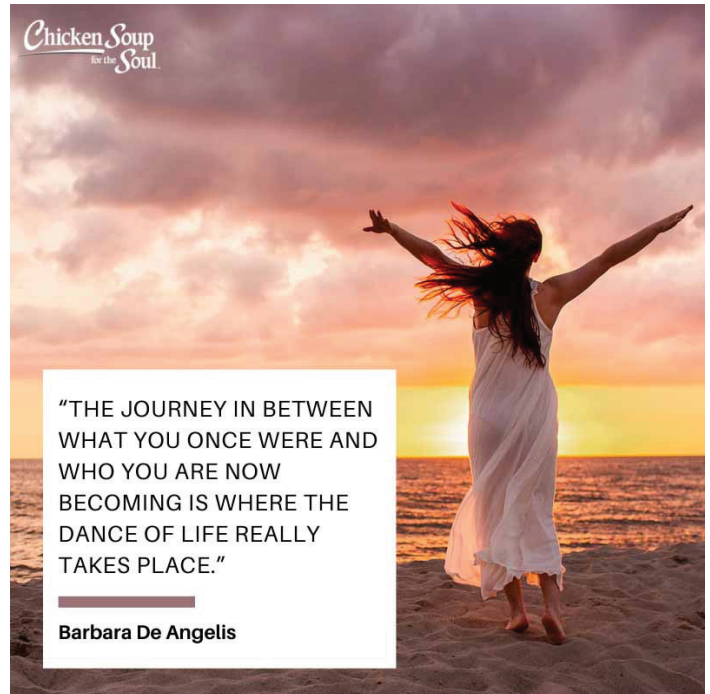


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## UpComing Events

### Today

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.

© 2022 Groton Daily Independent

## Groton Area boys win Northeast Conference title, again

Groton Area defended its Northeast Conference title with a 50-32 win over Tiospa Zina in a game played Wednesday night in Groton.

The game was postponed from earlier in the week due to the blizzard and school officials from both schools grappled with trying to find a make-up date. Tiospa Zina was suppose to play Crazy Horse Wednesday night in a make-up game as well, but because of the importance of this game in the conference, they canceled that game. Groton School officials said they were not happy about a Wednesday night game, but there were no other options available this late in the season. In a compromise, no junior varsity game was played so the varsity game could start earlier.

Coach Brian Dolan said that had the game not been played, there was a question in the conference of whether Groton or Tiospa Zina would have qualified for a share of the conference title because they would have had one less win than the other two teams, if they win their last games. "We didn't want to go down that road so we decided to play the game, not have the JV game to start earlier and allow the girls to have their night to shine in the regions," he said.

The Tigers struggled early in the game as Tiospa Zina controlled the tip and score in a few seconds and the Wambdi had an 8-3 lead early in the game. It was 10-8 in favor of Tiospa Zina after the first quarter. Groton Area tied the game at 13, but fell behind again at 16-13. Then Groton Area went on a 20-point run to take a 33-16 lead and the Tigers went on for the win. It was 21-16 at halftime and 37-20 after the third quarter.

Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 20 points while Jacob Zak had nine, Kaden Kurtz eight, Tate Larson and Wyatt Hearnen each had five and Jayden Zak had three.

Mike Smith, Caleb Barse and Perry Lufkins each had six points to lead the Wambdi while Tate Never Misses A Shot had five points, Storm Siera had four, Reondre Greeley three and Devin Long Crow had two points.

Jayden Zak - 3 points, 1 rebound, 4 assists, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Lane Tietz - 20 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals.

Jacob Zak - 9 points, 7 abounds, 2 assists, 2 steals, 3 fouls, 2 block.

Tate Larson - 5 points, 6 rebounds, 1 foul.

Kaden Kurtz - 8 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 3 fouls.

Cole Simon - 2 rebounds, 1 steal.

Wyatt Hearnen - 5 points, 9 rebounds, 3 fouls, 1 block.

Taylor Diegel - 1 assist, 1 foul.

Groton Area made 14 of 30 field goals for 47 percent, five of 19 three-pointers for 26 percent, seven of 13 free throws for 54 percent, had 32 rebounds, 10 turnovers, 10 assists, six steals, 12 fouls and three block shots.

Tiospa Zina made 14 of 40 field goals for 45 percent, three of six free throws for 50 percent, had 14 turnovers and 11 team fouls.



## Groton qualifies four to state wrestling

Three boys and Groton Area's first girl will advance to the state wrestling tournament to be held this weekend in Sioux Falls. Pictured are Coach Head Coach (Darin Zoellner, Cole Bisbee, Liza Krueger, Christian Ehresmann, Lane Krueger - state qualifiers) statistician Easton Ekern and Assistant Coach Ryan Scepaniak. (Photo from Groton Youth Wrestling - Tuff Tigers Facebook Page)



St. John's Lutheran Pre-School students made signs to wish the Groton wrestlers good luck at state. Pictured are River Wipf, Asher Heilman, Lexie Locke, Laker Hansen, Mya Flihs, Ivy Cole, Kodi Hinman, Beau Bahr, Landry Johnson, Carson Zeck, Natalie Walberg, Briggs Sperry and Roman Bahr. (Photo courtesy Tricia Keith)

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**GBB Region**  
on  
**GDILIVE.COM**  
Free to watch - no ticket required!



**GROTON VS. MILBANK**  
**AT SISSETON**  
**TUESDAY, FEB. 22, 7:30**

## Good Luck Lady Tigers from the GDILIVE.COM sponsors

Allied Climate Professionals  
Bahr Spray Foam  
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## Northern State Defeats Augustana in NSIC Tournament First Round

Sioux Falls, S.D. – The Northern State women’s basketball team withstood a third quarter run from Augustana and defeated the Vikings 76-66 in the first round of the NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament. All five starters for the Wolves scored in double figures and Laurie Rogers and Kailee Oliverson notched double-doubles in the victory.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 76, AU 66

Records: NSU 13-14 (9-12 NSIC), AU 13-11 (9-10 NSIC)

Attendance: 282

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern State ended the first quarter on a 14-0 run to take a 20-9 lead after ten minutes of play
- Northern and Augie would trade baskets early in the second quarter, but Kailee Oliverson capped an 8-2 run with a jumper in the paint with five seconds remaining and pushed the lead to 16 points at halftime
- The Vikings used a 24-15 advantage in the third quarter to cut the lead back within single digits at 56-49 entering the final period
- After Augustana tied the game at 59 with 4:57 remaining in the game, Brynn Alfson converted an and-one layup followed by a fastbreak 3-pointer by Oliverson to swing the momentum back towards Northern State
- The Wolves pushed the lead back to double digits with a 13-2 run late in the fourth quarter
- Northern State shot 42.1 percent from the field, 27.3 percent from 3-point range, and 71.4 percent from the free throw line
- The Wolves out-rebounded the Vikings 48-29, and dished out 16 assists on 24 made field goals
- Northern improved to 12-0 this season when leading at the halftime break
- Laurie Rogers’ 17 rebounds set a new career high and is tied for the third most rebounds in a single game

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Laurie Rogers: 19 points, 17 rebounds, 3 assists

Kailee Oliverson: 14 points, 10 rebounds

Lexi Roe: 13 points, 4 rebounds, 6 assists

### UP NEXT

The Northern State women’s basketball team advances to the quarterfinal round of the NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament and will face #13 St. Cloud State. The Wolves and Huskies are scheduled for a 4:30 p.m. tip-off on Saturday afternoon at the Sanford Pentagon in Sioux Falls.

## Northern State Men Rally in Opening Round Tournament Victory

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men’s basketball team came back from an 11-point half time deficit to defeat Minnesota Wednesday evening. The Wolves out-scored the Mavericks 38-24 in the second half to advance in the NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 65, MSU62

Records: NSU 20-11, MSU 16-10

Attendance: 696

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- The game went down to the wire, however the Wolves were able to hold on to their second half lead they grabbed with just over two minutes to play
- Northern shot 40.3% from the floor and 91.7% from the free throw line, however struggled from beyond the arc shooting at a 14.8% clip
- Minnesota State out-rebounded NSU 38-to-28 in the contest, however the Wolves tallied a game high 38 points in the paint and 19 points off turnovers
- They added ten assists, nine steals, and four blocks in the win
- Two Wolves scored in double figures, while three tallied six rebounds or more
- Kailleb Walton-Blanden led the team off the bench with six points and dished out a team high three assists
- Jackson Moni and Sam Masten led the Wolves in efficiency, shooting over 50.0% from the floor with Moni going a perfect 8-of-8 from the foul line

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Jacksen Moni: 23 points, 58.3 FG%, 6 rebounds, 2 blocks, 2 steals
- Sam Masten: 18 points, 7 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals
- Cole Bergan: 8 points, 7 rebounds, 2 steals

### UP NEXT

Northern will face second seeded Upper Iowa University at 11 a.m. on Sunday from the Sanford Pentagon in Sioux Falls.

Guest Speaker  
Nicole J Phillips  
The Kindness Podcast

*You're  
Invited!*

## RESET

womens conference

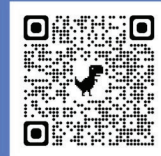
SATURDAY, MARCH 5  
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

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

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

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

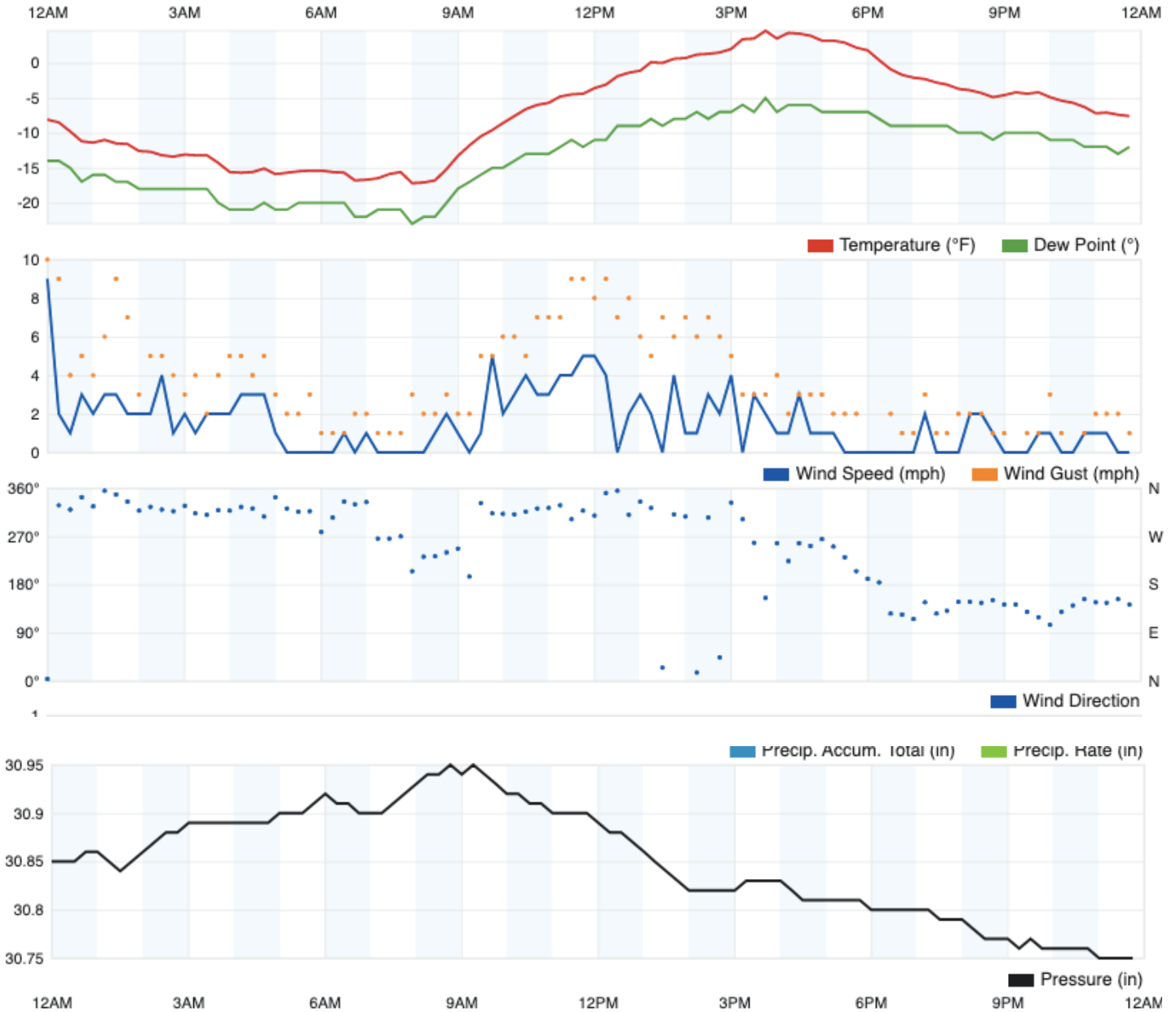
REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT  
ONLINE AT [ROSEHILLEFC.COM](http://ROSEHILLEFC.COM)



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

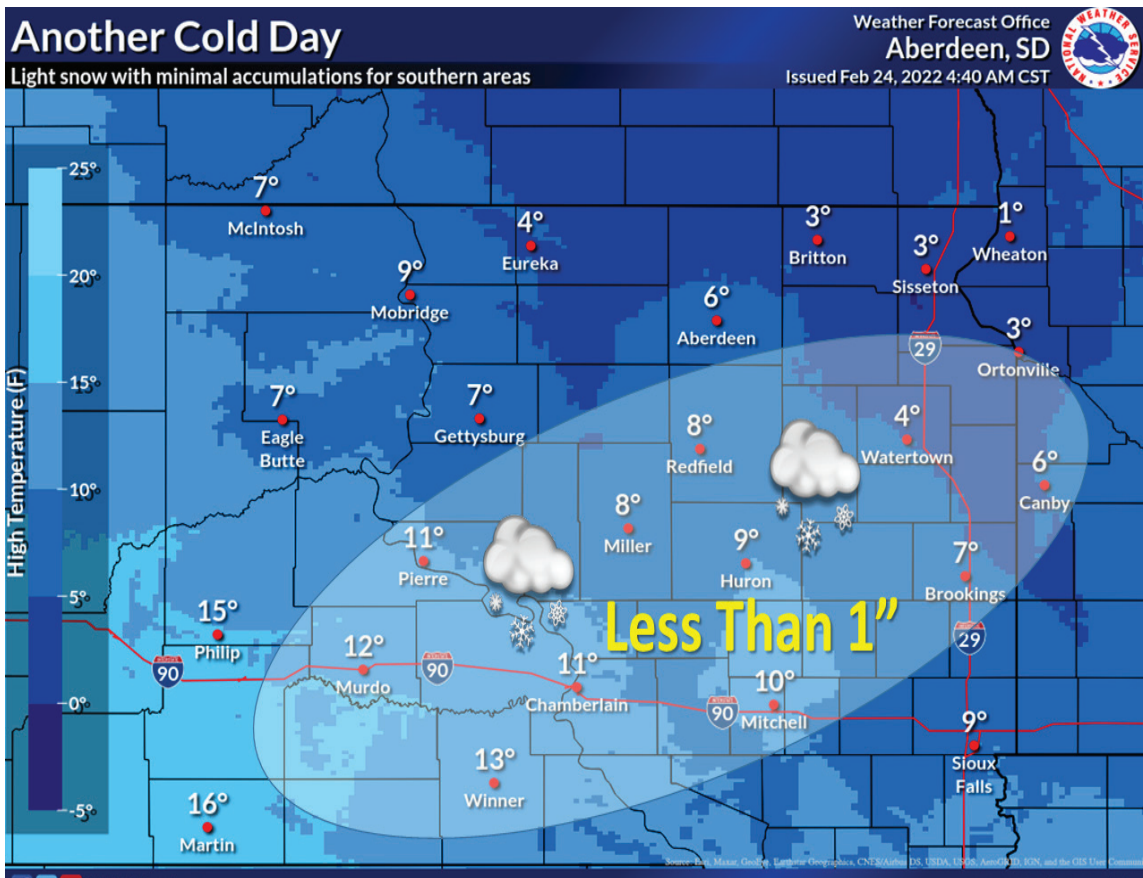




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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Cold	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Patchy Blowing Snow
High: 6 °F	Low: -14 °F	High: 16 °F	Low: 4 °F	High: 31 °F



Arctic air will remain in place across the region today, with highs mainly in the single digits above zero, although teens will be found for western and southern areas. A wave of low pressure passing to the south of the region will bring some light snow to southern portions of the forecast area today, with minor accumulations less than 1 inch. Relief is in store for this weekend, as highs will climb back into the 20s, 30s, and 40s.

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## Today in Weather History

February 24, 2001: Heavy snow of 6 to 14 inches fell across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. Along with the heavy snow came blizzard conditions across northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota during the morning hours of the 25th as northwest winds increased to 25 to 45 mph. As a result of the heavy snow and blizzard conditions, travel became difficult, if not impossible, resulting in some accidents and stranded motorists. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Waubay, Onida, Murdo, and Artas, 7 inches at Aberdeen, Faulkton, Ipswich, Kennebec, and Clark, 8 inches at Miller, Castlewood, 23 N Highmore, and Pierre. Nine inches of snow fell at Browns Valley, Wheaton, Clinton, Graceville, Dumont, Roy Lake, Mellette, Blunt, and Watertown. Other snowfall amounts included, 10 inches near Summit, 11 inches at Webster, Ortonville, and Artichoke Lake, and 14 inches at Milbank.

1969: The famous "100-Hour Storm" began in Boston, MA. Snow fell much of the time between early on the 25th through noon on the 28th. The 26.3 inches at Logan Airport is the 2nd greatest snowstorm in Boston's history. 77 inches fell at Pinkham Notch Base Station in New Hampshire, bringing their February total to 130 inches. Their snow cover on the 27th was 164 inches. Mt. Washington, NH, received 172.8 inches of snow in the month.

2001: Over a dozen tornadoes spawned in central and eastern Arkansas. The strongest tornado (F3) was in Desha County, with parts of a farm shop found six miles away from where it was blown apart. An 18-month-old was killed in Fulton County by an F2 tornado.

1852 - The Susquehanna River ice bridge at Havre de Grace, MD, commenced to break up after forty days of use. A total of 1738 loaded freight cars were hauled along rails laid on the ice. (David Ludlum)

1936 - Vermont and New Hampshire received brown snow due to dust from storms in the Great Plains Region. A muddy rain fell across parts of northern New York State. (24th-25th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A massive winter storm began to overspread the western U.S. In southern California, Big Bear was blanketed with 17 inches of snow, and Lake Hughes reported four inches of snow in just one hour. Snow pellets whitened coastal areas of Orange County and San Diego County, with three inches at Huntington Beach. The storm also produced thunderstorms with hail and waterspouts. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region which created "white-out" conditions in eastern Upper Michigan. Squalls produced up to 14 inches of snow in Geauga County of northeastern Ohio. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A total of thirty-three cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, and an Atlantic coast storm spread heavy snow from Georgia to southern New England. Snowfall totals in New Jersey ranged up to 24 inches in May County, with 19 inches reported at Atlantic City. Totals in North Carolina ranged up to 18 inches in Gates County, and winds along the coast of North Carolina gusted to 70 mph at Duck Pier. Strong winds gusting to 52 mph created blizzard conditions at Chatham MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Strong northerly winds prevailed from Illinois to the Southern and Central Appalachians. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Sewickley Heights PA. High winds caused considerable blowing and drifting of snow across northern and central Indiana through the day. Wind gusts to 47 mph and 6 to 8 inches of snow created white-out conditions around South Bend IN. Traffic accidents resulted in two deaths and 130 injuries. Sixty-five persons were injured in one accident along Interstate 69 in Huntington County. Wind gusts to 60 mph and 4 to 8 inches of snow created blizzard conditions in eastern and northern Ohio. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - Heavy snows blanket wide areas of northern New Mexico, closing schools and highways. The mountains east of Santa Fe receive 20 inches. Sandia Park, east of Albuquerque, measures 11 inches. 8 inches falls at Los Alamos.

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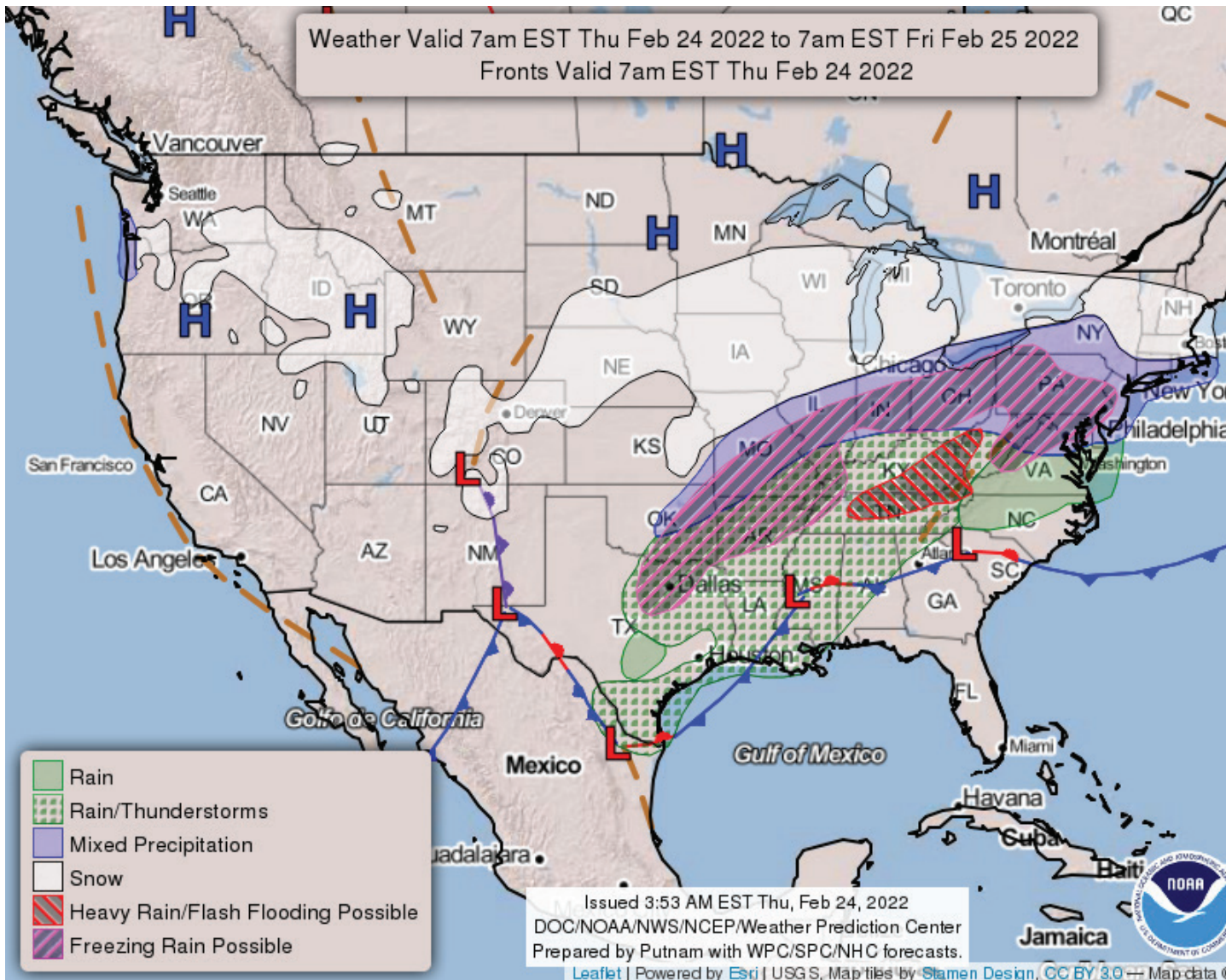
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 5 °F at 3:47 PM**  
**Low Temp: -18 °F at 8:02 AM**  
**Wind: 10 mph at 12:00 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 10 hours, 59 minutes  
Tomorrow will be 3 minutes longer than today in Groton

## Today's Info

Record High: 62 in 1976  
Record Low: -26 in 1940  
Average High: 32°F  
Average Low: 10°F  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.52  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 1.07  
Precip Year to Date: 0.59  
Sunset Tonight: 6:13:50 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:15:30 AM



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## SUFFERING AND OBEDIENCE

A member of a tourist group noticed a shepherd carrying food to one of his sheep. He was very curious and asked, "What happened? Is one of your sheep having problems?"

"Yes," came the reply. "I have a sheep with a broken leg."

