

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 1 of 78

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2 - Lady Tigers advance with come-from-behind win over Milbank](#)
- [3- Re:Set Women's Conference Ad](#)
- [4- Weather Pages](#)
- [8- Daily Devotional](#)
- [9- 2022 Community Events](#)
- [10- Subscription Form](#)
- [11- News from the Associated Press](#)



UpComing Events

Today

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: Groton Area vs. Sisseton, 6 p.m., at Sisseton

Monday, Feb. 28

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

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

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

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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 2 of 78

Lady Tigers advance with come-from-behind win over Milbank

Groton Area girls overcame a 10-point deficit to beat Milbank in the first round of the Region 1A Tournament, 40-36.

Milbank led the whole game until the final two minutes of the game. The Bulldogs took a 13-7 lead after the first quarter and a 19-13 lead at half time. Milbank opened up a 10-point lead, 31-21, late in the third quarter, but Groton Area quickly rallied and made it 31-27 at the third quarter break. Groton Area tied the game with a Sydney Leicht free throw with 2:02 left in the game. Gracie Traphagen put up an offensive rebound and Alyssa Thaler sank a three-pointer as Groton took a 40-35 lead. Milbank was one of four from the line in the closing minute and the Tigers went on to win, 40-36.

Groton Area will play Sisseton on Saturday at 6 p.m. at Sisseton.

Alyssa Thaler led the Tigers with 10 points followed by Sydney Leicht with nine, Gracie Traphagen had five, Allyssa Locke, Aspen Johnson and Brooke Gengerke each had four and Jerica Locke and Jaedyn Penning each added two points.

Maurina Street led Milbank with 17 points, scoring 13 of them in the first half. Tyra Berry had 12, Isabella Anderson had three and Claire Snaza added two points.

Alyssa Thaler - 10 points, 3 rebounds, 1 steal, 1 foul, 1 block.

Sydney Leicht - 9 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 steals, 1 foul.

Gracie Traphagen - 5 points, 7 rebounds, 1 steal, 1 foul, 2 blocks.

Allyssa Locke - 4 points, 5 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals, 1 foul.

Brooke Gengerke - 4 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist.

Aspen Johnson - 4 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 foul.

Jerica Locke - 2 points, 1 rebound, 2 steals, 4 fouls.

Jaedyn Penning - 2 points, 1 rebound, 1 assist, 1 foul.

Groton Area made 10 of 30 field goals for 33 percent, five of 16 three-pointers for 31 percent, five of 15 in free throws for 33 percent, had 27 rebounds, 15 turnovers, seven assists, eight steals, 10 fouls and three blocked shots.

Milbank made 15 of 47 field goals for 32 percent, made three of 10 free throws for 30 percent, had 17 turnovers and 15 fouls.



The region game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Allied Climate Professionals, Bahr Spray Foam, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Doug Abeln Seed Company, Groton American Legion, Groton Dairy Queen, John Sieh Agency, Locke Electric, Lori's Pharmacy, Matt's Tree Service, Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc., MJ's Sinclair, S & S Lumber, ThunderSeed, Weismantel Agency of Columbia,

Groton Area's two seniors, Allyssa Locke and Alyssa Thaler, get to play another game with a big win over Milbank.

Guest Speaker
Nicole J Phillips
The Kindness Podcast

*You're
Invited!*

RESET

womens conference

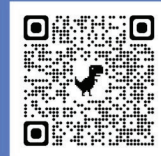
SATURDAY, MARCH 5
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

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.

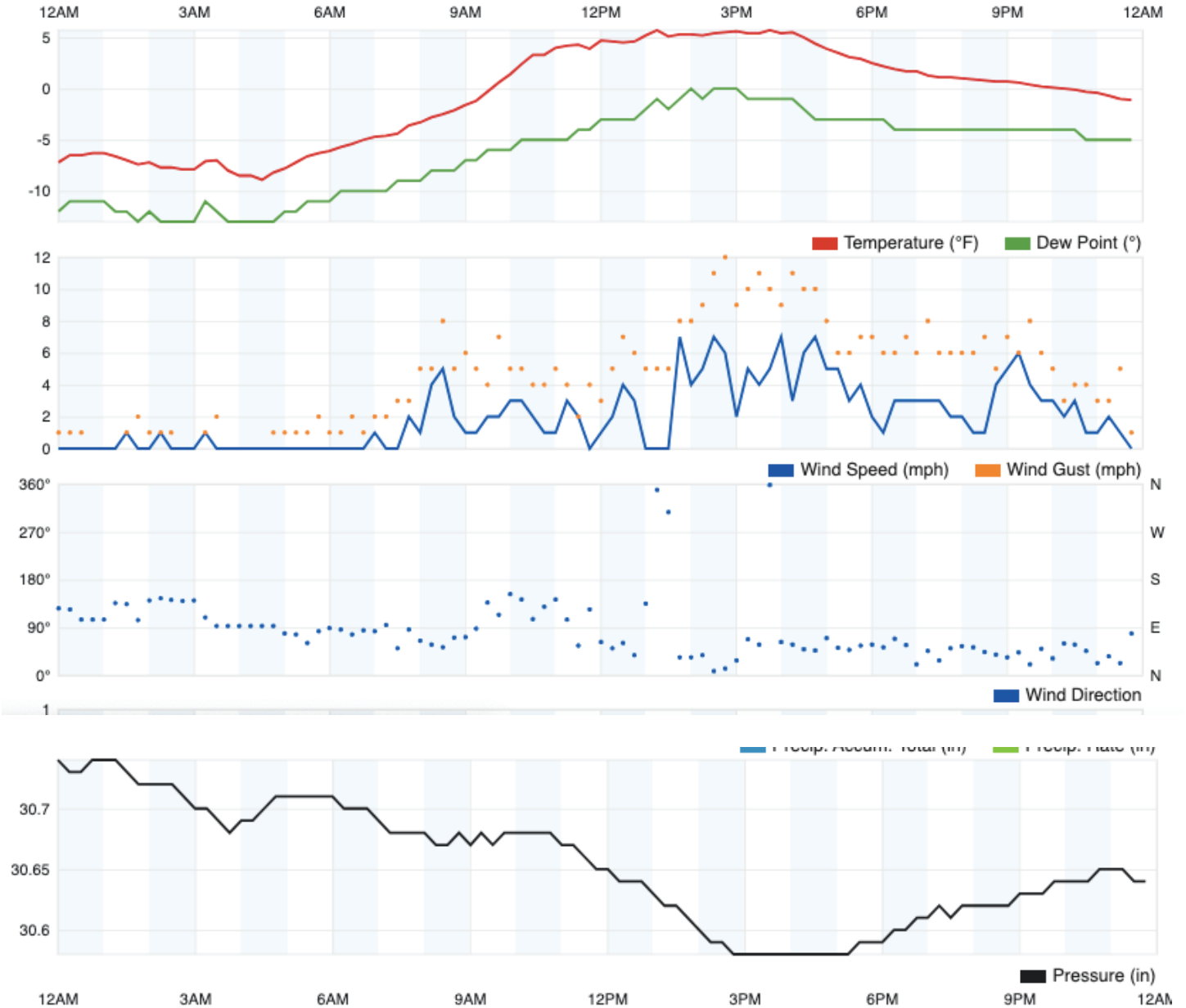
REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT
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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 4 of 78

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



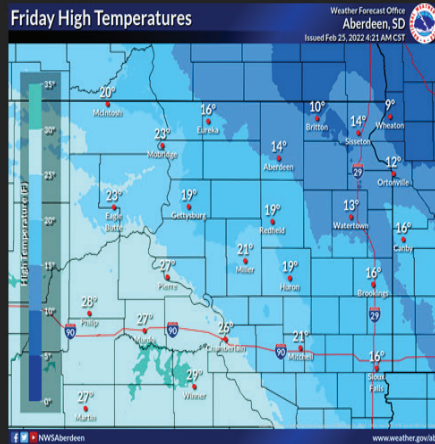
Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 5 of 78

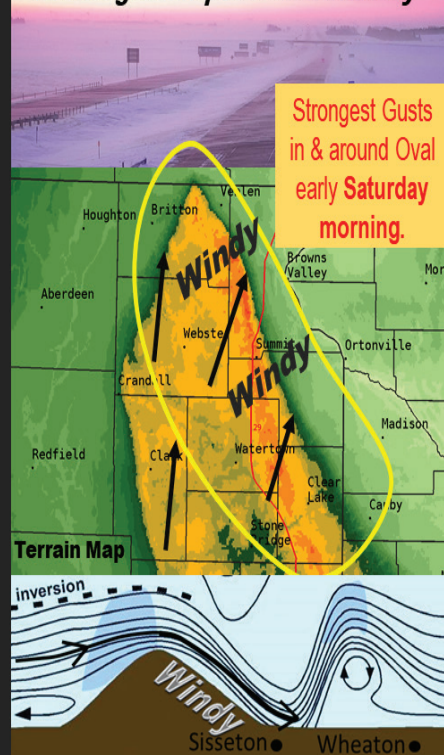
Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Patched Fog then Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Patchy Blowing Snow	Mostly Clear	Partly Sunny
High: 14 °F	Low: 3 °F	High: 31 °F	Low: 6 °F	High: 27 °F

Bitterly Cold Friday morning, **Winds** increase Saturday

Lowest Wind Chills -20 to -30 degrees this morning, before temperatures rebound this afternoon



Blowing snow possible Saturday



Wind Gusts 40+ mph, by early Saturday morning on the east side of the Sisseton Hills, blowing snow likely. Gusty winds and patchy blowing snow expand across the region Saturday afternoon.

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 2/25/2022 5:10 AM

Cold air and a stiff breeze will start the morning with dangerously cold wind chills, but conditions improve through the afternoon. By early Saturday morning gusty winds and blowing snow will be a concern over the Sisseton Hills I-29 corridor. Gusty winds and the possibility of patchy blowing snow will then expand across much of the region by Saturday afternoon. Be prepared for changing conditions if traveling.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 6 of 78

Today in Weather History

February 25, 1987: Six to thirty inches of snow fell on this date in 1987 across much of western and central South Dakota. Three to six inches of snow fell in the northeast part of South Dakota. Some of the most significant snowfall amounts reported were 30 inches at Phillip, 26 inches at Murdo, and Timber Lake, with 15 inches at Rapid City. Numerous accidents occurred in the western and central sections of the state. Many roads were closed, including interstate 90 for most of the 27th. Slippery roads were a major factor in the vehicle injuries of three women on Highway 12, six and one-half miles east of Ipswich in the late afternoon of the 27th. The storm began on the 24th and lasted until the 28th.

February 25, 2000: Unusual February severe thunderstorms produced nickel to quarter size hail in Lyman and Hand counties on this date in 2000.

1934: An outbreak of six tornadoes killed nineteen in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Hardest hit was Bowden, GA, and Shady Grove, AL. One home in Lauderdale County, Mississippi, was picked up, thrown 400 feet, and blown to bits. Six family members were killed in the house. [Click HERE](#) for more information about the tornadoes in Lauderdale County, Mississippi.

1991: Black rain fell over southeastern Turkey for 10-hours, causing panic among people. The black rain was the result of soot from burning oil fields in Kuwait.

2010: A powerful nor'easter spread significant snow and windy conditions across the Middle Atlantic region from Thursday, February 25th into Friday, February 26th. An area of low pressure developed off the Carolina coast late Wednesday night February 24th and then strengthened as it tracked northward to near Long Island, New York by Thursday evening. As low pressure aloft deepened over the Mid-Atlantic coast Thursday night into Friday, the surface low retrograded and moved westward into northern New Jersey and southern New York. By Saturday, February 27th, the low pushed into southern New England and gradually weakened over the weekend. Strong wind gusts were measured throughout the Middle Atlantic region as a result of this coastal storm. Some of the highest wind gusts recorded include 62 mph measured at Cape May, New Jersey; 52 mph at the Atlantic City Marina; 51 mph at the Mount Pocono Airport and Lewes, Delaware; and 50 mph at Dover Air Force Base. Wind gusts of 40 mph or higher were also recorded at Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Allentown. Considerable blowing and drifting snow resulted, especially from the Poconos eastward into northern New Jersey. Snow drifts as high as 3 to 5 feet were seen across portions of Warren and Sussex counties in New Jersey. Total accumulations of 20 inches or more were recorded from Morris and Sussex counties in New Jersey westward into Monroe County, Pennsylvania. A band of 12 to 18 inches of snow accumulation was measured from Warren and Morris counties in New Jersey westward to Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. In addition to snow that accumulated during the daytime on Thursday, many locations across the region experienced a heavier burst of snow with gusty winds Thursday night into early Friday thanks to additional moisture that wrapped around the low-pressure system. Some areas saw snowfall rates of 1 to 2 inches per hour, especially from northern New Jersey and into the Poconos. Central Park ended the month with a total of 36.9 inches of snow, making this the snowiest month since records began in 1869.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 7 of 78

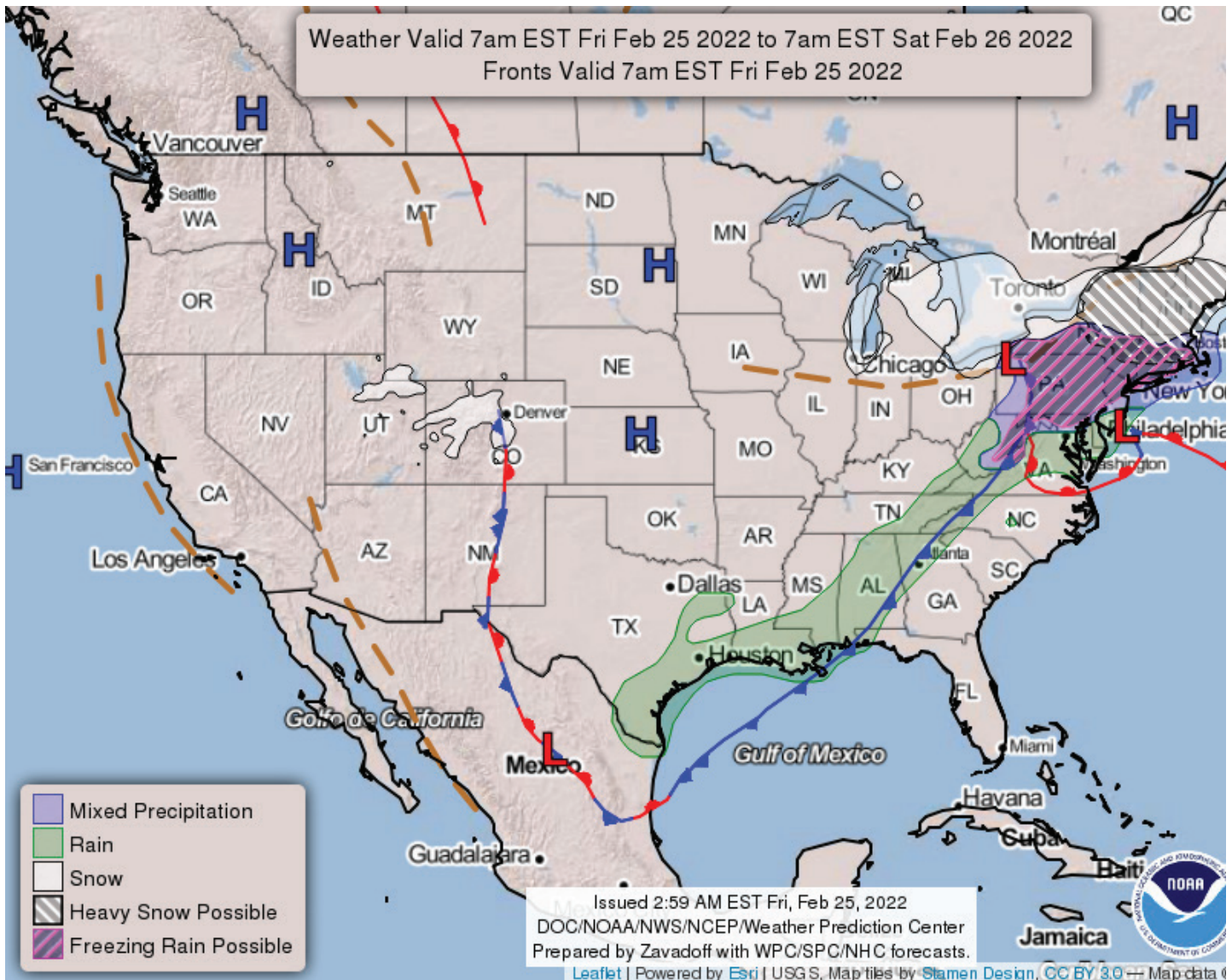
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 6 °F at 1:17 PM
Low Temp: -9 °F at 4:30 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 2:38 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 2 minutes
Tomorrow will be 3 minutes longer than today in Groton

Today's Info

Record High: 70 in 1958
Record Low: -29 in 1919
Average High: 32°F
Average Low: 10°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.54
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.09
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 6:15:14 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:13:46 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 8 of 78



WHAT - NOT WHY

"I wouldn't go through my experience with cancer again for a million dollars," said a friend to me recently. "But then again, I wouldn't take a million dollars for it, either."

Could it be that the most painful experiences in life are sometimes the most profitable? Is it not true that after we have struggled through one of the most challenging times in our lives we take a deep breath and say, "Thank You, Lord. That ended up as a great blessing! I sincerely appreciate Your presence and peace during the dark days and long nights. I would not have made it without You."

"It is good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn Your decrees!" said the Psalmist, after his ordeal.

As he struggled and strained with deep fears and high anxieties, he did not ask, "Why are these things happening to me?" Instead he asked, "What can I learn from them?"

"Why" is often a useless word. Most of the problems we face or the difficult issues that challenge or confront us cannot be answered if we ask, "Why?" Asking a different question is usually more beneficial: "What, God, are You trying to teach me?" usually brings the best answers.

"A.J." was a very successful leader. Nearly everyone looked up to him. He had answers to questions and insight to issues that others overlooked. One day he was in an accident and lost his sight. He did not ask, "Why Lord?" After realizing that his condition was permanent, he asked, "What can I do for You now, Lord?"

Prayer: We pray, Lord, that we will learn to ask, "What can I do for You with the 'unusual gifts' You give me?" Help us to recognize that our suffering can be a tool for You to use in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: It is good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. Psalm 119:71

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 9 of 78

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 10 of 78

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 11 of 78

News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 55, Little Wound 54

Clark/Willow Lake 78, Webster 47

Crazy Horse 110, Takini 10

Moorhead, Minn. 79, Watertown 53

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 64, Marshall, Minn. 48

Spearfish 62, Douglas 57

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Marshall, Minn. 66, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 46

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A=

Quarterfinal=

Region 1=

Florence/Henry 70, Tiospa Zina Tribal 28

Groton Area 40, Milbank 36

Sisseton 69, Clark/Willow Lake 49

Webster 34, Redfield 31

Region 6=

Crow Creek 77, McLaughlin 18

Dupree 63, Chamberlain 48

Mobridge-Pollock 79, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 36

Winner 58, Stanley County 27

Region 7=

Pine Ridge 65, St. Francis Indian 54

Red Cloud 82, Little Wound 20

Todd County 67, Bennett County 43

Region 8=

Belle Fourche 52, Lead-Deadwood 18

Hill City 50, Custer 46

Rapid City Christian 43, Hot Springs 24

Semifinal=

Region 2=

Flandreau 50, Deubrook 42

Hamlin 55, Sioux Valley 32

Region 3=

Sioux Falls Christian 49, Garretson 32

West Central 68, Tri-Valley 39

Region 4=

Dakota Valley 62, Lennox 44

Vermillion 38, Elk Point-Jefferson 30

Region 5=

Mt. Vernon 44, Parkston 25

Wagner 48, Hanson 36

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 12 of 78

Class B=
Quarterfinal=
Region 1=
Aberdeen Christian 50, Leola/Frederick 18
Britton-Hecla 43, Waubay/Summit 42
Warner 56, Northwestern 35
Region 2=
Herreid/Selby Area 58, Potter County 41
Highmore-Harrold 66, Lower Brule 54
Miller 56, Faulkton 20
Sully Buttes 67, North Central Co-Op 43
Region 6=
Gregory 50, Wessington Springs 38
Platte-Geddes 56, Burke 48
Region 8=
Bison 52, Timber Lake 48
Faith 83, Tiospaye Topa 23
Harding County 31, Newell 30
Wakpala 67, Lemmon 62
SoDak 16 Qualifier=
Region 3=
Castlewood 59, Arlington 43
DeSmet 69, James Valley Christian 36
Region 4=
Bridgewater-Emery 58, Ethan 54, OT
Howard 61, Colman-Egan 56, 2OT
Region 5=
Centerville 52, Freeman 50
Viborg-Hurley 59, Irene-Wakonda 46
Region 7=
Wall 68, Kadoka Area 49
White River 54, Jones County 42

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

South Dakota AG crash prosecutors defend charging decisions

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota prosecutors who charged the state's attorney general with misdemeanors in a 2020 fatal car crash defended their charging decision on Thursday to lawmakers weighing whether he should face impeachment charges.

The two prosecutors said neither the fact that criminal investigators doubted Attorney General Jason Ravensborg's account of the crash on a rural highway nor the surrounding pressure from Gov. Kristi Noem swayed them to pursue more severe charges.

"I have to do what you can prove," said Michael Moore, the Beadle County state's attorney who assisted the prosecution. "I need to have facts to show that you're guilty of a crime and then I can charge you."

Ravensborg, who was elected to his first term in 2018, pleaded no contest in August to a pair of misdemeanors in the September 2020 crash that killed a man walking near a rural highway. The attorney general first reported the crash as a collision with an animal. He has insisted that he did not realize he had killed the man, Joseph Boever, until he returned to the scene the next day and discovered his body.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 13 of 78

As a House impeachment investigation committee has sifted through the crash investigation and questioned key figures in the crash probe and prosecution, a divide has become evident on the nine-member committee.

One group of lawmakers has questioned Ravensborg's truthfulness and conduct during the crash investigation, while others have pursued a line of questioning about whether Noem was applying undue pressure to the prosecution as she pushed for Ravensborg to be forced from his office.

"We don't live in a vacuum. We know what the governor wanted us to do," Moore said of Noem's push to bring more severe charges.

Hyde County Deputy State's Attorney Emily Sovell, who led the prosecution, said she took steps to avoid being influenced, including at one point excluding Noem's Secretary of Public Safety, Craig Price, from communication about the case. But Sovell said Noem's administration last year crossed a line in releasing video of Ravensborg being interviewed by prosecutors while he was still facing charges. She said it made the job of the prosecution harder and could have tainted a jury.

Moore called it "an ethical violation for me as a prosecutor."

However, the Department of Public Safety had argued that it was part of Noem's push for a higher level of transparency as the state's top law enforcement officer was under a criminal investigation.

Price defended the investigation on Twitter after the committee hearing, describing it as "first class."

"I'm proud of the officers who dedicated so much time to seeking the truth," he said.

Meanwhile, other lawmakers raised questions about Ravensborg's conduct following the crash as the committee questioned two of his top aides.

Tim Bormann, the attorney general's chief of staff, testified that when he spoke with Ravensborg as he completed his trip in a borrowed car following the crash, he sounded "happy to be on the road getting home."

"I hit something in the road," Ravensborg had texted his top aides.

When the two men returned to the scene the next day and Ravensborg discovered Boever's body, Bormann said the attorney general was "very shook."

Lawmakers also questioned a conversation Ravensborg had during the crash investigation with a supervisory agent at the Division of Criminal Investigation, which his office oversees, about what could be uncovered in a forensic exam of his phones. The Division of Criminal Investigation was recused from the case, but North Dakota investigators had taken Ravensborg's phones to examine their data at the time.

