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UpComing Events

Today

Groton Area School 2 hours late today. No 8:30 a.m. preschool. OST will open at 7 a.m. Buses will run on plowed roads only.

Boys Basketball hosts Tiospa Zina. Varsity game only at 6 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 23

Girls Basketball regions begin. Groton plays Milbank at Sisseton at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 25

Boys Basketball vs. Aberdeen Christian at the Aberdeen Civic Center. Not sure if there is a C game yet.

Junior High Basketball at Webster with 7th grade playing at 7 p.m. followed by 8th grade game.

Debate National Qualifiers

Saturday, Feb. 25

Girls Basketball regions, 6 p.m.

Monday, Feb. 28

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

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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The Life of Debra Jensen

Funeral services for Debra L. Jensen, 67, of Bath, SD, will be 10:30am, Friday, February 25, 2022 at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, with Pastor Jeff Whillock officiating. Burial at Lebanon Cemetery, Lebanon, SD. Debra died Saturday, February 19, 2022, at Avera McKennan in Sioux Falls, SD.

Visitation will be 3:00-7:00pm, Thursday, with family present from 5:00-7:00pm, followed by a prayer service at 7:00pm at Spitzer-Miller Funeral Home, 1111 South Main Street.

Debra Lee Jensen, 67, of Bath, SD, passed away Saturday, February 19, 2022, at Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls, SD. It is with great sadness that the family announces Deb's sudden passing. Deb was surrounded by her family as she peacefully passed away.



Deb was born April 15, 1954, in Gettysburg, SD, to Lyle and Patricia Stoner. Deb and Greg Jensen were united in marriage on August 17, 1978, and soon after they began to build a life together in Groton, SD. They had two children, a daughter: Jenna Lee Jensen (Hansen), followed by a son: Justin Scott Jensen. Deb taught and lived in Groton, SD, until her retirement from public education in 2017. It was then that her and her husband Greg moved to Bath, SD.

Deb attended Gettysburg Public School where she was very involved in band and choir. Deb was very close with her grandparents, Harold (Red) and Edna (Peggy) Anderson, and spent a great deal of her childhood in Lebanon, SD. Following high school Deb graduated from Northern State University, and began her music teaching career in 1975. Deb taught in both the Hamlin and Mobridge school districts, later moving into the Groton Public School District in 1978. For 38 years Deb taught 5-12 band. Her bands and individual performers consistently earned superior ratings and had a woodwind player selected for All-State Band and/or Orchestra nearly every year of her career. She also directed the Groton show choir, Prismatic Sensations, consistently placing at competitions. In 2004 Deb was given statewide recognition by being named "Outstanding Bandmaster" by the South Dakota chapter of Phi Beta Mu, a national fraternity of band directors. Deb taught in Groton until her retirement in 2015, completing a 41 year teaching career. Deb devoted her life to the betterment of her students, school, and community. She was a true testament to what every educator hopes to achieve during their career.

Deb was an amazing wife and mother, and it was no surprise that she was an even better grandmother to Elliott and Emmett Hansen. She so enjoyed her family and the various family activities that consumed much of her time, such as: spending time at the lake, traveling, babysitting the grandkids, and attending many concerts and music events involving her family members.

Left to cherish her memory is her husband Greg Jensen; her children: Jenna (Kent) Hansen of Aberdeen, and Justin (Mackenzie) Jensen of Pierre; and her grandchildren Elliott and Emmett Hansen. Preceding Deb in death were her parents, Lyle & Patricia Stoner.

Deb will be deeply missed by her family, friends, and all who knew her. Her family would like to thank all of you for your support and friendship.

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Friendly Fellows and Daisies 4-H Club

Date: February 6, 2022

The Friendly Fellows and Daisies 4-H Club met on February 6, 2022, in Claremont. The meeting was called to order by President Andrew Marzahn. American Pledge was led by Hailey Pauli. The 4-H Pledge was led by Walker Zoellner. Roll call topic was name your favorite color. There was a thank you from a 4-H member read by communications officer Hailey Pauli. The treasurer's report was read by Logan Ringgenberg and was approved by Logan Warrington and seconded by Ashlynn Warrington. There were no additions or improvements. The Secretary's report was read by Logan Warrington and approved by Hailey Pauli and seconded by Walker Zoellner. Logan Warrington made a motion to close old business; Ashlynn Warrington approved it and was seconded by Walker Zoellner. For new business the club read the Newshound, talked about the ski trip, and the annual 4-H fundraiser. New business was closed by Logan Ringgenberg and seconded by Hailey Pauli. The meeting was adjourned by Ashlynn Warrington and seconded by Walker Zoellner. Lunch was served by the Eichler family. Demonstrations were given by Ashlynn and Logan Warrington on the state capital. The club members did their club project by making tile coasters.

Submitted by Walker Zoellner, Club Reporter

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Region Wrestling Photos Courtesy of Scott and Ann Thorson



Brevin Flihs



Pierce Kettering

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Cole Bisbee



Coach Darrin Zoellner

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Korbin Kucker



Christian Ehresmann



Lane Krueger

Groton Area qualifies first female to state tournament

In addition to the three boys going to the state wrestling meet, Liza Krueger will become the first female from Groton Area to advance to the state tournament. Liza will join her brother, Lane, plus Christian Ehresmann and Cole Bisbee at the state tournament this weekend in Sioux Falls.

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Guest Speaker
Nicole J Phillips
The Kindness Podcast

*You're
Invited!*

RE:SET *womens conference*

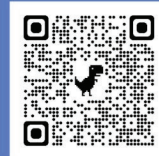
SATURDAY, MARCH 5
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

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.

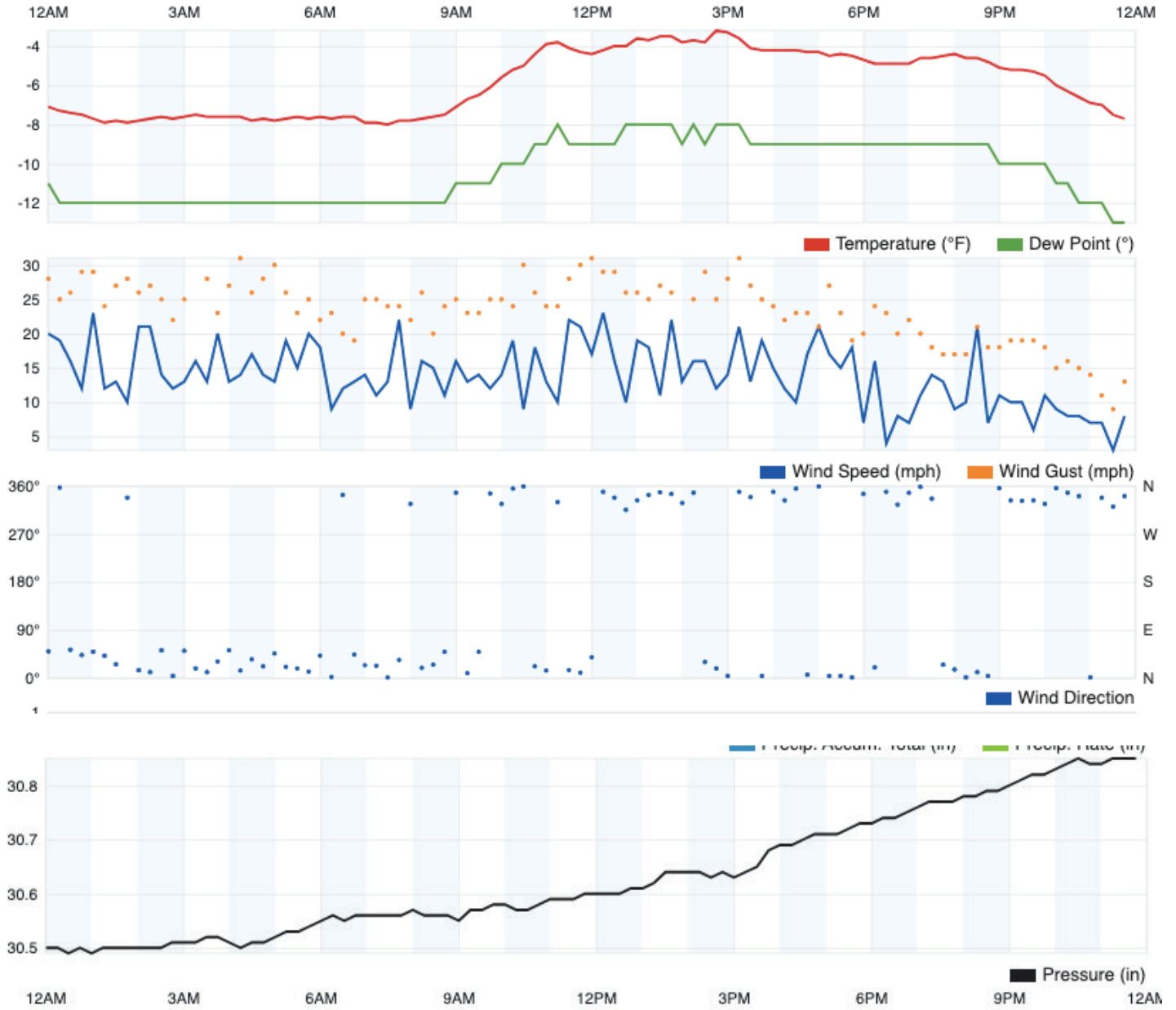
REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT
ONLINE AT ROSEHILLEFC.COM



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs




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Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Cold	Mostly Cloudy	Cold	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: -2 °F	Low: -16 °F	High: 3 °F	Low: -19 °F	High: 14 °F

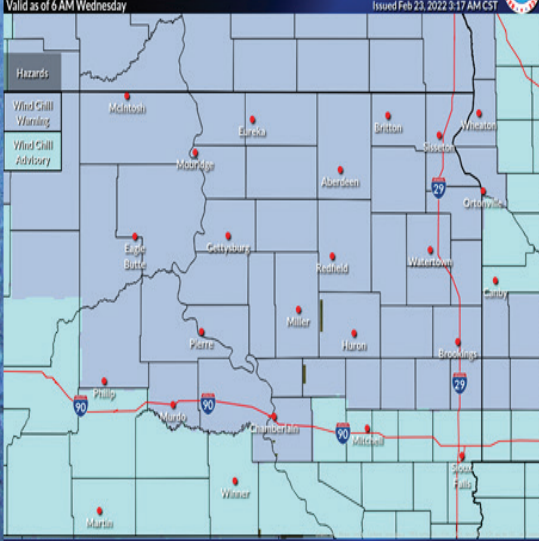
Dangerously Cold Wind Chills This Morning

Wind chill values from 30 below to 45 below zero this morning



Winter Weather Headlines

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Valid as of 6 AM Wednesday
Issued Feb 23, 2022 3:17 AM CST



Hazards: Wind Chill Warning, Wind Chill Advisory

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast

2/23 Wed

	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	Minimum
Aberdeen	-33	-37	-37	-35	-30	-25	-20	-18	-17	-17	-15	-15	-15	-37
Britton	-36	-41	-40	-37	-34	-30	-26	-25	-21	-20	-20	-20	-22	-41
Eagle Butte	-36	-36	-35	-30	-25	-21	-17	-15	-14	-14	-12	-14	-15	-36
Eureka	-29	-40	-40	-37	-34	-30	-26	-25	-21	-19	-18	-18	-19	-40
Gettysburg	-36	-36	-36	-30	-27	-24	-21	-17	-13	-10	-8	-10	-13	-36
Kennebec	-31	-29	-29	-25	-23	-20	-18	-15	-12	-12	-8	-9	-12	-31
McIntosh	-41	-43	-44	-41	-36	-32	-27	-24	-21	-20	-20	-19	-23	-44
Milbank	-33	-35	-32	-30	-27	-24	-21	-19	-19	-15	-14	-15	-16	-35
Miller	-36	-36	-35	-30	-28	-24	-21	-17	-14	-13	-12	-12	-14	-36
Mobridge	-30	-31	-29	-27	-23	-18	-15	-11	-8	-7	-8	-9	-13	-31
Murdo	-33	-34	-31	-28	-24	-21	-19	-16	-16	-15	-13	-12	-16	-34
Pierre	-27	-25	-24	-20	-17	-17	-13	-10	-9	-6	-5	-8	-9	-27
Redfield	-39	-39	-37	-34	-30	-25	-21	-19	-15	-15	-15	-14	-15	-39
Sisseton	-36	-36	-36	-33	-31	-26	-23	-22	-21	-20	-19	-18	-20	-36
Watertown	-33	-34	-32	-30	-28	-24	-21	-19	-17	-15	-14	-14	-15	-34
Wheaton	-35	-39	-39	-37	-34	-30	-26	-25	-24	-23	-21	-20	-22	-39

*Table values in °F
**Created: 3 am CST Wed 2/23/2022
***Values are minimums over the period beginning at the time shown.

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The snow and blowing snow are finally gone, but the arctic cold will now remain in place through the end of the work week. Very cold wind chills are in place this morning, with the coldest values ranging from 35 below to as cold as 45 below zero for portions of the forecast area. There will be a slow improvement in wind chills by the afternoon hours. Highs today and tomorrow will be stuck in the single digits above and below zero, with lows in the teens below zero to around 20 below zero. Signs of a warm up into the 20s and 30s arrive as early as Saturday, then again for the beginning of next week. And some more good news, winds will generally be on the light side through Friday morning!

Today in Weather History

February 23, 1977: A storm center developed over Colorado the morning of the 22nd and moved to southeast Nebraska by midnight Wednesday the 23rd with snow and rain entering southern Minnesota. The low-pressure center advanced to Iowa by sundown and weakened somewhat with precipitation across all of Minnesota. Snow fell over the north, and a combination of rain and freezing rain were in the south. The low then intensified over southeast Minnesota during the nighttime of Thursday the 24th before continuing northeast into Wisconsin with snow and blowing snow continuing over much of the state before ending on the 26th. There was a combination of rain, freezing rain, and the winds over southern Minnesota with 4 to 12 inches of snow in the north. Freezing rain and the heavy icing on power lines caused the worst power failure in a decade in the twin cities with 125,000 homes affected. Power outages occurred over numerous areas of southern and central Minnesota. Many roads were ice-covered with multiple vehicle accidents and many cars in the ditch. Many roads were blocked or closed, with numerous schools closed. The ice storm also damaged many trees.

February 23, 2007: A strong area of low pressure tracking across the central plains brought widespread snowfall to parts of central and much of northeast South Dakota along with west-central Minnesota. The precipitation initially began as freezing rain and sleet late in the evening of the 23rd as it lifted across the area through the morning of the 24th. The freezing rain and sleet then changed over to snow during the morning hours of the 24th. Thundersnow also occurred at some locations across the area. Snowfall amounts of 6 to 15 inches occurred by the end of the storm. With the roads slippery from the freezing rain and then the heavy snow, travel conditions became tough. The South Dakota State Emergency Management, Highway Patrol, and Department of Transportation issued a travel advisory for no travel for Interstate-90 and many highways in central South Dakota. There were numerous accidents along the interstate. Some snowfall amounts included, 7 inches at Browns Valley, 9 inches at Bryant, Webster, Wheaton, Artichoke Lake, and Tintah, 10 inches at Toronto, Roy Lake, Garden City, and Ortonville, 11 inches at Faulkton, 12 inches at Watertown, and 15 inches at Clear Lake.

February 23, 2010: Pierre sets a new record with a streak of 84 consecutive days with high temperatures failing to reach 40 degrees.

February 23, 2012: An area of low pressure sliding across the region brought heavy snow to much of central and north-central South Dakota. Travel became difficult, with many schools canceled. Click [HERE](#) for snowfall reports.

1887: The Central Bureau of Meteorology of Rome began receiving the first reports of a massive earthquake from northern Italy Observers. This estimated magnitude earthquake of 6.0 kills more than 2,000 people in southern France and northern Italy.

1977: A very rare February tornado touched down briefly in Mason City, Iowa, inflicting F1 damage on a home and injuring one person inside. This is the only known February tornado on record in Iowa.

1995: Cyclone Bobby slams into the Western Australia coast, causing widespread flooding. Some areas report up to 12 inches of rain from the storm.

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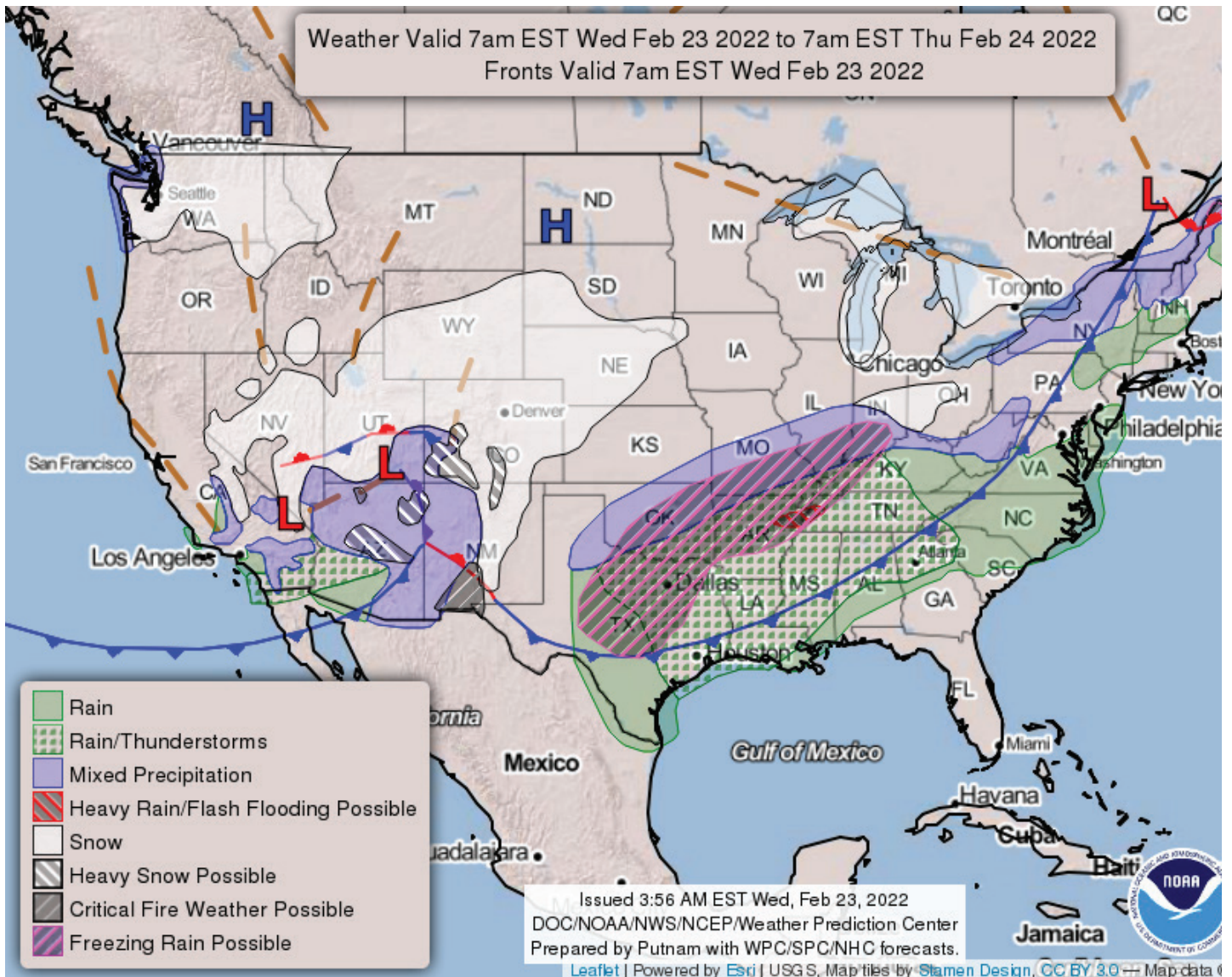
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: -3 °F at 2:48 PM
Low Temp: -8 °F at 11:58 PM
Wind: 32 mph at 10:04 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 56 minutes
Tomorrow will be 3 minutes longer than today in Groton

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1976
Record Low: -25 in 1910
Average High: 31°F
Average Low: 10°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.49
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.04
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 6:12:26 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:17:13 AM



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Midnight Thanks

There is a story of a young girl who was demon-possessed and a qualified fortune teller. A group of men saw an opportunity to make large sums of money from her talents, so they formed a syndicate, bought her time and talents, and made a good deal of money.

Not long after they formed their syndicate, an evangelist and his young associate saw the girl and felt sorry for her. The evangelist stood before her, addressed the demon in her and said, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." Instantly, the demon left her when he heard the voice of the evangelist.

When the owners of the girl realized that their investment and future income was gone, they succeeded in having Paul and Silas arrested. They were given a bloody beating, and then thrown into a dungeon, and their hands and feet were clamped into stocks.

When we look at this story up to this point, we see two men imprisoned for doing what was good and right, yet they were deeply wronged. Did they stop and pity themselves and complain to the God they were serving? Indeed not! At midnight they began to pray and sing praises to God, and a revival broke out. In fact, the jailer was converted.

One thing that cannot be taken away from a Christian is the presence of Christ. With Him and in Him there is a freedom that only He can give - even at midnight. No doubt they were familiar with the words of the Psalmist: "At midnight I rise to give You thanks."

Prayer: It's easy, Father, to give thanks when things are going our way. Give us the strength that we might also give thanks in our trials. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: At midnight I rise to give You thanks. Psalm 119:62

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2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,
04/07/2022 Groton CDE
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start
(4th of July)
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion
Baseball Tourney
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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- Colored \$42.60/6 months
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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:

Mega Millions

06-17-22-57-62, Mega Ball: 3, Megaplier: 3

(six, seventeen, twenty-two, fifty-seven, sixty-two; Mega Ball: three; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$75 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$45 million

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brookings 61, Yankton 51

Harrisburg 53, Watertown 48

Mitchell 59, Brandon Valley 46

Sioux Falls Jefferson 64, Pierre 54

Sioux Falls Washington 68, Sioux Falls Lincoln 65

Sturgis Brown 52, Douglas 34

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Aberdeen Central vs. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, ppd.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brandon Valley 56, Mitchell 18

Brookings 61, Yankton 51

Harrisburg 53, Watertown 50

Pierre 43, Sioux Falls Jefferson 40

Sturgis Brown 56, Douglas 33

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A=

Quarterfinal=

Region 2=

Flandreau 67, Elkton-Lake Benton 32

Hamlin 71, Flandreau Indian 26

Region 3=

Garretson 52, Madison 21

Sioux Falls Christian 71, Baltic 40

Tri-Valley 53, McCook Central/Montrose 49

West Central 69, Dell Rapids 16

Region 4=

Dakota Valley 56, Parker 30

Elk Point-Jefferson 45, Tea Area 42

Lennox 50, Canton 45

Vermillion 52, Beresford 29

Region 5=

Hanson 68, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 39

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Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 57, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 48

Parkston 45, Bon Homme 42, OT

Class B=

Quarterfinal=

Region 3=

Arlington 39, Estelline/Hendricks 25

Castlewood 60, Hitchcock-Tulare 26

DeSmet 81, Iroquois/Doland 50

James Valley Christian 49, Wolsey-Wessington 44

Region 4=

Bridgewater-Emery 59, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 47

Colman-Egan 59, Canistota 25

Ethan 69, Chester 39

Howard 60, Dell Rapids St. Mary 46

Region 5=

Centerville 35, Menno 23

Freeman 39, Scotland 32

Irene-Wakonda 53, Alcester-Hudson 30

Viborg-Hurley 56, Gayville-Volin 39

Region 6=

Avon 72, Marty Indian 29

Corsica/Stickney 66, Kimball/White Lake 28

Region 7=

Jones County 58, Philip 44

Kadoka Area 51, Edgemont 39

Wall 32, Lyman 27

White River 60, New Underwood 31

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Sioux Falls Roosevelt vs. Aberdeen Central, ppd.

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

Noem, South Dakota Republicans take aim at abortion pills

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem's proposal to make South Dakota one of the hardest places in the country to get abortion pills gained support Tuesday from Republican House lawmakers, even though a federal judge has halted a similar state rule from taking effect.

Every Republican on the House Health and Human Services committee voted to advance the bill for a vote in the full chamber this week. It would require women seeking an abortion to make three separate trips to a doctor in order to take abortion pills. Women in South Dakota can currently get both drugs in the two-dose regimen during a single visit and take the second dose at home.

Noem is not the only South Dakota politician taking aim at abortion pills. Her Republican primary challenger, Rep. Steve Haugaard, is pushing a proposal to ban administration of the drugs for abortions altogether. His bill passed the Republican-controlled House Tuesday and will next be considered in the Senate.

But both proposals would face uphill battles in federal court.

