty."

"These are personal initiatives and have nothing to do with the companies with which he is associated," she wrote.

Siebel has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to Republican candidates and organizations over the last 20 years, according to Federal Election Commission records, including a \$400,000 contribution in 2019 to a GOP fundraising committee called "Take Back the House 2020."

The GiveSendGo Freedom Convoy campaign was created on Jan. 27 by Tamara Lich. She previously belonged to the far-right Maverick Party, which calls for western Canada to become independent.

The Canadian government moved earlier this week to cut off funding for the protesters by broadening the scope of the country's anti-money laundering and terrorist financing rules to cover crowdfunding platforms like GiveSendGo.

"We are making these changes because we know that these platforms are being used to support illegal blockades and illegal activity, which is damaging the Canadian economy," said Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland.

Perhaps more important than the financial support is the cheerleading the Canadian protesters have received from prominent American conservative politicians and pundits, like Hannity, who see kindred

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spirits in their northern neighbors opposing vaccine mandates.

On the same day Lich created the GiveSendGo campaign, retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn shared a video of the convoy in a post on the messaging app Telegram.

"These truckers are fighting back against the nonsense and tyranny, especially coming from the Canadian government," wrote Flynn, the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency who served briefly as former President Donald Trump's national security adviser.

A few days later, Flynn urged people to donate to the Canadian protesters. Earlier this week, he twice posted the message "#TrudeauTheCoward" on Telegram, referring to the prime minister who leads Canada's Liberal Party.

Fox News hosts regularly laud the protests, and Trump weighed in with a broadside at Trudeau, calling him a "far left lunatic" who has "destroyed Canada with insane COVID mandates." Cruz called the truckers "heroes" and "patriots," and Greene said she cannot wait to see a convoy protest in Washington.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., said he hopes truckers come to America and "clog up cities" in an interview last week with the Daily Signal, a news website of the conservative Heritage Foundation.

Far-right and anti-vaccine activists, inspired by the Canadian actions, are now planning American versions of the protests against COVID-19 mandates and restrictions modeled on the Canadian demonstrations.

The protests in Canada have also created a moneymaking opportunity for some, including a chain of "New England for Trump" stores, which were selling merchandise inspired by the demonstrators. A mesh-back "Freedom Convoy 2022" trucker hat goes for \$25. —

Swenson reported from New York, and Smith reported from Providence, Rhode Island. Associated Press writers Amanda Seitz in Washington, Larry Fenn in New York, Frank Bajak in Boston and Camille Fassett in Oakland, California, contributed to this report.

## Vatican spy story takes center stage as fraud trial resumes

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican's big fraud and extortion trial resumes Friday after exposing some unseemly realities of how the Holy See operates, with a new spy story taking center stage that is more befitting of a 007 thriller than the inner workings of a papacy.

According to written testimony obtained Thursday, one of Pope Francis' top advisers brought in members of the Italian secret service to sweep his office for bugs and commissioned intelligence reports from them, completely bypassing the Vatican's own police force in the process.

The reported actions of Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, the No. 2 in the Vatican secretariat of state, raise some fundamental questions about the security and sovereignty of the Vatican City State, since he purportedly invited foreign intelligence operatives into the Holy See's inner sanctum, and then outsourced internal Vatican police spy work to them.

Peña Parra hasn't been charged with any crime, though his subordinates have. They are among 10 people, including a once-powerful cardinal, on trial in the Vatican criminal tribunal in connection with the Vatican's bungled 350 million euro investment in a London property.

In the trial, which resumes Friday, prosecutors have accused the Holy See's longtime money manager, Italian brokers and lawyers of fleecing the pope of tens of millions in fees and of then extorting the Vatican of 15 million euros to finally get full ownership of the property.

Peña Parra's role in the scandal has always been anomalous, since he authorized his subordinates to negotiate the final contracts in the deal, and then triggered a suspicious transaction report when he sought a 150-million-euro loan from the Vatican bank to extinguish the mortgage on the property. But prosecutors at least for now have spared him indictment.

The new testimony, reported by the Italian agency adnkronos and "Domani" daily and obtained Thursday by The Associated Press, provides another twist in the affair and underscores the Hollywood levels of intrigue that plague the Vatican and have rarely come to light. Until now.

One of Peña Parra's former deputies, Vincenzo Mauriello, told prosecutors that in May or June 2019, after

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the London deal was finalized, Peña Parra told him he wanted to do a security sweep of his office because he believed his private conversations “after a short while were becoming known outside.”

Peña Parra asked if Mauriello if he knew anyone outside the Vatican security apparatus who could do the job and Mauriello said he suggested a friend who worked in Italy’s AISI foreign intelligence service. After a preliminary meeting, the spy, Andrea Tineri, conducted the sweep on a Friday afternoon when few people were in the palazzo, Mauriello testified.

Nothing was found. But Peña Parra then asked Tineri to produce some intelligence dossiers on key figures, Mauriello testified. Tineri and his boss at the AISI presented the findings to Peña Parra, handing over a white envelope in one of their many encounters on Vatican soil, he said.

Adnkronos quoted unnamed Italian intelligence officials as denying Mauriello’s account. But Vatican prosecutors identified Tineri by name in their search warrant as one of Mauriello’s contacts, and said he had visited the Vatican eight times. Vatican prosecutors apparently didn’t realize he was a member of Italy’s foreign intelligence service and that they were identifying and publishing wiretaps of a foreign spy.

That the Vatican and Italy cooperate on security matters is not unusual: Italian police patrol St. Peter’s Square, and there are official levels of cooperation between Vatican gendarmes and Italian law enforcement. But Tineri’s spywork for Peña Parra certainly fell outside official channels, intentionally so. Mauriello recalled that he even had to escort Tineri past the Vatican security booth at one point because the gendarmes were asking too many questions.