"What happened? Did he fall over a cliff? Did an animal bite him?" he asked.

"Oh, no," said the shepherd. "I broke it."

"My goodness," said the tourist. "You broke your sheep's leg on purpose? I thought that shepherds loved their sheep more than anything else. I've even heard stories about shepherds searching for a lost sheep all night long. How could you do such a thing? Were you angry? Don't you love your sheep?"

"Of course, I love my sheep," replied the shepherd. "That's why I broke its leg. This was a 'wayward' sheep. When it strayed from the flock, it led other sheep with it. Something had to be done to preserve the life of this sheep and to prevent it from leading other sheep astray. I broke its leg and reset it to teach it obedience. Now, it waits for me to feed it and eats out of my hand. It will never leave me again and will stay by my side. Finally, it is obedient."

There was a Psalmist who must have had an experience like the sheep in this story. In writing of his experience, he said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey Your voice." Suffering has a purpose.

Prayer: No one likes to hurt, Lord. Yet, we ask that You do whatever is necessary to keep us close to You. Discipline us so we will be good disciples. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey Your voice. Psalm 119:67

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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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## Groton Daily Independent

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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 Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

04-10-20-28-30

(four, ten, twenty, twenty-eight, thirty)

Estimated jackpot: \$24,000

Lotto America

03-13-29-47-52, Star Ball: 1, ASB: 2

(three, thirteen, twenty-nine, forty-seven, fifty-two; Star Ball: one; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$8.05 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$87 million

Powerball

06-17-21-35-64, Powerball: 18, Power Play: 2

(six, seventeen, twenty-one, thirty-five, sixty-four; Powerball: eighteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$45 million

### South Dakota Senate passes bill to legalize recreational pot

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Senate on Wednesday passed a proposal to legalize recreational marijuana, as Republicans reasoned they should jump ahead of a campaign to legalize it on the November ballot.

The bill passed by a single vote in the Republican-controlled Senate, showing just how divided lawmakers are on pot legalization. The proposal will next head to the House, where Republicans have pushed tighter restrictions on medical marijuana.

They have been prodded by voters, who approved by 54% a 2020 constitutional amendment, known as Amendment A, to legalize recreational pot, medical marijuana and hemp. However, Republican Gov. Kristi Noem challenged its constitutionality and the state Supreme Court ruled it should be nullified last year.

Marijuana legalization advocates are mounting a campaign to bring it back to voters in November, and some Republicans argue they should jump on the law-making process.

"This is your opportunity to take control of the issue," Republican Sen. David Wheeler, told the Senate. "This bill is your opportunity to do what the people said they wanted in Amendment A."

Sponsors of this year's ballot measure campaign have also offered a compromise to the Legislature: they will drop the campaign if a law is enacted. The Senate's bill would not allow cannabis plants to be grown in people's homes and allow local governments to opt out of allowing retail sites.

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

However, those opposed argued that recreational pot legalization is not a done deal.

"If the voters tell us that's what they want when they actually get the chance to say how they feel, we'll find out," said Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck. "But there's no reason to get ahead of that."

Noem, who has repeatedly voiced opposition to legalizing recreational marijuana, would also get a chance to veto the bill if it passes the House. At a news conference Wednesday, she said she wouldn't take the compromise offered by the ballot campaign sponsors to drop the ballot measure if a law is enacted.

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"If the people of South Dakota this fall really want to have that debate, they'll have a few more months under their belt to see really what impact the medical program is having," the governor said.

Meanwhile, the Senate readied for pot to be legalized, whether in the Legislature or at the ballot. Lawmakers passed a series of bills Wednesday to set up retail licenses in the same way it licenses liquor establishments, create a tax on marijuana manufacturers and automatically remove from background check records misdemeanors and petty offenses for pot ingestion or possession that are more than five years old.

"The train on marijuana is only moving in one direction nationwide," Wheeler said. "It is better for us to get ahead of it."

## South Dakota House pushes sales tax cut, but Noem cautious

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House on Wednesday pushed to reduce the state's sales tax by half a percentage point, passing the proposal despite objections from Republican Gov. Kristi Noem.

The proposal was spearheaded by a group of right-wing Republicans who have sparred with the governor over the state budget this year. It passed the Republican-controlled House on a 39 to 31 vote and will next be considered by the Senate.

Republican Rep. Chris Karr, who chairs the committee ironing out the state budget, cast the proposal as a way to make good on a 2016 law that promised to reduce the 4.5% sales tax if the state won the right to tax sales from online sellers.

The proposal makes South Dakota one of the over two dozen states, both red and blue, looking to give taxpayers and consumers a break amid soaring tax revenue and billions in pandemic aid from the federal government

"Our economy is good, things are good," Karr said, arguing that between the state's economic growth and a massive influx of federal funds coming over several years, the time is right to scale back the tax.

"We're trying to give people in South Dakota their dollars back because we have the opportunity," he told the House. "We have unearmarked dollars that we don't necessarily need right now."

He proposed that the reduction happen over two years, with a quarter percent drop each year. Karr projected it would mean the state's revenues drop by \$74 million in the next fiscal year.

Republicans in the House were split on the proposal, but with Gov. Kristi Noem opposed, it faces a tough test in the Senate. In a news conference held minutes after the House vote, the Republican governor sounded caution on reducing one of the state's biggest revenue sources.

"We've done a fantastic job growing and benefiting the families and businesses here in our state right now. But we also have some challenges ahead," she said, pointing to drought, inflation and higher energy costs that could dampen the state's consumer spending.

"It's very, very conservative to adopt conservative numbers on what you will spend and make sure we're not spending more than what we have and set ourselves up for tax increases in the future," she added.

Noem has claimed that the state has the nation's "strongest economy" and that she wants to cut taxes, but her proposals to cut taxes and fees have been more modest. A proposal to cut the state's bingo taxes and fees was enacted, but that represented less than \$40,000 in annual revenue.

The governor has also proposed removing business filing fees and firearm carry permit fees, which together total just over \$4 million annually. The Senate on Wednesday struck the waiver on business filing fees from Noem's proposal.

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. February 21, 2022.

Editorial: A Path Forward For Recreational Cannabis?

As was speculated (and called for) last fall, South Dakota lawmakers are now giving serious consideration



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to legalizing recreational cannabis.

Last Thursday, the Senate's Commerce and Energy Committee passed Senate Bill 3, which calls for "the use and regulated sale of (recreational) marijuana." It was approved by a 5-3 margin and figures to go before the full Senate this week.

This effort was not unexpected, although if such a bill hadn't been introduced at all this session, it wouldn't have been a surprise, either.

A constitutional amendment (Amendment A) calling for the legalization of recreational and medical cannabis was approved by South Dakota voters in 2020 by a 54%-46% margin. The outcome was then challenged on the grounds that it violated state law in addressing more than one issue on a ballot question. The state Supreme Court spent seven months in deliberating before nullifying the law last November. (Medical cannabis was also approved in a separate 2020 initiative and is gradually coming online in the state.)

Despite the court ruling, it was clear that the recreational cannabis idea was not going away. A legislative summer interim study group addressed the matter and recommended that lawmakers take up the issue this session. Meanwhile, pro-marijuana groups, growing impatient with the slow pace of the Supreme Court's lengthy deliberation, announced a new petition drive to get the matter placed on the 2022 ballot.

SB 3, which was heard last week just two days after the House Taxation Committee approved a tax policy on cannabis sales, calls for recreational marijuana legalization while also addressing some concerns about control.

Notably, SB 3 would not allow home-grown plants for recreational purposes, making such a violation a felony. This contrasts with Amendment A, which allowed for the possession of home-grown plants.

As Rapid City television station KOTA reported, such a measure would give South Dakota some of the strictest recreational marijuana laws in the nation, and it would represent a major compromise by pro-marijuana advocates. However, it might also make for easier negotiations down the line with marijuana foes, who have tried unsuccessfully to strike home-growing from the medical cannabis law.

The concession by pro-marijuana forces would indeed be a major step. "We are not absolutists; we are people who believe in finding compromise and making progress," stated Matthew Schweich, director for South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws. "So yes, we are open to ending our signature drive and not putting our initiative on the ballot in November if a good law can be passed."

If it holds up, SB 3 appears to be a practical compromise on this issue.

Even so, it still has some hurdles to clear, not the least of which potentially facing a veto from Gov. Kristi Noem, if SB 3 gets that far. However, a veto by the governor — or a rejection by the Legislature — might be a gamble, for a new measure passed by voters would likely not carry the same restrictions.

So, there is currently a path for recreational cannabis in South Dakota through the Legislature. It would carry the spirit of Amendment A forward, but with more restrictions and regulations to possibly satisfy law enforcement and other opponents.

Whether this matter is wrapped up in Pierre or decided by voters in November remains to be seen. This week may tell us a lot about that.

END

## South Dakota GOP senators reject LGBTQ support resolution

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Senate Republicans rejected a proposed resolution on Wednesday that would have commended the state's LGBTQ and Native American Two Spirit community, offering no explanation and hearing no opposition testimony.

Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba brought the resolution to state that the "Legislature recognizes the LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit community for its collective efforts to secure true equality for all." It would have had no force of law.

Republican lawmakers and Gov. Kristi Noem have faced criticism from the LGBTQ community this year for

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passing and signing a ban on transgender girls and college-age women from joining school sports leagues that match their gender identity. Republicans cast the bill as "protecting fairness in women's sports," but the LGBTQ community derided it as state-sponsored bullying of students who are already marginalized.

Lawrence Novotny, a member of the Brookings Human Rights Commission, told lawmakers on the Senate State Affairs committee that the resolution was a chance for them to send a message to the LGBTQ community that they are welcome. He argued that has become a pressing need, pointing to high rates of depression among LGBTQ people in the state.

"If our intention is to truly be a place of great faces, then we must be truly inclusive of all people," April Carillo, a board member of Equality South Dakota, said, referencing the state motto.

However, every Republican present in the Senate State Affairs committee on Wednesday rejected Nesiba's resolution. Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck made the motion for it to be dismissed without discussing his reasoning.

The only senator on the committee who discussed the resolution was Democratic Sen. Troy Heinert, who offered a dissenting vote.

"What does this really hurt?" he asked. "Showing some solidarity with some people who may be a little bit different from us. Is that a bad thing?"

At a news conference last week, Noem was asked about the depression rates among LGBTQ South Dakotans. She said she did not know why there are high rates of reported depression.

"That makes me sad," she said. "We should figure it out."

## Prosecutors to testify at Ravensborg's impeachment hearing

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The prosecutors who decided against more serious charges against South Dakota's attorney general in a fatal crash are set to testify at a hearing on whether he should face impeachment.

The South Dakota House Select Committee on Investigation reconvenes Thursday to hear testimony on whether Republican Jason Ravensborg should face impeachment charges for conduct related to a 2020 car crash that killed Joe Boever who was walking along a highway.

Ravnsborg pleaded no contest to a pair of misdemeanors last year and has said he didn't realize he struck the 55-year-old man until returning to the scene the next day.

Investigators determined that Ravensborg would have walked right past Boever's body and the flashlight Boever had been carrying as Ravensborg looked around the scene the night of the crash. The flashlight was still illuminated the next morning.

Hyde County Assistant State's Attorney Emily Sovell, who led the prosecution against Ravensborg, and the Beadle County State's Attorney who assisted her in determining charges are set to testify, the Argus Leader reported.

Tim Bormann, Ravensborg's chief of staff who was at the crash scene near Highmore at the time Boever's body was discovered, is also on the witness list as is state Division of Criminal Investigation Director David Natvig.

Gov. Kristi Noem has made it clear that she believes the misdemeanor charges were not enough, and wants Ravensborg removed from office. She would also get to name the attorney general's replacement if he is removed.

## Live updates: Latvia suspends 3 Russian TV channels

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest on the Russia-Ukraine crisis:

HELSINKI — Latvian authorities say three Russian television channels will have their right to broadcast in Latvia suspended for several years with immediate effect. They cited the channels' incitement to hatred against Ukraine, justification of war and spreading of disinformation on Ukraine, Latvia and other countries.

Latvia's National Electronic Mass Media Council said Thursday that there will be a ban on broadcasts of

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the Rossija RTR channel for five years, Rossija 24 channel for four years and TV Centr International for three years.

European Union and NATO member Latvia is urging other European nations to make a similar decision.

"We are calling on all European Union member countries to use the evidence we have collected, follow our example and ban these three (Russian) channels in the entire territory of the EU," said the council's chairman, Ivars Abolins.

He said that "in the last several years, we have closed 41 programs associated with Russia. Unfortunately, other European countries have not done the same."

GENEVA — The head of the U.N. refugee agency is warning of "devastating consequences" of Russia's military action in Ukraine and calling on neighboring countries to keep their borders open for people fleeing the fighting.

Filippo Grandi, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, pointed to "reports of casualties and people starting to flee their homes to seek safety" without elaborating.

He said in a statement that UNHCR had stepped up its operations and capacity in Ukraine and its neighboring countries, without providing details.

KYIV, Ukraine — Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, says that "Russia's key goal is clear: to oust the Ukrainian leadership and stir up as much panic as possible."

Podolyak said Thursday the Russians "want to cut off part of the country and they moving in in big convoys."

He said that "we are seeing attempts to stabilize the situation in big cities, including Kyiv and Kharkiv."

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says Russia's military actions in Ukraine violate international laws and amount to a "heavy blow" to regional peace and stability.

In an address to an international gathering in Ankara on Thursday, Erdogan said Turkey -- which has enjoyed close ties to both Russia and Ukraine — "sincerely regrets" that the two countries are confronting each other.

"We reiterate our call for a resolution of the problems between Russia and Ukraine, with which we have deep historical ties and friendly relations, through dialogue, within the framework of Minsk agreements," Erdogan said. He was referring to deals that aimed to restore peace in eastern Ukraine.

The Turkish leader said Turkey would "do its part to ensure the safety of everyone living in Ukraine," including Turkish citizens and Crimean Tatars, with whom Turkey shares ethnic and cultural bonds.

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says Russian President Vladimir Putin has "unleashed war in our European continent" and Britain "cannot and will not just look away."

In a televised address Thursday, Johnson said the U.K. and its allies will agree a "massive package of economic sanctions designed in time to hobble the Russian economy."

"Our mission is clear: diplomatically, politically, economically and eventually militarily, this hideous and barbaric venture of Vladimir Putin must end in failure," Johnson said.

He is expected to give more details about new sanctions later Thursday.

"A vast invasion is underway by land by sea and by air," Johnson said. "(Putin) has attacked a friendly country without any provocation and without any credible excuse."

The prime minister also said that the West must collectively end its dependence on Russian oil and gas, which "for too long has given Putin his grip on western politics."

GENEVA — The head of a Nobel Peace Prize-winning anti-nuclear group says a warning from Russian President Vladimir Putin to anyone who might meddle in Russia's attack on Ukraine amounted to a threat to "launch a nuclear war."

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Beatrice Fihn, executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, was referring to the Russian leader's comments as the attack began that "whoever tries to impede us, let alone create threats for our country and its people, must know that the Russian response will be immediate and lead to the consequences you have never seen in history."

Fihn, whose group won the Nobel prize in 2017, said Russia had manufactured a "false justification" for its military action in Ukraine and said Putin's warning was "basically to launch a nuclear war."

She alluded to recent tests by Russia of intercontinental ballistic missiles and hypersonic missiles, saying that they smacked of "basically the Russian military practicing mass-murdering civilians."

BUCHAREST, Romania — The president of Romania has condemned Russia's "reprehensible" attack on Ukraine and said that Russian President Vladimir Putin "threatens the peace of the entire planet."

Romania borders Ukraine and is a member of NATO and the European Union. Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said that Russia "chose the reprehensible and completely illegal path of massive armed violence against an independent and sovereign state."

Iohannis said that Romania, a country of about 19.5 million people, is ready to deal with economic and humanitarian consequences that the conflict could generate.

He stressed that Romania will not be drawn into the military conflict in Ukraine and said Romanian authorities will take "absolutely all the necessary measures" to ensure the safety of the country's citizens.

PRAGUE — Czech President Milos Zeman, who has been a leading pro-Russian voice among European Union leaders, has condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine as "an unprovoked act of aggression."

Zeman said in an address to the nation that "Russia has committed a crime against peace."

A week ago, Zeman said that warnings of an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine were a failure by CIA. He said repeatedly he didn't believe Russia wanted to attack Ukraine.

"I admit I was wrong," Zeman said Thursday. "An irrational decision by the leadership of the Russian Federation will cause significant damages to the Russian state."

He called for harder sanctions against Russia, declaring that "it's necessary to isolate a lunatic and not just to defend ourselves by words but also by deeds."

BRUSSELS — NATO's secretary-general says Russia has launched war on Ukraine and shattered peace on the European continent.

Jens Stoltenberg called for a summit of NATO alliance leaders for Friday.

Stoltenberg said that "this is a deliberate, cold-blooded and long-planned invasion." And he charged that "Russia is using force to try to rewrite history."

Russia launched a wide-ranging attack on Ukraine earlier Thursday, hitting cities and bases with airstrikes or shelling. Ukraine's government said Russian tanks and troops rolled across the border.

HELSINKI — NATO member Lithuania, which has borders with Russian ally Belarus and Russia's exclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea, has declared a state of emergency effective early Thursday afternoon due to the situation in Ukraine.

The decree signed Thursday by Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda steps up border protection. It gives authorities, among other things, the right to check and inspect vehicles, persons and luggage in the border area.

Lithuania also borders fellow NATO and European Union members Poland and Latvia.

BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine, calling it a "dark day for Europe" and expressing his country's "full solidarity with Kyiv."

Scholz said in a statement at the chancellery in Berlin on Thursday that new sanctions to be imposed on Russia by Germany and its allies would show that "Putin has made a serious mistake with his war."

Addressing NATO allies in eastern Europe, Scholz said Germany understood their worries in light of the

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latest developments and stands by its commitments within the alliance.

Scholz said he and French President Emmanuel Macron proposed soon holding an in-person meeting of the heads of government of NATO member states.

BRUSSELS — NATO has agreed to beef up its land, sea and air forces on its eastern flank near Ukraine and Russia after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a military offensive in Ukraine.

NATO ambassadors said in a statement after emergency talks Thursday that “we have increased the readiness of our forces to respond to all contingencies.”

While some of NATO’s 30 member countries are supplying arms, ammunition and other equipment to Ukraine, NATO as an organization is not. It will not launch any military action in support of Ukraine.

Countries closest to the conflict – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland – are among those to have triggered rare consultations under Article 4 of NATO’s founding treaty, which can be launched when “the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the (NATO) parties is threatened.”

“We have decided, in line with our defensive planning to protect all allies, to take additional steps to further strengthen deterrence and defense across the Alliance,” the envoys said in a statement. “Our measures are and remain preventive, proportionate and non-escalatory.”

KYIV, Ukraine -- An adviser to Ukraine’s president says that Russian forces forged 10-20 kilometers (6-12 miles) deep into the Chernihiv region of northern Ukraine and are regrouping to continue the offensive.

But Oleksiy Arestovich said Thursday that “Kyiv is under reliable protection” and “they will face tough battles.”

Arestovich said that fighting is going on 4-5 kilometers (2 ½-3 miles) north of Ukraine’s second-largest city of Kharkiv, in the country’s northeast. He said Ukrainian troops destroyed four Russian tanks there.

The adviser said that Russian troops that moved into Ukraine from Russian-annexed Crimea are trying to advance toward Melitopol and Kherson.

JERUSALEM— Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has condemned Russia’s attack on Ukraine as “a grave violation of the international order.”

Lapid told reporters on Thursday that Israel is prepared to send humanitarian aid to Ukraine and urged Israeli citizens to leave the country.

“Israel is a country well-versed in war. War is not the way to resolve conflicts,” he said, adding that there was still a chance for a negotiated solution.

BUCHAREST, Romania — Moldova’s president says the country’s Supreme Security Council has decided to ask parliament to introduce a state of emergency following Russia’s attack on neighbouring Ukraine.

President Maia Sandu said Thursday that Russia’s attack on Ukraine is a “flagrant violation of international norms.”

Sandu urged Moldovan citizens in Ukraine to return home. Moldova, a former Soviet republic and one of Europe’s poorest nations, has a population of around 3.5 million and is not a NATO member.

There are now concerns in Moldova that the neighboring conflict could trigger an influx of refugees. Sandu said that “at the border crossing points with Ukraine there is an increase in traffic flow.”

She added that “we will help people who need our support. At this moment, we are ready to accommodate tens of thousands of people.”

KYIV, Ukraine — An adviser to Ukraine’s president says about 40 people have been killed so far in the Russian attack on the country.

Oleksiy Arestovich, an adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday that several dozen people have been wounded.

He didn’t specify whether the casualties included civilians.

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Zelenskyy said the Ukrainian authorities will hand weapons to all those willing to defend the country. "The future of the Ukrainian people depends on every Ukrainian," he said, urging all those who can defend the country to come to the Interior Ministry's assembly facilities.

ANKARA, Turkey — Ukraine's ambassador to Turkey has called on the NATO member country to close its airspace and to shut down the straits at the entrance of the Black Sea to Russian ships.

"We are calling for the airspace, Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits to be closed," Ambassador Vasyl Bodnar told reporters on Thursday. "We have conveyed our relevant demand to the Turkish side. At the same time, we want sanctions imposed on the Russian side."

A 1936 convention gives Turkey control over the straits connecting the Aegean Sea to the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea, and allows it to limit the passage of warships during wartime or if Turkey is threatened.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan convened an emergency security meeting to discuss the Russian attack on Ukraine.

Turkey, which enjoys close relations with both Ukraine and Russia, had been pressing for a diplomatic solution to the tensions.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's president says his country has cut diplomatic ties with Russia after it was attacked.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced the decision to rupture ties with Moscow on Thursday after it launched a massive air and missile attack on its neighbor and Russian forces were seen rolling into Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials say the country's military is fighting back and asked for Western defense assistance.

KYIV, Ukraine — A Ukrainian presidential adviser says that Russian forces have launched an attack on Ukraine from the north, east and south. The adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, said "the Ukrainian military is fighting hard."

Podolyak said Thursday that "our army is fighting back inflicting significant losses to the enemy." He said that there have been civilian casualties, but didn't give details.

He said that "Ukraine now needs a greater and very specific support from the world — military-technical, financial as well as tough sanctions against Russia," he said.

Another adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia has targeted air bases and various other military infrastructure.

BEIJING — China's customs agency on Thursday approved imports of wheat from all regions of Russia, a move that could help to reduce the impact of possible Western sanctions imposed over Moscow's attack on Ukraine.

The two governments announced an agreement Feb. 8 for China to import Russian wheat and barley after Russian President Vladimir became the highest-profile foreign guest to attend the Beijing Winter Olympics.

China's populous market is a growth area for other farm goods suppliers, but Beijing had barred imports until now from Russia's main wheat-growing areas due to concern about possible fungus and other contamination.

Russia is one of the biggest wheat producers but its exports would be vulnerable if its foreign markets block shipments in response to its attack on Ukraine.

Thursday's announcement said Russia would "take all measures" to prevent contamination by wheat smut fungus and would suspend exports to China if it was found.

## Ukraine attack leaves Baltics wondering: Are we next?

By LIUDAS DAPKUS and KARL RITTER Associated Press

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VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — Viewed from Paris, London and Washington, the events unfolding in Ukraine may seem like a new Cold War taking shape in Europe.

From the Baltic countries, it looks much worse.

To Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians — particularly those old enough to have lived under Soviet control — Russia's belligerence toward Ukraine has some worried that they could be the next target. The escalating tensions which preceded an attack Thursday brought back memories of mass deportations and oppression.

"My grandparents were sent away to Siberia. My father was persecuted by the KGB. Now I live in a free democratic country, but it seems that nothing can be taken for granted," said Jaunius Kazlauskas, a 50-year-old teacher in Vilnius, Lithuania's capital.

Russia's attack on Ukraine sent shockwaves through the Baltic countries. Lithuania's president declared a state of emergency, and Latvia suspended the broadcast licenses of several Russian TV stations accused of spreading disinformation and propaganda.

All three Baltic countries were seized and annexed by Joseph Stalin during World War II before gaining independence again with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. They joined NATO in 2004, putting themselves under the military protection of the U.S. and its Western allies. Ukraine is not part of NATO.

Along with Poland, also a NATO member, the small Baltic countries have been among the loudest advocates for powerful sanctions against Moscow and NATO reinforcements on the alliance's eastern flank.

Baltic government leaders in recent weeks have shuttled to European capitals, warning that the West must make Russian President Vladimir Putin pay for attacking Ukraine, or else his tanks will keep rolling toward other parts of the former Soviet empire.

