

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

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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#1 - TBD

 1 Florence	2/22 TBD
 8 Tiospa Zina	

#2 - TBD

 4 Redfield	2/22 TBD
 5 Webster Area	

#3 - TBD

 2 Sisseton	2/22 TBD
 7 Clark	

#4 - TBD

 3 Groton Area	2/22 TBD
 6 Milbank	

**Region 1A Girls Basketball
Sisseton and Florence/Henry will be
hosting the games.**

# Name	Season			Seed Pts	Home			Away			Opponents			vs .500 ↑			vs .500 ↓			Points		
	W	L	PCT	PTS	W	L	PCT	W	L	PCT	W	L	PCT	W	L	PCT	W	L	PCT	FOR	AGS	DIFF
1  Florence/Henry	15	4	.789	44.211	2	0	1.000	8	0	1.000	211	153	.580	8	4	.667	7	0	1.000	52.9	38.9	+14.1
2  Sisseton	16	4	.800	43.900	8	1	.889	7	2	.778	176	146	.547	6	4	.600	10	0	1.000	61.4	48.3	+13.1
3  Groton Area	11	9	.550	40.550	4	5	.444	7	3	.700	190	183	.509	2	7	.222	9	2	.818	38.6	35.1	+3.5
4  Redfield	9	11	.450	40.050	4	4	.500	5	5	.500	207	192	.519	4	7	.364	5	4	.556	36.6	44.0	-7.5
5  Webster Area	9	11	.450	39.750	6	7	.462	3	3	.500	198	200	.497	2	7	.222	7	4	.636	45.0	49.9	-4.9
6  Milbank	9	11	.450	39.450	6	4	.600	3	5	.375	161	180	.472	1	8	.111	8	3	.727	44.4	45.3	-0.9
7  Clark/Willow Lake	5	15	.250	38.300	1	8	.111	4	6	.400	235	161	.593	1	11	.083	4	4	.500	44.9	55.8	-10.9
8  Tiospa Zina	2	18	.100	35.600	0	4	.000	0	9	.000	184	173	.515	0	8	.000	2	10	.167	34.7	58.0	-23.3

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Varsity hoop teams ground the Cardinals

Groton Area's basketball teams won three of the five games played Friday at Deuel as part of a double-header. Both varsity teams won and the girls junior varsity team won.

The girls varsity team led at the quarterstops at 9-4, 26-9 and 38-23 en route to the 49-31 win.

Brooke Gengerke powered in three three-pointers to lead the Tigers with 19 points. Alyssa Thaler also had three three-pointers and had 13 points. Kennedy Hansen had eight, Allyssa Locke five and Sydney Leicht added four points.

Harley Hennings led the Cardinals with 10 points and Haley Winter added nine.

TEAM STATS

Brooke Gengerke - 19 points, 5 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals.

Alyssa Thaler - 13 points, 2 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals, 1 foul, 2 blocks.

Kennedy Hansen - 8 points, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal.

Allyssa Locke - 5 points, 6 rebounds, 8 assists, 4 steals, 4 fouls.

Sydney Leicht - 4 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Aspen Johnson - 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Jerica Locke - 3 rebounds, 3 assists, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Jaedyn Penning - 1 rebound, 3 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen - 1 steal.

Faith Traphagen - 2 rebounds, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Groton Area made 13 of 57 field goals for 35 percent, seven of 13 in three-pointers for 54 percent, made two of four free throws for 50 percent, had 27 rebounds, 11 turnovers, 18 assists, 12 steals, 15 fouls and 2 blocked shots.

The Lady Tigers won the junior varsity game, 45-7. Kennedy Hansen, Brooklyn Hansen and Jaedyn Penning each had eight points while Jerica Locke had 5, Faith Traphagen and Rylee Dunker each had 4, Laila Roberts and Elizabeth Flihs each had 3 points and Talli Wright added 2 points.

Shane Clark was the special guest commentator on GDILIVE.COM of both girls games. The girls livestream was sponsored by Rich and Tami Zimney.

The Deuel boys were able to keep up with Groton Area in the first quarter, but then the Tigers blew past the Cardinals after that to post a Northeast Conference win, 83-68. There were 10 lead changes in the game and the contest was tied twice before the Tigers went on a 12-point run to take the lead for good. Deuel held a 19-16 lead after the first quarter and Groton led at half time, 43-30, and held a 60-44 lead at the end of the third quarter.

TEAM STATS

Kaden Kurtz - 26 points, 4 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Tate Larson - 16 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assist, 2 fouls.

Jacob Zak - 13 points, 6 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals, 4 fouls, 1 block.

Wyatt Hearnen - 11 points, 3 rebounds, 2 steals, 3 fouls.

Lane Tietz - 10 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists.

Jayden Zak - 5 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assists, 2 steals, 4 fouls, 1 block.

Taylor Diegel - 2 points, 1 rebound, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Groton Area made 26 of 30 field goals for 87 percent, four of 12 three-pointers for 33 percent, 19 of 29 in free throws for 66 percent, had 22 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 10 assists, 8 steals, 17 fouls and 2 blocks.

Zane Bingham led the Cardinals with 19 points while Cooper Schiernbeck and Trey Maaland each had 15 points, Nathan Lovre had 9, Gavin Benck 6 and Braydon Simon 2.

Deuel won the junior varsity game, 39-21. The game was tied at 10 after the first period and Deuel led at halftime, 24-15, and after three periods, 31-19. Taylor Diegel led Groton Area with 12 points while Colby Dunker had 4, Ryder Johnson 3 and Holden Sippel 2. Dravyn Carlson led the Cardinals with 22 points. The junior varsity game was livestreamed and sponsored by Gordon and Dorene Nelson.

Deuel also won the C game by a couple of points.

Varsity game sponsors were Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, John Sieh Agency, Groton Ford, Matt's Tree Service, Allied Climate Professionals, Dacotah Bank and Bary Keith at Harr Motors.

Gov. Noem Launches Citizen Portal Website

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem announced the launch of the South Dakota Citizen Portal, an updated sd.gov website that will modernize citizen services.

“We want to make it easy to do business with the State of South Dakota,” Governor Noem said. “This portal is the launch point for the services that citizens regularly access, such as state park reservations or hunting licenses. This portal will allow people to create their own account, access all state agency services and maintain the records for services received. I want South Dakota to be a leader in citizen-focused digital government.”

The Governor challenged her team to think citizen-first since the project kicked off last May.

The first version of the Governor’s Citizen Portal includes enhanced search functions that will help citizens find the services they need. The portal also provides a live agent online between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. CT during regular business days.

You can also reach a hotline for assistance at 605-773-3011. The hotline will be available between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. CT during regular business days.

Newly built-in services include the ability to request child-care assistance, information about our ConnectSD broadband program, and victims’ services. Additional services will be added to the Governor’s Citizen Portal as part of ongoing improvements.

The project is being paid for with a special appropriation by the legislature for the IT modernization fund. The goal is to update the state’s digital infrastructure in an effort to strengthen our systems against cybersecurity risks.

DACOTAH BANK SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Dacotah Bank is proud to continue with their scholarship program for high school seniors. Dacotah Bank has been happy to help youth in the communities they serve move on to secondary schools. To be eligible, high school seniors must be attending a higher education institute in South Dakota, North Dakota or Minnesota, and the applicant or immediate family member must have an account with Dacotah Bank.

Each Dacotah Bank location has been allotted a \$1,000 scholarship to award a student that fits eligibility requirements and completes the application in its entirety. Dacotah Bank will choose the two highest scoring applications out of the submission pool to receive a \$2,000 scholarship. These two winners are not eligible for the \$1,000 location scholarship, and another application from that location will be chosen.

Robert Fouberg, Dacotah Bank president and CEO stated, “Dacotah Bank and the communities in which we live, and work depend on a quality workforce. Inasmuch as post-secondary education represents a huge financial commitment, we feel it is important to invest in the next generation.”

If you would like to apply for a Dacotah Bank Scholarship or for more information visit dacotahbank.com/scholarships.

Democratic Leadership Column from Jamie Smith— Week 6

PIERRE, SD (February 18th, 2022) – Greetings from Pierre! We have just completed the sixth week of the Ninety-Seventh Legislative Session. Things are ramping up once again with Crossover Day around the corner and many committees doing double duty with morning and afternoon hearings. Regardless, we are working tirelessly in the best interest of the people of South Dakota.

Earlier this week, the Senate heard a bill that would have expanded Medicaid which would give medical insurance to an additional 40,000 South Dakotans. Unsurprisingly, this bill failed. South Dakotans support Medicaid Expansion, which will be on the ballot in November. I urge you to get out to vote and vote yes on Medicaid Expansion to help your fellow South Dakotans.

We are upset to see the passage of legislation that imposes on teachers and our students. Banning certain subjects from schools and classrooms limits educators in a way the government should not. As legislators, we should not tell teachers how or what to teach. We need to focus on making sure our schools and teachers have the resources they need to do their jobs. We need to trust, support, and invest in our teachers, not attack them.

This week Democrats fought the good fight, just like we always do. I want to thank my colleagues who have brought impactful and positive legislation for the people of our state. We may be the minority caucus, but we get things done. We bring good legislation that helps all South Dakotans.

On Wednesday night, the Democratic caucus, along with Hughes and Stanley County Democrats, volunteered at Feeding South Dakota, packing 550 boxes of food. I encourage you to get involved at the local level and help your neighbors whenever you can. By working together and helping our neighbors we can make South Dakota better for all of us!

Democrats are here to work for you and want to hear from you! Please contact us to share your questions or concerns about the current session. Our caucus meetings have always been open to the public each day, an hour before floor session. Your voice matters to us, and we believe that together, we can create a South Dakota that works for all of us.

House Minority Leader Jamie Smith

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I will say that sometimes, our livestreaming experiences never ceases to amaze me in the challenges that we face.

As you or may not be aware, Jeslyn and Julianna are on the band trip to Florida. Jeslyn is the master video operator. Shane Clark has helped out with some of the girls games so that helped with the work load (perhaps should say stress level!).

We had one hiccup last night during the girls varsity game where we went off line. Not really sure what happened, but we got it back on-line fairly quickly. That happens from time to time.

But the kicker of it all was when it started to rain on us during the boys varsity game. The air conditioner unit was right above us. The person running the school camera beside me suddenly pointed to the table. Water started to fall on the table. Really! He grabbed a garbage can and set it on the table to catch

the water. Okay, problem solved. But then I felt it dripping down my back. And on the floor right near our power strip. So I'm trying to stay dry and move the electrical equipment away from the water and trying to keep the commentary going and keeping the stats. Then I started getting text messages about the camera not keeping up with the action. Gee, I wonder why?!

Livestreaming over the years has been interesting and I could probably write a book of all of the experiences, mishaps, and challenges that we have had. I will say one of the greatest joys of doing the livestreaming is really following the teams over the years and watching the players develop, grow and improve. Not every game is perfect and we're there when things are not going so well, but we're also there when they are going great - or even perhaps that big game winning basket - right Brody!

Over the years, we've even had high school students doing the play-by-play. And as of lately, we've had Mike Nehls coming along for the football games. The way I look at it, it's not just my livestream, it's the community's. We are the vehicle to bring the events into your home when you can't travel or make it to the game or event.

Thanks to our advertisers, sponsors and subscribers for making this all possible. I do hear from a lot of people who like the service.

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Guest Speaker
Nicole J Phillips
The Kindness Podcast

*You're
Invited!*

RE:SET
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.

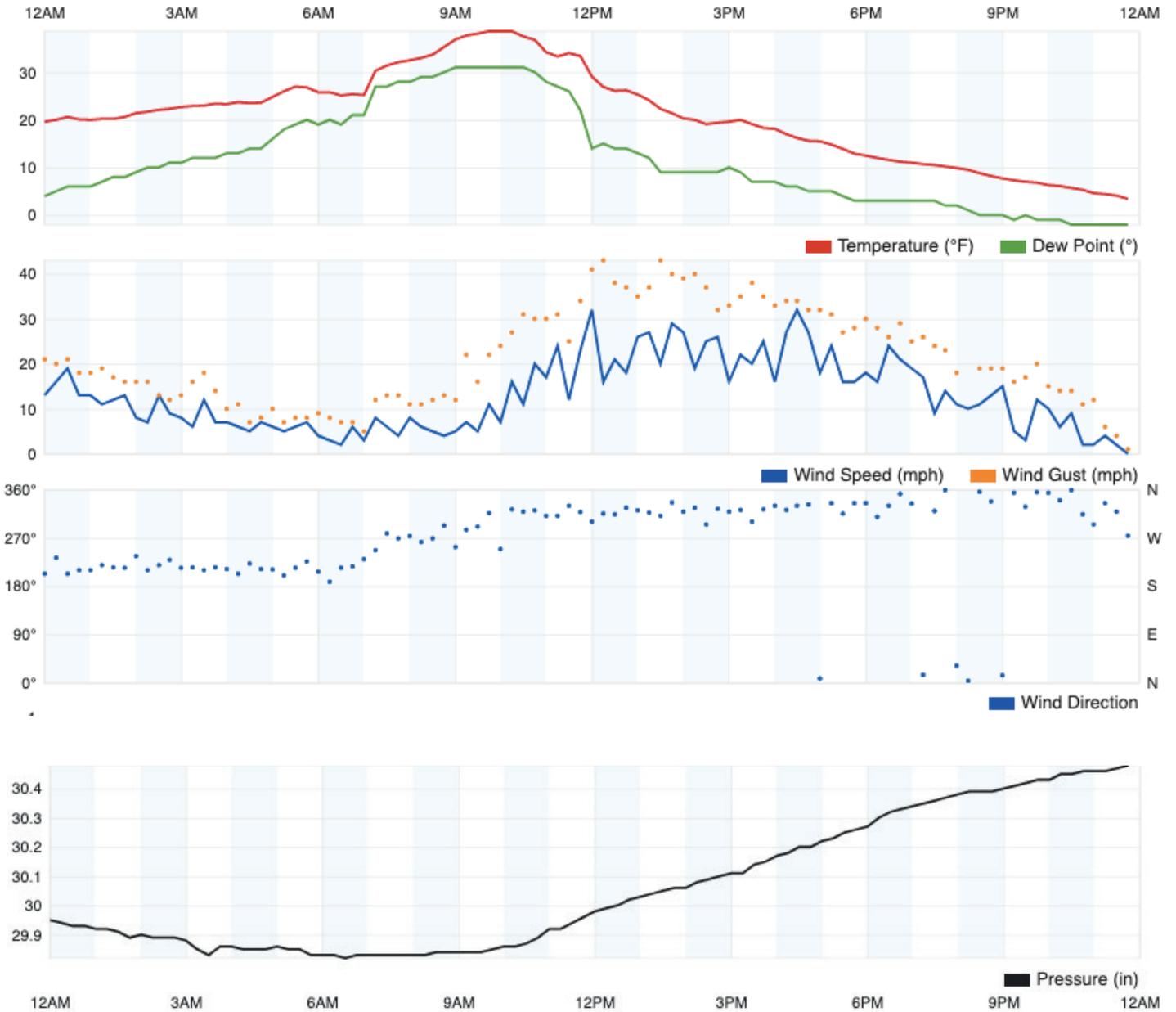
REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT
ONLINE AT ROSEHILLEFC.COM



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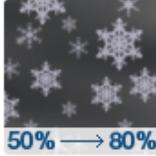
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

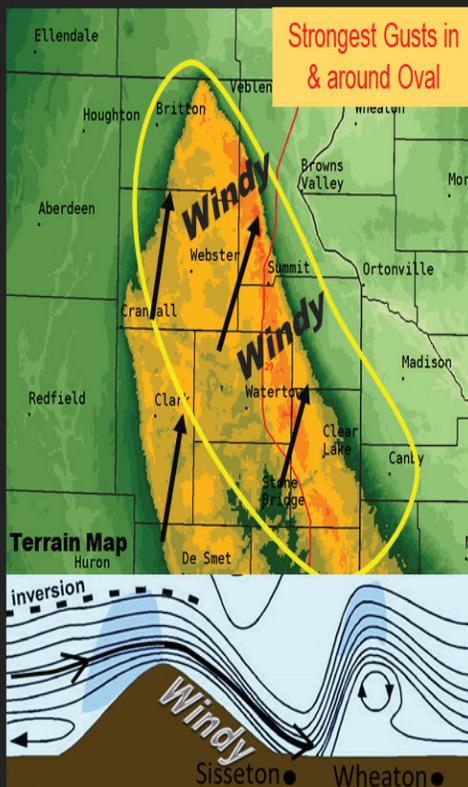


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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Washington's Birthday
				
Decreasing Clouds and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Breezy then Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny and Breezy	50% → 80% Chance Snow and Blustery then Heavy Snow and Blowing Snow	80% Snow and Blowing Snow
High: 47 °F	Low: 30 °F	High: 38 °F ↓	Low: -4 °F	High: 0 °F

Gusty Winds Today



Strongest Winds over and east of the Sisseton Hills, where gusts will be up to around 55 mph through midnight!

Elsewhere, the strongest Wind Gusts will be mainly from late morning through this afternoon

	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am
Aberdeen	22	29	35	38	40	40	41	40	38	35	28	28	26	25	24	23	22	21	22	21
Britton	18	26	35	38	40	41	41	43	41	40	36	33	35	31	32	31	30	29	28	25
Eagle Butte	26	31	30	30	29	30	29	29	26	25	20	21	21	20	21	23	23	25	28	28
Eureka	22	32	36	37	37	38	37	37	35	31	23	22	22	22	22	23	23	23	24	23
Gettysburg	26	36	39	40	39	39	37	33	33	30	21	22	22	22	21	21	21	21	23	24
Kennebec	22	30	33	32	35	37	36	38	35	32	20	20	18	18	20	20	22	21	20	20
McIntosh	29	38	39	37	37	38	38	39	38	35	22	23	24	25	24	26	26	28	29	31
Milbank	12	20	21	23	30	33	36	37	37	38	33	35	35	35	33	33	32	30	29	26
Miller	21	28	36	38	39	40	39	38	35	31	21	23	22	22	22	23	22	22	22	22
Mobridge	24	33	35	35	33	32	35	33	32	28	21	21	20	21	20	20	18	21	21	22
Murdo	23	28	30	31	33	35	35	37	35	31	24	23	22	22	24	24	25	24	24	24
Pierre	20	25	28	28	30	30	31	29	24	17	15	14	14	16	15	16	16	15	16	16
Redfield	21	26	32	37	40	40	41	39	37	33	24	24	23	22	20	21	20	20	20	20
Sisseton	14	20	23	29	36	37	43	44	45	43	44	45	45	44	40	39	37	35	32	30
Summit	20	26	32	38	45	53	56	55	55	53	53	53	55	55	55	52	37	35	33	31
Watertown	15	22	24	31	36	37	38	38	38	38	36	37	38	37	35	33	31	30	28	26
Wheaton	13	17	21	25	29	32	35	35	35	32	28	29	30	28	28	29	28	26	26	24

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

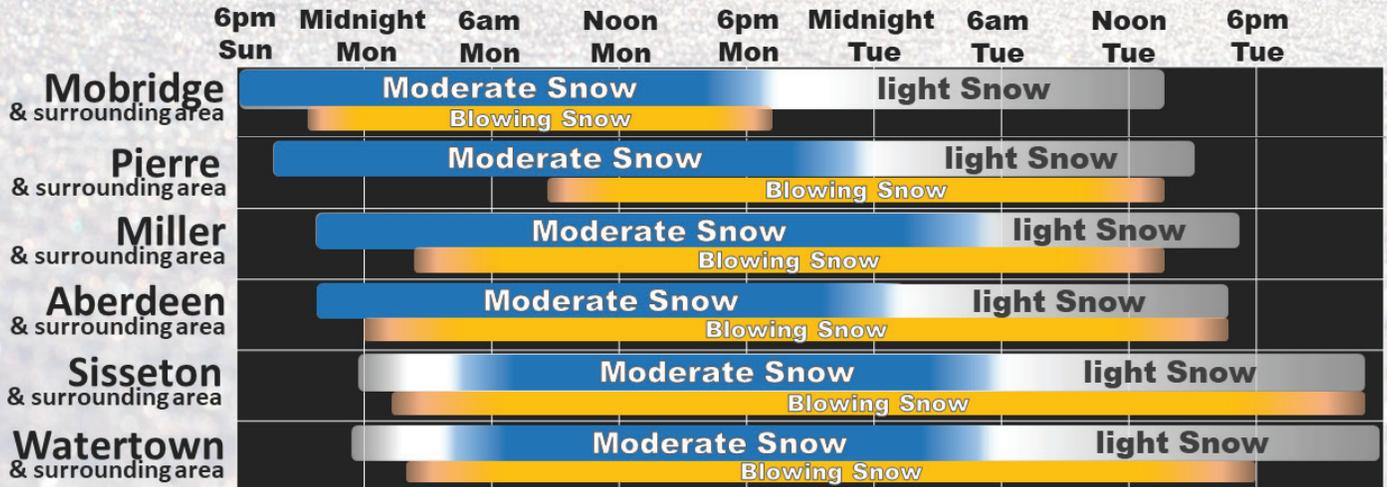
Updated: 2/19/2022 3:41 AM

Winds will increase out of the south to southwest today, especially across and east of the Sisseton Hills where gusts will be up to around 55 mph this afternoon and evening. Elsewhere, the strongest winds gusting 30 to 40 mph will be mainly confined to the late morning and afternoon hours. The combination of continued dry conditions, warm air, and gusty winds will lead to another day of elevated fire weather conditions over much of central South Dakota.



Snow & Blowing Snow Threats Timeline

A prolonged period of snow is taking aim at the area. Hazardous travel will be possible when Snow and Blowing Snow combine late Sunday night through the day Monday. Plan ahead, and monitor the latest forecasts for additional details!



Visit www.weather.gov/abr for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 2/19/2022 4:12 AM CT



A prolonged period of snow is taking aim at the area. Confidence is high on very cold air and gusty winds. We have very low confidence in exact snow amounts due to the banded west to east oriented snowfall that is expected. Banded snowfall events are very difficult to predict, so expect adjustments, with the main concern being between US Highway 12 and I-90. Stay up to date on the latest forecast if you have travel plans, as the combination of snow and blowing snow could result in hazardous travel late Sunday night through the day Monday.

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Snowfall Potential Sunday Night into Tuesday

First round of snow will likely be a band over north central SD Sunday Evening

Snow to overspread the area, while potentially sinking slightly south and east Monday. Blowing Snow expected.

Very Low Confidence

In Snow Amounts. The exact placement of snow bands is very difficult to predict - expect adjustments, and potentially a smaller area than what's shown on the graphics (between Highway 12 and I-90).

High Confidence

in Cold Arctic Air & Winds of 20-30mph Monday

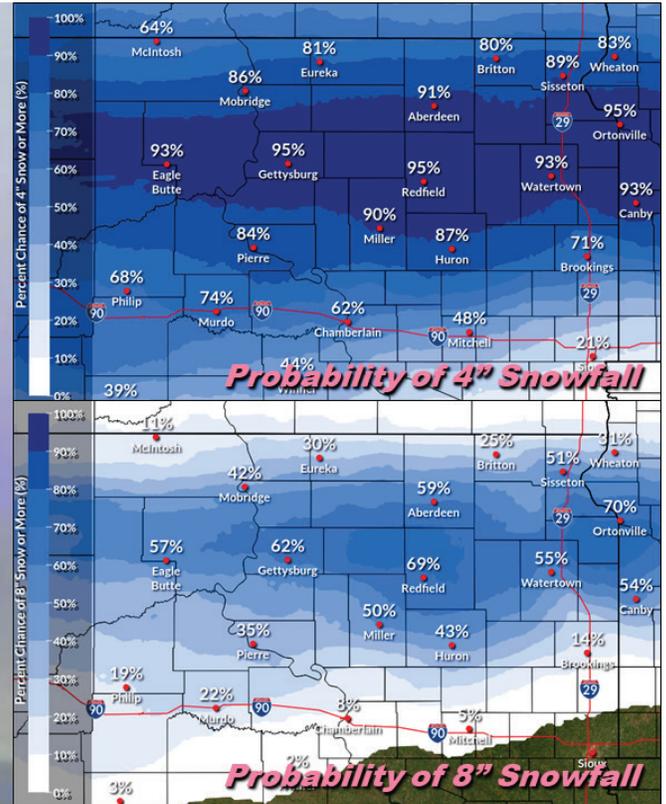
Traveling?

Stay Weather Aware & plan accordingly



Visit www.weather.gov/abr for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 2/19/2022 4:06 AM CT



We continue to be concerned about the potential for accumulating snowfall late Sunday through Monday, along with reduced visibility in blowing snow. Snow should diminish and exit east on Tuesday. Confidence is high on very cold air and gusty winds. We have very low confidence in exact snow amounts due to the banded west to east oriented snowfall that is expected. Banded snowfall events are very difficult to predict, so expect adjustments, with the main concern being between US Highway 12 and I-90. Stay up to date on the latest forecast if you have travel plans, as the combination of snow and blowing snow could result in hazardous travel late Sunday night through the day Monday.

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Today in Weather History

February 19th, 2000: Due to the arid and windy conditions, a fire believed to have been started by a discarded cigarette burnt about 1,300-acre of grassland between Kennebec and Lower Brule. The fire threatened a ranch but changed directions before anyone had to be evacuated.

February 19th, 2008: An Arctic air mass and blustery northwest winds brought extreme wind chills during the evening and early morning hours to northeast South Dakota. Wind chills ranged from 35 to 50 degrees below zero. The winds diminished in the early morning hours of the 20th, allowing air temperatures to fall to record or near-record lows across northeast South Dakota. Ten new record lows, ranging from 23 to 30 degrees below zero, were set for February 20th. Several water pipes were broken in Aberdeen and Roslyn. Also, many vehicles did not start along with late school starts or closings.

1884: Severe thunderstorms spawned sixty tornadoes in the southeastern U.S., killing more than 420 people and causing three million dollars damage. The tornado outbreak hit Georgia and the Carolinas the hardest.