Peña Parra, who remains in his day job as the Vatican interior minister, declined to comment Thursday, citing the ongoing trial, his office said. He didn’t refer to Mauriello’s claims in his lengthy defense memo to Vatican prosecutors. But he made it clear that as soon as he arrived at the Vatican in late 2018, he found a series of problematic activities that he sought to clean up, including outrageous spending, intransigent employees and dubious decision-making in the operational headquarters of the Holy See.

It is not the first time the secretariat of state has outsourced intelligence work: Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who was Peña Parra’s predecessor, is on trial in part because he hired a self-styled Sardinian security analyst with purported claims to the Italian intelligence services as a consultant to help negotiate the liberation of Catholic missionary hostages in Africa.

And Pope Francis himself authorized Vatican prosecutors to conduct wiretaps of Italian citizens on Italian soil, in yet another of the sovereignty-defying details of the case.

## **EXPLAINER: Russia-backed rebels a thorn in Ukraine’s side**

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Amid fears of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, tensions have also soared in the country’s east, where Ukrainian forces are locked in a long conflict with Russia-backed separatists.

More than 14,000 people have been killed in nearly eight years of fighting, and a sharp increase in skirmishes Thursday raised concern that Moscow could use the situation as a pretext for an incursion.

Here is a look at the state of affairs in the rebel-controlled territories in eastern Ukraine:

### **SEPARATIST REBELLION**

When Ukraine’s Moscow-friendly president was driven from office by mass protests in February 2014, Russia responded by annexing Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula. It then threw its weight behind an insurgency in the mostly Russian-speaking east, known as Donbas.

In April 2014, Russia-backed rebels seized government buildings in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, proclaimed the creation of “people’s republics” there and battled Ukrainian troops and volunteer battalions.

The following month, the separatist regions held a popular vote to declare independence and make a bid to become part of Russia. Moscow hasn’t accepted the motion, in the hope of using the regions as a tool to keep Ukraine in its orbit and prevent it from joining NATO.

Ukraine and the West accused Russia of backing the rebels with troops and weapons. Moscow denied that, saying any Russians who fought in the east were volunteers.

Amid ferocious battles involving tanks, heavy artillery and warplanes, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot

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down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, killing all 298 people aboard. An international probe concluded that the passenger jet was downed by a Russia-supplied missile from the rebel-controlled territory, but Moscow denied any involvement.

## PEACE AGREEMENTS

After a massive defeat of Ukrainian troops in the battle of Ilovaik in August 2014, envoys from Kyiv, the rebels and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe signed a truce in the Belarusian capital of Minsk in September 2014.

The document envisaged an OSCE-observed cease-fire, a pullback of all foreign fighters, an exchange of prisoners and hostages, an amnesty for the rebels and a promise that separatist regions could have a degree of self-rule.

The deal quickly collapsed and large-scale fighting resumed, leading to another major defeat for Ukrainian forces at Debaltseve in January-February of 2015.

France and Germany brokered another peace agreement, which was signed in Minsk in February 2015 by representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the rebels. It envisaged a new cease-fire, a pullback of heavy weapons and a series of moves toward a political settlement. A declaration in support of the deal was signed by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany.

## FROZEN CONFLICT

The 2015 peace deal was a major diplomatic coup for the Kremlin, obliging Ukraine to grant special status to the separatist regions, allowing them to create their own police force and have a say in appointing local prosecutors and judges. It also envisaged that Ukraine could only regain control over the roughly 200-kilometer (125-mile) border with Russia in rebel regions after they get self-rule and hold OSCE-monitored local elections — balloting that would almost certainly keep pro-Moscow rebels in power there.

Many Ukrainians see it as a betrayal of national interests and its implementation has stalled.

The Minsk document helped end full-scale fighting, but the situation has remained tense and regular skirmishes have continued along the tense line of contact.

With the Minsk deal effectively stalled, Moscow's hope to use rebel regions to directly influence Ukraine's politics has failed, but the frozen conflict has drained Kyiv's resources and effectively stymied its goal of joining NATO — which is enshrined in the Ukrainian constitution.

Moscow also has worked to secure its hold on the rebel regions by handing out more than 720,000 Russian passports to roughly one-fifth of their population of about 3.6 million. It has provided economic and financial assistance to the separatist territories, but the aid has been insufficient to alleviate the massive damage from fighting and shore up the economy. The Donbas region accounted for about 16% of Ukraine's Gross Domestic Product before the conflict.

## EFFORTS TO REVIVE PEACE DEAL

Amid soaring tensions over the Russian troop concentration near Ukraine, France and Germany have undertaken renewed efforts to encourage compliance with the 2015 deal, in the hope that it could help defuse the standoff.

Facing calls from Berlin and Paris for its implementation, Ukrainian officials have strengthened criticism of the Minsk deal and warned that it could lead to the country's demise.

Two rounds of talks in Paris and Berlin between presidential envoys from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany have yielded no progress.

Amid the deadlock in talks, the lower house of Russian parliament this week urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to recognize the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk. Putin signaled, however, that he wasn't inclined to make the move that would effectively shatter the Minsk deal.

## ESCALATION OF HOSTILITIES

Ukraine and the rebels accused each other Thursday of intensive shelling along the line of contact in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Separatist authorities claimed that Ukraine mounted a "large-scale provocation" and said they returned fire.

Ukraine denied opening fire and said the separatists were shelling government-controlled areas with

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heavy artillery and mortars. The Ukrainian military command charged that some shells hit a kindergarten in Stanytsia Luhanska, wounding two civilians, and cut power supply to half of the town.

Yasar Halit Cevik, head of the OSCE monitoring mission, said it reported 500 explosions along the contact line between Wednesday evening and 11:20 am Thursday. Cevik told the United Nations Security Council that the tension appeared to be easing after that with about 30 explosions reported, adding "it is critically important to de-escalate immediately."

## 'The brand is so toxic': Dems fear extinction in rural US

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

SMETHPORT, Pa. (AP) — Some Democrats in rural Pennsylvania are afraid to tell you they're Democrats.