A federal judge this month granted a preliminary injunction against a rule to restrict abortion pills that Noem initiated through in an executive order. Planned Parenthood, which operates the state's only clinic that regularly provides abortion services, sued the state, arguing it was an unconstitutional violation of abortion rights and would have made it practically impossible for the clinic to provide any medicine-induced

abortions.

U.S. District Judge Karen Schreier, who was appointed under former President Bill Clinton, wrote in her order that the rule "likely imposes an undue burden on Planned Parenthood and its patients' right to seek an abortion." However, Noem has appealed her order to a higher court.

The governor's office acknowledged that most of the proposal is tied up in federal court and put a clause in the bill that stipulates most of it wouldn't take effect until the court battle is resolved.

The Supreme Court's willingness to consider striking down *Roe v. Wade* — the 1973 landmark decision that established the nationwide right to an abortion — has prompted a flurry of legislation in statehouses this year.

But Noem has argued that she brought the bill out of concern for women's safety.

"In the instance of telemedicine abortions, someone can make a phone call, get online, order the drugs to be sent to their home and there is no medical supervision," she said at a news conference this month.

The Food and Drug Administration last year permanently lifted a requirement that people seeking the drugs pick them up in person after a scientific review supported broadening access.

The agency found complications from the medication to be rare. About 40% of all abortions in the U.S. are done through medication rather than surgery. The FDA has reported only 26 deaths associated with the drug since 2000, though not all of those can be directly attributed to the medication due to existing health conditions and other factors.

"For South Dakota to put these barriers in front of women says that they believe they are smarter than the FDA," Sarah Stoez, the president of Planned Parenthood North Central States, told *The Associated Press* this month.

Haugaard also pushed the House to put a proposed constitutional amendment on the November ballot that would define a fertilized egg as a living human being. His proposal was defeated by a one-vote margin Tuesday in the Republican-controlled House after fellow Republicans pointed out it would add a potentially unwieldy definition to the state constitution.

"*Roe versus Wade* is on the ropes and hopefully on its way out," Haugaard said.

But Stoesz questioned why Republican lawmakers are aggressively attacking abortion rights when the U.S. Supreme Court is expected later this year to issue a ruling that could potentially strike down *Roe*. South Dakota is one of a dozen states with a law to ban abortions that would be triggered if *Roe* is defeated.

"What the Legislature is doing right now just strikes me as purely political posturing," Stoesz said. "But at the end of the day, real people's lives are affected."

Powerful storm creates dangerous travel conditions

MILWAUKEE (AP) — A powerful winter storm with heavy snow and ice has created dangerous travel conditions, closed scores of schools and caused numerous crashes and spin-outs in the Upper Midwest.

The National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for parts of the Dakotas Tuesday, where sustained winds were blowing at least 30 mph for most of the day.

In Minnesota, snow continued to mount following Monday's totals, with more than 17 inches (43.18 centimeters) of snow recorded south of downtown Duluth. The Minneapolis metro area, which escaped unscathed from the first storm wave, was getting socked Tuesday with snow totals heading toward half a foot. Minneapolis and St. Paul declared snow emergencies to help clear roads.

A serious multi-vehicle crash involving three semi-trailer trucks and two cars shut down Interstate-35W near Elko New Market, south of Minneapolis.

Schools across the region closed Tuesday or switched to virtual learning. In Wisconsin, the state's largest district, Milwaukee Public Schools, was among the numerous closings. Ice from freezing rain and sleet was expected to make travel difficult in southeastern Wisconsin through Tuesday night.

In North Dakota, the State Patrol said six semis and eight other vehicles piled up west of Fargo Monday, closing a section of Interstate 94. At least six people were treated at Fargo hospitals, including a 69-year-old woman who suffered serious but non-life threatening injuries. It was the second 14-vehicle pileup on

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I-94 in eastern North Dakota in four days.

In South Dakota, cold temperatures and perilous wind chills were expected through the majority of the week. Forecasters said daytime highs along the North Dakota border were likely to stay well below zero.

SD House passes broad vaccine exemption bill, snubbing Noem

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House on Tuesday passed a proposal to allow employees to avoid their workplace COVID-19 vaccine requirement by citing any objection of their conscience.

The bill's passage on a 37-30 vote in the Republican-controlled House represented a snub to a separate proposal from Gov. Kristi Noem that would allow employees to avoid mandates by citing either a medical exemption, religious grounds for refusal or a test showing antibodies against COVID-19 in the last six months.

House Speaker Spencer Gosch, a Republican who has clashed with the governor, pushed the bill as a way to provide broad and simple exemptions from vaccine mandates.

Under the proposal, getting out of an employer's COVID-19 vaccine mandate would be as simple as objecting to getting a shot. It would not apply to National Guard troops and health care facilities that are under vaccine mandates from the federal government.

"You shouldn't have to take your Bible in or your catechism in and say I don't want to do this because these are my sincerely held beliefs," said Republican Rep. Steve Haugaard, who is challenging Noem in the GOP primary.

Noem last week voiced criticism of the bill allowing people to avoid the vaccine requirement by voicing their objections orally.

"It will be incredibly hard for people to document and for businesses to document," she said.

Her bill passed the Senate last week and will next be considered by House lawmakers; while the House bill is headed to the Senate.

The inter-party squabble comes as the state's vaccination rate of almost 60% of people fully vaccinated lags behind the nationwide rate of 64%.

However, South Dakota has seen a decrease in reported COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in recent weeks. The Department of Health on Tuesday reported 211 people are currently hospitalized with COVID-19 infections, marking a decline from last month when the number topped 400 — the highest rate in over a year.

President Joe Biden's administration pushed vaccine mandates through employers last year to boost the nation's COVID-19 vaccination rate and slow the spread of the coronavirus. The U.S. Supreme Court has stopped that effort, but a requirement for millions of health care workers, issued through Medicare and Medicaid providers, has remained.

SD--South Dakota Digest, 1:30 pm update

Here's a look at how AP's general news coverage is shaping up for select South Dakota stories. For up-to-the minute information on AP's complete coverage of South Dakota and the rest of the world, visit Coverage Plan at newsroom.ap.org

Questions about coverage plans are welcome and should be directed to News Editor Doug Glass at 612-332-2727 or dglass@ap.org.

For access to AP Newsroom and other technical issues, contact AP Customer Support at apcustomersupport@ap.org or 877-836-9477.

This information is not for publication or broadcast, and these coverage plans are subject to change. Expected stories may not develop, or late-breaking and more newsworthy events may take precedence. Coverage Plan will keep you up to date. All times are Central unless specified otherwise.

TOP STORIES:

SOUTH DAKOTA-ABORTION

PIERRE, S.D. — South Dakota House lawmakers take their first look Tuesday at a proposal from Gov.

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Kristi Noem that would make the state one of the hardest places in the nation to get abortion pills. The legislation would require women to make three separate trips to a clinic to get the drugs required for a medicine-induced abortion. However, a federal court has already halted the state from implementing an identical rule that the governor pushed. By Stephen Groves. Developing.

WINTER WEATHER-UPPER MIDWEST

MILWAUKEE — A powerful winter storm with heavy snow and ice has created dangerous travel conditions, closed scores of schools and caused a chain reaction accident that injured at least six people in the Upper Midwest. SENT: 230 words. Developing.

SPORTS:

WILD-SENATORS — The Minnesota Wild visit the Ottawa Senators. UPCOMING: 600 words, photos.

MINNESOTA-LOEWE

MINNEAPOLIS — Luke Loewe has had an up-and-down introduction to Big Ten play, but the graduate transfer is finishing strong. Coming to Minnesota has also given him more opportunity to pursue his favorite non-basketball passion: bass fishing. Loewe and the Gophers host 13th-ranked Wisconsin on Wednesday, and an upset of his home-state team would be the biggest catch of the season. By Dave Campbell. UPCOMING: 500 words, photos, by 5 p.m.

ST. THOMAS (MN)-NORTH DAKOTA — St. Thomas (MN) plays North Dakota at Betty Engelstad Sioux Center. UPCOMING: 150 words, more on merits.

25 years later, Legion of Christ victims seek reparations

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — A Connecticut newspaper exposed one of the Catholic Church's biggest sexual abuse scandals by reporting 25 years ago Wednesday that eight men had accused the revered founder of the Legion of Christ religious order of raping and molesting them when they were boys preparing for the priesthood.

It took a decade for the Vatican to sanction the founder, the Rev. Marcial Maciel, and another decade for the Legion to admit he was a serial pedophile who had violated at least 60 boys. In the meantime, the original whistleblowers suffered a defamation campaign by the Legion, which branded them liars bent on creating a conspiracy to hurt a man considered a living saint.

As they marked the quarter-century anniversary of revelations that tarnished the legacy of St. John Paul II, three of Maciel's victims are still seeking reparations from the Legion to compensate for the abuse they suffered and the "moral" harm done to their reputations by the order.

They had refused earlier compensation offers that their fellow survivors accepted, and a mediation process begun in 2019 has stalled, according to emails and documents provided to The Associated Press.

The Vatican in 2010 took over the Mexico-based Legion and imposed a process of reform after an investigation showed that Maciel had sexually abused seminarians and fathered at least three children with two women. The Vatican found he had created a system of power built on silence, deceit and obedience that enabled him lead a double life.

The findings were by no means news to the Holy See: Documents from Vatican archives show how a succession of popes, cardinals and bishops starting in the 1950s simply turned a blind eye to credible reports that Maciel was a con artist, drug addict, pedophile and religious fraud. The Vatican and especially John Paul, however, appreciated his ability to bring in vocations and donations.

The reality of Maciel's depravity burst into the public domain Feb. 23, 1997, when The Hartford Courant published a lengthy expose by investigative journalists Jason Berry and the late Gerald Renner about Maciel and the order, whose U.S. headquarters were based in Connecticut.

The story, which formed the basis of a 2004 book "Vows of Silence," quoted several victims by name who independently reported that Maciel would bring them into his bedroom at night, and under the pretense of abdominal pain, induce them to masterbate him.

"When The Courant ran the long investigative piece Renner and I did on Maciel, we thought Pope John

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Paul II would see the light and punish Maciel," Berry told the AP in an email. He noted that other mainstream media only began reporting on clergy sexual abuse after the Boston Globe's "Spotlight" revelations in 2002. "By then, John Paul's blind faith in Maciel was a cover-up by any other term, and lasted till his death."

A year after the original Courant story, in 1998, the victims filed a formal canonical complaint against Maciel with the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where the case languished until after John Paul died. Maciel was sentenced in 2006 to a lifetime of "penance and prayer," and he died in 2008, still considered a saint by the Legion.

Following the Vatican-mandated reform process, the Legion apologized and tried to make amends, even as it has been forced to confront revelations of a new generation of abusers within its ranks — some of them Maciel's original victims — and the superiors who covered up for the crimes, some of whom remain in power.

In 2020, the Legion publicly retracted the "negative institutional and personal judgments about the character and motivations of the people who made legitimate and necessary accusations" in the original Courant expose. Naming the original victims, it said "Today we recognize as prophetic their accusations in favor of truth and justice."

But Jose Barba, one of the most vocal of the original eight survivors, wants the Legion to formally retract what he calls the "lies" the order provided to the Courant to discredit him and the other victims. They include what he says were a falsified letter from a Chilean bishop who had investigated Maciel in the 1950s, and false statements from four Mexicans who claimed the victims had tried to enlist them in a conspiracy against Maciel.

Barba, who says he represents fellow survivors Arturo Jurado and Jose Antonio Perez Olvera, drafted a proposed letter to the Courant and the Vatican newspaper that he wanted the Legion to submit to retract the claims. But then Legion superior, the Rev. Eduardo Robles-Gil, refused during a December 2019 mediation meeting in Mexico City, Barba said.

In a Jan. 4, 2020 summary of that meeting, Barba said the Legion's initial calculus of a low five-figure settlement offer for each of the three remaining victims was a "humiliation," and he proposed a team of five arbitration experts to determine a more "just" reparation.

Robles-Gil signed the summary but wrote: "I receive this without accepting the process that is asked for and it remains at our consideration to accept it or not."

The Legion's new superior, the Rev. John Connor, tried unsuccessfully to engage with Barba after his February 2020 election, sending two letters that went unanswered until Barba emailed him on Jan. 5, 2021, seeking to restart negotiations.

Connor assured him he wanted to "find ways to contribute to heal and close the painful events of the history of our congregation." But in an email, Connor said Barba's proposal for five arbitration experts wouldn't help "in finding a shared resolution."

Barba never replied. "I don't trust them because it's not in good faith," he told the AP.

In a statement to the AP, Legion spokesman the Rev. Aaron Smith noted that the order had reached settlements with most of the historic victims and hoped for a resolution with the remaining ones.

"We are sad that meeting still has not happened, especially considering the positive experience of the encounters with other victims of Fr. Maciel," Smith said in a statement. "We continue to remain hopeful it will take place in the near future permitting open dialogue with him."

Barba, meanwhile, says he is getting old and his two confreres are ailing. While they are hailed by ex-Legionaries as "los 8 Magnificos" (the Magnificent Eight) for having stood up to Maciel and the order, Barba recalls a Nov. 8, 1997 letter he and the others wrote to John Paul, translated into Polish, asking for the pope to hear their pain and do something.

"It appears inconceivable to us, Holy Father, that our grave revelations and complaints mattered absolutely nothing to you," they wrote, according to a copy of the letter provided to the AP. "We want the church and society to understand that all we want is justice: not only for legitimate personal vindication, but for the good of the church and society."

South Korea's presidential race puts misogyny in spotlight

By JUWON PARK, KIM TONG-HYUNG and KIM JUNG YOON Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — As South Korea enters a bitter presidential race, Hong Hee-jin is one of many young women who feel that the country's politics has become dominated by discrimination against women, even outright misogyny.

"Women are being treated like they don't even have voting rights," the 27-year-old office worker in the capital, Seoul, said.

For years, South Korean women have made slow but steady progress in the workplace as they confronted an entrenched culture of male chauvinism and harassment. But this extremely tight presidential race, which culminates March 9, has exposed the fragility of what's been won.

Top conservative candidate Yoon Suk Yeol and his liberal rival Lee Jae-myung — both men above 55 — are fighting for what they see as a "male" vote crucial for victory. They have increasingly focused their messages on young men who decry gender equality policies and the loss of traditional privileges in a hyper-competitive job market.

"Politicians are taking the easy path," Hong said. "Instead of coming up with real policies to solve problems facing young people, they are fanning gender conflicts, telling men in their 20s that their difficulties stem from women receiving too many benefits."

The tensions can be seen on the streets. Hundreds of women have marched in protest against the "election of misogyny." Small but vocal groups of anti-feminist men have staged rallies in response.

Divisive gender politics has grown as South Korea deals with a fast-aging population, a plummeting birth rate, soaring personal debt, a decaying job market and stark inequality. There's also the growing nuclear threat from North Korea and fears of being squeezed in the confrontation between the United States and China.

No campaign issue, however, has caused more debate than Yoon's vow to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, which the candidate says promotes policies unfair to men.

A former prosecutor general, Yoon, 61, has also vowed stronger penalties for false sexual crime reports. Critics say this makes up only a small number of rape claims, and that the threat of tougher punishment could intimidate victims from coming forward amid a recent male backlash against the #MeToo movement.

Liberal ruling party candidate Lee, 57, has taken a cautious approach to gender issues, while clashing with Yoon over the economy and North Korea policy.

Narrowly trailing Yoon in the polls, Lee has faced calls to appeal to more young men, whose support of conservative candidates in mayoral by-elections in Seoul and Busan may have led to a shocking double-defeat for the liberals.

Lee has described gender tensions as related to joblessness and says men shouldn't be discriminated against. He said he plans to keep the gender ministry, but under a different Korean name that no longer includes the word "women."

Yoon's campaign has been influenced by his party's chairman, Lee Jun-seok, a 36-year-old Harvard-educated "men's rights" advocate who describes hiring targets for women and other gender equality policies as "reverse discrimination." Lee calls feminist politics "blowfish poison."

Yoon during a presidential debate on Monday repeated an argument that South Korea no longer has any structural barriers to women's success, saying discrimination is now about "individual versus individual."

The World Economic Forum ranks South Korea 102 out of 156 nations in an index that examines gender gaps in jobs, education, health and political representation.

South Korea has by far the largest gender pay gap among developed economies at around 32%, according to the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and women remain significantly underrepresented in corporate boardrooms and politics. The country's record-low birth rate underscores how many women find it impossible to combine careers and family.

Scrapping the gender ministry could weaken women's rights and "take a toll on democracy," said Chung Hyun-back, a scholar who served as gender equality minister in 2017-18, under current liberal President

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Moon Jae-in. It is also a key government department committed to helping single parents, sexual abuse survivors and the families of minorities and migrants.

The prospect frustrates Kang Ji-woo, a 36-year-old single mother who once struggled to find a job in a deeply conservative society and who receives child care support from the gender ministry. Unwed mothers in South Korea are sometimes pressured and shamed into having abortions or relinquishing their children for adoption.

"There's no candidate worth trusting on policies aimed at helping the disadvantaged," she said.

South Korean conservatives are galvanizing around a Trump-like brand of divisive "identity politics" that speaks almost exclusively to men after years of disarray following the 2017 ouster of the country's first female president, Park Geun-hye, over a massive corruption scandal, according to Park Won-Ho, a Seoul National University politics professor.

Park Geun-hye had drawn power from older conservative voters who saw her dictator father, Park Chung-hee, as a hero who lifted the nation from the devastation of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Yoon is tapping into the resentment of men in their 20s and 30s who face a bleak job market while agonizing over soaring housing prices and dimming prospects for marriage and parenthood. They are increasingly sensitive to competition from women, who often outpace them at school and are more eager to break from traditional gender roles for professional advancement.

Even as many men cling to the notion that their female colleagues have it easier in the workplace — including being exempt from a mandatory 18-month military service — women have begun to more loudly criticize a male-centered corporate culture that exposes them to harassment, unequal pay and promotions, and often derails their careers after they have children.

Hong Eun-pyo, a 39-year-old who runs an anti-feminist YouTube channel, justifies higher pay for men, insisting they put in longer hours or perform more difficult tasks. "If they want to reach as high as their male peers and be paid the same wages, they should keep working and not get pregnant," he said.

Song Tae-won, an office worker, says young men, worried about a life path that seems tougher than their fathers, resent women's increasing complaints about society.

"Our parents' generation, now in their 50s and 60s, got married early and progressed step by step," he said. "People today are ... extremely restless."

Some experts, including Chung, think politicians are overplaying the gender grievances of certain middle-class, college-educated men who have become radicalized over the internet as they compete with women for a shrinking number of decent jobs.

Recent surveys, however, show a striking political divide between increasingly conservative young men and their more left-leaning female peers, not just over gender issues but also on the economy and national security, says Park, the politics professor. This indicates conservatives are successfully mobilizing their young male supporters to back broader agendas, including tougher approaches on North Korea and policies emphasizing economic growth over welfare spending. Younger women are left feeling largely unrepresented, polls show.

Lee Ji-young, a teacher who has risen to the top of her field in the highly competitive private tutoring business, remembers years of verbal and physical sexual harassment and unwanted advances by male colleagues who constantly questioned her competitiveness.

One colleague told her that Korean society was stable during the medieval era "because women were quiet, but that now they have ruined South Korea," Lee said.

She said she once twisted the wrist of a male colleague when he tried to touch her backside.

"Usually women wouldn't react this way," Lee said. "I've witnessed women who would cry at home or quit work ... because they were afraid of being judged, personally and professionally."

'Thugs and bullies': Nations sanction Russia over Ukraine

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — World leaders sought Wednesday to back up their tough words over Russia's aggres-

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sion against Ukraine, announcing financial sanctions, trade and travel bans and other measures meant to pressure Moscow to pull back from the brink of war.

Even as they ramped up penalties, however, nations in Asia and the Pacific also prepared for the possibility of both economic pain, in the form of cuts to traditional energy and grain supply lines, and retaliation from Russian cyberattacks.

"We can't have some suggestion that Russia has some just case here that they're prosecuting. They're behaving like thugs and bullies, and they should be called out as thugs and bullies," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said while announcing targeted financial sanctions and travel bans as a first step in response to Russian aggression toward Ukraine.

The possibility of imminent war in Ukraine has raised fears not only of massive casualties but of widespread energy shortages and global economic chaos.

The punitive actions in Asia followed sanctions levied by U.S. President Joe Biden and European leaders against Russian oligarchs and banks in response to Russia massing 150,000 troops on three sides of Ukraine. While the larger army has yet to move, Russian forces have rolled into rebel-held portions of eastern Ukraine after Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized those areas' independence.

In Japan, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced sanctions targeting Russia and the two separatist Ukrainian regions.

Kishida told reporters that Tokyo will ban any new issuance and distribution of Russian government bonds in Japan because of "a series of actions Russia has been taking in Ukraine."

Kishida said Japan will also stop issuing visas to people linked to the two Ukrainian rebel regions and will freeze their assets in Japan. Tokyo will also ban trade with the two areas. He said Japanese officials are finalizing further details and added that Japan could increase sanctions if the situation worsens.

Japan opened a temporary office in Lviv, in western Ukraine, to help evacuate about 120 Japanese citizens, and has arranged chartered flights in nearby countries, Kishida said.

Officials in South Korea, which relies on imports to meet nearly all fossil fuel demand, held emergency meetings Wednesday to weigh how seriously events in Ukraine would hurt their country's economy.

The fallout has so far been limited, but First Vice Finance Minister Lee Eog-weon said things could worsen if the situation in Ukraine escalates and there's a "disruption of energy supply chains and an increase in market volatility."

While South Korea relies heavily on imports from Russia and Ukraine for wheat and corn, Lee said the country has enough reserves to last until June or July.

The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy also discussed ways to secure alternative energy supplies in case the Ukraine crisis disrupts the current methods.

U.S. officials have said an invasion is all but inevitable. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken canceled plans for a Thursday meeting in Geneva with his Russian counterpart, saying it would not be productive and that Russia's actions indicated Moscow was not serious about a peaceful path to resolving the crisis.

More than two dozen European Union members unanimously agreed to levy their own initial set of sanctions against Russian officials. Germany also said it was halting the process of certifying the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia — a lucrative deal long sought by Moscow but criticized by the United States for increasing Europe's reliance on Russian energy.

The United States moved to cut off Russia's government from Western finance, sanctioning two of its banks and blocking it from trading its debt on American and European markets. The Biden administration's actions hit civilian leaders in Russia's leadership hierarchy and two Russian banks considered especially close to the Kremlin and Russia's military, with more than \$80 billion in assets. That includes freezing all of those banks' assets under U.S. jurisdictions.

Australia's cabinet Wednesday approved sanctions and travel bans that target eight members of the Russian Security Council, and agreed to align with the United States and Britain by targeting two Russian banks.

"It's important that we play our part in the broader international community to ensure that those who

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are financing, profiting from an autocratic and authoritarian regime that is invading its neighbor should have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide when it comes to trying to move their money around," said Morrison, the prime minister.

Australia also warned businesses to prepare for retaliation through Russian cyberattacks.

In New Zealand, Russian Ambassador Georgii Zuev was summoned to meet with top diplomatic officials and "to hear New Zealand's strong opposition to the actions taken by Russia in recent days," said Foreign Affairs Minister Nanaia Mahuta in a statement. Mahuta is currently traveling abroad.

At the United Nations, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the world is facing "the biggest global peace and security crisis in recent years." He called Russia's declaration of the "so-called 'independence'" of separatist areas in eastern Ukraine a violation of its territorial integrity and accused Moscow of "the perversion of the concept of peacekeeping."

He urged the international community to rally "to save the people of Ukraine and beyond from the scourge of war" without further bloodshed.

In Washington, lawmakers from both parties in Congress displayed a largely unified front backing an independent Ukraine and vowing continued U.S. support, even as some pushed for swifter and even more severe sanctions on Russia.

On Tuesday, members of Russia's upper house, the Federation Council, voted unanimously to allow Putin to use military force outside the country — effectively formalizing a Russian military deployment to the rebel regions, where an eight-year conflict has killed nearly 14,000 people.

Italian city fundraises to pay retirees' rising energy bills

By MARIA GRAZIA MURRU Associated Press

FLORENCE, Italy (AP) — Florence is famed for its contributions to Italian art, architecture and cuisine. But these days, local leaders in the city regarded as the birthplace of the Renaissance are concerned with more mundane matters: paying the bills.

Amid soaring energy costs across Europe, officials at Palazzo Vecchio — the building that serves as Florence's city hall as well as a museum — have teamed up with a local nonprofit to help fixed-income retirees keep their power on through an "Adopt-a-Bill" fundraising campaign.

"Florence is a city where you live well, and for this reason, too, people live very long," Mayor Dario Nardella said.

A significant number of Florence's retirees, however, live on less than 9,000 euros (\$10,205) a year and can't afford to make ends meet with an expected 55% increase in home electricity costs and a 42% hike in residential gas bills, he said.