1888: Severe thunderstorms over southern Illinois spawned a violent tornado in Jefferson County and devastated the southeast half of Mount Vernon. The tornado killed 24 people, injured 80 others, and destroyed or damaged 300 homes and 50 businesses. In addition, overturned wood stoves ignited many fires in the wreckage. The tornado currently stands as the 9th deadliest Illinois tornado on record and was one of the first disasters to which the American Red Cross responded.

1884 - Severe thunderstorms spawned sixty tornadoes in the southeastern U.S., killing more than 420 persons and causing three million dollars damage. Georgia and the Carolinas hardest were hit in the tornado outbreak. (David Ludlum)

1888 - A tornado struck Mount Vernon IL. The tornado killed sixteen persons along its 62 mile path. (David Ludlum)

1954 - High winds across the southern half of the Great Plains, gusting to 85 mph, caused the worst duststorms since the 1930s. Graders were needed in places to clear fence high dirt drifts. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm over the southern and central Rockies produced 28 inches of snow at Echo Lake CO, and two feet of snow at Gascon NM and Los Alamos NM. Mora County NM was declared a disaster area following the storm. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Showers and thunderstorms in the southeastern U.S. drenched Valdosta GA with more than five inches of rain, and the 24 hour rainfall total of 7.10 inches at Apalachicola FL more than doubled their previous 24 hour record for February. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - An upper level weather disturbance brought heavy snow to parts of Nebraska, with six inches reported at Loup City and Surprise. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A moist Pacific storm worked its way into New Mexico and southern Colorado. Up to 36 inches of snow blanketed the Wolf Creek and Red Mountain passes of southwest Colorado, and up to 15 inches of snow was reported around Trinidad. In New Mexico, the eastern slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains were blanketed with 9 to 28 inches of snow, and 50 to 60 mph wind gusts were reported from Taos to Albuquerque. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2011 - Strong winds reaching as high as 40 mph with gusts to 53 mph topple the 48 year old National Christmas tree. The 42 foot tall Colorado blue spruce sat just south of the White House on the Ellipse. It was transplanted there from York, Pennsylvania in 1978. The Weather Doctor

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PROMISES! PROMISES!

He spent many years living alone not having the necessities of life. One day in his despair, he looked at the top shelf of an old bookcase cluttered with pictures and the mementos of his life. As his eyes passed from item to item, he noticed his mother's Bible that he had not touched since her death.

Slowly, he opened the well-worn Book and very carefully began to leaf through its pages. As he made his way through Genesis, he found \$1,000.00. He did the same with Exodus and found another \$1,000.00. His excitement grew as he went from book to book and found \$1,000.00 in each one of them.

Imagine having \$66,000 within arm's reach and not even knowing it was there, waiting to be discovered. We may fault the old man for living in poverty when it was totally unnecessary when riches were available. We might say, "How sad! Why didn't he look sooner?"

But, sadder than the fact that the money was in his mother's Bible waiting for him to discover it, is the fact that there are 3,573 promises in the Bible waiting for us to discover and claim. Our good and gracious God placed them there for each of us. Yet, most of us do not know where to find them, so they go unclaimed.

The Psalmist said, "My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promises preserve my life." Each promise is a benefit God has placed in His Word waiting for us to claim. Jesus addressed this same issue when He said, "For everyone who asks receives." Don't go without!

Prayer: The best things in life, Father, are ours for the asking. Increase our faith to meet our needs. Revive us when we feel defeated. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. Psalm 119:50

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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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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Belle Fourche 47, Faith 34
Crow Creek 75, St. Francis Indian 46
Dakota Valley 67, Madison 37
Elkton-Lake Benton 55, Milbank 49
Gregory 44, Bon Homme 39
Groton Area 49, Deuel 31
Hamlin 63, Britton-Hecla 16
James Valley Christian 45, Wessington Springs 39
Kadoka Area 47, Lyman 42
Marty Indian 66, Flandreau Indian 38
North Central Co-Op 36, Sunshine Bible Academy 25
Pierre 46, Watertown 33
Pine Ridge 65, McLaughlin 36
Rapid City Central 42, Huron 33
Rapid City Stevens 69, Mitchell 35
Red Cloud 64, Bennett County 21
Sisseton 53, Florence/Henry 46
Spearfish 49, Harrisburg 36
St. Thomas More 43, Hot Springs 27
Tea Area 41, Elk Point-Jefferson 35
Timber Lake 65, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 41
Vermillion 56, Parker 25
Wagner 58, Platte-Geddes 22
Wakpala 103, Crazy Horse 18
Wall 54, Hill City 51
Waubay/Summit 48, Great Plains Lutheran 27
Webster 55, Redfield 44
White River 57, Philip 33
Winner 63, Mobridge-Pollock 48

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Belle Fourche 58, Faith 48
Canistota 63, Colman-Egan 34
Castlewood 64, Estelline/Hendricks 38
Clark/Willow Lake 67, Sisseton 40
Crazy Horse 75, Wakpala 68
Dakota Valley 71, Madison 40
DeSmet 71, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 51
Dell Rapids 55, Lennox 50
Dell Rapids St. Mary 65, Baltic 32
Gregory 60, Bon Homme 54
Groton Area 83, Deuel 68
Hamlin 66, Britton-Hecla 29

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Hanson 55, Corsica/Stickney 46
Harding County 60, Lemmon 52
Harrisburg 74, Spearfish 37
Howard 68, Arlington 47
Huron 61, Rapid City Central 54
Jones County 51, Bennett County 39
Lakota Tech 72, Bridgeport, Neb. 58
Leola/Frederick 56, Herreid/Selby Area 48
Lyman 58, Kadoka Area 38
Marty Indian 98, Flandreau Indian 65
Pierre 72, Watertown 65
Pine Ridge 49, McLaughlin 47
Platte-Geddes 66, Wagner 52
Potter County 73, Highmore-Harrold 36
Rapid City Stevens 60, Mitchell 59
Scotland 44, Menno 31
Sioux Falls Lincoln 73, Sioux Falls Jefferson 64
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 66, Sioux Falls Washington 40
Timber Lake 59, McIntosh 49
Vermillion 64, Parker 34
Waubay/Summit 65, Great Plains Lutheran 31
West Central 62, Chamberlain 38
White River 75, New Underwood 38
Winner 49, Mobridge-Pollock 30

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

South Dakota teen falconer: Training birds changed her life

By ERIN WOODIEL Sioux Falls Argus Leader

WORTHING, S.D. (AP) — Gabi Olson smiled, her braces parting her lips as she took a deep breath of the winter air that shifted through her long blonde hair. In the small wooded area behind her home in Worthing, she was in her happy place with no one around. At least, no other people.

Reaching into a side pocket of her canvas bag, she pulled out a piece of quail, still covered in feathers and bone, holding it aloft in her thickly gloved hand. At the sound of the plastic black whistle she kept around her neck, a familiar mottled brown hawk with pale yellow eyes spread its wings from the trees above and flew directly onto her fist.

Olson is one of 34 licensed falconers in South Dakota, only seven of whom are female. At 16-years-old, she and just one other share the distinction of being the youngest falconers in the state, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

"It's unlikely for me to find anybody with the same experiences," said Olson. "And that's difficult when you're at this age where all you want is to be liked by everybody."

A person's teenage years are a time for growing up, finding who they are, finding where they belong. Like any other kid, Olson is in the middle of that search to understand herself. Her path just so happens to include training a wild bird with razor-sharp talons to hunt alongside her.

After completing her school assignments each morning, Olson trained with Harley, the Harlan's Hawk she caught in November, until the sun went down. When she wasn't working with Harley, she was thinking about her.

"It's not just a hobby, it's not just an art, it's not just a sport, it's not just a relationship," said Olson. "It's all those things and more."

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She knows that it sounds like an exaggeration, but Olson maintains that falconry changed her life. Nothing has challenged her, or given her a thrill, the way that bonding with a wild bird has.

"Before I was a falconer, I had really low self esteem," she said. "I couldn't talk to people, you know, I struggled so much with confidence. After I became a falconer, I had to do so many brave things in order to accomplish my goal."

Developing sense of trust with wild bird takes time

Olson became fixated on falconry as a child after reading Jean Craighead George's "My Side of the Mountain" and Terry Lynn Johnson's "Falcon Wild." A kid forming a bond with a wild animal seemed like something that would only happen in books, and when 12-year-old Olson learned that it was indeed a real pursuit, she couldn't let it go.

Armed with a new passion and the knowledge that the preliminary falconry license test could be taken as early as age 14, Olson convinced her parents to support her endeavor and hit the books. She passed the 100-question written test two years later and found Bruce Eckman, one of the few available falconers in eastern South Dakota, to sponsor her two-year apprenticeship. She quickly proved that she was more than "a little girl who wants a pet bird."

"She's always been an introvert, so it was about finding a sport that fit her," said Laura Olson, Gabi Olson's mother. "This is an outdoor extracurricular outside interest that is not like (anything) anybody else has."

At its core, falconry is the act of hunting for game by means of a bird of prey. Birds such as hawks and falcons will not form an affectionate bond with humans, but they will agree to a working relationship if a person earns their trust and keeps them comfortable.

"The feeling is indescribable," said Olson. "You're in this partnership with this creature that doesn't need you, but is choosing to stick with you."

In order to establish a sense of trust, Olson spent every day acclimating Harley to her presence. After Harley would eat from her (heavily gloved) hand, she started moving farther away to encourage the bird to jump to her fist. This continued for a couple weeks until Harley equated Olson with a steady food source. Once that precedent was set, Harley would follow Olson anywhere, free flying and no longer attached by any sort of tether. That's when they started hunting.

"When you catch that rabbit, when your bird flies to your fist, you're just kind of filled with this rush of a mix of adrenaline and joy, and you just need to have that again," said Olson.

Of all the birds she worked with since becoming a falconer, Harley was the first Olson trained entirely on her own, and she was Olson's favorite. As the pair bonded, Olson came to know exactly what a ruffle of the feathers meant or which kind of head movement indicated her bird was getting bored.

Recognizing raptor anatomy and understanding Harley's behavior are the most important skills Olson has developed as a falconer, but they are by no means the only things she's learned. A kit of leather-working tools allowed her to make custom leg bands. Basic carpentry knowledge was necessary to build a mews, or stable-like enclosure. She now has a contact at a zoo supply company to purchase frozen quail in bulk.

There are so many elements involved in becoming a successful falconer that Olson likens a day with Harley to solving a series of algebra equations. There are multiple variables to eliminate or simplify in order to identify and solve the problem at hand.

It's ironic, she added, that she doesn't particularly enjoy the algebra lessons she receives while being homeschooled.

"It fits her interests, it fits her intellectual abilities," said Laura Olson. "It's been very good for her growing and maturing emotionally."

With a plethora of practical trade skills under her belt and an abundance of connections with wild animals that feel straight out of a tall tale, Olson admits she feels wiser than many other people her age. However, she added, finding her life's devotion in such an unconventional place comes at the price of exclusion.

"When you're a kid, you're always told that being different is good," she said. "I believed that so much that I really wanted to be different, and I did everything so that I wouldn't be like the other kids. But now that I'm finally doing something that isn't something a lot of kids do, it's lonely."

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By not attending a public school and getting her education at home, Olson is already one step removed from a large number of her peers. By spending the rest of her free time with her hawk, she misses out on social media trends and often doesn't understand inside jokes made by other kids. Likewise, when she talks to them about her love of falconry, they either have never heard of it, or they say they don't get it and dismiss her.

"It is really fun when people have the first reaction, because then you get to tell them all about it and share your love for once," said Olson. "But even then, they're never going to share knowledge with you. There's not going to be any advice given."

Being a teenager without typical social connections is a difficult thing to accept. But for Olson, the idea of giving up falconry for a more common extracurricular activity will never be on the table. She's in it for life.

"For me, falconry is just so obvious," she said. "It's just, I have to do that. It's a part of me."

One life lesson Olson said every falconer has to learn is that of grief and loss. She didn't expect to be confronted with it so soon, but on January 10, Harley died. Olson said she doesn't know exactly what Harley was sick with, but she and her parents have their speculations. One day, the hawk was "fat and happy" with a full crop of food and the next, she took a turn for the worse.

"Even though I know it's not my fault, I still kind of believe it is," Olson said. "There's definitely a lot of guilt there, you feel so responsible for your bird."

Since Harley was the first hawk Olson trained since graduating from her apprenticeship, she said she felt most attached to Harley out of all the birds she'd worked with over the past few years. Coping with her first loss on her own has been a hard hit.

"This was my chance to prove myself and show I could be a falconer without somebody holding my hand along the way, and it's over," she said.

All of the constant challenges, long hours of work and detailed regulations surrounding falconry might be enough to turn some people away from the practice for good. Those people are not Gabi Olson. While it's a bit too late in the season to trap and train another hawk this year, she'll be studying up and preparing her equipment to do better with her next bird.

"I can't think of a logical reason why falconry is worth it other than the feeling is just so great that it's really hard to resist," she said. "It's something that you can't experience anywhere else. You've got to be just a little bit crazy to be a falconer."

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

06-11-50-63-68, Mega Ball: 17, Megaplier: 4

(six, eleven, fifty, sixty-three, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: seventeen; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$64 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$31 million

South Dakota 'Teen Mom' star gets home makeover show

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's "Teen Mom" star Chelsea DeBouer and her husband are set to star in a new home makeover show next spring.

The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported Thursday that DeBouer and her husband, Cole, will star in "Farmhouse Fabulous" on HGTV. The series is set to premiere in spring 2023.

The couple drew the network's attention after posting photos on Instagram of renovations they made to a Sioux Falls farmhouse. HGTV Senior Vice President of Programming and Production Betsy Ayala called the couple "spirited young entrepreneurs breaking ground in the home renovation business."

Chelsea DeBouer starred in MTV's "Teen Mom" and "Teen Mom 2."

Noem unveils new state services website with 'pheasant' chat

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Friday unveiled a new design for a government services website, billing it as a modernization for citizen services.

The website, which links to services ranging from state park permits to job postings and COVID-19 updates, also features a chat feature with a pheasant named "Fez."

"Don't shoot me! I'm here to help," Fez offers, connecting users to a live agent for 12 hours during business days.

The Republican governor said the project has been in the works since May and includes a search function to find government services.

"This portal will allow people to create their own account, access all state agency services and maintain the records for services received," Noem said in a statement. "I want South Dakota to be a leader in citizen-focused digital government."

The site offers links to requesting child care assistance, information about a broadband expansion program and crime victims' services.

Noem's office said the website is part of an effort to update the state's digital infrastructure to strengthen it against cybersecurity risks.

Her spokesman Ian Fury said the website portal cost \$1.6 million to build and launch. It was paid out of \$10 million the Legislature budgeted to modernize the state's information technology systems.

2 Sioux Falls officers charged in child pornography cases

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Two Sioux Falls police officers are facing child pornography charges in what officials say are unrelated cases.

Luke Schauer, 28, has pleaded not guilty to federal charges of attempted production of child pornography and transfer of obscene materials to minors. Schauer has bonded out of jail.

Matthew Jock, 23, is charged in state court with five counts of possession, manufacturing and distribution of child pornography. He remains in custody at the Minnehaha County Jail on a \$25,000 cash bond.

According to court documents, Jock's charges stem from an investigation by the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation after they received a tip last month from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the Argus Leader reported.

Jock's attorney, Ryan Kolbeck, declined to comment on the case.

In Schauer's case, prosecutors say he admitted during questioning this week with two FBI special agents that he was aware he was messaging with a 12-year-old girl. The potential victim, in fact, was an undercover FBI agent. Schauer's attorney, Sonny Walter, did not immediately return a message for comment.

A visibly upset Jon Thum, Sioux Falls police chief, repeated the sentiments he expressed after Schauer's arrest when addressing the media on Thursday regarding Jock's arrest.

"To whom much trust is given, much is expected, and these clearly aren't actions that reflect that trust," Thum said.

The chief, along with Mayor Paul TenHaken, said they will be reviewing the police department's internal policies and procedures.

EXPLAINER: Why half of Guantanamo's prisoners could get out

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration has been quietly laying the groundwork to release prisoners from the Guantanamo Bay detention center and at least move closer to being able to shut it down. A review board that includes military and intelligence officials has now determined more than half of the 39 men held indefinitely without charge at the U.S. base in Cuba can now be safely released to their homelands or sent to another country. Decisions about several of these prisoners, including some denied

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under previous reviews, have come in recent weeks as the administration faced criticism from human rights groups for not doing more to close Guantanamo, releasing only a single prisoner over the past year.

Where things stand:

IS THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION ABOUT TO EMPTY GUANTANAMO?

No. With the most recent decisions, there are now 20 prisoners deemed eligible for release or transfer and one due to soon complete a sentence after being convicted by military commission in a plea deal. Much still must happen, such as in some cases finding countries willing to accept prisoners and impose security controls on them. But some could start to leave in the coming weeks and months.

DOES THIS MEAN THE UNITED STATES IS CLOSER TO SHUTTERING GUANTANAMO?

In theory, yes. But even if the U.S. releases all 20, what to do with the rest? There are 10 still facing trial by military commission. They include five charged with planning and aiding the Sept. 11 attacks. The death penalty case has been bogged down in pretrial litigation for years and there still is no start date. One potential solution would be plea bargains to end all pending cases, but that leaves open the question of where they would serve out any sentences.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The U.S. opened the detention center under President George W. Bush in January 2001 after the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Afghanistan. It was intended to hold and interrogate prisoners suspected of having links to al-Qaida or the Taliban. About 780 men have passed through Guantanamo, which hit a peak of about 680 in 2003. Bush's defense secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld, famously referred to the men held there as "the worst of the worst," but many were low-level militants, some had no connection to terrorism at all and few would ever be charged with a crime.

As reports of torture and abuse emerged, the detention center became a lightning rod for international criticism from American allies and a propaganda bonanza for enemies. Bush released 532 prisoners but left it to his successor to figure out what to do with the rest.

President Barack Obama pledged to close Guantanamo upon taking office. But members of Congress resisted the idea of transferring prisoners to the United States, even to face trial in federal court. The Obama administration created the Periodic Review Board to evaluate prisoners and determine if they could be released without posing a threat to national security. Under Obama, 197 prisoners left Guantanamo.

Under President Donald Trump, a single prisoner was released as part of a plea bargain, bringing the total to 40. President Joe Biden has said little about Guantanamo, which has largely fallen out of the political spotlight. So far, just one prisoner has been released under his administration.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN RECENT WEEKS?

In January, human rights groups were marking the 20th anniversary of the opening of Guantanamo and bemoaning what they saw as a lack of progress on closure. Since then, there's been some behind-the-scenes activity with the board, which was never popular with detainee advocates but has been one of the few paths out of confinement. When Biden came into office, there were five cleared detainees; four were holdovers from the Obama administration and one was approved under Trump. Under Biden, 15 have been cleared so far, including more than half a dozen in recent weeks.

This is what the administration considers a "deliberate and thorough process focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population and closing of the Guantanamo facility," according to said Pentagon deputy press secretary J. Todd Breasseale.

Among the factors they consider, Breasseale said, are the age and health of the detainees. They have included Mohammed al-Qahtani, a mentally ill Saudi who authorities said intended to be one of the 9/11 hijackers but was prevented from entering the U.S. by a suspicious Customs officer at the airport in Orlando, Florida. A Bush legal official concluded al-Qahtani had been tortured at Guantanamo and an effort to try him by military commission was scrapped.

Also cleared under Biden was Saifullah Paracha, a Pakistani with various medical ailments who, at 74, is the oldest prisoner at Guantanamo.

The review board for this first time has cleared one of the "high-value detainees," designated as such because they were held in the clandestine CIA prisons known as black sites.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE REACTION?

Some Republicans in Congress have expressed outrage at the al-Qahtani decision. Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, called it "an appalling capitulation to the far left." Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is critical of the policy more broadly of seeking to close Guantanamo, which he recently defended as "a highly secure, humane and entirely legal place to detain terrorists." Under the law, Congress must be notified in advance of any pending transfers or releases but is largely powerless to stop it from occurring.

Among detainee advocates, there is a wait-and-see attitude. They welcome the board's decisions but want to see if the administration follows through with releases. Wells Dixon, an attorney for the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, is waiting to see what happens with his client, Majid Khan, the prisoner who has reached a plea bargain and has nearly completed his sentence. "It's a positive thing for these men to be cleared," Dixon said. "But it's not meaningful progress toward closure unless there are transfers."

Harris on Ukraine: World at 'a decisive moment in history'

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

MUNICH (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris warned Russia on Saturday that it will face "unprecedented" financial penalties if it invades Ukraine and predicted that such an attack would draw European allies closer to the United States. The world is at "a decisive moment in history," she told Ukraine's president, who said he just wants peace for his nation.

Harris spoke at the annual Munich Security Conference the day after President Joe Biden said he was "convinced" that Russia's Vladimir Putin has made the decision to invade neighboring Ukraine.

"Let me be clear, I can say with absolute certainty: If Russia further invades Ukraine, the United States, together with our allies and partners, will impose significant, and unprecedented economic costs," Harris said.

Harris aimed to make the case to a largely European audience that the West has "strength through unity" and that an invasion would likely lead to an even bigger NATO presence on Russia's doorstep.

Later, at the start of a meeting with Ukraine's leader, Harris called it "a decisive moment in history" and told Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "Any threat to your country we take seriously." He responded: "We clearly understand what is going on. This is our land. We want peace."

He also said he needs Western allies to take "specific steps," alluding to Ukraine's requests for even more military and economic assistance. Zelensky also noted that with Russian troops at his country's borders, Ukraine's army is in fact "defending all of Europe."

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula in 2014, and pro-Russia separatists have been fighting Ukrainian forces in the country's east for almost eight years. The United States and the European Union previously sanctioned Russia over its seizure of Crimea.

Western fears of an invasion have escalated in recent months as Russia amassed more than 150,000 troops near Ukraine's borders.

Harris said the Biden administration, along with its allies, had tried to engage with Moscow in good faith to find a diplomatic resolution but that effort was not reciprocated by the Kremlin.

"Russia continues to say it is ready to talk while at the same time it narrows the avenues for diplomacy," Harris said. "Their actions simply do not match their words."

Harris credited European allies for speaking with a largely unified voice as the latest Ukraine crisis has unfolded. The vice president said Republicans and Democrats in Washington — who rarely agree on many major issues — are generally in agreement on the necessity of confronting Putin.

"We didn't all start out in the same place," Harris said. "We came together and are now speaking with a unified voice. And that voice was a function of not only dialogue and debate, some concessions, but also the practical realization of the moment that we are in, which is that we are looking at a sovereign nation that may very well be on the verge of being invaded yet again."

Harris on Friday met in Munich with the leaders of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, who stressed that a

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U.S. increase in its troop presence on the eastern edge of NATO is necessary.

The White House has not yet said whether it will fulfill those requests, but Harris suggested in her address on Saturday that an invasion could lead to a bolstered American presence.

"The imposition of these sweeping and coordinated measures will inflict great damage on those who must be held accountable. And we will not stop with economic measures," Harris said. "We will further reinforce our NATO allies on the eastern flank."

Biden and other U.S. have offered increasingly dire warnings that the window for diplomacy is narrow.

Biden told reporters Friday that he believes Putin has decided to invade in the coming days, taking military action that could go far beyond the disputed Donbas region in eastern Ukraine and include the capital of Kyiv.

The vice president was scheduled to meet later Saturday with Germany's chancellor, Olaf Scholz.

Harris noted in her remarks that "not since the end of the Cold War" has the Munich conference "convened under such dire circumstances."

Ukraine rebels mobilize troops amid Russia invasion fears

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine ordered a full military mobilization Saturday amid a spike of violence in the war-torn region and fears in the West that Russia might use the strife as a pretext for an invasion.

Denis Pushilin, the head of the pro-Russia separatist government in Ukraine's Donetsk region, released a statement announcing a full troop mobilization. A similar announcement quickly followed from his counterpart in the Luhansk region.

Pushilin cited an "immediate threat of aggression" from Ukrainian forces, accusations that Ukrainian officials vehemently denied earlier.

"I appeal to all the men in the republic who can hold weapons to defend their families, their children, wives, mothers," Pushilin said. "Together we will achieve the coveted victory that we all need."

The separatists and Ukrainian forces have been fighting for almost eight years. But the violence along the line of contact separating the two sides, including a humanitarian convoy hit by shelling, has risen in recent days. A car bombing Friday in the city of Donetsk also sharpened the sense of alarm.

With an estimated 150,000 Russian troops now posted around Ukraine's borders, the long-simmering separatist conflict could provide the spark for a broader attack.

"They are uncoiling and are now poised to strike," U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said during a visit to Lithuania, where he assured the three Baltic nations they would not be on their own if faced with security threats from Russia.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was to meet with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris at the Munich Security Conference before returning home later Saturday.

"We do not fully know what President Putin intends, but the omens are grim, and that is why we must stand strong together," Johnson said.

Ukraine's military said shelling killed a soldier Saturday in the government-held part of the Donetsk region and that separatist forces were placing artillery in residential areas to try and provoke a response.

On Friday, the rebels began evacuating civilians to Russia with an announcement that appeared to be part of their and Moscow's efforts to paint Ukraine as the aggressor.

U.S. President Joe Biden said late Friday he was now "convinced" that Russian President Vladimir Putin has decided to invade Ukraine and assault the capital, Kyiv.

Biden, who for weeks had said the U.S. was not sure if Putin was determined to send troops into the neighboring country, cited American intelligence as the source of his ominous assessment.

"As of this moment, I'm convinced he's made the decision," Biden said. "We have reason to believe that." He reiterated that the assault could occur in the "coming days."

Meanwhile, Russia conducted massive nuclear drills on Saturday. The Kremlin said Putin, who pledged

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to protect Russia's national interests against what it sees as encroaching Western threats, was watching the drills together with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko from the situation room in the Kremlin.

Notably, the planned exercise involves the Crimea-based Black Sea Fleet. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula after seizing it from Ukraine in 2014. .

Underscoring the West's concerns of an imminent invasion, a U.S. defense official said an estimated 40% to 50% of the ground forces deployed in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border have moved into attack positions closer to the border.