The party's brand is so toxic in the small towns 100 miles northeast of Pittsburgh that some liberals have removed bumper stickers and yard signs and refuse to acknowledge publicly their party affiliation. These Democrats are used to being outnumbered by the local Republican majority, but as their numbers continue to dwindle, those who remain are feeling increasingly isolated and unwelcome in their own communities.

"The hatred for Democrats is just unbelievable," said Tim Holohan, an accountant based in rural McKean County who recently encouraged his daughter to get rid of a pro-Joe Biden bumper sticker. "I feel like we're on the run."

The climate across rural Pennsylvania is symptomatic of a larger political problem threatening the Democratic Party heading into the November elections. Beyond losing votes in virtually every election since 2008, Democrats have been effectively ostracized from the overwhelmingly white parts of rural America, leaving party leaders with few options to reverse a cultural trend that is redefining the political landscape.

The shifting climate helped Republicans limit Democratic inroads in 2020 — the GOP actually gained House seats despite Donald Trump's presidential loss. A year later, surging rural support enabled Republicans to claim the Virginia governorship. A small but vocal group of Democratic officials now fears the same trends will undermine their atic candidates in Ohio, Wisconsin, Georgia, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, states that will help decide the Senate majority in November, and the White House two years after that.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party continues to devote the vast majority of its energy, messaging and resources to voters in more populated urban and suburban areas.

In Pennsylvania, Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, a leading candidate in the Senate contest, insists his party can no longer afford to ignore rural voters. The former small-town mayor drove his black Dodge Ram pickup truck across five rural counties last weekend to face voters who almost never see statewide Democratic candidates.

Fetterman, wearing his signature hooded sweatshirt and gym shorts despite the freezing temperatures, described himself as a champion for "the forgotten, the marginalized and the left-behind places" as he addressed roughly 100 people inside a bingo hall in McKean County, a place Trump carried with 72% of the vote in 2020.

"These are the kind of places that matter just as much as any other place," Fetterman said as the crowd cheered.

The Democratic Party's struggle in rural America has been building for years. And it's getting worse.

Barack Obama won 875 counties nationwide in his overwhelming 2008 victory. Twelve years later, Biden won only 527. The vast majority of those losses — 260 of the 348 counties — took place in rural counties, according to data compiled by The Associated Press.

The worst losses were concentrated in largely white areas across the Midwest: 21 rural counties in Michigan flipped from Obama in 2008 to Trump in 2020; Democrats lost 28 rural counties in Minnesota, 32 in Wisconsin and a whopping 45 in Iowa. At the same time, recent Republican voter registration gains in swing states such as Florida and North Carolina were fueled disproportionately by rural voters.

Biden overcame rural losses to beat Trump in 2020 because of gains in more populous Democratic counties. Perhaps because of his victory, some Democratic officials worry that party leaders do not appreciate the severity of the threat.



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Democratic Rep. Jim Cooper of Tennessee, who recently announced he would not seek reelection to Congress this fall, warns that the party is facing extinction in small-town America.

"It's hard to sink lower than we are right now. You're almost automatically a pariah in rural areas if you have a D after your name," Cooper told the AP.

Even if Democrats continue to eke out victories by piling up urban and suburban votes, former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota fears her party will have "unstable majorities" if they cannot stop the bleeding in rural areas.

"Democrats have the House, they have the Senate, the presidency, but it's an unstable majority. By that, I mean, the narrowest kind, making it difficult to advance ideas and build coalitions," said Heitkamp, who now heads the One Country Project, which is focused on engaging rural voters.

She criticized her party's go-to strategy for reaching rural voters: focusing on farmers and pledging to improve high-speed internet. At the same time, she said Democrats are hurting themselves by not speaking out more forcefully against far-left positions that alienate rural voters, such as the push to "defund the police."

While only a handful of Democrats in Congress support stripping such money from police departments, for example, conservative media popular in rural communities — particularly Fox News — amplifies such positions.

"We're letting Republicans use the language of the far left to define the Democratic Party, and we can't do that," Heitkamp said. "The trend lines in rural America are very, very bad. ... Now, the brand is so toxic that people who are Democrats, the ones left, aren't fighting for the party."

To help win back rural voters, the Democratic National Committee has tapped Kylie Oversen, a former North Dakota legislator, to work with rural organizers and state party rural caucuses as the chair of the national committee's rural council. The DNC also says it's sharing resources with people on the ground in rural areas to help improve training, recruiting and organizing.

So far, at least, those resources are not making life any easier for Democrats in northwestern Pennsylvania.

At one of Fetterman's weekend stops in rural Clarion, a group of voters said they've been effectively ostracized by their community — and even family members, in some cases — for being Democrats. One woman brings her political signs inside at night so they aren't vandalized or stolen.

"You have to be careful around here," said Barbara Speer, 68, a retired sixth grade teacher.

Nearby, Michelle's Cafe on Clarion's main street is one of the few gathering points for local Democrats. A sign on the door proclaims support for Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ rights and other progressive priorities.

But the cafe owner, 33-year-old Kaitlyn Nevel, isn't comfortable sharing her political affiliation when asked.

"I would rather not say, just because it's a small town," she said.

One patron, 22-year-old college student Eugenia Barboza, said the cafe is one of the few places in town she feels safe as a Latina immigrant. Just down the road, she said, a caravan of Trump supporters met up to drive to the deadly protests in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021.

Barboza said she's grateful that Democrats like Fetterman are willing to come to rural areas, but she isn't hopeful that it'll change much.

"It would take a lot more than just him," she said. "It would take years and years and years."

## Estimated 73% of US now immune to omicron: Is that enough?

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The omicron wave that assaulted the United States this winter also bolstered its defenses, leaving enough protection against the coronavirus that future spikes will likely require much less — if any — dramatic disruption to society.

Millions of individual Americans' immune systems now recognize the virus and are primed to fight it off if they encounter omicron, or even another variant.