Widower Luigi Boni, 96, confirms that. He says that by the end of February, he will have emptied his bank account and spent his monthly pension check of under 600 euros (\$680) before covering utilities.

"Either I eat or I pay the rent," Boni said as he sat on his sofa with a daily newspaper in his hands.

To assist him and others among Florence's estimated 30,000 residents over age 65 and living alone, the city administration launched the fundraising campaign with the nonprofit Montedomini Foundation, which runs projects aimed at helping the city's retirees.

The campaign raised 33,000 euros (more than \$37,000) in its first few days. Private citizens, including Florentines living abroad, made more than 200 donations, according to the city's welfare counselor, Sara Funaro.

"Our goal is to raise funds to make sure that every elderly person who asks us for help can receive help to cover the increase in bills due to (energy costs) increasing," Funaro said.

Spiking energy prices are raising utility bills — and driving a record rise in inflation — from Poland to the United Kingdom. In response, governments across Europe are rushing to pass aid for residents and businesses as utility companies pass on costs to consumers.

In Turkey, where the economic pressure is extreme and has fueled protests, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir are among opposition-led municipalities with similar "Adopt-a-Bill" initiatives. Istanbul's municipal website

says nearly 49 million Turkish lira (about \$3.6 million) was donated since 2020, covering 320,000 utility bills.

Italian Premier Mario Draghi's government has passed measures valued at more than 8 billion euros (\$9 billion) to help blunt the impact of soaring energy prices for businesses and individuals.

The government's most recent decree, issued Friday, also had a forward-looking component: it looked to accelerate Italy's transition to more renewable energy sources, particularly solar power, to make the country less dependent on imported supplies.

Italy currently imports 90% of its gas, much of it from Russia, and Draghi has insisted that any European Union sanctions to punish Russia for recognizing two separatist-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine must exempt the energy sector.

The Italian mayors' association has said the government's response has so far been insufficient to help cities cope with hundreds of millions of euros in additional energy costs, making them choose between balancing budgets or cutting services.

Florence, Rome and other cities kept their municipal monuments and local government buildings dark on Feb. 10 to draw attention to the situation.

Florence's Adopt-a-Bill campaign enjoys popular support. As well as being a top tourist destination, the capital of Italy's Tuscany region has a long record of successfully providing social services to poor and vulnerable residents.

"It's a great initiative because you can help people who can't make it to pay a bill that in a shameless way has reached unsustainable costs," said Luca Menoni, the owner of a butcher's shop in Florence's Sant'Ambrogio indoor food market.

"I myself am paying a (electricity) bill double what I used to," Menoni said.

Boni may be getting some help with his energy bills to get him through the winter and stave off an expected move into a nursing home. But he still has a tight budget that doesn't allow many luxuries.

"Steaks? Meat? Let's not even talk about it. I eat (cheap) packaged food," he said. After his wife died, he said, "I became an expert in economic cooking."

Ukraine's economy is another victim of Russia's 'hybrid war'

By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — One by one, embassies and international offices in Kyiv closed. Flight after flight was canceled when insurance companies balked at covering planes arriving in Ukraine. Hundreds of millions of dollars in investment dried up within weeks.

With Russian troops encircling much of the country, Ukrainian businesses large and small no longer plan for the future — they can barely foresee what will happen week to week.

It is Ukraine, not Russia, where the economy is eroding the fastest under the threat of war. Even before Russian troops rolled into rebel-held areas in the country's east and Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the independence of the separatist region, Ukraine was the biggest loser in the agonizing, slow-motion aggression.

"Why is it that we are suffering consequences already? And Russia, who is actually threatening the whole world, in Europe, is not suffering any consequences?" asked Andrey Stavnitser, CEO of the port operator TIS Group.

The squeezing of Ukraine's economy is a key destabilizing tactic in what the government describes as "hybrid warfare" intended to eat away at the country from within. The Ukrainian president is also juggling state-sponsored cyberattacks, a Russia-backed separatist movement and the threat of 150,000 Russian soldiers surrounding his country on three sides.

The economic woes include restaurants that dare not keep more than a few days of food on hand, stalled plans for a hydrogen production plant that could help wean Europe off Russian gas and uncertain conditions for shipping in the Black Sea, where container ships must carefully edge their way around Russian military vessels.

Stavnitser said the Black Sea ports are operating as usual for now, but it's only a matter of time before

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the same insurance problems that cut off commercial flights start to hit the shipping industry. Ukraine is one of the world's top grain exporters, loading container ships that carry 12% of the world's wheat supply and 16% of its corn.

Alex Riabchyn is a former member of Ukraine's parliament who now spearheads a project to set up hydrogen plants for the national Naftogaz energy company. The idea is to give Europe — and especially its largest economy, Germany — a stable new source of hydrogen, which can be used to produce low-emission energy for transport, industry and other uses.

What he hears from European investors now is "we can buy everything that you can produce, but to come and invest to build these plants, it's too risky."

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock over the weekend acknowledged that the constant threat against Ukraine is "having very real effects — on investments, on air traffic, on jobs and on the daily life of people."

She said the Group of Seven ministers of leading industrial nations promised to ensure Ukraine gets help for financial stability.

Since the beginning of the crisis in January, the national currency, the hryvnia, has steadily lost value, and it plunged 1% Tuesday after Russia recognized the two breakaway regions led by Russia-backed separatists. The United States last week offered a \$1 billion loan guarantee, and the European Parliament approved \$1.3 billion in loans for Ukraine to cover financing needs this year.

But by late January, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that \$12.5 billion had been withdrawn from accounts in the country. Last week, he called on members of parliament and businessmen who had fled to return. More than 20 charters and private jets left Kyiv last week, carrying some of the country's most prominent executives.

"The more the government urges not to panic, the more nervous businesses are," said Volodymyr Sidenko, an analyst with the Razumkov Center.

In Russia, Margarite Simonyan, the head of the state-owned Russian RT news network, gloated last week that "Kyiv's economy is in tatters," calling it "a small but pleasant thing."

But Deputy Prime Minister Olga Stefanishyna said the destabilization of Ukraine's economy isn't a side effect of the Russian threat, but the point. It saps faith in the government, and it forces Ukraine to divert attention and resources from needed reforms. It is, she said, an essential pillar of the "hybrid war" Russia is waging.

"It's really important that we are resilient as we have never been before and we do our best to preserve the stability. But the longer this tension and escalation is taking place, the weaker Ukrainian economy can become," she said.

The Centre for Economics and Business research estimated this month that the conflict with Russia cost Ukraine \$280 billion in lost gross domestic product between 2014 and 2020 — with those losses expected to climb this year.

The United States and Europe worked out a series of limited sanctions on Tuesday, including targeting several Russian officials and banks financing the Russian armed forces, and putting limits on Moscow's access to EU capital and financial markets.

Additional plans to target trade from the breakaway regions are unlikely to have much of an effect on them or Russia as they've been largely isolated from the international community since 2014.

Daniel Fried, a former U.S. diplomat who helped write sanctions in 2014, said the challenge in designing any new sanctions is that Russia is already succeeding in what he called "the slow strangulation of Ukraine."

"When we saw the airlines pull out of Kyiv — they're not pulling out of Russia. They're pulling out of Kyiv. Putin is getting something that he wants without war."

Kyiv restaurateur Ievgen Klopotenko said he keeps just a few days worth of stock in his kitchens, to avoid having his money literally rot away if the crisis worsens. Planning more than a year into the future, he said, is folly.

"If something happens, I don't know, I will be open," he said, gesturing outside the window overlooking

one of Kyiv's broad sunlit streets as though imagining a day when they would be filled with soldiers, not families looking for brunch. "If I need to cook for the army, I will cook for the army."

EXPLAINER: Impending Iran nuclear deal alarms Israel

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — While the world's attention has been focused on Ukraine, the Biden administration also has been racing with world powers toward restoring the 2015 international nuclear deal with Iran.

After months of negotiations in Vienna, the various sides have indicated a new deal is close, perhaps in the coming days. But instead of the "longer, stronger" agreement originally promised by the U.S., the deal is expected to do little more than reinstate the original pact, whose key restrictions on Iranian nuclear activity expire in a few years.

This modest accomplishment appears to be the best the Biden administration can hope for at a time when it is restrained by Congress at home, and overwhelmed abroad with the Ukraine crisis and longer-term challenges such as China and climate change. But it is setting off alarm bells in Israel, whose leaders have grown increasingly vocal in their condemnations of a deal they fear will not prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

"The emerging deal, as it seems, is highly likely to create a more violent, more volatile Middle East," Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said this week, repeating his threat that Israel is not bound by the deal and is prepared to attack Iran if needed.

Here is a closer look at the agreement and what lies ahead:

HOW WE GOT HERE

The 2015 agreement, spearheaded by former President Barack Obama, aimed to prevent Iran from being able to build a nuclear bomb. It offered Iran relief from harsh economic sanctions in exchange for curbs of 10 to 15 years on its nuclear activities. Iran says its nuclear activities are peaceful.

Critics, led by then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, complained the restrictions were temporary, not airtight and gave Iran a pathway to developing atomic weapons capability. They also argued that the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA, did not address Iran's non-nuclear activity, including its support for regional proxies and its development of long-range missiles capable of delivering a bomb.

At Netanyahu's urging, President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement in 2018, promising a campaign of "maximum pressure" on the Iranians. Despite tougher sanctions, that strategy appears to have backfired. The Iranian government, now under a more hard-line leader who was elected last year, remains firmly in power, and with the deal unraveling, Iran has raced ahead with uranium enrichment and other research far beyond the boundaries of the original agreement.

WHY NOT NEGOTIATE A NEW DEAL?

Iran has shown little interest in seeking a longer-term agreement. Even if one could be reached, Biden would face a tough time implementing it.

Under a 2015 U.S. law, any new agreement granting Iran relief from sanctions would require congressional approval, a process that would be slow and uncertain. Instead, the White House has signaled it plans to argue that any deal emerging from the Vienna talks would be simply "re-entering" the initial JCPOA.

That could avert a battle with Congress but means that key aspects of the original deal, such as limits on uranium enrichment, would expire in 2025. The administration appears to have concluded that a flawed short-term deal is better than nothing at all.

WHY ISRAEL IS UPSET

Israeli leaders fear the brief remaining lifespan of the JCPOA will do little to halt Iran in the long run, especially after the technological gains Iran has made in recent years. It remains unclear whether Iran will even have to give up its stockpile of enriched uranium.

But they also fear that with sanctions eased and billions of dollars in now-frozen assets to be released, Iran would spend more on arming and funding its proxies across the region. These include Lebanon's

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Hezbollah militant group and the Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups in the Gaza Strip.

"Iran is going to be more able and confident to do things it has already been doing, with more resources and confidence, and perhaps immunity because it signed a very important agreement," said Yoel Guzansky, an expert on Iran at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank.

WHAT IRAN IS SAYING

Iran has long insisted on a complete lifting of U.S. sanctions imposed under the Trump administration as its economy buckles under the pressure of inflation and a currency crash. Tehran has signaled it is willing to return to the agreement's nuclear enrichment red lines but it wants access to \$7 billion in frozen assets and the ability to sell its oil exports unhindered.

Iran also insists it has every right to pursue peaceful nuclear energy. Israel is widely believed to have its own nuclear arsenal, though it has never acknowledged it.

The Biden administration has issued only limited sanctions waivers and says these moves are aimed at helping facilitate discussions so that Iran returns to full compliance of the accord.

Iranian media frequently lambasts Israel for working to derail the talks in Vienna and says Israel has tried to pursue maximum pressure on Iran by normalizing ties with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, as well as through attacks and acts of sabotage against Iran. Israel, in turn has accused Iran of attacking Israeli-linked cargo ships passing through the region.

The International Crisis Group, an organization once headed by the top U.S. negotiator, says any success in current talks still "hinges on the political willingness, mostly in the U.S. and Iran, to accept compromises on remaining areas of disagreement, which is by no means assured."

"After weeks of intensive talks, we are closer than ever to an agreement. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, though," Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani was quoted in Iranian media as recently saying.

WHAT ISRAEL CAN DO

Guzansky, the Israeli expert on Iran, says the upside of an agreement is that it "buys time."

He said Israel should use the coming years to beef up its military capabilities in case it has to take action against Iran. "We need to flex our muscles and get this option ready to use," he said.

He also said Israel should bolster its new alliances with the Gulf Arab states, who, even if they are less outspoken, feel equally threatened by Iran.

Israel recently signed a defense pact with Bahrain, participated with dozens of nations in a U.S.-led naval exercise and is sending for the first time a naval attaché to be based at the U.S. 5th Fleet in Bahrain.

"It's all connected," Guzansky said.

Pandemic legacy: Israeli company transforms jets for cargo

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

LOD, Israel (AP) — The passenger doors on the jumbo jet were just too small. So engineers at Israel's main airport sliced a new hole the size of an SUV into the side of the fuselage — and hoisted a massive hatch into place.

In many ways, it's the doorway to the post-pandemic future of the battered airline industry.

As global tourism struggles to its feet after two harrowing years of coronavirus restrictions, Israel's state-owned aerospace company is cashing in on the growth of e-commerce by converting grounded passenger planes into cargo jets for global giants like Amazon and DHL. The work reflects what analysts think is a permanent, pandemic-driven boom for shipping the stuff people buy.

To adapt, Israel Aerospace Industries early in the pandemic sped up and expanded what amounts to its assembly line. The sales pitch: At about \$35 million an aircraft, the metamorphosis is a bargain compared to buying a new cargo plane four or five times that price. Now, the company says, it transforms about 25 planes a year, up from about 18 annually before the onslaught of COVID-19.

The company has emerged as a top player in this market, competing with others like Boeing. Its numbers continue to grow, and IAI officials say orders are booked for the next four years.

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"This is about the relationship between passengers and cargo and pandemic," said Shmuel Kuzi, executive vice president and general manager of the company's aviation division. He says IAI now converts Boeing 737s and the much larger 767s.

Next year, the company expects to convert even bigger 777s — the first in the world, he says, with the work at a new plant in Abu Dhabi. That's partly a result of the U.S.-brokered "Abraham Accords," which formally established relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. And it's a sign, Kuzi says, of the demand for converted jumbo jets.

Analysts say the explosive growth in online buying is likely to settle a bit as the pandemic wanes, inflation rises and people spend less time at their laptops. But the cost of shipping goods, exacerbated by tangles in the supply chain, is expected to challenge even the largest businesses. Amazon, for example, pointed in part to rising shipping costs when it boosted its Prime membership on Feb. 18 from \$119 to \$139.

E-commerce jumped by double-digit percentages at the start of the pandemic, accelerating a trend driven by shutdowns that kept people inside. Instead of traveling, people ordered online and expected speedy doorstep service.

That's a big part of the reason that demand for cargo planes has held up throughout the the pandemic.

Before the crisis, 50% of all global air cargo traveled in passenger planes. But when the pandemic began, some 80% of passenger planes stopped flying. The price of freight shipped by sea soared.

Air freighters needed a workaround — and grounded passenger planes provided one.

Eytan Buchman, chief marketing officer of Freightos, a Jerusalem-based booking platform, said one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to increase capacity was converting passenger planes into freighters.

Meanwhile, people and businesses are expected to keep up their online buying.

"People are still stuck in the mindset of, 'I want to buy more goods,'" Buchman said. But he expects a "rebalancing" as the pandemic subsides.

For now, even as air travel begins to rebound, the number of passengers flying remains far below pre-pandemic levels.

"We don't anticipate passenger network recovery to be for several years," said Glyn Hughes, director general of the International Air Transport Association. Air cargo demand, he said, is expected to grow by as much as 5% per year.

The International Trade Administration, part of the U.S. Commerce Department, forecasts that worldwide e-commerce sales will continue to grow steadily by about 8% per year through 2024.

Richard Aboulafia, managing director of Michigan-based Aerodynamic Advisory, a consulting firm, said that while demand for refitted planes is robust, there is a danger that IAI and others are betting too heavily on the market. "There's that risk of, will demand stay high?" he said.

Through 2025, Kuzi says, IAI is booked with conversions, a sprawling engineering and technical process that takes about three months. The company earlier this month announced it had completed its 100th conversion of a 767-300. IAI, Kuzi said, leads the world's conversions of that model.

The transformation involves much more than removing seats and installing new doors.

On a recent day at the company's campus a few miles (kilometers) from Ben Gurion International Airport, three hulking 767s stood in different stages of transformation. The air whirred with drills, the rush of ventilation and the clang of equipment being installed or removed.

Outside the hangar, workers carted blue leather passenger seats away from one jetliner, formerly owned by Delta, that had just arrived and parked on the tarmac. A pile of yellow oxygen masks, tubing and ceiling panels grew on a jetway as workers emptied the fuselage, which bore an American flag. At the front of the dark, cool interior, the first class section and the cockpit stood — for the moment — nearly intact, a testament to how that space had been used in what's become known as the "before times."

Two more 767s inside a nearby hangar offered glimpses of the next steps in the conversion process.

Both behemoths stood on specially made stands, surrounded by scaffolding several stories high.

The opening for the new cargo door gaped. Inside, engineers and technicians installed a new floor and panels along the walls. Another crew rewired the cockpit. The only sign it had ever served another pur-

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pose was a red maple leaf spanning the the tail and faded letters spelling "Canada" emblazoned in red across the fuselage.

When it's done, the plane and all others like it will be able to carry about 60 tons of goods on two floors.

Everyone cleared away while a crane on the ceiling, attached to a pulley and cables, hoisted the five-meter-wide (16.5-foot-wide) cargo door toward the opening. Two men in a cherry picker, engine roaring, guided the door from the floor up to the fuselage and into place.

"The pandemic makes the e-commerce very, very popular," Kuzi said. "So in this case, it was a good thing for us."

Abolition newspaper revived for nation grappling with racism

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — America's first newspaper dedicated to advocating for the end of slavery is being resurrected and reimagined more than two centuries later as the nation continues to grapple with its legacy of racism.

The revived version of The Emancipator is a joint effort by Boston University's Center for Antiracist Research and The Boston Globe's Opinion team that's expected to launch in the coming months.

Deborah Douglas and Amber Payne, co-editors-in-chief of the new online publication, say it will feature written and video opinion pieces, multimedia series, virtual talks and other content by respected scholars and seasoned journalists. The goal, they say, is to "reframe" the national conversation around racial injustice.

"I like to say it's anti-racism, every day, on purpose," said Douglas, who joined the project after working as a journalism professor at DePauw University in Indiana. "We are targeting anyone who wants to be a part of the solution to creating an anti-racist society because we think that leads us to our true north, which is democracy."

The original Emancipator was founded in 1820 in Jonesborough, Tennessee, by iron manufacturer Elihu Embree, with the stated purpose to "advocate the abolition of slavery and to be a repository of tracts on that interesting and important subject," according to a digital collection of the monthly newsletter at the University of Tennessee library.

Before Embree's untimely death from a fever ended its brief run later that year, The Emancipator reached a circulation of more than 2,000, with copies distributed throughout the South and in northern cities like Boston and Philadelphia that were centers of the abolition movement.

Douglas and Payne say drawing on the paper's legacy is appropriate now because it was likely difficult for Americans to envision a country without slavery back then, just as many people today likely can't imagine a nation without racism. The new Emancipator was announced last March, nearly a year after the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May 2020 sparked social justice movements worldwide.

"Those abolitionists were considered radical and extreme," Douglas said. "But that's part of our job as journalists — providing those tools, those perspectives that can help them imagine a different world."

Other projects have also recently come online taking the mantle of abolitionist newspapers, including The North Star, a media site launched in 2019 by civil rights activist Shaun King and journalist Benjamin Dixon that's billed as a revival of Frederick Douglass' influential anti-slavery newspaper.

Douglas said The Emancipator, which is free to the public and primarily funded through philanthropic donations, will stand out because of its focus on incisive commentary and rigorous academic work. The publication's staff, once it's ramped up, will largely eschew the typical quick turnaround, breaking news coverage, she said.

"This is really deep reporting, deep research and deep analysis that's scholarly driven but written at a level that everyone can understand," Douglas said. "Everybody is invited to this conversation. We want it to be accessible, digestible and, hopefully, actionable."

The publication also hopes to serve as a bulwark against racist misinformation, with truth-telling explanatory videos and articles, she added. It'll take a critical look at popular culture, film, music and television and, as the pandemic eases, look to host live events around Boston.

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"Every time someone twists words, issues, situations or experiences, we want to be there like whack-a-mole, whacking it down with the facts and the context," Douglas said.

Another critical focus of the publication will be spotlighting solutions to some of the nation's most intractable racial problems, added Payne, who joined the project after working as a managing editor at BET.com and an executive producer at Teen Vogue.

"There are community groups, advocates and legislators who are really taking matters into their own hands so how do we amplify those solutions and get those stories told?" she said. "At the academic level, there's so much scholarly research that just doesn't fit into a neat, 800-word Washington Post op-ed. It requires more excavation. It requires maybe a multimedia series. Maybe it needs a video. So we think that we are really uniquely positioned."

The project has already posted a couple of representative pieces. To mark the one-year anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol building, The Emancipator published an interview with a Harvard social justice professor and commentary from a Boston College poetry professor.

It also posted on social media a video featuring Ibram X. Kendi, founding director of BU's anti-racism center and author of "How to be an Antiracist," reflecting on white supremacy. Kendi co-founded the project with Bina Venkataraman, editorial page editor at The Boston Globe.

And while the new Emancipator is primarily focused on the Black community, Douglas and Payne stress it will also tackle issues facing other communities of color, such as the rise in anti-Asian hate during the global coronavirus pandemic.

They argue The Emancipator's mission is all the more critical now as the debate over how racism is taught has made schools the latest political battleground.

"Our country is so polarized that partisanship is trumping science and trumping historical records," Payne said. "These ongoing crusades against affirmative action, against critical race theory are not going away. That drumbeat is continuing and so therefore our drumbeat needs to continue."

Olympics say goodbye to Asia after a star-crossed run

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — The Olympics have said goodbye to Asia after a star-crossed run, and it's unclear when they'll be back after the continent hosted four of the last eight Games.

The earliest the Summer Games could return is 2036, and the favorite could be the world's most populous country — not China, as you might expect, but India.

India's population is expected to overtake China's 1.4 billion in the next decade, and it is lobbying for the western city of Ahmedabad to be the host city for 2036, with events elsewhere, including New Delhi, the capital.

"India is in a race for hosting 2036," Narinder Batra, president of the Indian Olympic Committee, told The Associated Press. He offered few other details.

In a show of support, the IOC has scheduled the annual meeting of its full membership for next year in the western Indian metropolis of Mumbai. It's a signal the courting has begun.

Delivering the pitch: Indian IOC member Nita Ambani, who is married to Mukesh Ambani, the chairman of India's multinational conglomerate Reliance Industries. The family fortune has been estimated at \$100 billion.

As it did with China, the IOC can envision India as a new frontier that will yield deep-pocketed sponsors, television rights deals and generous government support.

Departing Asia means returning to familiar terrain: the Summer Games in Paris in 2024, the 2026 Winter Games in Milan-Cortina, and the 2028 Summer Games in Los Angeles. Brisbane is also lined up for the 2032 Summer Olympics, a return to Australia 32 years after Sydney.

Brisbane is certain to add cricket to its sports menu and, of course, it would stay in place for India, where the sport has the world's most fervent following.

The Asia focus started with the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a grand coming-out party that many hoped

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would change China. Instead, China used to Games to change how it was viewed.

The Asia run enriched the IOC with lucrative billion-dollar sponsorship deals with China's Alibaba and Japan's Toyota, put down roots in the world's most populous continent and featured a return to South Korea 30 years after the 1988 Seoul Olympics were credited with helping to usher in democracy.

Asia has also generated consistently bad public relations for the IOC. This includes a state-sponsored doping scandal from the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics that lingers and surfaced again with allegations in Beijing against Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva.

There was IOC vote-buying linked to the award of the Tokyo Olympics, which forced the resignation of the head of Japan's Olympic Committee, Tsunekazu Takeda, and a diplomatic boycott of the just-finished Beijing Games centered on human rights abuses that also dogged Beijing in 2008.

Add in the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro. This was another nontraditional stop that caused problems. It saw the organizing committee face bankruptcy and Carlos Nuzman, the head of the committee, convicted of corruption, money laundering and tax evasion. The former IOC member is appealing.

"The IOC I think is viewed as a villain globally at this time, and they have to do something to change their image," said Robert Baade, a sports economist at Lake Forest College outside Chicago. "I'm not sure that's going to happen at any time soon."

Baade is the co-author of "Going for Gold: The Economics of the Olympics," a study that looks at the costs and benefits of the Games.

"It's these little things, the five-star hotels, the elitism, the privilege that the IOC displays — and its eurocentrism," Baade added.