The shift has been underway for about a week, other officials have said, and does not necessarily mean Putin has decided to begin an invasion. The defense official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. military assessments.

The official also said the number of Russian ground units known as battalion tactical groups in the border area had grown to as many as 125, up from 83 two weeks ago. Each group has 750 to 1,000 soldiers.

Harris warned Russia that it would face "unprecedented" financial costs if it attacked Ukraine and underscored an invasion would draw European allies closer to the United States.

The president of the European Union's executive commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said the EU has prepared substantial additional sanctions against Russia in coordination with the U.S., U.K. and Canada, including limiting access to financial markets.

"The Kremlin's dangerous thinking, which comes straight out of a dark past, may cost Russia a prosperous future," von der Leyen said in Munich.

Lines of communication between Moscow and the West remain open: the American and Russian defense chiefs spoke Friday. French President Emmanuel Macron scheduled a phone call with Putin on Sunday. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed to meet next week.

Immediate worries focused on eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces have been fighting the pro-Russia rebels since 2014 in a conflict that has killed some 14,000 people. Violations of a 2015 ceasefire agreement, including shelling and shooting along the line of contact, have been common.

However, violence has escalated in recent days. A bombing struck a car outside the main government building in the rebel-held city of Donetsk on Friday. The head of the separatist forces, Denis Sinukov, said the car was his, the Interfax news agency reported. Targeted violence is unusual in rebel-held cities.

Adding to the tensions, two explosions shook the rebel-controlled city of Luhansk early Saturday. The Luhansk Information Center said one of the blasts was in a natural gas main. The center cited witnesses as saying the other was at a vehicle service station.

There were no immediate reports of casualties and no independent confirmation of the circumstances of the three blasts. Luhansk officials blamed a gas main explosion earlier in the week on sabotage.

By Saturday morning, the separatists in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, which form Ukraine's industrial heartland known as the Donbas, said that thousands of residents of the rebel-controlled areas had been evacuated to Russia.

More than 6,600 people had been evacuated from Donetsk, and some 25,000 people have left Luhansk, with 10,000 preparing to leave, separatist officials said.

Separatist officials announced plans Friday to evacuate hundreds of thousands of people. Russia has issued about 700,000 passports to residents of the rebel-held territories. Claims that Russian citizens are being endangered might be used as justification for military action.

Pushilin, the head of the Donetsk rebel government, said women, children and the elderly would go first, and that Russia has prepared facilities for them. Pushilin alleged in a video statement that Ukraine was going to order an imminent offensive in the area.

Metadata from two videos posted by the separatists announcing the evacuation show that the files were created two days ago, The Associated Press confirmed. U.S. authorities have alleged that the Kremlin's effort to come up with an invasion pretext could include staged, prerecorded videos.

Authorities began moving children from an orphanage in Donetsk, and other residents boarded buses for Russia. Long lines formed at gas stations as more people prepared to leave on their own.

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Authorities in Russia's Rostov region declared a state of emergency because of the influx of evacuees. Media reports on Saturday morning described chaos at some of the summer camps in assigned to accommodate the people from eastern Ukraine.

The reports said there were long lines of buses and hundreds of people waiting in the cold for hours on end to be housed without access to food or bathroom facilities. Some of the camps were said to have run out of space.

Putin ordered the Russian government to offer 10,000 rubles (about \$130) to each evacuee, an amount equivalent to about half of an average monthly salary in the war-ravaged Donbas region.

Around the volatile line of contact, a United Nations humanitarian convoy came under rebel shelling Friday in the Luhansk region, Ukraine's military chief said. No casualties were reported. Rebels denied involvement and accused Ukraine of staging a provocation.

Ukraine denied planning any offensive.

"We are fully committed to diplomatic conflict resolution only," Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted.

Ukraine's ruling party, Servant of the People, echoed his sentiment in an online statement Saturday.

It rejected "the possibility of liberating the temporarily occupied territories by military means" and accused Russia of "trying to artificially create a pretext for a full-scale aggression against Ukraine."

Western Europe cleans up after storm leaves at least 12 dead

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Crews cleared fallen trees and worked to restore power to about 400,000 people in Britain as Western Europe cleaned up Saturday after one of the most damaging storms in years.

At least 12 people were killed, many by falling trees, in Ireland, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Named Storm Eunice by the British and Irish weather services, and Storm Zeynep in Germany, Friday's storm was the second to hit the region in a week.

Winds toppled the spire of a church in Wells, southwest England, ripped off parts of the domed roof of London's O2 Arena and left a trail of felled trees and damaged buildings across several countries.

A gust of 122 miles an hour (196 kilometers an hour) was provisionally recorded Friday on the Isle of Wight. If confirmed, it would be the highest ever in England. Hurricane-force winds begin at 74 mph.

The Met Office weather service said more strong winds would hit the southern coasts of England and Wales on Saturday, with the potential for further damage, while snow and ice could cause disruption further north.

The U.K.'s National Rail association said "routes across most of Great Britain" remained affected by the weather on Saturday morning, with disruptions to continue throughout the day.

Transport in Germany also remained severely disrupted, with railway operator Deutsche Bahn saying no long-distance trains would operate north of Dortmund, Hannover and Berlin until at least 6 p.m.

The storm left at least three people dead in Germany, including a man who fell as he was trying to repair a damaged roof and a driver whose car crashed into a tree that had fallen across a road.

In the northwestern city of Bremen, a 55-meter (180-foot) crane fell onto an unfinished office building.

A cleanup also was underway in the Netherlands, where four people died as Eunice tore across the country on Friday.

Train services, halted during the storm, remained disrupted with the company responsible for rail infrastructure saying that it was working hard to repair "extensive" damage to tracks and overhead power lines.

Engineers were expected to assess damage to the roof of a stadium in The Hague where professional soccer team ADO The Hague plays its home matches after parts of the structure were blown loose.

Across the country, teams were shifting fallen trees and beginning to repair roofs damaged by the storm.

AP Exclusive: US skaters file appeal to get Olympic medals

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

ZHANGJIAKOU, China (AP) — The U.S. figure skaters whose Olympic silver medals are being withheld

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have filed an appeal to have them awarded before the end of the Beijing Games, with a decision expected as soon as Saturday night.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport confirmed to The Associated Press that it was hearing the case Saturday evening in Beijing and expected a rapid ruling.

In a letter sent to IOC president Thomas Bach, a copy of which was obtained by AP, attorneys for the skaters said they sought a ruling before Sunday's closing ceremony.

Kamila Valieva led the Russian team to a victory in last week's team event, and the U.S. finished second. Soon after, a positive doping test for the 15-year-old skater was disclosed. CAS allowed her to continue skating at the women's event, but the International Olympic Committee said it would not award medals in any events in which she finished among the top three.

She finished fourth in the women's event — crying as she left the ice, then criticized by her coach after a mistake-filled long program.

This case involves the team event held the previous week. The Russians won the event by a large margin. Japan was third and Canada finished fourth.

The letter sent on behalf of the American runners-up says the IOC's "own rules mandate that a victory ceremony to present medals to the athletes shall follow the conclusion of each sports event."

In a meeting earlier this week with the skaters, Bach offered them Olympic torches as something of a holdover memento while the doping case, which could take months, or even years, plays out.

In their letter to Bach, the attorneys said they hoped the IOC would reconsider but that because of the urgency, they were filing the appeal.

U.S. Figure Skating executive director Ramsey Baker sent the AP a statement standing in support of the skaters.

"Having a medal ceremony at an Olympic Games is not something that can be replicated anywhere else, and they should be celebrated in front of the world before leaving Beijing," Baker said.

The letter to Bach, sent by attorney Paul Greene, who represents athletes in doping and other cases against Olympic authorities, said the IOC president had asked the athletes for their input.

"A dignified medal ceremony from our clients' vantage point is one in the Medals Plaza as originally planned and afforded to all other medalists," he wrote.

After Valieva's test became public, Russia's anti-doping agency at first put her on provisional suspension, then lifted the suspension. That triggered the IOC and World Anti-Doping Agency to lead an appeal to CAS, which acted swiftly and said Valieva could still compete.

That did not resolve the larger question about the result from the team competition.

Nine Americans stand to get some sort of medal out of that — either the second-place prize they're aiming to receive this weekend, or a gold that could become theirs if the Russian's are disqualified because of Valieva's doping case.

Because she is 15, Valieva is considered a "protected person" under anti-doping rules, and is not expected to receive a harsh penalty. Her coaches and doctors are being investigated by Russian and world anti-doping authorities.

Olympics Live: Cross country race moved up due to wind

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

The 30-kilometer women's cross country ski race set for Sunday at the Beijing Olympics will start two-and-a-half hours earlier than originally scheduled due to harsh weather conditions

Strong winds are in the forecast for a second day.

The men's 50-kilometer race on Saturday was shortened to 30 kilometers as temperatures dropped and winds blasted the ski trails.

The women's distance of 30K will remain the same. The race was supposed to start at 2:30 p.m. but will start at 11 a.m. instead.

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Members of the U.S. men's hockey team were involved in a noisy late-night party at the Olympic Village that has prompted a conversation between the U.S Olympic and Paralympic Committee and USA Hockey.

The USOPC confirmed to The Associated Press that a noise complaint was reported. No property damage was involved, and no one was kicked out.

It was not at all like the 1998 Nagano Olympics when U.S. players from the NHL caused \$3,000 in damage by trashing apartments and throwing chairs and a fire extinguisher through windows to a courtyard below.

"We hold Team USA athletes to very high standards of personal conduct," the USOPC said in a statement sent to The AP. "We have spoken to USA Hockey leadership, affirmed those expectations and can confirm that athletes will remain in the village until their scheduled departures."

Sweden's Niklas Edin has claimed the only major title missing from a career in which he's established himself as the most decorated skip in curling history.

Four years after losing in the Pyeongchang final to American upstart John Shuster, Edin led Sweden to the gold medal on Saturday, beating Britain 5-4 in the first extra-end men's final in Olympic history.

With the medal podium already set up, and Canada standing by to collect the bronze it won Friday by ending the Americans' repeat hopes, Edin took advantage of the last-rock advantage in the first tiebreaker end and put his penultimate stone into the center of the target area.

When British skip Bruce Mouat failed to knock it out on a ricochet, the Swedes had clinched it. They paused — it's not polite to celebrate an opponent's miss — and then let out a yell.

Their alternate and coaching staff hurried down to the ice to join the celebration.

The organizers of the Beijing Olympics say no new positive COVID tests were reported in the Olympic bubble on Friday.

Since January 23, 265 people have tested positive on arrival at the airport and another 171 have tested positive in the Olympic bubble, for a total of 436 positive cases.

The bubble allows Olympics participants to skip quarantine when they arrive in China, but it means their movements have been severely restricted. Everyone is tested daily for the virus, and anyone who tests positive is quickly isolated to prevent the virus from spreading. Everyone is required to wear N95 face masks except athletes while they're competing.

Of those who tested positive in the bubble, 68 were athletes or coaches and 103 were other people working at the Games. More than 1.7 million daily tests were administered to people in the bubble.

Irene Schouten of the Netherlands has won her third gold medal of the Beijing Olympics, outspurring Canada's Ivanie Blondin to win the women's mass start.

In the final speedskating event of the Winter Games, Schouten established herself as the biggest star at the Ice Ribbon with a furious push to line to beat Blondin by 0.06 seconds.

Schouten let out a scream as she crossed the line, adding to her gold medals in the 3,000 and 5,000 meters. In a nifty bookend, she won the first and last speedskating events in Beijing.

Blondin settled for the silver, while the bronze went to Italy's Francesca Lollobrigida.

It was a frustrating final day at the oval for the U.S. team, which just missed a medal in both races. Mia Manganello Kilburg settled for fourth in the women's event to match the finish of the top American in the men's event, Joey Mantia, who was edged out for a medal in a photo finish.

The Netherlands again topped the speedskating medal table, finishing with six golds and 12 medals overall. The United States finished with three medals, their best showing since 2010.

Attorneys for the U.S. figure skaters who won silver in the team event have notified the International Olympic Committee that they have filed an appeal to have the medals awarded before the end of the Beijing Games, The Associated Press has learned.

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The medal ceremony has been delayed because of the controversy surrounding Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva, who helped Russia win gold in the team event. She failed a pre-Olympics drug test, but the result wasn't revealed until after the team competition.

AP obtained a copy of a letter sent to IOC president Thomas Bach Saturday in which attorneys said they would ask the Court of Arbitration for Sport for a ruling before Sunday's closing ceremony.

Bart Swings of Belgium has captured the gold medal in the final men's speedskating event of the Beijing Olympics, the mass start.

Swings improved on the silver medal he won in the frenetic event at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games. South Korea grabbed the other medals, with Chung Jae Won taking the silver and defending Olympic champion Lee Seung Hoon settling for bronze this time.

Three-time world champion Joey Mantia of the United States just missed out on a medal. He posted the same time as Lee, but the replay showed the tip of the South Korean's skate crossed the line just ahead of Mantia's blade.

The women's mass start will close out speedskating at the Ice Ribbon.

Alexander Bolshunov has sprinted to his third Olympic gold medal, winning a 30-kilometer mass start cross-country ski race that was rescheduled and shortened because of strong wind and frigid temperatures.

The Russian was part of a five-man breakaway in the final kilometer. He pushed ahead on the final climb into the stadium, taking the title in 1 hour, 11 minutes, 32.7 seconds.

Russian teammate Ivan Yakimushkin crossed the line 5.5 seconds behind for silver, and Simen Hegstad Krueger of Norway took bronze, 7 seconds behind.

Bolshunov also won gold in the skiathlon and the relay at the Beijing Games. He took silver in the 15-kilometer classic ski race and bronze in the team sprint.

World Cup leader Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo fell off the back of the lead group about 33 minutes into the race and took his bib off and walked off the tracks with about 7.9 kilometers to go.

The International Olympic Committee member who oversaw Beijing Winter Games preparations since 2015 has been put back on its executive board.

Juan Antonio Samaranch, whose father of the same name was IOC president from 1980-2001, was voted into the only open vice president slot. There are four vice presidents. The younger Samaranch was previously a vice president from 2016 to 2020.

It puts him into position for an expected run at the IOC presidency in 2025. Current IOC rules require Thomas Bach to stand aside after 12 years as president.

Samaranch replaces Yu Zaiqing of China, who had to step down after completing the maximum two consecutive four-year terms.

Samaranch's return to the 15-member board was approved by the full membership meeting in Beijing ahead of Sunday's closing ceremony. The voting was 72 for and four against. Nine members abstained.

Defending Olympic champion Nana Takagi has crashed out of the mass start semifinals, the second time the Japanese speedskater has fallen while leading a race in Beijing.

Takagi stumbled and her left hand touched the rinkside padding before she slid on her side into the outer padding.

Takagi lost her balance while leading the team pursuit and crashed in the last corner, which cost the Japanese women a gold medal.

Ivanie Blondin, who led Canada to a gold medal in team pursuit, won her semifinal. Francesca Lollobrigida of Italy, silver medalist in the 3,000, won the other semi.

Also advancing to the final was Claudia Pechstein of Germany. The nine-time Olympic medalist turns 50 on Tuesday.

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Americans Mia Manganello Kilburg and Olympic rookie Giorgia Birkeland also moved on. There were three falls in the first semi, including Marijke Groenewoud of the Netherlands. She went down in a corner with four laps go go, but got up and finished fifth to qualify for the final.

Irene Schouten of the Netherlands, winner of the 3,000, also made the 16-woman final.

Defending champion Lee Seung Hoon of South Korea has qualified for the final of men's mass start speedskating.

Lee won the event that made its debut four years ago in his home country.

Also moving on to the final are 2018 silver medalist Bart Swings of Belgium, three-time world champion Joey Mantia of the United States, and 2020 world champion Jorrit Bergsma of the Netherlands.

Sven Kramer of the Netherlands qualified for the last Olympic final of his career. The 35-year-old skater who is a nine-time medalist finished seventh in the semifinals.

Chinese organizers say a total of 97,000 spectators have attended medal events at the Beijing Olympics. That's less than two-thirds of the 150,000 predicted on the eve of the Olympics more than two weeks ago. The games close Sunday.

The number was revealed at an IOC meeting by the executive vice president of the local organizing committee, Zhang Jiandong.

Venues in Beijing and Zhangjiakou could have invited spectators to attend but fans were not allowed at Alpine skiing and sliding sports in Yanqing.

Plans to sell tickets to international visitors were scrapped last year because of the coronavirus pandemic and the block was extended to residents of China in January.

Spectators were to be invited from international communities living in mainland China, members of diplomatic missions and marketing partners.

The men's 50-kilometer cross-country ski race at the Olympics has been delayed and the length reduced to 30 kilometers because of the weather.

The International Ski Federation said the decision was made "in regards to the athletes safety to reduce the time of exposure of athletes in extreme conditions."

The wind has blasted the Zhangjiakou National Cross Country Center all morning, sending plumes of snow into the air.

The temperature is hovering around minus 18 degrees C (0 degrees F).

The 50-kilometer race can take up to two hours to complete, leaving athletes exposed and susceptible to frostbite. The racers will ski a 7.1-kilometer course four times, instead of the originally planned six laps on an 8.3-kilometer course.

The last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics has been pushed back a day because of strong winds. The mixed team parallel event was rescheduled from Saturday to Sunday, the last day of the Winter Games. It will start at 9 a.m. Beijing time.

It was supposed to start Saturday morning and was delayed twice because of gusts of up to about 40 mph (65 kph) before it was scrapped for the day.

The last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics will not be held as planned because of strong winds. A decision has not yet been made about whether to reschedule the event.

The team event was supposed to be held Saturday, but wind gusts at up to about 40 mph (65 kph) led to the announcement of two one-hour delays. The Winter Games end Sunday.

Organizers eventually said the race would not be held Saturday.

A meeting was being held "to discuss the potential rescheduling of the event."

Nico Porteous of New Zealand overcame the swirling wind to win the Olympic ski halfpipe final on a day

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when many skiers couldn't land their best tricks due to the strong gusts.

Porteous scored a 93 in his opening run on a bitterly cold and breezy morning in the last event at the Genting Snow Park. His score held up in tough conditions where skiers struggled to link big air and spins.

Two-time Olympic champion David Wise took home the silver with his first-run score of 90.75. The 31-year-old Wise was the only winner the men's event had ever known. He took the title at its Olympic debut in 2014 and again in 2018. Alex Ferreira of the United States threw down a strong first run, twirling his right ski pole at the bottom in elation, to end up with the bronze.

The last competitor to go, Aaron Blunck, crashed into the wall of the halfpipe while trying to land a trick in the gusty conditions. He stayed down for a moment before sitting up.

Wind gusts of up to about 40 mph (65 kph) are pushing back the start of the last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics.

The start of the team event has been delayed twice Saturday for a total of two hours and now will not begin before noon local time.

The blue and red gate flags are whipping in the wind along the race course known as "Ice River" at the National Alpine Skiing Center in Yanqing zone.

Nico Porteous of New Zealand grabbed the lead after the first run in the men's ski halfpipe final on a challenging day to throw tricks due to swirling wind.

Porteous scored a 93 thanks to back-to-back double cork 1620s. Two-time defending Olympic champion David Wise sits in second place with a score of 90.75 after the first of three runs. Many of the competitors struggled with wind gusts, including Brendan MacKay of Canada who appeared to be blown off line by the wind.

Top qualifier Aaron Blunck called the gusty conditions "gnarly." Although listed at 13 mph, the wind appears to be swirling in and through the halfpipe. The wind chill hovered around minus 26 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 32 degrees Celsius.)

The last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics is being delayed because of strong wind.

The start of the team event has been pushed back an hour to 11 a.m. local time on Saturday -- which is when it originally was scheduled to begin before a forecast of windy conditions prompted organizers to try to get going at 10 a.m.

Gusts of about 25 mph (40 kph) are kicking up snow near the bottom of the race course known as "Ice River" at the National Alpine Skiing Center in Yanqing zone.

The temperature is zero degrees Fahrenheit (minus 18 Celsius) and feels like minus 8 Fahrenheit (minus 22 Celsius).

Mikaela Shiffrin is on the roster for the United States, which faces Slovakia in the opening round. Other first-round matchups are Switzerland vs. China, Italy vs. Russia, Norway vs. Poland, France vs. Czech Republic, Germany vs. Sweden, and Slovenia vs. Canada.

Top-ranked Austria received a first-round bye because there are only 15 nations in the 16-spot bracket.

Behind China's Olympics, the saga of a chained woman unfolds

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The post, on China's Weibo social platform, resembled many others posted by official media during these Olympics — an ode to freestyle skier Eileen Gu, known to Chinese as Gu Ailing. "The biggest gold medal in Eileen Gu's heart," it teased.

Underneath, in the comments from users, came the questions. They were not on topic. They were about something else entirely — a chained woman captured in a viral video 500 miles from Beijing, on the southeastern China coast.

"Can you pay attention to Feng county? Where's the responsibility of national media?" one user asked.

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Said another: "Please thoroughly investigate the chained mother in Xuzhou so that every Chinese girl can accept the freedom and power given to them by this great era, just like our Ailing."

Since Jan. 28, the story of the chained woman who appeared in the video has continued to grow, evading numerous censors both digital and human. Underneath much Olympics coverage — from stories about copyright violations of mascot Bing Dwen Dwen to Gu's every move — Chinese commenters exhorted national media to highlight the growing scandal.

Even as the original accounts that shared the video disappeared and censors on social media platforms deleted articles and hashtags, amateur sleuths kept the story alive online. Offline, former investigative journalists went reporting on the scene.

"For this incident to have gotten this much attention, it's only because of netizens calling attention to it that it hasn't sunk," said Chase Zhao, an English teacher who has been following the case closely.

It is one case, one woman in a population of 1.4 billion at a moment when the Olympics are commanding a chunk of the national bandwidth. But as it unfolds, it affords a glimpse into what's happening in China behind the Winter Games — and how people advocate for causes even in the widely censored, politically fraught space of Chinese social media.

Days before the Lunar New Year holiday began on Feb. 1, a video spread online from a village in Feng county, located in Jiangsu province on the coast. It showed a woman with a chain around her neck.

The chain wasn't the subject of the video. A blogger had visited the village to show her as an example of a member of a poor rural family that would benefit from donations.

In the video, he offers her a jacket, asking if she's cold. Her response is unclear. The weather outside is zero degrees Celsius (32 Fahrenheit), according to the video, and she is wearing a dirty pink sweatshirt. He puts a child's jacket on her. He does not address the chain. Another video by the same blogger shows an interview with the woman's husband, who proudly says he has eight children with his wife.

The implications were troubling. Was the woman a victim of human trafficking? Was she abused? Why could she not move freely? What was her story?

The forthcoming answers did not really address such questions.

— On Jan. 28, the county government's propaganda office said the woman had not been trafficked and was married. She was chained, it said, because of mental health issues. In another statement shortly after, they said she'd been homeless.

— Later, the statement changed. The county government said the woman's name was "Xiaohuamei," or Little Plum Blossom, and that she had been brought to Jiangsu for medical treatment from a remote part of Yunnan province near Myanmar. She had been traveling with a woman named Sang from her village who somehow lost her.

— On Feb. 10, the city government issued a statement saying it had arrested three people, including Sang, Sang's husband and the father of the eight children — the first two for human trafficking, the father for illegal detention.

So many discrepancies. But what was the truth? On social media, people weren't having it. One popular Weibo user, "Jiangning popo," a police officer in Nanjing, said to his 5 million followers: "I'm so angry I could explode."

The changing narratives provoked people online into action.

Some created complex charts laying out the differences between each government notice. And as the contradictory answers grew, others took the situation into their own hands.

Two women, known only by their online aliases Quanquan and Wuyi, traveled to Feng county to help Little Plum Blossom. Based on their video and audio posts, they drove around, writing slogans on their car with lipstick to publicize the case while talking to people about the issue. At one point, according to a video posted by Quanquan, police had the slogans scrubbed from their car.

The two never met Plum Blossom, and were barred from entering a hospital where she had been taken

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when they tried to bring her a bouquet of sunflowers. Later, the bouquet they left behind appeared in a short video segment from state broadcaster CCTV.

When the two stopped posting, others online stepped in asking people to call the police station to find out what happened, fearing they were detained.

Zhao, the English teacher, said she tried calling the police station in Feng County to ask about the two women. A women's rights activist in Beijing who declined to be named confirmed Friday that they had been detained and were released.

Meanwhile, two former investigative journalists, known by their pen names Ma Sa and Tie Mu, set out to the village in Yunnan that Feng county officials had said the woman came from. According to an article they published on WeChat, they interviewed village residents who confirmed that someone once called Little Plum Blossom did live there and had been married before. They also reportedly found her sister. But they couldn't confirm if she was the chained woman.

By this point, many people were chiming in. One Weibo user employed professional editing software to compare faces, grabbing 900,000 views. A WeChat user looked up court records of women in Fengxian county who had been trafficked. Another former journalist posted a marriage license, purportedly from Little Plum Blossom, that someone sent to him — and raised an age discrepancy.

The inconsistencies highlighted a crucial point: No one had the whole story.

"If you place your hope on other people or other organizations, that's not reliable," said Yang Jingyao, a 28-year old lawyer in Beijing who said he had been following the case closely. "You have to have your own judgement on an issue."

If facts were in short supply, emotion was not. And understandably so.

"It evokes a broad sense of frustration and anger and a sense of powerlessness among people when they see government abuses and negligence," said Yaqiu Wang, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch. She looks at her WeChat feed lately, she says, and "nobody is talking about the Olympics, but everyone is talking about this woman."

Little Plum Blossom has not been able to advocate for herself. In the original video that circulated, her speech is impossible to understand. Since then, the only video has come from CCTV, the state broadcaster, with her face obscured to protect her identity. As with tennis player Peng Shuai, who had accused a senior politician of rape, she has not been able to meet with others independently.

Official statistics estimate that as of 2011, more than 16 million people in China had serious mental illnesses. But psychiatric hospitals have only one bed for every 100,000 patients, a rate far below that of other upper middle-income countries. And other care options are scarce, said Zhiying Ma, a professor at the University of Chicago who studies mental health in China.