About half of eligible Americans have received booster shots, there have been nearly 80 million confirmed infections overall and many more infections have never been reported. One influential model uses those

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factors and others to estimate that 73% of Americans are, for now, immune to omicron, the dominant variant, and that could rise to 80% by mid-March.

This will prevent or shorten new illnesses in protected people and reduce the amount of virus circulating overall, likely tamping down new waves. Hospitals will get a break from overwhelmed ICUs, experts agree.

"We have changed," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle. "We have been exposed to this virus and we know how to deal with it."

The coronavirus — the current variant or future ones that are sure to pop up — remains a dangerous germ. It is still infecting more than 130,000 Americans and killing more than 2,000 every day. Tens of millions of people remain vulnerable.

And there will be future outbreaks. The notion of a "herd immunity" that could stop the virus has slipped away under the harsh reality of new variants, waning immunity, and the rejection of vaccines by some Americans.

But the coronavirus is no longer new. Two years ago it arrived in a nation where nobody's immune system had seen it before. The entire population — 330 million people — were immunologically naive, that is, susceptible to infection.

"I am optimistic even if we have a surge in summer, cases will go up, but hospitalizations and deaths will not," said Mokdad, who works on the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation model, which calculated the 73% figure for The Associated Press.

With varying degrees of relief and caution, many Americans are starting to return to their pre-pandemic lifestyles.

Sarah Rixen, 41, of Bismarck, North Dakota, started singing again with a civic chorus after taking a year off. Now, with omicron winding down, she said she feels more confident than at any time since the crisis began.

"But I am still a little leery that there could be another variant around the corner," said Rixen, noting that her family and most of her relatives are fully vaccinated. "I am still going to wear a mask."

As mask mandates ease, workers return to offices and flights fill up, experts are trying to understand whether this return to normal can last, or if another setback is looming.

To address that, researchers are trying to answer questions about the virus, the vaccine, and how our bodies respond: How fast is booster protection waning against omicron? How long does protection from infection last? How many mild infections were never reported? How many people got infected but had no symptoms?

To find clues, they use health data from other countries such as Britain, Denmark, South Africa and Qatar to project what could be in store.

Scientists at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health estimate that about three out of four people in the United States will have been infected by omicron by the end of the surge.

"We know it's a huge proportion of the population," said Shaun Truelove, an epidemiologist and disease modeler at Johns Hopkins. "This varies a lot by location, and in some areas we expect the number infected to be closer to one in two."

That means different regions or groups of people have different level of protection — and risk. In Virginia, disease modelers are thinking about their population in terms of groups with different levels of immunity.

They estimate about 45% of Virginians have the highest level of immunity through boosted vaccination or through vaccination plus a recent infection with omicron. Another 47% have immunity that has waned somewhat; and 7% are the most vulnerable because they were never vaccinated and never infected.

In all, the vast majority of Virginians have at least some immunity, said Bryan Lewis, a computational epidemiologist who leads University of Virginia's COVID-19 modeling team.

"That's going to be a nice shield of armor for our population as a whole," Lewis said. "If we do get to very low case rates, we certainly can ease back on some of these restrictions."

Still, while the population is better protected, many individuals are not. Even by the most optimistic estimates for population immunity, 80 million or so Americans are still vulnerable. That's about the same as the total number of confirmed infections in the U.S. during the pandemic.

"The 26% who could still get omicron right now have to be very careful," Mokdad said.

Andrew Pekosz, a virus researcher at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, is concerned that people — particularly unvaccinated omicron survivors — may have a false sense of security. "In an ideal world, unvaccinated individuals infected with omicron would be lining up for a vaccine shot," he said.

Also, estimating protection is far from an exact science. It's a moving target, as immunity wanes and new variants circulate. Protection varies widely from person to person. And it's impossible to know for sure how many people are protected at all. The IHME model estimates a wide range — from 63% to 81% of Americans.

"We've reached a much better position for the coming months, but with waning immunity we shouldn't take it for granted," Mokdad said.

## Shiffrin's Olympics: 5 individual races, no medals, 3 DNFs

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP National Writer

BEIJING (AP) — There was simply no way to predict this. Not for anyone, including Mikaela Shiffrin herself.

That the American skier would go 0 for 5 in individual races at the Beijing Olympics, leaving without a medal from any and with a best showing of ninth place, was hard enough to imagine beforehand.

That she would not even manage to finish three of those events — the three that are her best, including Thursday's Alpine combined — was among the most surprising developments of the entire 2022 Games.

"I'm certainly questioning a lot," Shiffrin said. "I'm really disappointed. And I'm really frustrated."

She arrived in China as one of the biggest stars of ski racing — or any sport. Owner of three Olympic medals, two golds and a silver. Six world championship golds. Three overall World Cup titles.

Still, the 26-year-old from Colorado just never displayed her enviable technique and talent or big-moment gumption at the National Alpine Skiing Center in the brown, craggy mountains of Yanqing zone about 55 miles (90 kilometers) northwest of central Beijing.

"This is incredibly difficult for her as a person," U.S. head women's Alpine coach Paul Kristofic said. "We had big expectations coming here, and it hasn't gone the way we hoped, of course."

Shiffrin spoke openly and at length in the months leading up to these races about those enormous expectations — from herself, from fans, from coaches, even close friends and family. She also was frank about the lingering heartache from the accidental death of her father two years ago.

On Thursday, she acknowledged maybe she was pushing too hard and not leaving herself enough margin for error in the tick-tock-tick-tock, left-right rhythm of a slalom, but otherwise was not sure of any common denominator for the miscues.

"The pressure's there. It's always there. And I don't feel uncomfortable or even unfamiliar with it," she said, not far from where Switzerland's Michelle Gisin received her second consecutive combined gold medal. "Some days I'm a little bit more tight and it's still possible to ski well. And some days I'm a little looser and it's still possible to ski well."

Shiffrin's latest subpar performance came in the second leg of the combined, which adds the times from one downhill run and one slalom run.