Christophe Dubi, the Olympic Games' executive director, acknowledged India has expressed strong interest, but declined to name other countries that have. Several Chinese cities have been mentioned as possibilities, along with Jakarta, Indonesia, Seoul and others.

"We have to respect that some are speaking confidentially to us because the public authorities are not fully on board, or sometimes governments are interested but it's not the right timing," Dubi said.

The IOC no longer runs a wide-open bidding process, instead selecting cities in which it has interest — and vice versa. It puts the selection in the hands of the IOC leadership rather than with IOC members. The 2036 host is unlikely to be picked until after the next IOC presidential election in 2025.

The other return to Asia could come with the 2030 Winter Olympics, where Sapporo, Japan — the 1972 Winter host — is probably the favorite.

Also in the mix could be Vancouver, Salt Lake City and a Spanish bid, perhaps from Barcelona.

The Japanese news agency Kyodo, citing unidentified sources, has reported that Sapporo and the IOC are in talks and a decision could come before the end of the year. The city has put the cost at \$2.4 billion to \$2.6 billion.

The IOC owes Japan a favor after the one-year delay of the 2020 Olympics cost organizers an added \$2 billion. Dubi would not confirm any of this but said the IOC was lucky to have Japan and China organizing the last two Olympics in the middle of the pandemic.

"I think we were very fortunate to have them as partners," Dubi said. "I don't say that others could not have done it. But if you had to pick two countries where it was always doable and where you wouldn't have doubts that they could pull it off — it's those two."

Is omicron leading us closer to herd immunity against COVID?

By VICTORIA MILKO AP Science Writer

Is omicron leading us closer to herd immunity against COVID-19?

Experts say it's not likely that the highly transmissible variant — or any other variant — will lead to herd immunity.

"Herd immunity is an elusive concept and doesn't apply to coronavirus," says Dr. Don Milton at the University of Maryland School of Public Health.

Herd immunity is when enough of a population is immune to a virus that it's hard for the germ to spread

to those who aren't protected by vaccination or a prior infection.

For example, herd immunity against measles requires about 95% of a community to be immune. Early hopes of herd immunity against the coronavirus faded for several reasons.

One is that antibodies developed from available vaccines or previous infection dwindle with time. While vaccines offer strong protection against severe illness, waning antibodies mean it's still possible to get infected — even for those who are boosted.

Then there's the huge variation in vaccinations. In some low-income countries, less than 5% of the population is vaccinated. Rich countries are struggling with vaccine hesitancy. And young children still aren't eligible in many places.

As long as the virus spreads, it mutates — helping the virus survive and giving rise to new variants. Those mutants — such as omicron — can become better at evading the protection people have from vaccines or an earlier infection.

Populations are moving toward "herd resistance," where infections will continue, but people have enough protection that future spikes won't be as disruptive to society, Milton says.

Many scientists believe COVID-19 will eventually become like the flu and cause seasonal outbreaks but not huge surges.

S. Korea approves Pfizer's COVID vaccine for ages 5-11

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean health officials on Wednesday approved Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5 to 11, expanding the country's immunization program in the face of a massive omicron outbreak that is driving up hospitalizations and deaths.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency reported a record 171,452 new virus cases on Wednesday, nearly a 40-fold increase from levels in mid-January when omicron first emerged as the country's dominant strain. The 99 new deaths were the highest daily tally since Dec. 31, when the country was grappling with a delta-driven surge that buckled hospital systems.

More than 500 virus patients are now in serious or critical condition, up from around 200 in mid-February.

In a long-awaited announcement, the Ministry of Drug and Food Safety said it approved the Pfizer vaccine as the country's first shot to be used for children aged 5 to 11. The KDCA said it will announce a vaccine rollout plan for this age group in March.

The Pfizer shot is already used for children aged 5 to 11 in more than 60 countries, including the United States and in the European Union, the MDFS said in a press release. The vaccine will help protect younger children from infections or serious illness amid South Korea's fast-developing omicron surge, it added.

Teenagers and younger children have been linked to a rising number of infections in recent weeks, according to KDCA data, a worrisome development as schools prepare for new semesters in March.

The country had earlier approved vaccinations for people 12 years and older. As of Wednesday, 86.4% of South Korea's more than 51 million people have been vaccinated and nearly 60% have received booster shots.

South Korea was seen as a success story early in the pandemic after it contained infections and hospitalizations more effectively than most countries in the West. Health authorities worked closely with biotech companies to ramp up laboratory tests and aggressively mobilized technological tools and public workers to trace contacts and enforce quarantines.

But officials were accused of prematurely easing social distancing rules ahead of a devastating delta-driven spread in December and early January. The country's strengths have been further eroded by the highly transmissible omicron variant, which is stretching worn-out health and public workers.

The country has been forced to reshape its pandemic response in a way that effectively tolerates the virus' spread among the broader population while concentrating medical resources to protect high-risk groups, including people 60 years or older and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

Officials have significantly eased quarantine restrictions and reduced contact tracing, while more than

520,000 people with mild or moderate symptoms are currently being treated at home to save hospital space. The country has also reshaped its testing policy around rapid antigen test kits, despite concerns over their accuracy and propensity for false-negative results, to save laboratory tests mostly for priority groups.

Many South Koreans are wary of the bend-but-not-break approach as the country continues to report some of the world's highest daily infection numbers.

Authorities seem to have limited political capacity to strengthen social distancing ahead of the March presidential election, given people's fatigue and frustration with extended restrictions and the strain on service sector businesses. Despite the growing outbreak, officials last week extended restaurant dining hours by an hour to 10 p.m. over economic considerations, although they have so far maintained a six-person limit on private social gatherings.

"It would be crucial for us to weather the virus spread while minimizing serious illnesses and deaths," Health Ministry official Son Youngrae said during a briefing. He said South Korea's COVID-19 hospital capacities had expanded since the delta wave and are now able to handle around 2,000 patients with serious illnesses.

What Lies Beneath: Vets worry polluted base made them ill

By MARTHA MENDOZA, JULIET LINDERMAN and JASON DEAREN Associated Press

FORT ORD NATIONAL MONUMENT, Calif. (AP) — For nearly 80 years, recruits reporting to central California's Fort Ord considered themselves the lucky ones, privileged to live and work amid sparkling seas, sandy dunes and sage-covered hills.

But there was an underside, the dirty work of soldiering. Recruits tossed live grenades into the canyons of "Mortar Alley," sprayed soapy chemicals on burn pits of scrap metal and solvents, poured toxic substances down drains and into leaky tanks they buried underground.

When it rained, poisons percolated into aquifers from which they drew drinking water.

Through the years, soldiers and civilians who lived at the U.S. Army base didn't question whether their tap water was safe to drink.

But in 1990, four years before it began the process of closing as an active military training base, Fort Ord was added to the Environmental Protection Agency's list of the most polluted places in the nation. Included in that pollution were dozens of chemicals, some now known to cause cancer, found in the base's drinking water and soil.

Decades later, several Fort Ord veterans who were diagnosed with cancers — especially rare blood disorders — took the question to Facebook: Are there more of us?

Soon, the group grew to hundreds of people who had lived or served at Fort Ord and were concerned that their health problems might be tied to the chemicals there.

The Associated Press interviewed nearly two dozen of these veterans for this story and identified many more. AP also reviewed thousands of pages of documents, and interviewed military, medical and environmental scientists.

There is rarely a way to directly connect toxic exposure to a specific individual's medical condition. Indeed, the concentrations of the toxics are tiny, measured in parts per billion or trillion, far below the levels of an immediate poisoning. Local utilities, the Defense Department and some in the Department of Veterans Affairs insist Fort Ord's water is safe and always has been.

But the VA's own hazardous materials exposure website, along with scientists and doctors, agree that dangers do exist for military personnel exposed to contaminants.

The problem is not just at Fort Ord. This is happening all over the U.S. and abroad, almost everywhere the military has set foot, and the federal government is still learning about the extent of both the pollution and the health effects of its toxic legacy.

AP's review of public documents shows the Army knew that chemicals had been improperly dumped at Fort Ord for decades. Even after the contamination was documented, the Army downplayed the risks.

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And ailing veterans are being denied benefits based on a 25-year-old health assessment. The CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry concluded in 1996 that there were no likely past, present or future risks from exposures at Fort Ord.

But that conclusion was made based on limited data, and before medical science understood the relationship between some of these chemicals and cancer.

This is what is known:

Veterans in general have higher blood cancer rates than the general population, according to VA cancer data. And in the region that includes Fort Ord, veterans have a 35 percent higher rate of multiple myeloma diagnosis than the general U.S. population.

Veterans like Julie Akey.

Akey, now 50, arrived at Fort Ord in 1996 with a gift for linguistics. She enlisted in the Army on the condition that she could learn a new language. And so the 25-year-old was sent to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, and lived at Fort Ord as a soldier. By then the base was mostly closed but still housed troops for limited purposes.

"It was incredibly beautiful," she said. "You have the ocean on one side, and these expansive beaches, and the rolling hills and the mountains behind."

What she didn't know at the time was that the ground under her feet, and the water that ran through the sandy soil into an aquifer that supplied some of the base's drinking water was polluted. Among the contaminants were cancer-causing chemicals including trichloroethylene, also known as the miracle degreaser TCE.

She'd learn this decades later, as she tried to understand how, at just 46 and with no family history of blood cancers, she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma.

"No one told us," she said.

Despite the military's claims that there aren't any health problems associated with living and serving at Fort Ord, nor hundreds of other shuttered military bases, almost every closure has exposed widespread toxic pollution and required a massive cleanup. Dozens have contaminated groundwater, from Fort Dix in New Jersey to Adak Naval Air Station in Alaska. Fort Ord is 25 years into its cleanup as a federal Superfund site, and it's expected to continue for decades.

To date, the military has only acknowledged troops' health could have been damaged by drinking contaminated water at a single U.S. base: Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and only during a 35-year window, between 1953 to 1987. Servicemembers there were found by federal epidemiologists to have higher mortality rates from many cancers, including multiple myeloma and leukemia. Men developed breast cancer, and pregnant women tended to have children with higher rates of birth defects and low birth weight. Like Fort Ord, Camp Lejeune began closing contaminated wells in the mid-'80s.

Soldiers are often stationed at different bases during their years of military service, but neither the Defense Department nor the VA has systematically tracked toxic exposures at various locations.

Fort Ord's primary mission was training troops who deployed to World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam. It supported several thriving small towns on a piece of coastal land the size of San Francisco. Soldiers and their families lived in houses and apartments connected to its water system, and civilians worked at its airfields, hospitals and other facilities.

In the course of their work preparing for battle, they spilled solvents into the base's drains, sloughed chemical sludge into underground storage tanks and discarded 55-gallon drums of caustic material in the base landfill, according to a 1982 hazardous waste inventory report.

Curt Gandy, a former airplane mechanic, recalls being routinely doused with toxic chemicals from the 1970s to the 1990s. He said he hosed down aircraft with solvents, cleaned engine parts and stripped paint off fuselages without any protection. There were barrels of toluene, xylene, jet fuel and more.

"It gets on your body, it gets in your face, you get splashed with it, and we're using pumps to spray this stuff," he said. "It's got 250 pounds of pressure and we're spraying it into the air and it's atomized."

On Fridays, crews would forklift barrels of the used flammable liquids down a bumpy sandy road, dump-

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ing solvents, paint and metal chips onto the hulks of broken aircraft and tanks at a burn pit. One weekend a month, airfield firefighters would light up the toxic sludge and then douse the roaring fires with foam.

In 1984, an anonymous caller tipped off Fort Ord's officials that "approximately 30 55-gallon drums," containing about 600 gallons of a "solvent-type liquid" had been illegally spilled there, an Army report said. The state, which ordered a cleanup two years later, determined the Army had mismanaged the site in a way that threatened both ground and surface waters.

And the burn pit wasn't the base's only polluted site.

In 1991, when the Army began investigating what had actually been disposed of at the base's dump overlooking Monterey Bay, officials told the public the trash was similar to what one would find in the landfill of any small city, according to transcripts of community meetings.

While it's true that much of the trash going into that dump came from nearby houses — food scraps, old furniture, busted appliances, even gasoline — the Army officials who spoke at the meetings made no mention of the toxic stew of paints and solvents that today are banned from open landfills. The solvent TCE was among dozens of pollutants that scientists discovered as early as 1985 and today still exists in concentrations above the legal limit for drinking water in the aquifer below, according to local and federal water quality reports.

"The water from the aquifer above leaks down into the aquifer below and the pollution just gets deeper," said Dan O'Brien, a former board member of the Marina Coast Water District, which took over the Army's wells in 2001. "The toxic material remains in the soil under where it was dumped. Every time it rains, more of the toxin in the soil leeches down into the water table."

The Army's early tests of Fort Ord's wells near the landfill detected levels of TCE 43 separate times from 1985 to 1994. The VA told the AP the contamination was "within the allowable safe range" in areas that provided drinking water.

But 18 of those TCE hits exceeded legal safety limits; one reading was five times that amount. It's unclear how long and at what concentrations TCE may have been in the water before 1985. And TCE was only one problem. The EPA identified more than 40 "chemicals of concern" in soil and groundwater.

"It was not recognized that it was so toxic back then, and they threw it on the ground after use. They used a ton of it. Now, it's the most pervasive groundwater contaminant we have," said Thomas Burke, an environmental epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a former EPA official.

Contractors initially brought in to clean up the contaminated groundwater were warned not to tell community members what they found in their drinking water, specifically not the news media or even local public agencies, according to a 1985 military memo.

At the time, there were elevated levels of TCE in the aquifers, yet the military assured the public the drinking water was safe.

"There never have been any test results that indicate that Fort Ord's water was unsafe," an Army official told several local papers in August 1985.

Since then, advances in medical science have increased the understanding of the dangers of the chemicals at Fort Ord. TCE, for example, is now a known human carcinogen, and epidemiological studies indicate a possible link between TCE and blood cancers like non-Hodgkin lymphoma and multiple myeloma.

TCE "circulates in the body real effectively when you breathe it or drink it," Burke said. "It's related strongly to kidney cancer, the development of kidney cancers and suspected in several other cancers."

Julie Akey spent years collecting names of people who lived at Fort Ord and were later diagnosed with cancers. Her database eventually grew to more than 400 people, nearly 200 of which were listed as having those blood cancers.

Akey spent most of her Fort Ord days in a classroom, studying Arabic. But in the afternoons and evenings, she'd run along the coastline and do military drills. At home, she watered her small vegetable plot with the base's water supply, harvesting the fresh crops to chop into salads.

She filled her water bottle from the tap before heading out each morning, and thought nothing of the showers she took each night. After all, she was among hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the base's

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history who did the same.

She fell ill in Bogota, Colombia, in 2016. She'd left the military after nearly six years as a translator and interrogator to become a State Department foreign service officer, a dream job that gave her the chance to travel the world with her twin sons. Quite suddenly she became fatigued with a persistent ache in her bones. Soon she was in screaming pain.

When the Colombian doctors couldn't find a cause, Akey was sent to the U.S. for what she assumed would be a quick trip. She left plants on the mantle, food in the refrigerator and clothes at the dry cleaners. She never went back.

After weeks at the Cleveland Clinic, she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a rare and aggressive form of cancer that attacks plasma cells, and is most often detected in elderly African American men. The disease is treatable but has no cure.

"I was a zombie," she said. "I cried all the time."

Worried about keeping her government health insurance, she applied to work at a nearby airport as a part-time baggage checker while recovering from a bone marrow transplant.

"You don't ever think you're going to have cancer at 46. Why? Why do I get this crazy cancer that no one's ever heard of? So, I started looking for answers," she said.

Akey meticulously reviewed her assignments in Spain and Haiti, her stints in Guyana, Ecuador, Nigeria, at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and Fort Gordon in Georgia. And Fort Ord — a federal Superfund site.

"I think that that was my answer," she said.

Akey read as much as she could about the base, and searched for others like her. She combed through EPA reports, water records, newspaper clippings and obituaries. She scoured social media, and built a database of sick veterans; it's grown to 491 people to date.

Soon after Akey started a Facebook group in June of 2019, she connected with Tracy Lindquist. Lindquist's husband, Scott, was stationed at Fort Ord for two years in the 1980s. He has three types of rare cancers, including multiple myeloma. He had a stem cell transplant a few years back, and has been on chemotherapy since 2014.

He has health insurance through the VA, but when he applied for disability payments that would have allowed him to stop working, Tracy said, his claims were denied — twice.

Until May, he drove a van for \$11 an hour, shuttling people with developmental disabilities from their group homes to daylong workshops. Sometimes he had to change the oil or do maintenance, and the physical labor was hard on him, Tracy said. Then he started having seizures, and could no longer drive. He tried working three days a week, cleaning the vans and assisting clients, but he couldn't even manage that. Earlier this month, he was approved for Social Security disability payments.

"Scott hardly ever left the base and he drank water like a fish, and that water was contaminated," Tracy said. "I know there are people out there, they've lost legs and arms, and they need to take care of those people who got hurt in action. But this is a disability, too."

Debi Schoenrock, who lived around the corner from Akey's house at Fort Ord, was diagnosed in 2009 with multiple myeloma at 47. Like Akey, she was stunned. She was a military wife and lived on base for three years, from 1990 until 1993. She'd never been sick, and had no family history of cancer. Nobody said anything about toxic substances, she said.

In 1991, the Army surveyed dozens of community members to find out what they knew about ground-water contamination at Fort Ord. Everyone said they were concerned, and no one reported receiving any information from the Army.

Five years later, a federal report assured them that "because the concentration of contamination detected in the past in Fort Ord and Marina drinking water wells was low and the duration was not over a lifetime (70-years), those exposures will not likely result in adverse health effects."

Decades on, such health assessments at Fort Ord and other military bases are outdated and based on old science, said Burke of Johns Hopkins.

"A 1990s health assessment is a weak thing," he said.

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Peter deFur, a biologist who worked as an EPA-funded scientific adviser at the base, agrees. The report "stated that there could not be future health effects, which is not possible to know," he said.

While the federal government has established acceptable standards for the amount of TCE in drinking water, no level of such carcinogens are safe, according to the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974. Complicating matters, TCE vaporizes easily, and when it is inhaled it can be even more dangerous, according to a National Toxicology Program assessment.

William Collins, who is leading Fort Ord's cleanup for the Army, said he's never heard of anyone sickened by pollution at the base. Like the VA, Collins points to the 25-year-old study that found no likely human risks from exposure at Fort Ord. He said anyone can request a new, updated study if they want, which is what happened at Camp Lejeune in 2017.

Federal health officials told AP no one has done so at Fort Ord.

LeVonne Stone and her husband, Donald, were living at Fort Ord when the base shut down. LeVonne had a civilian job there, and Donald had been in the 7th Infantry Division.

During the base conversion, Stone formed the Fort Ord Environmental Justice Network, demanding answers about the toxic materials and the impact on friends and neighbors, who, at the time, made up the only significant Black community on California's central coast. But she said military and state officials were determined to develop the valuable coastal property and, in her mind, didn't want to deal with the pollution.

"We tried telling everybody, the state, the federal, everybody," she said. "There's so many people who have died of cancer. They have not done anything for the community locally. ... They just turned their heads, they looked the other way."

There have been efforts in recent years to force the government to come to grips with the effects of the military's environmental abuses.

Numerous bills have been introduced seeking to compensate veterans sickened by exposure to toxic chemicals during their service, but nothing significant has passed.

Last year President Joe Biden called on the VA to examine the impact of burn pits and other airborne hazards. In November, the White House announced that soldiers exposed to burn pits in a handful of foreign countries, who developed any of three specific ailments — asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis — within 10 years can receive disability benefits.

The Board of Veterans Appeals has ruled repeatedly that there's no presumptive service connection for any disease — stroke, cancer, vision problems, heart disorders and more — due to exposure to toxic chemicals at Fort Ord, according to an AP review of claims.

The VA told AP that it is updating how it determines links between medical conditions and military service, and encourages veterans who believe their ailments may have been caused by their service to file a claim.

Burke, the Johns Hopkins epidemiologist, said doing a study of health effects of living at Fort Ord now is difficult, if not impossible. "We can't reproduce what happened on that base in California," he said. "We need to admit we exposed people to a huge amount of toxic materials."

And it's not just a matter of exposures in the past.

Today Fort Ord is home to a small public university; some students live in former Army housing and spend weekends "Ording," exploring the abandoned, and contaminated, military buildings. More than 1.5 million mountain bikers, hikers and horseback riders a year enjoy some 85 miles of trails in a vast national monument. Brand-new neighborhoods with million-dollar homes are being built across the street from the Superfund landfill cleanup. Local water officials say drinking water is now pulled from other areas and treated before being delivered to customers.

Former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta grew up next to Fort Ord, went through basic training on the base and now runs a nonprofit institute there.

Too often, he said, the military does whatever is necessary at its bases to ready troops for war, "and they don't spend a lot of time worrying about the implications of what will happen once they leave."

Panetta said the military is abandoning communities, leaving huge messes to clean up.

"I think that they have every right to ask the question whether or not whatever physical ailments they

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may have was in part due to the failure to provide proper cleanup," Panetta said. "And in those situations, there is liability. And somebody has to take care of people who have been adversely impacted."

For Akey and other veterans with cancer, it's a matter of accountability. Health insurance, disability benefits and an acknowledgment of wrongdoing, she said, "isn't asking for too much."

"You're not just serving for six years, like me, and then you're out," she said. "If you've been given cancer, that's a life sentence."

On a recent foggy morning, Gandy, the former airplane mechanic, walked past the rusting hangar at the old airfield where he used to work. The single-landing strip and buildings are now the Marina Municipal Airport. But much of the legacy military infrastructure remains, including sheds with old paint cans, an oil separator the size of a school bus and disconnected nozzles and hoses.

Gandy became an outspoken activist along with Levonne Stone, and also founded community groups to maintain pressure on the military to clean up the site.

His group repeatedly sued the Army, but a judge agreed with Defense Department attorneys who said the claims were moot because a rigorous cleanup was underway.

Gandy, now 70, said he talked to the base commanders, every mayor and health and safety officer. Twenty-five years later, Gandy's comments — captured in videos and transcripts of contentious community meetings — seem prescient.

"I told them, 'If we do what we need to do now, nobody will know that we did the right thing. But if we do it wrong, they're going to know, because in about 20 years people are going to start dying,'" he said.

AP obtained a roster of Gandy's co-workers on a single day at the airfield in 1986. There were 46 pilots and welders, mechanics and radio engineers. Today, he was told, almost a third of them are dead, many of cancers and rare diseases, some in their 50s.

He knew three former colleagues had died, not 13. "I feel terrible," he said, tearing up. "It breaks my heart. Those guys were good guys and they deserved better."

Pregnancy-related deaths climbed in pandemic's first year

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

Pregnancy-related deaths for U.S. mothers climbed higher in the pandemic's first year, continuing a decades-long trend that disproportionately affects Black people, according to a government report released Wednesday.

Overall in 2020, there were almost 24 deaths per 100,000 births, or 861 deaths total — numbers that reflect mothers dying during pregnancy, childbirth or the year after. The rate was 20 per 100,000 in 2019.

Among Black people, there were 55 maternal deaths per 100,000 births — almost triple the rate for whites.

The report from the National Center for Health Statistics does not include reasons for the trend and researchers said they have not fully examined how COVID-19, which increases risks for severe illness in pregnancy, might have contributed.

The coronavirus could have had an indirect effect. Many people put off medical care early in the pandemic for fear of catching the virus, and virus surges strained the health care system, which could have an impact on pregnancy-related deaths, said Eugene Declercq, a professor and maternal death researcher at Boston University School of Public Health.

He called the high rates "terrible news" and noted that the U.S. has continually fared worse in maternal mortality than many other developed countries.

Pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 births climbed from 44 in 2019 to 55 in 2020 among Black people and from 13 to 18 among Hispanics. The 2020 rate among whites, 19 per 100,000 births, was essentially unchanged.

Reasons for those disparities are not included in the data. But experts have blamed many factors including differences in rates of underlying health conditions, poor access to quality health care and structural racism.

"This is incredibly sad news and especially scary for Black women," said Dr. Laura Riley, OB-GYN chief at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York.

Dr. Janelle Bolden, an assistant OB-GYN professor at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, said the report is not surprising.

"The pandemic has uncovered the disparities in access to care, healthcare quality and delivery. It has also laid bare the lack of support for public health and social agencies that many people rely on for basic needs," Bolden said. "These disparities and inadequacies lead to poor care and worse outcomes."

The U.S. maternal mortality rate has more than tripled in 35 years. A decade ago, it was 16 deaths per 100,000 births. It has climbed along with rising rates of obesity, heart disease and cesarean sections, which all increase risks for people giving birth.