Little Plum Blossom has been taken to a hospital for now, according to CCTV. And on Thursday, the Jiangsu provincial government said it planned to send a team to investigate. Many online expressed relief. Others, though, were less impressed: Too little, too late, they said.

So the story's cycle continues — a cycle that churns together fact, rumor, outrage, and the good intentions of ordinary Chinese internet users. Eventually, it will produce results from an official final investigation, monitored closely by a skittish government that shuts down conversations that might reflect poorly on it. The result: an official version of truth.

And while the Beijing Olympics wind to an end, watched by the world in a way this case is not, provincial investigators begin to dig in. As they do, says Ma, the professor, the most vital question remains unanswered: "What's the solution? What's the future for that woman?"

Judge rejects effort by Trump to toss Jan. 6 lawsuits

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge has rejected efforts by former President Donald Trump to toss out conspiracy lawsuits filed by lawmakers and two Capitol police officers, saying in his ruling that the former

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president's words "plausibly" led to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection.

U.S. District Court Judge Amit Mehta said in his Friday ruling that Trump's words during a rally before the violent storming of the U.S. Capitol were likely "words of incitement not protected by the First Amendment."

"Only in the most extraordinary circumstances could a court not recognize that the First Amendment protects a President's speech," Mehta wrote. "But the court believes this is that case."

The order is the latest example of growing legal peril for the former president. Just hours earlier, the National Archives said records found at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort contained classified information and that it had notified the Justice Department.

On Thursday, a judge in New York ruled that Trump and two of his children must answer questions under oath in New York state's civil investigation into his business practices. Another judge ordered that his company's financial chief be subjected to questioning in another probe by the District of Columbia attorney general's office. And earlier this week, the firm that prepared Trump's annual financial statements said the documents, used to secure lucrative loans and burnish Trump's image as a wealthy businessman, "should no longer be relied upon."

During a planned rally on the Ellipse just hours before Congress was to certify the results of the 2020 presidential election, Trump told his supporters to "Fight like hell and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." He said, "(We're) going to try to and give (weak Republicans) the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country," and then told the crowd to "walk down Pennsylvania Avenue."

Mehta said Trump's speech could have directed people to break the law. But the judge dismissed similar charges made against Trump's son Donald Trump Jr. and lawyer Rudy Giuliani, saying their speech was protected by the First Amendment. Mehta did not yet rule on another motion to dismiss from Alabama Republican Rep. Mo Brooks, also named in the suits.

The lawsuits, filed by Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., officers James Blassingame and Sidney Hemby and initially by Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., argued that Trump, Trump Jr., Giuliani and Brooks made "false and incendiary allegations of fraud and theft, and in direct response to the Defendant's express calls for violence at the rally, a violent mob attacked the U.S. Capitol."

Thompson later dropped out of the lawsuit when he was named to lead the Select Committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection. The NAACP continued in his stead.

The lawsuits cite a federal civil rights law that was enacted to counter the Ku Klux Klan's intimidation of officials. They spell out in detail how the Trumps, Giuliani and Brooks spread baseless claims of election fraud, both before and after the 2020 presidential election was declared, and charged that they helped to spin up the thousands of rioters before they stormed the Capitol. Five people died as a result of the violence on Jan. 6, including a U.S. Capitol Police officer.

They have all denied the allegations.

Mehta said Trump's efforts to dismiss the case ignored the theory that his words sparked what followed, but that argument was plausible.

"In this one-of-a-kind case, the First Amendment does not shield the President from liability," Mehta wrote.

A week of legal setbacks for Trump in Washington, New York

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump faced one legal setback after another this week as a judge ruled he must sit for a deposition in New York to answer questions about his business practices, his accounting firm declared his financial statements unreliable, another judge rejected his efforts to dismiss conspiracy lawsuits and the National Archives confirmed that he took classified information to Florida as he left White House.

Whatever happens, said Jeffrey Jacobovitz, a Washington lawyer who has been following the investigations, "I think the weeks will get worse for him."

Here's a look at the flurry of developments:

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NATIONAL ARCHIVES SAYS TRUMP TOOK CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS TO MAR-A-LAGO

In a Friday letter, the National Archives and Records Administration confirmed that classified information was found in 15 boxes of White House records that Trump had brought with him to Mar-a-Lago and turned over last month.

The National Archives "identified items marked as classified national security information within the boxes" and "has been in communication with the Department of Justice," they wrote in a letter House Committee on Oversight and Reform. The Archives also confirmed it had received paper records that had been torn up by Trump — some taped together and others left in pieces — and that some White House staff had conducted official business using personal accounts.

While federal law bars the removal of classified documents to unauthorized locations, sitting presidents have broad authority over classification. The Justice Department and FBI have not indicated they will pursue a case.

But David Laufman, the former head of the Justice Department's counterintelligence section who oversaw the investigation into Hillary Clinton for her use of a private email server as secretary of state, tweeted, "It's hard to imagine that @DOJNatSec is not conducting a criminal investigation into Trump's stash of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago."

"Even if DOJ ultimately forgoes criminal charges, an investigation is clearly warranted," he said.

While the Presidential Records Act that oversees the preservation of a president's documents is widely seen to have little enforcement mechanism, David Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor, said: "Taking classified documents is an entirely different ball of wax. And as we've seen in the past, those are what result in actual charges being filed."

No matter the legal risk, the revelation also exposes Trump to charges of hypocrisy given his relentless attacks on Clinton, his Democratic opponent in the 2016 presidential campaign.

In a statement Friday night, Trump said, "The National Archives did not 'find' anything, they were given, upon request, Presidential Records in an ordinary and routine process."

"If this was anyone but 'Trump,' there would be no story here," he said.

JUDGE REFUSES TO TOSS LAWSUITS AGAINST TRUMP OVER JAN. 6 ATTACK

A federal judge in Washington, D.C., on Friday rejected Trump's efforts to dismiss conspiracy lawsuits filed by Democratic lawmakers and police officers accusing him of being personally liable for the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection.

U.S. District Court Judge Amit Mehta said Trump's words at a rally held before the attack were likely "words of incitement not protected by the First Amendment" and "plausibly" may have led to what happened.

Trump had told his supporters to "Fight like hell" and warned that, if they didn't, "you're not going to have a country anymore."

"Only in the most extraordinary circumstances could a court not recognize that the First Amendment protects a President's speech," Mehta wrote. "But the court believes this is that case."

The plaintiffs are seeking financial damages for the physical and emotional injuries they sustained during the insurrection, which Trump has denied inciting.

JUDGE SAYS TRUMP MUST TESTIFY IN NEW YORK LAWSUIT OVER BUSINESS PRACTICES

On Thursday, a judge in New York ruled that Trump must answer questions under oath in the state's civil investigation into his business practices.

Judge Arthur Engoron ordered Trump and his two eldest children, Ivanka and Donald Trump Jr., to comply with subpoenas issued by New York Attorney General Letitia James and sit for depositions within 21 days. James's lawyers have said they have uncovered evidence that Trump's company used "fraudulent or misleading" valuations of his golf courses, skyscrapers and other properties to secure loans and tax benefits.

Trump's lawyers had argued his testimony could be used against him in the criminal investigation into the Trump Organization and its former CFO that's being overseen by the Manhattan district attorney's office.

The ruling is almost certain to be appealed by Trump's lawyers. But if upheld, it could force him to decide whether to answer questions, potentially risking perjuring himself if he lies, or stay silent, citing his

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Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination — something he's criticized others for doing in the past. "THERE IS NO CASE!" Trump said in a statement responding to the ruling.

While many legal experts agree the case poses a serious risk to Trump, lawyers who have examined the allegations have said it is not a slam dunk for James and she will face two major hurdles if she brings a suit alleging fraud: proving both an intent to deceive and proving that banks that loaned Trump money were actually fooled.

ACCOUNTING FIRM SAYS TRUMP'S FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AREN'T RELIABLE

In a letter made public in a court filing Monday, the accounting firm that prepared Trump's annual financial statements said the documents "should no longer be relied upon" after James' office alleged they regularly misstated the value of Trump's assets.

In the letter to the Trump Organization's lawyer, Mazars USA LLP advised the company to inform anyone who had received the documents not to use them to assess the financial health of the company and the former president. The firm also said it was cutting ties with Trump, its highest-profile client.

Michael Conway, who served as counsel for the House Judiciary Committee in President Richard Nixon's impeachment inquiry, wrote in an NBC News op-ed Thursday that "Mazars' disavowal of Trump's financial statements is a turning point in the attorney general's investigation. The independent accountants who prepared the statements no longer defend them and will likely have to testify why they had a change of heart."

Trump has given his Statement of Financial Condition — a yearly snapshot of his holdings that had been prepared by Mazars based on Trump Organization records — to banks including Deutsche Bank to secure hundreds of millions of dollars worth of loans. Mazars' announcement raises questions about whether other banks would be comfortable loaning money to the Trump Organization.

JUDGE ORDERS EX-TRUMP ORGANIZATION CFO TO SIT FOR DEPOSITION ON INAUGURAL COMMITTEE SPENDING

In a ruling Thursday, a judge said she would allow Allen Weisselberg, the longtime finance chief at Trump's company, to sit for a limited deposition as part of a lawsuit brought by the District of Columbia attorney general's office that accuses Trump's inaugural committee of grossly overspending at Trump's Pennsylvania Avenue hotel to enrich the former president's family.

The Democratic attorney general, Karl Racine, is suing the Trump Organization and the committee that organized Trump's inauguration, alleging they misused nonprofit funds and coordinated with management at the Trump International Hotel and members of the Trump family to arrange events, including spending more than \$1 million to book a ballroom at the hotel. Racine has said one of the event's planners raised concerns about pricing with Trump, Ivanka Trump and Rick Gates, a top campaign official at the time.

The case is scheduled to go to trial in September.

The Manhattan district attorney's office has already charged Weisselberg and the Trump Organization with tax fraud, alleging he collected more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation. The D.C. decision puts additional pressure on Weisselberg, who has pleaded not guilty.

BIDEN ORDERS TRUMP WHITE HOUSE VISITOR LOGS TURNED OVER TO JAN. 6 COMMITTEE

On Wednesday, President Joe Biden ordered the release of Trump White House visitor logs to the House committee investigating Jan. 6, rejecting Trump's claims of executive privilege once more.

The records show appointment information for individuals who were allowed to enter the White House on the day of the insurrection.

The committee has obtained tens of thousands of records so far as it investigates Trump's actions on Jan. 6, when he waited hours to tell his supporters to stop the violence and leave the Capitol. Investigators are also interested in the organization and financing of a Washington rally the morning of the riot. Among the unanswered questions is how closely organizers of the rally coordinated with White House officials.

Attorney General Merrick Garland has said the Justice Department remains committed to "holding all January 6th perpetrators, at any level, accountable under law, whether they were present that day or were otherwise criminally responsible for the assault on our democracy."

Ottawa crackdown: police arrest 100 after 3-week protest

By ROB GILLIES, WILSON RING and ROBERT BUMSTED Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — Police arrested scores of demonstrators and towed away vehicles Friday in Canada's besieged capital, and a stream of trucks started leaving under the pressure, raising authorities' hopes for an end to the three-week protest against the country's COVID-19 restrictions.

By evening, at least 100 people had been arrested, mostly on mischief charges, and nearly two dozen vehicles had been towed, including all of those blocking one of the city's major streets, authorities said. One officer had a minor injury, but no protesters were hurt, interim Ottawa Police Chief Steve Bell said.

Police "continue to push forward to take control of our streets," he said, adding: "We will work day and night until this is completed."

Those arrested included four protest leaders. One received bail while the others remained jailed.

The crackdown on the self-styled Freedom Convoy began in the morning, when hundreds of police, some in riot gear and some carrying automatic weapons, descended into the protest zone and began leading demonstrators away in handcuffs through the snowy streets as holdout truckers blared their horns.

Tow truck operators — wearing neon-green ski masks, with their companies' decals taped over on their trucks to conceal their identities — arrived under police escort and started removing the hundreds of big rigs, campers and other vehicles parked shoulder-to-shoulder near Parliament. Police smashed through the door of at least one RV camper before hauling it away.

Scuffles broke out in places, and police repeatedly went nose-to-nose with the protesters and pushed the crowd back amid cries of "Freedom!" and the singing of the national anthem, "O Canada." Later police on horses were used to push back the crowd for a time.

Police said late in the afternoon that protesters had assaulted officers and tried to take their weapons. Some began dismantling equipment at a stage where they had played music for weeks, saying they didn't want it to get destroyed.

Many protesters stood their ground in the face of one of the biggest police enforcement actions in Canada's history, with officers drawn from around the country.

"Freedom was never free," said trucker Kevin Homaund, of Montreal. "So what if they put the handcuffs on us and they put us in jail?"

But a steady procession of trucks began leaving Parliament Hill in the afternoon.

"There are indications we are now starting to see progress," Ontario Premier Doug Ford said.

Police would not disclose how many protesters or vehicles remained downtown. All indications were that police would be working into the weekend to clear the area.

The capital and its paralyzed streets represented the movement's last stronghold after weeks of demonstrations and blockades that shut down border crossings into the U.S. and created one of the most serious tests yet for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. They also shook Canada's reputation for civility, with some blaming America's influence.

Authorities had hesitated to move against the protests, in part because of fears of violence. The demonstrations have drawn right-wing extremists and veterans, some of them armed.

With police and the government facing accusations that they let the protests get out of hand, Trudeau on Monday invoked Canada's Emergencies Act. That gave law enforcement extraordinary authority to declare the blockades illegal, tow away trucks, arrest the drivers, suspend their licenses and freeze their bank accounts.

Ottawa police made their first move to end the occupation late Thursday with the arrest of two key protest leaders. They also sealed off much of the downtown area to outsiders to prevent them from coming to the aid of the protesters.

The emergency act enabled law enforcement authorities to compel tow truck companies to assist. Ottawa police said earlier that they couldn't find tow truck drivers willing to help because they either sympathized with the movement or feared retaliation.

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As police worked to dismantle the siege, Pat King, one of the protest leaders, told truckers, "Please stay peaceful," while also threatening the livelihoods of the tow truck operators.

"You are committing career suicide," King warned on Facebook. "We know where the trucks came from."

King himself was later arrested by officers who surrounded him in his car.

Ottawa police had made it clear for days that they were preparing to retake the streets. On Friday, even as the operation was underway, police issued another round of warnings via social media and loudspeaker, offering protesters one more chance to leave and avoid arrest.

Some locked arms instead as officers formed a line to push them back.

Dan Holland, a protester from London Ontario, packed up his car as police closed in. "I don't want to get beat up by this police," he said.

Children bundled up in coats and hats stood amid the crowd. Police said the protesters had put the youngsters in the middle in the confrontation.

The Freedom Convoy demonstrations initially focused on Canada's vaccine requirement for truckers entering the country but soon morphed into a broad attack on COVID-19 precautions and Trudeau's government.

Ottawa residents complained of being harassed and intimidated by the truckers and obtained a court injunction to stop their incessant honking.

Trudeau portrayed the protesters as members of a "fringe" element. Canadians have largely embraced the country's COVID-19 restrictions, with the vast majority vaccinated, including an estimated 90% of the nation's truckers. Some of the vaccine and mask mandates imposed by the provinces are already falling away rapidly.

The biggest border blockade, at the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, disrupted the flow of auto parts between the two countries and forced the industry to curtail production. Authorities lifted the siege last weekend after arresting dozens of protesters.

The final border blockade, in Manitoba, across from North Dakota, ended peacefully on Wednesday.

The protests have been cheered on and received donations from conservatives in the U.S.

Olympic mascots: Creative, cartoonish, at times contentious

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The panda mascot of the Beijing Games has been a huge success here in the Chinese capital, where fans have lined up for hours to buy plush dolls of the round cartoon, Bing Dwen Dwen.

Then last week, the character appeared on Chinese TV — and horrified viewers by speaking with a grown man's voice.

"I don't think it's cute anymore," one commenter said on Chinese social media. "It's just an old man."

The incident was a minor blemish on the character's popularity; by week's end, with the close of the Games approaching, the cult of Bing Dwen Dwen — one of the more ubiquitous Olympics mascots of recent years — was still going strong and drawing long lines for purchases. But it marked the latest comic mishap in the pantheon of Olympic characters.

The notion of a character as a representative of — and a distillation of — a product or event has a long and rich history across the world. In Asia, the creativity is widespread: Packaged goods are brimming with various colorful and cartoonish spokesanimals, spokesfoods and spokesfruits.

In an Olympics context, mascot characters are supposed to embody the culture of their host cities and fuel interest in the event through the merchandising of toys and other memorabilia. But they aren't always a sure-fire hit. And at times, they've been downright polarizing.

At the Sydney Games in 2000, for example, an unathletic character named Fatso the Wombat became a rebuke to the wholesome images of the official mascots. At the London Games in 2010, a newspaper likened the one-eyed mascots to "Cyclopean nightmares."

But the most widely ridiculed mascot may have been at the Atlanta Games in 1996, which featured a cross-eyed blue character that was supposed to represent "information technology" and the city's ambitions as a technology hub. The creation was introduced at the passing of the torch to Atlanta at the end of the

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Barcelona Games, when a giant costumed character ran onto the stage to awkwardly join a dance routine. "He's in these light blue tights, and the blob body sits way up high, so there's a lot of leg," said Sarah Dylla, who curated an exhibit of the Games at the Atlanta History Center.

The character's name — "WhatIzIt" — deepened the audience confusion because it seemed like a question, but nobody knew the answer, Dylla said.

"It's an embarrassment is what it is," declared a review by Catherine Fox, an art critic at an Atlanta paper.

The character was subsequently tweaked and renamed Izzy. Despite the media mockery, Dylla said Izzy proved popular among children and that his nonsensical being might have paved the way for other cartoon characters, including another divisive mascot: Wenlock, from the London Games in 2012.

According to Olympic organizers, Wenlock was supposed to be made from the steel used to build London's Olympic Stadium, and the giant eye on his face was the "lens of a camera, filming everything he sees." Some found the appearance unsettling; the Guardian called Wenlock and his look-alike mascot for the Paralympics "by far the worst mascots of any Olympics."

Opting for more conventional characters hasn't guaranteed success either, however.

After organizers of the Sydney Games in 2000 selected a trio of cartoon animals representing Australia, the mascots ended up being outshined by a big-bottomed character named Fatso the Wombat that rose to popularity on an Australian comedy show.

Fatso got so popular that athletes carried him to the podium at medal ceremonies, and Olympic officials were asked at a press conference whether he was "stealing the show" and if they were moving to ban him.

"I'm not aware of banning Fatso," an Olympic official responded.

Despite the embarrassment they can sometimes cause Olympic organizers, mascots have nevertheless become an important way for host cities to put their stamp on the Games and widen the appeal of the event.

And though the mascots typically vanish soon after the Olympics end, it's their temporary existence that can fuel buying frenzies for souvenirs, particularly among attendees who want mementos of their experience, said Keith Niedermeier, a marketing professor at Indiana University.

"They're wildly collectible," he said.

That has been true of Bing Dwen Dwen, which (not who!) has gotten a big publicity boost at medal ceremonies where athletes are given a doll of the bear to hold on the podium. Yet the superstar panda didn't get through the Games unscathed.

During a news segment on Chinese state TV last week, the mascot was seen bouncing around while interviewing a Chinese free skier. The voice that emerged from the bear was of an adult man, creating a jarring effect. A reporter was later shown emerging from inside the costume, but the backlash on Chinese social media was swift.

"It was a middle-aged man inside Bing Dwen Dwen. I'm horrified," one user wrote.

The hashtag "#BingDwenDwenHasSpoken" began trending, prompting Chinese officials to ban it, as they often do with grassroots expressions with any whiff of controversial sentiment. Beijing Olympic organizers clarified on their social media account that the character on TV was an impostor — and clarified in an email that the "real" Bing Dwen Dwen isn't able to speak.

The episode doesn't appear to have dampened the panda's popularity. On Saturday, the wait to get into the shop selling Bing Dwen Dwen toys in the main media center was still hours long.

Biden is 'convinced' Putin has decided to invade Ukraine

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, YURAS KARMANAU, AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden said Friday that he is "convinced" Russian President Vladimir Putin has decided to invade Ukraine, including an assault on the capital, as tensions spiked along the country's militarized line with attacks that the West said could be "false-flag" operations meant to establish a pretext for invasion.

A humanitarian convoy was hit by shelling, and pro-Russian rebels evacuated civilians from the conflict

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zone. A car bombing hit the eastern city of Donetsk, but no casualties were reported.

After weeks of saying the U.S. wasn't sure if Putin had made the final decision to invade, Biden said that assessment had changed, citing American intelligence.

"As of this moment I'm convinced he's made the decision," Biden said. "We have reason to believe that." He reiterated that the assault could occur in the "coming days."

Meanwhile, the Kremlin announced massive nuclear drills to flex its military muscle, and Putin pledged to protect Russia's national interests against what it sees as encroaching Western threats.

Biden reiterated his threat of massive economic and diplomatic sanctions against Russia if it does invade, and pressed Putin to rethink his course of action. He said the U.S. and its Western allies were more united than ever to ensure Russia pays a price for the invasion.

With an estimated 150,000 Russian troops posted around Ukraine's borders, U.S. and European officials warn that the long-simmering separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine could provide the spark for a broader attack.

As further indication that the Russians are preparing for a potential invasion, a U.S. defense official said an estimated 40% to 50% of the ground forces deployed in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border have moved into attack positions nearer the border. That shift has been under way for about a week, other officials have said, and does not necessarily mean Putin has decided to begin an invasion. The defense official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. military assessments.

The official also said the number of Russian ground units known as battalion tactical groups deployed in the border area had grown to as many as 125, up from 83 two weeks ago. Each battalion tactical group has 750 to 1,000 soldiers.

Lines of communication remain open: The U.S. and Russian defense chiefs spoke Friday, and U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin called for de-escalation, the return of Russian forces surrounding Ukraine to their home bases and a diplomatic resolution, according to the Pentagon. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed to meet next week.

Immediate worries focused on eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces have been fighting pro-Russia rebels since 2014 in a conflict that has killed some 14,000 people.

A bombing struck a car outside the main government building in the major eastern city of Donetsk, according to an Associated Press journalist there. The head of the separatist forces, Denis Sinenkov, said the car was his, the Interfax news agency reported.

There were no reports of casualties and no independent confirmation of the circumstances of the blast. Uniformed men inspected the burned-out car.

Shelling and shooting are common along the line that separates Ukrainian forces and the rebels, but targeted violence is unusual in rebel-held cities like Donetsk.

However, the explosion and the announced evacuations were in line with U.S. warnings of so-called false-flag attacks that Russia would use to justify an invasion.

Adding to the tensions, two explosions shook the rebel-controlled city of Luhansk early Saturday. The Luhansk Information Center said one of the blasts was in a natural gas main and cited witnesses as saying the other was at a vehicle service station. There was no immediate word on injuries or a cause. Luhansk officials blamed a gas main explosion earlier in the week on sabotage.

Separatists in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions that form Ukraine's industrial heartland known as the Donbas said they are evacuating civilians to Russia. The announcement appeared to be part of Moscow's efforts to counter Western warnings of a Russian invasion and to paint Ukraine as the aggressor instead.

Denis Pushilin, head of the Donetsk rebel government, said women, children and the elderly would go first, and that Russia has prepared facilities for them. Pushilin alleged in a video statement that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was going to order an imminent offensive in the area.

Metadata from two videos posted by the separatists announcing the evacuation show that the files were created two days ago, The Associated Press confirmed. U.S. authorities have alleged that the Kremlin's disinformation campaign could include prerecorded videos.

Authorities began moving children from an orphanage in Donetsk, and other residents boarded buses

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for Russia. Long lines formed at gas stations as more people prepared to leave on their own.

Putin ordered his emergencies minister to fly to the Rostov region bordering Ukraine to help organize the exodus and ordered the government to offer a payment of 10,000 rubles (about \$130) to each evacuee, equivalent to about half of an average monthly salary in the war-ravaged Donbas.

Ukraine denied planning any offensive.

"We are fully committed to diplomatic conflict resolution only," Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted.

Around the volatile line of contact, a United Nations humanitarian convoy came under rebel shelling in the Luhansk region, Ukraine's military chief said. No casualties were reported. Rebels denied involvement and accused Ukraine of staging a provocation.

Separatist authorities reported more shelling by Ukrainian forces along the line. A surge of shelling Thursday tore through the walls of a kindergarten, injuring two, and basic communications were disrupted. Both sides accused each other of opening fire.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the threat to global security is "more complex and probably higher" than during the Cold War. He told the Munich conference that a small mistake or miscommunication between major powers could have catastrophic consequences.

Russia announced this week that it was pulling back forces from vast military exercises, but U.S. officials said they saw no sign of a pullback — and instead saw more troops moving toward the border with Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the White House and the U.K. formally accused Russia of being responsible for recent cyber-attacks targeting Ukraine's defense ministry and major banks. The announcement was the most pointed attribution of responsibility for the cyber intrusions.

Also Friday, the U.S. government released new estimates of how many military personnel Russia has in and around Ukraine. It said there are between 169,000 and 190,000 personnel, up from about about 100,000 on Jan. 30, according to Michael Carpenter, the permanent U.S. representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The new estimate includes military troops along the border, in Belarus and in occupied Crimea, as well as Russian National Guard and other internal security units, and Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine. The separatists inside Ukraine, the National Guard and troops in Crimea were not included in the previous U.S. estimate of 150,000.

The Kremlin sent a reminder to the world of its nuclear might, announcing drills of its nuclear forces for the weekend. Putin will monitor the sweeping exercise Saturday that will involve multiple practice missile launches.

Asked about Western warnings of a possible Russian invasion on Wednesday that didn't materialize, Putin said: "There are so many false claims, and constantly reacting to them is more trouble than it's worth."

"We are doing what we consider necessary and will keep doing so," he said. "We have clear and precise goals conforming to national interests."

Ukraine-Russia crisis: What to know as the tension grinds on

By The Associated Press undefined

Spiking tensions in eastern Ukraine are heightening Western fears of a Russian invasion and a new war in Europe, with U.S. President Joe Biden saying he's "convinced" that Russian President Vladimir Putin has made the decision to invade.