She was fifth-fastest in the downhill, certainly in contention for a higher finish, perhaps even a gold. What she needed to do, and could not, was stay upright for 50 seconds or so — long enough get to the bottom of the slope as a light snow descended.

Trouble came after about 10 gates and 10 seconds. She lost her balance, could not regain it, and ended up landing on her hip.

Shiffrin sat for a few moments in the snow. When she rose, she shook her head, then looked up at the hill, as though trying to figure out exactly where things went wrong.

Later, course reports — sent to Americans who raced after Shiffrin — warned of a rut on the slope that might have been what caused Thursday's issue.

That was among several things she mentioned in discussing factors that could have contributed to what went wrong along the way over the past 1 1/2 weeks: the logistical challenges of an Olympics amid a

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pandemic; a late-December bout of COVID-19 that kept her off her skis for 10 days; icy, manufactured snow that several racers found different from what they're used to in Europe.

Didn't sound like someone offering excuses. Sounded like someone searching for explanations, right along with everybody else.

Afterward, Shiffrin said she could imagine people back home thinking before the slalom portion of the combined: "This could just be the medal that salvages everything, after all."

But instead, she said, "I just feel like a joke."

On Thursday evening, Shiffrin posted two tweets — one with critical words that seemed to come from social media, the other with her response to "the people who have so much apparent hate."

In truth, her series of miscues were as hard for her to believe as for anyone else.

"Beyond walking away from the Games with no medals — no individual medals — the most disappointing thing is I had multiple opportunities to ski slalom on this track," Shiffrin said, "and I, well, you know, failed in all of them."

It was quite similar to what happened in the first run in each of her first two races: the two-leg giant slalom on Feb. 7, and the two-leg slalom on Feb. 9. She didn't finish those, either, which was particularly stunning because she already won a gold in each at past Olympics and because she is lauded by other skiers, past and present, for her sound skills and unparalleled ability to complete courses.

The "Did Not Finish" beside her name on the result sheet for the GS in Beijing was her first in more than four years. Her 47 career World Cup slalom victories are more than any other racer has won in any discipline.

As for Shiffrin's other races, she was ninth in the super-G and 18th in the downhill, making her Olympic debuts in both.

Now she plans to enter the team event on Saturday, when the Alpine schedule concludes.

"She's human; she's just like the rest of us. She's allowed to have 'DNFs' without it being this huge ordeal. It's ski racing; something wrong can happen in a split-second. It's just the way it goes. We have too many elements and you can't always be 100% perfect," said U.S. teammate Bella Wright, who also wasn't able to finish the slalom part of the combined. "It's really unfortunate and I feel really badly for her. But I'm not worried about her. She's just fine."

## Shiffrin responds to those 'who have so much apparent hate'

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP National Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Not long after Mikaela Shiffrin skied off-course for the third time in five races at the Beijing Olympics, she wondered aloud to reporters about what sort of vitriol might be directed her way.

"There's going to be a whole chaotic mess ... that people are saying about how I just fantastically failed these last couple weeks in the moments that actually counted," the two-time gold medalist at other Winter Games said after failing to finish the slalom run of the two-leg Alpine combined on Thursday. "It's really strange, but I'm not even afraid of that right now. Maybe that's because I have zero emotional energy to give anymore."

Hours later, the 26-year-old American went on Twitter to post what seemed to be a series of comments she might have seen on social media in reaction to Thursday's fall, which followed similar mistakes in the giant slalom and slalom last week.

Some examples of what she included: "Choker," "Can't handle the pressure," "Arrogant."

Shiffrin followed that up with a tweet referring to "the people who have so much apparent hate."

Typed in all capital letters, her second post said, in part: "Let the turkeys get you down. There will always be turkeys. Or get up, again. Again. Again. Again. Again. Again. Again."

She continued: "Just get up. It's not always easy, but it's also not the end of the world to fail. Fail twice. Fail 5 times. At the Olympics. (Enter me ...)."

Shiffrin arrived in Beijing as one of the biggest stars of the Winter Olympics.

She won the slalom at the 2014 Sochi Olympics at age 18, then added a gold in the giant slalom and a silver in the combined at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics.

Shiffrin also owns six world championship golds and three overall World Cup titles and is leading the current standings, too.

"Pressure is a tough thing and expectation's a tough thing, and that comes with the territory of being one of the greatest in the sport, ever," U.S. ski team head women's coach Paul Kristofic said. "She feels that and it weighs on her."

The best Shiffrin did at the 2022 Games was a ninth-place finish in the super-G and 18th in the downhill. Her "Did Not Finish" result in the giant slalom was her first in that event in more than four years, a streak of 30 races, and was followed by "DNFs" in the slalom and combined.

While all of the individual ski races are done, Shiffrin does plan to enter a sixth contest Saturday: a team event that was added to the Olympics four years ago and closes the Alpine schedule.

Her second tweet ended with a mention of some of her U.S. teammates, such as Paula Moltzan and River Radamus, and ended with this: "If you are playing the side of hater today, ignore me but definitely look out for them!"

## National Guard deploys for new emergency: Teacher shortages

By CEDAR ATTANASIO Associated Press / Report for America

ALAMOGORDO, N.M. (AP) — On past deployments Army National Guard Spc. Michael Stockwell surveilled a desolate section of the U.S.-Mexico border during a migrant surge, and guarded a ring of checkpoints and fences around New Mexico's state Capitol after the January 2021 insurrection in Washington.

On his current mission, Stockwell helps students with assignments as a substitute science teacher at Alamogordo High School.

"You can't act Army with these kids. You can't speak the same way you would with another soldier with these kids. You can't treat them the same way. You have to be careful with corrective actions," he said with a laugh.

Dozens of National Guard Army and Air Force troops in New Mexico have been stepping in for an emergency unlike others they have responded to before: the shortage of teachers and school staff members that has tested the ability of schools nationwide to continue operating during the coronavirus pandemic.