West hits back with sanctions for Russia's Ukraine actions

By RAF CASERT, AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Responding swiftly to Russian President Vladimir Putin's order sending troops to separatist regions of Ukraine, world leaders hit back with non-military actions Tuesday in hopes of averting a full-blown war in Europe.

Germany made the first big move, taking steps to halt certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia — a massive, lucrative project long sought by Moscow but criticized by the U.S. for increasing Europe's reliance on Russian energy supplies.

And in Washington, U.S. President Joe Biden announced financial sanctions on banks and Russian officials close to Putin and their sons as punishment for what he called "the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine." He said the U.S. would impose "full blocking" on two large Russian financial institutions and "comprehensive sanctions" on Russian debt.

"That means we've cut off Russia's government from Western finance," Biden said. "It can no longer raise money from the West and cannot trade in its new debt on our markets or European markets either."

Biden promised that more sanctions would be coming if Putin proceeds further.

The European Union announced sanctions taking aim at the 351 Duma legislators who voted in favor of recognizing separatist regions in Ukraine, as well as 27 other Russian officials and institutions from the defense and banking world. They also sought to limit Moscow's access to EU capital and financial markets.

"This package of sanctions ... will hurt Russia and it will hurt a lot," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said after chairing a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Paris.

"We will make it as difficult as possible for the Kremlin to pursue its aggressive policies," said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Outside the EU, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson named five Russian banks and three wealthy Russian businessmen whom the U.K. hit with sanctions on Tuesday.

Australia on Wednesday said it would align with the U.S. and Britain by targeting two Russian banks. It also imposed sanctions and travel bans on eight members of Putin's Security Council. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said these are a first batch of measures in response to Russian aggression toward Ukraine.

Japan also announced sanctions, with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida saying Wednesday that his government will ban new issuance and distribution of Russian government bonds in Japan. He said Japan will also ban travel by people linked to the two Ukrainian rebel regions and freeze their assets in Japan, and will ban trade with the two areas.

And if Putin pushes farther into Ukraine, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg insisted, "there will be even stronger sanctions, even a higher price to pay."

The U.S. and other Western nations have pressed daily for diplomatic efforts to head off a dangerous military confrontation. But the failure of that effort was underscored Tuesday as Secretary of State Antony Blinken canceled plans for a Thursday meeting in Geneva with his Russian counterpart, saying Russia's actions showed there was no point.

Western powers have long made clear the fate of Ukraine must not lead to a direct military confrontation with Russia and the potential of a world war, so sanctions were the limited option.

"No lows too low, no lies too blatant, no red lines too red to cross," Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida

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Simonyte said in summing up the political disgust for Putin's actions felt by nations from Europe to North America and the democracies hugging Russia's borders in Asia such as Japan and South Korea.

However, Putin continued to knock the world off-kilter with a strategy that has led to confusion about his plans and possible actions.

Russia said it was sending what it called "peacekeepers" into eastern Ukraine, but EU foreign policy chief Borrell stressed they were "troops" on sovereign Ukrainian territory.

"I wouldn't say that's a fully fledged invasion, but Russian troops are on Ukrainian soil," Borrell said.

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace didn't mince words. "Russia has already invaded Ukraine. They did it in 2014, occupied illegally Crimea and Donbas. This is a further invasion of their sovereign territory," Wallace said.

Whatever the description, the latest developments were enough to push the 27-nation bloc into a mode of high alert, and the EU's foreign ministers stressed the sanctions announced Tuesday were done in close consultation with the United States and other Western allies.

They stopped short of the "massive" package threatened by the EU and Washington for a full military invasion into national territory that Kyiv still controls.

"The way we respond will define us for the generations to come," Simonyte said.

Too much too soon, though, could hurt the international response, said Britain's Johnson. "This the first tranche, the first barrage of what we are prepared to do, and we hold further sanctions at readiness to be deployed," he told British lawmakers.

"This is a first step," agreed French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. "We have more ammunition."

Biden's announcement appeared to hold in reserve some of the broadest and toughest of the penalties considered by the United States. Those include an export ban that would deny Russia U.S. high technology for its industries and military, and more sweeping financial bans that could cripple Russia's ability to do business with the rest of the world.

Still, U.S. Secretary of State Blinken said the sanctions announced are in line with "start high, stay high" approach.

White House deputy national security adviser Daleep Singh added that the initial sanctions send the message that "no Russian financial institution is safe if the invasion proceeds."

"No one should think that it's our goal to max out on sanctions," Singh said. "Sanctions are not an end of themselves. They serve a higher purpose, and that purpose is to deter and prevent."

The two major Russian banks targeted by the U.S. sanctions are Vnesheconombank (VEB) and Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company (PSB). VEB is crucial to Russia's ability to raise funds, and PSB is critical to Russia's defense sector. The two hold more than \$80 billion in assets combined and will be cut off from carrying out transactions in the U.S. and European banking systems.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said after a meeting with Blinken in Washington on Tuesday that U.S and Western sanctions against Russia in escalating waves can work, but he urged allies to be aggressive. Kuleba argued that Putin should not have a "single moment" when he feels sanctions have reached a ceiling.

Among those cited for sanctions are Denis Bortnikov a deputy president of state-owned VTB Bank, and Petr Fradkov, chairman and CEO of PSB.

The VTB official's father, Alexander Bortnikov, director of the Federal Security Service and a permanent member of the Security Council, was also cited in the sanction lists. Fradkov is the son of Mikhail Fradkov, a former Russian prime minister and former director of Russia's foreign intelligence service, who already was under U.S. sanctions.

Sergei Kiriyyenko, Putin's first deputy chief of staff, and his son Vladimir Kiriyyenko, who is the CEO of the parent company of Russia's top social media platform, VKontakte, were also designated.

Hopes are dwindling that a major conflict can be averted. Putin's directive came hours after he recognized the two Ukrainian separatist regions as independent, setting up Russian military support and antagonizing Western leaders who regard his actions as a breach of world order.

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Putin has blamed NATO for the current crisis and called the U.S.-led alliance a threat to Russia.

The global condemnation came amid rising skirmishes in the eastern regions of Ukraine that Western powers believe Russia could use as a pretext for an attack on the Europe-leaning democracy that has defied Moscow's attempts to pull it back into its orbit.

With an estimated 150,000 Russian troops massed on three sides of Ukraine, the U.S. has warned that Moscow has already decided to invade. Still, Biden and Putin tentatively agreed to a possible meeting brokered by French President Emmanuel Macron in a last-ditch effort to avoid war.

National Guard to help DC control traffic for truck convoys

By ASHRAF KHALIL and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon has approved the deployment of 700 unarmed National Guard troops to the nation's capital as it prepares for trucker convoys that are planning protests against pandemic restrictions beginning next week.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin approved the request Tuesday from the District of Columbia government and the U.S. Capitol Police, the Pentagon said in a statement Tuesday night.

The troops would be used to assist with traffic control during demonstrations expected in the city in the coming days, the Pentagon said. Four hundred Guard members from the District of Columbia Guard will be joined by 300 Guard members from other states, according to the statement.

Guard members will not carry firearms or take part in law enforcement or domestic-surveillance activities, the Pentagon said.

Modeled after recent trucker protests in Canada, separate truck convoys have been planned through online forums with names like the People's Convoy and the American Truckers Freedom Fund — all with different starting points, departure dates and routes. Some are scheduled to arrive in time for President Joe Biden's State of the Union address on March 1, though others may arrive afterward.

The convoys follow the recent Canadian truckers' protest which shut down the busiest U.S. Canadian border crossing and besieged the streets of the capital, Ottawa, for weeks to protest government pandemic restrictions. The multiple blockades were broken up by police last week, with more than 100 arrests.

It remains to be seen if any of the U.S. convoys would seek to actively shut down Washington's streets, the way their Canadian counterparts did in Ottawa. Some convoy organizers have spoken of plans to briefly roll through the city, then focus on shutting down the Beltway, which encircles the capital.

A statement from the People's Convoy specifically says the trucks "will NOT be going into DC proper." That convoy is planning to embark Wednesday from southern California and arrive in D.C. around March 5.

The U.S. convoys seek an immediate lifting of what they say are heavy-handed government pandemic restrictions like mask mandates and vaccine requirements. The American Truckers Freedom Fund website says the group is protesting "the unscientific, unconstitutional overreach of the federal government."

Vaccines have proven highly effective at preventing COVID-19 infections, especially serious illness and death, and high-quality masks offer strong protection against spreading or contracting the disease. Public sentiment, especially among conservatives, has been shifting against government mandates as the pandemic heads into its third year.

People's Convoy organizer Mike Landis, in a video testimonial on the group's website, said the current COVID vaccine "is not proven yet" but supported individual choice on whether to take it or not. Landis said the convoy was open to all vehicles and said the primary goal was to pressure Biden to lift the national state of emergency.

"We want this government to bring back the Constitution," Landis said. "We do not want to be under a dictatorship communism-style regime, like where we are right now."

A state of emergency in the U.S. was declared by President Donald Trump in March 2020. Last week, Biden announced his intention to extend it beyond the current March 1 expiration date.

The websites organizing the American trucker convoys directly reference the inspiration of the Canadian movement. A statement on the People's Convoy website pays homage to "our brave and courageous

neighbors to the north — our Canadian brothers and sisters who led the charge.”

Metropolitan Police Department Chief Robert Contee said Friday that his department was closely monitoring the shifting information and would be devoting additional police manhours in a rolling state of heightened alert over the next few weeks. In the meantime, he warned D.C. residents to stay alert for unexpected traffic snarls.

“There will be disruptions to traffic, that kind of thing,” Contee said. “I think we need to be very candid with the public about what some of the expectations, based upon what we’ve seen in Ottawa, that we might see here in the District.”

Contee called the Ottawa standoff “an incredible situation — one that we have not seen here in the District of Columbia.”

Contee and Mayor Muriel Bowser memorably predicted unrest several days before the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol Building. They warned residents to stay indoors and called for additional resources, but the Capitol Police and National Guard were still caught unprepared when crowds of Trump supporters overran the building, resulting in several deaths and numerous injuries.

Lingering memories of that debacle have fueled a heightened sense of anxiety and speculation over the coming convoys. But Bowser said she wasn’t yet warning residents to avoid the Capitol area or the National Mall.

“We’re not at a point to give specific instructions to residents just yet. We will,” Bowser said.

Biden, Putin signal bigger confrontation ahead over Ukraine

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, YURAS KARMANAU, AAMER MADHANI and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press MOSCOW (AP) — The East-West faceoff over Ukraine escalated dramatically Tuesday, with Russian lawmakers authorizing President Vladimir Putin to use military force outside his country and U.S. President Joe Biden and European leaders responding by slapping sanctions on Russian oligarchs and banks.

Both leaders signaled that an even bigger confrontation could lie ahead. Putin has yet to unleash the force of the 150,000 troops massed on three sides of Ukraine, while Biden held back on even tougher sanctions that could cause economic turmoil for Russia but said they would go ahead if there is further aggression.

The measures, accompanied by the repositioning of additional U.S. troops to the Baltic nations on NATO’s eastern flank bordering Russia, came as Russian forces rolled into rebel-held areas in eastern Ukraine after Putin said he was recognizing the independence of the separatist regions in defiance of U.S. and European demands.

Speaking at the White House, Biden said the Kremlin had flagrantly violated international law in what he called the “beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.” He warned of more sanctions if Putin went further.

“We are united in our support of Ukraine,” Biden said. “We are united in our opposition to Russian aggression.” When it comes to Russian claims of a justification or pretext for an invasion, Biden said, “None of us should be fooled. None of us will be fooled. There is no justification.”

Hopes for a diplomatic resolution to the threat of invasion, which U.S. officials have for weeks portrayed as all but inevitable, appeared to evaporate. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken canceled plans for a Thursday meeting in Geneva with his Russian counterpart, saying it would not be productive and that Russia’s actions indicated Moscow was not serious about a peaceful path to resolving the crisis.

Western nations sought to present a united front, with more than two dozen European Union members unanimously agreeing to levy their own initial set of sanctions against Russian officials. Germany also said it was halting the process of certifying the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia — a lucrative deal long sought by Moscow but criticized by the U.S. for increasing Europe’s reliance on Russian energy.

The U.S., meanwhile, moved to cut off Russia’s government from Western finance, sanctioning two of its banks and blocking it from trading in its debt on American and European markets. The administration’s actions hit civilian leaders in Russia’s leadership hierarchy and two Russian banks considered especially close to the Kremlin and Russia’s military, with more than \$80 billion in assets. That includes freezing all of those banks’ assets under U.S. jurisdictions.

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Biden, though, did hold back some of the broadest and toughest of the financial penalties contemplated by the U.S., including sanctions that would reinforce the hold that Germany put on any startup of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline; an export ban that would deny Russia U.S. high tech for its industries and military; and sweeping bans that could cripple Russia's ability to do business with the rest of the world.

Biden said he was moving additional U.S. troops to the Baltics, though he described the deployments as purely "defensive," asserting, "We have no intention of fighting Russia." The U.S. is sending about 800 infantry troops and 40 attack aircraft to NATO's eastern flank from other locations within Europe, according to a senior defense official. In addition, a contingent of F-35 strike fighters and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters will also be relocated.

Earlier Tuesday, members of Russia's upper house, the Federation Council, voted unanimously to allow Putin to use military force outside the country — effectively formalizing a Russian military deployment to the rebel regions, where an eight-year conflict has killed nearly 14,000 people.

Shortly afterward, Putin laid out three conditions to end the crisis that has threatened to plunge Europe back into war, raising the specter of massive casualties, energy shortages across the continent and global economic chaos.

Putin said the crisis could be resolved if Kyiv recognizes Russia's sovereignty over Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula that Moscow annexed after seizing it from Ukraine in 2014, renounces its bid to join NATO and partially demilitarizes. The West has decried the annexation of Crimea as a violation of international law and has previously flatly rejected permanently barring Ukraine from NATO.

Asked whether he has sent any Russian troops into Ukraine and how far they could go, Putin responded: "I haven't said that the troops will go there right now." He added that "it's impossible to forecast a specific pattern of action — it will depend on a concrete situation as it takes shape on the ground."

The EU announced initial sanctions aimed at the 351 Russian lawmakers who voted for recognizing the two separatist regions in Ukraine, as well as 27 other Russian officials and institutions from the defense and banking sectors. They also sought to limit Moscow's access to EU capital and financial markets.

With tensions rising and a broader conflict looking more likely, the White House began referring to the Russian deployments in the region known as the Donbas as an "invasion" after initially hesitating to use the term — a red line that Biden had said would result in severe sanctions.

"We think this is, yes, the beginning of an invasion, Russia's latest invasion into Ukraine," Jon Finer, principal deputy national security adviser, said on CNN. "An invasion is an invasion, and that is what is underway."

The White House announced limited sanctions targeting the rebel regions on Monday evening soon after Putin said he was sending in troops. A senior Biden administration official, who briefed reporters about those sanctions, noted "that Russia has occupied these regions since 2014" and that "Russian troops moving into Donbas would not itself be a new step."

Western leaders have long warned Moscow would look for cover to invade — and just such a pretext appeared to come Monday, when Putin recognized the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk separatist regions. The Kremlin then raised the stakes further by saying that recognition extends even to the large parts of those two regions now held by Ukrainian forces, including the major Azov Sea port of Mariupol. He added, however, that the rebels should eventually negotiate with Ukraine.

Condemnation from around the world was quick. In Washington, lawmakers from both parties in Congress vowed continued U.S. support for Ukraine, even as some pushed for swifter and even more severe sanctions on Russia. Senators had been considering a sanctions package but held off as the White House pursued its strategy.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he would consider breaking diplomatic ties with Russia, and Kyiv recalled its ambassador in Moscow.

If Putin pushes farther into Ukraine, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg insisted the West would move in lock-step. "If Russia decides once again to use force against Ukraine, there will be even stronger sanctions, even a higher price to pay," he said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the U.K. would slap sanctions on five Russian banks and three

wealthy individuals. He warned a full-scale offensive would bring "further powerful sanctions."

Zelenskyy said he was calling up some of the country's military reservists but added there was no need for a full military mobilization.

In an address to the nation, Zelenskyy said his decree applied only to those assigned to the so-called operational reserve, which is typically activated during ongoing hostilities, and covers "a special period of time," without clarifying what that means.

"Today there is no need for a full mobilization. We need to quickly add additional staff to the Ukrainian army and other military formations," he said. The head of the National Security and Defense Council, Oleksii Danilov, said earlier this year that Ukraine can call up up to 2.5 million people.

Archaeologists find 9,000-year-old shrine in Jordan desert

By OMAR AKOUR Associated Press

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — A team of Jordanian and French archaeologists said Tuesday that it had found a roughly 9,000-year-old shrine at a remote Neolithic site in Jordan's eastern desert.

The ritual complex was found in a Neolithic campsite near large structures known as "desert kites," or mass traps that are believed to have been used to corral wild gazelles for slaughter.

Such traps consist of two or more long stone walls converging toward an enclosure and are found scattered across the deserts of the Middle East.

"The site is unique, first because of its preservation state," said Jordanian archaeologist Wael Abu-Azziza, co-director of the project. "It's 9,000 years old and everything was almost intact."

Within the shrine were two carved standing stones bearing anthropomorphic figures, one accompanied by a representation of the "desert kite," as well as an altar, hearth, marine shells and miniature model of the gazelle trap.

The researchers said in a statement that the shrine "sheds an entire new light on the symbolism, artistic expression as well as spiritual culture of these hitherto unknown Neolithic populations."

The proximity of the site to the traps suggests the inhabitants were specialized hunters and that the traps were "the center of their cultural, economic and even symbolic life in this marginal zone," the statement said.

The team included archaeologists from Jordan's Al Hussein Bin Talal University and the French Institute of the Near East. The site was excavated during the most recent digging season in 2021.

Tonga's internet finally restored 5 weeks after big eruption

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Tonga's main internet connection to the rest of the world has finally been restored more than five weeks after a huge volcanic eruption and tsunami severed a crucial undersea cable.

Three people in Tonga were killed by the Jan. 15 tsunami, dozens of homes were destroyed and drinking water was tainted.

The fiber-optic cable is now fully operational again after being reconnected Tuesday, said Samiuela Fonua, the chairperson at Tonga Cable Ltd., the state-owned company that owns the cable.

"It's a huge relief when you know things have come to the end and are working well," Fonua told The Associated Press. "It's one step forward for the country."

Fonua said the crew aboard a repair ship replaced about 90 kilometers (56 miles) of cable that had been damaged by the tsunami. His company didn't have enough spare cable, Fonua added, and needed to borrow some from other companies.

The fix means that Tonga Cable can now focus on repairing a second severed cable that connects some of the outer islands to the main island, Fonua said. That cable runs close to the undersea volcano.

Fonua said that entrepreneur Elon Musk's SpaceX company had also been helping restore connections through its network of low-orbit satellites called Starlink.

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Fonua said his company had been testing the satellite connections this week and they had been working well. He said that now the main cable was restored, he hoped the SpaceX connections could be used for reconnecting people on some of the outer islands.

Officials in neighboring Fiji said SpaceX had established a station there to help restore connections in Tonga.

Tonga has also been grappling with its first outbreak of the coronavirus, which may have been brought in by foreign military crews aboard ships and planes delivering vital aid after the eruption.

The outbreak has grown to more than 250 cases but so far there have been no reported deaths. The country of 105,000 has begun easing some virus restrictions after initially imposing a lockdown.

Tongan health officials say that 90% of people aged 12 and over have had at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Oscars slim down, will hand out 8 awards ahead of broadcast

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — To combat slumping ratings, the Oscars are undergoing a radical slimming down, with eight awards to be presented off-air during next month's telecast of the 94th Academy Awards.

In a letter sent Tuesday to members of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, the group's president, David Rubin, said that the awards for film editing, production design, sound, makeup and hair-styling, music (original score) and the three short film awards (documentary, live-action and animated) will be presented at the ceremony before the March 27 live broadcast begins on ABC.

Now, instead of starting the ceremony and broadcast all at once, the Dolby Theatre ceremony will begin an hour before the telecast does. The presentation and speeches of those early eight winners will be edited and featured during the three-hour live broadcast, which Rubin emphasized would still provide each winner with their "Oscar moment."

Rubin said the changes were necessary for the future health of the Academy Awards.

"When deciding how to produce the Oscars, we recognize it's a live event television show and we must prioritize the television audience to increase viewer engagement and keep the show vital, kinetic, and relevant," wrote Rubin. "This has been an important focus of discussion for quite some time. We do this while also remembering the importance of having our nominees relish a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

The possibility of pulling some of the Oscars' 23 categories from the broadcast has long been a matter of debate. In 2019, the academy initially sought to air four categories — cinematography, editing, makeup and hairstyling and live-action short — in a shortened, taped segment. But after a backlash ensued, the academy reversed itself days before the show.

But ratings have continued to fall. Last year's broadcast, severely altered by COVID-19, plummeted to an all-time low of 9.85 million viewers. (In 2018, 29.6 million watched.) Pressure has mounted not only with the Oscars' longtime broadcast partner, ABC, but within the academy to innovate a cultural institution that has long resisted change.

This year, after several host-less Oscars, producers are turning to the trio of Amy Schumer, Regina Hall and Wanda Sykes to emcee. The show, produced by Will Packer, will also recognize the favorite movie as voted on by fans on Twitter.

In remaking the Oscars to be less of a march through awards, the Academy Awards will become a little more like the Tonys and the Grammys, which have similarly shrunk the number of awards handed out during their telecasts. That hasn't stopped a ratings slide for either, though. Both the Tonys and the Grammys notched new viewership lows in 2021. Some have argued that no tinkering can stem the tide against any network television broadcast in a more diffuse, streaming media world.

Rubin pledged the revamped broadcast will be "tighter and more electric" because of the category shifts but also promised one eyebrow-raising tweak from last year's ceremony won't return: The show will again end with the award for best picture.

Biden wants to cut into China's electric battery dominance

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — President Joe Biden highlighted his efforts to counter China's dominance of the electric battery market on Tuesday as he touted domestic efforts to mine and process lithium and rare metals necessary to create the technology that powers cars, electronics, wind turbines and more.

The Democratic president announced his administration is giving \$35 million to MP Materials, a company that mines rare earth metals near the Nevada border in Southern California. The funding will boost MP's ability to process the materials domestically for use in U.S. manufacturing.

He also touted efforts to extract lithium from geothermal brine found around California's Salton Sea. Biden said U.S. demand for such materials will grow by 400% to 600% over the next several decades.

"We can't build a future that's made in America if we ourselves are dependent on China for the materials that power the products of today and tomorrow," Biden said. "And this is not anti-China, or anti-anything else. It's pro-America."

Biden spoke virtually from Washington with a group of California business and government leaders, including Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Las Vegas-based MP Materials runs the Mountain Pass mine and processing facility that is the only one of its kind in North America. It extracts rare earth metals and produces a concentrate that's exported for use in other countries. Such metals are used to produce magnets necessary for batteries in electric cars and many other items.

The federal money will help the company create a processing facility for "heavy" rare earth metals, and it follows a \$10 million award last year for "light" rare earth metals. The company is spending \$700 million of its own money for improving processing and creating a manufacturing facility in Texas to produce magnets. The company has a deal with General Motors, said Matt Sloustcher, MP Materials' senior vice president for policy and communications.

"My team is committed to bringing this supply chain home," company Chief Executive Officer Jim Litinsky told Biden on the call.

Elsewhere, Biden touted lithium production efforts in California. Newsom has called the state the Saudi Arabia of lithium, a reference to that country's abundance of oil.

Newsom said lithium extraction in California has the potential to boost national security by improving domestic supply chains and accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels in the transportation sector. Biden earlier noted the nation could produce a half-million electric cars per year by 2025.

"If it's as big as it appears to be, this is a game-changer in terms of our efforts to transition to low-carbon green growth and to radically change the way we produce and consume energy," Newsom said.

Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Energy is among several companies working on extracting lithium from geothermal brine found around the Salton Sea, California's largest lake. Berkshire Hathaway has run geothermal plants around the lake for decades, but the lithium has historically been pumped back under ground with the brine after it's used to generate power.

With state and federal investments of about \$20 million, the company is working on projects to demonstrate it can extract the lithium and convert it to battery-grade in a way that's commercially viable, said Alicia Knapp, president of BHE Renewables.

The Newsom administration said it wants to ensure economic benefits from lithium extraction go back to the areas around the Salton Sea, which have been hit by economic hardship and environmental degradation as the lake dries up because of dwindling supplies from the Colorado River.

Silvia Paz, chairwoman of the state-created Lithium Valley Commission, told Biden communities in the region have seen "unfilled promises" before. She called for investments in career development and education for people in the region as well as improvements to basic services and environmental cleanup.

"We want to be at the table and help you understand what it means for us to have a prosperous economy," she said.