NATO countries fear that the volatile east, which has seen intense shelling in recent days and orders for civilians to evacuate, could be a flashpoint in their tensest standoff with Russia since the Cold War, providing the Kremlin with a pretext to invade Ukraine.

The United States upped its estimate of Russian troops for a possible invasion to as many as 190,000. Russia also plans to hold military exercises Saturday, including multiple practice launches of intercontinental ballistic missiles and cruise missiles in a display of military might.

The United States and its European partners are keeping on with their strategy of diplomacy and deterrence, offering to keep talking with the Kremlin while threatening heavy sanctions if an invasion happens.

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

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WHAT DID BIDEN SAY ABOUT PUTIN'S INTENTIONS?

After weeks of saying the U.S. wasn't sure if Putin had made a final decision to launch an invasion, Biden said Friday he's now convinced he has and it could occur in the "coming days."

He said an invasion could include an assault on the capital, Kyiv.

Biden said he was confident in the new assessment because of the Americans' "significant intelligence capability."

In an interview with ABC News, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin backed up Biden's claim. Asked about the potential for a Russian invasion, Austin said, "I don't believe it's a bluff."

WHAT SANCTIONS WOULD RUSSIA FACE?

The U.S. has decided to hold off on at least one of the most crushing financial options available to punish Russia if it invades Ukraine, Deputy National Economic Council Director Daleep Singh told reporters at a White House briefing Friday.

Booting Russia out of the SWIFT financial system that moves money around the world was one of the most damaging steps the U.S. could take against the Russian economy, but it is opposed by some European allies for the spillover damage it would cause to their economies as well.

Asked Friday if Americans and their European allies — many of them more exposed to any collateral damage from sanctions hitting Russia's economy — were on the same page on specific financial penalties, Biden said he expected "slight" differences.

Singh described sanctions against Russian financial institutions and state-owned enterprises, as well as U.S. export controls that would deny Russia advanced technology it seeks for its industry and military.

At a time of high oil and gas prices, the U.S. also did not intend to try to block Russian energy from reaching global markets, he said, but gave no details.

Italy, which is heavily reliant on Russian gas, has pushed for energy to be kept out of any sanctions. Italian Premier Mario Draghi told reporters Friday that he laid out his government's view at a European Council meeting in Brussels a day earlier.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN EASTERN UKRAINE?

In Ukraine's Donbas region, where fighting since 2014 between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed rebels has killed some 14,000 people, the rebels announced in videos posted online Friday that they were ordering an "immediate evacuation" to Russia because of the unrest.

But metadata embedded in the video files showed they had been created two days earlier.

A group of international monitors in eastern Ukraine that is tasked with keeping the peace reported more than 500 explosions in the 24 hours ending Thursday midday.

On Friday, a car exploded outside the main government building in Donetsk, but no casualties were reported, and a U.N. Refugee Agency convoy came under shelling.

The rebels accuse Ukraine of preparing to invade the region, which Kyiv denies. The unrest may be part of Moscow's suspected playbook of portraying Ukraine as the aggressor, thereby giving Russia grounds to invade.

Putin sent his emergencies minister to the Rostov region bordering Ukraine to help organize the evacuation. He ordered the government to give 10,000 rubles (about \$130) to each evacuee. That's equivalent to about half the average monthly salary in the area.

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THE CYBERATTACKS?

The U.S. and Britain are blaming Russia for this week's cyberattacks targeting Ukraine's defense ministry and major banks.

Anne Neuberger, the White House's chief cyber official, said the attacks this week were of "limited impact" since Ukrainian officials were able to quickly get their systems back up and running, but it is possible that the Russians were laying the groundwork for more destructive ones.

She and the British Foreign Office linked Tuesday's attacks to Russian military intelligence officers.

WHAT'S GOING ON AT THE KREMLIN?

The Kremlin says Putin will watch drills involving Russia's strategic nuclear forces from the situation room

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at the Russian Defense Ministry.

The Defense Ministry said Putin will personally oversee Saturday's display of his country's nuclear might. Notably, the planned exercise involves the Crimea-based Black Sea Fleet. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula after seizing it from Ukraine in 2014.

WHAT FORCES DOES RUSSIA HAVE NEAR UKRAINE?

The new U.S. estimate of up to 190,000 includes the Russian-backed separatists inside Ukraine, the Russian National Guard and Russian troops in Crimea, the peninsula that Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014. These forces were not counted in previous assessments of troops deployed near Ukraine's borders and in neighboring Belarus.

As further indication that the Russians are preparing for a potential invasion, a U.S. defense official said an estimated 40% to 50% of the ground forces deployed in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border have moved into attack positions nearer the border. The defense official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. military assessments.

The official also said the number of Russian ground units known as battalion tactical groups deployed in the border area had grown to as many as 125, up from 83 two weeks ago. Each battalion tactical group has 750 to 1,000 soldiers.

WHAT HAS NATO DONE?

Meanwhile, NATO is beefing up its eastern regions.

The U.S. has begun deploying 5,000 troops to Poland and Romania. The Biden administration announced Friday it has approved a \$6 billion sale of 250 Abrams battle tanks and related equipment to Poland.

Britain is sending hundreds of soldiers to Poland and offering more warships and planes. It also is doubling the number of personnel in Estonia and sending tanks and armored fighting vehicles.

Germany, Norway and the Netherlands are sending additional troops to Lithuania. The Dutch government also is sending to Ukraine 100 sniper rifles, combat helmets and body armor, two mine detection robots and weapon-detection radar systems.

WHAT ARE THE DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO PREVENT WAR?

Biden spoke by phone on Friday afternoon with a number of European leaders and the leaders of the European Union and NATO about the likelihood of Russian aggression, the White House said.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who was on the call, planned to speak with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday and with Putin on Sunday.

U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken were attending the annual Munich Security Conference in Germany. Moscow sent no delegates there.

Harris indicated the alliance's approach to the crisis would continue.

"We remain, of course, open to and desirous of diplomacy, as it relates to the dialogue and the discussions we have had with Russia," Harris said in Munich.

"But we are also committed, if Russia takes aggressive action, to ensure there will be severe consequences in terms of the sanctions we have discussed," she said at a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock expressed regret that Russian leaders declined to attend the Munich conference.

"Particularly in the current, extremely threatening situation, it would have been important to also meet Russian representatives in Munich," Baerbock said. Even tiny steps toward peace would be "better than a big step toward war," she added.

Kim Potter sentenced to 2 years in Daunte Wright's death

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Kim Potter, the former suburban Minneapolis police officer who said she confused her handgun for her Taser when she fatally shot Daunte Wright, was sentenced Friday to two years in prison. Wright's family denounced the sentence as too lenient and accused the judge of giving more con-

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sideration to the white officer than the Black victim.

Potter was convicted in December of first- and second-degree manslaughter in the April 11 killing of Wright, a 20-year-old Black motorist. She was sentenced only on the more serious charge in accordance with state law.

Wright's mother, Katie Wright, said after the sentencing that Potter "murdered my son," adding: "Today the justice system murdered him all over again." She also accused the judge of being taken in by "white woman tears" after Potter cried during her pre-sentencing statement.

Speaking before the sentence was imposed, a tearful Wright said she could never forgive Potter and that she would refer to her only as "the defendant" because Potter only referred to her son as "the driver" at trial.

"She never once said his name. And for that I'll never be able to forgive you. And I'll never be able to forgive you for what you've stolen from us," said Wright, who also sometimes uses the last name Bryant.

"Daunte Demetrius Wright, I will continue to fight in your name until driving while Black is no longer a death sentence," she said.

Potter offered an apology to Wright's family, then spoke directly to his mother: "Katie, I understand a mother's love. I'm sorry I broke your heart ... my heart is broken and devastated for all of you."

The judge, who imposed a sentence below state guidelines, called it "one of the saddest cases I've had on my 20 years on the bench." Judge Regina Chu said she received "hundreds and hundreds" of letters in support of Potter. "On the one hand, a young man was killed and on the other, a respected 26-year veteran police officer made a tragic error by pulling her handgun instead of her Taser."

Chu said the lesser sentence was warranted because Potter was "in the line of duty and doing her job in attempting to lawfully arrest Daunte Wright," and Potter was trying to protect another officer who could have been dragged and seriously injured if Wright drove away.

The judge said Potter will serve the standard two-thirds of her sentence, or 16 months in prison, with the rest on parole. She has earned credit for 58 days that she has been in the state's women's prison in Shakopee since the guilty verdict.

Wright's mother later joined a small group of protesters chanting and shouting outside a downtown building where they believed the judge lived.

Wright was killed after Brooklyn Center officers pulled him over for having expired license tags and an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror. Civil rights advocates complain that laws against hanging objects from rearview mirrors have been used as a pretext for stopping Black motorists.

The shooting, which happened as Derek Chauvin was on trial in Minneapolis on murder charges in George Floyd's killing, sparked several days of demonstrations outside the Brooklyn Center police station marked by tear gas and clashes between protesters and police.

Potter and Chauvin were convicted in the same courtroom.

Wright family attorney Ben Crump said the family was stunned by the sentence, saying they didn't understand why such consideration was given to a white officer in the killing of a young Black man when a Black officer, Mohamed Noor, got a longer sentence for the 2017 killing of a white woman, Justine Ruszczyk Damond.

"What we see today is the legal system in Black and white."

But the judge said the case was not the same as other high-profile killings by police.

"This is not a cop found guilty of murder for using his knee to pin down a person for 9 1/2 minutes as he gasped for air. This is not a cop found guilty of manslaughter for intentionally drawing his firearm and shooting across his partner and killing an unarmed woman who approached his squad," said Chu, referring to Chauvin and Noor. "This is a cop who made a tragic mistake."

For someone with no criminal history, such as Potter, the state guidelines on first-degree manslaughter range 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,

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saying Potter abused her authority as an officer and that her actions caused a greater-than-normal danger to others. But on Friday, Prosecutor Matt Frank said the presumptive sentence was proper.

"His life mattered, and that life was taken," Frank said before sentencing. "His name is Daunte Wright. We have to say his name. He was not just a driver. He was a living human being. A life."

Defense attorney Paul Engh asked for a sentence below the guidelines, including probation only, arguing that Wright was the aggressor. He said the testimony of other officers on the scene showed it was a dangerous situation because Wright was attempting to drive away and Potter had the right to defend other officers.

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, whose office prosecuted the case, said he accepts the sentence and urged others to do the same.

People should remember Daunte Wright and "know that no number of years in prison could ever capture the wonder of this young man's life," Ellison said in a statement.

But, he said, the sentence doesn't take away from "the truth of the jury's verdict."

Engh told the judge that Wright's death was "beyond tragic for everybody involved." But, he added: "This was an unintentional crime. It was an accident. It was a mistake."

Engh said if Potter were to receive probation, she would be willing to meet with Wright's family and to speak to police officers about Taser mix-ups, as suggested by prosecutors.

Engh also held up a box displaying what he said were among "thousands" of letters and cards of support for Potter.

"People took the time to write her," Engh said. "This is unheard of for a defendant. I dare say no one in this room has ever seen anything like this."

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 use her Taser on Wright, but she had her gun in her hand and fired one shot into his chest.

Wright's father and siblings also addressed the court to speak of their loss.

The mother of Wright's son, Chyna Whitaker, said Friday that Wright would never have a chance to play ball with his son, or see him go to school.

"My son shouldn't have to wear a 'rest in peace' shirt of his dad," Whitaker said.

Remote school makes academic, Olympic juggling act easier

By SALLY HO Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Here's one thing the pandemic has made easier for the young stars of the Beijing Olympics: juggling the demands of elite athletic competition with college life.

Remote schooling, now a fact of life for students everywhere, also comes in handy when you're a world away from campus for weeks at a time. And the technology has been battle tested for two years now.

Nathan Smith, a student at Minnesota State University and one of 15 college players on the U.S. men's hockey team, has been able to keep up with his school work and even talk with his teachers.

"I wasn't sure what kind of connection and everything I'd have over here," Smith said. "I'm trying to do my best and keep up with it."

Devon Levi, a goaltender for the Canadian men's hockey team and a student at Northeastern University in Boston, said his teachers have been supportive of his athletic endeavors, so he's doing his part to keep up to date with his studies. He brought his books with him to Beijing.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and they completely understand that," said Levi, who is majoring in computer science and business. "They're on my side and they want me to chase my dreams."

Other elite athletes at the Winter Games have opted to take time off from school to compete, including Jared Shumate, a member of the U.S. Nordic combined team who is studying geography and sociology at the University of Utah.

Balancing school and skiing "has definitely gotten easier than it was my first couple of years when I was

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living in the dorms and taking in-person classes and training," he said.

By the time they reach the elite level of their sports, most young Olympians are experienced at balancing academic and competitive demands, said Michelle Smith Ware, a board member of the national academic advising group NACADA.

Not everyone is able to strike that balance. Hong Kong skier Arabella Ng reportedly opted to drop out of the Beijing Games, citing academic pressures and the travel restrictions in place because of the pandemic.

"It's really an individual choice," said Ware, director of academic support services for athletics at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

"Either you're giving up your spot, or you're taking a leave from your education, or you are meeting that challenge of maintaining the workload during a semester while also working and conditioning and working or playing in the Olympics," she said. "It has to be a difficult (decision)."

The U.S. figure skating team is stacked with Ivy Leaguers who decided to put their education on hold to fulfill their Olympic dreams once the coronavirus crisis began and classes moved to Zoom anyway.

That includes gold medalist Nathan Chen, who is studying statistics and data science at Yale University, Vincent Zhou at Brown University, and Karen Chen, who is pre-med at Cornell University. Snowboarder Chloe Kim is on leave from Princeton University.

Nathan Chen said the only thing he was sure of after winning gold in Beijing was that he wanted to go back to school in August.

Even before the pandemic, some athletes had tapped into remote schooling options in order to focus on their sports.

Russian ice dancers Gleb Smolkin and Diana Davis are both students in an entirely remote program at Astrakhan State Technical University in southern Russia.

The duo train in Novi, Michigan, but they skate for Sambo 70, the club of Davis' famous mother, embattled Russian figure skating coach Eteri Tutberidze.

Smolkin said the club has an arrangement with the University that allows them to pursue their studies from afar.

"It's all remote learning, so we have no problem with it," Smolkin said. "They make some concessions for us. Now it's the Olympics and they give us time so we can concentrate on competing, but after that we will undergo all the assessments."

Even after the pandemic subsides, Ware said, the benefits of remote schooling will remain a resource for those balancing elite athletics with campus life.

"There's a lot of opportunities for that to be used after COVID," Ware said. "I'm not sure how institutions will choose to embrace that. Why not use the technology?"

Family: Judge in Potter case swayed by 'white woman tears'

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The judge who sentenced white former Officer Kim Potter on Friday to two years in prison for killing Black motorist Daunte Wright cited the difficult job that police face — and Potter's remorse — as justification for giving her a light sentence.

Hennepin County District Judge Regina Chu choked up as she described the difficulty deciding on a sentence for Potter, who said she meant to use her Taser but mistakenly fired her handgun into Wright's chest as he tried to drive away from a traffic stop in April.

Wright's family and attorneys angrily condemned Chu, who is Asian American, for going well below prosecutors' recommendations. They pointed out that a Black former officer convicted of shooting a white woman in 2017 in a different Minnesota case got no such mercy despite his expressions of remorse.

Katie Wright, who is white, told reporters that Potter "murdered my son," and that, with this sentence, "the justice system murdered him all over again." She accused Chu of being taken in by a performance she alleged was coached, and wondered why her own tears didn't get such a sympathetic response.

"This is the problem with our justice system today," Wright said. "White women tears trump — trump —

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justice. And I thought my white woman tears would be good enough because they're true and genuine."

She joined a small group of protesters later Friday evening chanting and shouting outside a downtown building they believed included Chu's home.

The phrase "white woman tears" has gained currency amid the national reckoning on race, suggesting that white people weaponize their emotions against people of color to protect their privileged positions.

Potter cried in testimony at her trial in December and sobbed again Friday as she directly addressed Wright's family in the courtroom.

"Katie, I understand a mother's love and I am sorry I broke your heart," Potter said. "My heart is broken for all of you."

Wright's family had called for the maximum possible sentence. The state attorney general's office originally laid out a case for a stiffer-than-normal sentence, then argued Friday for the presumptive sentence of just over seven years recommended by state guidelines.

But Chu said Potter's conduct over an otherwise exemplary 26-year career "cries out" for a shorter sentence.

Chu has been a judge since her 2002 appointment by then-Gov. Jesse Ventura and previously worked in private practice and the attorney general's office. Before Potter's trial, she was the target of a protest by a Minneapolis man who entered a condominium building he thought was hers, then filmed himself making comments meant to pressure her into allowing broadcast coverage of the trial.

Chu took time at Potter's sentencing to explain her thinking. She said there are four reasons to send someone to prison: "retribution, incapacitation, deterrence and rehabilitation." But she said Potter doesn't need to be prevented or deterred from committing future crimes and does not require rehabilitation to become law-abiding. Only retribution to pay for the harm she caused applies, she said.

"In this case, a young man was killed because Officer Potter was reckless," she said. "There rightfully should be some accountability."

Chu said "the evidence is undisputed" that Potter didn't intend to use her firearm, and that made this case less serious than other recent killings by police officers. The judge said Potter's case is "distinguishable" from the murder conviction of Derek Chauvin last year for killing George Floyd, which led to a 22 1/2 year sentence, or Mohamed Noor's manslaughter conviction for killing Justine Ruszczyk Damond, which resulted in a five-year sentence.

"This is not a cop found guilty of murder for using his knee to pin down a person for 9 1/2 minutes as he gasped for air," Chu said. "This is not a cop found guilty of manslaughter for intentionally drawing his firearm and shooting across his partner and killing an unarmed woman who approached his squad. This is a cop who made a tragic mistake. She drew her firearm thinking it was a Taser and ended up killing a young man."

And Potter's need to make a split-second decision amid a "chaotic, tense and rapidly evolving" situation constitutes a compelling mitigating circumstance, the judge said.

"To those who disagree and feel a longer prison sentence is appropriate, as difficult as it may be, please try to empathize with Ms. Potter's situation. As President Barack Obama once said, learning to stand in somebody else's shoes, to see through their eyes, that's how peace begins," the judge said.

"Officer Kimberly Potter was trying to do the right thing," Chu continued. "Of all the jobs in public service, police officers have the most difficult one. They must make snap decisions under tense, evolving and ever-changing circumstances. They risk their lives every single day in public service. Officer Potter made a mistake that ended tragically. She never intended to hurt anyone."

On its face, it does not look good that a white woman got a break while Wright's family and a Black officer — Noor — did not, said John Baker, a criminal justice studies professor at St. Cloud State University. Chu seemed more concerned about Potter than Wright and his family, he said, agreeing that Chu seemed to only pay lip service to the Wright family's expressions of pain.

Baker didn't know if Chu was trying to appease all sides on an extremely polarized issue, but said: "When you try to appease both sides, you appease nobody."

Locals fret as Colombia to declare hippos invasive species

By MARKO ÁLVAREZ and ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

PUERTO TRIUNFO, Colombia (AP) — Álvaro Molina has had his run-ins with the burly bunch of neighbors with disreputable contacts who showed up about a decade ago along the river in front of his house in Colombia's Antioquia province. But he's learned to live with them and says he is worried about a government plan he fears could harm them.

People around Puerto Triunfo have grown accustomed to the herd of hippopotamuses descended from a few that were imported illegally from Africa in the 1980s by flamboyant drug lord Pablo Escobar, whose former ranch is nearby.

Molina, 57, says he supports the hippos even though he is one of the few Colombians to have been attacked by one. He was out fishing one day when he felt a movement beneath his canoe that spilled him into the water.

"The female attacked me once — the first pair that arrived — because she had recently given birth," he said.

Within weeks, Colombia's government plans to sign a document declaring the hippos an exotic invasive species, according to Environment Minister Carlos Eduardo Correa. This means coming up with a plan for how to control their population, which has reached 130 and is projected hit 400 in eight years if nothing is done as they flourish in Colombia's rivers.

Correa said many strategies are being discussed but no decisions have been made. Local communities will be consulted about any plan to control the hippos' population, he added.

"They talk of castration, sterilization, taking the life of some hippopotamuses," he said. "What is important is the scientific and technical rigor with which the decisions are made."

Most people interviewed in Puerto Triunfo, some 200 kilometers (120 miles) of the capital, Bogota, say they can get along with the hippos and many oppose even sterilization — let alone killing some.

"They make laws from a distance. We live with the hippopotamuses here and we have never thought of killing them," said Isabel Romero Jerez, a local conservationist. "The hippopotamuses aren't African now; they are Colombians."

Escobar's Hacienda Nápoles — and the hippos — have become a sort of local tourist attraction in the years since the kingpin was killed by police in 1993. When his ranch was abandoned the hippos survived and reproduced in local rivers and favorable climatic conditions. They began showing up around Puerto Triunfo a decade ago.

Scientists warn the hippos do not have a natural predator in Colombia and are a potential problem for biodiversity since their feces change the composition of the rivers and could impact the habitat of manatees and capybaras.

An analysis by the Alexander Von Humboldt Biological Resources Research Institute said that climate change and "an increase in equatorial conditions, the ideal climate for the species" could increase the hippopotamus' dispersion across Colombia, potentially "overlapping with the geographic and ecological niches of native species, increasing the risk of possible competition for resources."

Hippopotamuses can also cause damage to crops because they are mainly herbivores and seek food in large quantities at night.

While hippos are considered one of the most dangerous animals for humans in Africa, there have been only a few injuries recorded so far in these parts.

"I don't consider them a threat, but there are difficulties with them. In the municipality, we have had reports of three attacks on the civilian population," said Carmen Montaña, an official with Puerto Triunfo's Municipal Agricultural Technical Assistance Unit.

Locals say the hippos sometimes come out of the water and walk through the streets of the town. When that happens, traffic stops and people keep out of their way.

"The human animal is the one that invades their territory, that is why they feel threatened and attack,"

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said Romero Jerez. "Human beings should be prudent, respectful and keep their distance."

Scientists warn that hippos are territorial and weigh up to three tons.

Daniel Cadena, a biologist and dean of sciences at the Universidad de Los Andes, said they are aggressive animals and not as gentle as people imagine.

"There are estimates in Africa that hippos kill more people each year than lions, hyenas and crocodiles combined," he said.

When the document declaring them an invasive species in Colombia is signed, hippopotamuses will join species such as the giant African snail, coqui frog, black tilapia and lionfish. The declaration will allow the government to allocate resources to control the hippo population, one of the main obstacles.

There is currently an experimental program of immuno-castration with a drug donated by the United States. Surgically sterilizing them requires sedating them, transporting them to a safe place and cutting through their thick skin.

"Hippopotamuses do not have what is called obvious sexual dimorphism, it is difficult to know if an animal is male ... the genitals are internal," Cadena said.

Any population control process promises to be costly and complex because it requires finding the hippos scattered along the mighty Magdalena River.

California bill would have citizens enforce weapons ban

By JULIE WATSON and ADAM BEAM Associated Press

DEL MAR, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom proposed Friday letting private citizens in his state sue gun makers to stop them from selling assault weapons just as Texas lets its residents sue abortion providers to stop the procedures, then essentially dared the U.S. Supreme Court to treat both issues the same.

At a news conference in the coastal town of Del Mar, north of San Diego, Newsom said he thought the Texas law was wrong and the Supreme Court's decision in December to let it stay in effect while it's appealed was "absurd" and "outrageous."

"But they opened up the door. They set the tone, tenor, the rules. And either we can be on the defense complaining about it or we can play by those rules. We are going to play by those rules," Newsom said. He later added: "We'll see how principled the U.S. Supreme Court is."

The unique Texas law, approved last year, bans all abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detected, usually around the sixth week of pregnancy. The law does not let the government enforce it. Instead, private citizens can sue abortion providers or anyone who "aids and abets" the procedure.

The theory is that because the government can't enforce the law, then abortion advocates can't sue the state to block it. That makes it much harder to challenge in court.

A bill in the California Legislature unveiled Friday would do the same thing. But instead of abortion providers, it would let people sue gun-makers and others who sell, make or distribute assault-style guns in the state.

California has banned the sale and manufacture of many assault-style guns for decades. But last year, U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez overturned that law, ruling it was unconstitutional while comparing an AR-15 rifle to a Swiss Army knife as "good for both home and battle." The ruling incensed Newsom and he vowed to fight back.

California's proposed legislation is exactly what gun rights groups feared would happen if the Supreme Court allowed the Texas law to stay in effect. That's why the Firearms Policy Coalition opposed that law at the high court. The group said Friday it would go to court if necessary to block the California proposal.

The restrictions, the group said, are "really just modern-day Jim Crow laws designed to suppress the exercise of human rights the tyrants who run California don't like."

Newsom and his Democratic allies in the state Legislature are convinced the U.S. Supreme Court would have to uphold their gun proposal if it allows the Texas abortion law to stand. But it might not be that simple.

The U.S. Constitution specifically says people have a right to bear arms, and the Supreme Court has

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interpreted that broadly. The right to an abortion is not specifically protected in the Constitution. But the court has recognized lots of other protections that aren't explicitly stated in the Constitution.

Melissa Murray, a law professor at New York University, said she believed if the conservative court majority could find a way to distinguish between the Texas law and the California proposal, they will.

"I think it will be a real test of this court's principles about how they regard a law like that that basically does exactly what (the Texas law) did only in the context of assault weapons," she said.

California law defines assault weapons as semiautomatic rifles or pistols that have a variety of functions. The bill would let people seek a court order to stop the spread of these weapons and recover a minimum of \$10,000 in damages for each weapon, plus attorney's fees.

California's bill, authored by Democratic state Sen. Bob Hertzberg, is not yet available on the state's website. But a fact sheet provided by Hertzberg's office said the bill would apply to those who manufacture, distribute, transport, import into California, or sell assault weapons, .50 BMG rifles or "ghost guns" — untraceable weapons that can be bought online and assembled at home.