"The battle for Ukraine is a battle for Europe. If Putin is not stopped there, he will go further," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis warned last week in a joint news conference with U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

Two days before the attack, U.S. President Joe Biden announced that some American forces deployed in Europe, including 800 infantry soldiers, F-35 fighters and Apache helicopters, would be moved to the three Baltic states, describing the step as purely defensive.

The news was met with enthusiasm in the Baltic capitals. While the NATO treaty commits all allies to defend any member that comes under attack, the Baltic countries say it is imperative that NATO show resolve not just in words but with boots on the ground.

"Russia always measures the military might but also the will of countries to fight," said Janis Garisons, state secretary at Latvia's Defense Ministry. "Once they see a weakness, they will exploit that weakness."

While Putin hasn't publicly expressed any ambition to reassert Russian control over the Baltic countries, many Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians worry he wants to regain influence across all former republics of the Soviet Union, the collapse of which he once described as a tragedy for the Russian people.

In his speech earlier this week setting the stage for Russia's military intervention, Putin said Ukraine is "not just a neighboring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space."

Culturally and linguistically different, the Baltic countries don't have the same connection to Russian history and identity. However, they were ruled by Moscow for most of the past 200 years, first by the Russian Empire, then for almost 50 years following World War II by the Soviet Union. All three countries have ethnic Russian minorities; in Latvia and Estonia, they make up about one-quarter of the population.

Though many of them are well integrated, tensions flared in 2007 when hundreds of ethnic Russians rioted against government plans to relocate a Soviet war memorial in Tallinn, Estonia's capital. Estonia suspected Russia of stoking the unrest and orchestrating cyberattacks that paralyzed government computer networks.

"When we hear Putin humiliating Ukraine, calling it an artificial state with no history, it reminds us of the same things that they have been repeating about all former Soviet republics for many years," said Nerijus Maliukevicius, a political analyst at Vilnius University. The Russian "state propaganda machine is

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now working on unprecedented levels of intensity, and the message is not just about Ukraine," he added.

Lithuania borders both Kaliningrad, a Russian region where the country's Baltic Sea fleet is based, and Belarus, the former Soviet republic where tens of thousands of Russian troops have been deployed for joint exercises. Belarus recently announced that the drills would continue because of the tensions in eastern Ukraine.

"It seems they are not going to leave," Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvydas Anusauskas said before Russia launched its attack on Ukraine. "But we must understand that numbers do not mean everything. There are technically very advanced troops on our side of the border. Their main task is deterrence — and defense, if necessary."

The Baltic countries have expressed strong support for Ukraine. Baltic leaders have traveled to Kyiv recently to show their solidarity and have sent both weapons and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

Estonia, which celebrates its independence day on Thursday, is taking a strong stance in the conflict, but not because it fears for its security, said former President Kersti Kaljulaid, the first woman to hold that office.

"We are doing it because we find it is our moral obligation," she said. "We very strongly feel that ... every nation should have the right to decide their future."

While the Baltics are direct neighbors of Russia, she said other European countries should be equally worried about the crisis in Ukraine.

"Frankly speaking, I don't think it concerns the Baltics more," she said. "If you look from Kyiv, it's the same distance to Berlin as Tallinn."

## World expresses outrage, plans stronger Russia sanctions

By RAF CASERT and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — World leaders expressed a raw outrage shrouded by an impotence to immediately come to the aid of Ukraine to avoid a major war in Europe, condemning Russia's attack on its neighbor as the European Union and others promised unprecedented sanctions to hit the Kremlin.

NATO has moved to beef up its eastern flank facing Russia and planned a virtual leaders' summit for Friday after President Vladimir Putin warned anyone listening that any interference would "lead to consequences you have never seen in history."

EU and NATO member Lithuania declared a state of emergency since the Baltic nation borders Russia's Kaliningrad region to the southwest and Russia's ally Belarus to the east. NATO nations have 100 jets and 120 ships on high alert as deterrence. "Make no mistake: we will defend every ally against any attack on every inch of NATO territory," said NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called it a "barbaric attack" on an independent nation that also targeted "the stability in Europe and the whole of the international peace order." The EU will hold an emergency summit in Brussels.

But no one promised to move in militarily and defend Ukraine as it could touch off a major European war.

So instead, most of the world — but not China — condemned and threatened to hit the Russian elites with, in the words of Von der Leyen — "massive and targeted sanctions." She will put to EU leaders late Thursday a proposal that "will target strategic sectors of the Russian economy by blocking the access to technologies and markets that are key for Russia."

She said the sanctions, if approved, "will weaken Russia's economic base and its capacity to modernize. And in addition, we will freeze Russian assets in the European Union and stop the access of Russian banks to European financial markets."

Like the first package of sanctions that were imposed when Russia recognized the two breakaway eastern Ukrainian republics, von der Leyen said all Western powers were walking in lockstep.

"We are closely aligned with our partners and allies the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, but also, for example, Japan and Australia," she said.

Highlighting a widening rift in superpower relations, China stood alone in failing to condemn the attack



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and instead accused the United States and its allies of worsening the crisis.

And it put its friendship in practice Thursday by approving imports of wheat from Russia, a move that could help to reduce the impact of possible increased Western sanctions. Russia is one of the biggest wheat producers but would be vulnerable if foreign markets block shipments.

In a clear defense of Moscow, China "called on parties to respect others' legitimate security concerns," Foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said that "all parties should work for peace instead of escalating the tension or hyping up the possibility of war," in language China has consistently used to criticize the West in the crisis.

"Those parties who were busy condemning others; what have they done? Have they persuaded others?" Hua said.

One thing was clear — weeks of diplomatic cajoling, global crisscrossing of leaders and foreign ministers, and the threat of sanctions against Putin's inner circle had failed to persuade the Kremlin to take one of the most significant measures in Europe since the end of the Cold War.

Overall, more sanctions appear the only option for the foreseeable future. And from South Korea to Australia to Europe, governments were lining up to oppose Putin.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who had labored until the last minute for a diplomatic solution, said "France firmly condemns Russia's decision to wage war," and promised support for Ukraine.

The turmoil from the beginning of a long-feared act of aggression rippled from Europe to Asia. Stock markets plunged, oil prices surged, and European aviation officials warned of a high risk to civilian aircraft over Ukraine, reminding air operators that "this is now an active conflict zone."

Russia's attack and uncertainty about the intensity of the Western response sent stocks tumbling and oil prices surging by more than \$5 per barrel. Market benchmarks in Europe and Asia fell by as much as 4%, while Brent crude oil briefly jumped above \$100 per barrel in London for the first time since 2014 on unease about possible disruption of supplies from Russia, the No. 3 producer.

In New York, the U.N. Security Council held an extraordinary emergency meeting meant to dissuade Russia from sending troops into Ukraine. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' plea to "give peace a chance" came just as Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared on Russian TV to announce the military operation.

Explosions were heard in Kyiv and other cities in Ukraine. Moscow had massed more than 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders. On Monday, Putin recognized the independence of two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine and ordered Russian forces there for what he called "peacekeeping."

To avoid international civilian casualties, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency said "there is a risk of both intentional targeting and misidentification of civil aircraft" and that "the presence and possible use of a wide range of ground and airborne warfare systems poses a HIGH risk for civil flights operating at all altitudes."

The attack touched all sectors of society across the globe. The director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention openly worried that global attention will now shift even further from helping the world's least vaccinated continent respond to COVID-19.

"The conflict in Ukraine definitely will draw attention, political attention, towards that crisis," John Nken-gasong said.

And a source told The Associated Press that the UEFA European soccer federation will no longer stage this season's May 28 Champions League final in St. Petersburg.

## Shares dive, oil soars after Russian action in Ukraine

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Stocks plunged and oil prices surged by more than \$8 per barrel Thursday after Russian President Vladimir Putin launched military action in Ukraine, prompting Washington and Europe to vow sanctions on Moscow that may roil the global economy.

Market benchmarks in Europe and Asia fell by more than 4% as traders tried to figure out how large Putin's incursion would be and the scale of Western retaliation. Wall Street futures sank, indicating that

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U.S. shares were likely to retreat after trading opens.

Energy prices surged, fuelling inflation fears. The spot price in Europe for natural gas, for which the continent relies on Russia to supply, jumped as much as 31%.

Brent crude oil jumped above \$100 per barrel in London for the first time since 2014 on unease about possible disruption of supplies from Russia, the No. 3 producer. Benchmark U.S. crude briefly surpassed \$98 per barrel. Prices of wheat and corn also jumped.

The ruble sank 7.5% against the dollar.

Financial markets are in a "flight to safety and may have to price in slower growth" due to high energy costs, Chris Turner and Francesco Pesole of ING said in a report.

In Brussels, the president of the European Commission said Thursday the 27-nation European Union planned "massive and targeted sanctions" on Russia.

"We will hold President Putin accountable," Ursula von der Leyen said.

The FTSE 100 in London fell 3.1% to 7,263.75 after Europe awakened to news of explosions in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, the major city of Kharkiv and other areas. The DAX in Frankfurt plunged 4.8% to 13,936.29 and the CAC in Paris lost 4.5% to 6,472.93.

Moscow's stock exchange briefly suspended trading on all its markets on Thursday morning. After trading resumed, the rouble-denominated MOEX stock index and dollar-denominated RTS index both tumbled by about a third.

The futures for Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index and the Dow Jones Industrial Average were off by more than 2%.

That was on top of Wednesday's 1.8% slide for the S&P 500 to an eight-month low after the Kremlin said rebels in eastern Ukraine had asked for military assistance. Moscow had sent soldiers to some rebel-held areas after recognizing them as independent.

Putin said Russia had to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine, a claim Washington had predicted he would make to justify an invasion.

President Joe Biden denounced the attack as "unprovoked and unjustified" and said Moscow would be held accountable, which many took to mean Washington and its allies would impose additional sanctions. Putin accused them of ignoring Russia's demand to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and to offer Moscow security guarantees.

Washington, Britain, Japan and the EU earlier imposed sanctions on Russian banks, officials and business leaders. Additional options include barring Russia from the global system for bank transactions.

The price for oil on international markets smashed through \$100 per barrel while benchmark U.S. crude flirted with that level.

West Texas Intermediate soared \$7.65 to \$99.75 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract fell 25 cents to \$92.10 on Wednesday.

Brent crude advanced \$8.48 to \$105.32 per barrel in London to its highest level since 2014. It lost 20 cents to \$94.05 the previous session.

In Asia, the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo fell 1.8% to 25,970.82 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong lost 3.2% to 22,901.56. The Shanghai Composite Index shed 1.7% to 3,429.96.

Asian economies face lower risks than Europe does, but those that need imported oil might be hit by higher prices if Russian supplies are disrupted, forecasters say.

The Kospi in Seoul lost 2.6% to 2,648.80 and Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 fell 3% to 6,990.60.

India's Sensex fell 4.7% to 54,529.91. New Zealand lost 3.3% and Southeast Asian markets also fell.

Investors already were uneasy about the possible impact of the Federal Reserve's plans to try to cool inflation by withdrawing ultra-low interest rates and other stimulus that boosted share prices.

The dollar weakened to 114.78 yen from Wednesday's 114.98 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1161 from \$1.1306.

## Russia attacks Ukraine; conflict reverberates around globe

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, DASHA LITVINOVA, YURAS KARMANAU and JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

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KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched a wide-ranging attack on Ukraine on Thursday, hitting cities and bases with airstrikes or shelling, as civilians piled into trains and cars to flee. Ukraine's government said Russian tanks and troops rolled across the border in what it called a "full-scale war" that could rewrite the geopolitical order and whose fallout already reverberated around the globe.

In announcing a major military operation, Russian President Vladimir Putin deflected global condemnation and cascading new sanctions — and chillingly referred to his country's nuclear arsenal as he threatened any foreign country attempting to interfere with "consequences you have never seen."

NATO's chief said the "brutal act of war" shattered peace on the European continent, as the U.S.-led alliance mobilized more troops to move toward eastern Europe.

Sirens rang out in Ukraine's capital and people massed in train stations and took to roads, as the government said the former Soviet republic was seeing a long-anticipated invasion from the east, north and south and reported more than 40 soldiers had been killed and dozens wounded.

"A full-scale war in Europe has begun," Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said. "Russia is not only attacking Ukraine, but the rules of normal life in the modern world."

World leaders decried the attack, which could cause massive casualties, topple Ukraine's democratically elected government, upend the post-Cold War security order and result in severe economic impact around the world from soaring heating bills to spikes in food prices.

"We woke up in a different world today," Germany's foreign minister said, as NATO agreed to beef up air, land and sea forces on its eastern flank near Ukraine and Russia.

Global financial markets plunged and oil prices soared, and governments from the U.S. to Asia and Europe readied new sanctions after weeks of failed efforts for a diplomatic solution. But global powers have said they will not intervene militarily to defend Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy cut diplomatic ties with Moscow and declared martial law. Ukrainians who had long braced for the prospect of an assault were urged to stay home and not to panic, even as officials said Russian troops were rolling into Ukraine, and big explosions were heard in the capital of Kyiv, Kharkiv in the east and Odesa in the west.

"We are facing a war and horror. What could be worse?" 64-year-old Liudmila Gireyeva said in Kyiv. She planned to head to the western city of Lviv and then to try to move to Poland to join her daughter. Putin "will be damned by history, and Ukrainians are damning him."

After weeks of denying plans to invade, Putin justified his actions in an overnight televised address, asserting that the attack was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine — a false claim the U.S. had predicted he would make as a pretext for an invasion. He accused the U.S. and its allies of ignoring Russia's demands to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and for security guarantees.

His spokesman said Thursday that Russia does not intend to occupy Ukraine but will move to "demilitarize" it.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels: "This is a deliberate, cold-blooded and long-planned invasion. ... Russia is using force to try to rewrite history."

The attacks came first from the air. Later Ukrainian authorities described ground invasions in multiple regions, and border guards released security camera footage Thursday showing a line of Russian military vehicles crossing into Ukraine's government-held territory from Russian-annexed Crimea.

An Associated Press photographer in Mariupol heard explosions and saw dozens of people with suitcases heading for their cars to leave the city. Another AP reporter saw the aftermath of an explosion in Kyiv. AP reporting elsewhere in Ukraine found other damage.

The Russian military claimed to have wiped out Ukraine's entire air defenses in a matter of hours, and European authorities declared the country's air space an active conflict zone. Russia's claims could not immediately be verified, nor could Ukrainian ones that they had shot down several Russian aircraft. The Ukrainian air defense system and air force date back to the Soviet era and are dwarfed by Russia's massive air power and precision weapons.

U.S. President Joe Biden pledged new sanctions to punish Russia for the "unprovoked and unjustified

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attack." The president said he planned to speak to Americans on Thursday after a meeting of the Group of Seven leaders. More sanctions against Russia were expected to be announced.

Zelenskyy urged global leaders to provide defense assistance to Ukraine and help protect its airspace, and urged his compatriots to defend the nation. Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba pleaded: "The world can and must stop Putin. The time to act is now."

In the capital, Mayor Vitaly Klitschko advised residents to stay home unless they are involved in critical work and urged them to prepare go-bags with necessities and documents if they need to evacuate.

Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's interior minister, said on Facebook that the Russian military had launched missile strikes on Ukrainian military command facilities, air bases and military depots in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Dnipro.

The Russian Defense Ministry said it was not targeting cities, but using precision weapons and claimed that "there is no threat to civilian population."

The consequences of the conflict and resulting sanctions on Russia started reverberating throughout the world.

World stock markets plunged and oil prices surged by nearly \$6 per barrel. Market benchmarks tumbled in Europe and Asia and U.S. futures were sharply lower. Brent crude oil jumped to over \$100 per barrel Thursday on unease about possible disruption of Russian supplies. The ruble sank.

Anticipating international condemnation and countermeasures, Putin issued a stark warning to other countries not to meddle.

In a reminder of Russia's nuclear power, Putin warned that "no one should have any doubts that a direct attack on our country will lead to the destruction and horrible consequences for any potential aggressor."

Putin's announcement came just hours after the Ukrainian president rejected Moscow's claims that his country poses a threat to Russia and made a passionate, last-minute plea for peace.

"The people of Ukraine and the government of Ukraine want peace," Zelenskyy said in an emotional overnight address, speaking in Russian in a direct appeal to Russian citizens. "But if we come under attack, if we face an attempt to take away our country, our freedom, our lives and lives of our children, we will defend ourselves."

Zelenskyy said he asked to arrange a call with Putin late Wednesday, but the Kremlin did not respond.

In an apparent reference to Putin's move to authorize the deployment of the Russian military to "maintain peace" in eastern Ukraine, Zelensky warned that "this step could mark the start of a big war on the European continent."

"Any provocation, any spark could trigger a blaze that will destroy everything," he said.

The attack began even as the U.N. Security Council was holding an emergency meeting to hold off an invasion. Members still unaware of Putin's announcement of the operation appealed to him to stand down. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres opened the meeting, just before the announcement, telling Putin: "Give peace a chance."

European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen later promised to hold the Kremlin accountable.

"In these dark hours, our thoughts are with Ukraine and the innocent women, men and children as they face this unprovoked attack and fear for their lives," they said on Twitter.

## Russia-Ukraine conflict raises big risks for global economy

By PAUL WISEMAN and DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just what a vulnerable world economy didn't need — a conflict that accelerates inflation, rattles markets and portends trouble for everyone from European consumers to indebted Chinese developers and families in Africa that face soaring food prices.

Russia's attack on Ukraine and retaliatory sanctions from the West may not portend another global recession. The two countries together account for less than 2% of the world's gross domestic product. And many regional economies remain in solid shape, having rebounded swiftly from the pandemic recession.

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Yet the conflict threatens to inflict severe economic damage on some countries and industries — damage that could mean hardships for millions of people. Russia is the world's third-biggest producer of petroleum and is a major exporter of natural gas. Ukraine's farms feed millions around the world. And financial markets are in a precarious spot as central banks prepare to reverse years of easy-money policies and raise interest rates to fight a resurgence of inflation. Those higher rates will likely slow spending and raise the risk of another downturn.

"I wouldn't be misled by just calculating GDP ratios ... especially at a time when commodity prices are already high, inflation is already high," said Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, a trade group for banks. "It's a tricky moment now, given where the global economy is."

Russia's attack could slow Europe's economic recovery by sending already elevated energy prices ever higher. Europe, an energy importer, receives close to 40% of its natural gas from Russia. A cutoff of that energy source could undercut the continent's economy. High natural gas prices have already led to higher home utility bills for both natural-gas heat and electricity generated from gas, crimping consumer spending.

"Gas prices in Europe are already crushing households and consumers, especially low-income households," said Adam Tooze, director of Columbia University's European Institute, whose 2018 history of the last decade's financial crisis, "Crashed," explored tensions over Ukraine.

Costly gas has forced production cutbacks at producers of fertilizer and some other heavy industrial users. Annual inflation hit 5.1% in January in the 19 countries that use the euro, the highest rate since record-keeping began in 1997.

"Escalating tensions put two cornerstones of this year's expected growth recovery — a rebound in consumer spending and a pickup in industrial activity — at further risk," Oliver Rakau and Mateusz Urban at Oxford Economics said in a research note.

Natural gas prices, which have tended to rise on crisis news, remain about four times what they were at the start of 2021. Russia sold less gas than normal on the short-term spot market, raising concerns that the Kremlin was using gas to press for approval of its Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The pipeline has now been frozen by sanctions imposed by Germany's government.

A mild winter and extra supplies of liquefied natural gas from the United States have helped ease some of Europe's jitters about a potential loss of Russian gas. Analysts say Russia has no interest in a complete gas cutoff, which would mean a sharp loss of revenue.

The threat to farms in eastern Ukraine and exports through Black Sea ports could reduce wheat supplies at a time when global food prices are at their highest level since 2011 and some countries are suffering from food shortages.

Ukraine is the world's fifth-largest wheat exporter, agricultural analyst Alex Smith wrote last month in the journal *Foreign Policy*, and many of the countries that rely on its wheat "already face food insecurity from ongoing political instability or outright violence." Yemen, for instance, imports 22% of its wheat consumption from Ukraine, Libya about 43%, Lebanon roughly half.

Rising energy and food prices will intensify the inflationary pressures that policymakers and central banks are struggling to ease. In the estimation of Capital Economics, a worst-case scenario of an escalating conflict and sanctions could send oil prices up to as much as \$140 a barrel — international Brent crude had surged above \$100 on Thursday after Russia attacked Ukraine — and force natural gas prices up, too.

That combination would add a sizable 2 percentage points to annual inflation in the world's wealthy countries, Capital Economics estimates. In the United States, the world's largest economy, consumer inflation jumped 7.5% last month compared with 12 months earlier, the steepest annual increase since 1982.

With inflation running hot, central banks may have less leeway — or inclination — to ride to the rescue with stimulus if the economy sputters in the face of the military conflict in Ukraine.

"The current inflationary backdrop suggests that policymakers have less flexibility than in the past to respond to a slowdown in real activity or a fall in asset prices," said Jonathan Petersen at Capital Economics.

Indeed, stocks have tumbled in anticipation of higher rates and a potential downturn. Market bench-

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marks in Europe and Asia fell by as much as 4% on Thursday, while Wall Street futures retreated by an unusually wide daily margin of 2.5%.

In the face geopolitical worries, Michael Taylor, managing director at Moody's Investors Service, warns that investors may flee to Treasuries and other super-safe investments, thereby driving up the relative credit costs for riskier businesses.

"Chinese property developers would be particularly exposed to this risk" as they try to roll over large amounts of foreign debt this year, Taylor said.

Financial markets could grow even more chaotic if the United States proceeds with what some call the "nuclear option": Cutting Russia out of the SWIFT payment network, a messaging service that links thousands of banks and allows them to transfer payments around the world.

Such a move would isolate Russia and bar the transfer of profits from energy production, which account for more than 40% of the country's revenue. But shutting Russia out of international finance could backfire, too, hurting U.S. and European companies that do business with Russian companies.

"There is a risk for global finance as much as there is for Russia," said Ribakova of the Institute of International Finance.

## Russia-Ukraine: What to know as Russia attacks Ukraine

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Russian troops launched a broad assault on Ukraine from three sides on Thursday, an attack that began with explosions before dawn in the capital Kyiv and other cities.

Ukraine's leadership said at least 40 people had been killed so far in what it called a "full-scale war" targeting the country from the east, north and south.

In a televised address as the attack began, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned other countries that any attempt to interfere would "lead to consequences you have never seen in history."

Ukrainians started fleeing some cities, and the Russian military claimed to have incapacitated all of Ukraine's air defenses and air bases within hours.

World leaders decried the start of an invasion that could cause massive casualties, topple Ukraine's democratically elected government and threaten the post-Cold War balance on the continent.

U.S. President Joe Biden declared that the world will "hold Russia accountable." NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg condemned Russia's action as a violation of international law and a threat to European security.

Ukraine's foreign ministry said Russia's intent was to destroy the state of Ukraine, a Westward-looking democracy intent on moving out of Moscow's orbit.

Here are the things to know about the conflict over Ukraine and the security crisis in Eastern Europe:  
PUTIN MAKES HIS MOVE

Putin said the military operation was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine — a claim the U.S. had predicted he would falsely make to justify an invasion.

Putin accused the U.S. and its allies of ignoring Russia's demands to block Ukraine from ever joining NATO and offer Moscow security guarantees.

Putin said Russia does not intend to occupy Ukraine but will "demilitarize" it. Soon after his address, explosions were heard in the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa. Russia said it was attacking military targets.

He urged Ukrainian servicemen to "immediately put down arms and go home."

Ukraine's border guard agency said the Russian military has attacked from neighboring Belarus, unleashing a barrage of artillery. The agency said Ukrainian border guards fired back, adding that there was no immediate report of casualties. Russian troops have been in Belarus for military drills.

THE WEST REACTS QUICKLY

Biden, Stoltenberg and other world leaders quickly condemned Russia's attack as unprovoked and unjustified.

Putin "has chosen a premeditated war that will bring a catastrophic loss of life and human suffering,"

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Biden said in a statement.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says Western allies will not stand by as Russia attacks Ukraine, and told Zelenskyy in an early morning call that he was appalled by events.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said: "This Russian invasion stands to put at risk the basic principle of international order that forbids one-sided action of force in an attempt to change the status quo."

## UKRAINE'S PRESIDENT URGES CALM

Residents of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, could be heard shouting in the streets when the first explosions sounded. But some kind of normalcy quickly returned, with cars circulating in the streets in the early morning commute.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy issued a video statement declaring martial law. He told Ukrainians that the United States was gathering international support to respond to Russia. He urged residents to remain calm and stay at home.