EXPLAINER: 'Willfulness' key to 2nd trial over Floyd killing

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

Prosecutors in the federal trial of three former Minneapolis police officers accused in George Floyd's killing needed to convince jurors that the officers "willfully" deprived Floyd of his civil rights.

It was a significant challenge. Jurors are likely to struggle with the concept as they deliberate, much as courts have for a century. Deliberations are expected to begin Wednesday. Here's a look at the charges and how "willfulness" applies:

WHAT CHARGES DO THE OFFICERS FACE?

Tou Thao and J. Alexander Kueng are charged with willfully violating Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure by not intervening to stop Officer Derek Chauvin as he pinned Floyd's neck with his knee. The indictment says they knew what Chauvin was doing and that Floyd was handcuffed, unresisting and eventually unresponsive.

Kueng, Thao and Thomas Lane are all charged with willfully depriving Floyd of his liberty without due process, specifically depriving him of the right to be free from an officer's deliberate indifference to his medical needs. The indictment says the three men saw Floyd needed medical care and willfully failed to aid him.

Kueng knelt on Floyd's back, Lane held his legs and Thao stopped bystanders from intervening. A prosecutor said in closing arguments Tuesday that Lane isn't charged with failure to intervene because he asked whether Floyd should be rolled on his side.

WHAT'S THE DEFINITION OF WILLFULNESS?

Dictionaries commonly define it as purposeful adherence to an action or an obstinance to maintain a course regardless of the rules. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary includes bullheadedness and intransigence as synonyms.

In legal contexts, willfulness is intent to commit a crime plus the prior knowledge an action is illegal.

DO ALL CRIMES REQUIRE THIS ELEMENT?

No. Usually, whether someone knew that something was illegal is irrelevant. But it is germane to some charges, including those Kueng, Lane and Thao face. In such cases, ignorance is a defense.

IS WILLFULNESS A HIGH STANDARD?

Yes. It requires evidence about what officers knew at the time. The high bar is one reason prosecutors often decline to bring charges.

Then-U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara cited the law's challenges in announcing that a white New York City police officer wouldn't face federal civil rights charges for the 2012 fatal shooting of Ramarley Graham. The officer said he fired believing the Black teenager had a gun, although he didn't.

"This is the highest standard of intent imposed by law," Bharara said. "Neither accident, mistake, fear, negligence nor bad judgment is sufficient to establish a federal criminal civil rights violation."

HOW HAVE PROSECUTORS ADDRESSED WILLFULNESS AT THIS TRIAL?

Prosecutors spent a lot of time presenting evidence of the officers' training. They argued that the officers knew they had a duty to render medical care to a suspect in obvious need of it. Lane and Keung, while rookies, were trained about the need to turn handcuffed suspects onto their sides so that they can breathe more easily, prosecutors said.

A former head of training for the Minneapolis Police Department, Katie Blackwell, testified that officers are taught to intervene if a fellow officer uses excessive force.

Prosecutor Manda Sertich explained to jurors in her closing argument that "willfulness" doesn't mean the government must prove the officers acted with ill will toward Floyd or intended to hurt him. She said the fact that the officers knew Floyd was in distress but did nothing after many red flags is proof of willfulness.

On the intervention charge, she said, prosecutors merely had to prove the officers knew the force Chauvin was using was unreasonable and that they had a duty to stop it — but did not.

HOW HAVE DEFENSE LAWYERS ADDRESSED WILLFULNESS?

They've tried to cast doubt on the quality and breadth of the officers' training to undermine the asser-

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tion they knew their actions were unlawful.

During closing arguments, Kueng's attorney, Tom Plunkett, hammered away at that point.

"I'm not trying to say he wasn't trained," Plunkett said. "I'm saying the training was inadequate to help him see, perceive and understand what was happening here."

When questioning Blackwell, Thao attorney Robert Paule said officers "received absolutely zero training on how to use a leg" restraint. Blackwell agreed.

Lane attorney Earl Gray argued that his client was concerned for Floyd and did, per his training, ask if they should turn him on his side, but was rebuffed.

HOW DID WILLFULNESS BECOME KEY TO THE LAW?

It started with a Reconstruction-era federal law meant to protect Black people from violations of their rights. The idea of willfulness was added in 1909, but it took a landmark Supreme Court decision to highlight its importance at trials.

The case, *Screws v. the U.S.*, involved a Georgia sheriff, Claude Screws, and two other officers who fatally beat Robert Hall after accusing him of stealing a tire. They punched the handcuffed Black man and hit him with an iron bar for 30 minutes.

The high court called the killing "shocking and revolting." But it tossed the civil rights convictions and ordered a retrial because of vagaries in the statute and because prosecutors didn't demonstrate that the officers specifically intended to violate Hall's rights by killing him.

However, instead of declaring the law unconstitutional, the court directed trial courts to make willfulness a centerpiece of prosecutions. It described willfulness as acting with specific intent to deprive someone of their rights.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT?

When the lower court retried the Georgia officers under the higher standard, they were acquitted, Paul J. Watford, a U.S. appellate court judge, said in a lecture published in the *Marquette Law Review* in 2014. Screws went on to become a state senator.

Many viewed the new standard as a blow to civil rights protections. But Watford said that, in hindsight, the fact the justices preserved the law at least assured a U.S. government "role in combating ... police brutality."

"Had the statute instead been struck down, the power of the federal government to prosecute such abuses would have been drastically curtailed," he said.

IS THE LAW STILL MURKY?

Reform advocates say it is.

A 2021 report from the New York-based Brennan Center for Justice called the willfulness standard "confusing and onerous." It argued the law should list prohibited acts by police, including chokeholds on people who pose no threat, saying that would make it easier for jurors to assess guilt.

The Senate this year blocked a bill that would have made recklessness, rather than willfulness, the standard.

The bill is named the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act.

EXPLAINER: A look at toughest US sanctions facing Russia

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Tuesday rolled out the first of what the U.S. says could be an ever-fiercer, ever-broader cascade of financial sanctions and penalties over Russia's moves against Ukraine.

Tuesday's first installment of sanctions hit members of Putin's inner circle and their families and two banks that the U.S. considers especially crucial to the Kremlin and Russia's military. Another new U.S. measure limits Russia's power to raise money abroad.

U.S. officials made clear they were holding in possible reserve more devastating measures, in case Russia escalates actions threatening Ukraine's territory and sovereignty. The Biden administration says those

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more sweeping penalties would cripple Russia's ability to do business at home and abroad, and likely bring on a recession there.

Here's a look at some of the tougher possible penalties that U.S. leaders are holding in abeyance — while watching for new Russian steps against Ukraine. The U.S. has yet to fully disclose which of the options it will use.

NORD STREAM 2:

Germany announced Tuesday that it would suspend its certification of the newly built but never operated Russia-to-Germany Nord Stream 2 pipeline. A multibillion-dollar project of Russia's Gazprom energy company and European companies, the pipeline would carry Russia's natural gas to the lucrative markets of Europe. It's been a top target of the Biden administration and Republican and Democratic lawmakers alike, who say the project was a strategic mistake from the start, increasing Putin's political power over Europe by prolonging its dependence on Russia's natural gas.

Reluctant to split with ally Germany, Biden has warded off repeated attempts in Congress to impose financial sanctions on any company or person that does business that involves Nord Stream 2, effectively making it financially impossible for the pipeline to operate. It's unclear if the U.S. might still impose its own sanctions on Nord Stream 2, to amplify the actions that Germany just took.

Biden insisted in recent weeks that Nord Stream had no chance if Russia invaded Ukraine. "Then there will be no longer a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it," Biden said.

SANCTIONS ON INDIVIDUALS, BUSINESSES AND ENTITIES

U.S. officials suggested that the latest sanctions were only a hint of how far it could go in targeting Russian companies and individuals.

Tuesday's actions included hitting civilian leaders in Russia's leadership hierarchy and two Russian banks considered especially close to the Kremlin and Russia's military, with more than \$80 billion in combined assets. That includes freezing all of those banks' assets under U.S. jurisdiction.

But U.S. officials emphasized Washington still could take more of Russia's banks, including its biggest, offline with a push of a button.

Overall, the U.S. and its allies aim to impose sanctions that compel Putin to change his ways, while hoping to minimize the harshest impacts on ordinary Russians and any collateral economic damage on the U.S. and European allies.

Sanctions are imposed on individuals listed on a Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List through the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

Also known as SDNs, the list includes individuals and companies owned, controlled by or acting on behalf of a targeted country. Traditionally, their assets will be blocked and the U.S. is almost completely prohibited from dealing with SDNs. Individuals, groups, companies and even aircraft can be given this designation.

Additionally, sectoral sanctions are an option to damage the economy. Sectoral sanctions apply to specific Russian firms — such as energy, finance, technology and defense — to be included on the Sectoral Sanctions Identifications List. Sectoral sanctions will limit some trade but will permit some transactions.

For historical context, Western sanctions issued when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014 included limits on trade, the blocking of assets under American jurisdiction and limits on access to the U.S. financial system. Those restrictions are maintained to this day on at least 735 individuals, entities and vessels, according to the Office of Foreign Assets Control.

SWIFT

For the U.S. and its European allies, cutting Russia out of the SWIFT financial system, which shuffles money from bank to bank around the globe, would be one of the toughest financial steps they could take, damaging Russia's economy immediately and in the long term. The move could cut Russia off from most international financial transactions, including international profits from oil and gas production, which in all accounts for more than 40% of the country's revenue.

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Allies on both sides of the Atlantic also considered the SWIFT option in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and backed separatist forces in eastern Ukraine. Russia declared then that kicking it out of SWIFT would be equivalent to a declaration of war. The allies — criticized ever after for responding too weakly to Russia's 2014 aggression — shelved the idea.

Russia since then has tried to develop its own financial transfer system, with limited success.

The U.S. has succeeded before in persuading the SWIFT system to kick out a country — Iran, over its nuclear program. But kicking Russia out of SWIFT would also hurt other economies, including those of the U.S. and key ally Germany.

DOLLAR CLEARING

The United States holds one of the most powerful financial weapons to wield against Putin — blocking Russia from access to the U.S. dollar. Dollars still dominate in financial transactions around the world, with trillions of dollars in play daily.

Transactions in U.S. dollars ultimately are cleared through the Federal Reserve or through U.S. financial institutions. Crucially for Putin, that means foreign banks have to be able to access the U.S. financial system to settle dollar transactions.

The ability to block that access gives the United States the ability to inflict financial pain well beyond its borders. Previously, the U.S. has suspended financial institutions from dollar clearing for allegedly violating sanctions against Iran, Sudan and other countries.

Unlike the SWIFT option and the other financial measures, it's one the U.S. could do on its own. Many Russians and Russian companies would be stymied in carrying out even the most routine transactions, like making payroll or buying things, because they would have no access to the U.S. banking system.

EXPORT CONTROLS

U.S. export controls could cut off Russia from the high tech that helps warplanes and passenger jets fly and makes smartphones smart, along with other software and advanced electronic gear that make the modern world run.

That could include adding Russia to the most restrictive group of countries for export control purposes, together with Cuba, Iran, North Korea and Syria, officials said.

That would mean that Russia's ability to obtain integrated circuits, and products containing integrated circuits, would be severely restricted because of the global dominance of U.S. software, technology and equipment. The impact could extend to aircraft avionics, machine tools, smartphones, game consoles, tablets and televisions.

Such sanctions could also target critical Russian industry, including its defense and civil aviation sectors, which would hit Russia's high-tech ambitions, whether in artificial intelligence or quantum computing.

Like some of the other penalties under consideration, U.S. export restrictions would risk motivating businesses to look for alternatives in other countries, including China.

Prosecutor: 3 cops in Floyd killing 'chose to do nothing'

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, TAMMY WEBBER and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Three former Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd's civil rights "chose to do nothing" as a fellow officer squeezed the life out of Floyd, a prosecutor said in her closing argument Tuesday. Defense attorneys countered that the officers were too inexperienced, weren't trained properly and did not willfully violate Floyd's rights.

J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao are charged with depriving Floyd of his right to medical care when Officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for 9 1/2 minutes as the 46-year-old Black man pleaded for air before going silent. Kueng and Thao are also charged with failing to intervene to stop Chauvin during the May 25, 2020, killing captured on a bystander video that triggered protests worldwide and a reexamination of racism and policing.

Prosecutors sought to show during the monthlong trial that the officers violated their training, including

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when they failed to roll Floyd onto his side or give him CPR. Prosecutors have argued that Floyd's condition was so serious that even bystanders without basic medical training could see he needed help. But the defense said the Minneapolis Police Department's training was inadequate and that the officers deferred to Chauvin as the senior officer at the scene.

Thao watched bystanders and traffic as the other officers held down Floyd. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back and Lane held his legs. All three officers testified.

During her closing argument, prosecutor Manda Sertich singled out each former officer.

Thao stared directly at Chauvin and ignored bystanders' pleas to help a man who was dying "right before their eyes," Sertich said.

Kueng casually picked gravel from a police SUV's tire as Chauvin "mocked George Floyd's pleas by saying it took a heck of a lot of oxygen to keep talking," she said.

And Lane voiced concerns that showed he knew Floyd was in distress but "did nothing to give Mr. Floyd the medical aid he knew Mr. Floyd so desperately needed," the prosecutor said.

But attorneys for rookies Lane and Kueng urged jurors to question why their clients were charged at all.

Lane's attorney, Earl Gray, said his client was "very concerned" about Floyd and suggested rolling Floyd on his side so he could breathe, but was rebuffed twice by Chauvin. He noted that Lane tried to help revive Floyd after the ambulance arrived, telling jurors that "any reasonable person should just be disgusted, should be infuriated" that Lane was charged.

Kueng's attorney, Thomas Plunkett, said police weren't adequately trained on the duty to intervene and that Chauvin was in charge. He also said Kueng looked up to Chauvin, his former field training officer, and "relied on this person's experience."

"I'm not trying to say he wasn't trained," Plunkett said. "I'm saying the training was inadequate to help him see, perceive and understand what was happening here."

He told jurors to "apply the law to the facts" and to be "the exact opposite of a mob."

Thao and Chauvin went to the scene to help Kueng and Lane after they responded to a call that Floyd used a counterfeit \$20 bill at a corner store. Floyd struggled with officers as they tried to put him in a police SUV.

Thao's attorney, Robert Paule, said his client thought the officers were doing what they believed was best for Floyd — holding him until paramedics arrived.

The charges include language that the officers "willfully" deprived Floyd of his constitutional rights. That means jurors must find that officers acted "with a bad purpose or improper motive to disobey or disregard the law," Paule said.

He noted that Thao increased the urgency of an ambulance call for Floyd, something he said was clearly "not for a bad purpose." He also said that Thao reasonably believed Floyd was on drugs and needed to be restrained until medical assistance arrived.

On the intervention charge, Sertich said, prosecutors merely had to prove that the officers knew the force Chauvin was using was unreasonable and that they had a duty to stop it but didn't. On the charge that Floyd was denied medical care, the fact that the officers knew Floyd was in distress but did nothing is proof of willfulness, she said.

She pointed to the 2 1/2 "precious minutes" after Floyd became unresponsive and before paramedics got there.

"They chose to do nothing, and their choice resulted in Mr. Floyd's death," she said.

Sertich contrasted the officers' inaction with the desperate cries of bystanders pleading with them to get off Floyd and to check for a pulse: "Even though they had no power, no authority, no obligation, they knew they had to do something."

Those bystanders, Sertich said, gave Thao and Kueng "play-by-play commentary" that should have raised their awareness that Floyd was in trouble — shouting that Floyd could not breathe, that he wasn't responsive and urging the officers to look at him.

Jurors were expected to begin deliberations on Wednesday, after the judge gives them instructions.

At the start of the trial, U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson selected 18 jurors, including six alternates. Fourteen remain: 12 who will deliberate and two alternates. A jury that appears to be all white will consider the case after a juror who appeared to be of Asian descent was dismissed Tuesday morning without explanation. The court did not release demographic information, other than each juror's county of residence.

Chauvin pleaded guilty in the federal case in December, months after he was convicted of state murder and manslaughter charges.

Lane, who is white, Kueng, who is Black, and Thao, who is Hmong American, also face a separate trial in June on state charges alleging that they aided and abetted murder and manslaughter.

The trial was wrapping up just as another major civil rights trial in Georgia resulted in the conviction of three white men on hate crimes charges in the death of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man who was chased and shot in February 2020.

US women's team players see settlement as turning point

By ANNE M. PETERSON and RONALD BLUM AP Sports Writers

U.S. women's national team players who spent years battling for pay equity lauded as historic an agreement by U.S. Soccer to pay \$24 million to settle a discrimination dispute with the team, as well as a commitment to equalize pay and bonuses to match the men's team.

"I think we're going to look back on this moment and just think, 'Wow, what an incredible turning point in the history of U.S. Soccer that changed the game and changed the world, really, forever,'" star midfielder Megan Rapinoe said.

The two sides announced a deal early Tuesday that will have players split \$22 million, about one-third of what they had sought in damages. U.S. Soccer also agreed to establish a fund with \$2 million to benefit the players in their post-soccer careers and charitable efforts aimed at growing the sport for women.

The proposal went further, with American soccer's governing body pledging to equalize pay — including World Cup bonuses. It effectively brings to a close the gender discrimination lawsuit players filed in 2019.

But there's one more hurdle: Collective bargaining agreement with the players' unions. Negotiations with the women continue following the Dec. 31 expiration of the last CBA, with a deadline set for March 31.

The settlement was a victory for the women, whose fans chanted "Equal Pay!" when they won their second straight World Cup title in France in 2019.

"I just think it's so difficult sometimes to talk about and to articulate the kind of discrimination, abuse, inequity and disrespect that so many women feel so often in their job," Rapinoe said. "And I think we were able to start to put a voice to that, put a face to it, put talking points to it and put a sort of movement behind it."

The agreement was also a success for federation President Cindy Parlow Cone, a former player who became head of the federation in March 2020.

"Now we can start to work with the players in growing this game because not only are they the best players in the world, they're the best ambassadors for our sport," Cone said. "I'm so glad we got this done. And I'm so looking forward to just working together and turning the page."

Cone replaced Carlos Cordeiro, who quit after the federation made a legal filing in the case that claimed women had less physical ability and responsibility than male counterparts. Cordeiro is currently seeking to regain the job from Cone when the USSF National Council meets on March 5 to vote on a four-year term.

The legal battle began when five American stars, including Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn and Alex Morgan, filed a complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in April 2016. The players sued three years later, seeking damages under the federal Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

The sides settled the working conditions portion in December 2020, dealing with issues such as charter flights, accommodations and playing surfaces. They were scheduled to argue on March 7 before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in an attempt to reinstate the equal pay portion thrown out by a U.S. District Court.

The players and the federation asked the appeals court on Tuesday morning to take the case off its

calendar. The \$22 million will be split into individual amounts proposed by the players, subject to the district court's approval.

"Every generation has taken on that fight to close the gap and every generation has left this program better for that fight, and we as the current players are thrilled that this fight has led to the closing of that gap," Sauerbrunn said. "There are a lot of on-field accomplishments like World Cups and Olympics, league championships, but this will really stand out as one of the most meaningful moments."

Cone said the federation's method of equalizing World Cup bonuses has yet to be determined. The federation has until now based bonuses on payments from FIFA, which earmarked \$400 million for the 2018 men's tournament, including \$38 million to champion France, and \$30 million for the 2019 women's tournament, including \$4 million to the champion U.S.

"Until FIFA equalizes it themselves, we need both the men's PA and the women's PA to come together with US Soccer to find a solution to equalize it," Cone said.

The men have been playing under the terms of a CBA that expired in December 2018. The women's union was at the bargaining table on Tuesday afternoon.

The U.S. women have won four World Cups since the program's start in 1985, while the men haven't reached a semifinal since 1930.

"It's really been incredible to stand alongside all these women on the national team and feel like we are making a difference, not only for ourselves, but for the next generation, for the women we stand alongside across sport and workforces," Morgan said. "I feel like it's just been exponentially bigger than I could have ever anticipated, in a good way."

COVID-19 shots unlikely to prompt rare inflammation in kids

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

COVID-19 vaccines are unlikely to trigger a rare inflammatory condition linked to coronavirus infection in children, according to an analysis of U.S. government data published Tuesday.

The condition, formally known as multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, involves fever plus symptoms affecting at least two organs and often includes stomach pain, skin rash or bloodshot eyes. It's a rare complication in kids who have had COVID-19, and very rarely affects adults. The condition often leads to hospitalization, but most patients recover.

First reported in the United Kingdom in early 2020, it is sometimes mistaken for Kawasaki disease, which can cause swelling and heart problems. Since February 2020, more than 6,800 cases have been reported in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

As part of COVID-19 vaccine safety monitoring, the CDC and U.S. Food and Drug Administration added the condition to a list of several potential adverse events of special interest. A few cases reported in people with no detectable evidence of coronavirus infection prompted researchers at the CDC and elsewhere to undertake the new analysis, which was published Tuesday in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*.

The possibility that the vaccines could somehow prompt the condition is only theoretical and the analysis found no evidence that it did, said co-author Dr. Buddy Creech, a Vanderbilt University pediatric infectious disease specialist who is leading a study of Moderna shots in children.

"We don't know what the exact contribution of the vaccine to these illnesses is," Creech said. "Vaccine alone in absence of a preceding infection appears not to be a substantial trigger."

The analysis involved surveillance data for the first nine months of COVID-19 vaccination in the U.S., from December 2020 through August 2021. During that time, the FDA authorized Pfizer's COVID-19 shots for ages 16 and up; expanded that in May to ages 12 through 15; and authorized Moderna and Johnson & Johnson shots for ages 18 and up.

More than 21 million people aged 12 to 20 received at least one vaccine dose during that time. Twenty-one of them developed the inflammatory condition afterward. All had received Pfizer shots, the analysis found. Fifteen of the 21 had laboratory evidence of a previous COVID-19 infection that could have triggered the condition.

The remaining six had no evidence of a previous infection, but the researchers said they could not conclude definitively that they'd never had COVID-19 or some other infection that could have led to the inflammatory condition. Kids with COVID-19 often have no symptoms and many never get tested.

The results suggest that the inflammatory condition may occur after vaccination in 1 in 1 million children who have had COVID-19, and in 1 in 3 million who have no detectable evidence of previous COVID-19 infection.

Most kids who had COVID-19 don't develop the post-infection illness, but it is estimated to happen at a significantly higher rate than both of those post-vaccination figures. In April to June 2020, the rate was 200 cases per million in unvaccinated infected people aged 12-20 in the U.S.

"Their findings overall are quite reassuring," Dr. Mary Beth Son of Boston Children's Hospital wrote in a commentary accompanying the study.

Dr. Adam Ratner, a pediatrician-scientist at New York University Langone Health, said the results show that chances are "super rare" for the shots to prompt an immune response that could lead to the inflammatory condition. By contrast, there's strong evidence that vaccination protects kids from getting COVID-19 as well as the condition, Ratner said.

EXPLAINER: Deciding when to use 'invasion' label in Ukraine

By ROBERT BURNS and LORNE COOK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized troops to cross Ukraine's border into regions controlled by Russian-backed separatists, the White House initially stopped short of calling it an invasion. That changed on Tuesday, and key allies in Europe joined in saying Putin had crossed a red line.

"This is the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine," President Joe Biden said.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was equally explicit.

"We saw last night that further Russian troops moved into the Donbas into parts of Donetsk and Luhansk," he said Tuesday, referring to the two areas of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region controlled by Russian-backed separatists. "What we see now is that a country that is already invaded is suffering further invasion."

But not all invasions are viewed as equal.

Asked whether Putin's decision to send in what he called "peacekeepers" amounts to an invasion, the European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said, "I wouldn't say that's a fully-fledged invasion, but Russian troops are on Ukrainian soil."

Use of the term "invasion" is important in this case because it sets the stage for what Biden said could become multiple waves of economic sanctions, in coordination with NATO allies and other countries who view Putin's aggression as a violation of international law and a threat to order in Europe.

Sanctions are the West's main tool for pushing back because they have ruled out taking on Russia militarily.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE GROUND IN UKRAINE?

The picture is ominous and not entirely clear.

Putin on Monday said Russia recognized the rebel regions' independence "in borders that existed when they proclaimed" their independence in 2014. That constitutes territory held by the Ukrainian army. Putin also issued a decree authorizing the use of what he termed peacekeepers in that region, although Russian officials had not confirmed that troops had crossed the border in response to the decree.

Separately, Russian lawmakers granted Putin permission to use the military abroad, raising fears of a major invasion, including an operation aimed at toppling the Kyiv government.

IS THIS AN INVASION?

It's difficult to see this as anything other than an invasion, although people can argue over terminology. The disagreements would fade if, as many expect, Putin launches a full-scale offensive to topple Kyiv.