Sam Paredes, executive director of Gun Owners of California, said he believed the bill's true purpose is to ban guns altogether in California.

"There's no question that it would put some of the smaller mom-and-pop gun stores out of business if they were challenged in court. They don't have the resources to defend themselves, even if they are not guilty," he said. "This will have a huge chilling effect, and that's their intent."

The bill is one of four pieces of legislation targeting the gun industry in California. The other bills would make it illegal to market assault weapons to children, crack down on ghost guns and make it easier for people to sue gun manufacturers for liability in shootings.

Earlier this week the families of nine victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut announced they have agreed to a \$73 million settlement of a lawsuit against Remington, the maker of the rifle used to kill 20 first-graders and six educators in 2012. The case was watched because of its potential to provide a roadmap for victims of other shootings to sue firearm-makers.

California Democratic Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, introduced AB 2571, which would limit the type of firearms advertising and marketing that can be geared toward children. She and Newsom said the gun industry is using social media and children's books, mascots, apparel and guns decorated to appeal to kids.

They specifically criticized a company called Wee1 Tactical, which markets the JR-15, patterned after the popular adult AR-15 assault-style semi-automatic rifle.

The company's website says its goal is to "safely help adults introduce children to the shooting sports." The company's logo is a skull sucking on a baby pacifier and it is on hats, shirts, patches and stickers.

"How the hell did they think that's OK?" Newsom asked.

The company did not immediately respond to a telephone message and email seeking comment.

US, Britain accuse Russia of cyberattacks targeting Ukraine

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House blamed Russia on Friday for this week's cyberattacks targeting Ukraine's defense ministry and major banks and warned of the potential for more significant disruptions in the days ahead.

Anne Neuberger, the Biden administration's deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging technologies, said the U.S. had rapidly linked Tuesday's attacks to Russian military intelligence officers.

Britain joined the U.S. in blaming the GRU military intelligence agency for the distributed denial-of-service attacks that unfolded as tensions escalate between Russia and Ukraine.

The attacks, which knocked government websites and a couple of major banks offline for much of the day, were of "limited impact" since Ukrainian officials were able to quickly get their systems back up and running, Neuberger said.

But she said the Russians could also be laying the groundwork for more disruptive activities that could

accompany an invasion of Ukraine.

"We do expect that should Russia decide to proceed with a further invasion of Ukraine, we may see further destabilizing or destructive cyber activity, and we've been working closely with allies and partners to ensure we're prepared to call out that behavior and respond," Neuberger said.

She said the U.S. was publicly blaming the Kremlin because of a need to "call out the behavior quickly."

"The global community must be prepared to shine a light on malicious cyber activity and hold actors accountable for any and all disruptive or destructive cyber activity," Neuberger said.

The British Foreign Office said the attack "showed a continued disregard for Ukrainian sovereignty. This activity is yet another example of Russia's aggressive acts against Ukraine."

Neuberger said there was no intelligence indicating that the U.S. would be targeted by a cyberattack, but that remained a concern, giving that the banking system does not have the "cyber resilience" that it should.

Ukrainian officials called Tuesday's denial-of-service attacks the worst in the country's history. But while they definitely disrupted online banking, impeded some government-to-public communications and were clearly intended to cause panic, they were not particularly serious by global or historic standards, said Roland Dobbins, the top engineer for DDoS at the cybersecurity firm Netscout.

"Most DDoS attacks succeed due to the lack of preparation on the part of the defenders," said Dobbins, adding that most commercial mitigation services designed to counter such attacks would likely have been able to fend off Tuesday's attacks.

Oath Keepers leader to stay jailed until Capitol riot trial

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

A federal judge refused Friday to free Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes from jail while he awaits trial on charges that he plotted with other members of his far-right militia group to attack the U.S. Capitol to stop Congress from certifying Joe Biden's electoral victory.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta said federal prosecutors have presented "compelling if not strong" evidence against Rhodes, who has been the group's leader since its 2009 founding. Rhodes poses a "clear and convincing danger" to the public, the judge said during a remote hearing.

"His ability to communicate, organize are his greatest weapons," Mehta said, calling Rhodes an "extremely sophisticated individual."

Rhodes and 10 other people linked to the Oath Keepers are the first to be charged with seditious conspiracy in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack at the Capitol. Four other Oath Keepers defendants charged with seditious conspiracy remain jailed pending a trial set for July.

Their Jan. 12 indictment also charged Rhodes with obstruction of justice. Prosecutors say he tried to destroy electronic evidence of the alleged plot from his cellphone.

Rhodes, 56, has been detained in federal custody since his arrest in Little Elm, Texas, a day after his indictment. On Jan. 26, a federal magistrate judge in Plano, Texas, ordered him jailed pending trial. Rhodes' lawyers asked Mehta to overturn that decision, but the judge rejected that request.

Prosecutors say Rhodes orchestrated the group's assault on the Capitol with backup from an armed "quick reaction force," or "QRF," stationed at a Comfort Inn just across the river in Arlington, Virginia. The QRF was composed of Oath Keepers members from Arizona, Florida and North Carolina and stayed in contact with Rhodes during the attack, according to prosecutors.

"The QRF teams guarded an arsenal of firearms and related equipment and were prepared to speed those weapons into the hands of co-conspirators on the ground in Washington when directed by Rhodes or other conspiracy leaders," prosecutors wrote in a court filing.

Rhodes' lawyers described the QRF as a defensive force, "called if and only if required to defend members or those with whom they have been charged with protecting," they wrote in a filing.

The indictment also alleges that two teams of Oath Keepers formed military-style "stacks" as they stormed and entered the Capitol.

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During a hearing Wednesday, the judge asked a prosecutor why authorities believe the Oath Keepers didn't activate a QRF team. Assistant U.S. Attorney Kathryn Rakoczy said they didn't need to because group members had breached the Capitol without it.

Rakoczy referred to Rhodes as the "architect" of the plot. One of Rhodes' lawyers, James Bright, said no such plot existed.

"There was no conspiracy to overthrow the government," Bright told the judge. "There certainly was an enormous amount of bombastic language that was involved."

Rhodes spent over \$15,000 on firearms and related equipment in the week before the Capitol riot and bought more than \$17,000 in additional firearms-related equipment between Jan. 6 and Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20, 2021, according to prosecutors. Mehta said the quantity and timing of those gun purchases isn't consistent with somebody buying them for self-defense.

Rhodes' attorneys said he doesn't pose a threat to the public or a flight risk. He voluntarily met with FBI agents multiple times after Jan. 6 and gave them his phone, they noted.

Rhodes' lawyers say Oath Keepers believed that then-President Donald Trump would be invoking the Insurrection Act on Jan. 6, "necessitating a need for militias and other groups to defend that declaration."

"When that did not happen, Rhodes and others took no action. They left the Capitol grounds and went to dinner," the defense attorneys wrote.

Oath Keepers also provided security for longtime Trump backer Roger Stone and others in Washington that day, according to Rhodes' lawyers.

The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection sought testimony from Rhodes when he appeared remotely before the panel from jail earlier this month.

Rhodes is a Yale Law School graduate and military veteran. He was living in Granbury, Texas, after the Capitol riot and has been held at a county jail in Bonham, Texas, since his arrest.

"Rhodes used his legal and military training to lead an attack on our core democratic traditions, and purposefully recruited others with similar military and law enforcement experience to join the fight," prosecutors wrote.

America's doctor, family get COVID-19 despite safeguards

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Surgeon General Vivek Murthy announced Friday that he and his young family have COVID-19 despite their best efforts to avoid infection by getting vaccinated and taking other precautions.

Writing on Twitter, America's doctor said, "When you've been as safe as you can, getting COVID-19 can be frustrating and disappointing. I've felt that. It can also be a source of shame. Many people assume you must have been careless to get sick. Our safety measures reduce risk but they can't eliminate risk. Nothing can."

As new cases and hospitalizations plummet, and deaths have finally started to decline, the Murthy family's bout with COVID calls attention to the real risks of a virus that many people assume is finally on the way out.

Murthy, a regular participant at White House COVID task force briefings, said he and his wife, physician and political activist Dr. Alice Chen, have mild symptoms. She has a headache and fatigue, and he said he was dealing with muscle aches, chills, and a sore throat.

"Our breathing is fine, thankfully," he wrote.

Murthy, his wife and their 5-year-old son are vaccinated and boosted. Their 4-year-old daughter is too young to be eligible for vaccination.

The kids are coping, Murthy wrote.

His daughter, "who tested positive first, is doing ok," he said. "Fever is starting to improve. She's still congested and is now hoarse from all the coughing, but thankfully she's still smiling and enjoying her arts and crafts."

"Our son has a runny nose and low-grade fever but is otherwise eating, drinking, playing with his sister,

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and watching his favorite cartoons," Murthy added.

"It has been chaotic at home with all of us sick but I wouldn't want to navigate this with anyone but Alice," he said.

Murthy was not present at Wednesday's White House COVID briefing. The White House said Murthy has not had any recent contact with President Joe Biden, and that COVID was not the reason for Murthy's absence from the briefing.

As surgeon general, Murthy called out early on COVID misinformation and disinformation, urging Americans to follow tested public health guidance and get vaccinated and boosted.

That he and his family got sick illustrates the ruthless efficiency of the omicron variant, which has a series of mutations that increase its capacity to evade vaccines. Government officials, however, say that data clearly show those fully vaccinated retain substantial protection against severe disease and hospitalization, and for those who get their booster shots resistance to getting sick is even greater.

Although unvaccinated people are still far more likely to get sick, be hospitalized, or die, the omicron wave has seen many vaccinated people get infected as well. That has created disruptions to family and work routines and added to the burden at crowded hospitals.

Murthy said his confidence in vaccines remains unshaken.

"One major source of peace of mind for us: we and our son are vaxed/boosted," he wrote. "Vaccines are very effective at saving our lives and keeping us out of the hospital. As parents, I can't tell you how reassuring it is to know we'll be able to care for our kids even if we get infected."

Murthy served on Biden's transition team as co-chair of the coronavirus advisory board, and is said to enjoy a close personal relationship with the president. His trademark is a soft-spoken, empathetic style of public speaking. Even before the pandemic, he was warning about the toll of loneliness in America.

Murthy's family roots are in India, but as a youngster he lived in Miami. His father had a medical clinic, where both parents worked. The son spent weekends helping out and says that's where he discovered the art of healing.

On Friday, Murthy sought to console those who've tried to protect themselves and still have gotten sick.

"If you've done everything you can and gotten COVID-19 anyway, don't beat yourself up," he wrote. "A lot of us are doing the best we can. And let's not assume those who get sick are careless. We don't know people's circumstances. They may not be able to protect themselves the way we can."

Biden faces test of dedication to Ukraine — and democracy

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Ukrainian parliament thundered with applause as Joe Biden stepped into the wood-paneled chamber a little more than six years ago. Five hundred miles to the south and east, Russian troops and separatists were occupying parts of the country, and President Barack Obama had dispatched his vice president in a show of solidarity with the besieged nation.

His voice rising, Biden declared that Ukraine could demonstrate that aggressors "can't use coercion, bribery, sending tanks and men across a border to extinguish the dreams and hopes of a people."

"For if you succeed" — Biden rapped his fist on the podium — "that message is sent around the world."

Ukraine's government was unable to retake the land it lost, and now the world waits to see what message will be sent as Russia readies what might be a new, more expansive invasion that could end the nation's short history as an independent republic.

Such an attack would be the most difficult test yet for a president who has made the defense of democracy a cornerstone of his administration. If Biden's threats of sanctions, shipments of weapons and intelligence operations are not enough to deter war, his next challenge will be holding together a fractious international coalition to punish Russia both economically and diplomatically.

Biden spoke Friday with allies on both sides of the Atlantic, and he told reporters at the White House that he believes Russian President Vladimir Putin has decided to invade. Western officials estimate that Moscow now has between 169,000 and 190,000 troops in and around Ukraine.

Until recently, the U.S. president's long political career has paralleled democracy's expansion across

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Europe. Unlike Putin, a former intelligence officer who views the collapse of the Soviet Union as a cascade of indignities, Biden cheered the so-called color revolutions that swept through former Soviet republics and supported the eastward expansion of NATO.

Daniel Fried, a longtime U.S. diplomat in the region, said Biden is someone with “a belief in the free world — without ironic tones.”

“It’s not put on,” he said. “It’s real.”

Now, decades of progress could be rolled back in dramatic fashion in a country where Biden invested years of work to hold the line against Russian aggression.

“He represents an older generation of American politicians who grew up in the Cold War and for whom the trans-Atlantic community is the center of gravity,” said Charles Kupchan, who served on Obama’s National Security Council and traveled with Biden when he spoke to the Ukrainian parliament.

Although Biden has tried to focus his foreign policy on countering China’s expanding influence, a peaceful and democratic Europe remains central to his worldview.

“All of that effort to deal with the rise of China has to be anchored on a group of likeminded liberal democracies,” said Kupchan, now a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. “That’s why he’s gone out of his way to build a united front.”

Although Biden spent decades engaged on foreign affairs as a senator, his focus on Ukraine sharpened as Obama’s vice president.

Today’s crisis began when the country’s Russia-aligned leader rejected an agreement that would have strengthened ties with the European Union, angering a populace that saw a better future looking west than east. A subsequent uprising known as the Revolution of Dignity toppled Ukraine’s government in 2014, rattling Putin.

He responded by seizing Crimea, a peninsula that juts into the Black Sea, and backing separatists in the Donbas, a region along Ukraine’s eastern edge.

“Everyone was caught totally off guard,” said Max Bergmann, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress who was serving in the U.S. State Department at the time.

A stalemate eventually took hold. Russian forces and separatists remained in control of parts of Ukraine, while a democratic government based in Kyiv, the capital, tried to carry on.

Biden traveled to Ukraine six times as vice president, and his work in the country is one of the major storylines of his 2017 memoir, “Promise Me, Dad.”

He wrote that some warned him the situation would damage him politically because it “was bound to be a defeat for the West,” but he “didn’t much care.”

(It eventually caused headaches in a different way during the 2020 campaign, when President Donald Trump bludgeoned Biden with unproven allegations of corruption because his son, Hunter, served on the board of a Ukrainian gas company at the same time.)

Before his 2015 speech to the Ukrainian parliament, known as the Rada, Biden spent weeks developing his remarks and kept tweaking the text as he flew to the country. He described the government as struggling with twin threats of internal corruption and Russian aggression.

“Ukraine was at the crossroads of history,” Biden wrote, and he wanted “to remind the men and women sitting in the Rada that they were on the cusp of something extraordinary and — like all the most worthwhile things in life — extraordinarily fragile.”

A tactile politician who believes in the power of his personal relationships, Biden described feeling a connection with his audience.

“One thing I know from working with politicians and national leaders across the world is that they are a lot more like me than unlike me,” he wrote.

In his last mention of the country in his memoir, Biden wrote that its future remained uncertain — “It might take a generation or more to know if the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine had truly succeeded.”

Putin is trying to ensure that it does not. He’s spent months ratcheting up the pressure on Ukraine, and U.S. officials accuse him of planning false flag operations to create a pretense for an invasion.

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Timothy Naftali, a historian at New York University who has studied the Soviet Union, said the Russian president is using “the same playbook” as his Cold War predecessors.

“You had a series of Soviet leaders who would try to get their way by scaring us,” he said.

Biden has declined to commit American troops to defend Ukraine, which would raise the possibility of war between the U.S. and Russia, two nuclear-armed powers.

But he’s moved additional forces into Eastern Europe, warning Putin that he would “defend every inch of NATO territory,” and he’s pumped more American-made weapons into Ukraine, which is not a NATO member.

U.S. analysts and former officials praise Biden for rallying European nations to oppose any Russian attack, a difficult task when countries have varying political and economic interests.

“This is what it looks like when it’s working,” said Fried, a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council whose decades-long career in the Foreign Service included a stint as the U.S. ambassador to Poland. “The French always have a different style. The Germans are always agonizing.”

Trans-Atlantic unity has been a priority for Biden since taking office, and Fried said solid relationships would make sanctions on Russia more damaging,

“If Putin is determined to start a war, he will start a war,” Fried said. “But if he does, our job is to make sure it ends badly for his regime.”

Fiona Hill, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who served as senior director for European and Russian affairs on Trump’s National Security Council, said an invasion could have ripple effects around the world.

“This is not just about Ukraine, it’s about a precedent that is set globally,” she said.

That’s something Biden is anxious to avoid as he watches democracy face threats at home and abroad. He frequently warns that autocrats like Putin, who has claimed that “the liberal idea has started eating itself,” want to demonstrate that representative governments can’t function in the current era.

During a December virtual Summit on Democracy, Biden called such threats “the defining challenge of our time.”

By that point, Russia already had tens of thousands of troops on the border with Ukraine.

Elon Musk’s \$5.7B donation sparks questions about giving

By GLENN GAMBOA and HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writers

Leave it to Elon Musk to stir up controversy without saying — or tweeting — a word.

In November, according to a regulatory filing, the Tesla CEO donated to charity about 5 million shares of company stock, worth \$5.7 billion. Since the filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission was made public Monday, Tesla hasn’t responded to a request for comment. Nor has Musk mentioned the donation on Twitter, his favorite communications forum.

Yet that hasn’t quelled debates in and out of philanthropy, about transparency, tax deductions and congressional legislation, along with speculation about where exactly the money was donated. Some experts say Musk likely donated his shares to his donor-advised fund, or DAF for short. DAFs are essentially charitable investment accounts in which donors can claim a tax deduction upfront but aren’t legally required to distribute the money.

Experts say that would be the most advantageous strategy for Musk, currently the world’s richest man with an approximate net worth of more than \$220 billion. A DAF donation would allow him to claim a tax deduction of as much as 30% of his 2021 adjusted gross income, instead of 20% if he had donated it instead to his foundation. Musk could also deduct the fair market value of the stock, instead of its original value.

“He can do whatever he wants with his money — anyone can,” said John Arnold, a billionaire philanthropist who co-founded the Laura and John Arnold Foundation and Arnold Ventures with his wife, Laura. “But if he’s getting a subsidy from society through this tax deduction, then there’s a responsibility that goes with it.”

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Whether or not Musk donated his Tesla shares to a DAF, Arnold said, the possibility that he did highlights a questionable tax loophole for many wealthy Americans.

"Society is giving them this tax deduction, this subsidy to encourage more resources to get to communities," Arnold said. "But the way that the tax law is structured today, it doesn't necessitate that that happens. You can get the tax deduction today, and there's no requirement for that money ever to get to the community. You can give money to a donor advised fund and keep it in a tax-free investment account forever."

Arnold and others who want to address that loophole have formed a coalition, the Initiative to Accelerate Charitable Giving, that seeks to tighten requirements for DAFs and other financial vehicles used by the wealthy.

This month, a bipartisan group of lawmakers proposed a bill in the House of Representatives that would limit how long donations can remain in a DAF untaxed. Similar bipartisan legislation was introduced last year in the U.S. Senate.

Many DAF proponents oppose the changes, arguing that DAFs, with an average payout rate of around 20%, are distributing money faster and more robustly than many private foundations, whose average distribution is generally only slightly above the 5% annually required by law, according to the Stanford Law School Policy Lab on Donor Advised Funds.

If Musk did place Tesla shares in a DAF, the tax law's intent backfired, Arnold said. The community received neither the tax revenue generated by Musk's income on the shares or the philanthropic benefit that the tax deduction was meant to create.

DAFs also allow for anonymity. Benjamin Soskis, a historian of philanthropy and a senior researcher at the Urban Institute, suggested that Musk's donation shows norms may be tipping towards a lack of disclosure about where large gifts are landing.

"When you're giving away that much money, it is by definition a matter of public interest where it's going to," Soskis said.

Generally, Musk's approach to donations has differed from that of many other wealthy donors, who are often accused of publicizing their gifts as a way to burnish their reputations.

About a month before donating his stock, the notoriously provocative Musk engaged in a Twitter fight with the head of the United Nations World Food Programme, who had urged billionaires to donate \$6 billion on a "one time basis" to help end starvation.

Musk said he would sell \$6 billion of Tesla stock and donate the proceeds to the agency if it could show how the money would solve world hunger. David Beasley, the organization's executive director, said this week that it had yet to receive a donation from the Tesla CEO.

Soskis, of the Urban Institute, has suggested that there's room for Musk to be more transparent about his gifts while still signaling his "contempt" for "elite public opinion," as the Tesla CEO frequently does.

At times, Musk does provide transparency about his donations. Last year, he gave \$50 million to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. He also donated about \$30 million to a variety of public schools and nonprofits in south Texas, where SpaceX builds its rockets.

His private foundation's latest IRS filing shows he donated 11,000 Tesla shares to the charity in 2019. From July that year to June 2020, the foundation distributed \$23.6 million in grants. Some of that went directly to working charities, but a large chunk — \$20.7 million — went to Fidelity Charitable, a grantmaker that sponsors DAFs.

Some who have worked with Musk explain his style of philanthropy by saying he isn't focused on looking good.

Marcus Extavour, vice president of climate and energy at XPrize, which manages Musk's \$100 million prize for carbon removal, says Musk wanted the project to be focused on finding impactful solutions and didn't want it to use his image everywhere. That's in contrast to some other donors, who, Extavour asserts, seem more concerned about invitations to speaking engagements and other events.

"It's been pretty nice to work with the Musk Foundation as a donor who is not.. nitpicking on how we describe this or how we describe that," Extavour said. "Or making sure they get the shine or the limelight."

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Steve Greanias, general manager of fundraising solutions for the fundraising platform GiveSmart, says that like most people working in philanthropy, he is curious about where Musk's money went and how it was or will be used. Yet he doesn't think it's necessarily everyone's business to know. His own platform, which serves about 8,000 nonprofits and has processed about \$800 million in donations, accepts anonymous donations.

"If you have this kind of money and you want to do good with it and you don't feel the need to be recognized for it, that's OK," Greanias said. "That's between you and the organization. As long as your relationship's OK with them, it shouldn't matter if the world wants to know where money came from."

US paves way for resumption of Mexico avocado exports

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The U.S. Embassy announced Friday that Washington is lifting a ban on inspections of Mexican avocados, freeing the way for exports to resume.

The suspension of inspections had threatened Mexico's \$3 billion annual exports and raised the possibility of price increases for U.S. consumers.

Ambassador Ken Salazar said in a statement the decision came after Mexico and the United States agreed "to enact the measures that ensure the safety" of agricultural inspectors who are in charge of making sure Mexican avocados don't carry diseases or pests that would harm U.S. orchards.

Salazar did not describe those measures or whether they would address reports of Mexican growers and packers playing fast and loose with sanitary measures designed to protect U.S. production.

The inspections were halted last week after one of the U.S. inspectors was threatened in the western state of Michoacan, where growers are routinely subject to extortion by drug cartels.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture said Thursday that the inspector had received a threat "against him and his family."

It said the inspector had "questioned the integrity of a certain shipment, and refused to certify it based on concrete issues."

Michoacan is the only Mexican state certified as pest-free and able to export avocados to the U.S. market. There have been frequent reports that some packers in Mexico are buying avocados from other, non-certified states, and trying to pass them off as being from Michoacan.

"I am pleased to report that today the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service has determined it will immediately resume its avocado inspection program in Michoacán," Salazar wrote.

The service said Friday that "avocado exports to the United States have resumed."

The week-old ban had already been taking a toll on avocado pickers in Michoacan, who stood on a roadside this week outside the city of Uruapan asking for donations after they lost their work.

Holding up signs saying "Voluntary donations" and "We make our living off avocado picking," they waited for motorists to drop spare change into buckets they held.

There were signs that supplies may have tightened since the inspection suspension was announced last Saturday and that the damage to Mexico's violence-plagued avocado industry may be lasting: It could prompt companies that import avocados to look beyond Mexico, which currently supplies about 92% of U.S. imports of the fruit.

Peru, Colombia and Chile already ship avocados to the United States, but in quantities that are only a tiny fraction of Mexico's production. That may change.

"I was talking with a few buyers of avocado domestically, and on toward the future, they they know they need to diversify suppliers," said Miguel Gómez, professor of applied economics and management in the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business. "The issue is that they realized that it would be very risky to depend on a single source."

Exports from Mexico were largely responsible for the huge increase in U.S. avocado consumption in recent decades because they made the fruit available year-round, most famously during the Super Bowl.

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U.S. per capita consumption of avocados tripled since 2001 to 8 pounds per person in 2018.

The Mexican harvest is January through March, while U.S production runs from April to September.

While there is concern about the deforestation and violence that have resulted from the avocado boom in Michoacan, it is unclear whether Americans would be willing to pay more for avocados produced by growers who do not pay protection money demanded by drug cartels in Michoacan.

The connection to U.S. consumers is hardly theoretical: That protection money goes to the same cartels flooding the United States with deadly fentanyl pills counterfeited to look like Xanax, Adderall or Oxycodone. Synthetic opioid overdoses killed about 60,000 Americans last year.

"It's requiring Americans to really ask themselves, do they want to pay more to have a quality product or do they want to kind of look the other way and be able to slice their toast accordingly?" said Desirée LeClercq, a professor of employment law at Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. "And I think that consumers are becoming more educated on how these products are made. But whether or not that's going to trickle into consumer behavior, I think has yet to be seen."

NYC mayor pushes to remove homeless people in subway system

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Eric Adams is making an aggressive push to try to remove homeless people from the city's sprawling subway system, announcing a plan to start barring people from sleeping on trains or riding the same lines all night.

The new mayor, at one point likening homelessness to a "cancerous sore," said Friday that the city next week would deploy more teams of police officers and mental health workers to the transit network and start enforcing rules more strictly.

"People tell me about their fear of using the system and we are going to ensure that fear is not New York's reality," Adams said.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, who joined Adams at a subway station Friday to make the announcement, said the city and state can't recover from the devastation of the pandemic until people return to their jobs — and ride the subway to get there.

She said the state was working to get more psychiatric beds at hospitals available by increasing the amount of money hospitals receive for having the beds.

"We know it's a big problem. But shame on us if this moment in time, if we don't turn over every single stone, find every possible way to to deal with this," Hochul said.