David Natvig, the director of the Division of Criminal Investigation who was present for part of the conversation, described the interaction as "a pretty innocuous conversation between individuals who knew each other."

However, the supervisory agent, Brent Gromer, documented what their conversation covered in a statement, which drew some lawmakers to raise questions about the conversation.

Natvig chalked the statement up the thorough work of a seasoned law enforcement officer.

The impeachment investigation committee gave no indication on the next direction of its probe, but scheduled its next meeting for March 10, the final day that lawmakers will be in Pierre for the legislative session.

Appel leads South Dakota State over Oral Roberts in OT

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Luke Appel scored a career-high 41 points and grabbed 10 rebounds as South Dakota State won its 17th straight game, edging past Oral Roberts 106-102 in overtime on Thursday night.

Appel, who entered with a career-high of 20 points, made two free throws with 1.3 seconds left in regulation to force overtime. He finished 16 of 20 from the field to help secure his first career double-double.

Douglas Wilson scored a season-high 29 points for South Dakota State (26-4, 17-0). Baylor Scheierman tied a season high with 26 points and had seven assists.

Max Abmas had 34 points for the Golden Eagles (18-10, 12-5 Summit League). Carlos Jurgens scored a career-high 25 points. Issac McBride had 18 points. Elijah Lufile had a career-high 16 rebounds plus 13

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 14 of 78

points and three blocks.

The Jackrabbits improve to 2-0 against the Golden Eagles for the season. South Dakota State defeated Oral Roberts 82-76 on Dec. 22.

Gilyard lifts Kansas City past South Dakota 72-63

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Evan Gilyard II had 20 points as Kansas City defeated South Dakota 72-63 on Thursday night.

Josiah Allick had 18 points and 12 rebounds for Kansas City (19-10, 12-5 Summit League). Marvin Nesbitt Jr. added 14 points and Arkel Lamar had 13 points and seven rebounds.

Tasos Kamateros had 15 points for the Coyotes (17-11, 10-7), whose four-game win streak was broken. Mason Archambault added 13 points and Hunter Goodrick had 12 points.

The Roos improve to 2-0 against the Coyotes for the season. Kansas City defeated South Dakota 68-57 on Dec. 22.

Republican helps defeat Arizona abortion pill ban

By BOB CHRISTIE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — One Republican in the Arizona House defected from a united GOP front on Thursday to defeat a measure that would have banned manufacturing or prescribing medication that would cause an abortion.

The bill that unexpectedly failed would have eliminated the choice used by half of the people who have abortions in the state, leaving a surgical procedure as the only option.

"Members, I am about as pro-life as they come," Rep. Michelle Udall of Mesa said as she joined all Democrats in voting against the measure. "However, in my research of some of these medications, they are used for other purposes as well.

"They're used for women who have had a miscarriage. They're also used to treat Cushing's Syndrome and they have other uses," she said. "And so to criminalize making these medications and using them will hurt other people."

Republicans control 31 of 60 seats in the House and the loss of any one means a bill can't get the needed 31 votes to pass if Democrats are united in opposition. The state has some of the most restrictive abortion laws in the nation and Republicans in Arizona routinely enact bills targeting the procedure.

The measure could return later in the session, but Udall's statement showed it will need major revisions if backers want it to pass.

The proposal was one of two major anti-abortion bills in the Legislature this year. The other passed the Senate last week. It would outlaw abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy and awaits House action.

Of the 13,186 abortions performed in Arizona in 2020, just 636 were after 15 weeks of pregnancy, according to the latest data from the Arizona Department of Health Services.

The ban on medication abortion is sponsored by Mesa Republican Rep. Jennifer Parker. She said during a Judiciary Committee hearing last week that she understands the issue is deeply partisan and people are entrenched in their position but that she's willing to fight the battle.

Pills accounted for 54% of all U.S. abortions, up from roughly 44% in 2019, according to a report released Thursday by the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights. A state report shows slightly lower numbers, with the Department of Health Services showing 50.2% of the abortions were done with medication.

"To me, there's no more important right than the right to live," Parker said. "And there's nothing else without life and the chance for life."

Democrats and abortion rights advocates noted at the hearing that the ban would prevent people who suffer miscarriages from using medication to clear their body of the dead fetus, forcing them to have surgery instead.

"How is tying the hands of physicians and preventing them from providing medical care that is consti-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 15 of 78

tutionally protected pro-life?" Democratic Rep. Melody Hernandez said at the hearing. "How is preventing people needing miscarriage treatment in this form pro-life?"

There was no debate on the House floor Thursday as the chamber rushed to complete work on scores of bills before a mid-session deadline.

Several states are considering similar legislation to ban medication used in abortions, according to the Guttmacher Institute, which advocates for reproductive rights. They include Alabama, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, Wyoming and Washington. The Washington bill is unlikely to advance in the Democratically-led state.

Many GOP-led states are also considering a ban on mailing abortion-inducing pills, which the Food and Drug Administration allowed to be sent by mail in December. Arizona, Montana, Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma passed laws banning that practice last year, although courts blocked the laws in Montana and Oklahoma from taking effect.

"This is part of the decades long attack on abortion rights to make it impossible to access care in any way, shape or form," said Elizabeth Nash of the Guttmacher Institute in an email. "Medication abortion is a major method of abortion and is safe and effective, so the effort to ban it is pure politics."

Among Arizona's strict abortion laws is an automatic outlaw of the practice if the U.S. high court fully overturns Roe v. Wade, the nearly five-decade-old ruling that enshrined a nationwide right to abortion. Abortion is legal until the point a fetus can survive outside the womb, which is usually around 24 weeks.

Republicans hope to put the 15-week ban in place so it takes effect quickly if the Supreme Court further limits abortion rights but stops short of fully overturning Roe. The Arizona measure closely mirrors a Mississippi law.

South Dakota House Republican: Noem's conduct 'unacceptable'

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota House Republican introduced a resolution Thursday calling Gov. Kristi Noem's alleged involvement in her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license from a state agency "unacceptable" and "injurious."

Rep. John Mills said he had been thinking for months about proposing the resolution, which would have no force of law but would state the House's opinion if it were passed. The resolution will next be considered by a House committee.

"To me, integrity is really important," Mills said when asked why he brought the resolution.

Mills appears in a campaign video for Noem's GOP primary challenger, Rep. Steve Haugaard. He insisted that did not affect his decision to bring the resolution, saying there was "absolutely zero political motivation behind this."

But the governor's spokesman, Ian Fury, dismissed Mills' resolution as an attempt to use "the legislative process to launch campaign attacks."

Fury slammed Mills, pointing out that he filed only one bill during the current legislative session and adding, "Mills should spend more time serving his constituents' interests and less time playing politics."

Mills' move comes amid sparring between Noem and House Republicans over the next state budget and several bills that deal with hot-button social issues.

Mills said he began looking into Noem's conduct after The Associated Press reported last year that in July of 2020, the Appraiser Certification Program moved to reject Noem's daughter Cassidy Peters' application for an appraiser license because she hadn't met federal requirements.

Days later, Noem held a meeting with her daughter, the director of the Appraiser Certification Program at the time and other key decision-makers in the agency. Peters received an extra opportunity to show her appraiser work could meet federal requirements and she received her license months later. Shortly after that, the agency's director, Sherry Bren, was pressured to retire.

Noem has repeatedly denied wrongdoing and implied that Bren was standing in the way of efforts to make it easier for potential appraisers to get licenses.

The state's Government Accountability Board is also evaluating a complaint from the state's attorney

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 16 of 78

general against Noem for her conduct. It has given her until April to respond to the complaint.

House revives bill striking defense for medical pot

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota House Republican lawmakers on Thursday revived a bill to rid the state's medical marijuana law of a provision that allows patients with debilitating medical conditions to avoid criminal charges for pot possession if they have not obtained a marijuana identification card.

The bill, which has already passed the Senate, was dismissed Wednesday by a House committee. But the bill was resurrected Thursday with support from one-third of the House in a maneuver called a "smokeout." It would still need support from at least half the House to get a vote in the chamber.

The bill is one among dozens of changes lawmakers are considering to the state's medical marijuana law, which voters passed in 2020. Organizations and businesses supporting medical pot argued that people who need medical marijuana are still struggling to get recommendations from physicians and ID cards issued by the Department of Health.

"You are effectively criminalizing patients that have not yet had the chance to find a legal avenue for access," Liz Tiger, a medical pot patient, told the House Judiciary committee Wednesday.

The bill's proponents say that people have had time to get the ID cards and the provision has hamstrung enforcement of recreational pot possession laws.

Yankton man convicted of manslaughter resentenced

YANTON, S.D. (AP) — A Yankton man convicted in a 2019 fatal shooting has received significantly less prison time after the South Dakota Supreme Court vacated his original sentence.

Jameson Mitchell, who pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter in the death of Lucas Smith in Yankton, was resentenced Wednesday to 60 years in the state penitentiary with 15 years suspended and about 3 years credit for time served.

First Circuit Court Judge Cheryle Gering in 2019 sentenced Mitchell to 124 years in prison, more than double what the state had recommended.

The sentence was appealed to the state Supreme Court.

In the court's decision, Justice Mark Salter said the circuit court "effectively treated Mitchell as solely responsible for Smith's killing without considering Smith's own criminal conduct," the Yankton Press and Dakotan reported.

Salter noted that the shooting was a "gravely serious offense" and that the justices understood the circuit court's inclination to impose a stern sentence.

"However, in order to accurately assess the nature of Mitchell's conduct, the court must consider the fact that he was reacting to a threat posed by Smith's own assaultive conduct," the justice wrote.

Mitchell made a brief statement apologizing to Smith's family during his resentencing.

"I hope today we can bring this to an end," he said.

On April 6, 2019, Yankton police were called to a downtown area for a report of a male with a gunshot wound. The shooting followed an altercation at a nearby business involving Mitchell, Smith and a third individual.

Mitchell was arrested that night for aggravated assault and first-degree murder.

Judge halts South Dakota Gov. Noem's abortion pill rule

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A federal judge temporarily halted a South Dakota rule from taking effect that would have made the state one of the hardest places in the U.S. to get abortion pills.

U.S. District Judge Karen Schreier late Wednesday granted a request from Planned Parenthood for a restraining order on a state Department of Health rule that was set to go into effect Thursday.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem initiated the rule change through an executive order. It would have required

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 17 of 78

people seeking abortions to return to a doctor to take the second of two drugs used for a medication abortion. Women have been able to receive both drugs in one visit, taking the second medication at home.

Schreier, who was appointed under former President Bill Clinton, found that Planned Parenthood had shown the rule likely "imposes an undue burden on a person's right to seek an abortion."

Abortion rights advocates said the rule change would have effectively ended access to medication abortions in South Dakota.

"We are relieved that South Dakotans' access to medication abortion remains unchanged for right now," Sarah Stoesz, president of Planned Parenthood of North Central States, said in a statement. "The rule's proposed changes to medication abortion are completely unsupported by medicine and would place an immense burden on patients."

Noem in a news conference Thursday argued that the rule was necessary for women's safety and said she is not backing down from pushing a bill to enshrine it into law.

"They can literally get on the phone or online and request a prescription and undergo this medical procedure in their home with no supervision whatsoever," she said, although the state requires abortion-seekers to consult with a doctor twice in person before receiving the medication.

Medication abortion has been available in the United States since 2000, when the Food and Drug Administration first approved mifepristone to terminate pregnancies up to 10 weeks. Taken with a drug called misoprostol, it constitutes what's commonly referred to as the abortion pill.

Noem sought to further clamp down on abortion pills after the FDA last month permanently lifted a requirement that people seeking the drugs pick them up in person. The agency said a scientific review supported broadening access, including no longer limiting dispensing to a small number of specialty clinics and doctor's offices.

The FDA has found complications from the medication to be rare. The agency has reported 26 deaths associated with the drug since 2000, though not all of those can be directly attributed to the medication due to existing health conditions and other factors.

Opponents of Noem's rule argued that it made little sense to require patients to take the second drug at a clinic for an abortion, but allow it to be taken at home for a miscarriage.

By restricting access to the second drug, Planned Parenthood argued, the rule could actually put abortion-seekers at greater risk, pointing to a study that indicated women who skip taking the drug may be at risk of dangerous amounts of bleeding.

During a hearing for the rule last month, two doctors opposed to abortion access argued on behalf of Noem's administration that having multiple checkups for abortion-seekers during the process was in the interest of their health.

About 40% of all abortions in the U.S. are now done through medication — rather than surgery — and that option has become more pivotal during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A hearing on Planned Parenthood's request for a preliminary injunction on the rule is set for next week.

Couple sues over treatment of son in Rapid City school

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City couple has filed a federal lawsuit against the local school district, its superintendent and others over how their autistic son was treated by staff.

Dwayne Milne and Jaclynn Paul claim in their lawsuit that their 8-year-old son, who has been diagnosed with autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, was mistreated as a student at Knollwood Elementary School in 2019.

The parents allege their child was tackled, assaulted and restrained by staff at the school. They also say he was, at times, taken to a de-escalation area in a corner of a classroom that was walled off by 5-foot high dividers, which they said resembled a cattle pen, KOTA-TV reported.

The lawsuit accused the district and staff of using excessive force, violating equal protection and the Americans with Disabilities Act, among other claims. The parents are seeking monetary damages in excess of \$75,000.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 18 of 78

Rapid City Area Schools declined to comment on the lawsuit.

Live updates: Chinese TV says Russia is willing to negotiate

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest on the Russia-Ukraine crisis:

BEIJING — Chinese state TV says Russian President Vladimir Putin has told his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, that Moscow is willing to negotiate with Ukraine, even as Moscow's forces invade its neighbor.

The report Friday followed a Kremlin announcement that Putin's government was considering an offer by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to negotiate non-aligned status for his country.

Putin said Moscow "is willing to conduct high-level negotiations with the Ukrainian side," China Central Television reported on its website.

It gave no indication whether Putin said he was responding to Zelenskyy's offer or gave any details of what the two sides might negotiate.

Russia complains that the United States and its allies ignored Moscow's "legitimate security concerns" by expanding the NATO military alliance eastward, closer to Russia's borders.

Xi said China "supports Russia and Ukraine resolving the problem through negotiations," CCTV said.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's foreign minister says officials are still assessing a request by Ukraine for Turkey to close to Russian shipping the straits at the entrance of the Black Sea.

Mevlut Cavusoglu warned, however, that under a 1936 convention Ankara may not be able to deny total access to the Russian vessels.

Ukraine on Thursday formally asked Turkey to close the Turkish Straits to Russian warships in line with the Montreux Convention which allows Turkey to restrict the passage of belligerent countries' warships during times of war. The convention stipulates however, that warships belonging to Black Sea coastal countries can return to their bases.

"If there is a demand for the ships of the warring countries to return to their bases, then (passage) must be allowed," Cavusoglu was quoted as telling Hurriyet newspaper in an interview.

The minister said Turkish experts were assessing if the current situation amounted to "a state of war."

BERLIN — Germany's president is appealing to Russian President Vladimir Putin to "stop the madness of this war now."

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in Berlin on Friday said that "we don't want enmity with the Russian people, quite the contrary, but this wrongdoing cannot go without a clear answer."

Steinmeier, whose post is largely ceremonial but holds moral authority, said that Germany will do its part in deterring Putin from using force against its NATO allies.

The president, who served twice as Germany's foreign minister, said that Putin "should not underestimate the strength of democracies" and Germans shouldn't either.

He said it's good that people are going out to demonstrate, adding: "The Russian president should not believe for a second that people in Germany and Europe simply accept this brutal violence."

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis went to the Russian embassy in Rome on Friday to personally express his concern about the war in Ukraine, in an extraordinary papal gesture that has no recent precedent.

Popes usually receive ambassadors and heads of state in the Vatican. For Francis to travel a short distance to the Russian embassy outside the Vatican walls was a sign of his strength of feeling about Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Vatican officials said they knew of no such previous papal initiative.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni confirmed the pontiff wanted "clearly to express his concern about the war." Pope Francis was there for just over a half-hour, Bruni said.

Francis has called for dialogue to end the conflict and has urged the faithful to set next Wednesday as

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 19 of 78

a day of fasting and prayer for peace in Ukraine.

But he has refrained from publicly calling out Russia, presumably for fear of antagonizing the Russian Orthodox Church, with which he is trying to build stronger ties.

GENEVA — The U.N. human rights office says it is receiving increasing reports of civilian casualties in Ukraine in the wake of Russia's military invasion.

Spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani of the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights says its staffers have so far verified at least 127 civilian casualties. They include 25 people killed and 102 injured, mostly from shelling and airstrikes.

She cautioned Friday that the numbers are "very likely to be an underestimate."

Shamdasani also said the rights office was "disturbed by the multiple arbitrary arrests" of demonstrators in Russia who on Thursday protested against the conflict.

"We understand more than 1,800 protesters were arrested," she said, before adding that it was unclear how many might have been released already.

Meanwhile, spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo of the U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, said its latest update had that more than 100,000 people were believed to have left their homes in Ukraine. She said the agency's planning figures anticipated that "up to 4 million people may flee to other countries if the situation escalates."

LONDON — Latvia's defense minister is criticizing European nations for failing to cut Russia off from the global bank payments network and refusing to provide weapons to help Ukraine defend itself.

Artis Pabriks' comments came after the U.S. and European Union stopped short of blocking Russia's access to the SWIFT payments system when they announced a new round of sanctions late Thursday.

Pabriks also chided fellow EU nations that have refused to provide "lethal aid" to Ukraine, saying only the U.K., Greece, Poland and the Baltic states had done so.

In an interview with the BBC on Friday, Pabriks suggested that many European leaders don't want to take these steps because they would cause economic hardship for their own countries.

"If you are really not ready yourself to spill blood, at least spill money now," he said. "Do it now, because if you lose Ukraine all European geopolitics will change. ... There will be much more pressure on Poland, much more pressure on the Baltics."

The Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia fear they could be the Kremlin's next target.

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syrian President Bashar Assad is praising Russia's military incursion into Ukraine and denouncing what he calls western "hysteria" surrounding it.

Assad spoke by phone Friday with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"What is happening today is a correction of history and a restoration of balance which was lost in the world after the breakup of the Soviet Union," Assad said, according to state-run news agency SANA.

He said confronting NATO expansionism is Russia's right.

Russia is a main backer of Assad's government and its military intervention in 2015 in the country's civil war helped tip the balance of power in his favor.

MOSCOW — The Kremlin says it will analyze the Ukrainian president's offer to discuss a non-aligned status for his country, as a Russian military invasion pushes closer to Kyiv.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he was ready to hold talks on the issue.

Asked about Zelenskyy's offer, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Friday described it as "a move in a positive direction."

He said in a conference call with reporters that "we paid attention to that, and now we need to analyze it."

But Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Zelenskyy "is simply lying" when he offers to discuss non-aligned status for Ukraine.

Lavrov said at a briefing that Zelenskyy "missed the opportunity" to discuss a neutral status for Ukraine

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 20 of 78

when Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed it.

Putin says the West left him no option but to invade when it rejected Moscow's demand to keep Ukraine out of NATO.

BRUSSELS — A senior European Union official says the 27-nation bloc intends to slap further sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine.

EU Council president Charles Michel tweeted Friday: "Second wave of sanctions with massive and severe consequences politically agreed last night. Further package under urgent preparation."

Michel announced the move after a call with Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Michel said Kyiv "is under continued attack by Russian forces" and called on Russia to immediately stop the violence.

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Hungary has extended temporary legal protection to Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion, as countries in eastern Europe prepare for the arrival of refugees at their borders.

Hungary, which borders Ukraine to the west, has in the past taken a firm stance against all forms of immigration. It has controversially refused to accept refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

But in a decree published late Thursday, Hungary's government announced that all Ukrainian citizens arriving from Ukraine, and all third-country nationals legally residing there, would be entitled to protection.

The section applying to third-country nationals makes it possible for non-Ukrainians — for example, Belarussian refugees living in Ukraine — to receive protection in the European Union.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban has said that Hungary will play no part in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but that it would accept refugees arriving at its borders.

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has expressed his solidarity with Ukraine in telephone call with the country's leader.

Johnson's Downing Street office said Friday that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy offered an update on Russian military advances, including missile and artillery strikes.

"The prime minister assured President Zelenskyy that the world is united in its horror at what Putin is doing," Johnson's office said in a statement. "He paid tribute to the bravery and heroism of the Ukrainian people in standing up to Russia's campaign of violence and expressed his deep condolences for those who have been killed."

BERLIN — The German government says it has suspended the granting of export credit and investment guarantees for business with Russia.

The Economy Ministry said Friday that the granting of new export credit guarantees and investment guarantees for Russia was suspended on Thursday.

The so-called Hermes credit export guarantees protect German companies from losses when exports aren't paid for. Investment guarantees are granted by the German government to protect direct investments by German companies from political risk in the countries where they are made.

The Economy Ministry said that new export credit guarantees to the tune of 1.49 billion euros (\$1.67 billion) were granted last year for business with Russia. New investment guarantees came in at a fraction of that amount, at 3.75 million euros (\$4.2 million).

WARSAW, Poland — Poland's Border Guard says that some 29,000 people were cleared to enter through the country's land border with neighboring Ukraine on Thursday, the day Russia's invasion of Ukraine began.

Before that, there were some 12,000 average daily entries from Ukraine into European Union and NATO member Poland, through land, sea and airport checkpoints, according to Border Guard statistics.

Poland has lifted the requirement of COVID-19 quarantine or vaccination certificates for refugees from Ukraine. A number of reception centers with camp beds, soup kitchens and medical care have been or-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 21 of 78

ganized in locations close to the border with Ukraine.

BEIJING — China is holding back from labeling Russia's attack on Ukraine an invasion.

At the same time, it is upholding the sanctity of territorial sovereignty, in a nod to its own insistence that Taiwan is part of China.

"The sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected and maintained," China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Friday.

"At the same time, we also see that the issue of Ukraine has its own complex and special historical merits, and we understand Russia's legitimate concerns on security issues," he added.

Wang did not answer questions about whether China would recognize the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, in Ukrainian territory claimed by Russia, as independent states.

MOSCOW — Russia's civil aviation authority has banned U.K. flights to and over Russia in retaliation against the British government's ban on Aeroflot flights.

Rosaviatsiya said that all flights by the U.K. carriers to Russia as well as transit flights are banned starting Friday.

It said the measure was taken in response to the "unfriendly decisions" by the British authorities who banned flights to the U.K. by the Russian flag carrier Aeroflot as part of sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

MOSCOW — The Russian military claims it has destroyed 118 Ukrainian military assets since the beginning of its assault on its neighbor and as it pushes into the outskirts of Kyiv.

The claim could not be independently verified and was not confirmed by Ukraine amid a flurry of claims and counterclaims by each side.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Friday that among the targets were 11 Ukrainian air bases, 13 command facilities, 36 air defense radars, 14 air defense missile systems, 5 warplanes, 18 tanks and warships.

However, U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace rejected Russian claims of success on the first day of its invasion of Ukraine, saying it had "failed to deliver" on its day one objectives.

Wallace told Sky News that the Western assessment is that Russia had failed to take its major objectives and is behind on its timetable for advance.

"They've lost over 450 personnel," he said.

BERLIN — Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel has condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine, calling it "a deep cut in European history after the end of the Cold War."

Germany's dpa news agency quoted Merkel saying Friday that there was "no justification for this blatant attack of international law. I condemn it in the sharpest possible manner."

Merkel, who grew up in East Germany and speaks Russian, was heavily engaged in negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin throughout her 16 years in office, which ended in December.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's nuclear energy regulatory agency says that higher than usual gamma radiation levels have been detected in the area near the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant, after it was seized by the Russian military.

The State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate said Friday that higher gamma radiation levels have been detected in the Chernobyl zone, but didn't provide details of the increase.