## WORLD MARKETS FALL

World stock markets have plunged and oil prices surged by nearly \$6 per barrel after Putin launched Russian military action in Ukraine.

Market benchmarks tumbled in Europe and Asia and U.S. futures were sharply lower. Brent crude oil jumped to over \$100 per barrel Thursday on unease about possible disruption of Russian supplies.

The ruble sank 7.5% to more than \$87 to the U.S. dollar. Earlier, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index fell 1.8% to an eight-month low after the Kremlin said rebels in eastern Ukraine asked for military assistance.

## CHINA'S SUPPORT FOR RUSSIA

China's customs agency on Thursday approved imports of wheat from all regions of Russia, a move that could help to reduce the impact of possible Western sanctions.

The two governments announced an agreement Feb. 8 for China to import Russian wheat and barley after Putin became the highest-profile foreign guest to attend the Beijing Winter Olympics.

China's populous market is a growth area for other farm goods suppliers, but Beijing had barred imports until now from Russia's main wheat-growing areas due to concern about possible fungus and other contamination.

Russia is one of the biggest wheat producers but its exports would be vulnerable if its foreign markets block shipments in response to its attack on Ukraine.

Thursday's announcement said Russia would "take all measures" to prevent contamination by wheat smut fungus and would suspend exports to China if it was found.

## PUTIN'S DECLARATION OVERTAKES EMERGENCY U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL SESSION

At an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council called by Ukraine that opened just before Putin's announcement, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Putin: "Stop your troops from attacking Ukraine. Give peace a chance. Too many people have already died."

Guterres later pleaded with Putin, "In the name of humanity, bring your troops back to Russia."

## WHEN WILL THE WEST IMPOSE MORE SANCTIONS?

Ukraine's forces are no match for Moscow's military might, so Kyiv is counting on other countries to hit Russia hard — with sanctions.

Biden on Wednesday allowed sanctions to move forward against the company that built the Russia-to-Germany Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and against the company's CEO.

Biden waived sanctions last year when the project was almost completed, in return for an agreement from Germany to take action against Russia if it used gas as a weapon or attacked Ukraine. Germany said Tuesday it was indefinitely suspending the pipeline.

Biden said more sanctions would be announced on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the European Union planned the "strongest, the harshest package" ever, to be considered at a summit on Thursday, according to EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell.

"A major nuclear power has attacked a neighbor country and is threatening reprisals of any other states that may come to the rescue," Borrell said.

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"This is not only the greatest violation of international law, it's a violation of the basic principles of human co-existence. It's costing many lives with unknown consequences ahead of us. The European Union will respond in the strongest possible terms."

## WHAT SANCTIONS WERE UNDER U.S. CONSIDERATION IF RUSSIA INVADED?

The Biden administration had made clear it was holding tough financial penalties in reserve in case of just such a Russian invasion.

The U.S. hasn't specified just what measures it will take now, although administration officials have made clear that all-out sanctions against Russia's major banks are among the likely options. So are export limits that would deny Russia U.S. high tech for its industries and military.

Another tough measure under consideration would effectively shut Russia out of much of the global financial system.

## HOW IS UKRAINE'S ECONOMY HOLDING UP?

It was Ukraine, not Russia, where the economy was eroding the fastest under the threat of war.

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.

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 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.

## UKRAINE SEES MORE CYBERATTACKS

The websites of Ukraine's defense, foreign and interior ministries were unreachable or painfully slow to load Thursday morning after a punishing wave of distributed-denial-of-service attacks as Russia struck at its neighbor.

In addition to DDoS attacks on Wednesday, cybersecurity researchers said unidentified attackers had infected hundreds of computers with destructive malware, some in neighboring Latvia and Lithuania.

Officials have long expected cyberattacks to precede and accompany any Russian military incursion.

## HOW HAS THE CONFRONTATION BEEN SEEN IN RUSSIA?

In the buildup to the attack, Russian state media portrayed Moscow as coming to the rescue of war-torn areas of eastern Ukraine where residents were tormented by Ukraine's aggression.

"You paid with your blood for these eight years of torment and anticipation," anchor Olga Skabeyeva said during a popular political talk show Tuesday morning. "Russia will now be defending Donbas."

Channel One struck a more festive tone, with its correspondent in Donetsk asserting that local residents "say it is the best news over the past years of war."

"Now they have confidence in the future and that the years-long war will finally come to an end," she said.

Whether ordinary Russians were buying it is another question.

## **Fear, calm among Ukrainians as Russian troops enter**

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Although Ukrainians had been warned for weeks that war with Russia was imminent, when the attacks finally came Thursday many seemed not to know how to react.

Civil defense sirens wailed in the air of the capital, Kyiv, in the gray and drizzly morning, but the city's main street Khreshchatyk was a mixture of anxiety and normalcy.

The hotel where many Associated Press journalists stayed ordered an evacuation within 30 minutes. Upon checkout, the friendly desk clerk asked: "Did you have anything from the mini-bar?"

Outside, guests hurriedly loaded their hastily packed luggage into cars, while passersby walked dogs and occasionally waved at acquaintances.



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Some had been awakened by the sound of explosions on the city's fringes, but others heard nothing. The mayor of Boryspil, the suburb where the capital's main airport lies, said some of the explosions were due to the shooting down of drones of unidentified origin.

"I'm not scared at the moment, maybe I'll be scared later," said Maxim Prudskoi, a resident standing on Khreshchatyk.

In Mariupol, the Azov Sea port city that many fear will be the first major target because of its strategic importance and valuable heavy industry, AP journalists saw similar scenes of aplomb and fear.

People waited at bus stops, seemingly on their way to work, while others hastened to their cars to leave the city that is only about 15 kilometers (less than 10 miles) from the front line with the Donetsk People's Republic, one of two separatist-held areas recognized by Russian President Vladimir Putin as independent this week in a prelude to the invasion.

As the morning progressed in Kyiv, alarm rose, with long lines of cars at gas stations and others heading away from the city. The city's extensive subway system was declared free for all riders and scores of people huddled with luggage in corridors, appearing uncertain where to ride to but comforted by the protection of being underground.

Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitschko called on the city's 3 million people to stay indoors unless they were workers in critical sectors and said everyone should prepare go-bags with necessities such as medicine and documents.

The ambivalent reaction of Ukrainians may reflect the frequent attempts by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to moderate expectations of aggression by Russia. He had argued that panic would lead to societal destabilization that could be as much of a tactical advantage for Russia as the estimated 150,000 troops that had massed on Ukraine's borders since late last year.

"We didn't believe this situation would come," said Elizaveta Melnik of Kyiv.

Zelenskyy's position notably changed on Wednesday, when Ukraine imposed a state of emergency that included possible restrictions on gatherings and limitations on vehicular traffic.

A day later, after Russian troops entered the country, Zelenskyy was imposing martial law.

## Weighing Russia sanctions success tough in Ukraine conflict

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the Biden administration prepares its response to Russia's attack on Ukraine, U.S. Treasury Department officials and their counterparts in Europe are tasked with finding ways to make Russia's economy pay a price.

One key question is how to measure the success.

With inflation already at record highs, a global pandemic that keeps businesses struggling to reopen and an energy shortage throughout Europe, the right way to punish one of the world's major economies can be complex to tease out.

The first round of sanctions came before Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday announced a military operation in Ukraine and warned other countries that any attempt to interfere would lead to "consequences they have never seen." As he spoke, big explosions were heard in Kyiv, Kharkiv and other areas of Ukraine.

Previous sanctions on Russia have been more narrowly targeted at individuals and entities, but Maria Shagina, a sanctions expert at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, said sanctions now need to be much broader to have any chance to influence Russia's behavior. "At this point, going middle of the road is not going to deter anyone further, and at this point sanctions can play an important role in trying to deter a further invasion."

She said full blocking sanctions on important Russian banks to cripple Russia's financial system, and steps against oil and gas companies, were options. "If some sort of light sanctions are implemented, that is going to embolden (Putin) further. At least we have to try at this point ... to damage the economy," she said.

"I can't predict what sanctions can do, but the best thing is not to sit and wait to react, because this

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is not OK.”

The mere threat of sanctions did not deter the attack because Putin may have calculated the U.S. and Europe would stop short of the toughest measures due to Russia’s role as a key supplier of oil and natural gas, especially in Europe, Shagina said. “I think Russia didn’t, still doesn’t believe the West would impose the most nuclear options because this interdependence works as a shield for Russia.”

Hours earlier, White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Wednesday ticked through a list of factors the administration is watching, describing recent trends of rising borrowing costs for the Russian government, falling foreign investment in the country, increasing weakness of the ruble and shrinking fortunes for the “super-rich.”

She added that all of this had transpired “before the bite even takes place” from the new sanctions that the U.S. and its allies started to roll out Tuesday.

“This is a vicious feedback loop that will get more severe” if Putin doesn’t pull back, she said, adding that if elites tried to use their bank cards for transactions on Tuesday, they “wouldn’t have been working.”

After Putin announced the launch of military operations against Ukraine, President Joe Biden promised the U.S. and allies would announce “further consequences” Thursday against Russia for its “needless act of aggression.”

Experts with knowledge of how the U.S. imposes sanctions say the biggest determinant of the success of such measures won’t be in the valuation of Russian markets, the ruble or other assets.

“To be honest, there aren’t any formalized systems, processes or procedures where Treasury actually makes that assessment, so that’s an interesting shortcoming but it’s a reality,” said Adam Smith, who served in the Obama administration as senior advisor in Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control. “The bigger question is, are these going to change President Putin’s mind.”

The administration, in its first tranche of sanctions Tuesday, moved to cut off Russia’s government from Western finance, sanctioning two banks and blocking it from trading debt on U.S. and European markets. On Wednesday, Biden allowed sanctions to move forward against the company that built the Russia-to-Germany Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and against the company’s CEO.

Nicholas Mulder, a professor of modern European history at Cornell University, says there are sometimes concrete measures of successful sanctions. He cited the restrictions on Iran’s growth, particularly from 2011 to 2015, when crude oil exports dropped by more than half.

In April 2015, then-Treasury Secretary Jack Lew said Iran’s economy had shrunk by 20% due to sanctions, according to a Congressional Research Service report.

But Mulder says that since Russia is a massive economy, the mathematics on sanctions enforcement and their success will look different, saying “it quickly becomes difficult in terms of repercussions on global markets.”

That’s why sanctions are often imposed on individuals, not an entire economy.

Psaki predicted that the initial round of sanctions “will have a significant impact on Russian leadership in the inner circle,” essentially cutting off their ability to tap into funds from state-owned banks that are being blocked from making transactions with the United States and Europe.

Those banks, she said, were “some of the glorified piggy banks for the Kremlin” and included one where military finances have been held. She added that “no financial institution is safe” from further sanctions if the Russian government continues movement into Ukrainian territory.

William C. Wohlforth, faculty director at the Dartmouth Institute for Global Security, said the most recent financial penalties should be viewed as a “warning shot across the bow about what could be done.”

“The only indicator that matters is whether it deters Putin from further moves in Ukraine. Sanctions on this or that oligarch will have zero effect,” he said.

Mulder said measuring success will also be difficult as Asian economies now take on a larger chunk of trading with Russia than they had in 2014, when sanctions were imposed when Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine.

“There are ways of adjusting trade,” Mulder said, given that non-European countries will maintain com-

merce with Russia.

Smith stressed that the market costs of sanctions shouldn't be the only measure of success, but should also include the possibilities of what sanctions serve to prevent.

Citing the 2014 sanctions issued on various individuals and entities, Smith said Putin "took Crimea, but theoretically without those 2014 sanctions they could've gone into Kyiv."

He said Treasury and the administration juggle many challenges but, "the task of measuring success is somewhat of a fool's errand."

## 'It's too late': Russian move roils UN meeting on Ukraine

By JENNIFER PELTZ and EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The emergency U.N. Security Council meeting was meant as an eleventh hour effort to dissuade Russia from sending troops into Ukraine. But the message became moot even as it was being delivered.

While diplomats at U.N. headquarters were making pleas for Russia to back off — "Give peace a chance," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres implored — Russian President Vladimir Putin went on television in his homeland to announce a military operation that he said was intended to protect civilians in Ukraine.

Putin warned other countries that any effort to interfere with the Russian operation would lead to "consequences they have never seen."

The council, where Russia holds the rotating presidency this month, gathered Wednesday night hours after Russia said rebels in eastern Ukraine had asked Moscow for military assistance. Fears that Russia was laying the groundwork for war bore out about a half hour later.

"It's too late, my dear colleagues, to speak about de-escalation," Ukrainian Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya told the council. "I call on every one of you to do everything possible to stop the war."

In a spontaneous exchange not often seen in the council chamber, Kyslytsya challenged his Russian counterpart to say that his country wasn't at that very moment bombing and shelling Ukraine or moving troops into it.

"You have a smartphone. You can call" officials in Moscow, Kyslytsya said.

"I have already said all I know at this point," Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia responded.

He added that he didn't plan to wake up Russia's foreign minister — and said that what was happening was not a war but a "special military operation."

Kyslytsya dismissed that description outside the meeting as "lunatic semantics."

At the council's second emergency meeting this week on Ukraine, members found themselves delivering prepared speeches that were instantly outdated. Some ultimately reacted in a second round of hastily added remarks.

"At the exact time as we are gathered in the council seeking peace, Putin delivered a message of war, in total disdain for the responsibility of this council," U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.

She added that a draft resolution would be circulated to the council Thursday.

The resolution would declare that Russia is violating the U.N. Charter, international law and a 2015 council resolution on Ukraine, a European diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity because the discussions were private. The resolution would urge Russia to come back into compliance immediately, the diplomat said.

Earlier Wednesday, diplomats from dozens of countries took the floor at the U.N. General Assembly to deplore Russia's actions toward Ukraine and plead for dialogue, while Russia and ally Syria defended Moscow's moves.

Echoing a narrative being broadcast to Russians at home, Nebenzia portrayed his country as responding to the plight of beleaguered people in the breakaway areas. Russia claims Ukraine is engaging in violence and oppression, which Ukraine denies.

"The root of today's crisis around Ukraine is the actions of Ukraine itself," he told the council Wednesday.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba implored countries to use tough economic sanctions, strong

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messages and "active diplomacy" to get Russia to back off. A lackluster response would jeopardize not only Ukraine but the concept of international law and global security, he warned.

Meeting a day after Western powers and some other countries imposed new sanctions on Russia, the 193-member General Assembly didn't take any collective action. But the comments from nearly 70 nations, with more scheduled for Monday, represented the broadest forum of global sentiment since the crisis dramatically escalated this week.

Russia seized Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula in 2014, and pro-Russia rebels have since been fighting Ukrainian forces in the eastern areas of Donetsk and Luhansk. More than 14,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

After weeks of rising tension as Moscow massed over 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders, Putin on Monday recognized the two regions' independence and ordered Russian forces there for what he called "peacekeeping."

Guterres disputed that, saying the troops were entering another country without its consent.

By the end of the night Wednesday, as explosions were heard in Kyiv and other cities across Ukraine, Guterres' appeal to "give peace a chance" had become a darker and more desperate plea.

"President Putin, in the name of humanity, bring your troops back to Russia," the secretary-general said in remarks to reporters. "In the name of humanity, do not allow to start in Europe what could be the worst war since the beginning of this century."

## **Poll: Stark racial gap in views on Black woman on high court**

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans are starkly divided by race on the importance of President Joe Biden's promise to nominate a Black woman to the Supreme Court, with white Americans far less likely to be highly enthusiastic about the idea than Black Americans — and especially Black women.

That's according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research that shows 48% of Americans say it's not important to them personally that a Black woman becomes a Supreme Court Justice. Another 23% say that's somewhat important, and 29% say it's very or extremely important. Only two Black men have served on the nation's highest court, and no Black women have ever been nominated.

The poll shows Biden's pledge is resonating with Black Americans, 63% of whom say it's very or extremely important to them personally that a Black woman serves on the court, compared with just 21% of white Americans and 33% of Hispanics. The findings come as Biden finalizes his pick to fill the seat that is being vacated by Stephen Breyer, who announced his retirement last month.

"While I've been studying candidates' backgrounds and writings, I've made no decisions except one: The person I will nominate will be someone with extraordinary qualifications, character, experience and integrity, and that person will be the first Black woman ever nominated to the United States Supreme Court," Biden said in his remarks on Breyer's impending retirement. "It's long overdue, in my view."

Black women are particularly moved by the idea, with 70% placing high importance on the nomination, compared to 54% of Black men.

Diana White, a 76-year-old Democrat from Hanley Hills, Missouri, said Biden wouldn't choose someone if "she didn't have the potential and the professionalism and the knowledge to do the job."

White, who is Black, said making a groundbreaking nomination could be inspirational to younger people.

"That's what I think about, things for other people to look forward to later in life," she said.

Any enthusiasm that could be generated by Biden's nomination could benefit his party in this year's midterm elections, when Democrats risk losing control of Congress. So far Biden has struggled to deliver on other goals for the Black community, such as police reform legislation and voting rights protections.

Some 91% of Black voters backed Biden in the 2020 presidential election, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of the electorate.

But recent polls suggest Biden's approval rating has dipped substantially among Black Americans since

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the first half of 2021, when about 9 in 10 approved of how he was handling his job. The new poll shows that his approval among Black Americans stands at 67%.

Jarvis Goode, a 35-year-old Democrat from LaGrange, Georgia, agreed that it's "overdue" to have a Black woman on the court.

Goode, who is Black, said he hopes the nomination would provide further proof that "women can do the same as men."

Biden first promised to choose a Black women for the Supreme Court when he was running for president. According to a person familiar with the process, he's interviewed at least three candidates for the position — judges Ketanji Brown Jackson, J. Michelle Childs and Leondra Kruger — and he's expected to announce his decision next week.

The poll shows that most Democrats say a Black woman on the court is at least somewhat important, though only half think it's very important. Among Republicans, about 8 in 10 say it's not important.

John Novak, a 52-year-old Republican from Hudson, Wisconsin, said he disliked Biden's pledge to choose a Black woman, saying there's too much focus on "checking boxes" when it comes to nominating people.

"It should have been stated that we're going to pick the best candidate who is going to follow the Constitution," said Novak, who is white. "And then throw in that we'd like her to be a woman and woman of color."

There's been a mixed reaction from Republican elected officials.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, described Biden's promise as "offensive" because it sends a message to most Americans that "I don't give a damn about you, you are ineligible."

However, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said it did not bother him, and he noted that President Donald Trump and President Ronald Reagan had promised to nominate women for the Supreme Court.

"I heard a couple of people say they thought it was inappropriate for the president to announce he was going to put an African American woman on the court. Honestly, I did not think that was inappropriate," said McConnell said during a Tuesday event in his home state.

The poll found that Americans' faith in the Supreme Court continues to wane. Only 21% said they have a great deal of confidence in the high court, while 24% said they have hardly any confidence. The latter number has risen somewhat from 17% in September 2020, the last time the question was asked.

## **MLB: Season to be shortened if no deal by end of Monday**

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

JUPITER, Fla. (AP) — Major League Baseball said only five days remain to salvage March 31 openers and a full season, telling locked out players that games would be canceled if a labor contract is not agreed to by the end of Monday.

After the third straight day of negotiations with little movement, MLB went public with what it had told the union on Feb. 12.

"A deadline is a deadline. Missed games are missed games. Salary will not be paid for those games," an MLB spokesman said after Wednesday's bargaining ended. The spokesman spoke on behalf of MLB on the condition the spokesman not be identified by name.

Players have not accepted Monday as a deadline and have suggested any missed games could be made up as part of doubleheaders, a method MLB said it will not agree to.

The union told MLB if games are missed and salaries are lost, clubs should not expect players to agree to management's proposals to expand the postseason and to allow advertisements on uniforms and helmets.

Bargaining is scheduled to continue Thursday, and both sides said they are prepared to meet through Monday.

A shortened season would be baseball's second in three years following a 2020 schedule cut from 162 games to 60 because of the coronavirus pandemic. The last seasons truncated by labor strife were during the strike that ended the 1994 schedule on Aug. 12 and caused the start of the following season to be

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delayed from April 2 to April 25. The 1995 schedule was reduced from 162 games to 144.

Players are paid only during the regular season, accruing 1/162nd of their salary daily. Players would be subject to losing as much as \$232,975 daily in the case of Mets pitcher Max Scherzer, or as little as \$3,441 for a player at a \$640,000 minimum.

Baseball's work stoppage was in its 84th day, and the three sessions this week increased the total on core economic issues to just nine since the lockout began Dec. 2.

Spring training workouts had been scheduled to start on Feb. 16, and MLB already has canceled the first week of exhibitions, which were to begin Friday.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said on Feb. 10 a minimum of four weeks of training are needed before starting the season. A deal by Monday would allow that plus a few days for players to report to camps in Arizona and Florida.

Manfred has spoken publicly just once since the day the lockout began and union head Tony Clark not at all.

MLB's public statement was interpreted as a pressure tactic by the union, which was angered payrolls decreased during the expired five-year deal and an increased number of teams jettisoned higher-salaries veterans and transitioned to rebuilding mode.

"To get bears in the forest, you can't offer them bear traps," said Scott Boras, agent for five of eight players on the union's executive subcommittee.

A day after the union made only small moves in response to management's incremental proposal of a day earlier, MLB advanced only one change: Teams offered to increase the minimum salary from \$570,500 to \$640,000, up from their previous proposal of \$630,000. The minimum would increase by an additional \$10,000 each season during a five-year agreement. Clubs withdrew their proposal for a tiered minimum, which players opposed.

Players have asked for \$775,000 in 2022 and additional \$30,000 jumps in each succeeding season. The union evaluated MLB's proposal as adding \$5 million annually.

There was no discussion Wednesday on the key issue of luxury tax thresholds and rates, but players voiced their concern over a lack of competition and the need for younger players to get higher salaries earlier in their careers.

The union proposed a \$115 million pool of money that would go to 150 pre-arbitration players annually, while the clubs offered \$20 million that would be distributed to 30.

Yankees pitchers Gerrit Cole and Zack Britton joined the talks, two of six members on hand from the executive subcommittee that supervises the negotiations. They were joined by Scherzer, free agent pitcher Andrew Miller, Mets shortstop Francisco Lindor, and Houston catcher Jason Castro.

After meeting at the start of the day at Roger Dean Stadium, the vacant spring training home of the Miami Marlins and St. Louis Cardinals, the sides caucused and then had a smaller group meeting that included Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem, Colorado CEO Dick Monfort, Scherzer and Miller.

Teams have told the union they will not decrease revenue sharing and will not add new methods for players to accrue service time, which the union said is needed to prevent teams from holding players back to delay free agency.

Clubs also are refusing to increase arbitration eligibility among players with at least two years of service and less than three, of which the top 22% by service time are eligible. The union wants it expanded to 75%.

## Cyberattacks accompany Russian military assault on Ukraine

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — The websites of Ukraine's defense, foreign and interior ministries were unreachable or painfully slow to load Thursday morning after a punishing wave of distributed-denial-of-service attacks as Russia struck at its neighbor, explosions shaking the capital of Kyiv and other major cities.

In addition to DDoS attacks on Wednesday, cybersecurity researchers said unidentified attackers had infected hundreds of computers with destructive malware, some in neighboring Latvia and Lithuania.

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Asked if the denial-of-service attacks were continuing Thursday morning, senior Ukrainian cyber defense official Victor Zhora did not answer. "Are you serious?" he texted. "There are ballistic missiles here."

"This is terrible. We need the world to stop it. Immediately," Zhora said of the offensive that Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in the pre-dawn hours.

Officials have long expected cyber attacks to precede and accompany any Russian military incursion. The combination of DDoS attacks, which bombard websites with junk traffic to render them unreachable, and malware infections hewed to Russia's playbook of wedding cyber operations with real-world aggression.

ESET Research Labs said it detected a previously unseen piece of data-wiping malware Wednesday on "hundreds of machines in the country." It was not clear how many networks were affected.

"With regards whether the malware was successful in its wiping capability, we assume that this indeed was the case and affected machines were wiped," said ESET research chief Jean-Ian Boutin. He would not name the targets but said they were "large organizations."

ESET was unable to say who was responsible.

Symantec Threat Intelligence detected three organizations hit by the wiper malware — Ukrainian government contractors in Latvia and Lithuania and a financial institution in Ukraine, said Vikram Thakur, its technical director. Both countries are NATO members.

"The attackers have gone after these targets without much caring for where they may be physically located," he said.