Adams, a former New York City Police captain and transit officer who once patrolled the subterranean trains, said the vast majority of unhoused people are not dangerous. But the pandemic has exacerbated the issue, with more people dealing with job loss and untreated medical and mental health issues, and some of those people are dangerous to themselves and the public.

Adams called it a complex problem, saying "You can't put a band-aid on a cancerous sore," but, "You must remove the cancer and start the healing process."

Shelly Nortz, the deputy executive director for policy at the Coalition for the Homeless, called the mayor's comment "sickening" and said "criminalizing homelessness" was not the answer.

"Repeating the failed outreach-based policing strategies of the past will not end the suffering of homeless people bedding down on the subway. It is sickening to hear Mayor Adams liken unsheltered homeless people to a cancer. They are human beings," Nortz said.

Adams' spokesperson, Fabien Levy, responded by saying the mayor "was abundantly clear today that his heart breaks when he sees fellow New Yorkers sleeping on trains."

"We are not going to abandon those who are experiencing homelessness to lives of suffering and pain and we are not going to allow the betrayal of these individuals to continue any longer. We can help those in need, uphold the law, and restore public confidence in our transit system all at the same time," Levy said.

Nortz said the coalition was pleased to hear, however, that part the plan would involve expanding the number of psychiatric beds at hospitals.

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As subway ridership cratered during the pandemic, homeless people have become more visible, sometimes sleeping on platforms or several seats on a train, something the mayor has said contributes to a general feeling of "disorder" in the nation's largest city.

The mayor, who has emphasized the appearance of crime and disorder as being just as important to tackle as the actual crime statistics, said it was unacceptable that the system allowed, in one case, a woman to live under a stairway inside a station for months.

"That is not dignity. That is disgusting," he said. "And that's not who we are as a city."

In addition to the tens of thousands of people who sleep in the city's shelter systems, there are uncounted thousands of people sleeping on the city's streets and sometimes subway stations and trains.

Adams announced last month he was injecting more police officers into the system, not only having officers riding trains but having other neighborhood patrol officers spend more time in stations and on platforms.

The crackdown was spurred by a string of violent incidents in the transit network, including the death of a woman who was pushed to her death in front of a train in January and a fresh incident Thursday afternoon, when a man breakdancing on a train was wounded when he was stabbed twice by another man who then fled.

In the case of the fatal shoving of Michelle Alyssa Go, police said the suspect, Martial Simon, was homeless and had a history of "emotionally disturbed encounters."

Adams encountered incidents himself on his first day as mayor, when he witnessed a fight and at least one person sleeping on a train as he made a point of commuting on the subway to City Hall.

"Who wants to start their day that way? Of that level of despair that's right in front of them?" the mayor said Friday when reflecting on his first day.

Police statistics show major felonies in the subways have dropped over the last two years, but the numbers are difficult to compare with ridership numbers having dropped as well.

Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell said starting next week, the police department's officers will be joined by mental health workers in the subways. The teams will focus on high-traffic areas or areas where there have been increased reports of crime.

"Trained people will look to assist those in need. We will enforce transit rules when necessary, but this is about helping people," she said.

Biden signs stopgap spending bill averting shutdown

By ZEKE MILLER and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday signed a bipartisan bill to extend government funding for three weeks to give Congress more time to reach an overdue deal financing federal agencies through the rest of the fiscal year, the White House announced.

The Senate approved the measure Thursday by a bipartisan 65-27 vote, five more than the 60 votes needed, after 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.

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.

At least 9 more deaths as 2nd major storm hits north Europe

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By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The second major storm in three days smashed through northern Europe on Friday, killing at least nine people as high winds felled trees, cancelled train services and ripped sections off the roof of London's O2 Arena.

The U.K. weather service said a gust provisionally measured at 122 mph (196 kph), thought to be the strongest ever in England was recorded on the Isle of Wight as Storm Eunice swept across the country's south. The weather system, known as Storm Zeynep in Germany, is now pushing into the European mainland, prompting high wind warnings in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany.

The storm caused mayhem with travel in Britain, shutting the English Channel port of Dover, closing bridges linking England and Wales and halting most trains in and out of London.

At least three people died in Britain, including a man in southern England killed when a car hit a tree, another man whose windshield was struck by debris in northwest England and a woman in her 30s who died in London when a tree fell on a car, police said,

In the Netherlands, firefighters said three people were killed by falling trees in and around Amsterdam, and a fourth died in the northern province of Groningen after driving his car into a fallen tree.

In neighboring Belgium an elderly man died when high winds pushed him into a canal in Ypres. In County Wexford, Ireland, a local government worker was killed as he responded to the scene of a fallen tree, the local council said.

Eunice is the second named storm to hit Europe this week, with the first storm killing at least five people in Germany and Poland. Peter Inness, a meteorologist at the University of Reading in England, attributed the storms to an unusually strong jet stream over the eastern Atlantic Ocean, with winds close to 200 mph (321 kph) at high altitudes.

"A strong jet stream like this can act like a production line for storms, generating a new storm every day or two," Inness said. "There have been many occasions in the recent past when two or more damaging storms have passed across the U.K. and other parts of Europe in the space of a few days."

The forecast led British authorities to take the unusual step of issuing "red" weather warnings — indicating a danger to life — for parts of southern England, including London, and Wales that lasted through early afternoon. A lower level amber warning for gusts up to 80 mph covers the whole of England from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Even before Britain was hit by the full force of the storm, Eunice disrupted travel across southern England and Wales with many train services interrupted and numerous flights and ferry services cancelled. A number of tourist attractions in England, including the London Eye, Legoland and Warwick Castle, closed ahead of the storm, as were all of London's Royal Parks.

In the town of Wells in southwest England, the wind toppled the spire of a 19th-century church. In London, high winds ripped sections of roofing from the O2 Arena, a landmark on the south bank of the River Thames that was originally known as the Millennium Dome. Firefighters evacuated 1,000 people from the area.

"I urge all Londoners to stay at home, do not take risks, and do not travel unless it is absolutely essential," Mayor Sadiq Khan said before the storm.

The Environment Agency issued 10 severe flood warnings, another indicator of life-threatening weather conditions.

The storm was expected to hit northern Germany later Friday and sweep eastward overnight. A flood warning was issued for Germany's North Sea coast on Friday. Meteorologists warned Friday's storm could cause more damage than the earlier weather system, which triggered accidents that killed at least three people, toppled trees and damaged roofs and railroad tracks.

Germany's biggest rail operator, Deutsche Bahn, cancelled all train services in the north of the country on Friday due to the storm.

In the Netherlands, authorities sent a push alert to mobile phone users on Friday afternoon, warning them to stay indoors.

The Dutch weather institute earlier issued its highest warning, code red, for coastal regions and code

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orange for much of the rest of the low-lying nation. The country's rail company said it would halt all trains nationwide from 2 p.m. (1300 GMT). The airline KLM cancelled dozens of flights at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport.

In The Hague, high winds tore off part of the roof of soccer club ADO The Hague's stadium. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

At Scheveningen beach in The Hague, authorities built walls of sand to protect beachfront bars from the storm, even as dozens of surfers braved the weather in search of storm-driven waves.

In Denmark, strong winds prompted authorities to ban light vehicles from crossing the Storebælt tunnel and bridge linking the central island of Funen to Zealand, home to the capital, Copenhagen.

Storm Eunice produced heightened concern because it had the potential to produce a "sting jet," a small area of intense winds that may exceed 100 mph.

One example of such a phenomenon occurred during what's known as the Great Storm of 1987, which killed 18 people and knocked down 15 million trees across the U.K., according to the Met Office.

Liz Bentley, chief executive of the Royal Meteorological Society, described the phenomenon as being akin to a scorpion in the sky.

"It's often referred to as a sting-jet because it's like it's the sting in the tail as the storm moves through," she said. "And that's usually the bit where the strong winds are — right on the tip of that curl of cloud."

Train operators across Britain urged passengers to avoid traveling on Friday and many services shut down. Airlines warned of delays and cancelled flights at airports in southern England, including London Heathrow, where hundreds of flights were canceled.

Friederike Otto, a climate scientist at Imperial College who is an expert in extreme weather events, said there is no evidence climate change is leading to more violent storms in Europe.

But she said the damage caused by such storms has increased because rainfall has become more intense as a result of human-caused climate change.

"The second thing is that sea levels have risen," said Otto, who is part of World Weather Attribution, which investigates the link between extreme weather and global warming. "This means that storm floods, which also occur during such storms, (are) higher and therefore lead to greater damage than there would be without climate change."

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Paris police didn't give fines for waving flag, saying 'freedom'

CLAIM: Police in Paris ticketed protesters for carrying the French flag and saying the word "freedom."

THE FACTS: Paris police ticketed protesters for offenses related to "participating in a prohibited protest," not for carrying the French flag or saying the word "freedom," as some people falsely claimed online. Following demonstrations in the French capital last weekend against COVID-19 mandates — inspired by rallies among truckers and others in Canada — one popular post asserted that Paris police were issuing tickets with fines of up to 135 euros (\$153) for actions such as holding the flag and shouting "liberté." "Tanks and tear-gas in France, with €135 fee for those holding a french flag and €90 to those who dare utter the word "freedom", while protesting in Paris is now made illegal," one tweet said. While some people on social media said they took the post to be a metaphor, others believed that people were actually being ticketed for these actions. But Paris police officials said in a statement issued to The Associated Press that tickets handed out to protesters were for participating in the rally despite a police order that prohibited involvement, a police spokesperson confirmed. Police gave out two tiers of driving tickets for fines of 135 and 90 euros (\$102) for infractions that related to driving on a temporarily closed road and for attending a prohibited protest, according to information from the Paris police, checked against a ledger of fine

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amounts from the National Agency for the Automated Processing of Offenses by the AP. Police set up checkpoints into the French capital on key roads last weekend and said they successfully stopped at least 500 vehicles from heading to the banned protest, which, like in Canada, aimed to blockade roads and use vehicles to create a convoy. Still, a few dozen vehicles were able to slip into Paris and disrupt traffic. Authorities fired tear gas as they demanded that the demonstrators disperse, some of whom climbed onto their vehicles to create chaos, the AP reported. In Canada, similar demonstrations have unfolded over the past several weeks in and around the capital city of Ottawa among truckers and others angry over Canada's COVID-19 restrictions. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked emergency powers Monday to quell the protests.

— Associated Press writer Sophia Tulp in Atlanta and Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

Posts distort research details to suggest secret vaccine campaign

CLAIM: Johns Hopkins University research shows that someone can "be vaccinated with a PCR swab test without knowing."

THE FACTS: Researchers have developed tiny devices for potentially delivering drugs, but the technology hasn't been tested or used with vaccines — or delivered through PCR swab tests. Social media posts baselessly linked the technology developed by Johns Hopkins researchers to a method of stealthily administering vaccines to unknowing recipients. "Johns Hopkins U Confirms You Can Be Vaccinated with a PCR Swab Test Without Knowing," reads one blog post's headline shared on Facebook and Instagram. But the university confirmed no such thing. The blog post points to a November 2020 article by the university announcing that researchers had "designed tiny, star-shaped microdevices that can latch onto intestinal mucosa and release drugs into the body." The researchers published a study a month prior in the journal *Science Advances* on using such technology to deliver medicine in animals' gastrointestinal tract. But the so-called "theragrippers" — which latch onto tissue and release medicine — have not been approved for use in humans, or tested for vaccine administration. "This nanotechnology has shown promise in a laboratory setting," Johns Hopkins Medicine said in a statement provided to The Associated Press. "However, it is still in its infancy and has not been approved for use in humans." The statement said the university article "has been inaccurately used for disinformation purposes over the past few months," noting that the devices are deployed through an endoscope and have "been neither tested nor used for vaccine delivery." While the university's article reporting on the research included a photo of the devices on a cotton swab, it did not say they are delivered that way. Instead, the cotton swab was used to convey the size of the devices, saying that "a theragripper is about the size of a speck of dust." The COVID-19 vaccines that are currently authorized for use in the U.S. are administered via shots into one's muscle.

— Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia contributed this report.

Image of girl with gun is an old meme, not recent Ukraine photo

CLAIM: A photo of a girl on a bus with a rifle shows "life in Ukraine, now."

THE FACTS: The photo shows a Russian social media influencer holding a fake gun after a photo shoot in March 2020, not a recent image of life in Ukraine amid warnings of an imminent Russian invasion. The image was taken well before tensions began escalating between the two countries in recent weeks. A Twitter user shared the photo — which shows a girl scrolling through a smartphone on public transportation while holding a fake gun — last weekend, with a false caption suggesting it was just taken in Ukraine. In reality, the image was taken two years ago in Russia, according to Ekaterina Gladkikh, who lists her location on Instagram as Novosibirsk, a city in Siberia. Gladkikh told The Associated Press through direct messages on Instagram that she was returning from a photo shoot when the image was taken. "With this fake weapon, I managed to sit in a cafe and, as you can see, and take a ride in transport. None of the passers-by or the guards asked me any questions," she said. "I live in Russia, not in Ukraine," she added. In other photos posted on Instagram, she can be seen wearing the same beige hat from the widely shared photo. She also posted a story highlight video in March 2020 where she was wearing the same distinctive nail polish as the photo — one hand was painted with red nail polish, while the other was painted with

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blue polish. Reverse image search results show the photo has also appeared over time on Facebook and Twitter, with captions from 2020 and 2021 asserting it showed "a normal day in Russia." One Facebook post from March 2020, the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, captioned the photo: "Slav Girl in need of social distance in bus." An April 2020 entry on a blog post headlined "Evolution of a Meme: Girl in Belarus on a Bus with AK," discussed how the image had been repurposed multiple times by online meme pages. The photo has begun recirculating in recent days as tensions mount between Russia and Ukraine.

— Associated Press writers Arijeta Lajka in New York and Sophia Tulp contributed this report.

PA school board didn't vote to ban CNN in classrooms

CLAIM: A school board in suburban Pittsburgh voted to ban CNN from its classrooms.

THE FACTS: Teachers can still use their own discretion to show instructional videos from any source, including CNN, according to Norwin School District Superintendent Jeff Taylor. The Norwin School Board had voted on Monday to stop routinely playing television programs during homeroom classes at Norwin Middle School unless they are "student, teacher or administrator driven." But this vote by the Pittsburgh-area school board is being misrepresented online. "School District Just Banned CNN From Classrooms," read one widely-shared headline. "CNN got thrown out of Pennsylvania classrooms for being FAKE NEWS!" a Twitter user wrote. "Pennsylvania school removes CNN from classrooms, can choose patriotic videos instead," read a misleading Fox News headline. While the article itself contained more nuance, users on Instagram posted screenshots of the headline alone that racked up tens of thousands of likes. Taylor explained in a phone interview that teachers in the district still have the option to play CNN or any other media source they deem has instructional value. Taylor said the claims stemmed from the middle school's use of CNN 10, a 10-minute daily digital news program for students, publicly available on CNN's website. The program had been shown to students during the homeroom period at Norwin Middle School since 2018. In a workshop meeting on Jan. 10, a school board member expressed concern over the program, saying it hadn't been approved by the board and that he would like to remove it from the classroom. However, the motion that ultimately came to a board vote didn't specifically address CNN 10. Instead, the board voted to stop showing TV programs during homeroom at Norwin Middle School to allow students to socialize and interact, unless the program was "either student, teacher or administrator driven." A video of Monday's meeting shows Taylor asked the board to clarify whether the phrase "teacher driven" meant teachers could still opt to show CNN 10 videos to their students. "I believe that's the intent of the motion," said board member Raymond Kocak. No board members expressed dissent, and the board approved the motion with a 5-4 vote. Taylor told the AP that "student, teacher or administrator driven" could be understood to mean hand-selected by those individuals. He clarified that the board's decision covered homeroom classes for Norwin Middle School only, and did not affect curriculum for other classes or schools in the 5,300-student K-12 district. Taylor reiterated the importance of teaching current events in the classroom and pointed out that Pennsylvania state curriculum standards require it. Reached for comment, Fox News Digital Deputy Managing Editor Kelley Kramer said, "The Norwin School Board voted to end student programming from classrooms, which is accurately reflected in the FOX News Digital story." A spokesperson for WarnerMedia, which owns CNN, declined to comment.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report.

Prosecutors in DC haven't charged Trump's children with crimes

CLAIM: Prosecutors in the District of Columbia recently filed criminal charges against Ivanka Trump and her brothers.

THE FACTS: District prosecutors have not filed any criminal charges against Ivanka Trump, Eric Trump or Donald Trump Jr., according to a spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia. The YouTube commentator who made the claim, Christo Aivalis, has also admitted it is false. Aivalis made the claim in a video titled, "Ivanka Trump CHARGED with MAJOR CRIME." In the clip, Aivalis cites a news article discussing new developments in an ongoing lawsuit filed in January 2020 by District of Columbia Attorney General Karl Racine against former President Donald Trump's inaugural committee,

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the Trump International Hotel and the Trump Organization, alleging that the committee overpaid the hotel to enrich the Trump family. But the suit involving the inaugural committee is a civil matter, not a criminal case. None of Trump's children are named as defendants, although the suit alleges that Ivanka Trump was involved. Reached by the Associated Press for comment, Aivalis admitted that the claim in his video is inaccurate. "I appear to have been mistaken in this regard, misunderstanding the nature of the efforts by DC officials," Aivalis wrote in an email to the AP. The District of Columbia attorney general's office has not filed any criminal charges against Ivanka Trump, Eric Trump or Donald Trump Jr., spokesperson MARRISA GELLER confirmed to the AP. Alan Garten, executive vice president and chief legal officer at the Trump Organization, wrote in an email to the AP that the claim that the three siblings have been criminally charged is "completely untrue." The lawsuit filed by prosecutors in the District of Columbia alleges that the committee spent over \$1 million to book a ballroom at the Trump International Hotel in the capital, and that one of the event's planners raised concerns about the high price with Ivanka. Ivanka has said she instructed the hotel to charge a "fair market rate." Racine's office announced on Thursday that the case is going to trial, according to a news release.

Daunte Wright's mother angered by Potter's smiling mug shot

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A prison intake photo of Kim Potter that showed her smiling widely after she was convicted of manslaughter in Daunte Wright's death flared up at her sentencing Friday, with Wright's mother saying it showed Potter wasn't genuinely sorry for his death.

Potter's attorney said no disrespect was intended and Potter was simply doing as instructed by the prison staff.

Katie Wright brought up the mug shot as she addressed the court. Potter, then a Brooklyn Center police officer, said she confused her handgun for her Taser when she fatally shot Wright last April. A jury convicted her in December.

Katie Wright said Potter never looked at her and other Wright family members as they passed in the hallway during the trial, and when she testified, expressed sorrow only after a break where she "had time to be coached on how to gain some sort of sympathy from the jury."

"How do you show remorse when you're smiling in your mug shot after being sentenced to manslaughter? After taking my son's life? How do you say you're sorry with no tears?" Katie Wright said.

Damik Bryant, Daunte Wright's brother, also called the mug shot "painful" and urged the judge to impose a "strong sentence."

Defense attorney Paul Engh began his remarks by responding to the Wright family's anger.

"There's no disrespect intended to the booking photograph," he said. "Ms. Potter indicates they asked her to smile, she smiled. It was not meant to be disrespectful, it was in response to the prison's request."

When Potter was given a chance later to address the court, she addressed the Wright family directly, saying she was "so sorry that I brought the death of your son." She also told Katie Wright that she felt she didn't believe she "had a right to" look at her during the trial.

"I understand a mother's love, and I'm sorry I broke your heart," Potter said.

Potter is white. Wright, who was Black, was killed after Brooklyn Center officers pulled him over for having expired license tags and an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror.

Judge Regina Chu later sentenced Potter to two years, well below prosecutors' request, saying that mitigating factors warranted it.

US mulls booting Nicaragua from trade pact over crackdown

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Biden administration is considering trying to expel Nicaragua from a lucrative regional free trade pact — or allocate its valuable sugar quota to another country in Central America — to retaliate against President Daniel Ortega's crackdown on his opponents, according to a U.S. official.

The economic impact of the action is still under analysis and no decision has been made, according to

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a U.S. official speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal conversations.

But any action affecting billions in annual trade with the U.S. could inflict serious economic pain on the country's business elite, who have mostly stood by silently as Ortega's repressive tactics have grown, said the official.

"The Nicaraguan private sector has a choice to make," said Eddy Acevedo, the son of Nicaraguan immigrants and chief of staff at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington. "They either continue aiding and abetting this tyrannical regime with blood on its hands or stand alongside the people of Nicaragua who yearn for freedom and democracy."

Such economic patriotism may be hard to find with several business leaders already among those imprisoned.

Nicaragua has been holding what the U.S. considers daily show trials against antigovernment activists rounded up ahead of last fall's elections. His likely opponents unable to compete, Ortega easily won a fourth consecutive term. Each defendant so far has been convicted and sentenced to prison.

The Biden administration's response to Ortega's authoritarian tilt has so far consisted of targeting individuals in the president's inner circle and family members with sanctions cutting off their access to the U.S.

Expulsion from the Central America Free Trade Agreement, which was signed in 2004, would be a major blow, depriving Ortega's government of important export earnings and foreign investment. Nicaragua is the only nation in CAFTA to run a trade surplus with the U.S., about \$2.5 billion last year, or 20% of its gross domestic product.

But booting Nicaragua from the trade pact is no easy feat.

CAFTA is an international treaty ratified by seven nations and suppliers from Nicaragua, especially in the textile sector and light electronics, are deeply woven into the supply chains of many U.S. retailers.

The treaty has no expulsion mechanism, so any attempt to corral Ortega would require Nicaragua's neighbors plus the Dominican Republic, also a signatory, to withdraw from the agreement and negotiate a new deal in which other grievances — everything from U.S. agricultural subsidies to the impact on U.S. businesses — could be back on the table.

Additionally, U.S.-negotiated free trade deals don't generally carry so-called democracy clauses like the one that was used in 2012 by Argentina and Brazil to suspend Paraguay from the Mercosur trade pact after the rushed impeachment of then-President Fernando Lugo.

"It would surely be messy," said Eric Farnsworth, a former U.S. trade negotiator in the Clinton White House and now vice president of the Council of the Americas, which is funded by U.S. companies doing business in Latin America. "But it would send the right message to the private sector to stay away from Nicaragua."

A less complicated alternative, says Farnsworth, would be for the U.S. to refuse to import certain products with the argument that Nicaragua is under U.S. sanctions. Such a move would effectively dare Ortega to sue under the treaty's terms, kicking off a lengthy and costly process.

The other option under consideration, reassigning Nicaragua's annual sugar quota to another country in Central America, would take away what is essentially a U.S. subsidy worth millions of dollars every year.

Farnsworth said hitting such a labor-intensive industry as sugar could stir resentment against Ortega in Nicaragua's countryside, site of the bloody civil war in the 1980s fought between Ortega's Sandinista army and U.S.-backed Contra rebels.

Choosing sugar could be a way to mobilize Carlos Pellas, Nicaragua's wealthiest man and owner of the largest sugar producer. Pellas was a signatory to an open letter from business leaders after antigovernment protests in 2018, calling on Ortega to move up elections. He warned that the country's economic model was bankrupt. But he's remained on the sidelines, at least publicly, since Ortega really started cracking down.

His family, however, had major properties targeted for expropriation under Ortega in the 1980s and could be wary of suffering a repeat.

Ortega has already sent a clear message to economic elites who might oppose him. In June, police arrested two prominent business leaders, and in October the president and vice president of the country's top business association, charging them with crimes including money laundering, acts that diminish the

country's independence and inciting foreign interference.

The charges were similar to those applied to his political opponents.

Just before the November election, the U.S. Congress passed the Renacer Act, giving more tools to pressure Ortega. Among the law's provisions was a mandate requiring the White House review Nicaragua's participation in CAFTA. It also called for a report on Russia's security ties with Nicaragua, which is due later this month.

Manuel Orozco, a Nicaragua expert at the Inter-American Dialogue, said Ortega's government is already in violation of several components of the trade agreement, especially labor provisions.

But he warned that disbanding CAFTA could backfire and even benefit Ortega, who could try to reimpose tariffs on imported U.S. goods and blame Biden for the added cost to consumers.

"It's a double-edged sword," Orozco said. "If you try to dismantle CAFTA it could mean more revenue for the Nicaraguan government."

Afghanistan's Taliban detain Brits, American; reason unclear

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have detained several British citizens and an American, including a former freelance television journalist who has been coming to Afghanistan for more than 40 years, both governments and a family member say.

A statement from the British government this week said there are a number of British nationals currently in Taliban custody. While the government refused to release their identities, Hassina Syed, the wife of Peter Jouvenal, a former freelance cameraman turned businessman, told The Associated Press, her husband was taken on Dec. 13.

And U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday that Washington was "actively working" to get the American released from Taliban custody. He refused to say more, citing the "sensitivity of it."

The American detainee and at least four other British nationals in custody remain publicly unidentified. It was not clear how many were detained together.

Speaking to The AP by phone from her home in London, Syed, an Afghan, said her husband was in Afghanistan investigating business opportunities, including investment in lithium mining. Afghanistan is rich in lithium, a key component of energy-storage batteries. He was traveling alone and not associated with the other detainees, she said.

Jouvenal had worked as a freelance cameraman during the 1980s Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and followed the country through its many wars. He married Syed and they have three daughters.

Jouvenal, who speaks both Pashto and Dari, Afghanistan's two official languages, had held several meetings with the Taliban's mining ministry before being detained in December, Syed said, including with the minister. No charges have been filed and until his detention, Syed said, Jouvenal had been careful to stay in regular contact with the Taliban authorities to ensure that they were aware of his activities and movements.

In the mid 2000s, Jouvenal owned and operated the Gandamak Restaurant and guest house in the Afghan capital, which had become well known among the many journalists who traveled to Afghanistan during the U.S.-led invasion that toppled the Taliban government in 2001.

The Taliban did not respond to requests for comment on the foreign nationals and on Jouvenal in particular.

In a statement, the British foreign office said the detention of British nationals is being discussed with the Taliban.