It attributed the rise to a "disturbance of the topsoil due to the movement of a large amount of heavy military equipment through the exclusion zone and the release of contaminated radioactive dust into the air."

Ukrainian authorities said that Russia took the plant and its surrounding exclusion zone after a fierce battle Thursday.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 22 of 78

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Russian airborne troops were protecting the plant to prevent any possible "provocations." He insisted that radiation levels in the area have remained normal.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency said it was told by Ukraine of the takeover, adding that there had been "no casualties or destruction at the industrial site."

The 1986 disaster occurred when a nuclear reactor at the plant 130 kilometers (80 miles) north of Kyiv exploded, sending a radioactive cloud across Europe. The damaged reactor was later covered by a protective shell to prevent leaks.

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court says he is "closely following recent developments in and around Ukraine with increasing concern."

Karim Khan warned "all sides conducting hostilities on the territory of Ukraine" that Ukraine has accepted the court's jurisdiction.

That means "my office may exercise its jurisdiction over and investigate any act of genocide, crime against humanity or war crime committed within the territory of Ukraine since 20 February 2014 onwards," Khan said in a statement Friday.

Khan adds that because neither Russia nor Ukraine are member states of the court, his office does not have jurisdiction over the crime of aggression in the conflict.

The International Criminal Court is the world's permanent war crimes court. It was set up in 2002 to prosecute atrocities in countries where local authorities are unable or unwilling to conduct trials.

KYIV, Ukraine — Kyiv mayor Vitaly Klitschko said at least three people were injured when a rocket hit a multi-story apartment building in Ukraine's capital on Friday, starting a fire.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the Russian military's claim it is not targeting civilian areas is "a lie." He said that military and civilian areas in Ukraine are both being hit by Russian attacks.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine began early Thursday with a series of missile strikes, many on key government and military installations, quickly followed by a three-pronged ground assault. Ukrainian and U.S. officials said Russian forces were attacking from the east toward Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city; from the southern region of Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014; and from Belarus to the north.

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron said Friday that France and its European allies have decided to "inflict very severe blows on Moscow," further sanctioning individuals and targeting finance, energy and other sectors. The legal texts for the sanctions will be finalized and submitted for approval to EU foreign ministers later Friday.

Macron also said the EU has decided on economic aid for Ukraine in the amount of 1.5 billion euros (\$1.68 billion).

The French president also called the Belorussian government "an accomplice" in Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, and said it will also be targeted.

KYIV, Ukraine — As Russian troops continued pressing their offensive Friday, intense fighting also raged in the country's east.

Russian troops entered the city of Sumy near the border with Russia that sits on a highway leading to Kyiv from the east. The regional governor, Dmytro Zhivitsky, said Ukrainian forces fought Russian troops in the city overnight, but other Russian convoys kept rolling west toward the Ukrainian capital.

"Military vehicles from Sumy are moving toward Kyiv," Zhivitsky said. "Much equipment has passed through and is heading directly to the west."

Zhivitsky added that another northeastern city, Konotop, was also sieged. He urged residents of the region to fight the Russian forces.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 23 of 78

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court says he is “closely following recent developments in and around Ukraine with increasing concern.”

Karim Khan issued a statement Friday on Twitter while on a visit to Bangladesh, where he is investigating crimes against Myanmar’s Rohingya minority.

Khan said he alerted “all sides conducting hostilities on the territory of Ukraine” that Ukraine has accepted the court’s jurisdiction.

That means “my office may exercise its jurisdiction over and investigate any act of genocide, crime against humanity or war crime committed within the territory of Ukraine since 20 February 2014 onwards,” Khan added.

He said that “any person who commits such crimes, including by ordering, inciting or contributing in another manner to the commission of these crimes may be liable to prosecution before the Court.”

Khan added that because neither Russia nor Ukraine are member states of the court, his office does not have jurisdiction over the crime of aggression in the conflict.

The International Criminal Court is the world’s permanent war crimes court. It was set up in 2002 to prosecute atrocities in countries where local authorities are unable or unwilling to conduct trials.

Russia loses Champions League final to Paris; Sochi F1 axed

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

LONDON (AP) — Russia was stripped of hosting the Champions League final by UEFA on Friday with St. Petersburg replaced by Paris, and Formula One dropped this season’s Russian Grand Prix at Sochi, as the invasion of Ukraine drew punitive measures in the sporting world.

The showpiece final in the European men’s football season will still be held on May 28 but now at the 80,000-seat Stade de France in the Saint-Denis suburb of the French capital after the decision by UEFA’s executive committee.

It followed discussions led by UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin that involved the European Commission and French President Emmanuel Macron in recent days after concerns were raised about the status of Russia retaining such a prestigious event after its aggression toward another European country.

UEFA thanked Macron for his “personal support and commitment to have European club football’s most prestigious game moved to France at a time of unparalleled crisis.”

Alexander Dyukov, a Russian member of the UEFA executive committee, complained the decision was taken for “political reasons.” Dyukov also opposed UEFA ordering Russian clubs and national teams to play at neutral venues until further notice — a ruling also imposed on Ukrainian sides.

The move comes as Russian bombs and troops pounded Ukraine during the invasion’s first full day, and world leaders on Friday began to fine-tune a response meant to punish the Russian economy and its leaders, including President Vladimir Putin’s inner circle.

The F1 race wasn’t due until September in the Black Sea resort of Sochi but the motorsport series leadership decided it would be “impossible” to stage the Grand Prix after talks with teams and the FIA governing body. American team Haas also dropped the sponsorship of Russian company Uralkali during preseason testing in Barcelona. Nikita Mazepin of Haas is the only Russian driver on the F1 grid this season.

“We are watching the developments in Ukraine with sadness and shock and hope for a swift and peaceful resolution to the present situation,” F1 said in a statement.

The French government will work with UEFA to help to rescue footballers and their families who “face dire human suffering, destruction and displacement,” European football’s governing body said in a statement.

There is the unresolved matter of Russia still being due to host Poland in World Cup qualifying playoff semifinals in Moscow. Poland wants the game taken out of Russia, but FIFA has yet to decide.

UEFA was more decisive on the Champions League final hosting, which was welcomed by the British government.

“Russia must not be allowed to exploit sporting and cultural events on the world stage to legitimize its unprovoked, premeditated and needless attack against a sovereign democratic state,” said British Culture

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 24 of 78

Secretary Nadine Dorries, who has the sports brief.

This is the third consecutive year that UEFA has had to change its Champions League final location after two switches due to coronavirus issues.

The Stade de France last hosted the Champions League final 16 years ago, when Barcelona beat Arsenal in the 2006 final.

The 68,000-capacity St. Petersburg stadium was originally picked in 2019 to host the final in 2021. That was postponed by one year in the fallout of disruption caused by the pandemic.

The stadium is named for Russian state-owned energy firm Gazprom, which is also a top-tier UEFA sponsor of the Champions League and European Championship.

UEFA has two weeks before the next set of Champions League games to resolve the issue of Gazprom adverts flashing around stadium pitches. Reinforcing the company's close links to UEFA, Dyukov is a CEO of a Gazprom subsidiary as well as sitting on European football's top decision-making body.

Gazprom's logo has already been removed this week from the jerseys of German club Schalke but it remains a sponsor.

Manchester United has yet to drop Russian state-owned airline Aeroflot as a sponsor despite the company being banned in Britain on Thursday as part of sanctions.

Away from soccer, the International Ski Federation announced that Russia will not host any more of its World Cup events this winter. The decision came after a farcical attempt to hold ski cross races on Friday in the Urals resort Sunny Valley one day after Russia started an invasion of Ukraine.

Only a handful of Russians started and dozens of racers from all other countries did not take part. FIS cited "the safety of all participants and to maintain the integrity of the World Cup" for calling off five scheduled events in the next month. Replacement venues are being sought.

Ukraine's capital under threat as Russia presses invasion

By YURAS KARMANAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia pressed its invasion of Ukraine to the outskirts of the capital Friday after unleashing airstrikes on cities and military bases and sending in troops and tanks from three sides in an attack that could rewrite the global post-Cold War security order.

Explosions sounded before dawn in Kyiv and gunfire was reported in several areas, as Western leaders scheduled an emergency meeting and Ukraine's president pleaded for international help to fend off an attack that could topple his democratically elected government, cause massive casualties and ripple out damage to the global economy.

Among the signs that the Ukrainian capital was increasingly threatened, the military said Friday that a group of Russian spies and saboteurs was seen in a district on the outskirts of Kyiv, and police told people not to exit a subway station in the city center because there was gunfire in the area. Elsewhere in the capital, soldiers established defensive positions at bridges, and armored vehicles rolled down the streets, while many residents stood uneasily in doorways of their apartment buildings.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Kyiv "could well be under siege" in what U.S. officials believe is a brazen attempt by Russian President Vladimir Putin to install his own regime.

The assault, anticipated for weeks by the U.S. and Western allies, amounts to the largest ground war in Europe since World War II. After repeatedly denying plans to invade, the autocratic Putin launched his attack on the country, which has increasingly tilted toward the democratic West and away from Moscow's sway.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose grasp on power was increasingly tenuous, appealed to global leaders for even more severe sanctions than the ones imposed by Western allies and for defense assistance.

"If you don't help us now, if you fail to offer a powerful assistance to Ukraine, tomorrow the war will knock on your door," said the leader, who cut diplomatic ties with Moscow, declared martial law and ordered a full military mobilization that would last 90 days.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 25 of 78

Zelenskyy said he's the No. 1 target for the invading Russians but that he planned to remain in Kyiv. Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said early Friday that the Ukrainian attended a meeting of European Union leaders via video link from what appeared to be some sort of bunker.

As air raids sirens sounded in the capital early Friday, guests of a hotel in the city center were directed to a makeshift basement shelter, lined with piles of mattresses and bottles of water. Workers, all local university students, served tea and cookies to the guests. Some people ducked out to a courtyard to smoke or get fresh air.

"We're all scared and worried. We don't know what to do then, what's going to happen in a few days," said one of the workers, Lucy Vashaka, 20.

The invasion began early Thursday with a series of missile strikes on cities and military bases, and then quickly followed with a multi-pronged ground assault that rolled troops in from several areas in the east; from the southern region of Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014; and from Belarus to the north.

After Ukrainian officials said they lost control of the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear power plant, scene of the world's worst nuclear disaster, Russia said Friday it was working with the Ukrainians to secure the plant. There was no corroboration of such cooperation from the Ukrainian side.

Zelenskyy said that 137 "heroes," including 10 military officers, had been killed, and one of his advisers said about 400 Russian forces had died. Moscow has given no casualty count. Neither claim could be independently verified.

Fearing a Russian attack on the capital city, thousands of people went deep underground as night fell, jamming Kyiv's subway stations.

At times it felt almost cheerful. Families ate dinner. Children played. Adults chatted. People brought sleeping bags or dogs or crossword puzzles — anything to alleviate the waiting and the long night ahead.

"Nobody believed that this war would start and that they would take Kyiv directly," said Anton Mironov, waiting out the night in one of the old Soviet metro stations. "I feel mostly fatigue. None of it feels real."

Many who spent the night in makeshift bunkers, emerged in the early hours of Friday to a relatively quiet city. Some traffic and cars moved along highways, along with columns of military. The lines at fuel stations the day before had evaporated.

With social media amplifying a torrent of military claims and counter-claims, it was difficult to determine exactly what was happening on the ground.

Russia said it was not targeting cities, but journalists saw destruction in many civilian areas and Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitschko said a rocket hit a multistory apartment building in the city on Friday, starting a fire. Meanwhile, the mayor of the city in the rebel-controlled east said Ukrainian shelling hit a school building.

The Ukrainian military on Friday reported significant fighting near Ivankiv, about 60 kilometers (40 miles) northwest of Kyiv, as Russian forces apparently tried to advance on the capital from the north. Russian troops also entered the city of Sumy, near the border with Russia that sits on a highway leading to Kyiv from the east.

Later came the reports of at least some forces much closer.

"The hardest day will be today. The enemy's plan is to break through with tank columns from the side of Ivankiv and Chernihiv to Kyiv," Interior Ministry adviser Anton Gerashchenko said on Telegram.

Hours after the invasion began, Russian forces seized control of the now-decommissioned Chernobyl plant and its surrounding exclusion zone, presidential adviser Myhailo Podolyak told The Associated Press.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency said it was told by Ukraine of the takeover, adding that there had been "no casualties or destruction at the industrial site."

The conflict shook global financial markets: Stocks plunged and oil prices soared amid concerns that heating bills and food prices would skyrocket. Condemnation came not only from the U.S. and Europe, but from South Korea, Australia and beyond — and many governments readied new sanctions. Even friendly leaders like Hungary's Viktor Orban sought to distance themselves from Putin.

U.S. President Joe Biden announced new sanctions that will target Russian banks, oligarchs, state-controlled companies and high-tech sectors, saying Putin "chose this war" and had exhibited a "sinister" view

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 26 of 78

of the world in which nations take what they want by force. He added that the measures were designed not to disrupt global energy markets. Russian oil and natural gas exports are vital energy sources for Europe.

Biden was to meet Friday morning with fellow leaders of NATO governments in what the White House described as an "extraordinary virtual summit" to discuss Ukraine.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he aimed to cut off Russia from the U.K.'s financial markets as he announced sanctions, freezing the assets of all large Russian banks and planning to bar Russian companies and the Kremlin from raising money on British markets.

"Now we see him for what he is — a bloodstained aggressor who believes in imperial conquest," Johnson said of Putin.

Zelenskyy urged the U.S. and West to go further and cut the Russians from the SWIFT system, a key financial network that connects thousands of banks around the world. The White House has been reluctant to do that, worried it could cause enormous economic problems in Europe and elsewhere in the West.

While some nervous Europeans speculated about a possible new world war, the U.S. and its NATO partners have shown no indication they would send troops into Ukraine, fearing a larger conflict. NATO reinforced its members in Eastern Europe as a precaution, and Biden said the U.S. was deploying additional forces to Germany to bolster NATO.

Ukrainians were urged to shelter in place and not to panic.

"Until the very last moment, I didn't believe it would happen. I just pushed away these thoughts," said a terrified Anna Dovnya in Kyiv, watching soldiers and police remove shrapnel from an exploded shell. "We have lost all faith."

Hong Kong's new COVID cases top 10,000 in spiraling outbreak

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong on Friday reported another sharp jump in new COVID-19 cases to more than 10,000 in the latest 24-hour period as it battles its worst outbreak of the pandemic.

The new daily case count reached 10,010, health officials said, after topping 6,000 last week and 8,000 earlier this week in a spiraling outbreak. The city has been reporting about 50 deaths a day, many among the unvaccinated elderly.

The government has announced plans to test everyone in the semi-autonomous Chinese city of 7.4 million people next month as it tries to adhere to a zero-COVID policy modeled on the strict mainland China approach.

Mainland experts and builders are putting up temporary testing facilities and constructing isolation centers to handle the burgeoning caseload. The zero-COVID approach requires the isolation of anyone who tests positive, even without symptoms, to prevent spread.

Hong Kong started a vaccine pass system this week, requiring people entering shopping malls, restaurants, gyms and other premises to be vaccinated. The requirement has driven many who weren't vaccinated to get the shot.

'I don't want to die': Ukrainians fear as invasion closes in

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Yurii Zhyhanov woke to his mother's screaming and found himself covered in dust. Before dawn on the second day of Russia's invasion, their residential building had been struck by shelling on the outskirts of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv.

He and other civilians were horrified to find their lives at risk, and many have begun to flee. Amid the smoke and the wailing of car alarms, Zhyhanov and his family packed and joined them.

"What are you doing? What is this?" he said, addressing Russia and gesturing to the damaged building behind him. "If you want to attack military personnel, attack military personnel. This is all I can say."

His weariness and shock reflected that of his country on Friday as people climbed out of bomb shelters, basements and subways to face another day of upheaval.

Those who didn't wake to explosions were roused by another day of air raid sirens. Then came the news

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 27 of 78

that Russian forces had advanced to the outskirts of the capital.

Russia has said it is not targeting cities, but the fighting seemed far too close.

The body of a dead soldier lay on the ground near a Kyiv underpass. Elsewhere, fragments of a downed aircraft smoked amid the brick homes of a residential area. Black plastic was draped over body parts found beside them.

Armored personnel carriers drove down the city's streets. Residents stood uneasily in doorways of apartment buildings, watching.

In the port city of Mariupol, a young girl named Vlada was new to war and already wished for it to stop. "I don't want to die," she said. "I want all of this to end as soon as possible."

Ukrainians picked through the damage left by shelling. And some mourned.

In the city of Horlivka, a body covered with a blanket lay on the ground outside a house that had been hit by shelling. A man standing nearby spoke on the phone.

"Yes, Mom's gone, that's all," he said. "That's it, Mom's gone."

The urge to run away grew. In a train station just across the border in Poland, hundreds of people from Ukraine sought shelter. Some curled up on cots, trying to sleep. A woman stroked the hair of a young girl.

One of those at the station was Andry Borysov, who said he had heard the rush of something flying overhead and then an explosion as he hurried to catch a train out of Kyiv.

"It was an unmistakable sound," he said.

Others hesitated to leave Ukraine, even as they stood on railway platforms.

In Kostiantynivka, a government-controlled area in the separatist-held Donetsk People's Republic, a woman who gave only her first name, Yelena, was among those who appeared undecided.

"It's fifty-fifty on whether it is worth leaving or not," she said. "But it wouldn't hurt to leave for a couple days, for a weekend."

Others leaving Ukraine knew it might take much longer before they can come home.

Putin waves nuclear sword in confrontation with the West

By JOHN DANISZEWSKI Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — It has been a long time since the threat of using nuclear weapons has been brandished so openly by a world leader, but Vladimir Putin has just done it, warning in a speech that he has the weapons available if anyone dares to use military means to try to stop Russia's takeover of Ukraine.

The threat may have been empty, a mere baring of fangs by the Russian president, but it was noticed. It kindled visions of a nightmarish outcome in which Putin's ambitions in Ukraine could lead to a nuclear war through accident or miscalculation.

"As for military affairs, even after the dissolution of the USSR and losing a considerable part of its capabilities, today's Russia remains one of the most powerful nuclear states," Putin said, in his pre-invasion address early Thursday.

"Moreover, it has a certain advantage in several cutting-edge weapons. In this context, there should be no doubt for anyone that any potential aggressor will face defeat and ominous consequences should it directly attack our country."

By merely suggesting a nuclear response, Putin put into play the disturbing possibility that the current fighting in Ukraine might eventually veer into an atomic confrontation between Russia and the United States.

That apocalyptic scenario is familiar to those who grew up during the Cold War, an era when American school children were told to duck and cover under their desks in case of nuclear sirens, But that danger gradually receded from the public imagination after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when the two powers seemed to be on a glide path to disarmament, democracy and prosperity.

Before that, even young people understood the terrifying idea behind the strategy of mutual assured destruction -- MAD for short -- a balance in nuclear capabilities that was meant to keep hands on each side off of the atomic trigger, knowing that any use of the doomsday weapons could end in the annihilation of both sides in a conflict.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 28 of 78

And amazingly, no country has used nuclear weapons since 1945, when President Harry Truman dropped bombs on Japan in the belief that it was the surest way to end World War II quickly. It did, but at a loss of about 200,000 mostly civilian lives in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Around the world, even today, many regard that as a crime against humanity and question if it was worth it.

For a brief time after the war, the United States had a nuclear monopoly. But a few years after, the Soviet Union announced its own nuclear bomb and the two sides of the Cold War engaged in an arms race to build and develop increasingly more powerful weapons over the next few decades.

With the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, and its transformation to a hoped-for democracy under Boris Yeltsin, the United States and Russia agreed to limits on their armaments. Other post-Soviet countries like Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus voluntarily gave up the nukes on their territory after the Soviet Union dissolved.

In recent years, if nuclear weapons were spoken of at all, it was usually in the context of stopping their proliferation to countries like North Korea and Iran. (Iran denies that it wants to possess them and North Korea has been steadily but slowly building both its nuclear weapons and its delivery mechanisms.)

When former U.S. President Donald Trump made an implicit threat to use nuclear weapons against North Korea in August 2017, many were shocked. Trump spoke before diplomacy and his fruitless summits with Kim began the following year. "North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States," Trump told reporters at his golf club in Bedminster, N.J.. "They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen." But North Korea's nuclear arsenal is far smaller than Russia's.

President Joe Biden has been aware of the danger of nuclear war between Russia and NATO since the emergence of the crisis with Ukraine. From the start, he has said NATO would not be sending troops into Ukraine because it could trigger direct fighting between the U.S. and Russia, leading to nuclear escalation and possibly World War III.

It was a tacit admission that the United States would not take on the Russians militarily over Ukraine, and instead rely on extraordinary sanctions to gradually strangle the Russian economy.

But the admission also included another truth. When it came to fighting off a Russian invasion, Ukraine remained on its own because it is a non-treaty member and does not qualify for protection under NATO's nuclear umbrella.

If Putin tried to attack one of the America's NATO partners, however, that would be a different situation, because the pact is fully committed to mutual defense, Biden has said.

Knowing that Biden had already taken a military response off the table, why did Putin even bother to raise it in his speech?

In part, he may have wanted to keep the West off balance, to prevent it from taking aggressive action to defend Ukraine against Putin's blitzkrieg drive to take over the country.

But the deeper context seemed to be his great desire to show the world that Russia is a powerful nation, not to be ignored. Putin talks repeatedly about the humiliation of Russia after the Soviet collapse. By waving his nuclear sword, he echoed the bluster with which the Soviet Union had stared down the United States and earned, in his mind, respect.

After Putin's speech, Pentagon officials offered only a muted response to his implied threat to use nuclear weapons against any country that tried to intervene in Ukraine.

A senior defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said Thursday that U.S. officials "don't see an increased threat in that regard," but he would not say more.

Putin's language touches a raw nerve in the Pentagon because it highlights a longstanding concern that he might be willing to preemptively use nuclear weapons in Europe preemptively in a crisis.

This is one reason Washington has tried for years, without success, to persuade Moscow to negotiate limits on so-called tactical nuclear weapons -- those of shorter range that could be used in a regional war. Russia has a large numerical advantage in that weaponry, and some officials say the gap is growing.

Coincidentally, the Biden administration was wrapping up a Nuclear Posture Review -- a study of possible changes to U.S. nuclear forces and the policies that govern their use -- when Russia's troop buildup near Ukraine reached a crisis stage this month. It's unclear whether that study's results will be reworked

in light of the Russian invasion.

For all its parallels, Ukraine war feels distant in Taiwan

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The Russian attack on Ukraine has put a spotlight on another place that could face an invasion by its larger neighbor, as some analysts draw quick comparisons to China's threats to assert its control over self-ruled Taiwan.

While similarities exist and Taiwan is a democracy that has defied a more powerful authoritarian government, the differences are much greater. And for many on the island, the war in Ukraine, and war in general, feels far away.

"I think our situation is not very similar to Ukraine's, whether it's political or in terms of connections," said Ethan Lin, a 40-year-old who works in the service industry. "China has many exchanges with Taiwan in several areas, so I don't think it's that dangerous."

Taiwan, an island of 23 million people about 160 kilometers (100 miles) off China's eastern coast, is self-ruled, but claimed by China. The decades-old issue has grown more intense since independence-leaning President Tsai Ing-wen took the helm in Taiwan in 2016, and China stepped up military pressure on the island, sending ships into nearby waters and fighter jets in its direction.

On Tuesday, China's People's Liberation Army's Eastern Command announced it had recently conducted landing drills in an undisclosed location in the East China Sea.

The critical question for Taiwan is whether the United States, which is not sending troops to defend Ukraine, would intervene if China invaded. The U.S. has no official ties with Taiwan but has historical relations and sells Taiwan billions of dollars worth of weapons. It is also bound by its own law to ensure Taiwan can defend itself.