Biden said it defies logic to think Putin has taken such extensive military preparations, including putting more than 150,000 troops on the border and moving blood supplies to those areas, for reasons other than invading his neighbor.

"You don't need blood unless you plan on starting a war," Biden said.

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Mary Ellen O'Connell, a Notre Dame law professor and an expert on international law and the use of force, says any crossing of a national border with military forces is unlawful, even if it's called something other than an invasion.

"A lawful response is gauged by the scale and effects of the incursion," she said. "Using force to take control of an entire country, displacing a government and military forces loyal to it is the most extreme form of violation."

WHAT WAS WASHINGTON'S INITIAL RESPONSE?

After Putin outlined his rationale Monday for recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk areas, a White House official tip-toed around the question of whether Putin's action constituted a military invasion.

The official said Russian troops had been operating in the rebel-held areas for eight years without admitting it.

"Now Russia looks like its going to be operating openly in that region, and we are going to be responding accordingly," the official said.

WHAT WILL WASHINGTON DO NEXT?

After stating publicly that Russia has again invaded Ukraine, the question is how far Biden will go in responding. He has made clear that he would not send U.S. troops into Ukraine, but on Tuesday said he has ordered a shifting of Europe-based U.S. troops to three NATO members who feel most vulnerable to potential Russian attack: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Those three Baltic states were annexed by Moscow following World War II and regained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Biden announced heavy financial sanctions against Russian banks and oligarchs and said more would be imposed if Putin extends his invasion.

Global reaction against Putin's moves in Ukraine has been swift, with little argument about the legality.

"Moscow has now moved from covert attempts to destabilize Ukraine to overt military action," Stoltenberg told reporters Tuesday. "This is a serious escalation by Russia, and a flagrant violation of international law."

WILL RUSSIAN TROOPS STOP AT INVADING UKRAINE?

Putin has given no indication he intends to start a war on NATO territory, but the allied nations still worry. That is why the Biden administration sent 4,700 additional troops to Poland this month and set up a more robust military headquarters staff in Germany, while also shifting 1,000 troops from Germany to Romania.

Stoltenberg said that NATO allies have more than 100 jet planes on high alert and more than 120 warships ready at sea from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean Sea.

"Every indication is that Russia continues to plan for a full-scale attack on Ukraine," Stoltenberg said.

Standoff ends at Amsterdam Apple Store, hostage safe

By PETER DEJONG Associated Press

AMSTERDAM (AP) — An hours-long hostage standoff at the Apple Store in Amsterdam ended late Tuesday with police in a car driving into the hostage taker as he ran from the store. His hostage was safe, police said.

"We can confirm that the hostage taker is out of the Apple Store," police said in a tweet. "He is lying on the street and a robot is checking him for explosives. Armed police officers have him under control from a distance. The hostage is safe."

Police then said that the man did not have explosives and that medical staff were attending to him. There was no word on his condition.

The motive for the incident was not immediately clear. Local broadcaster AT5 suggested the standoff was the result of an attempted armed robbery. AT5 said witnesses reported hearing shots fired.

Dozens of police, including heavily armed specialist arrest teams, massed around the store, cleared and sealed off the nearby Leidseplein square and urged people living there or in shops or cafes nearby to remain indoors. The square ringed by bars and restaurants is close to one of the Dutch capital's main shopping streets.

Police said dozens of people managed to leave the building during the standoff but declined to give more

details about the situation in the popular store.

As police lines were set up to keep people away from the store, a helicopter could be heard hovering overhead. The police asked people not to publish images or livestream the hostage situation "for the safety of the people involved and our deployment."

Earlier, video posted on social media appeared to show an armed person in the store, apparently holding somebody else. It was not clear how many people were in the store.

A spokesman for Apple in the Netherlands did not respond to requests seeking comment.

Biden's full plate: Ukraine, inflation, low public approval

JOSH BOAK Associated Press

On the same day that President Joe Biden called out Russia and issued harsh sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine, his only other public appearance was an event focused on the need to unkink the supply chain for minerals used in batteries, electronics and other technologies.

The back-to-back events on Tuesday highlighted the competing claims for Biden's attention entering the spring of a midterm election year: the prospect of a calamitous European land war that will only add to inflation and other problems at home while also managing a vexing set of domestic challenges and must-do tasks.

For Biden, the convergence of such urgent foreign and domestic issues puts to a test the often cavalier assertions of previous administrations that a president has to be able to "walk and chew gum" at the same time.

Biden acknowledged the troubling overlap in remarks Tuesday as oil and gasoline prices have climbed on the grim headlines from Ukraine. He announced sanctions against Russian financial institutions, oligarchs and banks as well as Russia's sovereign debt, effectively cutting the country off from U.S. and European financial systems.

Yet Biden also said he wants to limit the "pain" to Americans because sanctions aimed at pressuring Russian President Vladimir Putin could also limit Russia's exports of oil and natural gas and cause global energy prices to soar.

"I want to take robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted at a Russian economy, not ours," the president said at the White House. "We're closely monitoring energy supplies for any disruption. We're executing a planned coordination with major oil producing consumers and producers toward a collective investment to secure stability and global energy supplies."

His White House this week is also vetting nominees for a coming opening on the Supreme Court. Add that 40-year high inflation, a stalled domestic agenda, a slew of executive orders to enforce, infrastructure dollars to spend and sagging approval ratings that could make implementation all the more difficult. And the impact of the COVID pandemic, while seeming to fade, is still being felt.

Biden used the minerals event to stress the importance of investing in U.S. production and avoiding reliance on China. California Gov. Gavin Newsom greeted Biden at the minerals event Tuesday afternoon by expressing surprise that the virtual event hadn't been rescheduled because of Ukraine.

"I had an over-under that you were going to do this today," Newsom joked. "Thank you for not canceling on us."

The start of a Russia invasion into Ukraine has spillover effects for Biden's previous plans. It takes time to barnstorm the country and rally support for Democrats as he said he would do to try to maintain control of Congress in the midterm elections and it gets tougher to defuse inflation as the U.S. and its European allies escalate sanctions against Russia.

The invasion also puts Biden in a holding pattern, as he plans to amplify sanctions only to counter any additional aggression from Putin.

"The fact that Putin is in control of when and how and to what degree he invades, really places Biden in a very difficult position," said Cal Jillson, a political scientist at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. "Putin looks like he is completely in charge."

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All of this takes away from the problem that Americans had previously said Biden must prioritize: inflation. A December poll from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 68% of Americans deemed the economy to be a top priority, while 24% said the cost of living should be a top priority.

But just how the unfolding crisis in Ukraine plays out and what it means for Biden's agenda is difficult to divine. The higher energy and commodity prices could be short-lived, or they could reflect the beginning of a prolonged disruption as the sanctions to exclude Russia from the global economy wage a toll on oil, natural gas, aluminum and nickel supplies.

"We're chasing a moving target," said William Galston, a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution.

Biden could easily blame higher prices on Putin. But voters might be skeptical because the inflationary run-up predates the current tensions in Europe. U.S. gas prices have increased about 6% over the past month, but they're up about 33% from a year ago, according to AAA.

"We have had close to a year of soaring inflation rates and higher gas prices that cannot be attributed to foreign policy," Galston said. "And in these in these circumstances, it's not clear to me that an all out effort to shift the inflation focus to the Russian actions would be credible."

Republican lawmakers have argued that Biden's spending plans have been the real trigger for inflation. Yet they're also encouraging Biden to immediately deploy sanctions against Russia in hopes of deterring Putin, a move that could drive prices even higher.

"This should begin, but not end, with devastating sanctions against the Kremlin and its enablers," Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said in a statement. "The president should waste no time in using his extensive existing authorities to impose these costs."

Beyond oil, the markets for natural gas, corn, wheat, aluminum and nickel — all commodities at risk from the invasion — have turned volatile and hypersensitive to each move by the U.S., Russia, Ukraine and NATO allies.

The higher prices could push U.S. inflation above its current annual rate of 7.5% at a time when Biden has struggled to get sufficient support for an expanded child tax credit, child care subsidies, universal pre-kindergarten and other programs that could free up cash in family budgets. West Virginia Sen. Manchin, the key Democratic vote in the split Senate, is wary of additional spending.

Yet families will likely need some form of relief and that creates even greater urgency for Biden's domestic agenda, said Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at the consultancy RSM, who estimates that the economic shock from war in Ukraine could send inflation above 10%.

Brusuelas said that the best fix might be renewing the recently expired increase to the child tax credit. The credit would get additional funds to families on a monthly basis to insulate them against price increases, an immediate source of funds that would contrast to proposed changes in federal regulation and new infrastructure spending to reduce price pressures in the long term.

"We have a readymade program that could be quickly revived to provide direct cash to stressed households and cushion the adjustment caused by Vladimir Putin's external adventures," Brusuelas said. "It is the American middle and working classes that will bear the burden of adjustment caused by another European war."

Jury seated in trial related to Breonna Taylor's shooting

By DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — A jury has been selected in the trial of a former Kentucky police officer involved in the deadly narcotics raid that left Breonna Taylor dead.

Former Louisville officer Brett Hankison's trial will begin Wednesday morning when lawyers give opening statements. Hankison is charged with wanton endangerment for shooting into the apartment of one of Taylor's neighbors on the night of the March 2020 raid. He was fired a few months later. Hankison, whose shots did not hit Taylor, is the only officer charged in the botched raid that ended with Taylor's death.

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Attorneys spent Tuesday selecting the final 15 jurors from a pool of 48. Three of the 15 will be alternate jurors.

On Tuesday morning, half of the 48 remaining prospective jurors were questioned by lawyers in the courtroom as a group. The second half went through a similar question session in the afternoon. Eight of the prospective jurors from the afternoon group — seven men and one woman — were selected for jury service. The other seven remaining jurors selected were from the morning session, so they will receive a phone call notifying them they have been selected.

Court officials initially gathered an expanded pool of 250 potential jurors, to account for the widespread publicity in Taylor's death, which sparked months of marches and protests in downtown Louisville in the summer of 2020. From that large pool, the remaining 48 were selected after four days of individual questioning earlier this month.

Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman who worked as an emergency medical technician, was shot multiple times during a botched narcotics raid on March 13, 2020. Louisville officers kicked in her door using a narcotics warrant and drew fire from Taylor's boyfriend, who thought an intruder was breaking in. Two officers at the door returned fire, killing Taylor.

One of the officers who shot Taylor, former Louisville police detective Jonathan Mattingly, has invoked his Fifth Amendment privilege and will not testify at the trial due to a pending federal investigation. Jurors will instead hear parts of a video deposition Mattingly gave in a pending civil lawsuit.

The trial is expected to last about two weeks.

A 10% drop for stocks is scary, but it's not that rare

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The worries rocking Wall Street about interest rates, inflation and now Ukraine have sent the S&P 500 index — the most widely followed measure of the U.S. stock market — tumbling more than 10% from its record.

It's a big enough fall that Wall Street has a name for it: a "correction." Such drops occur regularly, and market pros tend to see them as potentially healthy setbacks that can clear out unjustified market exuberance or excessive risk-taking.

But they're frightening in the moment, particularly for every new generation of investors that gets into the market at a time when it seems like stocks only go up. The S&P 500 more than doubled between late March 2020 and early January, when it set its last all-time high.

Taking a little froth out of the market is one thing. The larger fear, which always accompanies a correction, is that a correction could augur a "bear market," which is what Wall Street calls a drop of at least 20%.

Here's a look at what history shows about past corrections, and what market watchers are expecting going forward.

WHAT'S BEHIND THIS CORRECTION?

Much of this drop is the result of fears about an abrupt shift to higher interest rates. After years of keeping interest rates super low, the Federal Reserve is set to start raising short-term rates to help corral the high inflation that's blazing across the global economy.

Higher rates can keep a lid on prices by slowing the economy, but they can cause a recession if they get too high. They also often serve to suck money out of riskier areas of the market, including stocks. When interest rates are higher and safe investments like bonds are paying more in interest, investors are less willing to pay high prices for more speculative plays.

The Fed has been buying trillions of dollars' worth of bonds through the pandemic, in order to keep longer-term rates low, an action Wall Street terms "printing money." Investors expect the Fed to throw this process into reverse, which would act much like additional rate increases.

More recently, worries about tensions with Russia over Ukraine have accelerated the market's tumble. Beyond the human toll, a conflict in the region could send prices for oil and other energy commodities soaring and further stoke inflation.

HOW OFTEN DO CORRECTIONS OCCUR?

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Every couple years, on average. Even during the historic, nearly 11-year-long bull run for U.S. stocks from March 2009 to February 2020, the S&P 500 stumbled to five corrections, according to CFRA. Worries about everything from interest rates to trade wars to a European debt crisis caused the pullbacks.

In 2020, a correction did graduate to a bear market after the global economy suddenly shut down because of the pandemic. That sent the S&P 500 on a breathtaking drop of nearly 34% in about a month.

This is the 24th time in the last 50 years that the S&P 500 has fallen at least 10%, including both bear markets and milder corrections.

HOW QUICKLY DO THEY USUALLY HAPPEN?

Not quite this fast. Looking only at corrections since World War II that didn't end up becoming bear markets, it took an average of 76 days for the S&P 500 to lose 10% from a recent high, according to CFRA. This time, it took 50 days.

Of course, things could be worse. In February 2020, the S&P 500 tumbled more than 10% from a record in just over a week. That ended up being the start of the quickest bear market on record, as well as the shortest-lasting.

WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS AFTER A DROP LIKE THIS?

Looking only at corrections since 1946 that managed to right themselves before turning into a bear market, the S&P 500 has taken an average of 135 days to hit bottom and lost an average of 14% along the way, according to CFRA. The index has taken an average of 116 days to recoup its losses.

For declines that become bear markets, the damage is much worse. Going back to 1929, the average bear market has taken an average of nearly 20 months to hit bottom and caused a loss of roughly 39% for the S&P 500, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

HOW BAD CAN A BEAR MARKET BE?

On paper, an investor can lose most of their money. From late 1929 into the middle of 1932, the stock market fell a little more than 86%, for example.

A bear market can also feel interminable: One lasted more than five years, from 1937 into 1942, where U.S. stocks lost 60%, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

In Japan, the Nikkei 225 index is still trying to get back to the peak it set at the end of 1989. It remains roughly 30% below that level.

The Japanese example is an outlier, though. In almost every case, investors would have made back all their losses from a bear market for U.S. stocks if they simply held on and didn't sell. That includes the 2000 dot-com bust, the 2008 financial crisis and the 2020 coronavirus collapse.

HAVE RISING-RATE WORRIES CAUSED OTHER CORRECTIONS?

If the Fed does raise short-term rates next month, which investors see as a certainty, it would be the first such increase since 2018.

At that time, the S&P 500 sank nearly 20% amid worries the Fed was being too aggressive in raising rates and shrinking its balance sheet. The index avoided a full-blown bear market only after the Fed took a hard shift to say that it would be "patient" in its policies. It didn't raise rates again.

SHOULD WE EXPECT THE SAME THING TO HAPPEN AGAIN?

No one knows. Some investors on Wall Street say they expect the Fed to again loosen up before the stock market falls too sharply. But the Fed is facing much higher inflation this time around than in late 2018 and early 2019. The consumer price index leaped 7.5% in January from a year earlier, its hottest rate in four decades.

Arbery killers convicted of federal hate crimes in his death

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — The three white men convicted of murder in Ahmaud Arbery's shooting were found guilty of federal hate crimes Tuesday in a verdict that affirmed what family members and civil rights activists said all along: that he was chased down and killed because he was Black.

The verdict — handed down one day before the second anniversary of Arbery's death on Feb. 23, 2020

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— was symbolic, coming just months after all three defendants were convicted of murder in a Georgia state court and sentenced to life in prison.

But family and community members viewed the hate crimes trial as an important statement. The case also became part of a larger national reckoning on racial injustice after graphic video of Arbery's killing leaked online.

"Ahmaud will continue to rest in peace. But he will now begin to rest in power," Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, told reporters outside the courthouse.

Arbery's father, Marcus Arbery Sr., bowed his head and shook his fists in quiet celebration as the guilty verdicts were read in the courtroom. He then pressed his hands together in front of his face as if saying a silent prayer.

Arbery Sr. and Cooper-Jones emerged from the courthouse holding hands with their attorney Ben Crump, then raised their clasped hands to cheers from supporters.

But Cooper-Jones did not describe the outcome as a victory.

"We as a family will never get victory because Ahmaud is gone forever," she said.

Arbery Sr. noted that his son used to call every day, even if just to tell his family that he loved them.

"Ahmaud was a kid you can't replace, because of the heart he had," he said. "I'm struggling with that every day," he said. "It hurts me every day."

Defendants Greg and Travis McMichael sat stoically at the defense table as the guilty verdicts were read. When called one-at-a-time before the judge to discuss next steps in their cases, the father and son answered with hushed voices.

The McMichaels and their neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, were also found guilty of attempted kidnapping, and the McMichaels were also convicted of the use of a firearm in the commission of a violent crime.

The trial has been taking place simultaneously with that of three former Minneapolis police officers who have been charged with violating the civil rights of George Floyd. Floyd, a Black man, died on May 25, 2020, when then-officer Derek Chauvin pinned him to the ground and pressed a knee to his neck for what authorities say was 9 1/2 minutes. Attorneys began delivering their closing arguments in that case on Tuesday.

Weeks prior to the hate crimes trial in the Arbery killing, the McMichaels had both agreed to enter guilty pleas to the hate crimes in exchange for being able to serve their sentences in federal, rather than state prison. Judge Lisa Godbey Wood rejected the deal, however, saying it would tie her hands at sentencing, and after Arbery's family vehemently opposed it.

"What we got today, we wouldn't have gotten if it wasn't for the fight by the family for Ahmaud," Cooper-Jones said Tuesday, reiterating her anger at Justice Department prosecutors, who she said "chose to ignore the family's cry."

The facts of the case were not disputed during the hate crimes trial. The McMichaels grabbed guns and jumped in a pickup truck to pursue Arbery after seeing him running in their neighborhood outside the Georgia port city of Brunswick. Bryan joined the pursuit in his own pickup and recorded the cellphone video that later leaked online.

To back the hate crime charges, prosecutors showed roughly two dozen text messages and social media posts in which Travis McMichael and Bryan used racist slurs and made derogatory comments about Black people. The FBI wasn't able to access Greg McMichael's phone because it was encrypted.

In 2018, Travis McMichael commented on a Facebook video of a Black man playing a prank on a white person: "I'd kill that f---ing n---r."

A woman who served under Travis McMichael in the U.S. Coast Guard a decade ago said he called her "n---r lover," after learning she'd dated a Black man. Another woman testified Greg McMichael had ranted angrily in 2015 when she remarked on the death of civil rights activist Julian Bond, saying, "All those Blacks are nothing but trouble."

Crump remarked after the verdict that "for many of us, there was never any doubt that Greg McMichael, Travis McMichael, and William Bryan targeted Ahmaud because of his skin color."

"But because of indisputable video evidence, disgusting messages sent by the defendants, and witness

testimony, their hate was revealed to the world and the jury," he said. "We hope and demand that the severity of their crimes are reflected in the sentencing, as well."

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland said the verdict "makes clear that the Justice Department will continue to use every resource at its disposal to confront unlawful acts of hate and to hold accountable those who perpetrate them."

Garland added that Arbery's family and his friends "should be preparing to celebrate his 28th birthday, later this spring, not mourning the second anniversary of his death tomorrow."

"Ahmaud Arbery should be alive today," he said.

Defense attorneys contended the McMichaels and Bryan didn't chase and kill Arbery because of his race but acted on the earnest, though erroneous, suspicion that Arbery had committed crimes in their neighborhood.

The attorneys for the McMichaels, Amy Lee Copeland and A.J. Balbo, declined to comment on the verdict. Bryan's attorney, Pete Theodocion, did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

The jury of eight white people, three Black people and one Hispanic person received the case Monday. The jurors adjourned for the night after about three hours of deliberations, and then deliberated for about an hour Tuesday morning before announcing they had reached a verdict.

US House candidate sorry for intoxication during sleepover

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A U.S. House candidate in Oklahoma has apologized after reports that she became intoxicated at a Valentine's Day weekend sleepover for middle-school-aged girls, berated several of the children and vomited in a hamper.

Democrat Abby Broyles, 32, told television station KFOR that she had an adverse reaction after drinking wine and taking sleep medication given to her by a friend.

"Instead of helping me sleep, I hallucinated," Broyles told the station in a televised interview. "And I don't remember anything until I woke up or came to, and I was throwing up in a hamper."

She said she was invited to the slumber party by a good friend from law school who was the mother of one of the girls.

Parents and at least one of the girls who were at the sleepover told the online news outlet NonDoc, which first reported the story, that Broyles used profanity and berated several of the 12- and 13-year-old girls at the party, commenting on one girl's acne and another's Hispanic ethnicity.

The parent of one of the girls, Sarah Matthews, tweeted last week that she was disappointed that Broyles had not reached out to the girls to apologize.

"For someone who pontificates to be undyingly pro woman, I am disgusted by your behavior and find it appalling you couldn't understand why their parents are angry," Matthews wrote.

Broyles, who initially denied to NonDoc that she had attended the party, apologized last week during her interview with KFOR, a news channel for which she used to work as a journalist.

"I want to say sorry from the bottom of my heart, I apologize for any hurt or damage or trauma that my behavior, when I didn't know what I was doing, caused," Broyles said. "I'm deeply sorry."

In a statement provided to The Associated Press on Tuesday, Broyles said she doesn't believe she would have said the things she's accused of saying and that she has no plans to drop out of the race.

"The things I'm accused to have said are not who I am. They're not a reflection of my beliefs at all," Broyles said. "It's clear this media smear campaign is politically backed, and I won't stop fighting for Oklahomans."

Broyles, an attorney who was the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate from Oklahoma in 2020, announced last year she planned to run against Republican U.S. Rep. Stephanie Bice for the 5th Congressional District that includes Oklahoma City.

WHO: New COVID cases fall for the 3rd week, deaths also drop

GENEVA (AP) — The number of new coronavirus cases around the world fell 21% in the last week,

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marking the third consecutive week that COVID-19 cases have dropped, the World Health Organization said Tuesday.

In the U.N. health agency's weekly pandemic report, WHO said there were more than 12 million new coronavirus infections last week. The number of new COVID-19 deaths fell 8% to about 67,000 worldwide, the first time that weekly deaths have fallen since early January.

The Western Pacific was the only region that saw an increase in COVID-19 cases, with a 29% jump, while the number of infections elsewhere dropped significantly. The number of new deaths also rose in the Western Pacific and Africa while falling everywhere else. The highest number of new COVID-19 cases were seen in Russia, Germany, Brazil, the U.S. and South Korea.

WHO said omicron remains the overwhelmingly dominant variant worldwide, accounting for more than 99% of sequences shared with the world's biggest virus database. It said delta was the only other variant of significance, which comprised fewer than 1% of shared sequences.

WHO also reported that available vaccine evidence shows that "booster vaccination substantially improves (vaccine effectiveness)," against the omicron variant, but said more details are still needed on how long such protection lasts.

The agency had previously said there was no proof that boosters were necessary for healthy people and pleaded with rich countries not to offer third doses to their people before sharing them with poorer countries.

Health officials have noted that omicron causes milder disease than previous COVID-19 variants and in countries with high vaccination rates, omicron has spread widely but COVID-19 hospitalization and death rates have not increased substantially.

Scientists, however, warn that it's still possible that more transmissible and deadly variants of COVID-19 could still emerge if the virus is allowed to spread uncontrolled.

WHO's Europe chief Dr. Hans Kluge says the region is now entering a "plausible endgame" for the virus and said there is now a "singular opportunity" for authorities to end the acute phase of the pandemic.

This week, Britain announced it would scrap all remaining COVID-19 restrictions, including the requirement for people with the illness to self-isolate, even as Prime Minister Boris Johnson acknowledged there could be future deadly variants of the virus. Earlier this month, Sweden abandoned wide-scale testing for COVID-19 even in people with symptoms, saying that testing costs and the expense of its pandemic restrictions were "no longer justifiable."

Hong Kong's leader, meanwhile, announced Tuesday that the city will test its entire population of 7.5 million people for COVID-19 three times in March as it grapples with its worst outbreak yet, driven by the highly contagious omicron variant.

'Wendy Williams Show' ending, new Sherri Shepherd show ahead

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "The Wendy Williams Show" will end because of Williams' prolonged health-related absence and be replaced this fall with a show hosted by Sherri Shepherd, the producer of both TV programs said Tuesday.

The new daytime show, crisply titled "Sherri," will "inherit" the time slots on Fox owned-and-operated stations that have been the backbone of Williams' nationally syndicated talk show since 2008, producer and distributor Debmar-Mercury said.

"Since Wendy is still not available to host the show as she continues on her road to recovery, we believe it is best for our fans, stations and advertising partners to start making this transition now," company co-presidents Mort Marcus and Ira Bernstein said in a statement.