All three had "close affiliation with the government of Ukraine," said Thakur, saying Symantec believed the attacks were "highly targeted." He said roughly 50 computers at the financial outfit were impacted, some with data wiped.

Asked about the wiper attack on Wednesday, Zhora had no comment.

Boutin said the malware's timestamp indicated it was created in late December.

"Russia likely has been planning this for months, so it is hard to say how many organizations or agencies have been backdoored in preparation for these attacks," said Chester Wisniewski, principal research scientist at the cybersecurity firm Sophos. He guessed the Kremlin intended with the malware to "send the message that they have compromised a significant amount of Ukrainian infrastructure and these are just little morsels to show how ubiquitous their penetration is."

Word of the wiper follows a mid-January attack that Ukrainian officials blamed on Russia in which the defacement of some 70 government websites was used to mask intrusions into government networks in which at least two servers were damaged with wiper malware masquerading as ransomware.

Cyberattacks have been a key tool of Russian aggression in Ukraine since before 2014, when the Kremlin annexed Crimea and hackers tried to thwart elections. They were also used against Estonia in 2007 and Georgia in 2008. Their intent can be to sow panic, confuse and distract.

Distributed-denial-of-service attacks are among the least impactful because they don't entail network intrusion. Such attacks barrage websites with junk traffic so they become unreachable.

The DDoS targets Wednesday included the defense and foreign ministries, the Council of Ministers and Privatbank, the country's largest commercial bank. Many of the same sites were similarly knocked offline Feb. 13-14 in DDoS attacks that the U.S. and U.K. governments quickly blamed on Russia's GRU military intelligence agency

Wednesday's DDoS attacks appeared less impactful than the earlier onslaught — with targeted sites soon reachable again — as emergency responders blunted them. Zhora's office, Ukraine's information protection agency, said responders switched to a different DDoS protection service provider.

Doug Madory, director of internet analysis at the network management firm Kentik Inc., recorded two attack waves each lasting more than an hour.

A spokesman for California-based Cloudflare, which provides services to some of the targeted sites, said Wednesday that DDoS attacks in Ukraine had been until then sporadic but on the rise in the past month but "relatively modest compared to large DDoS attacks we've handled in the past."

The West blames Russia's GRU for some of the most damaging cyberattacks on record, including a pair in 2015 and 2016 that briefly knocked out parts of Ukraine's power grid and the NotPetya "wiper" virus

of 2017, which caused more than \$10 billion of damage globally by infecting companies that do business in Ukraine with malware seeded through a tax preparation software update.

The wiper malware detected in Ukraine this year has so far been manually activated, as opposed to a worm like NotPetya, which can spread out of control across borders.

## **AP sources: Yemen's Houthis seize another US Embassy staffer**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels have detained another official of the long-closed U.S. Embassy there, bringing the number of local ex-U.S. Embassy staffers in the rebel group's custody to at least 11, according to accounts from Yemeni officials and others.

The Houthis, an Iran-backed group that controls the capital, Sanaa, and much of Yemen's north, took into custody a former press officer from the U.S. Embassy last week, according to a rights lawyer in Sanaa, Abdel-Majeed Sabra, and a family member of a detainee. The family member spoke on condition of anonymity because of the fear of reprisals.

Sabra said the former embassy press officer was being held in the Houthi-run Security and Intelligence Authority facility. It's not known whether Houthis have charged the man or any other of the detainees from the U.S. Embassy staff, he said.

Sabra said the latest staffer was detained a month after the rebel group arrested his former deputy at the embassy.

Houthi rebels brought the latest embassy staffer back to his home on Tuesday to search it, and took him away again.

The State Department said in an email to The Associated Press this week that the U.S. government was "unceasing" in efforts to secure the release of the local embassy staffers.

Washington shut down its embassy in Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula's poorest nation, in 2015, as conflict fractured the country.

Houthis had swept down from their base in the north the year before at a time of mounting political upheaval, seizing the capital and other territory. A military coalition led by Saudi Arabia entered the war in 2015.

Houthis, with increasing support from Iran, have been able to hold off the Saudi-led military coalition. U.N. and aid agencies call the overall situation in Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with millions of Yemenis vulnerable to famine.

Houthis have rebuffed repeated attempts by the Biden administration to get them into peace talks, and accuse the U.S. of supporting the coalition.

Houthis seized the headquarters of the U.S. Embassy last October. They detained dozens of former staffers, many of whom were later released.

With the latest detention, at least 11 staffers from the closed embassy remain in Houthi custody, however, according to a security official and a family member of the detainees. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly, and the family member for fear of reprisal.

U.N. agencies confirmed late last year that the Houthis also had arrested two of their employees in Sanaa in early November. UNESCO and the U.N. human rights office said no legal grounds were given for their detention.

Both sides in the war in the past have used detainees as leverage in negotiations, including prisoner swaps.

The new detention comes as the Biden administration is considering redesignating the Houthis or individual Houthi leaders as terrorists, a step that carries harsh U.S. government penalties for those doing business with them.

That's after Houthis stepped up cross-border attacks by drone and missiles on the United Arab Emirates, in the wake of suffering heavy territorial losses in fighting.

The U.S. deepened sanctions Wednesday on what it said was an illicit, Iran-aligned smuggling network



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helping to fund the Houthis, but appeared to stop short of the terrorist designation.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are pushing for the terrorist designation. Some Americans and Yemenis argue it could deter Houthis in attacks and help push them into peace talks.

Humanitarian organizations and some Democratic lawmakers say the financial penalties associated with the designation would have minimal impact on isolated Houthi leaders but drive food suppliers and shippers away from the country, risking famine for millions. Twelve Democratic lawmakers wrote Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday urging against the terror designation.

## Russia attacks Ukraine as defiant Putin warns US, NATO

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, DASHA LITVINOVA, YURAS KARMANAU and JIM HEINTZ Associated Press MOSCOW (AP) — Russian troops launched their anticipated attack on Ukraine on Thursday, as President Vladimir Putin cast aside international condemnation and sanctions, warning other countries that any attempt to interfere would lead to “consequences you have never seen.”

Big explosions were heard before dawn in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa as world leaders decried the start of an Russian invasion that could cause massive casualties and topple Ukraine’s democratically elected government.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy introduced martial law, saying Russia has targeted Ukraine’s military infrastructure and explosions are heard across the country. Zelenskyy said he had just talked to President Joe Biden and the U.S. was rallying international support for Ukraine. He urged Ukrainians to stay home and not to panic.

Biden pledged new sanctions meant to punish Russia for an act of aggression that the international community had for weeks anticipated but could not prevent through diplomacy.

Putin justified it all in a televised address, asserting the attack was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine — a false claim the U.S. had predicted he would make as a pretext for an invasion. He accused the U.S. and its allies of ignoring Russia’s demand to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and offer Moscow security guarantees, and credulously claimed that Russia doesn’t intend to occupy Ukraine but will move to “demilitarize” it and bring those who committed crimes to justice.

Biden in a written statement condemned the “unprovoked and unjustified attack” on Ukraine and he promised the U.S. and its allies “will hold Russia accountable.” Biden said he planned to speak to Americans on Thursday after a meeting of the Group of Seven leaders. More sanctions against Russia were expected to be announced Thursday.

Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba described the action as a “full-scale invasion of Ukraine” and a “war of aggression,” adding, “Ukraine will defend itself and will win. The world can and must stop Putin. The time to act is now.”

The Russian military said it has struck Ukrainian air bases and other military assets and hasn’t targeted populated areas. The Russian Defense Ministry statement said the military is using precision weapons to target Ukrainian air bases, air defense assets and other military infrastructure. It claimed that “there is no threat to civilian population.”

Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine’s interior minister, said on Facebook that the Russian military has launched missile strikes on Ukrainian military command facilities, air bases and military depots in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Dnipro.

After the initial explosions in Kyiv, people could be heard shouting in the streets. But then a sense of normality returned, with cars circulating and people walking in the streets as a pre-dawn commute appeared to be starting in relative calm.

Beyond casualties that could overwhelm Ukraine’s government, the consequences of the conflict and resulting sanctions levied on Russia could reverberate throughout the world, affecting energy supplies in Europe, jolting global financial markets and threatening the post-Cold War balance on the continent.

Asian stock markets plunged and oil prices surged after the military action got underway. Earlier, Wall Street’s benchmark S&P 500 index fell 1.8% to an eight-month low after the Kremlin said rebels in eastern

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Ukraine asked for military assistance

Anticipating international condemnation and countermeasures, Putin issued a stark warning to other countries not to meddle, saying, "whoever tries to impede us, let alone create threats for our country and its people, must know that the Russian response will be immediate and lead to the consequences you have never seen in history."

Putin urged Ukrainian servicemen to "immediately put down arms and go home."

In a stark reminder of Russia's nuclear power, Putin warned that "no one should have any doubts that a direct attack on our country will lead to the destruction and horrible consequences for any potential aggressor." He emphasized that Russia is "one of the most potent nuclear powers and also has a certain edge in a range of state-of-the-art weapons."

Though the U.S. on Tuesday announced the repositioning of forces around the Baltics, Biden has said he will not send in troops to fight Russia.

Putin announced the military operation after the Kremlin said rebels in eastern Ukraine asked Russia for military assistance to help fend off Ukrainian "aggression," an announcement that the White House said was a "false flag" operation by Moscow to offer up a pretext for an invasion.

Putin's announcement came just hours after the Ukrainian president rejected Moscow's claims that his country poses a threat to Russia and made a passionate, last-minute plea for peace.

"The people of Ukraine and the government of Ukraine want peace," Zelenskyy said in an emotional overnight address, speaking in Russian in a direct appeal to Russian citizens. "But if we come under attack, if we face an attempt to take away our country, our freedom, our lives and lives of our children, we will defend ourselves. When you attack us, you will see our faces, not our backs."

Zelenskyy said he asked to arrange a call with Putin late Wednesday, but the Kremlin did not respond.

In an apparent reference to Putin's move to authorize the deployment of the Russian military to "maintain peace" in eastern Ukraine, Zelensky warned that "this step could mark the start of a big war on the European continent."

"Any provocation, any spark could trigger a blaze that will destroy everything," he said.

He challenged the Russian propaganda claims, saying that "you are told that this blaze will bring freedom to the people of Ukraine, but the Ukrainian people are free."

At an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council called by Ukraine because of the imminent threat of a Russian invasion, members still unaware of Putin's announcement appealed to him to stop an attack. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres opened the meeting, just before the announcement, telling Putin: "Stop your troops from attacking Ukraine. Give peace a chance. Too many people have already died."

NATO Secretary-General Jen Stoltenberg issued a statement saying he strongly condemns "Russia's reckless and unprovoked attack on Ukraine, which puts at risk countless civilian lives. Once again, despite our repeated warnings and tireless efforts to engage in diplomacy, Russia has chosen the path of aggression against a sovereign and independent country."

Anxiety about an imminent Russian offensive soared after Putin recognized the separatist regions' independence on Monday, endorsed the deployment of troops to the rebel territories and received parliamentary approval to use military force outside the country. The West responded with sanctions.

Late Wednesday, Ukrainian lawmakers approved a decree that imposes a nationwide state of emergency for 30 days starting Thursday. The measure allows authorities to declare curfews and other restrictions on movement, block rallies and ban political parties and organizations "in the interests of national security and public order."

The action reflected increasing concern among Ukrainian authorities after weeks of trying to project calm. The Foreign Ministry advised against travel to Russia and recommended that any Ukrainians who are there leave immediately.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Wednesday the Russian force of more than 150,000 troops arrayed along Ukraine's borders is in an advanced state of readiness. "They are ready to go right now," Kirby said.

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Early Thursday, airspace over all of Ukraine was shut down to civilian air traffic, according to a notice to airmen. A commercial flight tracking website showed that an Israeli El Al Boeing 787 flying from Tel Aviv to Toronto turned abruptly out of Ukrainian airspace before detouring over Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland. The only other aircraft tracked over Ukraine was a U.S. RQ-4B Global Hawk unmanned surveillance plane, which began flying westward early Thursday after Russia put in place flight restrictions over Ukrainian territory.

Another wave of distributed-denial-of-service attacks hit Ukraine's parliament and other government and banking websites on Wednesday, and cybersecurity researchers said unidentified attackers had also infected hundreds of computers with destructive malware.

Officials have long said they expect cyberattacks to precede and accompany any Russian military incursion, and analysts said the incidents hew to a nearly two-decade-old Russian playbook of wedding cyber operations with real-world aggression.

Even before Putin's announcement, dozens of nations imposed sanctions on Russia, further squeezing Russian oligarchs and banks out of international markets.

Biden allowed sanctions to move forward against the company that built the Russia-to-Germany Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and against the company's CEO.

Germany said Tuesday that it was indefinitely suspending the project, after Biden charged that Putin had launched "the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine" by sending troops into the separatist regions. The pipeline is complete but has not yet begun operating.

Even before the Russian military attack on Ukraine began, the threat of war had shredded Ukraine's economy and raised the specter of massive casualties, energy shortages across Europe and global economic chaos.

European Union sanctions against Russia took effect, targeting several companies along with 351 Russian lawmakers who voted for a motion urging Putin to recognize the rebel regions and 27 senior government officials, business executives and top military officers.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has shrugged off the sanctions, saying that "Russia has proven that, with all the costs of the sanctions, it is able to minimize the damage."

## Asian stocks plunge after Putin announces action in Ukraine

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets plunged and oil prices surged to nearly \$100 a barrel Thursday after President Vladimir Putin announced Russian military action in Ukraine.

Market benchmarks in Tokyo and Seoul fell 2%. Hong Kong and Sydney lost more than 3%.

Oil prices jumped more than \$4 on anxiety about possible disruptions of Russian supplies. The ruble fell 4.4% against the dollar.

U.S. futures were also sharply lower and the future for Germany's DAX lost more than 4%.

Putin said the military operation was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine, a claim Washington had predicted he would make to justify an invasion. As Putin spoke, explosions were heard in Kyiv, Kharkiv and other areas of Ukraine.

President Joe Biden denounced the attack as "unprovoked and unjustified" and said Moscow would be held accountable, which many took to mean Washington and its allies would impose additional sanctions. Putin accused them of ignoring Russia's demand to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and to offer Moscow security guarantees.

"The relief rally has quickly reversed course," said Jeffrey Halley of Oanda in a report. "Equities are tanking in Asia."

On Wednesday, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index fell 1.8% to an eight-month low after the Kremlin said rebels in eastern Ukraine asked for military assistance. Moscow had sent soldiers to some rebel-held areas after recognizing them as independent.

Washington, Britain, Japan and the 27-nation European Union earlier imposed sanctions on Russian

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banks, officials and business leaders. Potential options for more penalties including barring Russia from the global system for bank transactions.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo fell 2.2% to 25,855.04 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong lost 3.1% to 22,925.60. The Shanghai Composite Index was off 0.9% at 3,458.12.

Asian economies face lower risks than Europe does, but those that need imported oil might be hit by higher prices if supplies from Russia, the third-largest producer, are disrupted, forecasters say.

The Kospi in Seoul lost 2.6% to 2,649.29 and Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 fell 3.1% to 6,983.40..

New Zealand lost 2.8% and Southeast Asian markets also fell.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 fell to 4,225.50. That put it 11.9% below its Jan. 3 record, solidly in a correction, or a decline of more than 10% from its latest peak.

More than 85% of stocks in the S&P 500 fell. Tech companies weighing down the index most.

The Nasdaq, dominated by technology stocks, lost 2.6% to 13,037.49, led by steep losses in Apple and Microsoft. That put the index 18.8% below its November 2021 high.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1.4% to 33,131.76.

Investors already were uneasy about the possible impact of the Federal Reserve's plans to try to cool inflation by withdrawing ultra-low interest rates and other stimulus that boosted share prices.

Since the start of the year, Facebook parent Meta is down 41.4%, Tesla is off 36.3% and Microsoft is down 16.3%, while Apple and Google's parent Alphabet are both down 12.9%.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude jumped \$4.36 to \$96.46 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract fell 25 cents to \$92.10 on Wednesday. Brent crude, the price basis for international oils, advanced \$4.32 to \$98.37 per barrel in London. It lost 20 cents to \$94.05 the previous session.

The dollar weakened to 114.56 yen from Wednesday's 114.98 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1211 from \$1.1306.

## Jury to meet for 2nd day in trial of cops in Floyd killing

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — A jury was to resume deliberations Thursday in the trial of three former Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd's civil rights after reaching no verdict in its first day.

Jurors met for about seven hours Wednesday with no decision on the charges against J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao. All three are charged of depriving Floyd of his right to medical care as fellow Officer Derek Chauvin pinned the 46-year-old Black man to the ground for 9 1/2 minutes with his knee on Floyd's neck.

Kueng and Thao are also charged with failing to intervene in the May 25, 2020, killing that was captured on bystander video that triggered protests worldwide and a reexamination of racism and policing.

Prosecutors told jurors during closing arguments that the three officers "chose to do nothing" as Chauvin squeezed the life out of the 46-year-old Black man. Defense attorneys countered that the officers were too inexperienced, weren't trained properly and did not willfully violate Floyd's rights.

All 12 members of the jury — eight women and four men — appear to be white, although the court has not released demographics such as race or age. A woman who appeared to be of Asian descent was excused Tuesday from the panel without explanation; a man who appears to be of Asian descent remains as an alternate if one of the current 12 cannot continue.

Lane is white, Kueng is Black and Thao is Hmong American.

That is a sharp contrast to the jury that deliberated the state murder case against Chauvin. That jury was half white and half nonwhite.

The federal jury pool was selected from throughout the state, which includes areas much more conservative and less diverse than the Minneapolis area from which Chauvin's jury was drawn. Chauvin was convicted of murder and manslaughter, and later pleaded guilty to a federal civil rights charge.

Alan Tuerkheimer, a Chicago-based jury consultant, said potential jurors with obvious extreme views

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about the case likely were weeded out during jury selection. But the geographic makeup of the final 12 could matter.

"The more suburban, the more rural, the less-populated place, the more deferential attitude there is to police," said Tuerkheimer, who lived in Minnesota for several years. "I think that's something the defendants had going in: When you broaden the pool outside the metro area, you do tend to get people who are a little more sympathetic (to police)."

Prosecutors sought to show during the monthlong trial that the officers violated their training, including when they failed to roll Floyd onto his side or give him CPR. They 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.

Chauvin and Thao went to the scene to help rookies 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 watched bystanders and traffic as Kueng knelt on Floyd's back and Lane held his legs.

Thao's attorney said his client thought the officers were doing what they believed was best for Floyd — holding him until paramedics arrived. Kueng's attorney said police weren't adequately trained on the duty to intervene. And Lane's attorney said his client suggested rolling Floyd onto his side so he could breathe, but was rebuffed twice by Chauvin.

U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson went through the counts Wednesday, telling jurors what they must consider. For example, he defined reasonable force and said if the jury finds that Chauvin used unreasonable force — and that Thao and Kueng had a realistic opportunity to intervene to stop it — then they must find that they deprived Floyd of his right to be free from unreasonable force under the Constitution.

The jurors are not sequestered — isolated from outside influences that could sway their opinion — which is sometimes done by having them stay in hotels during deliberations. They are allowed to watch videos from the scene and view other evidence as much as they want during deliberations.

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, and federal sentencing guidelines suggest the officers would get much less if convicted.

Lane, Kueng and Thao also face a separate trial in June on state charges alleging that they aided and abetted murder and manslaughter.

## Russia-Ukraine: What to know as explosions boom over Ukraine

By JIM HEINTZ, RAF CASERT and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Associated Press journalists in the cities of Odesa and Kharkiv were hearing explosions Thursday morning after Russian President Vladimir Putin defiantly announced he was launching a military operation in Ukraine. Putin is warning other countries that any attempt to interfere with the Russian action would "lead to the consequences you have never seen in history."

U.S. President Joe Biden says the world will "hold Russia accountable," and NATO's head called Russia's action a violation of international law and a threat to the security of Europe and its Atlantic allies.

The Ukrainian president earlier rejected Moscow's claims that his country poses a threat to Russia and made a passionate plea for peace.

Before Putin's announcement, world leaders worked to maintain a united stance and vowed to impose tougher sanctions in the event of a full-fledged invasion.

Putin's declaration came even as the U.N. Security Council was in an emergency meeting Wednesday night on the crisis, at Ukraine's request.

Here are the things to know about the conflict over Ukraine and the security crisis in Eastern Europe:

### PUTIN MAKES HIS MOVE

Putin said the military operation was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine — a claim the U.S.

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had predicted he would falsely make to justify an invasion.

In a televised address aired before dawn Thursday Moscow time, Putin accused the U.S. and its allies of ignoring Russia's demands to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and offer Moscow security guarantees. He said Russia's goal was not to occupy Ukraine.

Putin urged Ukrainian servicemen to "immediately put down arms and go home." In a stark warning to other countries, Putin said: "I have a few words for those who could feel tempted to interfere with ongoing developments. Whoever tries to impede us, let alone create threats for our country and its people, must know that the Russian response will be immediate and lead to the consequences you have never seen in history."

Soon after, the AP heard explosions in the cities of Odesa and Kharkiv.

## US, NATO REACT

Leaders of the United States and NATO quickly condemned Russia's attack as unprovoked and unjustified.

Putin "has chosen a premeditated war that will bring a catastrophic loss of life and human suffering," Biden said in a statement after Putin's announcement.

Biden promised united and decisive responses by the United States and its allies. "The world will hold Russia accountable," he said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg called any Russian attack a violation of international law and a threat to the security of Europe and its partners.

"Despite our repeated warnings and tireless efforts to engage in diplomacy, Russia has chosen the path of aggression against a sovereign and independent country," the NATO leader said.

## UKRAINE'S PRESIDENT MAKES PLEA FOR PEACE

Speaking in Russian, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy gave an emotional address early Thursday, before Putin announced the start of the offensive on Zelenskyy's country.

"The people of Ukraine and the government of Ukraine want peace," he said. "But if we come under attack, if we face an attempt to take away our country, our freedom, our lives and lives of our children, we will defend ourselves. When you attack us, you will see our faces, not our backs."

Zelenskyy said he asked for a call with Putin late Wednesday but the Kremlin didn't respond.

Earlier Wednesday, Ukraine imposed a nationwide state of emergency, which allows authorities to impose restrictions on movement, block rallies and ban political parties and organizations.

## PUTIN'S DECLARATION OVERTAKES EMERGENCY U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL SESSION

At an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council called by Ukraine because of the imminent threat of a Russian invasion, members still unaware of Putin's announcement of a military operation appealed to him to stop an attack.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres opened the meeting, and just before the announcement, he told Putin: "Stop your troops from attacking Ukraine. Give peace a chance. Too many people have already died."

Guterres later pleaded with Putin, "In the name of humanity, bring your troops back to Russia."

## WHEN WILL THE WEST IMPOSE MORE SANCTIONS?

Ukraine's forces are no match for Moscow's military might, so Kyiv is counting on other countries to hit Russia hard — with sanctions.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Twitter that the West should target Putin where it hurts without delay. "Hit his economy and cronies. Hit more. Hit hard. Hit now," Kuleba wrote.

Biden on Wednesday allowed sanctions to move forward against the company that built the Russia-to-Germany Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and against the company's CEO.

Biden waived sanctions last year when the project was almost completed, in return for an agreement from Germany to take action against Russia if it used gas as a weapon or attacked Ukraine. Germany said Tuesday it was indefinitely suspending the pipeline.

Ukraine's Western supporters said they had already sent out a strong message with a first batch of sanctions on Tuesday. They said Russian troops moving beyond the separatist-held regions would produce

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more painful sanctions and possibly the biggest war in a generation on Europe's mainland.

"This is the toughest sanctions regime we've ever put in place against Russia," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said of measures that target key banks that fund the Russian military and oligarchs. "But it will go further, if we see a full-scale invasion of Ukraine."

The European Union finalized a similar package, which also targets legislators in the lower house of Russia's parliament and makes it tougher for Moscow to get on EU financial and capital markets.

U.S. actions announced Tuesday target high-ranking Russian officials and two Russian banks considered especially close to the Kremlin and Russia's military, with more than \$80 billion in assets.

## HOW IS UKRAINE'S ECONOMY HOLDING UP?

It is Ukraine, not Russia, where the economy is eroding the fastest under the threat of war.

One by one, embassies and international offices in Kyiv have 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.

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 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.

## UKRAINE SEES MORE CYBERATTACKS

Ukraine's parliament and other government and banking websites were hit with another wave of distributed-denial-of-service attacks Wednesday.