Taiwan is also a dominant player in the production of semiconductors that are used in everything from smartphones to cars.

"Taiwan's economy and technology is important to the U.S., and perhaps the U.S. will value Taiwan more, but we have to see how the conflict plays out," said Kao-Cheng Wang, a professor at the Graduate Institute of International Affairs and strategic studies at Tamkang University in Taiwan.

Taiwan announced Friday it would join global sanctions against Russia, although it did not provide details on what those measures would be.

"We can't sit on the sidelines while a big power bullies a small neighbor," Wang Ting-yu, a lawmaker from Tsai's ruling Democratic Progressive Party, wrote on Twitter.

China and Taiwan split during a civil war in 1949. The U.S. cut formal diplomatic relations with Taipei in 1979 in order to recognize Beijing.

While China's President Xi Jinping has stressed that "peaceful reunification" is in the best interests of both sides, China's Cabinet-level Taiwan Affairs Office routinely issues angry threats to crush moves by Taiwanese politicians to continue pushing for an independent country, although it's been left with only 14 diplomatic allies.

China has not ruled out force if necessary to achieve reunification, but for now, military action remains unlikely and outside events will have relatively little effect on Beijing's calculations, said Li Minjiang, a Chinese international relations expert at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

"External influences on China's decision over Taiwan are minimal," Li said, adding China would continue to use information campaigns and peaceful inducements to influence public opinion on Taiwan.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is different from Xi and has previously used force against other countries, such as neighboring Georgia, said Wang, the Tamkang University professor. "Xi Jinping is rather strong, but he increased military activity, rather than starting a war."

In Taipei, the bustling capital, salesperson Peter Chiang doubted China would attack. "I think even internally, they aren't that stable right now," he said.

Chinese Communist Party-owned Global Times newspaper has compared Taiwan to Ukraine's separatist

eastern Donetsk region, where the conflict first broke out in 2014. Former U.S. President Donald Trump predicted Taiwan would be attacked in an interview this week in which he praised Putin's action.

But Chinese officials are more careful. "Taiwan is indeed not Ukraine," China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said this week, insisting that Taiwan is an integral part of China.

On Matsu, a group of outlying Taiwanese islands whose closest point is just 10 kilometers (6 miles) from China, Taiwanese politician Wen Lii is not dismissive of a possible invasion. But he rejected simplistic comparisons to Ukraine.

"Lazy comparisons often fuel an inevitable, triumphalist narrative for China, or weaken confidence in democracies, while ignoring different contexts for each region," Wen, director of the Matsu chapter of the Democratic Progressive Party, wrote in an email.

"People in Matsu always remain alert, but discussions about Chinese threats are usually based on concrete observation instead of a foreign crisis," he said, saying there is no military buildup for now.

World leaders fine-tune punitive measures against Russia

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Twenty million dollars in U.N. humanitarian funds, and a planned infusion of 1.5 billion euros (\$1.68 billion) in EU economic aid for Ukraine. A raft of new, stronger sanctions against Russia from Japan, Europe, Australia, Taiwan and others. And a cascade of condemnation from the highest levels.

As Russian bombs and troops pounded Ukraine during the invasion's first full day, world leaders on Friday began to fine-tune a response meant to punish the Russian economy and its leaders, including President Vladimir Putin's inner circle.

While there's an acute awareness that a military intervention is unlikely, for now, the strength, unity and speed of the financial sanctions — with the striking exception of China, a strong Russian supporter — signal a growing global determination to make Moscow reconsider its attack.

French Finance minister Bruno Le Maire said Friday that France and its European allies are determined to inflict great damage on Russian economy and punish Russia for the "foolish decisions of Vladimir Putin" with "massive and immediate sanctions."

"We want to isolate Russia financially," Le Maire said. "We want to cut all ties between Russia and the global financial system. We will dry up the financing of the Russian economy."

France and its allies have decided to further sanction individuals, as well as impose penalties targeting finance, energy and other sectors, French President Emmanuel Macron said Friday. The legal texts for the sanctions will be finalized and submitted for approval to EU foreign ministers later Friday.

Macron also said that the EU has decided on economic aid for Ukraine in the "unprecedented" amount of 1.5 billion euros (\$1.68 billion).

Russia's civil aviation authority has banned U.K. flights to and over Russia in retaliation to the British ban on Aeroflot flights. Rosaviatsiya said that all flights by U.K. carriers to Russia as well as transit flights are banned starting Friday. It said the measure was taken in response to the "unfriendly decisions" by the British authorities who banned flights to the U.K. by the Russian flag carrier Aeroflot as part of sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Countries in Asia and the Pacific have joined the United States, the 27-nation European Union and others in the West in piling on punitive measures against Russian banks and leading companies. The nations have also set up export controls aimed at starving Russia's industries and military of semiconductors and other high-tech products.

"Japan must clearly show its position that we will never tolerate any attempt to change the status quo by force," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters Friday while announcing new punitive measures that included freezing the visas and assets of Russian groups, banks and individuals, and the suspension of shipments of semiconductors and other restricted goods to Russian military-linked organizations.

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an extremely grave development that affects the international order, not only for Europe but also for Asia," Kishida said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 31 of 78

The moves follow Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin's forces conducted airstrikes on cities and military bases, and his troops and tanks rolled into the nation from three sides. Ukraine's government pleaded for help as civilians fled. Scores of Ukrainians, civilians and service members alike, were killed.

"An unthinkable number of innocent lives could be lost because of Russia's decision," New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. She announced targeted travel bans against Russian officials and other measures.

UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace rejected Russian claims of success on the first day of its invasion, telling Sky News that it had "failed to deliver" on its major objectives and is behind on its timetable for advance.

Wallace also said that imposing a no-fly zone over Ukraine would put British pilots in direct conflict with Russian forces, and enforcing it would effectively require NATO to declare war on Russia and broaden the conflict in Ukraine.

"I'm not putting British troops directly to fight Russian troops," Wallace told the BBC.

At the United Nations, officials set aside \$20 million to boost U.N. humanitarian operations in Ukraine. Separately, the U.N. Security Council is expected to vote Friday on a resolution condemning Russia and demanding the immediate withdrawal of all its forces. Moscow, however, is certain to veto it.

U.N. humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said the \$20 million from the U.N.'s Central Emergency Response Fund will support emergency operations along the contact line in eastern Donetsk and Luhansk and in other areas of the country, and will "help with health care, shelter, food, and water and sanitation to the most vulnerable people affected by the conflict."

The West and its allies have shown no inclination to send troops into Ukraine — a non-member of NATO — and risk a wider war on the continent. But NATO reinforced its member states in Eastern Europe as a precaution against an attack on them, too.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency extended to 200 nautical miles the airspace it considers risky, and warned of "the threat of missile launches to and from Ukraine."

Protests by Ukrainians and their supporters were planned Friday across Asia. Public buildings, sports stadiums and landmarks in the Australian city of Melbourne were illuminated in Ukraine's national colors of blue and yellow.

Japan's new sanctions follow an earlier set of measures that include the suspension of distributing and issuing new Russian government bonds in Japan — a move aimed at cutting funding for Russia's military — a trade ban with two Ukrainian separatist regions and the freezing of their assets and visas.

Japan, which has long sought to regain control of Russian-held northern islands seized at the end of World War II, took a milder stance toward Moscow during Russia's 2014 Crimea annexation. Tokyo's response to the current invasion has been considered tougher and faster, something that may be linked to a deep worry in Tokyo over China's increasingly assertive military actions in the region.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said his nation will join international sanctions, but won't consider unilateral sanctions.

South Korea's comparative caution is likely because its economy is heavily dependent on international trade. It also worries that strained ties with Moscow could undermine efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis. Russia is South Korea's 10th largest trading partner, and Moscow is a veto-wielding member of the U.N. Security Council and maintains friendly ties with North Korea.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi phoned Putin late Thursday and appealed for an "immediate cessation of violence," his office said in a statement.

India's permanent U.N. representative pushed for "urgent de-escalation" through "sustained and focused diplomacy," but stopped short of either condemning Russia or acknowledging Ukraine's sovereignty.

The cautious statement reflects India's delicate position. It relies heavily on Russia, a historic partner, for military equipment but has sought to strengthen ties with the West over the years.

Taiwan announced Friday that it would join in economic sanctions against Russia, although it did not specify what type of measures those would be. Sanctions could potentially be focused on export control of semiconductor chips, local media reported. Taiwan is the dominant manufacturer of such chips, a criti-

cal component used in technologies from cars to laptops to cellphones.

While most nations in Asia rallied to support Ukraine, China has continued to denounce sanctions against Russia and blamed the United States and its allies for provoking Moscow. Beijing, worried about U.S. power in Asia, has increasingly aligned its foreign policy with Russia to challenge the West.

"At a time when Australia, together with the United Kingdom, together with the United States and Europe and Japan, are acting to cut off Russia, the Chinese government is following through on easing trade restrictions with Russia and that is simply unacceptable," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Friday.

"You don't go and throw a lifeline to Russia in the middle of a period when they're invading another country," he added, referring to a report in The South China Morning Post that China had announced it was fully open to Russian wheat imports.

In Tokyo, Ukraine's top diplomat for Japan urged China to join international efforts to stop the Russian invasion.

"We would very much welcome that China will exercise its connection with Russia and talk to Putin and explain to him it is inappropriate in the 21st century to do this massacre in Europe," Ambassador Sergiy Korsunsky told reporters.

World shares up, US futures sink as Russia moves toward Kyiv

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — World shares advanced Friday but U.S. futures were lower as Russian troops pressed toward the capital of Ukraine.

Market benchmarks rose in London, Paris, Tokyo and Shanghai but fell in Hong Kong. Russian shares gained 15%, rebounding after a nosedive on Thursday as the invasion of Ukraine began.

The price of oil hovered just below \$100 per barrel and prices of most other commodities fell after surging the day before.

Despite uncertainty about the Ukraine and worries over inflation and the pandemic, an overnight turnaround on Wall Street seemed to buoy Asian and European shares.

Investors appeared relieved that sanctions against Russia were not as severe as they might have been, even as Ukraine's president pleaded for international help to fend off an attack that could topple his democratically elected government, cause massive casualties and ripple out damage to the global economy.

France's CAC 40 edged up 0.6% in early trading to 6,562.96, while Germany's DAX rose 0.2% to 14,083.92. Britain's FTSE 100 gained 1.2% to 7,295.52.

But U.S. futures augured a less upbeat start for New York markets, with the future for the benchmark S&P 500 down 1.2% while the contract for the Dow industrials was 1% lower.

Russia was pressing its invasion of Ukraine to the outskirts of the capital Friday after unleashing air-strikes on cities and military bases and sending in troops and tanks from three sides in what amounts to the largest ground war in Europe since World War II.

Market players might be betting that the crisis could slow moves by central banks to cool inflation by raising interest rates and unwinding other support for pandemic-burdened economies, said Ipek Ozkardes-kaya of Swissquote Bank SA.

"But in reality, it's about volatility, high volatility that results from a high-voltage environment," Ozkardes-kaya wrote in a commentary. "This morning, the US equity futures are again in the red. It's impossible to tell what direction the market will take in the next five minutes. The only certainty is uncertainty, and this is how it will be for the next couple of sessions unfortunately."

The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused a barrage of new, targeted financial sanctions meant to isolate, punish and impoverish Russia in the long term.

But U.S. and European officials have held back on one key financial measure, choosing for now not to boot Russia off SWIFT, the dominant system for global financial transactions.

Japan on Friday announced new sanctions on Russia, including freezing the assets of Russian groups, banks and individuals and suspending exports of semiconductors and other sensitive goods to military-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 33 of 78

linked organizations in Russia.

Earlier in the week, Tokyo suspended new issuances and distribution of Russian government bonds in Japan, to reduce financing opportunities for Russia. It also banned trade with the two Ukrainian separatist regions.

But while most nations in Asia rallied to support Ukraine, China denounced sanctions against Russia, blaming the United States and its allies for provoking Moscow.

In Asian trading, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 surged 2.0% to finish at 26,476.50. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost some of its earlier gains to close 0.1% higher at 6,997.80. South Korea's Kospi jumped 1.1% to 2,676.76. Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 0.6% to 22,767.18, while the Shanghai Composite rose 0.6% to 3,451.41.

Russia and Ukraine are major producers of both energy and grains and other commodities and the conflict pushed prices of many higher, adding to inflationary headaches for central banks.

Asian economies already reeling from the pandemic are particularly vulnerable to rising energy costs. Japan imports almost all its energy, although its purchases from Russia are limited.

On Friday, benchmark U.S. crude was up 59 cents at \$93.40 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, the basis for international oil prices, added \$1.08 to \$96.50 a barrel.

Prices for energy have surged more in Europe than in the U.S. because its economy is more closely tied to Russia and Ukraine. The spot price in Europe for natural gas has jumped more than 50%.

Higher energy and food prices are amplifying worries about inflation, which in January was at its hottest level in the United States in a couple generations, and about what the Federal Reserve will do to rein it in.

The U.S. Fed looks certain to raise rates beginning next month for the first time since 2018. Although it sometimes has delayed big policy decisions in times of geopolitical uncertainty, such as the Kosovo war and the U.S. invasion of Iraq, economists say they still expect it to act to tamp down inflation. A major concern is whether it can do that without choking the economy into recession.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar inched down to 115.25 Japanese yen from 115.48 yen. The euro cost \$1.1189, up from \$1.1204.

The Russian ruble was down 1.5% at 83.75 to the dollar.

Republicans eye state courts as next political battlegrounds

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — In most midterm election years, races for state supreme court seats are overshadowed by campaigns for governor or the Senate. Some Republicans, however, say the party's priorities need to change.

The GOP's focus on the makeup of state supreme courts escalated this week after a series of legal setbacks frustrated the party's effort to redraw congressional maps in Pennsylvania and North Carolina. That prompted some leading Republicans to press the party to pay more attention to elections in November in which some supreme court justices will face voters.

"The top of the ticket where you have a governor's race, Senate race, are important," Chris Christie, the former New Jersey governor who leads the National Republican Redistricting Trust, told reporters this week. "But if you want your House districts to be determined in fair districts, you need to pay attention to your elected Supreme Courts."

The comment, and the rulings that sparked it, shows how state courts are playing an increasingly high-profile role in the politically charged, once-a-decade redrawing of legislative lines. Legislatures typically control the process and can contort the lines to scoop up as many of their party's voters as possible in as many districts as they can draw, a process known as gerrymandering.

Even in the best of circumstances, that process triggers an avalanche of litigation. But this cycle has fueled even intensity in the state courts because the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2019 that federal courts can't rule on partisan gerrymandering cases. Race-based line-drawing is governed by a thicket of federal law and constitutional principles and federal courts can intervene in those

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 34 of 78

cases. But for most redistricting legal battles, state courts are the last resort.

The GOP's frustration with state courts escalated this week after the Democratic-majority Pennsylvania Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected the recommendations of a lower court to adopt a GOP-drawn map that reduced the number of Democratic-leaning House seats, despite the fact that Democrats largely represent the areas where the state's population is growing. Instead, the high court picked a map drawn by Democratic plaintiffs that combined two Republican-held seats where population growth was particularly stagnant.

The same day, a panel of North Carolina judges ruled that a map drawn by that state's GOP-controlled legislature didn't comply with a 4-3 decision from the Democratic-controlled supreme court that found a similar map to illegally favor Republicans. The new map, drawn by court-appointed mapmakers and left intact later Wednesday by the state's high court, may cost Republicans three House seats compared with the initial map they submitted, which made 10 of the state's 14 seats safe for the GOP.

Despite the Republican criticism, state courts do not always rule on partisan lines.

The Republican chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, for instance, joined three Democrats to repeatedly throw out maps drawn by the GOP-controlled state legislature as illegal partisan gerrymanders. The Ohio court, which has a GOP majority, ordered members of the state's map-drawing commission — including Republican Gov. Mike DeWine — to attend a hearing next week on why they should not be held in contempt for drawing maps that don't comply with its orders.

Earlier this month, the Florida Supreme Court, which has largely been appointed by Republican governors, unanimously rejected a request from Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis to bless his preferred map's most controversial aspect, dissolving a north Florida district drawn to give Black voters a chance to pick their own representatives.

The rulings are one reason this redistricting cycle has gone better for Democrats than many expected. With most large states besides GOP-controlled Florida done with their maps, the party has kept about even with Republicans even though the GOP controls the line-drawing process in more states.

"We are winning not because of the political natures of the supreme courts," said Kelly Ward Burton, executive director of the National Democratic Redistricting Coalition. "We are winning because Republicans have violated the law."

To Republicans, though, Democratic groups like the NDRC that focus on electing Democratic judges in the 22 states with high court elections are part of the problem. They point to the organization's spending in North Carolina's 2018 supreme court race, where the campaign of Democrat Anita Earls, now the decisive vote on the bench, received \$5,200 from NDRC and the group donated another \$250,000 to the state Democratic Party, which then gave \$199,000 to Earls' campaign.

Of course, Republicans and their allies have themselves spent millions of dollars on North Carolina Supreme Court races over the past decade. The GOP said it may sue to overturn the new North Carolina maps in federal court, arguing the state courts are infringing on federal control of elections or are giving Black voters inappropriate weight in their line-drawing decisions.

But it also intends to compete in the supreme court election this fall, when two of the Democratic justices who comprise a 4-3 majority are up for reelection. In Ohio, the chief justice who defied her party, Maureen O'Connor, is retiring and her seat is up for grabs in November. If the GOP wins either of the state races, the Legislature can redraw that state's maps for 2024 and count on a friendlier high court, Republicans say.

"These elections for supreme court in North Carolina and Ohio are extremely important this fall," Christie said.

In Pennsylvania, Democrats have a three-justice majority and no justices are up for election this year. But the Republican state legislature has been trying to constrain the court's power since it ruled in 2018 that the Legislature illegally gerrymandered last decade's map to benefit the GOP. Pennsylvania lawmakers have proposed impeachment or otherwise limiting the court's power, and one state senator this week introduced a bill forbidding it from drawing new maps that last more than two years.

Michael Li, a redistricting expert with the Brennan Center for Justice in New York, warned that state courts are becoming increasingly pivotal political and electoral battlegrounds as the conservative major-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 35 of 78

ity on the U.S. Supreme Court rolls back rights guaranteed by prior court majorities. He cited a series of recent rulings that weakened the Voting Rights Act as well as the court's upcoming abortion case that could overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade that legalized the procedure nationally.

"We may be in an age where it's very state by state, not just in redistricting but in a wide number of rights," Li said. "People are recognizing that we're in a different world now."

Biden and Europe waiting on one key sanction against Russia

By JOSH BOAK, FATIMA HUSSEIN and KEN SWEET Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. and European officials are holding one key financial sanction against Russia in reserve, choosing not to boot Russia off SWIFT, the dominant system for global financial transactions.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused a barrage of new financial sanctions Thursday. The sanctions are meant to isolate, punish and impoverish Russia in the long term. President Joe Biden announced restrictions on exports to Russia and sanctions against Russian banks and state-controlled companies.

But Biden pointedly played down the need to block Russia from SWIFT, saying that while it's "always" still an option, "right now that's not the position that the rest of Europe wishes to take." He also suggested the sanctions being put in place would have more teeth.

"The sanctions we've imposed exceed SWIFT," Biden said in response to a question Thursday. "Let's have a conversation in another month or so to see if they're working."

Still, some European leaders, including in the United Kingdom, favor taking the additional step of blocking Russia from SWIFT, the Belgium-headquartered consortium used by banks and other financial institutions that serves as a key communications line for commerce worldwide. The SWIFT system averaged 42 million messages daily last year to enable payments. The name is an acronym for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications, and about half of all high-value payments that cross national borders go through its platform.

Ukraine has sought for Russia to be excluded from SWIFT, but several European leaders would prefer to stay patient because a ban could make international trade more difficult and hurt their economies.

"A number of countries are hesitant since it has serious consequences for themselves," said Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who believes a ban should be a last resort.

The British government says Prime Minister Boris Johnson pushed at a virtual meeting of the Group of Seven world leaders Thursday for Russia to be kicked out of SWIFT. It said there was "no pushback" but it was agreed that more discussion was needed. U.K. officials would not confirm Germany was resisting.

U.S. lawmakers have called on Biden to deploy every available financial sanction, with Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell saying Thursday that America should "ratchet the sanctions all the way up. Don't hold any back. Every single available tough sanction should be employed and should be employed now."

But Sen. Jim Risch of Idaho, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the SWIFT ban would be complicated and time-consuming in part because the U.S. doesn't have control over the decision.

The problem is that banning Russia from SWIFT might not cut it off from the global economy as cleanly as proponents think. Also, there could be blowback in the form of slower international growth. And rival messaging systems could gain users in ways that erode the power of the U.S. dollar — all of which has left SWIFT as a sanction waiting to be deployed.

"It's a communications platform, not a financial payments system," said Adam Smith, a lawyer who worked in the Obama administration. "If you remove Russia from SWIFT, you're removing them from a key artery of finance, but they can use pre-SWIFT tools like telephone, telex or email to engage in bank-to-bank transactions."

The other risk is that countries could migrate their institutions to platforms other than SWIFT, such as a system developed by China. This would increase the friction in global commerce — hurting growth — and make it harder to monitor the finances of terrorist groups.

"By politicizing SWIFT you give incentive for others to develop alternatives," said Brian O'Toole, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and former Treasury official. "SWIFT also is an important partner in U.S.-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 36 of 78

European counterterrorism efforts. It shares data with U.S. Treasury related to counterterrorism issues that has proven to be enormously valuable."

The sanctions announced Thursday would still accomplish much of what would happen if Russia lost access to SWIFT, said Clay Lowery of the Institute of International Finance.

"Cutting off these financial institutions from utilizing the dollar, euro, pound sterling is still a pretty significant step," Lowery said. "You're really having the same impact on certain subsections of the Russian economy through sanctions."

Iran was blocked from the SWIFT system in 2014 because of its nuclear program. In 2019, then-Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said losing access to SWIFT would be akin to a declaration of war against Russia. The statement by Medvedev is a sign that Russia viewed the platform as a vulnerability and developed workarounds to limit any economic damage.

"I think it will be harmful in the immediate term and psychological as well, but I'm not sure it'll impact the economy in ways that make it worthwhile," Smith said.

Russia has already prepared for ways to evade sanctions, including those imposed this week, experts say.

Ari Redbord, a former Treasury senior adviser, said he expects Russia's leadership to bypass financial penalties that limit its ability to engage in the global financial system through the increased use of cryptocurrency.

He said this is a risk "especially when there are actors like Iran, China and North Korea" that will continue to trade with Russia outside of the formal financial system, Redbord said.

"If Russian banks are entirely cut off from the U.S. and European financial system, that will be very debilitating to those banks and the Russian economy," he said. But the Russian government will use alternative means to trade with countries "even if there are debilitating" sanctions from the European Union and U.S.

Ukraine invasion: What to know as Russian troops sweep in

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Russian forces moved to the outskirts of Ukraine's capital on Friday as U.S. officials warned that President Vladimir Putin may be intent on installing a new, more friendly government.

The invasion began early Thursday with a series of missile strikes, many on key government and military installations. They were quickly followed by a ground assault from the north, east and south in an attack that could rewrite the global post-Cold War security order.

U.S. President Joe Biden was to meet Friday morning with fellow leaders of NATO governments in what the White House described as an "extraordinary virtual summit" to discuss Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed that his military will keep fighting back and he ordered a full mobilization. He said 137 people, both servicemen and civilians, have been killed and hundreds more wounded since the invasion began.

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

AN UNEASY NIGHT IN KYIV

Fearing a Russian attack, many of the capital's residents took shelter deep underground in metro stations. People brought sleeping bags and blankets, dogs and crossword puzzles as they sought safety in the makeshift bomb shelters.