While many other states and school districts issued pleas for substitute teachers amid omicron-driven surges in infections, New Mexico has been alone in calling out its National Guard members. In 36 of the state's 89 school districts, guard members have traded in mission briefs for lesson plans to work for school systems.

When Stockwell first walked into the freshman science class, wearing camouflage fatigues and combat boots, some students thought he was just visiting, like a recruiter. Then he took a seat in the teacher's chair.

"When he started taking attendance, I was like, 'whoa,'" said Lilli Terrazas, 15, of Alamogordo. "I was kind of nervous because, like, you know — a man in a uniform. But it was cool. He helped me."

Roughly 80 service members have volunteered to work in schools. The troops have gone through background checks and taken brief courses required for substitute teachers. As substitutes, they don't have to learn much about curriculum, but they need to be attentive to students.

Stockwell has been filling in since late January when his students' teacher moved to an administrative role in another school. One recent day, he shuffled through the rows of school desks, kneeling to meet students eye-to-eye as he helped them with assignments calculating the depth of the earth's crust, and other layers of the planet.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, called out the guard to help with the acute shortages in a state that like several others has struggled to find enough educators. At least 100 schools had reported closing down for at least one day this school year.

New Mexico saw a surge of teacher retirements last fall, and there are currently around 1,000 open teaching positions in a state with about 20,000 teachers. Grisham stressed the guard deployment is a temporary measure and state officials are working to bolster the teaching force and school staff through increased pay and other strategies.

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At Alamogordo High School, the teacher shortage peaked on Jan. 13, when 30 teachers, about a third of the teaching staff, were out due to illness, professional training, or family emergencies.

"Everybody was enjoying their holiday and things like that, and then they came back and were sick," said Raeh Burns, one of two Alamogordo High School secretaries tasked with filling teaching slots each morning. "I know I'm going to have Mr. Stockwell every morning and that he's OK to go where I need him to go."

In some communities, there have been concerns raised about soldiers going in classrooms. In Santa Fe, the school district was asked if soldiers would wear uniforms and carry guns, school district spokesperson Cody Dynarski said. Guns were always out of the question. The district decided that soldiers would wear civilian clothing.

Ultimately, Santa Fe and Albuquerque, two of the largest urban school districts, did not receive any soldiers despite their requests as the deployments have prioritized smaller and more rural school districts.

Elsewhere, when given the choice, some soldiers have opted for military fatigues over civilian clothes to command respect in the classroom, particularly if they're not much older than their students.

"I think I look like an 18-year-old out of uniform," said Cassandra Sierra, 22, of Roswell, N.M., who has served as a substitute teacher in a high school in Hobbs.

Sierra already works with kids in her day job as a student coordinator at a military boarding school in Roswell, which has given her an edge as a substitute.

"Kids just need patience," she said. "I think I just have a lot of patience."

At a middle school on Alamogordo's Holloman Air Force Base, students are used to seeing people in uniform, but not in classrooms.

"I was like, 'Oh, we have somebody in the uniform that's going to teach us. That's kinda awkward.' It was weird," said Andrew George, 12, of his computer classes led by a woman trained in combat and with experience leading a platoon overseas. "Once she introduced herself I was like 'Oh yeah, this is going to be fun.'"

The substitute, Lt. Amanda Zollo, works in the 911 dispatch center in Albuquerque when she's not training or serving with the guard. She kept students on task during a lesson about cybersecurity, as they created and then attempted to break each other's passwords.

She was subbing for a teacher who was having trouble finding childcare. The principal, Whitney Anderson, said that having Zollo's services meant that for the first time that week she didn't have to take over a classroom herself.

Zollo doesn't talk about her work as an infantry officer with her students, which, after a nervous laugh, she describes as "engaging with and destroying the enemies of the U.S. in close-quarter combat."

## **EXPLAINER: Robots and Olympics — a potent photo combination**

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A figure skater framed only by ragged ice gazes up, almost beseechingly. A goaltender sprawls inside a net, defeat written all over his limbs, even with his face obscured.

These Renaissance painting-like images capture the barrage of emotions evoked during Winter Olympics competition. The key behind them? Robots.

The images don't read "(AP Photo/Robot)," though. Good old-fashioned photography skills and instinct are integral to making them.

The five members of the International Olympic Photo Pool — Reuters, Getty Images, Agence France-Presse, Xinhua and, of course, The Associated Press — all employ robotics to augment their wire offerings.

How do they get it done?

**AN EVOLVING PROCESS**

The method is scarcely a decade old — no one was using robotics, at least at the Olympics, before the 2012 Summer Games. There were to be no catwalks at the London venues, so heavy rigs wired with clunky microphone cable were deployed. After that experience, the first change on the list: figuring out how to do the whole operation over a network connection.

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The main man behind the AP's mechanics is photographer David J. Phillip. The rigs spend the off-season in Houston, where Phillip is based.

Just before London, Phillip was tasked with devising an underwater camera system — an assignment that mushroomed. He's a scuba diver and generally interested in tinkering around, having taught himself programming from scratch.

A system born of necessity just keeps getting better, Phillip says, adding that keeping up with the software changes is a "moving target." The robotics are periodically trotted out for other special events: this week's Super Bowl, the World Series, even presidential debates.

Planning for each Olympics typically begins a couple years before, but the usual site visit 18 months in advance had to be substituted with pandemic-induced Zoom conference calls and studying schematics. Everything — we're talking 10 cargo containers here — has to ship two to three months before the Games begin. It took so long getting the rigs back from Tokyo, that by the time they arrived home to Houston in the fall, it was nearly time for them to make the journey back to Asia.

## USING THE TECH

Only a handful of AP photographers are trained on how to use the tech. Photographers Chris Carlson and Jeff Roberson — based in Charlotte, North Carolina, and St. Louis, respectively — join Phillip in Houston a week before the equipment is to ship. They help him build the rigs, program them ... and then take them apart, so they can be shipped.

On the other end, only Phillip is there to attend their homecoming, slowly unpacking the containers over the course of a week — a contrast that reflects the protracted preparation and sudden denouement that defines the Olympics for athletes, organizers and media.