Unidentified attackers had also infected hundreds of computers with destructive malware, cybersecurity researchers said.

Officials have long said they expect cyberattacks to precede and accompany any Russian military incursion, and analysts said the incidents hew to a nearly two-decade-old Russian playbook of wedding cyber operations with real-world aggression.

## HOW IS THE CONFRONTATION SEEN IN RUSSIA?

Russian state media are portraying Moscow as coming to the rescue of war-torn areas of eastern Ukraine that are tormented by Ukraine's aggression.

TV presenters are professing the end of suffering for the residents of the breakaway regions.

"You paid with your blood for these eight years of torment and anticipation," anchor Olga Skabeyeva said during a popular political talk show Tuesday morning. "Russia will now be defending Donbas."

Channel One struck a more festive tone, with its correspondent in Donetsk asserting that local residents "say it is the best news over the past years of war."

"Now they have confidence in the future and that the years-long war will finally come to an end," she said. Whether ordinary Russians are buying it is another question.

## Uncertain future for islanders who survived Tongan eruption

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The first two booms from the volcano were scary enough, but the third explosion was immense, sending everyone from the village running from their homes in a reaction that would save all but one of their lives.

Even now, more than five weeks later, the children from Mango Island still often run or cower when they hear a thunderclap or loud noise.

The small island in Tonga was one of the closest places to the Jan. 15 South Pacific volcanic eruption, an event so massive it sent out a sonic boom that could be heard in Alaska and a mushroom plume of ash that was seen in startling images taken from space. On Mango Island, every single home was destroyed by the tsunami that followed.

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All 62 survivors were rescued by boat and moved to Tonga's capital, Nuku'alofa, where they have been living together since in a church hall. Most of that time they've been in lockdown after Tonga experienced its first outbreak of the coronavirus.

Two of the survivors described their experiences and uncertain future to The Associated Press in an interview that was translated by an official from the Tonga Red Cross.

Sione Vailea, 52, said Mango Island is the prettiest place he knows and nothing compares to it in all of Tonga. Just 14 families lived on the island, he said, all of them close together in a single village.

Each family owned a small, open-sided boat and each morning the weather was favorable, they would go onto the ocean to catch reef fish, snapper, octopus and lobster.

What they couldn't eat themselves they would take to the capital to sell, getting enough money to buy food and other necessities. For those fortunate enough to have a decent-sized engine on their boats, it was a six-hour return journey to the capital, but it could take double that time for those puttering along on 15 horsepower.

Mango Island is a little over 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai undersea volcano, which back in late 2014 had rumbled to life, creating a small, new island and briefly disrupting air travel in a series of eruptions.

But those were nothing compared to the scale of eruption that took place on that Saturday evening in January. When the islanders heard the third massive boom, they began running from their low-lying village up a nearby hill, the highest point on Mango Island.

"There was no sign that there was going to be a tsunami, but our gut feeling was we needed to get up to the top, because we weren't sure what was happening," Vailea said.

As the island's appointed town officer, Vailea checked to make sure everybody was gathered. He noticed one family was missing.

Another survivor, 72-year-old Sulaki Kafoika, who goes by the name Halapaini — or talking chief — a title bestowed upon him by Tonga's king, said that once he got to the top of the hill, he looked back. He could see waves crashing over the tops of their houses. He'd never experienced anything like it in his life.

Vailea scrambled back down the hill and saw the wife, two daughters and son of a 65-year-old man coming up. The man was gone, taken by the waves.

"He was the first victim of the tsunami," Vailea said. "Because he died right then, as they were trying to get up to the top of the island."

Two other people elsewhere in Tonga also died from the tsunami, including a British national, and a fourth person died from what authorities described as related trauma. The tsunami crossed the Pacific Ocean to Peru, where it caused an oil spill and two more people drowned.

On Mango Island, night's darkness quickly followed the tsunami as the villagers remained huddled at the top of the hill. Throughout the night, the men held blankets above the women and children to protect them from the ash and small volcanic rocks that were pelting down. The tsunami had cut off all phone and internet connections, and they were alone and isolated.

When dawn broke, they walked down the hill and found the body of the drowned man. Amid the wreckage, they found a small shovel and an axe. They dug a grave, a process that took much of the day after they hit rock about 1 meter (3 feet) down.

All of their boats were wrecked and they had almost no food. After searching the village, they found two small bags of rice, which they cooked for the children, Vailea said. The adults ate nothing that day, or the next, as they waited.

Finally on Tuesday morning, a boat arrived from a neighboring island to check on them. Their neighbors had brought with them some cassava, a root vegetable, and a bunch of plantains, which are similar to bananas.

"They cooked it and it was the best meal," said Vailea. "On a normal day, you wouldn't call it a good meal. But on that Tuesday, it was very special."

The next day, they were all transported to the nearby island of Nomuka and then a few days later to Nuku'alofa, the capital, where they have been living since. None of them have been back to Mango Is-



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land. Until Sunday, they were in lockdown after the outbreak of the virus, which was likely brought in by foreign military crews delivering vital aid.

The survivors say it has been difficult for them over the past few weeks as they deal with the trauma and the lockdown restrictions, but it has helped immensely that they have all been living together and have been able to comfort one another. They've benefited from the clothes, food and money that have been donated by people from around the world.

What happens next remains uncertain. As town officer, Vailea has been meeting regularly with Tongan officials but said the final decision of whether they will be able to return and resettle Mango Island rests with Tonga's government and the monarch, King Tupou VI. The survivors hope they will get a decision within the coming weeks.

Vailea said the people of Mango Island are split, with some wanting to return and others happy to start life afresh in Nuku'alofa or elsewhere. He said it is his duty to support whatever his people want.

Halapaini said he has mixed feelings. All the good things that he enjoyed in life were on Mango Island, but he also worries that the volcano could erupt again.

Vailea is more emphatic. He wants to return to Mango Island, where life can be hard but where you own your time and share everything with your neighbors. Where you wake up in the morning and jump on your boat to fish.

## US drops name of Trump's 'China Initiative' after criticism

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is scrapping the name of a Trump-era initiative that was intended to crack down on economic espionage by Beijing but has been criticized as unfairly targeting Chinese professors at American colleges because of their ethnicity.

The decision to abandon the China Initiative and to impose a higher bar for prosecutions of professors was announced Wednesday by the Justice Department's top national security official. It follows a monthslong review undertaken after complaints that the program chilled academic collaboration and contributed to anti-Asian bias. The department has also endured high-profile setbacks in individual prosecutions, resulting in the dismissal of multiple criminal cases against academic researchers in the last year.

Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen said the department will still "be relentless in defending our country from China," but no longer will group its investigations and prosecutions under the China Initiative label, in part out of recognition of the threats facing the U.S. from Russia, Iran, North Korea and others.

"I'm convinced that we need a broader approach, one that looks across all of these threats and uses all of our authorities to combat them," he told reporters before a speech in which he detailed the changes.

The program was established in 2018 under then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions as a way to thwart what officials said were aggressive efforts by China to steal American intellectual property and to spy on American industry and research.

Olsen told reporters he believed the initiative was prompted by genuine national security concerns. He said he did not believe investigators had targeted professors on the basis of ethnicity, but he also said he had to be responsive to concerns he heard, including from Asian American groups.

"Anything that creates the impression that the Department of Justice applies different standards based on race or ethnicity harms the department and our efforts, and it harms the public," Olsen said.

Speaking later in the day at the National Security Institute at George Mason University's Antonin Scalia Law School, Olsen said that by "grouping cases under the China Initiative rubric, we helped give rise to a harmful perception that the (Justice Department) applies a lower standard to its investigations and prosecutions of criminal conduct related to that country or that we in some way view people with racial, ethnic or familial ties to China differently."

Some Asian American groups and officials who had lobbied the department to end the China Initiative cheered the move Wednesday. Rep. Judy Chu, a California Democrat and the chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, said the initiative had ruined careers, discouraged Asian Americans from

pursuing academic specialties in science, technology, engineering and math and reinforced “harmful stereotypes.”

“There are serious national security concerns facing our country from all across the world, but our response must be based on evidence, not racism and fear,” Chu said in a statement.

The initiative has resulted in convictions, including of Charles Lieber, a Harvard University professor who was found guilty in December of hiding his ties to a Chinese-run recruitment program.

But its pursuit of professors, including those accused of concealing ties to the Chinese government on applications for federal research grants, hit snags. The department in the last year dismissed multiple cases against researchers or had them thrown out by judges.

In January, the department dropped its case against Gang Chen, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor charged in the final days of the Trump administration. Prosecutors concluded that they could no longer meet their burden of proof after they received information from the Department of Energy suggesting he had not been required to disclose certain information on his forms.

A federal judge in September threw out all charges against a University of Tennessee professor accused of hiding his relationship with a Chinese university while receiving research grants from NASA, and the university has since offered to reinstate him.

Olsen said the department continued to stand behind the pending cases it has against academics and researchers, signaling that those prosecutions won’t necessarily be abandoned.

Federal prosecutors are still expected to pursue grant fraud cases against researchers when there is evidence of malicious intent, serious fraud and a connection to economic and national security, with prosecutors from the department’s National Security Division in Washington playing an active supervisory role — though in some cases, prosecutors may opt for civil or administrative solutions instead of criminal charges, Olsen said.

FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a speech last month that the threat from China was “more brazen” than ever, with the FBI opening new cases to counter Chinese intelligence operations every 12 hours or so. And Olsen said he agreed.

“I’m not taking any tools off the table here,” Olsen said. He also noted, “I do not think that there is a reason to step back from that threat, and we will not step back from that threat.”

## **Jury ends 1st day, no verdict for 3 cops in Floyd killing**

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — A jury wrapped up its first day of deliberations Wednesday without a verdict in the federal trial of three fired Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd’s civil rights when he was pinned to the ground for 9 1/2 minutes as fellow Officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee into his neck.

J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao are charged with depriving Floyd of his right to medical care. Kueng and Thao are also charged with failing to intervene to stop Chauvin during the May 25, 2020, killing that was captured on bystander video that triggered protests worldwide and a reexamination of racism and policing.

Jurors deliberated all day Wednesday without reaching a verdict and were expected to resume their efforts on Thursday.

Prosecutors told jurors during closing arguments that the three officers “chose to do nothing” as Chauvin squeezed the life out of the 46-year-old Black man. Defense attorneys countered that the officers were too inexperienced, weren’t trained properly and did not willfully violate Floyd’s rights.

All 12 members of the jury — eight women and four men — appear to be white, although the court has not released demographics such as race or age. A woman who appeared to be of Asian descent was excused Tuesday from the panel without explanation; a man who appears to be of Asian descent remains as an alternate if one of the current 12 cannot continue.

Lane is white, Kueng is Black and Thao is Hmong American.

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The jury is a sharp contrast to the panel that deliberated the state murder case against Chauvin. That jury was half white and half nonwhite, according to demographic information provided by the Hennepin County court.

The federal jury pool was selected from throughout the state, which includes areas much more conservative and less diverse than the Minneapolis area from which the jury for Chauvin's trial was drawn. Chauvin was convicted of murder and manslaughter, and later pleaded guilty to a federal civil rights charge.

In this case, four jurors are from Hennepin and Ramsey counties, where Minneapolis and St. Paul are located, and three are from mostly suburban counties. Five are from counties in southern Minnesota, including a woman from Jackson County, along the Iowa border.

They have diverse educational backgrounds and life experiences, including a project captain at an architectural firm, a man with a degree in French and education, a computer programmer, a retired hospital chef and a woman who home-schools her children.

Alan Tuerkheimer, a Chicago-based jury consultant, said potential jurors with obvious extreme views about the case likely were weeded out during jury selection. But the geographic makeup of the final 12 could matter.

"The more suburban, the more rural, the less-populated place, the more deferential attitude there is to police," said Tuerkheimer, who lived in Minnesota for several years. "I think that's something the defendants had going in: When you broaden the pool outside the metro area, you do tend to get people who are a little more sympathetic (to police)."

Prosecutors sought to show during the monthlong trial that the officers violated their training, including when they failed to roll Floyd onto his side or give him CPR. They 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.

Chauvin and Thao went to the scene to help rookies 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 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, who are out on bail, testified in their own defense.

Thao's attorney said his client thought the officers were doing what they believed was best for Floyd — holding him until paramedics arrived. Kueng's attorney said police weren't adequately trained on the duty to intervene. And Lane's attorney said his client suggested rolling Floyd onto his side so he could breathe, but was rebuffed twice by Chauvin.

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He also reminded jurors that they need to consider the evidence against each man separately and return a separate verdict for each count.

The jurors are not sequestered — isolated from outside influences that could sway their opinion — which is sometimes done by having them stay in hotels during deliberations.

About an hour after the jurors got the case, attorneys wheeled a cart with exhibits out of the courtroom. The jurors are allowed to watch videos from the scene and view other evidence as much as they want during their deliberations.

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Lane, Kueng and Thao also face a separate trial in June on state charges alleging that they aided and abetted murder and manslaughter.

## Trudeau revokes emergency powers after Canada blockades end

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Wednesday he is removing emergency powers police can use after authorities ended the blockades at the borders and the occupation in Ottawa by truckers and others opposed to COVID-19 restrictions.

Trudeau said the “threat continues” but the acute emergency that included entrenched occupations has ended. His government invoked the powers last week and lawmakers affirmed the powers late Monday.

“The situation is no longer an emergency, therefore the federal government will be ending the use of the emergencies act,” Trudeau said. “We are confident that existing laws and bylaws are sufficient.”

The emergencies act allows authorities to declare certain areas as no-go zones. It also allows police to freeze truckers’ personal and corporate bank accounts and compel tow truck companies to haul away vehicles.

The trucker protest grew until it closed a handful of Canada-U.S. border posts and shut down key parts of the capital for more than three weeks. But all border blockades have now ended and the streets around the Canadian Parliament are quiet.

“We were very clear that the use of the emergencies act would be limited in time,” Trudeau said.

Trudeau had warned earlier this week there were some truckers just outside Ottawa who might be planning further blockades or occupations. His public safety minister also said there was an attempt to block a border crossing in British Columbia over the weekend.

The protests, which were first aimed at a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers but also encompassed fury over the range of COVID-19 restrictions and hatred of Trudeau, reflected the spread of disinformation in Canada and simmering populist and right-wing anger.

The self-styled Freedom Convoy shook Canada’s reputation for civility, inspired convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands and interrupted trade, causing economic damage on both sides of the border. Hundreds of trucks eventually occupied the streets around Parliament, a display that was part protest and part carnival.

For almost a week the busiest U.S.-Canada border crossing, the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, was blocked. The crossing sees more than 25% of the trade between the two countries.

Authorities moved to reopen the border posts, but police in Ottawa did little but issue warnings until Friday, even as hundreds and sometimes thousands of protesters clogged the streets of the city and besieged Parliament Hill.

On Friday, authorities launched the largest police operation in Canadian history, arresting a string of Ottawa protesters and increasing that pressure on Saturday until the streets in front of Parliament were clear. Eventually, police arrested at least 191 people and towed away 79 vehicles. Many protesters retreated as the pressure increased.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said those who had their bank accounts frozen were “influencers in the illegal protest in Ottawa, and owners and/or drivers of vehicles who did not want to leave the area.”

The province of Ontario also announced it is ending its state of emergency but said the “emergency tools provided to law enforcement will be maintained at this time as police continue to address ongoing activity on the ground.”

Those who block critical infrastructure face up to a year in prison and a maximum fine of \$100,000.

A small convoy of truckers demanding an end to coronavirus mandates began a cross-country drive from California to the Washington, D.C., area on Wednesday.

Several hundred people rallied in a parking lot in the cold, windswept Mojave Desert town of Adelanto before about two dozen trucks and a number of other vehicles hit the road. It wasn’t clear how many intended to go all the way.

The Pentagon has approved the deployment of 700 unarmed National Guard troops to the nation’s capital as it prepares for multiple trucker convoys. The troops would be used to assist with traffic control

during demonstrations expected in the city in the coming days, the Pentagon said.

## Prosecutors in charge of Trump criminal probe have resigned

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The two prosecutors in charge of the Manhattan district attorney's criminal investigation into former President Donald Trump and his business dealings suddenly resigned Wednesday, throwing the future of the probe into question just as pressure was building on Trump on several legal fronts.

A spokesperson for District Attorney Alvin Bragg confirmed the resignations of Carey Dunne and Mark Pomerantz, top deputies who had been tasked with running the investigation on a day-to-day basis. Both started on the Trump probe under former District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., and Bragg asked them to stay when he took office in January.

Dunne, the office's former general counsel, argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in a successful, multiyear fight for Trump's tax records. Pomerantz, a former mafia prosecutor, was brought out of private practice by Vance last year to add his expertise in white collar investigations and had been involved in questioning witnesses before the grand jury.

"We are grateful for their service," Bragg spokesperson Danielle Filson said. She declined to comment further, saying the investigation is ongoing.

The New York Times, citing sources, reported that the grand jury investigation had stalled, with no sessions in the last month, and that Dunne and Pomerantz quit after Bragg raised doubts about pursuing a case against Trump himself. No former president has ever been charged with a crime.

So far, the nearly three-year investigation has resulted only in tax fraud charges against Trump's company, the Trump Organization, and its longtime finance chief Allen Weisselberg relating to lucrative fringe benefits such as rent, car payments and school tuition.

Messages seeking comment were left for Dunne and Pomerantz.

Trump did not immediately respond to the news. In a telephone interview, his lawyer Robert Fischetti said: "I'm a very happy man. In my opinion, this investigation is over."

Fischetti said Bragg has not spoken to him about the status of the investigation or potential charges against Trump but, given Wednesday's developments, the lawyer said it appeared that the D.A. had reviewed the case and signaled to his deputies he was not inclined to pursue an indictment.

"My client has done nothing wrong," Fischetti said.

Duncan Levin, a former Manhattan prosecutor who represents a witness cooperating in the Trump case, said Dunne and Pomerantz resigning "signals major issues with the pending investigation."

"What is for sure is that an enormous amount of resources have gone into this investigation and its future seems somewhat uncertain," Levin said.

The resignations were likely to further embolden Trump, a Republican who continues to tease another run for president in 2024, after several recent legal setbacks. Trump has repeatedly railed against the New York probes as baseless and politically motivated, saying in a statement last week that Democratic prosecutors were spending "historic amounts of time, energy, and money trying to get Trump."

But Trump's legal challenges continue. Last week, a judge in New York ordered him to testify under oath in a parallel civil investigation focused in part on whether his company misrepresented asset values; a judge in Washington refused to dismiss conspiracy lawsuits trying to hold him liable for the Jan. 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol riot; and the National Archives revealed that classified information was found in 15 boxes of White House records taken to his Mar-a-Lago home.

Asked if Wednesday's developments would affect the civil probe, New York Attorney General Letitia James' office said "the investigation is ongoing and there is a robust team working on it."

Meanwhile, the Jan. 6 committee is continuing to investigate the insurrection, and what role Trump played in inciting it, and an investigation in Georgia is continuing into whether Trump broke the law by trying to pressure state officials to throw out President Joe Biden's 2020 election victory. A special grand jury is expected to be seated in May in that case and will work for up to a year.

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The Manhattan D.A.'s office started investigating Trump in 2019, first examining hush-money payments paid to women on his behalf and then expanding into an inquiry into whether the president's company misled lenders or tax authorities about the value of its properties.

Just last month, Bragg said he was proud of the continuity that Dunne and Pomerantz had brought in running the high-profile investigation as he took over the D.A.'s office from Vance, who declined to run for reelection after winning the battle over Trump's tax returns.

"I do think the one continuity is the staffing and (Vance) brought on incredible lawyers to do it," Bragg said in a Jan. 20 question-and-answer session with reporters.

"And they've been dedicated and we've been working and keeping them in place and thinking about the kind of resources to continue the investigation in order to then be in a position to make" decisions on the direction of the probe, Bragg said.

Bragg, limited by ethics rules from discussing the case in detail, said at the time that he was getting up to speed on the Trump investigation and that he would "follow the facts." He didn't offer a timeline for a charging decision.

"It's a matter that's personally, as you would imagine, on my radar screen and that I'm mindful of and paying attention to," Bragg said.

Weisselberg, the only person charged in the investigation, has pleaded not guilty to charges he collected and failed to pay taxes on more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation.

On Tuesday, lawyers for Weisselberg and the Trump Organization filed court papers seeking to throw out the case. Weisselberg's lawyers argued the D.A.'s office was targeting him as punishment because he wouldn't flip on the former president.

## Texas governor order treats gender-confirming care as abuse

By PAUL J. WEBER The Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has ordered the state's child welfare agency to investigate reports of gender-confirming care for kids as abuse, a directive that opponents say is a first by any governor over GOP efforts to restrict transgender rights.

The immediate impact of the order, which Abbott issued Tuesday, was unclear and a spokesman for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services said there were no open cases based on the governor's directive.

Abbott's letter to state agencies came after Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton this week released a non-binding legal opinion that labeled certain gender-confirming treatments as "child abuse." That goes against the nation's largest medical groups, including the American Medical Association, which have opposed Republican-backed restrictions filed in statehouses nationwide.

Both Abbott and Paxton are up for reelection this year, and their actions came a week before they are on the ballot for Republican voters in Texas's first-in-the-nation primary of 2022.

"I hereby direct your agency to conduct a prompt and thorough investigation of any reported instances of these abusive procedures in the State of Texas," Abbott said in a letter to the Department of Family and Protective Services.

The uncertainty over the impact is largely due to the fact that attorney general opinions do not carry the weight of law. In Houston, the county office that represents the state in civil child abuse cases said it would not take any actions based on the letter, and Texas' largest child welfare advocacy group said it was unclear what judges and prosecutors would do with the opinion.

"What is clear is that politicians should not be tearing apart loving families — and sending their kids into the foster care system — when parents provide recommended medical care that they believe is in the best interest of their child," said Kate Murphy, the senior policy associate for child protection at Texans Care for Children.

The opinion by Paxton is directed at treatments that include puberty blockers and hormone therapy. It comes months after Texas Republican legislators— who filed more anti-LGBTQ proposals last year than

in any other statehouse — proposed laws banning such treatments but failed to pass them.

Arkansas became the first state to pass a law prohibiting gender confirming treatments for minors, and Tennessee approved a similar measure.

Numerous states also have enacted laws banning transgender students from competing in scholastic sports on the basis of their gender identity.

Cathryn Oakley, state legislative director and senior counsel for the Human Rights Campaign, said no other governor has taken the same action as Abbott. She called it a “lawless interpretation” and expressed worry for parents.

“The terror that is being struck into their hearts is very real,” Oakley said. “I’m also thinking about the kids who are relying on that care and how frightened they are.”

## Ex-official: Space station ‘largely isolated’ from tensions

By ALEX SANZ Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Tensions in eastern Ukraine and heightened Western fears of a Russian invasion should not have a significant impact on the International Space Station or U.S.-Russia cooperation in space, the former head of the National Space Council told The Associated Press.

Four NASA astronauts, two Russian cosmonauts and one European astronaut are currently on the space station.

Scott Pace, who served as executive secretary of the space council under President Donald Trump and is now the director of the Space Policy Institute at George Washington University, said the space station “has been largely isolated” from political events.

“It’s possible to imagine a break with Russia that would endanger the space station, but that would be at the level of a dropping diplomatic relations,” said Pace. “That would be something that would be an utterly last resort so I don’t really see that happening unless there is a wider military confrontation.”

The space station, an international partnership of five space agencies from 15 countries, including Canada, several countries in Europe, Japan, Russia and the United States, launched in 1998 and morphed into a complex that’s almost as long as a football field, with eight miles of electrical wiring, an acre of solar panels and three high-tech labs.

It marked two decades of people continuously living and working in orbit in 2020.

The first crew — American Bill Shepherd and Russians Sergei Krikalev and Yuri Gidzenko — blasted off from Kazakhstan on Oct. 31, 2000. Two days later, they swung open the space station doors, and clasped their hands in unity.

The three astronauts got along fine but tension sometimes bubbled up with the two mission controls, in Houston and outside Moscow.

Shepherd, during a NASA panel discussion with his crewmates, said he got so frustrated with the “conflicting marching orders” that he insisted they come up with a single plan.

Russia kept station crews coming and going after NASA’s Columbia disaster in 2003 and after the space shuttles retired in 2011.

In 2020, SpaceX ended a nine-year launch drought for NASA and became the first private company to launch Americans to the space station.

“It is a way of undertaking common endeavors but that power is not infinite and terrestrial conflicts on Earth can still get in the way,” said Pace. “Space is ever more critical to our daily life and it’s something everybody should be aware of.”