In the early hours of the morning, several explosions were heard in different parts of the city. Air raid sirens also went off.

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

Friday morning, Klitschko said at least three people were injured when a rocket hit a multi-story apartment building, starting a fire.

"Just as yesterday, the military and civilians are equally under Russian attack," Zelenskyy said.

The Ukrainian military on Friday morning reported significant fighting in the area of Ivankiv, about 60 kilometers (40 miles) northwest of Kyiv, as Russian forces apparently tried to advance on the capital from

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 37 of 78

the north. It said one bridge across a small river had been destroyed.

Zelenskyy said he has information that he's the No. 1 target for the invading Russians but said he planned to remain in Kyiv.

CHERNOBYL IN RUSSIAN HANDS

Ukraine said it lost control of the Chernobyl nuclear site after Ukrainian forces waged a fierce battle with Russian troops. A nuclear reactor at the plant 130 kilometers (80 miles) north of Kyiv exploded in April 1986, sending a radioactive cloud across Europe. The damaged reactor was later covered by a protective shell.

Alyona Shevtsova, an adviser to the commander of Ukraine's Ground Forces, wrote on Facebook that the staff had been "taken hostage" when Russian troops seized the facility. The White House press secretary expressed alarm, concerned that it could hamper efforts to maintain the nuclear facility.

HOW HAS PUTIN JUSTIFIED THE INVASION?

In a televised address as the attack began, Putin said it was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists have been fighting for almost eight years.

The U.S. had predicted Putin would falsely claim that the rebel-held regions were under attack to justify an invasion.

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

Putin said Russia does not intend to occupy Ukraine but plans to "demilitarize" it, a euphemism for destroying its armed forces.

WHAT SANCTIONS ARE WESTERN POWERS IMPOSING?

In announcing a new round of sanctions on Thursday, Biden said the U.S. and its allies will block the assets of four large Russian banks, impose export controls and sanction oligarchs.

The penalties fall in line with the White House's insistence that it would look to hit Russia's financial system and Putin's inner circle, while also imposing export controls that would aim to starve Russia's industries and military of U.S. semiconductors and other high-tech products.

New U.S. sanctions also targeted the military and financial institutions of Belarus, which Russia is using as a staging ground for its troops moving into Ukraine from the north.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he would aim to cut Russia off from the U.K.'s financial market.

The sanctions include freezing the assets of all major Russian banks, including VTB Bank, its second-biggest. Britain also plans to bar Russian companies and the Russian government from raising money on U.K. markets, ban the export of a wide range of high-tech products, including semiconductors, to Russia and bar its flagship airline, Aeroflot, from landing at U.K. airports.

The European Union and other Western allies, including Australia, Japan and South Korea, announced similar sanctions.

OTHER REPERCUSSIONS FOR RUSSIANS

UEFA will no longer host the Champions League final in St. Petersburg in May, a person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private talks. An extraordinary meeting of the UEFA executive committee will be held Friday.

Valery Gergiev, a conductor who is close to Putin, will not lead the Vienna Philharmonic in a five-concert U.S. tour that starts at Carnegie Hall on Friday. Milan's Teatro alla Scala sent a letter to Gergiev asking him to make a clear statement in favor of a peaceful resolution in Ukraine or he would not be permitted to return for his next scheduled performance on March 5.

PROTESTS IN RUSSIA

Russians shocked by the invasion turned out by the thousands for street protests in Moscow and other cities. They signed open letters and online petitions demanding the Kremlin halt the assault. One petition garnered 330,000 signatures by the end of the day.

The crackdown was swift. Some 1,745 people in 54 Russian cities were detained, at least 957 of them in Moscow.

State television was all in for the invasion, with one host calling it an effort to protect people in eastern

Ukraine from a "Nazi regime."

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.

China's market is a growth area for other 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 blocked 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.

For 3 more officers at Floyd killing, jury says: Guilty

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The three Minneapolis police officers alongside Derek Chauvin at the scene of George Floyd's killing offered a variety of reasons why they weren't to blame: Inexperience. Bad training. Fear of a senior officer. The looming threat of angry bystanders.

A federal jury swept them all aside Thursday, emerging from two days of deliberations that followed a month of testimony to convict Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane of violating Floyd's civil rights.

All three men were convicted of depriving Floyd of his right to medical care as the 46-year-old Black man was pinned under Chauvin's knee for 9 1/2 minutes while handcuffed, facedown on the street on May 25, 2020. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back, Lane held his legs and Thao kept bystanders back.

Thao and Kueng were also convicted of failing to intervene to stop Chauvin in the videotaped killing that sparked protests in Minneapolis and around the globe as part of a reckoning over racial injustice.

Floyd's brother Philonise Floyd called the verdicts "accountability," but added: "There can never be justice because I can never get George back."

And Floyd's nephew Brandon Williams said he hoped the verdicts would change laws and policies to "protect people from these situations." He also said the outcome "sends a message that says, if you murder or use excessive or deadly force, there's consequences that follow."

Lane shook his head and looked at his attorney as his verdict was read. Thao and Kueng showed no visible emotion. Their attorneys declined to comment immediately afterward.

Charles Kovats, acting U.S. attorney for Minnesota, called the convictions a reminder that all sworn law enforcement officers have a duty to intervene.

"These officers had a moral responsibility, a legal obligation and a duty to intervene, and by failing to do so, they committed a crime," Kovats said.

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.

During the monthlong federal trial, prosecutors sought to show that the officers violated their training, including when they failed to move Floyd or give him CPR. Prosecutors argued that Floyd's condition was so serious that even bystanders without basic medical training could see he needed help, but that the officers "chose to do nothing."

The defense said their training was inadequate. Kueng and Lane both said they deferred to Chauvin as the senior officer at the scene. Thao testified that he relied on the other officers to care for Floyd's medical needs as his attention was elsewhere.

A jury of eight women and four men that appeared to be all-white reached the verdicts after about two days of deliberations. The court did not release demographics such as race or age. Lane is white, Kueng is Black and Thao is Hmong American.

The former officers remain free on bond pending sentencing, which has not yet been scheduled. Con-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 39 of 78

viction of a federal civil rights violation that results in death is punishable by life in prison or even death, but such sentences are extremely rare. Federal sentencing guidelines rely on complicated formulas that indicate the officers would get much less.

Chauvin, who is white, was convicted of murder last year in state court and pleaded guilty in December in the federal case. He was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in the state case. A sentencing date has not yet been set in the federal case, but both sides agreed Chauvin should face a sentence ranging from 20 to 25 years.

Public reaction to Thursday's verdicts was muted, with only a tiny handful of protesters visible outside the courthouse, which was surrounded by fencing throughout the trial. On the day Chauvin was convicted, many people listened live as his verdicts were read and crowded into the square where Floyd died for a celebration afterward. That trial was livestreamed, while this one was not.

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

The verdicts come just days after the conviction of three white men on hate crimes charges in Georgia in the death of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man who was chased and shot in February 2020.

CDC to significantly ease pandemic mask guidelines Friday

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration will significantly loosen federal mask-wearing guidelines to protect against COVID-19 transmission on Friday, according to two people familiar with the matter, meaning most Americans will no longer be advised to wear masks in indoor public settings.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday will announce a change to the metrics it uses to determine whether to recommend face coverings, shifting from looking at COVID-19 case counts to a more holistic view of risk from the coronavirus to a community. Under current guidelines, masks are recommended for people residing in communities of substantial or high transmission — roughly 95% of U.S. counties, according to the latest data.

The new metrics will still consider caseloads, but also take into account hospitalizations and local hospital capacity, which have been markedly improved during the emergence of the omicron variant. That strain is highly transmissible, but indications are that it is less severe than earlier strains, particularly for people who are fully vaccinated and boosted. Under the new guidelines, the vast majority of Americans will no longer live in areas where indoor masking in public is recommended, based on current data.

The new policy comes as the Biden administration moves to shift its focus to preventing serious illness and death from COVID-19, rather than all instances of infection, as part of a strategy adjustment for a new "phase" in the response as the virus becomes endemic.

The two people familiar with the change spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the CDC's action before the announcement.

The change comes as nearly all U.S. states that had put in place indoor mask-wearing mandates for the winter omicron surge are letting them lapse as cases have precipitously dropped nationwide. Some have eliminated the mandates entirely, while others have kept mask-wearing requirements in place for schools and medical facilities.

It was not immediately clear how the new CDC guidance would affect U.S. federal mandates requiring face coverings on public transportation.

The CDC's director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, has said a change has been in the works.

"We must consider hospital capacity as an additional important barometer. Our hospitals need to be able to take care of people with heart attacks and strokes. Our emergency departments can't be so overwhelmed that patients with emergent issues have to wait in line," she said during a White House briefing last week.

However, she declined to give a specific day when the CDC would announce a change. CDC officials on Thursday refused to confirm a release date.

"At @CDCgov, we have been analyzing our #COVID19 data and shifting our focus to preventing the

most severe outcomes and minimizing healthcare strain," Walensky tweeted Thursday night, offering no details on Friday's announcement.

US intel predicted Russia's invasion plans. Did it matter?

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For months, the White House made highly unusual releases of intelligence findings about Russian President Vladimir Putin's plans to attack Ukraine. Hoping to preempt an invasion, it released details of Russian troop buildups and warned repeatedly that a major assault was imminent.

In the end, Putin attacked anyway.

Critics of U.S. intelligence — including Russian officials who dismissed invasion allegations as fantasy — had been pointing to past failures like the false identification of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. But Russia's invasion so far has played out largely as the Biden administration said it would back in December, with nearly 200,000 troops striking from several sides of Ukraine.

Lawmakers from both political parties on Thursday said the accurate predictions were a credit to the often-criticized U.S. intelligence community.

But whether the White House's unprecedented public campaign delayed or limited Putin's plans could be debated for years. And some say both Washington and Kyiv could have done more with the information the two governments had beforehand.

Ukrainians are fighting a vastly more powerful Russian army all over their country, with deaths reported on both sides and explosions in several cities. There are fears Russia may try to depose Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, even as Putin claims — in the face of the U.S. intelligence — that Russia is only trying to protect residents of two separatist territories in eastern Ukraine.

Announcing new sanctions on Thursday, President Joe Biden cited his administration's moves to warn of what it knew of Putin's intentions.

"We shared declassified evidence about Russia's plans and false pretext so that there could be no confusion or cover-up about what Putin's doing," he said. "Putin is the aggressor. Putin chose this war. And now he and his country will bear the consequences."

Sen. Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, noted several results of the public campaign: weakening any potential move by Putin to create a "false-flag" operation to justify war, undercutting any potential coup in Kyiv that might have appeared to be led by Ukrainians, and unifying allies who quickly denounced Putin's aggression this week and backed tough sanctions.

"The intelligence community usually doesn't like to share information; they want to hold it close," Warner said in an interview. "What they've done is push the Russian timeline back. They've also, I think, allowed us to build this coalition that is virtually unprecedented."

Ohio Rep. Mike Turner, the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, said the Biden administration's declassifying of information was "incredibly important."

"This has both impacted the international community's view of Putin and has slowed his actions," Turner said. "The goal in releasing intelligence is to permit Ukraine to plan, and any delay in Putin's actions helped Ukraine in the planning to defend itself."

But Turner said the White House should have provided more lethal weapons and air defense capability to Ukraine in advance. He also said that the White House was initially reluctant to provide some of its intelligence findings to Kyiv.

One U.S. official familiar with the intelligence gathering, who was not authorized to comment publicly by name, said the White House shared intelligence with Ukraine about Russia even before the troop buildup began last year and accelerated its sharing throughout the crisis. The official added that the administration reduced constraints to allow findings to be shared with the Ukrainians and more broadly with allies.

Still, Washington and Kyiv were often publicly and privately at odds about the nature of the Russian threat and what needed to be done.

Zelenskyy for months tried to publicly downplay American warnings of an imminent major outbreak,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 41 of 78

noting that Ukraine remained locked in an eight-year war over the eastern Donbas region fighting Russian-backed separatists. Zelenskyy did not call up military reservists until Wednesday, when he also announced a 30-day state of emergency.

"The one area that I wish we could have been more effective is convincing the Ukrainians themselves to further mobilize their troops, their reserves," Warner said Thursday. "I'm not saying that would have stopped the Russian invasion. The Russian forces are so overwhelming. But it might have allowed a bit of a better fight."

A Ukrainian government official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence said Kyiv was convinced about two weeks ago that Russia would invade. But the government publicly tamped down concerns about an invasion to limit damage to Ukraine's economy and panic in the country, the official said. Any mass mobilization of Ukrainian forces could have given additional pretext to Putin, who repeatedly and falsely claimed Ukraine was planning to attack separatist-held parts of the Donbas.

The official also noted that only on Wednesday did the U.S. sanction the company that built the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Zelenskyy and lawmakers from both parties had long pushed for the sanctions on the pipeline, which would carry natural gas from Russia to Germany and bypass Ukraine.

"We wish it were a deterrence victory, not an intelligence victory," the official said. "Unfortunately there was zero deterrence and now we have a humanitarian catastrophe."

Russia presses invasion to outskirts of Ukrainian capital

By YURAS KARMANAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia pressed its invasion of Ukraine to the outskirts of the capital Friday after unleashing airstrikes on cities and military bases and sending in troops and tanks from three sides in an attack that could rewrite the global post-Cold War security order.

Explosions sounded before dawn in Kyiv as Western leaders scheduled an emergency meeting and Ukraine's president pleaded for international help. The nature of the explosions was not immediately clear, but the blasts came amid signs that the capital and largest Ukrainian city was increasingly threatened following a day of fighting that left more than 100 Ukrainians dead.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the government had information that "subversive groups" were encroaching on the city, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Kyiv "could well be under siege" in what U.S. officials believe is a brazen attempt by Russian President Vladimir Putin to dismantle the government and replace it with his own regime.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told lawmakers on a phone call Thursday evening that Russian mechanized forces that entered from Belarus were about 20 miles from Kyiv, according to a person familiar with the call.

The assault, anticipated for weeks by the U.S. and Western allies and undertaken by Putin in the face of international condemnation and cascading sanctions, amounts to the largest ground war in Europe since World War II.

Russian missiles bombarded cities and military bases in the first day of the attack, and Ukraine officials said they had lost control of the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear power plant, scene of the world's worst nuclear disaster. Civilians piled into trains and cars to flee and patrons of a hotel were directed into a shelter as explosions sounded in Kyiv.

"Russia has embarked on a path of evil, but Ukraine is defending itself and won't give up its freedom," Zelenskyy tweeted. His grasp on power increasingly tenuous, he called Thursday for even more severe sanctions than the ones imposed by Western allies and ordered a full military mobilization that would last 90 days.

Zelenskyy said in a video address that 137 "heroes," including 10 military officers, had been killed and 316 people wounded. The dead included border guards on the Zmiinyi Island in the Odesa region, which was taken over by Russians.

He concluded an emotional speech by saying that "the fate of the country depends fully on our army,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 42 of 78

security forces, all of our defenders." He also said the country had heard from Moscow that "they want to talk about Ukraine's neutral status."

Biden was to meet Friday morning with fellow leaders of NATO governments in what the White House described as an "extraordinary virtual summit" to discuss Ukraine.

U.S. President Joe Biden announced new sanctions against Russia, saying Putin "chose this war" and had exhibited a "sinister" view of the world in which nations take what they want by force. Other nations also announced sanctions, or said they would shortly.

"It was always about naked aggression, about Putin's desire for empire by any means necessary — by bullying Russia's neighbors through coercion and corruption, by changing borders by force, and, ultimately, by choosing a war without a cause," Biden said.

Blinken said in television interviews that he was convinced that Russia was intent on overthrowing the Ukrainian government, telling CBS that Putin wants to "reconstitute the Soviet empire" and that Kyiv was already "under threat, and it could well be under siege."

Fearing a Russian attack on the capital city, thousands of people went deep underground as night fell, jamming Kyiv's subway stations.

At times it felt almost cheerful. Families ate dinner. Children played. Adults chatted. People brought sleeping bags or dogs or crossword puzzles — anything to alleviate the waiting and the long night ahead.

But the exhaustion was clear on many faces. And the worries.

"Nobody believed that this war would start and that they would take Kyiv directly," said Anton Mironov, waiting out the night in one of the old Soviet metro stations. "I feel mostly fatigue. None of it feels real."

The invasion began early Thursday with a series of missile strikes, many on key government and military installations, quickly followed by a three-pronged ground assault. Ukrainian and U.S. officials said Russian forces were attacking from the east toward Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city; from the southern region of Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014; and from Belarus to the north.

Zelenskyy, who had earlier cut diplomatic ties with Moscow and declared martial law, appealed to global leaders, saying that "if you don't help us now, if you fail to offer a powerful assistance to Ukraine, tomorrow the war will knock on your door."

Though Biden said he had no plans to speak with Putin, the Russian leader did have what the Kremlin described as a "serious and frank exchange" with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Both sides claimed to have destroyed some of the other's aircraft and military hardware, though little of that could be confirmed.

Hours after the invasion began, Russian forces seized control of the now-unused Chernobyl plant and its surrounding exclusion zone after a fierce battle, presidential adviser Myhailo Podolyak told The Associated Press.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency said it was told by Ukraine of the takeover, adding that there had been "no casualties or destruction at the industrial site."

The 1986 disaster occurred when a nuclear reactor at the plant 130 kilometers (80 miles) north of Kyiv exploded, sending a radioactive cloud across Europe. The damaged reactor was later covered by a protective shell to prevent leaks.

Alyona Shevtsova, adviser to the commander of Ukraine's ground forces, wrote on Facebook that staff members at the Chernobyl plant had been "taken hostage." The White House said it was "outraged" by reports of the detentions.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense issued an update saying that though the plant was "likely captured," the country's forces had halted Russia's advance toward Chernihiv and that it was unlikely that Russia had achieved its planned Day One military objectives.

The chief of the NATO alliance, Jens Stoltenberg, said the "brutal act of war" shattered peace in Europe, joining a chorus of world leaders decrying an attack that could cause massive casualties and topple Ukraine's democratically elected government. The conflict shook global financial markets: Stocks plunged and oil prices soared amid concerns that heating bills and food prices would skyrocket.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 43 of 78

Condemnation came not only from the U.S. and Europe, but from South Korea, Australia and beyond — and many governments readied new sanctions. Even friendly leaders like Hungary's Viktor Orban sought to distance themselves from Putin.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he aimed to cut off Russia from the U.K.'s financial markets as he announced sanctions, freezing the assets of all large Russian banks and planning to bar Russian companies and the Kremlin from raising money on British markets.

"Now we see him for what he is — a bloodstained aggressor who believes in imperial conquest," Johnson said of Putin.

The U.S. sanctions will target Russian banks, oligarchs, state-controlled companies and high-tech sectors, Biden said, but they were designed not to disrupt global energy markets. Russian oil and natural gas exports are vital energy sources for Europe.

Zelenskyy urged the U.S. and West to go further and cut the Russians from the SWIFT system, a key financial network that connects thousands of banks around the world. The White House has been reluctant to immediately cut Russia from SWIFT, worried it could cause enormous economic problems in Europe and elsewhere in the West.

While some nervous Europeans speculated about a possible new world war, the U.S. and its NATO partners have shown no indication they would send troops into Ukraine, fearing a larger conflict. NATO reinforced its members in Eastern Europe as a precaution, and Biden said the U.S. was deploying additional forces to Germany to bolster NATO.

European authorities declared the country's airspace an active conflict zone.

After weeks of denying plans to invade, Putin launched the operation on a country the size of Texas that has increasingly tilted toward the democratic West and away from Moscow's sway. The autocratic leader made clear earlier this week that he sees no reason for Ukraine to exist, raising fears of possible broader conflict in the vast space that the Soviet Union once ruled. Putin denied plans to occupy Ukraine, but his ultimate goals remain hazy.

Ukrainians were urged to shelter in place and not to panic.

"Until the very last moment, I didn't believe it would happen. I just pushed away these thoughts," said a terrified Anna Dovnya in Kyiv, watching soldiers and police remove shrapnel from an exploded shell. "We have lost all faith."

With social media amplifying a torrent of military claims and counter-claims, it was difficult to determine exactly what was happening on the ground.

Russia and Ukraine made competing claims about damage they had inflicted. Russia's Defense Ministry said it had destroyed scores of Ukrainian air bases, military facilities and drones. It confirmed the loss of one of its Su-25 attack jets, blaming "pilot error," and said an An-26 transport plane had crashed because of technical failure, killing the entire crew. It did not say how many were aboard.

Russia said it was not targeting cities, but journalists saw destruction in many civilian areas.

Live updates: Ukraine diplomat urges China to talk to Putin

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest on the Russia-Ukraine crisis:

TOKYO — The Ukrainian ambassador to Japan is urging China to join international efforts to stop the Russian "massacre" in his country amid Beijing's lack of criticism of Moscow's actions.

"We would very much welcome that China exercises its connection with Russia and talks to Putin and explains to him that it is inappropriate in the 21st century to do this massacre in Europe," Ukrainian diplomat Sergiy Korsunsky told a news conference in Tokyo.

China has not criticized Russia over its actions against Ukraine, and has joined in verbal attacks on Washington and its allies.

"I do believe China can play a much more active role to work with Putin in a manner we expect for civilized countries to do," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 44 of 78

Korsunsky also asked support from the United States and its allies to provide anti-missile defense equipment to fight Russian cruise missile attacks. He said Ukraine wants to join NATO and called for its support in resolving the conflict.

KYIV, Ukraine — Explosions are being heard before dawn in Kyiv as Western leaders scheduled an emergency meeting and Ukraine's president pleads for international help.

The nature of the explosions was not immediately clear, but the blasts came amid signs that the capital and largest Ukrainian city was increasingly threatened following a day of fighting that left more than 100 Ukrainians dead.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the government had information that "subversive groups" were encroaching on the city, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Kyiv "could well be under siege" in what U.S. officials believe is a brazen attempt by Russian President Vladimir Putin to dismantle the government and replace it with his own regime.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told lawmakers on a phone call that Russian mechanized forces that entered from Belarus were about 20 miles from Kyiv, according to a person familiar with the call

BEIJING — China's Embassy in Ukraine says it is arranging evacuation flights for Chinese citizens. An embassy statement Friday says conditions in Ukraine have "deteriorated sharply" but makes no mention of the Russian invasion.

The embassy gave no details on where the evacuation flights would be leaving from. Nor did it say when the charter flights might happen, saying that scheduling will depend on the "flight safety situation."

It says travelers should be packed and ready to react quickly once flight schedules are announced. Passengers must have a passport from China, Hong Kong or Macau or a "Taiwan compatriot card."

The embassy earlier advised Chinese in Ukraine to stay home and to put a Chinese flag on their vehicles if they planned to travel long distances.

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines top diplomat says he will travel to Ukraine's border with Poland to ensure the safety of Filipinos fleeing from the eastern European country now under attack by Russian forces.

Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. did not specify in his tweet Friday where he is going. Nor did he say how many of the approximately 380 Filipinos in Ukraine are trying to flee amid the Russian invasion.

Locsin expressed gratitude to Poland for agreeing to accept fleeing Filipinos without entry visas.

The Philippines has not condemned Russia's assault on Ukraine but has called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Its outgoing president, Rodrigo Duterte, has been a vocal Asian critic of U.S. security policies and has nurtured close ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

TOKYO — Asian stock prices are higher early Friday after U.S. shares recovered toward the end of a wild trading day Thursday as the world slapped sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

Benchmarks are up in Japan, South Korea, Australia, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Japan announced additional sanctions on Russia, including freezing the assets of Russian groups, banks and individuals and suspending exports of semiconductors.

Prices for oil and other commodities have risen sharply, raising inflation fears.