"We hope to be able to work with Wendy again in the future, and continue to wish her a speedy and full recovery," the executives said. They also expressed their "great love and affinity for Wendy" and admiration for her success.

The company declined to comment further on her recent health issues, which Williams herself has not

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discussed other than in generalities.

In a statement, Williams spokesman Howard Bragman said it's been a "challenging time" as she deals with her health and is grateful to Debmar-Mercury, Shepherd and others who have supported her show.

Williams knows "the reality of syndicated television -- you can't go to the marketplace and sell a show that's the 'Maybe Wendy Show,'" Bragman said, and understands the decision from a "business point of view."

Reflecting the company's statement, he said Williams has been assured that if her health rebounds — and she wants to host again — "she would be back on TV at that time."

For Debmar-Mercury, the stability represented by Shepherd is especially important as changes in day-time TV near. Ellen DeGeneres' long-running talk show ends this season, leaving its viewers in search of alternatives. The field already includes Drew Barrymore and Kelly Clarkson-hosted shows, with one led by Jennifer Hudson reportedly set for fall.

"OMG! I am so excited to have my dream come true and debut my very own talk show" in New York, actor-comedian Shepherd, a former co-host of "The View," said in a statement. "Sherri" will combine her love of "pop culture, talk, entertainment and comedy," she said.

"The Wendy Williams Show" has relied on a string of guest hosts, Shepherd among them, since the start of its 13th year last fall. Built on Williams' popularity as a brash radio host, the show has been a success for Lionsgate-owned Debmar-Mercury.

Shepherd proved the most popular sub for Williams, Debmar-Mercury said, and the show's ratings held up during her appearances. Production will continue on "The Wendy Williams Show" through the current season, with rotating fill-in hosts, including Shepherd.

She is the "perfect choice" for her own show and has already proven her appeal to the Fox audience, said Frank Cicha, an executive vice president with Fox Television Stations. He thanked Debmar-Mercury for navigating "an extremely trying situation."

Shepherd, who appeared on "The View" before joining as a co-host from 2007-14, will remain as a co-host with the Fox TV stations' "Dish Nation." She's acted from the start of her entertainment career, with credits including "The Jamie Foxx Show," "Everybody Loves Raymond," "30 Rock" and, recently, "The Sex Lives of College Girls." She's also had roles in movies: "Beauty Shop" and the 2007 film "Who's Your Caddy?"

She is an executive producer for "Sherri," along with her producing partner Jawn Murray and David Perler, the latter having worked as executive producer for all but one season of "The Wendy Williams Show."

Williams last taped her show in July 2021, when season 12 wrapped. Production on the current season was delayed last September because she had a "breakthrough" case of COVID-19, the show said at the time. Reasons for her continuing absence were not subsequently detailed.

Williams' health didn't intrude on her TV work until 2017, when she fainted during the show and took a three-week leave. Williams said in 2018 that she had been diagnosed years before with Graves' disease, an autoimmune condition that affects the thyroid.

She has been blunt about her life, saying her longtime cocaine use that began in college made her a "functioning addict" before kicking the drug. However, on a March 2019 episode of her show, a tearful Williams said that she was living "in a sober house" and had a round-the-clock sobriety coach. She didn't specify why.

In a video posted last week, Williams is seen strolling on a Florida beach as an off-screen questioner, whom she identifies as her son, Kevin Hunter Jr., asks about her activities — including plans to go to the gym — and how she's doing.

While she's taking a "break from New York," where the show tapes, she will be going back "stronger," Williams replies in the video. She also alluded vaguely to "things that happen to you" at about age 40, and "they go on from there."

Some of Williams' references in the clip, such as being 56 when she is 57, led to questions about whether it was recently made. A spokeswoman said that Williams simply misspoke.

High court takes case involving refusal to serve gay couples

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a new clash involving religion and the rights of LGBTQ people in the case of a Colorado web designer who says her religious beliefs prevent her from offering wedding website designs to gay couples.

The high court said Tuesday it would hear the case of Lorie Smith. The Denver-area designer offers graphic and website design services and wants to expand to wedding website services, but she says her Christian beliefs would lead her to decline any request from a same-sex couple to design a wedding website. She also wants to post a statement on her website about her beliefs. Doing those things, however, would run afoul of a Colorado anti-discrimination law. Smith had argued the law violates her free speech and religious rights.

The Supreme Court said in taking the case that it would look only at the free speech issue. It said it would decide whether a law that requires an artist to speak or stay silent violates the free speech clause of the First Amendment. The case is expected to be argued in the fall.

Smith's attorney, Kristen Waggoner, said in a statement after the court agreed to hear the case that "Colorado has weaponized its law to silence speech it disagrees with, to compel speech it approves of, and to punish anyone who dares to dissent."

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser said the Supreme Court has consistently held that anti-discrimination laws like the one in his state apply to all businesses selling goods and services.

"Companies cannot turn away LGBT customers just because of who they are," Weiser said in an emailed statement. "We will vigorously defend Colorado's laws, which protect all Coloradans by preventing discrimination and upholding free speech."

In a 2-1 ruling last year, the Denver-based 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denied Smith's attempt to overturn a lower court ruling throwing out her legal challenge. The panel said Colorado had a compelling interest in protecting the "dignity interests" of members of marginalized groups through its law, the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act.

The law, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, is the same one at issue in the case of Colorado baker Jack Phillips that was decided in 2018 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The high court said at the time that the Colorado Civil Rights Commission had acted with anti-religious bias against Phillips after he refused to bake a cake for two men who were getting married. But it did not rule on the larger issue of whether a business can invoke religious objections to refuse service to LGBTQ people.

The Arizona-based Alliance Defending Freedom represented Phillips and represents Smith.

EU advises further relaxing travel rules for foreigners

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union member countries agreed Tuesday that they should further facilitate tourist travel into the 27-nation bloc for people who are vaccinated against the coronavirus or have recovered from COVID-19.

The European Council is recommending that EU nations next month lift all testing and quarantine requirements for people who received vaccines authorized in the EU or approved by the World Health Organization.

Individuals who received the last dose of their primary vaccination series at least 14 days and no more than 270 days before arrival, or who have received a booster dose, would be eligible along with those who recovered from COVID-19 within 180 days of travel.

The EU's executive commission welcomed the non-binding guidance, which also makes clear that no test or additional requirements should be applied to children under 6 who are traveling with an adult.

"The updates will further facilitate travel from outside the EU into the EU, and take into account the evolution of the pandemic, the increasing vaccination uptake worldwide and the administration of booster doses," the European Commission said.

Travelers who received vaccines that were approved by WHO but are not authorized for use in the EU

may still be asked to present a negative PCR test or to quarantine, the European Council said.

So far, the EU has authorized the COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Novavax.

EXPLAINER: What is the Russia-Europe Nord Stream 2 pipeline?

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has suspended the certification process for the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline after Russia recognized separatist-held regions in eastern Ukraine.

The undersea pipeline directly links Russian gas to Europe via Germany and is complete but not yet operating. It has become a major target as Western governments try to exert leverage on Russia to deter further military moves against its neighbor.

Here are key things to understand about the pipeline:

WHAT IS NORD STREAM 2?

It's a 1,230-kilometer-long (764-mile-long) natural gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea, running from Russia to Germany's Baltic coast.

It runs parallel to an earlier Nord Stream pipeline and would double its capacity, to 110 billion cubic meters of gas a year. It means Gazprom can send gas to Europe's pipeline system without using existing pipelines running through Ukraine and Poland.

The pipeline has been filled with gas but had been awaiting approval by Germany and the European Commission.

HOW IS SCHOLZ BLOCKING THE PIPELINE?

Germany's utility regulator was reviewing the pipeline for compliance with European regulations on fair competition. It's that approval process that Scholz said Tuesday that he was suspending.

Germany was required to submit a report on how the pipeline would affect energy security, and Scholz said that report was being withdrawn.

WHY IS SCHOLZ TAKING ACTION NOW?

Scholz, who took power in December, backed the project as finance minister for his predecessor, Angela Merkel, and his Social Democratic Party supported it. As Russia massed troops near Ukraine's border, Scholz avoided referring to Nord Stream 2 specifically even as U.S. officials said it would not move forward if Russia invaded.

But Scholz warned that Russia would face "severe consequences" and that sanctions must be ready ahead of time. Germany had agreed with the U.S. to act against Nord Stream 2 if Russia used gas as a weapon or attacked Ukraine.

The chancellor said Tuesday that Russia recognizing the independence of rebel-held areas in Ukraine marked a "serious break of international law" and that it was necessary to "send a clear signal to Moscow that such actions won't remain without consequences."

WHY DOES RUSSIA WANT THE PIPELINE?

State-owned gas giant Gazprom says it will meet Europe's growing need for affordable natural gas and complement existing pipelines through Belarus and Ukraine.

Nord Stream 2 would offer an alternative to Ukraine's aging system that Gazprom says needs refurbishment, lower costs by saving transit fees paid to Ukraine, and avoid episodes like brief 2006 and 2009 gas cutoffs over price and payment disputes between Russia and Ukraine.

Europe is a key market for Gazprom, whose sales support the Russian government budget. Europe needs gas because it's replacing decommissioned coal and nuclear plants before renewable energy sources such as wind and solar are sufficiently built up.

WHY IS THE U.S. AGAINST NORD STREAM 2?

The White House was in "close consultations with Germany" and welcomed their announcement, press secretary Jen Psaki tweeted Tuesday.

The U.S., European NATO allies such as Poland, and Ukraine have opposed the project going back before

the Biden administration, saying it increases Europe's dependence on Russian gas and gives Russia the possibility of using gas as a geopolitical weapon. Europe imports most of its gas and gets roughly 40% of its supply from Russia.

The pipeline, which went forward under Merkel, has been an irritant in U.S.-German relations. Biden waived sanctions against the pipeline's operator when it was almost complete in return for an agreement from Germany to take action against Russia if it used gas as a weapon or attacks Ukraine.

In Congress, Republicans and Democrats — in a rare bit of agreement — have long objected to Nord Stream 2.

WILL SUSPENDING NORD STREAM 2 MAKE EUROPEANS FREEZE THIS WINTER?

No. Even before Scholz's move, regulators made clear the approval process could not be completed in the first half of the year. That means the pipeline was not going to help meet heating and electricity needs this winter as the continent faces a gas shortage.

The winter shortage has continued to feed concerns about relying on Russian gas. Russia held back from short-term gas sales — even though it fulfilled long-term contracts with European customers — and failed to fill its underground storage in Europe.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the shortage underlines the need to quickly approve Nord Stream 2, increasing concerns about Russia using gas to gain leverage over Europe.

COULD RUSSIA CUT OFF GAS TO EUROPE IN RETALIATION?

While Europe needs Russian gas, Gazprom also needs the European market. That interdependence is why many think Russia won't cut off supplies to Europe, and Russian officials have underlined they have no intention to do that.

Meanwhile, the Ukraine crisis, on top of the winter shortage, has already given European governments more reason to find their gas somewhere else, such as through liquefied natural gas, or LNG, brought by ship from the U.S., Algeria and other places.

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who is now deputy chair of Russia's Security Council, tweeted his displeasure after Germany suspended Nord Stream 2: "Welcome to the brave new world where Europeans are very soon going to pay 2,000 euros for 1,000 cubic meters of natural gas!"

The spot market gas price in Europe was 829 euros (\$940) per thousand cubic meters Tuesday. It was 1,743 euros (nearly \$2,000) in late December amid jitters over the Ukraine crisis, and prices have since fallen as Europe has secured more LNG.

EXPLAINER: Federal charges against 3 cops in Floyd killing

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Three former officers who were with Derek Chauvin as he pressed his knee into George Floyd's neck are on trial on federal charges alleging they violated the Black man's civil rights. Prosecutors have said J. Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao stood by as Chauvin slowly killed Floyd in front of them.

Defense attorneys have said Chauvin, the senior officer, called the shots.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Floyd, 46, was killed on May 20, 2020, after Chauvin placed his knee on Floyd's neck and pinned him to the street for 9 1/2 minutes as he was facedown and gasping for air. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back and Lane held down Floyd's legs. Thao kept bystanders from intervening.

THE FEDERAL CHARGES

Kueng, Lane and Thao are broadly accused of willfully depriving Floyd of his constitutional rights while acting under "color of law," or government authority. Chauvin pleaded guilty to one count of violating Floyd's civil rights and is not on trial with his former colleagues.

Thao and Kueng are charged with willfully violating Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure by not intervening to stop Chauvin. The indictment says they knew what Chauvin was doing and that Floyd was handcuffed, unresisting and eventually unresponsive. It's not clear why Lane, who held Floyd's legs, is not

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mentioned in that count, but evidence shows he asked twice whether Floyd should be rolled on his side.

Kueng, Lane and Thao are all charged with willfully depriving Floyd of his liberty without due process, specifically depriving him of the right to be free from an officer's deliberate indifference to his medical needs. The indictment says the three men saw Floyd needed medical care and willfully failed to aid him.

Both counts allege the officers' actions resulted in Floyd's death.

Prosecutors presented weeks of testimony and evidence about the officers' training, arguing they knew they had a duty to intervene to stop Chauvin, and that they knew they had a duty to render medical aid. They argued that Floyd's condition was so serious, that even bystanders without basic medical training could see he needed help.

Defense attorneys have argued that the Minneapolis Police Department's training was inadequate. They also attacked a police culture they said teaches officers to respect senior officers, like Chauvin. Lane and Kueng, both rookies, argued they deferred to Chauvin. Thao, who was watching the bystanders, said he trusted the officers behind him were caring for Floyd.

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM THE STATE CASE?

The three officers are also charged in state court with aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter.

State prosecutors must prove the officers helped Chauvin commit murder or manslaughter, while federal prosecutors must show they violated Floyd's rights, essentially by failing to intervene or provide medical help.

Mark Osler, a former federal prosecutor and now a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, drew this distinction: The state case is about what the officers did, and the federal case is about what they didn't do.

The state trial is scheduled to begin June 13.

RARE PROSECUTIONS

To bring federal charges in deaths involving police, prosecutors must believe that an officer acted under the "color of law," or government authority, and willfully deprived someone of their constitutional rights, including the right to be free from unreasonable seizures or the use of unreasonable force. That's a high legal standard; an accident, bad judgment or simple negligence on the officer's part isn't enough to support federal charges.

Essentially, prosecutors must prove that the officers knew what they were doing was wrong but did it anyway.

Historically, federal charges have been brought after a state case was unsuccessful, Phil Turner, another former federal prosecutor, said. He pointed to the 1991 police beating of Rodney King as an example. After the Los Angeles officers were acquitted in state court, federal charges were brought "because the state system failed and it was obvious to everyone that it was a miscarriage of justice," Turner said. Two of the four officers were ultimately convicted in federal court.

Most high-profile fatal shootings by police in recent years have not resulted in federal charges, though activists have called for them. An exception is the case of Michael Slager, a white South Carolina police officer who fatally shot Walter Scott in the back as the unarmed, 50-year-old Black man ran from a 2015 traffic stop.

Slager's state murder case ended with a hung jury and mistrial in 2016. A year later, he pleaded guilty in federal court to violating Scott's civil rights; prosecutors dropped state murder charges. Slager was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Several corrections officers have been convicted in the past two decades of violating the civil rights of inmates who died after they were denied medical care — sometimes after an assault. The allegation involving deprivation of medical care is similar to the count all three former Minneapolis officers face in Floyd's killing.

WHAT SENTENCE COULD THEY FACE?

Federal civil rights violations that result in death are punishable by up to life in prison or even death, but those sentences are extremely rare. Federal sentencing guidelines rely on complicated formulas that

indicate the officers would get much less if convicted.

Black innovators who reshaped American gardening, farming

By JESSICA DAMIANO Associated Press

The achievements of George Washington Carver, the 19th century scientist credited with hundreds of inventions, including 300 uses for peanuts, have landed him in American history textbooks.

But many other agricultural practices, innovations and foods that traveled with enslaved people from West Africa — or were developed by their descendants — remain unsung, despite having revolutionized the way we eat, farm and garden.

Among the medicinal and food staples introduced by the African diaspora were sorghum, millet, African rice, yams, black-eyed peas, watermelon, eggplant, okra, sesame and kola nut, whose extract was a main ingredient in the original Coca-Cola recipe.

Whether captives smuggled seeds and plants from aboard slave ships or captains purchased them in Africa for planting in America, key components of the West African diet also journeyed along the Middle Passage across the Atlantic.

After long days spent working on the plantation's fields, many enslaved people grew their own gardens to supplement their meager rations.

"The plantation owners could then force them to show them how to grow those foods," said Judith Carney, a professor of geography at UCLA and co-author of "In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World" (University of California Press, 2011).

"Those crops would then become commodities," said Carney, who spent a decade tracing such food origins by reconciling oral history with written documents.

It's no coincidence, then, that "many of the agricultural practices seen in Africa were also happening in the South," said Michael W. Twitty, culinary historian and James Beard-winning author of "The Cooking Gene" (Amistad, 2017).

Multicropping (growing different types of plants in one plot), permaculture (emulating natural ecosystems) and planting on mounds (arguably the precursor of berms) can be traced to African agricultural practices, said Twitty, who partnered with Colonial Williamsburg last year to establish the Sankofa Heritage Garden, a living replica of the type of garden grown by enslaved people during that era.

History did not record many inventions of enslaved Africans, in no small part because slaveowners often claimed credit. Some, however, were recognized, as were the accomplishments of many who came after them.

Here are five early Black innovators whose contributions reshaped the agricultural landscape:

Henry Blair (1807-1860)

Only the second Black man to be awarded a U.S. patent (Thomas L. Jennings, who invented an early method of dry-cleaning clothes in 1821, is believed to be the first), Blair designed a wheelbarrow-type corn planter to help farmers sow seeds more effectively. Two years later, he received a second patent for a mechanical horse-drawn cotton planter, which increased yield and productivity.

Details about the Maryland farmer and inventor's personal life, including whether he was born into slavery, are scarce.

George Washington Carver (circa 1864-1943)

Peanuts, believed to have originated in South America, were brought to Spain by European explorers before making their way to Africa. They then traveled back to the Western Hemisphere aboard slave ships in the 1700s. By the late 1800s, the legume had grown from a Southern regional crop to one with national appeal across the United States.

It was around that time that Carver, who was born into slavery in Missouri and freed as a child after the Civil War, earned a master's degree from Iowa State Agricultural College.

As head of the agriculture program at Alabama's Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (today's Tuskegee University), Carver gained fame for his peanut research and invented hundreds of peanut-based

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versions of products, including flour, coffee, Worcestershire sauce, beverages, hen food, soap, laxatives, shampoo, leather dye, paper, insecticide, linoleum and insulation.

He also devised alternative uses for other crops, and is credited with discovering the soil-rejuvenating benefits of compost and promoting crop rotation as a means of preventing the depletion of soil nutrients.

Frederick McKinley Jones (1893-1961)

With a background in electrical engineering, Jones is credited with many inventions — from a portable X-ray machine to a broadcast radio transmitter — but one in particular made a drastic impact on the modern American diet: mobile refrigeration technology.

Jones, who was born in Cincinnati and settled in Minnesota, developed a refrigeration system that was installed in trucks, train cars, airplanes and ships, enabling the safe transport of perishable foods around the world.

Booker T. Whatley (1915-2005)

An Alabama horticulturist and agriculture professor at Tuskegee University, Whatley introduced the concept of “clientele membership clubs” in the 1960s to help struggling Black farmers, who often were denied the loans and grants afforded to their white counterparts.

The farmers would sell pre-paid boxes of their crops at the beginning of the season to ensure a guaranteed income. In many instances, customers would harvest their shares themselves, which saved on labor costs.

Today’s Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) and U-Pick farming enterprises grew directly from Whatley’s ideas, as, it can be argued, did the farm-to-table and eat-local movements.

Whatley also pioneered sustainable agriculture and regenerative farming practices to maximize biodiversity and keep soil healthy and productive. His handbook “How to Make \$100,000 Farming 25 Acres” (Regenerative Agricultural Assn. of Rodale Institute, 1987) is still regarded as an important resource for small farmers.

Edmond Albius (1829-1880)

Although not American, Albius, who was enslaved as a youth and living on the French colony island of Réunion in the Indian Ocean, is responsible for the worldwide distribution of vanilla.

The plant had been brought from Mexico to Europe by the explorer Hernán Cortés but did not produce beans there due to the absence of a specific pollinator bee indigenous to Mexico.

A man named Ferréol Bellier-Beaumont, who lived on Réunion, had come to own Edmond and taught him from a young age how to care for his many plants. One of those lessons included instruction for hand pollination, manually transferring pollen from male flowers to female flowers to produce fruit.

In the 1840s, 12-year-old Edmond examined Bellier-Beaumont’s vanilla vine flowers, which had been growing without yield for two decades, and observed that their male and female reproductive organs were not on separate flowers but contained within a single flower, separated by a flap-like membrane. He moved the flap and, beneath it, spread the pollen from the stamen to the pistil. Before long, the plants were producing beans.

Word spread, and Réunion began cultivating vanilla and exporting it overseas. Within 50 years, the island had surpassed Mexico in vanilla production. Albius’ pollination technique reshaped the vanilla industry and remains in use worldwide.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 23, the 54th day of 2022. There are 311 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Feb. 23, 1954, the first mass inoculation of schoolchildren against polio using the Salk vaccine began in Pittsburgh as some 5,000 students were vaccinated.

On this date:

In 1685, composer George Frideric Handel was born in present-day Germany.

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In 1822, Boston was granted a charter to incorporate as a city.

In 1836, the siege of the Alamo began in San Antonio, Texas.

In 1861, President-elect Abraham Lincoln arrived secretly in Washington to take office, following word of a possible assassination plot in Baltimore.

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an agreement with Cuba to lease the area around Guantanamo Bay to the United States.

In 1942, the first shelling of the U.S. mainland during World War II occurred as a Japanese submarine fired on an oil refinery near Santa Barbara, California, causing little damage.

In 1945, during World War II, U.S. Marines on Iwo Jima captured Mount Suribachi, where they raised two American flags (the second flag-raising was captured in the iconic Associated Press photograph.)

In 1998, 42 people were killed, some 2,600 homes and businesses damaged or destroyed, by tornadoes in central Florida.

In 2007, a Mississippi grand jury refused to bring any new charges in the 1955 slaying of Emmett Till, the Black teenager who was beaten and shot after being accused of whistling at a white woman, declining to indict the woman, Carolyn Bryant Donham, for manslaughter.

In 2011, in a major policy reversal, the Obama administration said it would no longer defend the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act, a federal law banning recognition of same-sex marriage.

In 2013, some 30 NASCAR fans were injured when rookie Kyle Larson's car was propelled by a crash into the fence at Daytona International Speedway, and large chunks of debris flew into the grandstands.

In 2020, Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man, was fatally shot on a residential Georgia street; a white father and son had armed themselves and pursued him after seeing him running through their neighborhood. (Greg and Travis McMichael and neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan were convicted of murder, aggravated assault and other charges and were sentenced to life in prison.)

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama, speaking in Miami, sought to confront public anxiety over rising gasoline prices as he promoted the expansion of domestic oil and gas exploration, as well as the development of new forms of energy.

Five years ago: Seeking to tamp down growing unease in Latin America, President Donald Trump's Homeland Security secretary, John Kelly, pledged during a visit to Mexico City that the United States would not enlist its military to enforce immigration laws and that there would be "no mass deportations."

One year ago: Officials who were in charge of Capitol security at the time of the Jan. 6 riot told lawmakers that missed intelligence was to blame for the failure to anticipate the violent mob. Golfer Tiger Woods was seriously injured when his SUV crashed into a median and rolled over several times on a steep road in suburban Los Angeles.

Today's Birthdays: Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Fred Biletnikoff is 79. Author John Sandford is 78. Actor Patricia Richardson is 71. Former NFL player Ed "Too Tall" Jones is 71. Rock musician Brad Whitford (Aerosmith) is 70. Singer Howard Jones is 67. Rock musician Michael Wilton (Queensryche) is 60. Country singer Dusty Drake is 58. Actor Kristin Davis is 57. Former tennis player Helena Sukova is 57. Actor Marc Price is 54. TV personality/businessman Daymond John (TV: "Shark Tank") is 53. Actor Niecy Nash is 52. Rock musician Jeff Beres (Sister Hazel) is 51. Country singer Steve Holy is 50. Rock musician Lasse (loss) Johansson (The Cardigans) is 49. Film and theater composer Robert Lopez is 47. Actor Kelly Macdonald is 46. Rapper Residente (Calle 13) is 44. Actor Josh Gad is 41. Actor Emily Blunt is 39. Actor Aziz Ansari is 39. Actor Tye White (TV: "Greenleaf") is 36. Actor Dakota Fanning is 28.