Earlier this year, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who chaired a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in Brussels, said he was keen to discuss ways to prevent dangerous military incidents or accidents involving Russia and the Western allies, reducing space and cyber threats, as well as setting limits on missile deployments and other arms control initiatives.

There have been concerns raised in Congress about the impact that conflict over Ukraine could have on the International Space Station.

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Lawmakers have specifically exempted space cooperation from previous sanctions and can be expected to make similar arguments against targeting it as the administration considers its next steps over Ukraine.

On Wednesday, Russia began evacuating its embassy in Kyiv, and Ukraine urged its citizens to leave Russia.

Russian lawmakers authorized President Vladimir Putin to use military force outside his country and President Joe Biden and European leaders responded 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 the toughest sanctions that could cause economic turmoil for Russia but said they would go ahead if there is further aggression.

The sanctions underscored the urgency felt by Western nations to blunt the conflict.

## Study: Child poverty rising after tax credit expires

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of children in America living in poverty jumped dramatically after just one month without the expanded child tax credit payments, according to a new study. Advocates fear the lapse in payments could unravel what they say were landmark achievements in poverty reduction.

Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy estimates 3.7 million more children were living in poverty by January — a 41% increase from December, when families received their last check. The federal aid started last July but ended after President Joe Biden's Build Back Better bill stalled in the sharply divided Congress. Payments of up to \$300 per child were delivered directly to bank accounts on the 15th of each month, and last week marked the second missed deposit of the year.

The Columbia study, which combines annual U.S. Census data with information from the Census Bureau's monthly Current Population Survey bulletins, found that the monthly child poverty rate increased from 12.1% in December to 17% in January. That's the highest level since December 2020, when the U.S. was grappling with high unemployment and a resurgence of COVID-19. Black and Latino children experienced the highest percentage point increases in poverty — 5.9% and 7.1% respectively.

Megan Curran, policy director for the Center on Poverty and Social Policy, said the sudden spike shows how quickly the payments became core to household financial stability for millions of families after only six months.

"It really had a huge impact right off the bat," Curran said. "We saw food insecurity drop almost immediately as soon as the payments started ... all of that progress that we made could now be lost."

Curran said the increase in children living in poverty could also partially reflect rising prices.

The new numbers represent a serious setback from the original goals of the child tax credit program, which ambitiously sought to cut nationwide child poverty in half. As part of Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 rescue package last year, the existing child tax credit program was massively reshaped, boosting the amount of the payments, greatly expanding the pool of eligible families and delivering the money in monthly installments designed to be incorporated into day-to-day household budgets.

The program extended payments of \$250-per-month for children ages 6 through 17 and \$300-per-month for those under 6 to most families in the country, at an annual cost of about \$120 billion. The goal was to put discretionary cash in the hands of parents along with the freedom to spend it as they saw fit month-to-month.

Republican lawmakers are generally unified in opposition to the expanded tax credit — describing it as excessive, inflationary and a disincentive to work. But when it was originally passed, many Democrats openly declared their intention to make the payments a permanent anchor of the American social safety net.

The goal for the Democratic-held Congress was to keep the program running, and fight about its future months from now, armed with data and millions of anecdotes about the tax credit's benefits.

Instead the 50-member Democratic bloc in the Senate collapsed from within, with West Virginia Sen.



Joe Manchin holding out on his vote for weeks before finally refusing to endorse Biden's social spending package. Manchin cited his opposition to the child tax credit's massive price tag among his reservations with the bill.

Earlier this month, Manchin called negotiations on Biden's Build Back Better bill "dead."

Democratic New Mexico Sen. Martin Heinrich, one of the expanded child tax credit's strongest advocates, said Wednesday in a statement to The Associated Press that nearly all the children in his state benefited from the credit and that letting it expire was "a moral failure."

An informal survey conducted of families by the nonprofit advocacy group ParentsTogether Action found a similarly immediate impact to the lapsed child tax credit payments for respondents, with roughly 1 in 5 families surveyed reporting they could no longer afford housing or enough food for their kids.

Allison Johnson, the organization's campaign director, said the child tax credit payments were designed so parents would "not have to make these really hard choices," she said.

The end to the deposits makes it nearly impossible for needy families, who may be struggling to pay down debt or cope with major expenses, to develop financial stability or momentum, Johnson said.

"This lack of clarity is super difficult for people. It makes them unable to plan for things," she said.

## High court wades into clash over Trump-era immigration rule

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court waded into a political clash Wednesday between the Biden administration and Republican-led states seeking to defend a signature Trump-era immigration rule that the new administration has abandoned.

Conservative and liberal Supreme Court justices acknowledged during arguments at the high court that when a new administration comes in, it can change policy. That's what the Biden administration did with the Trump-era "public charge" rule that denied green cards to immigrants who use food stamps or other public benefits.

The question for the court is not the legality of the now defunct Trump-era rule, just whether a group of states led by Arizona should be able to pick up the legal fight over it.

Justice Elena Kagan suggested to Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, arguing for the group of states, that allowing the group to intervene in a case "that's completely dead that never applied to you in the first place" is not the answer. "Whoever the federal government is, there's always going to be a state that thinks it's done the wrong thing," she said. Other justices suggested a limited right to intervene might be possible.

Kagan, for her part, did question whether the Biden administration had erred by maneuvering to quickly jettison the Trump-era rule rather than going through a longer process. Justice Samuel Alito said the administration had devised a strategy to quickly set aside the rule and he wasn't "aware of a precedent where an incoming administration has done anything quite like this."

Kagan and other justices suggested that if Arizona objected to the way the Biden administration ended the previous policy, however, it should have brought that issue to a court rather than attempting what Kagan described as a "quadruple bank shot" strategy to intervene in other cases.

Another issue for several of the justices: geography. Stephen Breyer, Clarence Thomas and Sonia Sotomayor were among the justices who questioned why Arizona belongs in a case that has its origins in California and Washington. "I've seen how Los Angeles has spread, but I don't think it's yet spread to Arizona," said Breyer, who last month announced his plans to retire from the court.

At the center of the case before the justices is a federal law says that green card applicants can't be burdens to the country or "public charges." But the Trump administration significantly expanded the definition, saying the use of public benefits including food stamps or Medicaid could be disqualifying. That led to court challenges, but the Supreme Court allowed the policy to take effect while those continued.

The Biden administration rescinded the rule and has since announced new guidelines. The administration says that in practice, in the year the rule was in effect, it only affected about five out of some ap-

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proximately 50,000 applications it was applied to. The Biden administration and immigration groups have said the bigger impact of the rule was scaring immigrants, causing them to drop benefits or not enroll in them because of fears doing so could affect their applications to become legal permanent residents.

Despite the political nature of Wednesday's arguments, they did underscore one point of agreement between the Trump administration and the Biden administration. In the case of the public charge rule, a single federal judge in Illinois ruled to block the policy nationwide. The Trump administration had criticized similar nationwide injunctions by a single judge blocking a policy nationwide, calling them unlawful. Attorney Brian Fletcher, representing the Biden administration, said that view is shared by the new administration.

In addition to Arizona, the states involved in the case are Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia.

## AP-NORC poll: Most in US oppose major role in Russia strife

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's little support among Americans for a major U.S. role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, according to a new poll, even as President Joe Biden imposes new sanctions and threatens a stronger response that could provoke retaliation from Moscow.

Biden has acknowledged a growing likelihood that war in Eastern Europe would affect Americans, though he has ruled out sending troops to Ukraine. Gas prices in the U.S. could rise in the short term. And Russian President Vladimir Putin has a range of tools he could use against the U.S., including cyberattacks hitting critical infrastructure and industries.

"Defending freedom will have costs for us as well, here at home," Biden said Tuesday. "We need to be honest about that."

Just 26% say the U.S. should have a major role in the conflict, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Fifty-two percent say a minor role; 20% say none at all.

The findings are a reminder for Biden and fellow Democrats that while the crisis may consume Washington in the coming months, pocketbook issues are likely to be a bigger priority for voters heading into the midterm elections. A December AP-NORC poll showed that Americans are particularly focused on economic issues, including rising inflation.

The Biden administration has argued that supporting Ukraine is a defense of fundamental American values and has made a concerted effort to declassify intelligence findings underscoring the dangers it sees for Ukraine and the wider European region. But the survey shows widespread public skepticism of the U.S. intelligence community.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Wednesday noted that Americans may have different interpretations of a major U.S. role and reiterated that Biden would not send the U.S. military to Ukraine, though troops have deployed to nearby NATO member countries.

"We make national security decisions based on what's best for our country's national security, not on the latest polling," she said.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to think the U.S. should have a major role in the conflict, 32% to 22%. Overall, the poll shows 43% of Americans now approve of Biden's handling of the U.S. relationship with Russia, a downtick from 49% in June of last year.

Despite the clear reluctance about major involvement in the conflict, Americans are hardly looking at Russia through rose-colored glasses. The poll finds 53% say they're very or extremely concerned that Russia's influence around the world poses a threat to the U.S., an uptick from 45% in August 2021.

Jennifer Rau, a 51-year-old mother of three adopted teenagers who lives on Chicago's South Side, said she listens to local public radio for her world news. But in recent days, when the news turns to Russia and Ukraine, she has started to turn it off.

"I'm so frustrated. It's enough. We're bombarded," Rau said. "There are other stories in Chicago that need to be covered."

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Rau is a political independent who voted for Biden. But she believes the U.S. gets involved in foreign wars to make money. She is more concerned about rising crime in Chicago, the prevalence of guns, and systemic racism that affects her three children, who are Hispanic.

"I just feel like there's a war going on in the United States, every day, in Chicago," she said. "And it is really scary. And I feel like no one helps us."

Edward Eller, a 67-year-old retiree from Shady Valley, Tennessee, said the White House needs to focus on lowering oil prices.

"They want to send millions of dollars of ours to stop a war that we have nothing to do with," he said. "I'm sorry they're involved in a mess, but it's not our problem."

The poll was conducted Friday to Monday during a period of rapidly escalating tensions, culminating with Putin recognizing the independence of two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, widely seen in the West as a step toward a wider war. Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces have been locked since 2014 in fighting that's killed 14,000 people.

Russia has massed at least 150,000 troops on three sides of Ukraine and continues to establish bridges, camps, and logistics necessary for a protracted invasion. U.S. officials believe Putin could attack Ukraine at any time. A full-on war in Ukraine could result in thousands of deaths and huge numbers of refugees fleeing for the U.S. or elsewhere in Europe.

The U.S. has imposed sanctions on Russian banks and oligarchs with more measures possible this week.

The White House has warned in increasingly strong words about a Russian invasion while trying to persuade Putin against launching one. It has declassified Russian troop positions and detailed allegations of "false-flag" plots that could set a pretext for a military attack on Ukraine.

However, the poll shows there remains skepticism among Americans of the U.S. intelligence community. Only 23% said they had a "great deal of confidence" in intelligence agencies. Another 52% say they have some confidence and 24% have hardly any.

U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley, an Illinois Democrat who serves on the House Intelligence Committee, says the intelligence he's received on Ukraine "has been very, very good. Sadly, it's been accurate." But he often hears from constituents who are uninterested in Ukraine and more focused on health care and the coronavirus pandemic.

Over time, Quigley said, he has developed comments about why Ukraine matters to the U.S.: its role as a strategic ally and a "sovereign democratic nation at Putin's doorstep," and how a new war could hit already disrupted technology supply chains that use exports from Russia and Ukraine.

Among Russia's biggest threats to Americans is its capability to wage cyberwarfare. Previous Russia-linked cyberattacks have cut off services at hospitals and breached the servers of American government agencies. A ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline linked to a Russia-based hacking group temporarily shut down gas stations across the East Coast. And Russia was accused of interfering in both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.

"I think it's an incredibly difficult time to message because of everything else that's topping the list of what Americans care about. It's hard to bump COVID, inflation, safety issues away," Quigley said. "But you've got to try."

## As climate change costs mount, Biden seeks to price damages

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

HARDIN, Mont. (AP) — In the coal fields of eastern Montana, climate change is forcing a stark choice: halt mining that helped build everything from schools to senior centers or risk astronomical future damage as fossil fuel emissions warm the planet and increase disasters, crop losses and premature deaths.

One of the largest mines in this arid region straddling the Wyoming border is Spring Creek -- a gaping hole among sagebrush hills where house-sized mechanical shovels dig up millions of tons of coal annually, much of it shipped overseas and burned in Asian power plants.

Spring Creek's hundreds of jobs help undergird the economy of the Crow Indian Reservation and nearby parts of Wyoming. In Big Horn County, encompassing most of the reservation, taxes and royalties from

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coal fund almost two-thirds of government services. It's one of the most coal-dependent communities in America.

"Everything's got coal dust on it," said county commissioner George Real Bird III, referring to civic projects coal money has financed since Spring Creek opened 40 years ago.

Greenhouse gas emissions from burning that coal also stoke climate change, and President Joe Biden's administration wants to put a cost on the resulting damages to people and the environment. Highlighting the "social cost of carbon" could justify emission reduction rules for fossil fuels, transportation and other industries.

But a federal judge in Louisiana temporarily halted such efforts this month and blocked the administration from using an interim standard of \$51 in damages per ton of carbon dioxide emitted.

The White House had been preparing to update its climate damage price tag in coming weeks. Many economists expected the figure to increase dramatically and even double. Republicans and business groups argued the emphasis on future climate damages would hobble the economy, particularly the energy industry.

For Spring Creek, applying the administration's carbon cost would yield estimated damages of more than \$1 billion annually from a federal government coal sale that would keep it mining at least another few years.

It's an eye-popping number from just one of 15 mines dotting the Powder River Basin of Montana and Wyoming. But, after a federal judge in Montana ruled that the government overstated the mine's economic benefits, the Biden administration is weighing the climate costs and reconsidering the mine's permit.

Environmentalists want the department to stop an ongoing Spring Creek expansion and end mining. Their goal is to use the social cost of carbon to deny fossil fuel projects, not just to inform rules and policies as in the past.

## BRACING FOR A DOWNTURN

Climate change already is being felt in this sparsely populated region -- where recurring droughts hit farms and ranches, lower river levels harm fishing and massive wildfires rip across the landscape.

"The impacts just from the greenhouse gas emissions from burning this coal are tremendous," said attorney Shiloh Hernandez, who represents environmentalists against mining. "These are real impacts that cause real harm to real people."

Pending the permit review, Spring Creek keeps digging — 13 million tons last year as Powder River Basin coal prices reached record levels when the economy rebounded from its early-pandemic slump. The mine is owned by a Navajo corporation that became the third largest U.S. coal producer when it took over bankrupt Cloud Peak Energy three years ago.

Spokesperson Erny Zah said the Navajo Transitional Energy Company values responsible mining and balances the environment against the economic needs of people around Spring Creek.

Local officials aren't counting on coal's recent bump to last: Over the past decade, U.S. demand plummeted and dreams of shipping more coal overseas were blocked by West Coast states. A mine next to Spring Creek closed in early 2021.

Worried Big Horn County commissioners enlisted accountant Michael Opie eight years ago to help navigate the industry's collapse. At the time, he figured coal had about 10 years left. He won't offer a prediction anymore.

After cutbacks hit key services such as maintenance of 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) of gravel roads, the county's shifting the tax burden onto local residents to keep its sheriff's office and other departments functioning.

"We've had to ... basically boil down government to the bare minimum," Real Bird said.

Spring Creek contributed \$23 million in local and state taxes and other payments last year, Zah said. The company expects 2022 to be good for coal but is bracing for another downturn — halting new equipment investment and planning to shift workers into mine reclamation jobs.

## DEBATE OVER CARBON COST

The Obama administration first adopted the social cost of carbon and used it more than 80 times in

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cost-benefit analyses for government rules, including tightened vehicle emissions standards and regulations aimed at shuttering coal plants.

In seeking to roll back those rules, the Trump administration cut the social cost of carbon to \$7 or less per ton. The lower number included only domestic climate impacts and not global damages, making it harder to justify expensive rules for industry.

Biden restored Obama's \$51-ton estimate on an interim basis and signaled an even higher number would be adopted. On Saturday, the administration appealed the Feb. 11 court ruling that blocked use of the social cost of carbon, saying it could affect more than 30 pending rules, delay permits and leasing for federal fossil fuel reserves and undermine international climate talks by silencing U.S. officials on the topic.

"It's a little shocking to see all of the impacted actions," said Romany Webb, a Columbia Law School researcher focused on climate change.

Republican attorneys general led by Louisiana's Jeff Landry warned of more burdensome rules across daily life if the administration prevails — including for home appliances, vehicles and electricity. They called the use of the carbon cost possibly "the most significant regulatory encroachment upon individual liberty and state sovereignty in American history."

But many economists say rationally confronting climate change means weighing its future costs in today's decisions.

The \$51-ton estimate came from climate models developed by three economists in the 1990s.

Two of them -- William Nordhaus at Yale University and Richard Tol at the University of Sussex in the U.K. -- say updated models show more damage than previously expected.

"Estimates are higher ... because we now better understand the impact of climate change on labor productivity -- the human body cannot work hard when it is hot and humid," Tol said.

Nordhaus in a recent study reported a "substantial increase" in the social cost of carbon -- up to twice previous estimates. He predicted trillions of dollars in damages, equating to 2% of global income based on warming of 3 degrees Celsius (5.4 degrees Fahrenheit).

However, some economists say the models fail to capture complexities of climate change that could result in less damage than feared.

"You have to model the global climate system, you have to model the global economy and you have to do it for centuries. There's an enormous amount of uncertainty," said Steve Rose, a senior economist at the Electric Power Research Institute, a non-profit organization funded by utilities and government contracts.

Despite debate over the correct dollar value for climate damage, previous court rulings made clear that future impacts must be considered in some fashion, Rose and several legal experts said.

With much of Biden's climate agenda stalled in Congress, the issue could take center stage if the administration uses executive branch rules to limit industry emissions, said Michael Greenstone, former chief economist for the White House Council of Economic Advisers.

"Climate science and climate economics have advanced rapidly," said Greenstone, who helped establish the Obama carbon cost and argued in court to apply it at Spring Creek. He believes a major cost increase is warranted. "It would be easy to justify a value of around \$200-a-ton that would represent the frontier of our understanding."

## US vaccination drive is bottoming out as omicron subsides

By JAY REEVES and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

HAMILTON, Ala. (AP) — A handwritten log kept by nurses tells the story of the losing battle to get more people vaccinated against COVID-19 in this corner of Alabama: Just 14 people showed up at the Marion County Health Department for their initial shot during the first six weeks of the year.

That was true even as hospitals in and around the county of roughly 30,000 people filled with virus patients and the death toll climbed. On many days, no one got a first shot at all, while a Mexican restaurant up the street, Los Amigos, was full of unmasked diners at lunchtime.

The vaccination drive in the U.S. is grinding to a halt, and demand has all but collapsed in places like this deeply conservative manufacturing town where many weren't interested in the shots to begin with.

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The average number of Americans getting their first shot is down to about 90,000 a day, the lowest point since the first few days of the U.S. vaccination campaign, in December 2020. And hopes of any substantial improvement in the immediate future have largely evaporated.

About 76% of the U.S. population has received at least one shot. Less than 65% of all Americans are fully vaccinated.

Vaccination incentive programs that gave away cash, sports tickets, beer and other prizes have largely gone away. Government and employer vaccine mandates have faced court challenges and may have gone as far as they ever will.

And with COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths subsiding across the U.S., people who are against getting vaccinated don't see much reason to change their minds.

"People are just over it. They're tired of it," said Judy Smith, administrator for a 12-county public health district in northwestern Alabama.

The bottoming-out of demand for the first round of vaccinations is especially evident in conservative areas around the country.

On most days in Idaho, the number of people statewide getting their first shot rarely surpasses 500.

In Wyoming, a total of about 280 people statewide got their first shot in the past week, and the waiting area at the Cheyenne-Laramie County Health Department stood empty Tuesday morning. The head of the department fondly recalled just a few months ago, when the lobby was bustling on Friday afternoons after school with children getting their doses. But they aren't showing up anymore either.

"People heard more stories about, well, the omicron's not that bad," Executive Director Kathy Emmons said. "I think a lot of people just kind of rolled the dice and decided, 'Well, if it's not that bad, I'm just going to kind of wait it out and see what happens.'"

Marion County, along the Mississippi line, is part of a band of Alabama counties where most people aren't fully vaccinated more than a year after shots were rolled out. Just to the east, Winston County has the state's lowest share of fully vaccinated residents, at 26%, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 42% are fully immunized in Marion County.

The digital sign outside First National Bank flashes Bible verses along with the temperature, and many Marion County residents work in small plants that make mobile homes and components for prefab housing. Most area jobs are blue-collar, and TVs are typically turned to Fox News. A conservative, working-class ethic runs deep.

The area went heavily for President Donald Trump in the 2020 election. And yet resistance to the vaccine is so strong that two counties over, in Cullman, some booed Trump when he encouraged vaccinations during a rally that drew thousands last summer.

COVID-19 has killed almost 18,000 people in Alabama, giving the state the nation's fourth-highest rate of deaths relative to population. Marion County's rate exceeds the state average at 1.78%, with more than 140 deaths, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Health officials expected to have a hard time persuading Black people to get government-sponsored vaccines in Alabama, home of the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study and a place where distrust of Washington runs deep. They started work on public education campaigns weeks early in mostly Black areas, which now have some of the state's highest vaccination rates, at 60% or more.

But they didn't expect the stiff resistance among rural whites that has kept vaccination numbers stubbornly low in places like Marion County, which is 94% white. While rural transportation difficulties, confusion over vaccine costs — they're free — and a lack of health care access have also been factors, the partisan divide in America killed the vaccine drive for some before it really got started, officials said.

"Rural white men who identify as conservative are just not interested in this. That caught us off guard," said Dr. Scott Harris, head of the Alabama Department of Public Health. "By the first or second month of the vaccine campaign, it became clear that those folks just weren't going to come in."

Richard Kitchens is among that group. The owner of a clothing and sports shoe shop on the square in Hamilton, Kitchens said he isn't interested in the vaccine after getting COVID-19 in 2020 before vaccines were available and having relatives who contracted the illness, developed only minor symptoms

and recovered.

Short of a proven guarantee against illness — which no vaccine provides — he doesn't see the point.

"I guess if I knew I could go out and get a shot and wouldn't get it or spread it, I would go get it, and they say it helps," Kitchens said. "But I think that will be determined sometime down the road maybe."

Doris Peterson is fully vaccinated, but she said she didn't get a booster on the advice of her two adult daughters, neither of whom is vaccinated. Peterson said she is used to being one of the few people around still wearing a mask in public.

"Most of the time I am it," she said.

Kelly Moore, a former Tennessee health official who now heads a CDC-funded vaccination advocacy organization named Immunize.org, recalled seeing data from a recent survey that hit her like a punch to the gut.

The results were presented at a CDC meeting of vaccine experts earlier this month. The January survey of about 1,000 adults asked unvaccinated participants what, if anything, would change their mind and persuade them to get a shot. Half said "nothing."

"It was quite demoralizing to see those results, frankly," Moore said.

With the pandemic still a mortal threat, public health workers haven't given up on getting more people vaccinated, even if it feels like an uphill slog.

Jordan Ledbetter, a nurse who works at the Marion County Health Department, was thrilled when two people came in for first-time shots on the same day recently.

"That was exciting," she said. "There are days when I haven't given any vaccines."

## Russia state TV paints Moscow as savior of eastern Ukraine

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — As the West sounded the alarm about the Kremlin ordering troops into eastern Ukraine and decried it as an invasion, Russian state media painted a completely different picture — of Moscow coming to the rescue of war-torn areas tormented by Ukraine's aggression and bringing them peace.

The fanfare came hours after Vladimir Putin announced Russia's recognition of the separatist areas in eastern Ukraine as independent states and ordered its troops to "maintain peace" in territory where Russia-backed rebels have been fighting Kyiv's forces since 2014 — a conflict that has killed over 14,000 people.

TV presenters hailed the "historic" day and professed the end of suffering for the residents of the breakaway regions.

"You paid with your blood for these eight years of torment and anticipation," anchor Olga Skabeyeva told residents of the areas known as Donbas during a popular political talk show Tuesday morning on Russia 1 state TV. "Russia will now be defending Donbas."

TV pundit Vladimir Solovyev echoed those sentiments on his morning show on state Vesti.FM radio. "We will ensure their safety," he declared. "It is now dangerous to fight with them ... because one will now have to fight with the Russian army."

Channel One, another popular state-funded TV station, struck a more festive tone, with its correspondent in Donetsk asserting that local residents "say it is the best news over the past years of war."