Despite uncertainty about the Ukraine crisis, as well as worries about COVID-19, the turnaround on Wall Street seemed to buoy Asian trading.

BRUSSELS — European Union leaders are putting on a united front after a six-hour meeting during which they agreed on a second package of economic and financial sanctions on Russia.

The EU Council president accuses Russia of using "fake pretexts and bad excuses" for justifying its invasion of Ukraine and says sanctions will hurt the government,

The legal texts for the sanctions agreed on are expected to be finalized overnight and be submitted for

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 45 of 78

approval to EU foreign affairs ministers Friday.

EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen says the package includes targeting 70% of the Russian banking market and key state-owned companies.

She says Russia's energy sector also will be targeted "by making it impossible for Russia to upgrade its refineries." And there will be a ban on sales of software, semiconductors and airliners to Russia.

ADELAIDE, Australia — Australia's prime minister is accusing China of throwing Russia a lifeline by easing trade restrictions at a time the much of the world is trying to stop the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison was reacting Friday to a report in The South China Morning Post that China had announced it was fully open to Russian wheat imports.

Morrison noted that Australia, the United States, Britain, the European Union and Japan are imposing sanctions on Russia, and said China's easing of trade restrictions "is simply unacceptable."

In his words: "You don't go and throw a lifeline to Russia in the middle of a period when they're invading another country."

TOKYO — Japan has announced additional sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Friday that the new measures include freezing the assets of Russian groups, banks and individuals and suspending exports of semiconductors and other sensitive goods to military-linked organizations in Russia.

Kishida says that "Japan must clearly show its position that we will never tolerate any attempt to change the status quo by force."

Earlier in the week, Japan suspended new issuances and distribution of Russian government bonds in Japan, aiming of reduce funding for Russia's military. It also banned trade with the two Ukrainian separatist regions.

Japan has long sought to regain control of northern islands Russia seized at the end of World War II and previously had tended to be milder toward Moscow.

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council will vote Friday on a resolution that would condemn Russia's military aggression against Ukraine "in the strongest terms." It also would demand an immediate halt to Russia's invasion and the withdrawal of all Russian troops.

A senior U.S. official says the Biden administration knows the measure will be vetoed by Russia, but believes it is very important to put the resolution to a vote to underscore Russia's international isolation.

The official says the council vote will be followed by a resolution voted on quickly in the 193-member U.N. General Assembly where there are no vetoes.

The final draft resolution, obtained Thursday by The Associated Press, would reaffirm the council's commitment "to the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders."

The council is scheduled to vote at 3 p.m. EST Friday.

WASHINGTON — The White House is expressing outrage at "credible reports" from Ukrainian officials that the staff at the shuttered Chernobyl nuclear plant have been taken hostage by Russian troops.

Press secretary Jen Psaki said Thursday that "we condemn it and we request their release."

Psaki says the U.S. has no assessment on the state of the plant where radioactivity is still leaking decades after the worst nuclear disaster in history. But she says hostage taking could hamper efforts to maintain the nuclear facility and is "incredibly alarming and greatly concerning."

Psaki spoke after Alyona Shevtsova, an adviser to the commander of Ukraine's Ground Forces, wrote on Facebook that the staff at the Chernobyl plant had been "taken hostage" when Russian troops seized the facility.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 46 of 78

BRUSSELS — An official at France's presidential office says the aim of French President Emmanuel Macron's phone call to Russian leader Vladimir Putin was to demand the immediate halt of military operations.

According to the official at the Elysee Palace, Macron called Putin from Brussels on Thursday just before the start of an urgent meeting of European Union leaders focusing on sanctions against Russia.

The official says Macron made the call after consulting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The official says Macron reminded Putin "that Russia was facing massive sanctions." The official spoke anonymously in accordance with the French presidency practice.

According to the Kremlin's report on the call, Putin and Macron agreed to continue their contacts.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says 137 civilians and military personnel have been killed so far in the Russian invasion of his country.

He calls them "heroes" in a video address released early Friday in which he also says hundreds more have been wounded.

Zelenskyy says that despite Russia's claim it is attacking only military targets, civilian sites also have been struck. In his words: "They're killing people and turning peaceful cities into military targets. It's foul and will never be forgiven."

The president says all border guards on Zmiinyi island in the Odesa region were killed Thursday. Ukraine's border guard service earlier in the day reported that the island was taken by the Russians.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's president is ordering a full military mobilization to challenge the Russian invasion.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy issued a decree Thursday evening saying the mobilization would last 90 days.

He ordered the military's General Staff to determine the number of those liable for service and reservists as well as the order of the call-up.

Zelensky gave his Cabinet the job of allocating funds to pay for the mobilization.

BRUSSELS — European Union leaders pledged Thursday to impose tough economic and financial sanctions on Russia, but there is a lack of consensus within the West over cutting the country off the SWIFT financial payment system.

The Belgium-based cooperative is used by more than 11,000 institutions globally. It shuffles money from bank to bank, and removing Russia from it would likely also have an impact on European economies.

Ukraine has requested the move. While the head of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, said EU sanctions need to include the exclusion of Russia from the scheme, many EU leaders remain unconvinced.

Dutch Prime minister Mark Rutte, for instance, said such a decision would also hurt European economies. Rutte said it should be a last-resort measure that could be decided at a later stage.

"A number of countries are hesitant since it has serious consequences for themselves," he said.

BUDAPEST, Hungary - Several thousand demonstrators gathered in front of the Russian embassy in Hungary's capital on Thursday to denounce Russia's invasion of Ukraine and demand that Hungary's government cut its close ties with Moscow.

Waving the flags of Ukraine and the European Union, protesters chanted for peace and an end to the Russian attacks, and demanded that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban pull his country out of its business dealings with Russia.

The demonstration in Budapest was organized by a coalition of six opposition parties that have united to unseat Orban and his ruling Fidesz party in parliamentary elections April 3.

That coalition's candidate for prime minister, independent conservative Peter Marki-Zay, criticized Orban for his close ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and urged the prime minister to "take a clear stand on Hungary's commitment to the European Union and NATO, our allies."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 47 of 78

BRUSSELS — Josep Borrell, the EU's top diplomat, said he spent his day "reaching out all over the world" to organize a united front against Russia.

Borrell carried his two phones upon arrival at the urgent meeting of EU leaders held on Thursday evening in Brussels.

He said he called more than 20 countries.

"The African Union, (countries in) Latin America, in Southeast Asia, India, Japan, a lot," he said.

Borrell added that the sanctions he prepared with the EU's executive arm that were agreed by leaders in retaliation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine will start having effect once adopted by the EU Council during a meeting of foreign affairs ministers scheduled Friday.

The EU said sanctions will cover "the financial sector, the energy and transport sectors, dual-use goods as well as export control and export financing, visa policy, additional listings of Russian individuals and new listing criteria."

PARIS — French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said on Thursday that sanctions that the European allies are discussing to impose on Russia are "massive and aimed at asphyxiating Russia's economy".

Measures that will be taken against Russia are "very massive, very strong and I believe they will be very effective," Le Drian said in an interview with the French broadcaster TF1.

France is working with allies in NATO and at the United Nations on getting an international consensus to isolate Russia following President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine.

WASHINGTON — The U.S. State Department has at least temporarily withdrawn its remaining diplomatic presence from Ukraine.

The department says a core group of essential personnel who had relocated from the capital of Kyiv to the western city of Lviv near the Polish border earlier this month will now work from offices in Poland rather than on Ukrainian territory.

Earlier this week, the department had instructed those diplomats to work in Lviv during daylight hours but to spend their nights in Poland.

The department says they were ordered late Wednesday not to make the commute back to Lviv to work beginning Thursday until further notice.

VIENNA — The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency says it has been informed by Ukraine that "unidentified armed forces" have taken control of the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant, adding that there had been "no casualties or destruction at the industrial site."

IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi called for "maximum restraint" to avoid actions that could put Ukraine's nuclear facilities at risk.

"In line with its mandate, the IAEA is closely monitoring developments in Ukraine with a special focus on the safety and security of its nuclear power plants and other nuclear-related facilities," he said in a statement.

WASHINGTON — U.S. aviation regulators widened the area of eastern Europe and Russia where U.S. airlines and pilots are barred because of the conflict.

In a new directive Thursday, the Federal Aviation Administration prohibited U.S. airlines from flying over any part of Ukraine or Belarus and the western part of Russia.

Earlier restrictions had barred U.S. airlines from flying over the eastern part of Ukraine. The restrictions cover both passenger and cargo flights, but not military ones.

MOSCOW — A Russian military plane crashed in the country's Voronezh region that borders with Ukraine, the Russian military said Thursday night.

The An-26 plane was carrying out a planned flight transporting military equipment and crashed because of technical failure, military officials said, adding that the plane's entire crew died in the crash.

They didn't specify how many crew members were on board of the plane.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 48 of 78

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Joe Biden says the sanctions against Russia for invading Ukraine will not disrupt the global oil and natural gas markets.

Biden says, "Our sanctions package is specifically designed to allow energy payments to continue."

The president announced a series of sanctions at a White House speech Thursday. The sanctions include restrictions on exports to Russia and sanctions on Russian banks and state-controlled companies.

Biden also says that U.S. oil and gas companies should not exploit the geopolitical risks to hike their prices and raise their profits.

A key concern has been preserving Russian oil and natural gas exports, which are vital sources for Europe and other countries. Financial markets already view the Russian invasion in Ukraine as straining energy supplies with the soon to expire futures contract for Brent crude increasing more than 5% to top \$100 a barrel.

UNITED NATIONS -- Ukraine's ambassador to the United Nations has asked the president of the 193-member General Assembly to prepare for an emergency session in the coming days in light of Russia's military aggression.

Ukraine's U.N. Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya tweeted Thursday that the meeting should be held under the so-called "Uniting for Peace" resolution. The resolution gives the General Assembly the power to call emergency meetings to consider matters of international peace and security when the Security Council is unable to act because of the lack of unanimity among its five veto-wielding permanent members -- the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France.

The U.N. Security Council is expected to vote Friday on a resolution condemning Russia in the strongest terms possible for attacking Ukraine and demanding the immediate withdrawal of all its forces — knowing that Russia will veto the legally binding measure, according to a senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

ROME — Addressing fellow G-7 leaders, Italian Premier Mario Draghi warned that the crisis over Ukraine "could last for a long time, we must be prepared."

He thanked U.S. President Joe Biden for sharing intelligence in recent weeks. He also had praise Thursday evening for the European Commission for putting what he called "a good proposal of sanctions on the table."

Italy is "completely aligned with France, Germany and the European Union" on sanctions, he said.

"We must be united, firm, decisive and we must re-affirm in every possible moment our full support to Ukraine," Draghi said in his G-7 remarks, according to the premier's office.

JERUSALEM — Israeli police say they arrested four people suspected of scrawling anti-Putin graffiti on the gate of the Russian embassy in Tel Aviv during a protest.

Several hundred people staged a demonstration outside the Russian Embassy in Tel Aviv on Thursday over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Another smaller protest was held outside the Russian consulate in the northern port city of Haifa.

Israel is home to a large population of immigrants former Soviet Union and their descendants who arrived in the 1990s and 2000s.

Israel maintains good relations with both Ukraine and Russia and has tried to avoid involvement in the conflict. Earlier on Thursday Israel's foreign minister condemned Russia's invasion.

UNITED NATIONS — Repeating a plea for Russia to halt its invasion of Ukraine, the U.N. chief said Thursday the world body was freeing up \$20 million for urgent humanitarian needs in the country.

"Stop the military operation. Bring the troops back to Russia," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at U.N. headquarters. He called the offensive wrong and unacceptable, but not irreversible.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 49 of 78

"It's not too late to save this generation from the scourge of war," Guterres said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the assault is meant to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatists have been fighting the government for nearly eight years. The U.S., however, said ahead of time that Russia would try to justify an invasion by falsely claiming that the rebel-held areas were under attack.

The U.N. said Thursday it was relocating some of its roughly 1,500 staffers in Ukraine. However, Guterres reiterated that the U.N. will continue providing aid to people in the country, "regardless of who or where they are."

BRUSSELS — Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said European Union leaders need to adopt sanctions that will be strong enough to impact the Russian economy and the country's military industrial complex.

"We don't need sanctions that bark, we need sanctions that bite," De Croo said upon his arrival at an urgent meeting of EU leaders in Brussels to discuss a new package of measures targeting Russia.

De Croo said the main goal of the sanctions should be to make it hard for Russian financial institutions to access international markets.

Asked whether Russia should be expelled from the Swift payment system financial system that moves money from bank to bank around the world, De Croo said he is open for discussions on that topic.

OTTAWA, Ontario — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says he spoke with President Zelenskyy and says Canada is imposing more severe sanctions.

The sanctions will target 58 people and entities connected to Russia, including members of that country's elite and their families, the paramilitary organization known as the Wagner Group and major Russian banks.

The measures, announced Thursday after Trudeau attended a virtual G-7 meeting, will also affect members of the Russian Security Council, including key cabinet ministers.

Canada is also cancelling existing export permits for Russia and will not issue new ones.

Trudeau also says the federal government will be prioritizing immigration applications for Ukrainians who want to come to Canada and is launching a dedicated telephone line for anyone who has any urgent questions about immigrating from Ukraine.

KYIV, Ukraine — An adviser to Ukrainian president says that Ukraine has lost control over the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant after a fierce battle.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said the condition of the plant's facilities, a confinement shelter and storage of nuclear waste is unknown.

A nuclear reactor in then-Soviet Ukraine exploded in April 1986, spewing radioactive waste across Europe in the world's worst nuclear disaster. The exploded reactor has been covered by a protective shelter to prevent radiation leak and the entire plant has been decommissioned.

Podolyak said that after "absolutely senseless attack of the Russians in this direction, it is impossible to say that the Chernobyl nuclear power plant is safe."

He charged that Russia may mount provocations there and described the situation as "one of the most serious threats to Europe today."

NEW DELHI, India — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi phoned Russian President Vladimir Putin late Thursday night and appealed for an "immediate cessation of violence," his office said in a statement.

Modi called for efforts to return to diplomatic discussions, saying the "differences between Russia and the NATO group can only be resolved through honest and sincere dialogue."

Modi also expressed concern over Indian citizens in Ukraine - officials earlier in the day said some 4,000 out of the 20,000 Indian nationals had been evacuated with efforts on to bring the rest back home.

The conversation between the two leaders comes hours after the Ukraine envoy in New Delhi urged

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 50 of 78

Modi to contact Putin, saying the country "has a special relationship with Russia and New Delhi can play a more active role in controlling the situation."

WARSAW — Some of the first refugees from Ukraine have arrived in European Union member Poland by road and rail.

A scheduled train from Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine arrived Thursday afternoon in the Polish town of Przemysl, near Ukraine's western border, carrying a few hundred passengers.

The passengers of various ages, arriving with bags and backpacks, told The Associated Press they were fleeing war. Some live in Poland and were returning urgently from visits to their homeland.

The chief of Poland's border guards, Gen. Tomasz Praga, said there was a visible increase in the number of people wanting to cross into Poland.

Officials said Poland has prepared at least eight centers with food, medical care and places to rest.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said that "innocent people are being killed" in Ukraine and appealed to the Poles to extend every possible assistance to the Ukrainians who have found themselves in need of help.

NAIROBI, Kenya — The African Union chair is urging an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine "to preserve the world from the consequences of planetary conflict."

The statement by Senegal President Macky Sall and AU Commission chair Moussa Faki Mahamat also calls on Russia to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and international law, expressing "extreme concern at the very serious and dangerous situation."

Few among Africa's 54 countries have publicly reacted to the invasion.

PRISTINA, Kosovo - Kosovo leaders on Thursday rejected Russian President Vladimir Putin's claim of similarities with Ukraine's eastern rebel provinces.

Kosovo's president, prime minister and other senior ministers issued a joint statement denouncing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The massive and unprovoked attack against Ukraine's cities and villages is one of the most dangerous hits made to the architecture of the international security built after World War II," said the statement.

Kosovo declared independence in 2008 after a bloody conflict with Serbia years earlier left more than 10,000 people dead and triggered a NATO intervention. Pristina's government is recognized by the United States and most EU nations, but Belgrade has refused to recognize its independence and relies on support from Russia and China in its bid to retain claims on the territory.

"Dictator Putin's effort to refer to the Kosovo case and draw parallel are totally unstable, abusive and an attempt to camouflage the lack of any base or reason for the barbarous attack of its forces against a sovereign state," said the statement.

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he would aim to cut Russia off from the U.K.'s financial markets as he announced a new set of sanctions in response to President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

The sanctions include freezing the assets of all major Russian banks, including VTB Bank, the nation's second-biggest bank, Johnson said Thursday. Britain also plans to bar Russian companies and the Russian government from raising money on U.K. markets.

Britain will also ban the export of a wide range of high-tech products, including semiconductors, to Russia and bar the nation's flagship airline, Aeroflot, from landing at U.K. airports.

The slate of sanctions comes days after Johnson was criticized for acting too cautiously in response to Russian aggression earlier this week.

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.K., Vadym Prystaiko, earlier called on world leaders to ban trade in Russian oil and gas and block foreign investment in the country.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 51 of 78

MOSCOW — The Russian Defense Ministry has formally confirmed that its forces have moved into Ukraine from Crimea.

Until Thursday's statement Russia had said only that it unleashed a barrage of air and missile strikes on Ukrainian air bases, air defense batteries and other military facilities.

The ministry said it has destroyed a total of 83 Ukrainian military facilities. Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov confirmed that Russian ground troops advanced toward the city of Kherson northwest of the Crimea peninsula.

Kherson sits on water reservoir used in the past to provide the bulk of fresh water for Crimea until Ukraine cut it with a dam in 2017 in response to Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. Konashenkov said Thursday's move allows the resumption of the water supply to Crimea.

BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has made a televised address to the nation condemning the Russian attack on Ukraine sharply and vowed that Russian President Vladimir Putin "will not win."

Scholz said Thursday evening that "we will not accept this violation of Ukraine's sovereignty by Russia" and vowed to imply severe sanction together with Germany's allies.

Regarding the military attack on Ukraine, Scholz stressed that Putin "is on his own. It was not the Russian people who decided to go to war. He alone bears full responsibility for it. This war is Putin's war."

The chancellor said that "Putin should not underestimate NATO's determination to defend all its members. That applies explicitly to our NATO partners in the Baltic States, in Poland and in Romania, in Bulgaria and in Slovakia. Without ifs and buts. Germany and its allies know how to protect themselves."

UNITED NATIONS -- A senior U.S. official says the U.N. Security Council is expected to vote Friday on a resolution condemning Russia in the strongest terms possible for attacking Ukraine and demanding the immediate withdrawal of all its forces — knowing that Russia will veto the legally binding measure.

The United States believes it is very important to put the resolution to a vote to underscore Russia's international isolation, and emphasizes that the veto will be followed quickly by a resolution in the 193-member U.N. General Assembly where there are no vetoes, the official said Thursday. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

"This is a first step in how the U.N. responds to this premeditated war of choice that Russia has chosen to take, and we will see action in the General Assembly in the coming days," he said, adding that it is part of a much broader, coordinated response that includes steps the Biden administration and its allies are taking.

The resolution is drafted under Article 7 of the U.N. Charter, which can be enforced militarily, according to the official.

By Edith M. Lederer

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin says he was "forced" to order a military action in Ukraine because of the Western refusal to heed Russian security demands.

Speaking at a Kremlin meeting with businesspeople Thursday, Putin said the military action was a "forced measure" that stemmed from rising security risks for Russia.

He said that he was surprised by the West's "intransigence" regarding Moscow's security demands. "I was surprised that didn't move a millimeter on any issue," he said. "They have left us no chance to act differently."

Turning to Western sanctions, he said "Russia remains part of the global economy and isn't going to hurt the system that it is part of as long as it remains there."

"Our partners should realize that and not set a goal to push us out of the system," he said in an apparent warning to the West.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has urged Moscow to end hostilities, adding

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 52 of 78

that Russian airborne troops have been checked outside Kyiv.

"It wasn't Ukraine that chose the path of war, but Ukraine is offering to go back to the path of peace," he said Thursday.

He said a Russian airborne force in Hostomel airport outside Kyiv, which has a big runway, has been stopped and is being destroyed.

The Ukrainian leader said many Russian warplanes and armored vehicles were destroyed but didn't give numbers. He also said an unspecified number of Russian troops was captured.

He said a difficult situation is developing in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city just over 20 kilometers from the Russian border. In the north the Russians are slowly advancing toward Chernihiv, Zelenskyy said.

He appealed to global leaders, saying that "if you don't help us now, if you fail to offer strong assistance to Ukraine, tomorrow the war will knock on your door."

BERLIN — Group of Seven leaders have strongly condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine.

The German government, which currently heads the G7, put out a joint statement after a virtual leaders' meeting Thursday, vowing to bring "forward severe and coordinated economic and financial sanctions."

It called "on all partners and members of the international community to condemn this attack in the strongest possible terms, to stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine, and raise their voice against this blatant violation of the fundamental principles of international peace and security."

HELSINKI — Baltic NATO members Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have received the first batches of U.S. military troops and equipment promised this week by U.S. President Joe Biden in the wake of the Ukraine crisis.

An undisclosed number of U.S. F-35 fighters landed Thursday afternoon at NATO's air base in Amari, near Estonia's capital Tallinn, Estonian media reported. F-35 fighters were reported to have arrived also at NATO's air base in Lithuania.

On Wednesday evening, the first 40 American soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived in Latvia, Latvian media reported.

A senior U.S. defense official says Thursday's attack by Russia appears to be the first phase in what will likely be a multiple phased, large-scale invasion.

The official said it began around 9:30 p.m. U.S. eastern time, with land- and sea-based missile launches. The official said that roughly more than 100 missiles, primarily short-range ballistic missiles, but also medium-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, surface-to-air missiles and sea-launched missiles, were launched in the first few hours of the attack.

The official said the Russians are moving on three axes: From Crimea to Kherson, from Belarus toward Kyiv, and from the northeast to Kharkiv.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said it's not clear how many Russian troops are in Ukraine now, and the main targets of the air assault have been barracks, ammunition warehouses, and 10 airfields. The official said Russian ground forces began to move in to Ukraine from Belarus around 5 a.m. Eastern time.

50 years apart: Philippine activist fights dictator then son

By JIM GOMEZ and JOEAL CALUPITAN Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Memories of the "People Power" revolt by millions of Filipinos who helped overthrow Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos 36 years ago are bittersweet for Loretta Rosales, who opposed him as an activist and was arrested and tortured by his forces before his downfall.

Her battle has gone full circle.

The euphoria over that triumph of democracy in Asia has faded through the years and now looks up-ended with the late dictator's son and namesake a leading candidate in the May 9 presidential election.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 53 of 78

Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s rise loomed large as the Southeast Asian nation marked the anniversary Friday of the army-backed uprising that toppled Marcos and became a harbinger of change in authoritarian regimes worldwide.

"It puzzles and dismays me," said Rosales, who remains a pro-democracy activist at age 82 and is now raising alarms over Marcos Jr. She expressed fears he will take after his father and seek to cover up his crimes and failures.

Rosales was among human rights victims who asked the Commission on Elections to disqualify Marcos Jr. from the presidential race because of a past tax conviction they say showed "moral turpitude" that should bar him from holding public office.

The commission dismissed her petition and five others. All are now on appeal, and an additional one remains pending but will likely also be rejected.

"This is history repeating itself," Rosales said in an interview. "This is round two."

Marcos Jr., 64, who has served as a governor, congressman and senator, leads popularity surveys in the presidential race by a large margin despite his family's history. He has called the allegations against his father "lies" and his campaign steadfastly focuses on a call for unity while staying away from past controversies.