"UK officials have raised their detention with the Taliban at every opportunity, including when a delegation travelled to Kabul last week," the British foreign office said in a statement earlier this week,

There's been no explanation for the detentions.

Syed said her husband was alone and was not travelling with the other men who have been detained.

According to people with direct knowledge of the men currently being held in Taliban custody, at least

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two of the detainees were apparently in Afghanistan to secretly evacuate Afghan nationals. The people with direct knowledge spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks.

The Taliban have made it clear that Afghans without proper documents would not be allowed to leave the country.

Syed said she feared her husband may have gotten caught up in a Taliban investigation into attempts to secretly transfer Afghan nationals out of the country.

But Syed said she, too, was planning to return to Afghanistan after her husband's initial trip looking for partners in mining ventures. Together they planned to establish joint ventures.

In the telephone interview, Syed expressed fear for her husband's welfare but also frustration with the Taliban administration.

"They say they want foreign and Afghan businesspeople to come to Afghanistan, to invest in Afghanistan, but why will anyone want to invest if they cannot be certain of their safety?" she asked.

Gu's global coming-out party ends with 3rd Olympic medal

By BERNIE WILSON AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Eileen Gu turned the Beijing Olympics into her own personal playground.

In the city. In the mountains. Spinning, flipping and flying above three different venues.

The American-born Gu came into the Games hoping to win three gold medals in freestyle skiing while representing China, where her mother was born. She didn't, but she did come away with two golds and one silver, making her the first action-sports athlete to win three medals at the same Olympics.

The 18-year-old Gu capped her global coming-out party Friday by winning the gold medal in women's halfpipe. She had such a big lead after two runs that she was able to take a carefree final run down the halfpipe.

"I was very emotional at the top and I chose to do a victory lap," Gu said. "Because I felt like, for the first time, I like really deserved it and I really earned it."

She won the gold medal in the Olympic debut of women's freeski big air in front of an old steel mill in the city. She took the silver in slopestyle on the Secret Garden course, where elements were carved out of snow to resemble portions of the Great Wall. Finally, she dominated in the halfpipe.

Well known in China before these Games, she's now a household name back in the United States and around the world. Part of that had to do with the criticism she received for competing for China rather than the United States.

But a lot of it was due to her skill, confidence and personality.

If there's a face of joy at the Beijing Games, it's Gu and her ever-present smile. It was a remarkable contrast to the tears of Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva after her shocking litany of mistakes left the heavily favored teenager off the podium in women's figure skating, and the disappointment and self-doubt of U.S. skiing superstar Mikaela Shiffrin after she failed to medal in any of the five individual races she entered.

Gu is also a model and her face is on advertisements all over Beijing. She's been photographed for Vogue, Victoria's Secret, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany and more. Born in San Francisco, she will enroll at Stanford in the fall.

On Friday, she remained undefeated in the halfpipe with exceptional performances on her first two runs. She scored 93.25 on her first run and 95.25 on her second run.

"She has basically set a level that's pretty unattainable for a lot of us," said American Carly Margulies, who finished 11th.

She also has three stuffed Bing Dwen Dwen mascots that are given to all medalists. The mascots are so popular that people stand in line for hours in the city trying to buy one. Gu got into the spirit of the Beijing Games by wearing a furry panda hat on the podium.

MEN'S SKICROSS

Ryan Regez led a 1-2 finish by Switzerland in the Olympic skicross final at Genting Snow Park, taking the lead early and never giving it up. He raised his arms in triumph after finishing the course filled with jumps, bumps and rolling terrain. Teammate Alex Fiva finished with the silver medal and Russian athlete

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Sergey Ridzik grabbed the bronze.

SPEEDSKATING

Thomas Krol won gold in the 1,000 meters, giving the Netherlands its third straight Olympic speedskating title in the event. The Netherlands earned its fifth gold medal in 12 events in Beijing with one day of competition remaining. Laurent Dubreuil of Canada took silver and Haavard Lorentzen, the 2018 silver medalist, earned bronze.

BIATHLON

Johannes Thingnes Boe of Norway dominated throughout and stayed composed during the four shooting stages to win the gold medal in the men's mass start race.

Justine Braisaz-Bouchet of France used strong shooting and great skiing to win the women's mass start race.

CURLING

Brad Gushue is returning to Canada with a bronze medal in men's curling and John Shuster is going home to the United States empty-handed. Gushue won the gold medal 16 years ago in Turin and Shuster won it four years ago, helping to popularize curling in the United States.

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

Sweden and Britain will play for gold Saturday.

MEN'S HOCKEY

The Russians and Finland will meet in the gold medal game Sunday. The defending champion Russians beat Sweden 2-1 in a shootout, and Finland defeated surprise semifinalist Slovakia 2-0.

Ivan Fedotov made 34 saves in regulation and overtime against Sweden and six more in the eight-round shootout, and Anton Slepyshev scored in regulation. Former NHL forwards Nikita Gusev and Yegor Yakovlev and New Jersey Devils prospect Arseni Grisyuk scored in the shootout.

Tournament MVP candidate Sakari Manninen scored his fourth goal of the Olympics for Finland, and former Florida Panthers goaltender Harri Sateri made 28 saves for the shutout of Slovakia. The Finns are looking for their first Olympic gold medal.

Slovakia will play Sweden for the bronze. It is going for its first hockey medal of any kind since the breakup of Czechoslovakia.

A mild US flu season is waning, but is it really over?

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — This winter's mild flu season has faded to a trickle of cases in much of the U.S., but health officials aren't ready to call it over.

Since the beginning of the year, positive flu test results and doctor's office visits for flu-like illness are down. But second waves of influenza are not unusual, and some experts said it's possible a late winter or spring surge could be coming.

"The question we're asking ourselves now is: 'Is this it, or is there more to come?'" said Lynnette Brammer of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

COVID-19 cases have been falling, leading to a decline in mask wearing and behaviors that may have been keeping flu down this winter. As people are less cautious, flu or other respiratory viruses can surge, Brammer said.

Indeed, some indicators of flu activity have inched up the last couple of weeks: a count of flu-related hospitalizations and the percent of specimens from patients with respiratory illnesses that test positive for flu.

Limited data on who is testing positive for flu suggest about two-thirds are kids and young adults. Kids have driven flu's spread in past years, so "it's quite possible we could see continued increases," Brammer said.

Dr. Angela Branche, a University of Rochester infectious diseases specialist, called the flu season unusual.

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"I don't have any (flu) cases in my practice this week," she said recently. Normally, doctors in Rochester would be diagnosing 50 to 100 flu cases a day around this time of year.

It seems like the current flu season is "easing to the finish line," said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University infectious diseases expert. But viruses can be unpredictable.

"As the flu-ologists like to say, 'if you've seen one flu season, you've seen one flu season,'" he said.

Last winter's flu season was virtually non-existent. Experts credit mask wearing, social distancing, school closures and other measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Some doctors were nervous about how things would go this winter, wondering if last year's lull would cause flu immunity to wane. Also, fewer children and adults got flu shots this year, according to preliminary CDC data.

The worry seemed to be legitimized by an early November flu outbreak at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where more than 700 cases were reported. The illnesses were caused by a certain version of flu — called Type A H3N2 — that traditionally leads to more hospitalizations and deaths, particularly among the elderly. Worse, many of the infected kids were vaccinated, and investigators concluded the shots offered low levels of protection.

That strain later became the main cause of flu illnesses across the country. But this season has nevertheless turned out to be tame.

That was a surprise, said Dr. Edward Belongia, a flu expert at the Wisconsin-based Marshfield Clinic Research Institute.

"We have occasionally seen other very mild flu seasons, but not where H3N2 is the dominant strain. That's what really makes it odd," he said.

The season peaked in December, just as COVID-19 cases surged, driven by the more transmissible omicron variant, Branche observed. Flu cases dropped as more people masked up and took other steps to prevent coronavirus from spreading, she noted.

Even at its height, the flu season was not nearly as bad as some of the pre-pandemic flu seasons driven by H3N2 strains. Experts aren't sure why.

Some wonder whether the coronavirus essentially muscled aside flu and other bugs. Scientists say they don't fully understand the mechanism behind that.

Of course, a highly effective vaccine would help lessen the severity of a flu season. But researchers say the flu strain that's been circulating is a mismatch for this year's vaccine.

The CDC has not yet released estimates of the current vaccine's effectiveness but it is expected to do so next week.

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.

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"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.

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.

Canadian police began arresting protesters late Thursday, when they picked up two key protest leaders. Officers returned Friday morning, going door to door along a line of trucks and other vehicles after sealing off much of the downtown area to outsiders. Some protesters were led away in handcuffs.

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.

Skiing for joy, Gu wins 3rd Olympic medal -- a halfpipe gold

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

ZHANGJIAKOU, China (AP) — Pure joy on the halfpipe looked like this on a sunny, windswept day at the Beijing Olympics:

—It was multinational freeskiing sensation Eileen Gu learning her gold medal was secure, then falling to her knees at the top of that halfpipe, covering her mouth with her mittens and screaming “Oh my God!”

—It was the 18-year-old superstar doing straight airs all the way down the pipe, gleefully punching her fists and poles downward as she vaulted herself above the lip, enjoying every last second of a victory run that meant nothing — and everything.

—It was Gu wearing a furry panda hat as she climbed the podium, smiling wide and belly laughing while accepting her third Bing Dwen Dwen mascot of the Olympics — one for each medal she’s won.

“I was very emotional at the top and I chose to do a victory lap,” Gu said of her breezy final ride down the pipe Friday. “Because I felt like, for the first time, I really deserved it and I really earned it.”

There were smiles mixed with tears as Gu mingled with her competitors, the coaches and the media at the bottom — a huge sense of pride blended with incredible relief. Her two-week odyssey in China included 16 combined runs down halfpipe, slopestyle and big air courses and countless more practice trips down those same icy expanses.

By winning her gold, in a state-of-the-art contest over defending champion Cassie Sharpe, Gu is the first action-sports athlete to win three medals at the same Olympics. Two were gold and one was silver.

“She has basically set a level that’s pretty unattainable for a lot of us,” said American freeskiier Carly Margulies, who finished 11th.

Gu’s trip to China was about more than sports. About 30 months ago, she took a chance and made a statement when she decided to wear the colors of her mother’s homeland — China, the host country — instead of those of her native United States.

She received some love and some hate for that move. She explained it time and again: She did it to inspire girls in China. There was little in the way of winter-sports culture here when she was younger. There certainly is more now.

“We’re not here to break limits for a country, we’re here to break a human limit,” Gu said.

Good intentions aside, her trip to the Olympics was ultimately destined to be gauged, at least on the outside, by how she did on the slopes. Yet again, with the pressure on and the world watching, Gu delivered. With her latest win, she stayed undefeated on the halfpipe this season.

“She’s a machine,” Sharpe said.

With winds gusting left to right on a 3 degree F (minus 16 degree C) day, Gu put this contest to rest on her first run. It included a pair of 900-degree spins in different directions, each frosted with full, second-long reaches downward to grab her skis.

Gu scored a 93.25 for that, then on her second run, she scored two points better.

She increased the difficulty on her final jump, going for back-to-back “alley-ooop” flat spins in which she starts her spin twirling up the halfpipe even though she’s traveling downhill. She landed both jumps without even a hint of a bobble.

One of her coaches, Misra Tornianen, was even more impressed with the 13 feet, 9 inches Gu flew above the halfpipe on her first hit.

“It’s amazing, all she has done without resting, dealing with the pressure and just delivering every day,” Tornianen said.

That Gu’s win wasn’t in much doubt hardly diminished the overall quality of the contest.

A year ago at the Winter X Games, Sharpe fell hard and tore up her left knee. On Friday, for only the second time in her career, she landed two 1080-degree spins in the same run.

Her 2-3 finish, along with teammate Rachael Karker, marked another beautiful day on the halfpipe for Canada. It was that country’s best freeskiier, the late Sarah Burke, who pushed hard to get women included

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in halfpipe skiing, and then to bring the sport to the Olympics for the 2014 Sochi Games.

In a twist that feels like something more than just mere happenstance, the sport's original star, Burke, and its newest one, Gu, share the same birthday: Sept. 3.

In an interview last year, Gu spoke about making a wallet out of duct tape for a sixth-grade art project. Across the front, she wrote "Celebrate Sarah," a tribute to the pioneer who had died in a training accident in 2012.

"Even if I'm terrible at art," Gu said that day, "I can still express myself to the best of my ability."

A magazine cover girl who scored 1580 (out of 1600) on the SAT and is Stanford-bound next, Gu saves her finest artwork for the snow. Her latest performance launched her into the debate about best Olympic performances of all time.

When it comes to action sports, the versatile teenager is in the same conversation with snowboarder Shaun White, whose pressure-packed victory four years ago was an all-timer; it earned him a third gold medal over the span of 12 years.

And with her friend Chloe Kim, who has dominated her sport for a decade and left China with her second snowboarding gold in two tries.

It seemed only fitting that the final event of Gu's freeski trifecta came in the same halfpipe where Kim won and White bid an emotional farewell to the Olympics the week before.

More than any other place in the action park, the halfpipe is where Olympic stars are born.

As Gu prepared to head down it for the first time of her last event, she placed her hands on her hips and closed her eyes, then repeated one sentence three times.

"I said 'My name is Eileen Gu,'" she told reporters as tears welled up in her eyes, "and I'm the best halfpipe skier in the world."

After the pep talk, she pulled down her goggles, took off down the hill and proved that one more time.

Olympics Live: China pair breaks figure skating world record

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

Sui Wenjing and Han Cong of China shattered their own world record for a short program at the Beijing Games on Friday night, giving them the narrowest of leads over Russian rivals Evgenia Tarasova and Vladimir Morozov heading into the free skate to decide the Olympic champion.

Sui and Han, who won the short program at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games before settling for the silver medal, scored 84.41 points to their orchestral suite from the film "Mission: Impossible 2." That topped the record of 82.83 points that they set during the short program of the team competition earlier this month.

Tarasova and Morozov, who are coached in part by the controversial Eteri Tutberidze, also would have broken the record with their short program. Instead, the fourth-place finishers in Pyeongchang were 16-hundredths of a point behind.

The start of the Olympic men's curling final between Britain and Sweden has been pushed back 45 minutes to accommodate TV viewers in Europe.

The match will be played at 2:50 p.m. on Saturday, rather than 2:05 p.m. Sweden is seven hours behind Beijing, and Britain is eight hours back.

The women's bronze medal match will take place afterward at the original start time of 8:05 p.m.

Organizers also said that the men's victory ceremony will now take place at the Ice Cube curling venue, instead of the medals plaza. Canada beat the United States for the bronze on Friday.

Russian figure skating coach Eteri Tutberidze was back rink-side for the pairs competition Friday, hours after she was criticized by International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach for her callous attitude toward Kamila Valieva after the women's free skate.

Tutberidze helps to coach the Russian pairs team of Aleksandra Boikova and Dmitrii Kozlovskii.

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Valieva, the 15-year-old at the center of a doping scandal, crashed out of the women's program without a medal Thursday night. As she exited the ice, Tutberidze was caught on camera berating her in Russian.

Bach never identified Tutberidze by name, but he did refer to Valieva's coaches and said during his Friday news conference that there "appeared to be a tremendous coldness" and that "it was chilling to see this."

Figure skater Timothy LeDuc became the first nonbinary American athlete to compete at the Winter Games, joining up with Ashley Cain-Gribble for a strong short program to open their pairs competition Friday night.

Their score of 74.13 points was a season best and put them squarely in the top 10 entering Saturday's free skate.

The 31-year-old LeDuc came out as nonbinary last year. The term is used to describe a person who does not identify as exclusively male or female, and can also encompass agender, bigender, genderqueer and gender-fluid.

Last year, Canadian women's soccer player Quinn became the first openly transgender and nonbinary Olympic medal winner when the team earned gold in Tokyo. Weightlifter Laurel Hubbard, skateboarder Alana Smith and cyclist Chelsea Wolfe also were among at least 186 openly LGBTQ participants during the Summer Games.

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 bobsled-der 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. 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 Sjaastad 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-

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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 Røiseland 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.

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

Røiseland 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.

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?"

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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.

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 ana-

bolic 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.

Prince Harry lawyers say he feels unsafe bringing kids to UK

LONDON (AP) — Lawyers for Prince Harry told a court hearing on Friday that the British royal is unwilling to bring his children to his homeland because it is not safe.

Harry has launched a legal challenge to the U.K. government's refusal to let him personally pay for police protection when he comes to Britain.

His legal team says Harry wants to bring his children — Archie, who is almost 3, and 8-month-old Lilibet — to visit his home country from the United States but thinks it would be too risky without police protection.

Harry, who lives in Santa Barbara, California, with the children and his wife, Megan, did not attend Friday's preliminary hearing. The court considered requests by both sides in the case for parts of some legal documents to be kept private.

Senior members of Britain's royal family are given taxpayer-funded police protection, but Harry lost that when he and Meghan stepped down as working royals and moved to the United States in 2020. The couple said their decision was due to what they described as unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media.

Harry, also known as the Duke of Sussex, wants to be able to pay for the protection, saying his private security team in the U.S. doesn't have adequate jurisdiction abroad or access to U.K. intelligence information.

During a hearing at the High Court in London, Harry's lawyer, Shaheed Fatima, said the prince "does not feel safe when he is in the U.K. given the security arrangements applied to him."

"It goes without saying that he does want to come back to see family and friends and to continue to support the charities that are so close to his heart," she said. "Most of all, this is and always will be, his home."

A lawyer representing the British government, Robert Palmer, called Harry's claim "unarguable and unmeritorious."

Palmer said in a written submission that Harry's offer to pay for police security was irrelevant because "personal protective security by the police is not available on a privately financed basis."

Abortion recedes from spotlight in Texas' primary election

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — As the right to an abortion in the U.S. hangs in doubt, one thing seemed clear at the outset of 2022: the issue would tower over America's midterm elections.

But in Texas — of all places — that hasn't been the case going into the nation's first primary.

Airwaves are not swamped with campaign ads focused on abortion access. Candidates spend more time talking about COVID-19, immigration and the reliability of the power grid. Some rallies and events come and go without even a mention of Texas having the most restrictive abortion law in the country on the books for months now.

"It's almost like we've become numb," said Democrat Ann Johnson, a state representative in Houston.

With early voting already underway for the March 1 primary, the absence of abortion at the forefront of Texas races amounts to an abrupt swing from last fall, when the law banning abortions after roughly six weeks of pregnancy took effect and made headlines across the country. Republican lawmakers in other states rushed to propose copycat measures, and in the White House, President Joe Biden slammed the

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law as unleashing “constitutional chaos.”

The change has disappointed abortion rights supporters who suspect that months of court defeats has taken a toll on their side at a time when a full press is still needed. Others worry that some candidates, particularly Democrats, still don’t know how to effectively campaign on abortion even after the tumult of last fall.

“It’s a community issue, it’s a public health issue and I think to not talk about it is like super blind,” said Amy Hagstrom Miller, president of Whole Woman’s Health, which operates four clinics in Texas.

It shows that both Democratic and Republican candidates alike in Texas have concluded other issues are currently higher priorities for voters in the primary — the economy, schools and health care chief among them.

Many believe the abortion issue will return to the spotlight in the general election campaign, when candidates are facing the opposing party rather than like-minded competitors from their own, and after the Supreme Court decides whether to weaken the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling that guarantees the right to an abortion. The court’s decision on a key abortion case is expected by June.

But as the 2022 campaign begins, the Texas race has revealed cracks between the practical impact of the Texas law on abortion rights and the politics of the issue. Recent data confirmed that in the first month after the restrictions took effect, abortions in Texas fell by 60%.

Outside San Antonio this month, a forum of candidates for a seat in the Texas House — where the law known as Senate Bill 8 overwhelmingly passed a year ago — drew a crowd of more than 100 people in mostly rural Kendall County.

None of the candidates on stage talked about it, and no one in the audience asked.

“There was 45 minutes there that it could have come up, and it didn’t,” said Laura Bray, who chairs the local Democratic Party.

In her county, where President Donald Trump won 3-to-1 in 2020, Bray said Democrats purposefully avoid discussing abortion so they don’t turn off Republican voters they’re trying to win over.

What campaigns in Texas have been most emphasizing aligns with national surveys: although Democratic voters increasingly support protecting reproductive rights, a range of issues from the economy to gun control still rank higher, according to a December poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Across the country, Democrats have promised to make abortion a cornerstone of the midterm elections, saying the issue can energize their base at a time when their narrow majorities in Congress are at risk. The conventional wisdom is that abortion is more of a motivating issue for Republicans. But even Gov. Greg Abbott’s early campaign for a third term has also not heavily promoted his signing of the law, which appeared to go even too far for other GOP states where copycat measures have stalled.

“Abortion has never been one of the top issues for most voters,” GOP pollster Whit Ayres said. “It’s always overwhelmed by, in this day and age, the pandemic and the economy.”

Polling shows relatively few Americans want to see Roe overturned. The Texas law in particular, Ayres says, is “very problematic” over leaving enforcement solely up to lawsuits filed by private citizens who can collect \$10,000 or more — what critics have slammed as a bounty.

“I can’t imagine many Republicans lining up behind that,” he said.

To be sure, the issue has not been an afterthought in all Texas races. One of the biggest surrounds Democrat U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, one of the most conservative members of his party, who has voted to oppose abortion access. He is again in a fight against progressive challenger Jessica Cisneros.

NARAL, one of the nation’s largest abortion rights groups, has deployed staff into the district in hopes of delivering what would be a major victory for advocates to start the 2022 election cycle.

But Cisneros, an immigration attorney who puts health care and raising the minimum wage as two of her biggest issues, said she doesn’t know whether her position on abortion rights can swing the race.

“We’re not a single-issue campaign,” she said during a break between knocking on doors in the South Texas district that stretches more than 150 miles from San Antonio to the border. “When we’re talking to

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voters it's not just that one thing."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Feb. 19, the 50th day of 2022. There are 315 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On Feb. 19, 2008, an ailing Fidel Castro resigned the Cuban presidency after nearly a half-century in power; his brother Raul was later named to succeed him.

On this date:

In 1473, astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus was born in Torun, Poland.

In 1807, former Vice President Aaron Burr, accused of treason, was arrested in the Mississippi Territory, in present-day Alabama. (Burr was acquitted at trial.)

In 1878, Thomas Edison received a U.S. patent for "an improvement in phonograph or speaking machines."

In 1942, during World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which paved the way for the relocation and internment of people of Japanese ancestry, including U.S.-born citizens.

In 1945, Operation Detachment began during World War II as some 30,000 U.S. Marines began landing on Iwo Jima, where they commenced a successful month-long battle to seize control of the island from Japanese forces.

In 1959, an agreement was signed by Britain, Turkey and Greece granting Cyprus its independence.

In 1976, President Gerald R. Ford, calling the issuing of the internment order for people of Japanese ancestry in 1942 "a sad day in American history," signed a proclamation formally confirming its termination.

In 1985, the British soap opera "EastEnders" debuted on BBC Television.

In 1986, the U.S. Senate approved, 83-11, the Genocide Convention, an international treaty outlawing "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group," nearly 37 years after the pact was first submitted for ratification.

In 1997, Deng Xiaoping (dung shah-oh-ping), the last of China's major Communist revolutionaries, died at age 92.

In 2003, an Iranian military plane carrying 275 members of the elite Revolutionary Guards crashed in southeastern Iran, killing all on board.

In 2019, President Donald Trump directed the Pentagon to develop plans for a new Space Force within the Air Force, accepting less than the full-fledged department he had wanted.

Ten years ago: Three skiers were killed when an avalanche swept them about a quarter-mile down an out-of-bounds canyon at Stevens Pass, Washington, but a fourth skier caught up in the slide was saved by a safety device. Forty-four inmates were killed in a prison riot in Apodaca, northern Mexico.

Five years ago: Three former elite U.S. gymnasts, including 2000 Olympian Jamie Dantzscher, appeared on CBS' "60 Minutes" to say they were sexually abused by Dr. Larry Nassar, a volunteer team physician for USA Gymnastics. (Nassar would be sentenced to decades in prison after hundreds of girls and women said he sexually abused them under the guise of medical treatment.) Anthony Davis had an All-Star Game for the record books, scoring 52 points as the Western Conference beat the Eastern Conference 192-182 — the highest-scoring game in league history.

One year ago: Southern cities slammed by winter storms that left millions without power for days were dealing with water pipes ruptured by record-low temperatures; the breaks created a shortage of clean drinking water, shut down airports and left hospitals scrambling. The United States officially returned to the Paris climate accord; President Joe Biden told a virtual gathering of European leaders that the world "can no longer delay or do the bare minimum to address climate change." U.S. officials scrambled to re-inforce the nation's cyber defenses following a sweeping hack that may have exposed government and corporate secrets to Russia. Kim Kardashian West filed for divorce from Kanye West in Los Angeles after 6 1/2 years of marriage.

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Today's Birthdays: Singer Smokey Robinson is 82. Actor Carlin Glynn is 82. Former Sony Corp. Chairman Howard Stringer is 80. Singer Lou Christie is 79. Rock musician Tony Iommi (Black Sabbath, Heaven and Hell) is 74. Actor Stephen Nichols is 71. Author Amy Tan is 70. Actor Jeff Daniels is 67. Rock singer-musician Dave Wakeling is 66. Talk show host Lorianne Crook is 65. Actor Ray Winstone is 65. Actor Leslie David Baker is 64. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell is 63. Britain's Prince Andrew is 62. Tennis Hall of Famer Hana Mandlikova is 60. Singer Seal is 59. Actor Jessica Tuck is 59. Country musician Ralph McCauley (Wild Horses) is 58. Rock musician Jon Fishman (Phish) is 57. Actor Justine Bateman is 56. Actor Benicio Del Toro is 55. Actor Bellamy Young is 52. Rock musician Daniel Adair is 47. Pop singer-actor Haylie Duff is 37. Actor Arielle Kebbel is 37. Christian rock musician Seth Morrison (Skillet) is 34. Actor Luke Pasqualino is 32. Actor Victoria Justice is 29. Actor David (dah-VEED') Mazouz (TV: "Gotham") is 21. Actor Millie Bobby Brown is 18.