While the major camera suppliers have consultants in Beijing's closed-loop "bubble," there are no hardware stores along the closed loop. Accordingly, a duplicate of any component that could break got a ticket to the Olympics. The lumbering ones from London even made the trip, just in case. The A-team was intact and all those extra parts were still riding the bench, though, more more than halfway through the Olympics.

Although AP's Telemetrics rigs are nimbler than most — each weighs about 26 pounds (12 kilograms), standard Sony A1 mirrorless camera included — installation and disassembly the rigs is a matter of pure manual labor. The photographers even need to get certified in heights every two years to do it.

There are four trusses at the Capital Indoor Stadium, home to figure skating and short track speedskating. They're pre-programmed for certain spots — including above the "Kiss & Cry" station — but are maneuverable, offering glimpses into holding areas otherwise walled off from eye level. At the Bird's Nest, four static, remote-operated cameras captured the opening ceremony and remain in place for the closing.

## CONTROLLING THE CAMERAS

While a photographer is usually dedicated to piloting the operation over at the Capital Indoor Stadium, the hockey photographers are shooting and firing the remote-operated cameras at the same time. Because those cameras are over the goals, it's fairly obvious when to fire.

The AP brought fewer remote setups to Beijing than in summer, so the photography staff had to choose the sports where the tech would "pay the most dividends," Phillip says. There's at least \$100,000 worth of equipment among the rigs. Whatever the cost, he says, "the reward — what we've able to do with them — has been worth it 10 times over."

The ability to control the cameras from multiple venues was piloted in in 2016 in Rio. That means that photographers technically don't have to be on site to make the photos. Roberson shot a pairs skating session from the AP office in the Main Media Center so he could make it to the opening ceremony. But being in the venue is definitely preferred, affording a broader perspective.

At the Capital Indoor Stadium, Roberson is nearly totally screened in — literally. At his station atop the press tribune, there's a control panel on one monitor with the robotics software. A joystick enables zoom, and photos can be made by clicking a small keypad. A second monitor with Sony software displays the view from each camera and allows him to adjust camera settings like shutter speed and aperture.

He's watching the multi-view display, ice action and editing photos on his laptop all at the same time — a process that vacillates between being balletic and frenetic.

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"It's like playing a video game, and I'm not good at video games," Roberson quipped. "This is the hardest thing I've ever done." (The simile is not totally figurative: at one point, another robotics maker wanted \$5,000 for a controller, so Phillip figured out how to map it onto an old PlayStation 2 joystick instead.)

'LIKE LEARNING PHOTOGRAPHY AGAIN'

Roberson estimates that four-fifths of the robotics-assisted images are unusable. Sometimes, because athletes are so fast, he has to resort to smashing all the keypad buttons at once, producing many photos of nothing but the dingy, scarred Olympic ice.

Despite the stress, Roberson says he loves it all the same: "When I just started doing this, it was like learning photography again."

Phillip says there's one major thing on his wish list as the technology continues to evolve. There's already spin, tilt and zoom, but he'd like the ability to roll to add a fourth axis.

Despite that, there's only one major impediment in the robotics' way: the Spidercam, a video camera suspending by wires that sags down, following the dancers' every move like an eager puppy. Sighs Phillip: "It's always a battle with the Spidercam."

## Weekly US jobless claims up, but remain historically low

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Applications for U.S. unemployment benefits rose last week but remain near historically low levels, reflecting relatively few layoffs across the economy.

Jobless claims rose by 23,000 to 248,000 for the week ending Feb. 12, the Labor Department reported Thursday. Claims were revised upward to 225,000 the previous week.

Yet the four-week average for claims, which compensates for weekly volatility, fell by 10,500 to 243,250. It was the second straight week of declines after rising for five straight weeks as the omicron variant of the coronavirus spread, disrupting business in many parts of the U.S.

In total, fewer than 1.6 million Americans were collecting jobless aid the week that ended Feb. 5, a decrease of about 26,000 from the previous week.

First-time applications for jobless aid generally track the pace of layoffs, which are back down to fairly healthy pre-pandemic levels.

Earlier this month, the Labor Department reported a surprising burst of hiring in January, with employers adding 467,000 jobs. It also revised upward its estimate for job gains in November and December by a combined 709,000. The unemployment rate edged up to a still-low 4% from 3.9%, as more people began looking for work, but not all of them securing jobs right away.

Even as omicron variant spread quickly earlier this winter, employers have been eager to hire. That winter spike in infections briefly tripped up the country's strong recovery from 2020's virus-caused recession, but employers appear confident in long-term growth.

Massive government spending and the vaccine rollout jumpstarted the economy as employers added a record 6.4 million jobs last year. The U.S. economy expanded 5.7% in 2021, growing last year at the fastest annual pace since a 7.2% surge in 1984, also coming after a recession.

An overheated U.S. economy has spawned inflation not seen in four decades, leading the Federal Reserve to ease its monetary support for the economy. The Fed has signaled that it would begin a series of interest-rate hikes in March, reversing pandemic-era policies that have fueled hiring and growth, but also stubborn inflation.

## Senate launches group to examine embattled US prison system

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Senate is launching a bipartisan working group of lawmakers to scrutinize conditions within the Bureau of Prisons following reporting by The Associated Press that uncovered widespread corruption and abuse in federal prisons.

The working group, being led by Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., and Sen. Mike Braun, R-Ind., is aimed at de-



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veloping policies and proposals to strengthen oversight of the beleaguered federal prison system and improve communication between the Bureau of Prisons and Congress.

The group plans to examine the conditions of incarceration inside America's 122 federal prisons, protect human rights and promote transparency. The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., also will be part of the group.

The federal prison system, a hotbed of corruption and misconduct, has been plagued by myriad crises in recent years, including widespread criminal activity among employees, systemic sexual abuse at a federal women's prison in California, critically low staffing levels that have hampered responses to emergencies, the rapid spread of COVID-19, a failed response to the pandemic and dozens of escapes. And late last month, two inmates were killed in a gang clash at a federal penitentiary in Texas, prompting a nationwide lockdown.