The four-day revolt that forced the elder Marcos from power in 1986 unfolded when then-defense chief Juan Ponce Enrile and his forces withdrew their support from him after their coup plot against the ailing leader was uncovered. Later joined by a top general, Fidel Ramos, they barricaded themselves in two military camps along the main EDSA highway in the capital, where a Roman Catholic leader summoned Filipinos to bring food and support the mutinous troops.

A mammoth crowd turned up and served as a human shield for the defectors. Rosary-clutching nuns, priests and civilians kneeled in front of them and stopped tanks deployed to crush the largely peaceful uprising.

The elder Marcos died in 1989 while in exile in Hawaii without admitting any wrongdoing, including accusations that he, his family and cronies amassed an estimated \$5 billion to \$10 billion while he was in power. A Hawaii court later found him liable for human rights violations and awarded \$2 billion from his estate to compensate more than 9,000 Filipinos led by Rosales who filed a lawsuit against him for torture, extrajudicial killings, incarceration and disappearances.

After the Marcos family returned from exile in the early 1990s, Marcos Jr. decided to run for Congress to protect his family from being hounded politically, he told broadcast journalist Korina Sanchez-Roxas in a recent interview.

In Rosales's suburban Manila home, a wall is filled with mementos of a life of activism, including as a member of the House of Representatives for nine years and later as head of the Commission on Human Rights until 2015. The only reminder of the worst moments is a grainy military mugshot showing her with a tense smile and carrying a nameplate with the scribbled date 4 Aug 76. That was when she and five other anti-Marcos activists were arrested by military agents while meeting in a restaurant four years after Marcos placed the Philippines under martial law in 1972.

"I was smiling, that was before the torture," Rosales said.

For about two days in a military hideout, her captors blindfolded her and clipped wires on her fingers and toes and ran streams of electricity that caused her body to convulse wildly, she said. Her mouth was gagged so she could not scream. At other times, she said she was subjected to Russian roulette, in which a captor pointed a revolver to her head and pulled the trigger several times to force her to inform on other activists. "There was sexual molestation," said Rosales, who was eventually freed.

Nearly four decades after democracy was restored, the Philippines remains mired in poverty, corruption, inequality, long-running communist and Muslim insurgencies and political divisions. Pre-pandemic economic growth mostly benefited the wealthiest families and failed to lift millions from desperation. At the height of the pandemic, unemployment and hunger worsened to record levels.

"Ordinary Filipinos look at these realities and they question whether this is really what they want," Manila-based academic and analyst Richard Heydarian said, adding that disenchantment over the failures

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 54 of 78

of liberal reformist politics in the post-dictatorship era steadily grew. "This is where Marcos came in and said we are the ultimate alternative."

Many Filipinos remember relative peace and quiet under martial law in the 1970s and well as lavish infrastructure projects, and Marcos Jr. has promised increased prosperity and peace.

His current strong following did not emerge overnight. As a vice presidential candidate in 2016, he won more than 14 million votes, losing to Leni Robredo by only 263,000 votes.

Robredo, the leading liberal opposition candidate in the presidential race, ranks second in most popularity polls but is far behind Marcos Jr. three months before the vote.

In a measure of how history has shifted, Enrile, now 98, has endorsed Marcos Jr.'s candidacy. Ex-army Col. Gregorio Honasan, a key leader of the coup plot against the elder Marcos, has been adopted by Marcos Jr. in his senatorial slate. Honasan, 73, said he has not decided whom to support among the presidential aspirants but that the choice of the people should be respected.

"If the Filipino people decide to have a collective national amnesia and say, 'let's give another Marcos a chance,' who are we to question that?" Honasan said in an interview.

Rosales, who backs Robredo, remains hopeful and pointed to large numbers of volunteers who are campaigning for the current vice president on social media and across the country due to exasperation over corrupt and inept politicians.

"This volunteerism is a new kind of resistance," Rosales said. "It is people power."

Asia shares rise after US rebound amid sanctions on Ukraine

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares rose Friday after U.S. stocks recovered toward the end of a wild trading day, as the world, including President Joe Biden, slapped sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 surged 1.4% in morning trading to 26,343.02. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gained 0.5% to 7,022.30. South Korea's Kospi jumped 1.2% to 2,681.19. Hong Kong's Hang Seng added nearly 0.2% to 22,941.59, while the Shanghai Composite rose 0.8% to 3,456.39.

Japan announced additional sanctions on Russia, including freezing the assets of Russian groups, banks and individuals and suspending exports of semiconductors and other sensitive goods to military-linked organizations in Russia.

Earlier in the week, Japan suspended new issuances and distribution of Russian government bonds in Japan, aimed at reducing funding opportunities for Russia. It also banned trade with the two Ukrainian separatist regions.

Despite uncertainty about the Ukraine, as well as worries about inflation and the COVID-19 omicron variant, the turnaround on Wall Street seemed to buoy Asian shares.

"The market pivot came after the announcement of retaliatory measures towards Russia overnight, with the U.S. implementing export controls to cut Russia off from semiconductors and other advanced technology, including software," said Yeap Jun Rong, market strategist at IG in Singapore.

Beyond its tragic human toll, the conflict looked set to send prices even higher at gasoline pumps and grocery stores around the world as prices for oil, wheat and corn soared. Russia and Ukraine are major producers not only of energy but also grains and various other commodities.

The higher cost of gas is likely to further damage Asian economies, already reeling from the coronavirus pandemic. Japan imports almost all its energy, although it does not import a significant amount from Russia.

Oil prices on both sides of the Atlantic briefly jumped above \$100 per barrel to their highest levels since 2014. But they gave back much of their gains after Biden said the sanctions package is "specifically designed to allow energy payments to continue." Biden also said he wanted to limit the economic pain for Americans.

Afterward, the price of U.S. oil settled at \$92.81, up 71 cents for the day, well below the \$100.54 it had touched earlier in the day.

In Asia, benchmark U.S. crude jumped \$2.45 to \$95.26 a barrel. Brent crude added \$2.32 to \$101.40 a

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 55 of 78

barrel.

Prices also rose for everything from heating oil to wheat to gasoline. As with stocks, the movements were sharper in Europe than in the U.S. because its economy is more closely tied to Russia and Ukraine. The spot price in Europe for natural gas jumped more than 50%.

Higher energy and food prices could amplify worries about inflation, which in January hit its hottest level in the United States in a couple generations, and what the Federal Reserve will do in turn to rein it in.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 rallied 1.5% after erasing an early 2.6% loss, while the Nasdaq staged an even bigger comeback to end with a gain of more than 3%. The heaviest losses hit stocks in Europe, where officials called Russia's actions a "brutal act of war," with the German DAX down 4%.

The U.S. Fed looks certain to raise rates for the first time since 2018, with the only question being how quickly and how aggressively it will move, starting next month.

In the past, the Fed has sometimes delayed big policy decisions amid uncertainty over geopolitical events such as the Kosovo war and the U.S. invasion of Iraq, according to Goldman Sachs. But economists at the bank say they still expect the Fed to raise rates steadily at its upcoming meetings.

The Ukraine tensions probably just make it less likely the Fed will start the process with a bigger-than-usual increase in rates, something some Fed officials had recently suggested.

"The Fed may become more worried about the impact on economic growth and will probably want to tread more cautiously," said Kristina Hooper, chief global market strategist at Invesco.

The Fed was already saddled with the delicate task of raising interest rates enough to stamp out high inflation but not so much as to choke the economy into a recession. Strategists at Evercore ISI said that risk still remains, and has become even more complicated by the attack on Ukraine, but that it's "substantially greater in Europe relative to the US."

Many investors also said that past global events, such as an invasion, have had only short-term effects on markets.

With expectations falling for a bigger-than-usual increase in rates, stocks that tend to benefit the most from low interest rates led the way for indexes to pare their losses through the day. That put the spotlight on big tech stocks; Amazon, Microsoft and Nvidia all rose 4.5% or more.

That helped the Nasdaq composite swing from a 3.4% loss in the morning to a 3.3% gain by the end of the day, rising 436.10 points to 13,473.59. It was a remarkable turnaround after the Nasdaq was on track during the morning to close 20% below its record high for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic collapsed the economy in 2020. Expectations for higher interest rates had been beating down high-growth and tech stocks for weeks.

"We're seeing some attempt at bottom-fishing here in terms of prices," said Haworth. Such a "buy-the-dip" ethos has proved profitable in the past, but he said he thinks it's still "a little early. We just have a lot of uncertainty ahead of us."

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which isn't as influenced by big tech stocks, rose a more modest 92.07 points, or 0.3%, to 33,223.83. It rallied back from an earlier 859-point loss. The S&P 500 rose 63.20 points to 4,288.70.

Huge swings also rocked the bond market, where yields initially sank as money moved into investments that looked to offer safer returns than stocks. But yields recovered through the day, and the 10-year Treasury yield was 1.96% in late trading, close to the 1.97% it was at late Wednesday.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar inched down to 115.46 Japanese yen from 115.48 yen. The euro cost \$1.1203, little changed from \$1.1204.

EXPLAINER: A look at US steps taken, and not, against Russia

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden hit Russia with some of the broadest and toughest financial penalties that the world's biggest economy can muster on Thursday, hours after President Vladimir Putin launched his military's invasion of Ukraine.

The U.S. sanctions and penalties announced so far appear to spare Putin himself from sanctions. They

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 56 of 78

also forgo an option long-cited as one of the toughest possible, by holding off from banning Russia from the SWIFT financial system that moves money around the world. Biden cited concerns by European allies.

But the steps the United States took Thursday are powerful ones regardless, aimed at crippling Russia's financial system, its elites and any hopes Russia has of economic growth. Here's a look at the retaliatory financial steps the U.S. announced for Russia's biggest state-owned banks and businesses, its industry, its economy and some of its most powerful people, as well as key measures that the U.S. is still holding off on.

CUTTING RUSSIAN BANKS OFF FROM THE U.S. DOLLAR

Thursday's sanctions target big Russian banks holding nearly 80% of all the country's banking assets, the Treasury Department said.

That includes Russia's two biggest: state-owned SberBank and VTB. Combined, they hold almost \$750 billion in assets, the U.S. said, which is more than half of the entire total in Russia.

Thursday's sanctions on the banks wield the unique power the U.S. has through the dollar, the currency of choice in business transactions around the world.

The targeted banks normally do tens of billions of dollars in business in dollars daily. The U.S. is now cutting them off from the U.S. financial system and U.S. dollar. The aim is to make the most ordinary business matters as well as international trade far more difficult for the banks, and Russia.

Other U.S. measures target key state-owned and private businesses in Russia, aiming to make it harder for them to raise money to invest and operate.

The U.S. also went after more of Russia's elites, sanctioning bankers and other powerful associates of Putin in Russia's top financial, political and security circles.

STARVING RUSSIA'S BUSINESSES, MILITARY OF U.S. HIGH-TECH

Export controls announced by the Biden administration feature another especially strong piece of leverage the U.S. holds — America's semiconductors and other advanced high-tech gear.

Biden said new U.S. export limits will deprive Russia of more than half of its current high-tech supply. It will "strike a blow" to Russia's aims to modernize its military, its vaunted aerospace industry, its space program, shipping and other industry, he declared.

By "reducing their ability to compete economically," the high-tech limits will be a "major hit to long-term strategic ambitions," Biden said.

U.S. export controls are expected to deprive Russian industries and the military of the high-tech U.S. components that help warplanes and passenger jets fly and make smartphones smart, along with other software and advanced electronic gear that make the modern world run.

The U.S. said the European Union, Japan, Britain and other countries were also cooperating in the move to starve Russia of high-tech components.

The U.S. response could add Russia to the most restrictive group of countries for export control purposes, joining Cuba, Iran, North Korea and Syria.

They limit Russia's ability to obtain integrated circuits and products containing integrated circuits, due to the global dominance of U.S. software, technology and equipment. The impact could extend to aircraft avionics, machine tools, smartphones, game consoles, tablets and televisions.

However, U.S. export restrictions would risk motivating businesses to look for alternatives elsewhere, including China.

STEPS THE U.S. DIDN'T TAKE — OR HASN'T YET

Biden says the sanctions against Russia were tailored not to disrupt the global oil and natural gas markets. That's at a time when tight petroleum supply and high prices are making it tough for governments and consumers around the world. The Biden administration itself is under political pressure over rising oil and gas prices.

"Our sanctions package is specifically designed to allow energy payments to continue," Biden said in his White House address Thursday.

Russia is one of the world's top oil and gas exporters. Germany and other allies are heavily dependent on

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 57 of 78

its shipments, despite the strong progress some are making in moving away from fossil fuels. The Biden administration has stressed the care it is taking to minimize sanctions' impact on those allies.

Biden also cited European concerns for the U.S. decision to keep holding off on proposals to ban Russia from the SWIFT financial system, which moves money bank-to-bank around the world.

Leaders of Germany, with its numerous business ties to Russia, had publicly expressed skepticism about banning SWIFT.

Biden told reporters Thursday his banking sanctions will hit Russia even harder than a SWIFT ban would. Some financial experts agree, and say the banking sanctions could also be less disruptive to global financial systems than wrenching Russia out of the SWIFT system would be.

And Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen made clear the U.S. could still levy some punishments that it's currently holding in reserve.

The individual sanctions announced by the United States also spared the prime mover in a Russian invasion that has shaken the security networks of Europe and the world — Putin himself. Individual European sanctions also appear to spare Putin.

U.S. and European officials didn't immediately explain their reasoning in that. Biden has expressed reluctance about sanctioning heads of state in the past. Concern that targeting Putin's wealth and family directly might cut off all hope of diplomatic resolution also may have played a part.

But when asked by reporters to explain that step not taken Thursday, Biden pointedly refused to answer.

For world, Floyd's death was about race. Why not the trials?

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

For people around the world, the killing of George Floyd was about race. A white police officer, with three other officers nearby, knelt on the neck of a Black man until he stopped breathing, and protests erupted across the country. Corporations and governments promised change, and a new generation of civil rights leaders rose up.

Yet in the courtrooms where those officers faced trial for their roles in Floyd's killing — including the three who were convicted Thursday — race was rarely mentioned, at least explicitly, and lawyers and judges told jurors not to consider it.

When a potential juror who appeared to be Black told Judge Paul Magnuson at the trial of former officers J. Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao that he didn't know if he could be impartial "because of my color," Magnuson responded: "There is absolutely nothing about the subject of religion, race or ethnicity that's involved in this case." The man was later dismissed from serving on the jury.

The disconnect between the public prism through which the case was viewed and its handling in court is due partly to the specific charges federal prosecutors pursued, which didn't include a hate crime. But to some, it also reflected the failure of the legal system to confront issues of race, and how a justice system that often seeks to be colorblind may be stacked against people of color.

"Would this have happened to a white man? Probably not. Everyone on the jury knows that, and you have a jury that has no Black people on it," T. Anansi Wilson, director of the Center for the Study of Black Life and the Law at Mitchell Hamline School of Law, said before Thursday's verdict. When he heard Magnuson's comment, Wilson said, "I thought, this is another blow to most people of color, and particularly Black folks', belief in the judicial system."

Floyd, 46, died in May 2020 after Officer Derek Chauvin placed his knee on Floyd's neck and pinned him to the street, facedown and gasping for air, for almost 10 minutes. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back, Lane held down Floyd's legs and Thao kept bystanders from intervening.

Chauvin was convicted last year of state murder and manslaughter charges and was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in prison. In December, he pleaded guilty to a federal charge of violating Floyd's civil rights, including using unreasonable force, by kneeling on Floyd's neck even though he was handcuffed and not resisting — a scene a bystander captured on cellphone video.

Kueng, who is Black; Lane, who is white; and Thao, who is Hmong American, were convicted on federal charges that they willfully deprived Floyd of his constitutional rights while acting under "color of law," or

government authority. They also are scheduled to go on trial in state court in June on charges of aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter.

Federal prosecutors argued at the men's trial in a St. Paul courtroom that the officers saw Floyd needed medical care and did nothing to help as Chauvin slowly killed Floyd in front of them. Defense attorneys argued that Chauvin was the most senior officer on the scene and was calling the shots. They also said Floyd was acting like he was high and struggled with officers, who had responded to a call accusing Floyd of using a counterfeit \$20 bill for a pack of cigarettes at a corner market.

The trial, which focused mostly on what the men did and didn't do, varies from other high-profile civil rights cases that focus explicitly on race, such as the trial of the three men charged with killing Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia. Those men, who are white, were convicted of a hate crime for chasing Arbery down and killing him because he was Black.

To support the hate crime charges, prosecutors presented text messages and social media posts in which two of the men used racist slurs and made derogatory comments about Black people. Witnesses also testified the men made racist statements.

The charges against the officers in the Floyd killing didn't involve questions of racial bias, so attorneys and judges hearing the cases largely steered away from the topics. But the defendants, typically through their attorneys, at times used coded language to raise the topic in jurors' consciousness, legal experts say — from describing Floyd as acting high to being in a gang neighborhood or referring to his superhuman strength.

Mark Osler, a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, said many judges will try to keep "hot-button" topics from being discussed at trial in hopes of avoiding jury decisions that are based on emotion rather than the facts of a case, determining that race isn't relevant to the charges.

He pointed to the federal trial of officers involved in the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles. Four white officers were charged with federal civil rights violations after they were acquitted by a jury in state court of beating the Black motorist. Their acquittals prompted violent race riots, but at their federal trial, race was not a focus, Osler said.

Wilson criticized judges and others in the system who don't want to acknowledge the role race plays, noting it's already an issue in everything from how communities are policed to who writes laws, what constitutes a jury of one's peers and the funding for public defenders' offices. He said he often hears judges and others say they are afraid of politicizing things or that people will lose faith in the system.

"My question is always 'Which people? Who had faith in it in the first place?'" he said. "I don't know many Black folks or other people of color, particularly those that are darker complected, that have any faith in the court system."

To Osler, the judge's admonition that the case wasn't about race was "a fiction."

"This was a case the entire world saw as about race," Osler said. "Whether a judge tells people not to think about race or not, they will."

3 ex-cops convicted of rights violations in Floyd killing

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Three former Minneapolis police officers were convicted Thursday of violating George Floyd's civil rights, as a federal jury rejected their arguments that inexperience, improper training or the distraction of shouting bystanders excused them from failing to prevent Floyd's killing.

Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane were convicted of depriving Floyd of his right to medical care as the 46-year-old Black man was pinned under fellow Officer Derek Chauvin's knee for 9 1/2 minutes while handcuffed, facedown on the street on May 25, 2020. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back, Lane held his legs and Thao kept bystanders back.

Thao and Kueng were also convicted of failing to intervene to stop Chauvin in the videotaped killing that sparked protests in Minneapolis and around the globe as part of a reckoning over racial injustice.

Floyd's brother Philonise Floyd called the verdicts "accountability," but added: "There can never be justice

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 59 of 78

because I can never get George back.”

And Floyd’s nephew Brandon Williams said he hoped the verdicts would change laws and policies to “protect people from these situations.” He also said the outcome “sends a message that says, if you murder or use excessive or deadly force, there’s consequences that follow.”

Lane shook his head and looked at his attorney as his verdict was read. Thao and Kueng showed no visible emotion. Their attorneys declined to comment immediately afterward.

Charles Kovats, acting U.S. attorney for Minnesota, called the convictions a reminder that all sworn law enforcement officers have a duty to intervene.

“These officers had a moral responsibility, a legal obligation and a duty to intervene, and by failing to do so, they committed a crime,” Kovats said.

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.

During the monthlong federal trial, prosecutors sought to show that the officers violated their training, including when they failed to move Floyd or give him CPR. Prosecutors argued that Floyd’s condition was so serious that even bystanders without basic medical training could see he needed help, but that the officers “chose to do nothing.”

The defense said their training was inadequate. Kueng and Lane both said they deferred to Chauvin as the senior officer at the scene. Thao testified that he relied on the other officers to care for Floyd’s medical needs as his attention was elsewhere.

A jury of eight women and four men that appeared to be all-white reached the verdicts after about two days of deliberations. The court did not release demographics such as race or age. Lane is white, Kueng is Black and Thao is Hmong American.

The former officers remain free on bond pending sentencing, which has not yet been scheduled. Conviction of a federal civil rights violation that results in death is punishable by life in prison or even death, but such sentences are extremely rare. Federal sentencing guidelines rely on complicated formulas that indicate the officers would get much less.

Chauvin, who is white, was convicted of murder last year in state court and pleaded guilty in December in the federal case. He was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in the state case. A sentencing date has not yet been set in the federal case, but both sides agreed Chauvin should face a sentence ranging from 20 to 25 years.

Public reaction to Thursday’s verdicts was muted, with only a tiny handful of protesters visible outside the courthouse, which was surrounded by fencing throughout the trial. On the day Chauvin was convicted, many people listened live as his verdicts were read and crowded into the square where he died for a celebration afterward. That trial was livestreamed, while this one was not.

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

The verdicts come just days after the conviction of three white men on hate crimes charges in Georgia in the death of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man who was chased and shot in February 2020.

CDC to significantly ease pandemic mask guidelines Friday

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration will significantly loosen federal mask-wearing guidelines to protect against COVID-19 transmission on Friday, according to two people familiar with the matter, meaning most Americans will no longer be advised to wear masks in indoor public settings.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday will announce a change to the metrics it uses to determine whether to recommend face coverings, shifting from looking at COVID-19 case counts to a more holistic view of risk from the coronavirus to a community. Under current guidelines, masks are recommended for people residing in communities of substantial or high transmission — roughly 95% of

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 60 of 78

U.S. counties, according to the latest data.

The new metrics will still consider caseloads, but also take into account hospitalizations and local hospital capacity, which have been markedly improved during the emergence of the omicron variant. That strain is highly transmissible, but indications are that it is less severe than earlier strains, particularly for people who are fully vaccinated and boosted. Under the new guidelines, the vast majority of Americans will no longer live in areas where indoor masking in public is recommended, based on current data.

The new policy comes as the Biden administration moves to shift its focus to preventing serious illness and death from COVID-19, rather than all instances of infection, as part of a strategy adjustment for a new "phase" in the response as the virus becomes endemic.

The two people familiar with the change spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the CDC's action before the announcement.

The change comes as nearly all U.S. states that had put in place indoor mask-wearing mandates for the winter omicron surge are letting them lapse as cases have precipitously dropped nationwide. Some have eliminated the mandates entirely, while others have kept mask-wearing requirements in place for schools and medical facilities.

It was not immediately clear how the new CDC guidance would affect U.S. federal mandates requiring face coverings on public transportation.

The CDC's director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, has said a change has been in the works.

"We must consider hospital capacity as an additional important barometer. Our hospitals need to be able to take care of people with heart attacks and strokes. Our emergency departments can't be so overwhelmed that patients with emergent issues have to wait in line," she said during a White House briefing last week.

However, she declined to give a specific day when the CDC would announce a change. CDC officials on Thursday refused to confirm a release date.

"At @CDCgov, we have been analyzing our #COVID19 data and shifting our focus to preventing the most severe outcomes and minimizing healthcare strain," Walensky tweeted Thursday night, offering no details on Friday's announcement.

'The worst sunrise in my life': Ukrainians wake to attack

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The missile fragment pierced the ceiling of Mikhail Shcherbakov's apartment in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. A Russian attack, after weeks of rhetoric and warning signs, had hit home.

"I heard noise and woke up. I realized it sounded like artillery," Shcherbakov said. He jumped from the couch and ran to wake his mother, and something exploded behind him.

The missile left a nearby computer and teacup shrouded with dust, instant artifacts of Europe's latest crisis.

At dawn on Thursday, Ukrainians' uneasy efforts at normality were shattered. Smoke rose from cities, even ones well away from a long-running separatist conflict in the country's east. By the end of the day, many of the capital's residents had taken shelter deep underground, in Kyiv's metro system.