"Now they have confidence in the future and that the years-long war will finally come to an end," she said.

Whether ordinary Russians are buying it is another question.

After his announcement Monday evening, Putin said he was "positive about the people's support."

But critics denounced the moves as harmful for both Ukraine and Russia.

Imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny, in a message from behind bars posted on social media, said Putin "won't let Ukraine develop, drag it into a swamp, but Russia will also pay the same price."

A Facebook campaign with the hashtag "I'm not staying silent," launched by independent Russian news site Holod urged people "to express their opinion about the war aloud — and also to remember that each of us has something connecting us to Ukraine." It brought dozens of posts sharing memories about Ukraine and condemning the Kremlin's moves.

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Still, many have voiced their wholehearted support for Putin's decision.

"It should have been done a long time ago," said Irina Nareyko, a Moscow resident. "These poor people who identify as Russian, who mainly identify as Orthodox, who cannot wait anymore and live expecting to be killed ... we should have accepted them a long time ago."

Denis Volkov, director of the Levada Center, Russia's top independent pollster, said that according to its poll data, more than half of Russians were ready to support Putin's moves.

"The situation, as it is understood by the majority, is that the West is pressuring Ukraine" to make a move against the rebel-held areas, "and Russia needs to somehow help," Volkov told the AP. "This notion of helping in an extraordinary situation translates into support" for recognition of the separatist regions.

The narrative of Ukraine having aggressive designs on Donbas has been actively promoted by the Russian authorities — along with accusations that the West is pumping Ukraine full of weapons and warmongering.

The Kremlin has denied plans to invade Ukraine, something the West fears due to a massive buildup of Russian troops along Ukraine's borders. Russian officials point fingers at Kyiv instead, saying it has massed its own troops and could try to retake the rebel-held areas by force, which the Ukraine government denies.

The official rhetoric heated up last week, when Putin charged that "what is now happening in Donbas is genocide." Popular newscasts and political talk shows on state TV channels started widely using the term.

Prominent news anchor Dmitry Kiselev likened what was happening in Donbas to World War II atrocities committed by Nazi Germany and dressed down German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for challenging Putin's use of the word "genocide."

"It is, simply, solidarity with the genocide of today," he charged on Russia 1's flagship news show .

Over the weekend, separatist officials added a sense of urgency to the picture, announcing mass evacuations of Donetsk and Luhansk residents into Russia and mobilizing troops in the face of a purportedly imminent attack by Ukrainian forces.

News bulletins showed emotional visuals of women and children lining up to board buses, followed by segments alleging massive shelling of the areas by Ukrainian forces. Some of those segments stressed that Kyiv's military was deliberately targeting civilians.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speech at a Munich security conference Saturday, during which he threatened to pull out of an agreement to abandon the nuclear weapons left in Ukraine after the Soviet collapse in exchange for security guarantees, fueled the fire even further.

Russian state TV channels aired multiple segments about Kyiv's capability to develop its own nuclear weapons, and news show hosts warned the threat shouldn't be taken lightly.

Finally, to drive home the point about Ukraine's alleged aggressions, Russian officials on Monday accused Ukrainian forces of an attempted incursion into Russia— an allegation Ukraine dismissed as false "disinformation."

"The invasion has begun," Russia 1 TV host Yevgeny Popov proclaimed. "But it wasn't Putin who invaded Ukraine — instead, Ukraine went to war with Russia and Donbas."

Several hours later, Putin announced recognition of the self-proclaimed republics in eastern Ukraine.

Political analyst Abbas Gallyamov says that while the majority of Russians will support the decision, the impact of such propaganda on the domestic audience is limited, compared to 2014, when the Kremlin managed to rally Russians around the idea of annexing Crimea.

The only popular show of support for the moves on eastern Ukraine took place in St. Petersburg on Wednesday — the day Russia celebrates Defender of the Fatherland Day, a holiday that commemorates the country's veterans.

Russian media reported several hundred pro-Kremlin activists gathered in the city center with Russian flags and banners saying: "We don't abandon our own." According to reports, some of the demonstrators didn't know what the rally was about and said they were promised a hot meal after it.

At the same time, rights groups in Moscow reported six protesters detained over holding pickets against a war with Ukraine.

State TV channels showed a top official from the Kremlin's United Russia party laying flowers at a memorial for the "defenders of Donbas" in Donetsk, along with the area's separatist leader.



Putin will score some political points at home, but not too many, Gallyamov believes.

"People remember what (the annexation of Crimea) led to. People understand that there will be sanctions now, the economy will decline even further, and living conditions will continue to worsen."

"They remember that there was a hangover after the party."

Moscow resident Sergei, who only gave his first name, appeared to be one of those skeptics. "It's terrible, it's very bad," he said.

"As usual, nobody asked anybody about anything," he said. "The economic repercussions are economic repercussions for us, not the ruling elite."

## Weisselberg, Trump Organization seek to toss tax fraud case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Lawyers for Donald Trump's longtime finance chief, Allen Weisselberg, are asking a judge to throw out tax fraud charges against him, arguing New York prosecutors targeted him as punishment because he wouldn't flip on the former president.

In court papers filed Tuesday, Weisselberg's lawyer said the Trump Organization's CFO is "collateral damage" in a "singular crusade" by Democratic prosecutors to have him implicate and help put the Republican ex-president behind bars.

"Mr. Weisselberg's unequal and unfair treatment is the consequence of his proximity to Donald J. Trump, and his rejection of (prosecutors') demand that he cooperate with (their) investigation targeting Mr. Trump and his businesses," Weisselberg lawyers wrote.

Weisselberg was arrested last July on charges he collected more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation, including apartment rent, car payments and school tuition. Trump's company is also charged in the case, which prosecutors have described as a "sweeping and audacious" tax fraud scheme.

Weisselberg and the Trump Organization have pleaded not guilty. Lawyers for the company also sought Tuesday to have the company's charges dismissed.

Weisselberg, 74, is the only Trump executive charged in the yearslong criminal investigation started by former Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. and now overseen by his successor, Alvin Bragg. Several other Trump executives have been granted immunity to testify before a grand jury in the case.

A message seeking comment was left Wednesday with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. Prosecutors are expected to respond to Weisselberg's motion to dismiss in a court filing in the coming weeks.

Judge Juan Manuel Merchan has given both sides until spring to file motions and responses and indicated he'll decide on them at a July hearing, the next time Weisselberg is due in court. Merchan has said he'll likely schedule a trial for the end of August or beginning of September.

Weisselberg's lawyers, who include Mary Mulligan, Bryan Skarlatos and Rita Glavin, have also asked Merchan to consider throwing out part of the indictment and suppressing statements made while in custody on July 1, if the judge doesn't agree to dismiss the case entirely. Glavin also represents former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Weisselberg's lawyers argued that some charges against him are outside the statute of limitations or are otherwise legally deficient. They said Weisselberg's statements to investigators during the eight hours he was in custody after his arrest shouldn't be admissible because they were taken in violation of his rights.

D.A.'s office investigators struck up conversations with Weisselberg that were "laser-focused on issues relevant to the indictment," even though they were aware that Weisselberg was represented by counsel that wasn't present at the time, the lawyers wrote. The conversations constituted an interrogation and violated Weisselberg's Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, they said.

Trump has not been charged with any wrongdoing, but prosecutors noted he signed some of the checks at the center of Weisselberg's case, which they said stemmed from a 15-year scheme "orchestrated by the most senior executives" at the Trump Organization.

A judge last week ruled that Trump and his two eldest children, Ivanka and Donald Trump Jr. must answer questions under oath in a parallel civil investigation into his business practices being run by New

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York Attorney General Letitia James.

James, a Democrat, said her investigation has uncovered evidence Trump's company, the Trump Organization, used "fraudulent or misleading" valuations of assets like golf courses and skyscrapers to get loans and tax benefits. Trump's longtime accounting firm recently dumped him after warning him not to rely on years of financial statements it prepared based on his company's valuations, given questions about their accuracy.

Although James' civil investigation is separate from the criminal investigation, her office has been involved in both, dispatching several lawyers to work side-by-side with prosecutors from the Manhattan D.A.'s office. It was evidence uncovered in James' civil investigation that led to criminal charges against Weisselberg.

In a statement last week, Trump said he believed Weisselberg was innocent and that the charges against the man he described as "a 74-year-old long-term and wonderful employee" were overblown.

The charge "is that he did not pay taxes on a company car or a company apartment (Do others pay such a tax? Did Cy Vance pay a tax on his car?), and a charge having to do with my paying for the education of his grandchildren," Trump said. "Murderers all over the city and they are worried about me helping with young children's education?"

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

## **UN: Wildfires getting worse globally, governments unprepared**

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A warming planet and changes to land use patterns mean more wildfires will scorch large parts of the globe in coming decades, causing spikes in unhealthy smoke pollution and other problems that governments are ill prepared to confront, according to a U.N. report released Wednesday.

The Western U.S., northern Siberia, central India, and eastern Australia already are seeing more blazes, and the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires globally could increase by a third by 2050 and more than 50% by the turn of the century, according to the report from the United Nations Environment Program.

Areas once considered safe from major fires won't be immune, including the Arctic, which the report said was "very likely to experience a significant increase in burning."

Tropical forests in Indonesia and the southern Amazon of South America also are likely to see increased wildfires, the report concluded.

"Uncontrollable and devastating wildfires are becoming an expected part of the seasonal calendars in many parts of the world," said Andrew Sullivan, with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation in Australia, one of the report's authors.

The report describes a worsening cycle: Climate change brings more drought and higher temperatures that make it easy for fires to start and spread, and in turn those blazes release more climate-changing carbon into the atmosphere as they burn through forests and peatland.

Some areas including parts of Africa are seeing decreasing wildfires, in part because more land is being devoted to agriculture, said report co-author Glynis Humphrey from the University of Cape Town.

But U.N. researchers said many nations continue to spend too much time and money fighting fires and not enough trying to prevent them. Land use changes can make the fires worse, such as logging that leaves behind debris that can easily burn and forests that are intentionally ignited to clear land for farming, the report said.

Poor communities are often hit hardest by fires, which can degrade water quality, destroy crops and reduce land available to grow food.

"It impacts people's jobs and the economic situation that people are in," Humphrey said. "It's integral that fire be in the same category of disaster management as floods and droughts. It's absolutely essential."

In the United States, officials recently unveiled a \$50 billion effort to reduce fire risks over the next decade by more aggressively thinning forests around "hot spots" where nature and neighborhoods collide.

Only some of that work has funding so far — about \$3 billion over five years under the recently passed federal infrastructure bill, according to officials in President Joe Biden's administration.

Critics of the administration's plan say it continues to put too much emphasis on fighting some fires that can be useful to clear out underbrush when the flames remain relatively small and don't threaten houses.

The U.N. researchers also called for more awareness of the dangers from wildfire smoke inhalation, which can affect tens of millions of people annually as plumes from major wildfires drift thousands of miles across international borders.

## Gambia urges UN court to continue Rohingya genocide case

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Lawyers for Gambia on Wednesday urged the United Nations' top court to throw out Myanmar's legal bid to end a case accusing the Southeast Asian nation of genocide against the country's Rohingya minority.

"This court must reject Myanmar's meritless preliminary objections and proceed to adjudicate the merits of this dispute," Gambia's Attorney General and Justice Minister Dawda Jallow told judges at the International Court of Justice.

Lawyer Paul S. Reichler said the military takeover of power in Myanmar last year made the case all the more important as the country's new rulers are alleged to be behind the atrocities committed against the Rohingya.

"If they can escape the court's jurisdiction, they will be accountable to no one and there will be no constraints on their persecution and ultimate destruction of the Rohingya," he warned, adding that "the Rohingya remain at grave risk of mass atrocity crimes."

The case stems from what the Myanmar military called a clearance campaign it launched in Rakhine state in 2017 after an attack by a Rohingya insurgent group. Security forces were accused of mass rapes, killings and torching thousands of homes as more than 700,000 Rohingya fled into neighboring Bangladesh.

The African nation of Gambia has argued that the 2017 crackdown amounts to genocide and is asking the world court to hold Myanmar accountable.

On Monday, lawyers representing Myanmar's military-installed government urged judges at the global court to throw out the case, arguing they did not have jurisdiction, in part because they say Gambia was acting as a mouthpiece for an organization of Muslim nations.

Myanmar's legal team was led by Ko Ko Hlaing, the minister for international cooperation. He replaced pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, who led the country's legal team at earlier hearings in the case in 2019. She now is in prison after being convicted of what her supporters call trumped-up charges.

The leader of Gambia's legal team stressed the case was brought by Gambia and not the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

"We are no one's proxy," Jallow told the court.

"This is very much a dispute between the Gambia and Myanmar," he added in a direct rebuttal of Myanmar's argument that Gambia's case was really brought by the Muslim organization and that the court can only hear cases between nations.

Judges will likely take months to rule on Myanmar's preliminary objections. If they reject them, the case will go ahead and likely take years to reach a conclusion.

Summing up Gambia's presentation on Wednesday, Philippe Sands was dismissive of Myanmar's attempts to have the case dropped.

"To say that the arguments of Myanmar are tantamount to clutching at straws would be generous," he told judges. "It would require you to redefine both the act of clutching and the nature of straw."

Pro-democracy advocates have harshly criticized the U.N. court for allowing the military government to represent Myanmar in a case focusing on alleged atrocities by the country's armed forces.

"It is outrageous for the ICJ to proceed with these hearings on the basis of junta representation. The junta is not the government of Myanmar, it does not represent the state of Myanmar, and it is dangerous

for the court to allow it to present itself as such," said Chris Sidoti of advocacy group Special Advisory Council for Myanmar.

## **The 1990s: Jordan era takes flight; Magic battles HIV virus**

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

Michael Jordan had just won his first championship, beating Magic Johnson in the NBA Finals. They were poised to lead a Dream Team the world couldn't wait to watch.

Yes, the NBA rolled into the fall of 1991 with unlimited promise.

Jordan, already basketball's best and most popular player, was now on its top team. The 1992 Olympics were just a year away and for the first time would include NBA players, opening international doors the league previously couldn't reach.

Then, suddenly, the foundation that never felt stronger was rocked by devastating news.

When Johnson announced that November he had contracted the HIV virus and would retire immediately, the sadness wasn't just over the end of his career. There was fear for his life.

The virus caused AIDS, which was considered a death sentence at the time. People who got AIDS died, it was thought, just as Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury did the month Johnson retired. The consternation around the HIV virus then was similar to the mixed feelings the country and world has about COVID-19.

The NBA was still a relatively young league, just 45 years old, when Johnson disclosed his condition some fans thought one of its most beloved players was going to die.

Only Johnson didn't die. Instead, he's credited for saving lives.

With the unrelenting backing of NBA Commissioner David Stern, Johnson would return to play in the 1992 All-Star Game, winning MVP honors and providing hope for health that had been mostly missing.

"We used to talk about it all the time, how we changed the world and we changed HIV and AIDS on that particular day, as well as we saved a lot of people's lives that day," Johnson tearfully recalled in 2020 at a memorial service for Stern.

But those conversations weren't the norm for the NBA at that time.

Unlike the active role players took in the 1950s and '60s, or take today when it comes to social issues and race relations, during the 1990s players largely shied away from issues outside of basketball.

Johnson and Larry Bird loathed discussions of race that was at the center of their rivalry in the 1980s. Jordan refused to endorse Black candidate Harvey Gantt in his 1990 North Carolina senate race against Jesse Helms.

When Rodney King was beaten by Los Angeles police in March of 1991, there was nothing from players similar to the Milwaukee Bucks' refusal to play a playoff game in 2020 following the shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin.

But Johnson's announcement forced the NBA to deal with an issue many Americans hadn't been ready to address.

Orin Starn, a professor of cultural anthropology at Duke, said Johnson and the NBA helped changed the way AIDS was viewed — an illness for homosexuals, and those who weren't gay didn't care to learn how it was contracted or spread.

"So in that context, to have one of the most famous men in America and one of the most well-liked men in America, Magic Johnson, announce that he had HIV/AIDS was a huge deal," Starn said. "And it kind of marked the entry of AIDS into the national consciousness in a new way also, because it made people realize that, hey, this isn't just a problem for gay Americans or for intravenous drug users.

"It's a problem everybody needs to address."

The NBA began educating its players. That included stars like Karl Malone, who like others, had concerns about playing with Johnson. Terry Lyons, a longtime NBA executive, remembers calls coming into the league office with questions they couldn't answer.

A doctor was brought in to address players and coaches during the 1992 All-Star weekend in Orlando. Public health education became a responsibility within the league, one that has continued into the coro-

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navirus pandemic.

Johnson then went as planned to the Barcelona Olympics, where the U.S. suited up what may still be the best team in sports history. Opponents were overpowered and fans overjoyed by the Dream Team, a roster of NBA All-Stars who willingly blended their talents to play basketball at the highest level ever seen.

One of those stars shined brighter than the rest.

Jordan, whose Bulls won their second of three straight titles in 1992, stood alone as a player and a pitchman. There was no rival in the way Johnson had Bird, or Wilt Chamberlain had Bill Russell. Jordan was the biggest thing in the sport and one of the most recognizable athletes in the world.

Little changed even when he retired in 1993 and went on to play minor league baseball. Hakeem Olajuwon led the Houston Rockets to the 1994 and '95 titles, but Jordan returned to the NBA and soon regained his grip on the league. He didn't give it back until he retired again.

Charles Barkley, Clyde Drexler, Gary Payton, Malone and John Stockton all were victims of Jordan's 6-0 mark in the NBA Finals, while Patrick Ewing and Reggie Miller lost out on title shots when Jordan derailed their opportunities before they even had a chance.

With Johnson breaking down barriers off the court, Jordan had taken flight on it and the NBA was soaring five years after one the league's darkest days ever.

The Bulls started a second run of three straight titles in 1995-96 and Jordan was back full-time — things looked better than ever. The growth of the NBA was evident with expansion into Canada for the Toronto Raptors and Vancouver Grizzlies.

The Bulls became the first NBA team to win 70 games and they seemed even bigger off the court, the team of Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman and coach Phil Jackson attracting a worldwide following. Shortly after they won the '96 championship, the NBA welcomed one of its deepest draft classes, a group that included Kobe Bryant, Allen Iverson, Steve Nash and Ray Allen.

The rookies knew they were walking into Jordan's NBA.

"Michael was on the Bulls when I came in the league, so I didn't come in expecting to win, that's for sure," Nash said. "It was in a sense alarming to play against him. because you'd sat there and watched him win and win and win, and be so dominant and be someone that everyone was intimidated by."

Adding to the euphoria of the 1995-96 season: Magic Johnson, who was healthy enough to return and play in 32 games.

Starn, who lived in San Francisco at the time of Johnson's retirement and recalls the sadness for homosexuals who knew infected friends and were resigned to watching them die, said seeing Johnson playing again provided hope that medication had stopped AIDS from being a death sentence.

During the 1990s, the true globalization of the NBA began and the league took a huge step in the ongoing struggle for gender equity in sports.

The 1996 Atlanta Olympics were a coming-out party for women's basketball, and the league launched the WNBA in 1997. Jordan was gone again by the end of the decade, but by then NBA drafts were featuring international players such as Dirk Nowitzki and Manu Ginobili, another legacy of the Dream Team.

Once Jordan, Johnson and their teammates showed the best of basketball to the rest of the world, everyone seemed to want to be in the NBA.

"It was just incredible ... it just kept coming," Lyons said. "Guys started coming from everywhere. The stars were just aligning."

The cloud of doom that hovered over the league in the early 1990s was now long gone by the end of the decade. Johnson was changing the world's view of AIDS and Jordan was completing the transformation of the NBA on the court.

## Abolition newspaper revived for nation grappling with racism

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

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

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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.

"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.

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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, editor-at-large 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."

## 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. The 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.

The 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.

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 rela-

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tionship 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, dumping 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



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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 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

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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 mantel, 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.

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 is safe, according to the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974. Complicat-

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ing 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 the 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 the 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 may have was in part due to the failure to provide proper cleanup," Panetta said. "And in those situations,

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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.

The 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.”

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Feb. 24, the 55th day of 2022. There are 310 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Feb. 24, 1942, the SS Struma, a charter ship attempting to carry nearly 800 Jewish refugees from Romania to British-mandated Palestine, was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine in the Black Sea; all but one of the refugees perished.

On this date:

In 1803, in its Marbury v. Madison decision, the Supreme Court established judicial review of the constitutionality of statutes.

In 1868, the U.S. House of Representatives impeached President Andrew Johnson by a vote of 126-47 following his attempted dismissal of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton; Johnson was later acquitted by the Senate.

In 1981, a jury in White Plains, New York, found Jean Harris guilty of second-degree murder in the fatal shooting of “Scarsdale Diet” author Dr. Herman Tarnower. (Sentenced to 15 years to life in prison, Harris was granted clemency by New York Gov. Mario Cuomo in December 1992.)

In 1986, the Supreme Court struck down, 6-3, an Indianapolis ordinance that would have allowed women injured by someone who had seen or read pornographic material to sue the maker or seller of that material.

In 1988, in a ruling that expanded legal protections for parody and satire, the Supreme Court unanimously overturned a \$150,000 award that the Rev. Jerry Falwell had won against Hustler magazine and its publisher, Larry Flynt.

In 1989, a state funeral was held in Japan for Emperor Hirohito, who had died the month before at age 87.

In 1993, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (muhl-ROO’-nee) resigned after more than eight years

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in office.

In 2002, the Salt Lake City Olympics came to a close, the same day Canada won its first hockey gold in 50 years (the U.S. won silver) and three cross-country skiers were thrown out of the games for using a performance-enhancing drug.

In 2008, Cuba's parliament named Raul Castro president, ending nearly 50 years of rule by his brother Fidel.

In 2011, Discovery, the world's most traveled spaceship, thundered into orbit for the final time, heading toward the International Space Station on a journey marking the beginning of the end of the shuttle era.

In 2015, the Justice Department announced that George Zimmerman, the former neighborhood watch volunteer who fatally shot Trayvon Martin in a 2012 confrontation, would not face federal charges.

In 2020, former Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was convicted in New York on charges of rape and sexual assault involving two women. (Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in state prison.)

Ten years ago: Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in Tunisia for a conference on Syria, called Russia and China "despicable" for opposing U.N. action aimed at stopping the bloodshed caused by the Damascus regime's crackdown on an anti-government uprising. Jan Berenstain, 88, who with her husband, Stan, wrote and illustrated the Berenstain Bears books, died in Solebury Township, Pennsylvania.

Five years ago: Vice President Mike Pence assured the Republican Jewish Coalition meeting in Las Vegas that he and President Donald Trump would work tirelessly on foreign and domestic issues important to the group, such as enacting business-friendly policies at home and supporting Israel abroad.

One year ago: The acting head of the Capitol Police acknowledged to a House panel that the department had intelligence warning of a "significant likelihood for violence" on Jan. 6 but said officers were not prepared for the insurrection that would follow. Lady Gaga's dog walker was shot and two of the singer's French bulldogs were stolen in Hollywood during what police described as an armed robbery; the singer offered a \$500,000 reward for the return of her dogs. (The dogs were recovered unharmed two days later; five people would be charged either with carrying out the attack or as alleged accomplices.) Palm Beach County defied Florida's governor and refused to lower its flags for a day in honor of the late conservative broadcaster Rush Limbaugh; flags at the state Capitol and in the Town of Palm Beach were lowered.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-singer Dominic Chianese (kee-uh-NAY'-see) is 91. Opera singer-director Renata Scotto is 88. Singer Joanie Sommers is 81. Actor Jenny O'Hara is 80. Former Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., is 80. Actor Barry Bostwick is 77. Actor Edward James Olmos is 75. Singer-writer-producer Rupert Holmes is 75. Rock singer-musician George Thorogood is 72. Actor Debra Jo Rupp is 71. Actor Helen Shaver is 71. News anchor Paula Zahn is 66. Baseball Hall of Famer Eddie Murray is 66. Country singer Sammy Kershaw is 64. Actor Mark Moses is 64. Actor Beth Broderick is 63. Actor Emilio Rivera is 61. Singer Michelle Shocked is 60. Movie director Todd Field is 58. Actor Billy Zane is 56. Actor Bonnie Somerville is 48. Jazz musician Jimmy Greene is 47. Former boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr. is 45. Rock musician Matt McGinley (Gym Class Heroes) is 39. Actor Wilson Bethel is 38. Actor Alexander Koch is 34. Actor Daniel Kaluuya (Film: "Get Out") is 33. Rapper-actor O'Shea Jackson Jr. is 31.