In early January, the embattled federal prisons director, Michael Carvajal, announced he was resigning amid growing criticism over his leadership of the bureau. The Justice Department is searching for a new director — even posting advertisements on LinkedIn — but hasn't found a replacement yet.

"America's prisons and jails are horrifically dysfunctional and too often places where brutality and criminality are prevalent," Ossoff said in a statement to the AP on Thursday. "The Senate Bipartisan Prison Policy Working Group will identify and advance solutions."

Ossoff, Braun and several other lawmakers, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, have introduced legislation to require the director of the Bureau of Prisons to be confirmed by the Senate, as is the case with nearly every other major federal agency.

In a statement, Durbin said the working group was "essential to helping us achieve our goal of creating safer conditions for those at correctional facilities." He said the trio was "committed to working on a bipartisan basis to improve conditions and safety, strengthen transparency and communications, and reduce recidivism in our federal prison system."

The Senate passed legislation that Ossoff had introduced to require federal prisons to repair and upgrade security systems, including broken surveillance cameras. Failing security cameras in federal prisons have allowed inmates to escape undetected and were the center of the investigation when wealthy financier Jeffrey Epstein, who was awaiting trial on charges he sexually abused girls as young as 14, killed himself behind bars in 2019.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Feb. 18, the 49th day of 2022. There are 316 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 18, 2001, auto racing star Dale Earnhardt Sr. died in a crash at the Daytona 500; he was 49.

On this date:

In 1564, artist Michelangelo died in Rome.

In 1885, Mark Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" was published in the U.S. for the first time (after being published in Britain and Canada).

In 1970, the "Chicago Seven" defendants were found not guilty of conspiring to incite riots at the 1968 Democratic national convention; five were convicted of violating the Anti-Riot Act of 1968 (those convictions were later reversed).

In 1972, the California Supreme Court struck down the state's death penalty.

In 1983, 13 people were shot to death at a gambling club in Seattle's Chinatown in what became known as the Wah Mee Massacre. (Two men were convicted of the killings and were sentenced to life in prison; a third was found guilty of robbery and assault.)

In 1984, Italy and the Vatican signed an accord under which Roman Catholicism ceased to be the state religion of Italy.

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In 1988, Anthony M. Kennedy was sworn in as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1994, at the Winter Olympic Games in Norway, U.S. speedskater Dan Jansen finally won a gold medal, breaking the world record in the 1,000 meters.

In 2001, veteran FBI agent Robert Philip Hanssen was arrested, accused of spying for Russia. (Hanssen later pleaded guilty to espionage and attempted espionage and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

In 2003, an arson attack involving two South Korean subway trains in the city of Daegu claimed 198 lives. (The arsonist was sentenced to life in prison, where he died in 2004.)

In 2016, in what was seen as a criticism of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, Pope Francis said that a person who advocated building walls was "not Christian"; Trump quickly retorted it was "disgraceful" to question a person's faith. (A Vatican spokesman said the next day that the pope's comment was not intended as a "personal attack" on Trump.)

In 2020, President Donald Trump commuted the 14-year prison sentence of former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich for political corruption; Blagojevich left prison hours later and returned home to Chicago. (Trump also issued pardons or clemency to former New York City police commissioner Bernie Kerik, financier Michael Milken and a long list of others.)

Ten years ago: A star-studded funeral service was held for pop singer Whitney Houston at New Hope Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey, a week after her death at age 48. Syrian security forces fired live rounds and tear gas at thousands of people marching in a funeral procession that turned into one of the largest protests in Damascus since the 11-month uprising against President Bashar Assad began.

Five years ago: Norma McCorvey, whose legal challenge under the pseudonym "Jane Roe" led to the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision that legalized abortion but who later became an outspoken opponent of the procedure, died in Katy, Texas, at age 69. Omar Abdel-Rahman, the so-called "Blind Sheik" convicted of plotting terror attacks in the United States in the 1990s, died at a federal prison in North Carolina where he was serving a life sentence; he was 78.

One year ago: Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who had flown with his family to a vacation in Mexico as his state dealt with a deadly winter storm that crippled the power grid, returned home a day later and described the trip as "obviously a mistake." Bob Dole, a 97-year-old former longtime senator and the 1996 Republican presidential nominee, said he'd been diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. (Dole died in December 2021.) Health officials reported that life expectancy in the United States had dropped by one year during the first half of 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic caused its first wave of deaths. Naomi Osaka stopped Serena Williams' latest bid for a record-tying 24th Grand Slam singles title in the Australian Open semifinals.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Yoko Ono is 89. Singer-songwriter Bobby Hart is 83. Singer Irma Thomas is 81. Singer Herman Santiago (Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers) is 81. Actor Jess Walton is 76. Singer Dennis DeYoung is 75. Actor Sinead Cusack is 74. Actor Cybill Shepherd is 72. Singer Randy Crawford is 70. Rock musician Robbie Bachman is 69. Actor John Travolta is 68. Actor John Pankow is 67. Game show host Vanna White is 65. Actor Jayne Atkinson is 63. Actor Greta Scacchi (SKAH'-kee) is 62. Actor Matt Dillon is 58. Rock musician Tommy Scott (Space) is 58. Rapper Dr. Dre is 57. Actor Molly Ringwald is 54. Actor Sarah Brown is 47. Country musician Trevor Rosen (Old Dominion) is 47. Actor Ike Barinholtz is 45. Actor Kristoffer Polaha is 45. Singer-musician Sean Watkins (Nickel Creek) is 45. Rock-singer musician Regina Spektor is 42. Opera singer Isabel Leonard is 40. Roots rock musician Zac Cockrell (Alabama Shakes) is 34. Actor Shane Lyons is 34. Actor Sarah Sutherland is 34. Actor Maiara Walsh is 34.