"Today I had the worst sunrise in my life," said another Kharkiv resident, who gave her name only as Sasha. She rushed to her balcony and realized the sounds that had woken her weren't fireworks.

Farther from the border, a morning commute transformed into chaos, with lines of cars waiting at fuel stations or fleeing from the gray and drizzly capital, Kyiv. People carrying luggage took shelter in the subway, unsure of where to go.

Some panicked. Others clung to routine, with irritation.

"I'm not afraid. I'm going to work. The only unusual thing is that you can't find a taxi in Kyiv," one resident complained, as air raid sirens wailed.

Many seemed unsure how to react. Kyiv's main street, Khreshchatyk, rippled with anxiety as people checked their phones. Some walked their dogs or waved at friends.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 61 of 78

"I'm not scared at the moment. Maybe I'll be scared later," resident Maxim Prudskoi said.

But elsewhere in the capital, Anna Dovnya watched soldiers and police remove shrapnel from an exploded shell and was terrified. "We have lost all faith," she said. "Until the very last moment, I didn't believe it would happen. I just pushed away these thoughts."

In Mariupol, the Azov Sea port city that many feared would be the first major target because of its strategic importance, AP journalists saw similar scenes of mixed routine and fear.

Some residents waited at bus stops, seemingly on their way to work, while others rushed 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 attack.

"I can't do anything. I'm just stuck standing here," said one Mariupol resident who gave only his first name, Maxim, after running around the city since sunrise in search of cash or a full tank of gas, in vain.

At a supermarket, retiree Anna Efimova worried about her mother, who she said was busy stocking her basement with supplies. "There's nowhere to run, where can we run?" she said.

As the day progressed, alarm rose across Ukraine. People crowded grocery stores. In Kharkiv, worried residents inspected fragments of military hardware strewn across a children's playground.

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

Within an hour of it turning dark, the capital's metro stations had filled with families and children, chatting, playing and eating dinner. People brought sleeping bags and blankets, dogs and crossword puzzles. Some appeared visibly moved by what was happening to their country.

"(I'm here) because I think that it is one of the only places right now where you can hide in Kyiv. All the other places are... terrifying," said Bogdan Voytenko, one of the residents taking shelter in the metro. He said he intended to spend the night in the makeshift bomb shelter along with his two friends. They had brought nuts and dried fruits, and sleeping bags to make the night as comfortable as possible.

"Nobody believed that this war would start, and that they would take Kyiv directly" said Anton Mironov, another man who was sheltering tonight in the old Soviet metro station. "In general, I feel mostly, fatigue. None of it feels real. I don't even know how to relate to it."

Best friends Euhenia Lysenko and Anna Dudka said they were shocked that Russia had launched a "full-scale invasion" and the capital had been hit.

"In the morning, there was total panic. Hysteria. Tears. Fear for your relatives, for your loved ones. And it wasn't clear what to do, where to run, or how to behave" Dudka said.

For weeks, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had tried to moderate expectations of aggression by Russia, even as warnings by the United States became more urgent. Zelenskyy 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.

On Thursday, as the president imposed martial law, Ukrainians realized with a jolt that everything was changing.

"I feel panic, scared and excited. I don't know who I should ask for help," said Kyiv resident Elizaveta Melnik. "We didn't believe this situation would come."

Ukrainians in the western city of Lviv, not far from Poland, began lining up outside gun shops, encouraged by the government to join the national defense.

"We are defending and not attacking," said one resident, who gave his name only as Yuri. "This is our land, and we will fight to the last."

Parents of teen charged in school shooting to stand trial

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

A judge on Thursday ordered the parents of a 15-year-old boy charged with killing four students at his Michigan high school to stand trial on involuntary manslaughter charges.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 62 of 78

Rochester Hills District Court Judge Julie Nicholson said following the preliminary examination for Jennifer and James Crumbley that she found enough evidence to send their case to circuit court.

They are charged with involuntary manslaughter and accused of making the gun used in the shooting available to the teen. The couple is also accused of failing to intervene when he showed signs of mental distress at home and at school.

Ethan Crumbley is charged as an adult with first-degree murder, assault with intent to murder, terrorism and gun charges in the Nov. 30 shooting at Oxford High School, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of Detroit. Six other students and a teacher were wounded.

The gun used in the shooting was given to Ethan Crumbley as an early Christmas present, prosecutors have said.

"The court finds that the deaths of the four victims could have been avoided if James and Jennifer Crumbley exercised ordinary care and diligence in the care of their son," Nicholson said.

Nicholson said prosecutors showed Ethan Crumbley presented a danger to the community and "that danger was apparent to an ordinary mind." Testimony showed that Ethan Crumbley was a "troubled young man" and his parents knew it, she said.

"But they purchased a gun which he believed was his," Nicholson added.

The Crumbleys' attorneys insisted the couple didn't know their son might plan an attack and didn't make the gun easy to find in their home, but Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald said Thursday that Ethan Crumbley reached out to his parents for help.

And while no help was forthcoming, the coming trouble was foreseeable, she said.

"You're allowed to be a terrible parent," McDonald said. "if that's all this was, we wouldn't be here."

On the morning of the shooting, Ethan's parents were summoned to the school and confronted with his drawings, which included a handgun and the words: "The thoughts won't stop. Help me." Authorities said the parents refused to take him home after the 13-minute meeting.

Ethan's counselor testified Thursday that he told the teen's parents at that meeting that he believed their son was a threat to himself and needed mental health support.

"I said as soon as possible, today if possible," Shawn Hopkins said. But, he testified, Jennifer Crumbley told him, "Today was not an option because they had to return to work."

"I wrote Ethan a pass back to class," Hopkins continued. "I told him, 'I just want you to know I care about you.' I don't remember them saying goodbye (to Ethan)."

Prosecutors alluded to a disconnect between Ethan and his parents, including texts he made to a friend in which he talks about his "dark side."

"In a text on April 5, 2021, Ethan writes: 'Now my mom thinks I take drugs. Like she thinks the reason why I'm so mad and sad all the time is because I take drugs, and she doesn't worry about my mental health,'" assistant prosecutor Marc Keast said. "And then he writes: 'They make me feel like I'm the problem.'"

Testimony also was given Thursday about what was written in a journal found in Ethan's backpack following the shooting. Authorities have said the gun used in the shooting was hidden in the backpack that day.

One entry dated Nov. 29 stated, "first off, I got my gun... second, the shooting is tomorrow, I have access to the gun and ammo," read Oakland County sheriff's Lt. Timothy Willis.

Another page featured the drawing of a bullet being fired into the back of what appears to be a person's head. "Just above it, it says 'the first victim has to be pretty girl with a future so she can suffer like me,'" Willis read.

Willis also said another entry read, "I have fully mentally lost it after years of fighting with my dark side. My parents won't listen. I have zero help with my mental problems and its causing me to shoot up the (expletive) school."

But Shannon Smith, Jennifer Crumbley's lawyer, pointed out that the journal also contained the entry: "I'm sorry for this mom and dad. I'm not trying to hurt you by doing this. I have to do this," and "I will have to find where my dad hid my 9 mm before I can shoot the school."

"The element that the prosecution in this case can never prove is that Jennifer Crumbley or James Crum-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 63 of 78

bley knew that their son was going to commit a school shooting,” Smith said in her closing statement.

The Crumbleys remain jailed on \$500,000 bond. The case against them is highly unusual because parents are rarely held criminally responsible for teens accused in mass school shootings.

Last month, Ethan Crumbley’s attorneys filed a notice of an insanity defense.

He is lodged alone in a cell in the Oakland County Jail’s clinic to keep him from seeing and hearing adult inmates. Defense attorneys want him moved to a juvenile facility, but prosecutors say he would pose a potential risk of harm to the safety of other juveniles.

An Oakland County Circuit Court judge said during a hearing for Ethan Crumbley on Tuesday that he expected to have a ruling by early next week on whether the teen will remain in the adult jail or be transferred to the county’s Children’s Village.

Texas clinics battle strict abortion law as legal hopes dim

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — The nation’s strictest abortion law went before the Texas Supreme Court on Thursday but an attorney representing abortion clinics said he no longer sees a way in this case to halt the law.

The Austin-based court took no immediate action over Texas’ restrictive law, which since September has banned abortions after roughly six weeks of pregnancy and has resulted in a sharp drop of abortions across the state.

But an attorney for abortion clinics said that even the court’s best-case ruling for them wouldn’t undo the law that is enforced by private citizens who can collect \$10,000 or more by suing doctors who perform abortions.

“It will not stop the bounty-hunting scheme or fully restore abortion access across the state,” Marc Herron, senior counsel at the Center for Reproductive Rights, said after the hearing.

In December, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to keep the law in place and allowed only a narrow challenge against the restrictions to proceed. So on Thursday, the Texas Supreme Court, which is entirely controlled by Republican justices, heard arguments on the issue of whether state licensing officials have a role in enforcing the law.

Herron said that if the state Supreme Court rules that licensing officials can’t enforce the law in any way, that would “effectively end” their challenge to the law.

He said that if the court said such officials could enforce the law, they would seek an injunction so the officials couldn’t revoke the licenses of abortion providers who performed abortions after six weeks.

“The best outcome we can get in this case would be a ruling blocking the state licensing officials from disciplining doctors and nurses, pharmacists and facilities or revoking those facility licenses for violating” the law, he said.

The attorney representing Texas, Judd E. Stone II, told the judges that the law is clear that no enforcement “may be taken or threatened by the state.”

“If a state official revoked a doctor’s license as a consequence of violating (the law), any ordinary individual would describe that as enforcement,” Stone said.

In the meantime, the U.S. Supreme Court in a ruling expected this summer in a Mississippi case has signaled a willingness to weaken or reverse the landmark Roe v. Wade decision guaranteeing a right to an abortion.

Shortly after the Texas law known as Senate Bill 8 took effect, a lawsuit filed in federal court argued it was enacted “in open defiance of the Constitution.” U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman ordered Texas to suspend the law but barely two days later, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated the law, which which doesn’t make exceptions for rape or incest.

After the U.S. Supreme Court weighed in, the case went back to the 5th Circuit, which ruled against sending the case back Pitman — the only judge who has ever blocked the restrictions — and instead sent it to the Texas Supreme Court.

Figures recently released by Texas showed that abortions fell by 60% in the first month under the law,

from over 5,400 abortions in August to nearly 2,200 abortions in September.

Analysis: Ukraine crisis reshaping Biden's presidency

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia's expanding invasion of Ukraine has opened a new and perilous chapter in Joe Biden's presidency, testing his aspirations to defend democracy on a global level and thrusting him into a long-term struggle to restore European security.

It's a far different trajectory than he imagined when his administration began last year with the goals of countering China's growing influence in the world and reinvesting at home as the United States tried to turn the page on a deadly pandemic.

Biden talked about forging a "stable and predictable" relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a description that implied America's focus could then be directed toward other, more pressing challenges.

Now he is confronted with the outbreak of the worst fighting in Europe since World War II. Although U.S. forces are not directly involved, the conflict is testing the limits of American power and Biden's campaign assurances that he was well positioned to lead the country on the international stage.

"We stand up to bullies," Biden said Thursday at the White House. "We stand up for freedom. This is who we are."

His efforts to prevent the invasion — by threatening sanctions and exposing Russian subterfuge — were not successful. U.S. officials believe Moscow plans to topple Ukraine's democratically elected government and install a puppet regime in its place.

The grim scenario has forced Biden to shift toward complex plans to economically punish Russia and demonstrate the danger of an authoritarian government overturning a neighboring democracy.

"This is a fight that could take years," said Timothy Naftali, a historian at New York University who has studied the U.S. presidency and the Soviet Union. "The future of Europe depends on the Kremlin paying a price for war crimes. If Putin gets away with this, what country is next?"

Biden announced additional sanctions Thursday, targeting Russian banks by freezing assets held in Western nations and limiting Moscow's ability to import crucial technology such as semiconductors.

"We have purposely designed these sanctions to maximize a long-term impact on Russia and to minimize the impact on the United States and our allies," Biden said.

What about the impact on him and his party?

The struggle will test American patience for playing a major role in foreign conflicts, even if U.S. troops are not themselves fighting. Biden already faces sagging approval ratings, and his domestic agenda, including education initiatives and climate programs, has stalled. Now the economic ripple effects from sanctions could contribute to inflation and higher gas prices at a time when the Democrats already are seen as likely to lose control of Congress in November's midterm elections.

"I want to limit the pain the American people are feeling at the gas pump," he said. "This is critical to me."

Maintaining a united front with allies could also prove challenging. Although the White House has emphasized international solidarity, European nations usually have varying appetites for challenging Moscow and cutting themselves off from the financial largesse of its oligarchs. There's dissension over whether to cut off Russia's access to SWIFT, an international network that enables global bank transfers.

Biden predicted that Putin is "going to test the resolve of the West to see if we'll stay together. And we will."

Naftali said Biden, a politician with deep foreign policy experience who has embraced the traditional American role of anchoring the trans-Atlantic alliance, is "almost uniquely qualified to provide that leadership."

"It recasts his presidency," he said. "And this gives him an opportunity to demonstrate the arguments that you need a president who understands alliances and realizes you can't go it alone."

Strengthening international relationships was part of Biden's pitch to voters when he was running against President Donald Trump, who scorned longstanding alliances in Europe.

And while Trump displayed coziness with Putin, Biden cast the Russian leader as an adversary in a global

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 65 of 78

struggle between autocracy and democracy.

"Vladimir Putin wants to tell himself and anyone he can dupe into believing him that the liberal idea is obsolete – because he's afraid of its power," Biden said in a foreign policy speech during his presidential campaign.

On Thursday, he described Putin as someone with a "sinister vision for the future of our world," a place where "nations take what they want by force."

The conflict in Ukraine is only the most violent slice in a worldwide tug-of-war over democracy's future. China has also held itself out as an alternative to Western liberalism, meaning Biden faces encroaching authoritarian powers on two fronts.

"The U.S. will have to manage both an aggressive and dangerous Russian dictator, on the one hand, and a more subtle but equally challenging Chinese regime," said Eliot A. Cohen, a former State Department counselor who is now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

A reminder of the challenges on the other side of the globe came Thursday when Taiwan said Chinese aircraft entered the island's air defense zone.

Although such maneuvers have become routine in recent months, the latest was viewed warily as analysts wonder what lessons Chinese President Xi Jinping will take from the Ukraine crisis. China considers Taiwan, a self-governing island off the mainland's coast, to be part of its territory.

There is also the potential for the war in Ukraine to snowball into an even greater crisis.

Fighting took place around Chernobyl, where the worst nuclear disaster in history took place in 1986. Disruptions at the site, which is now controlled by the Russians, could allow radioactive dust to escape and float over the area — or even neighboring countries.

"This is a declaration of war against the whole of Europe," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tweeted of the Chernobyl attack.

Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., suggested it "would certainly trigger Article 5," the mutual defense commitment of NATO.

Already some NATO members in the region have invoked Article 4, which requires consultation when countries fear their territories are under threat. Ukraine itself is not a member of the alliance.

The Pentagon is deploying another 7,000 troops to Europe and shifting further east some assets that are already there, including attack helicopters and advanced fighter jets. Biden pledged the U.S. "will defend every inch of NATO territory with the full force of American power."

Douglas Brinkley, a presidential historian at Rice University, said Biden "has to be ardent and tough but not let the situation unravel into World War III."

"You don't want Russian expansionism to metastasize," he said. "This has to be quickly contained."

The problem for Biden, he said, is "this can ring people's Jimmy Carter bell," referring to the former president's struggle to respond to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

"Biden has to look at the politics of the situation," he said. "The Republicans are going to paint him as the president who caused this."

Trump himself, who remains influential in the Republican Party, has praised Putin as "pretty smart" for his handling of Ukraine.

Biden is already suffering from low support. Overall, 44% of Americans approve of his job as president, while 55% disapprove, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

An earlier AP-NORC poll conducted in January found that just 25% of Americans thought that "strong leader" was a phrase that described Biden extremely or very well.

Now Biden has both the challenge and the opportunity to prove his doubters wrong.

Oscar-nominated 'MASH' actor Sally Kellerman dies at 84

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Sally Kellerman, the Oscar and Emmy nominated actor who played Margaret "Hot

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 66 of 78

Lips" Houlihan in director Robert Altman's 1970 film "MASH," died Thursday.

Kellerman died of heart failure at her home in the Woodland Hills section of Los Angeles, her manager and publicist Alan Eichler said. She was 84.

Kellerman had a career of more than 60 years in film and television. She played a college professor who was returning student Rodney Dangerfield's love interest in the 1986 comedy "Back to School." And she was a regular in Altman's films, appearing in 1970's "Brewster McCloud," 1992's "The Player" and 1994's "Ready to Wear."

But she would always be best known for playing Major Houlihan, a straitlaced, by-the-book Army nurse who is tormented by rowdy doctors during the Korean War in the army comedy "MASH."

In the film's key scene, and its peak moment of misogyny, a tent where Houlihan is showering is pulled open and she is exposed to an audience of cheering men.

"This isn't a hospital, this is an insane asylum!" she screams at her commanding officer.

She carries on a torrid affair with the equally uptight Major Frank Burns, played by Robert Duvall, demanding that he kiss her "hot lips" in a moment secretly broadcast over the camp's public address speakers, earning her the nickname.

Kellerman said Altman brought out the best in her.

"It was a very freeing, positive experience," she told Dick Cavett in a 1970 TV interview. "For the first time in my life I took chances, I didn't suck in my cheeks, or worry about anything."

The film was nominated for five Academy Awards, but her best supporting actress was its only acting nod despite a cast that included Duvall, Donald Sutherland and Elliot Gould.

The movie would be turned into a TV series that lasted 11 seasons, with Loretta Swit in Kellerman's role.

Sally Clare Kellerman was born in 1937 in Long Beach, California, the daughter of a piano teacher and an oil executive, moving to Los Angeles as a child and attending Hollywood High School.

Her initial interest was in jazz singing, and she was signed to a contract with Verve records at age 18. She opted to pursue acting and didn't put out any music until 1972, when she released the album "Roll With the Feeling." She would sing on the side, and sometimes in roles, throughout her career, releasing her last album, "Sally," in 2007.

She took an acting class at Los Angeles City College and appeared in a stage production of "Look Back in Anger" with classmate Jack Nicholson and several other future stars.

She worked mostly in television early in her career, with a lead role in 1962's "Cheyenne" and guest appearances on "The Twilight Zone," "The Outer Limits," "The Alfred Hitchcock Hour" and "Bonanza."

Her appearance in the original "Star Trek" pilot as Dr. Elizabeth Dehner won her cult status among fans.

She would work primarily in film in the years following "MASH," including 1972's "Last of the Red Hot Lovers" and 1975's "Rafferty and the Gold Dust Twins," both with Alan Arkin, 1973's "Slither" with James Caan, 1979's "A Little Romance" with Laurence Olivier and 1980's "Foxes" with Jodie Foster.

She would work into her 80s, with several acclaimed television performances in her final years.

She starred in the comedy series "Decker" with Tim Heidecker and played comedian Mark Maron's mother on his series "Maron."

"Sally Kellerman was radiant and beautiful and fun and so great to work with," Maron said on Twitter Thursday. "My real mom was very flattered and a bit jealous. I'm sad she's gone."

And in 2014 she was nominated for an Emmy for her recurring role on "The Young and the Restless."

Kellerman was married to television producer Rick Edelstein from 1970 to 1972 and to movie producer Jonathan D. Krane from 1980 until his death in 2016.

She is survived by her son Jack and daughter Claire.

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

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the opening hours of Russia's assault on Ukraine, ballistic missiles by the dozens struck mostly military targets across the country, but there was little sign of Russian soldiers crossing the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 67 of 78

border or naval infantry landing on Ukraine's shores.

So was this an invasion, or something less? The ambiguity did not last long.

Russian ground forces soon captured the Chernobyl nuclear site north of Kyiv, the capital, and other Russian troops were seen moving on Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city to the east. Pentagon officials said Thursday this was the first phase of a Russian war whose ultimate aim appeared to be "decapitation" of the Ukrainian government, meaning the removal by force of its elected leadership.

President Joe Biden, who two days earlier declared "the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine" when Russian forces began moving into the separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, used other terms Thursday when he announced a new set of economic sanctions against Moscow. He called it a "brutal assault," and said, "This is a premeditated attack."

"Putin chose this war," Biden said, and the United States and others will fight back with non-military means. He announced U.S. sanctions targeting Russian banks, oligarchs and high-tech sectors. U.S. and other international sanctions are the West's main tool for punishing Putin; unless he extends the war into NATO territory, the U.S. and its allies will not join the fighting.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE GROUND IN UKRAINE?

The full dimensions of the Russian invasion are not yet clear. As expected, Putin has used a lethal combination of attacks, including cyberattacks, missile and artillery strikes, airborne assaults and other means to try to disrupt Ukrainian commanders' ability to direct a cohesive defense. He appeared to be laying the groundwork for an intensifying assault.

In announcing his "special military operation," Putin said his goal was to "demilitarize" Ukraine, a euphemism for destroying its armed forces. Whether that entails capturing control of the entire country, in addition to Kyiv, is yet to be seen.

Ukrainian forces were fighting back, but the scale and effectiveness of their defenses was hard to judge in the early going.

IS THIS AN INVASION?

Even after U.S. officials began calling this an invasion, news organizations, including The Associated Press, were hesitant to do so until they could confirm that the initial wave of air attacks was followed by ground forces entering Ukrainian territory.

In his remarks from the White House on Thursday, Biden said there can be little doubt that Putin had long planned to invade.

"Vladimir Putin has been planning this for months, as we've been saying all along," Biden said. "He moved more than 175,000 troops and military equipment into positions along the Ukrainian border. He moved blood supplies into position and built field hospitals, which tells you all that you need to know about his intentions all along."

Mary Ellen O'Connell, a Notre Dame law professor and an expert on international law and the use of force, says any crossing of a national border with military forces is unlawful, even if it's called something other than an invasion. On Thursday she called Putin's invasion "the most serious violation of international law in Europe since World War II."

"He and his leadership are criminally responsible for the deaths and destruction that are occurring as Ukraine attempts to defend its very existence as an independent state," O'Connell said. "Other states in the world have certain obligations to support Ukraine and the rule of law. There is no obligation to join Ukraine in fighting Russia. There is an obligation to do everything short of that step."

WHAT WILL WASHINGTON DO NEXT?

After stating publicly that Russia has again invaded Ukraine, after seizing the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, the question is how far Biden will go in responding. He has made clear that he would not send U.S. troops into Ukraine, but on Thursday he ordered the deployment of more U.S. troops to Europe. The Pentagon said Biden approved sending approximately 7,000 additional troops, comprised of an Army brigade of armored forces and support troops. They will deploy to Germany, the Pentagon said, to reassure NATO Allies, deter Russian aggression and "be prepared to support a range of requirements in the region."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 68 of 78

Global reaction against Putin's invasion of Ukraine has been swift, with little argument about the legality. Jens Stoltenberg, the secretary-general of NATO, called the invasion an unprovoked and unjustified assault on Ukraine.

"We now have war in Europe, on a scale and of a type we thought belong to history," he said.

WILL RUSSIAN TROOPS STOP AT INVADING UKRAINE?

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

Biden said he would participate in a virtual conference Friday with the heads of other NATO governments to assess the war in Ukraine and coordinate a strategy for responding to the crisis, including a potential flood of refugees.

"The United States will defend every inch of NATO territory with the full force of American power," he said.

Hundreds arrested as shocked Russians protest Ukraine attack

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Shocked Russians turned out by the thousands Thursday to decry their country's invasion of Ukraine as emotional calls for protests grew on social media. Some 1,745 people in 54 Russian cities were detained, at least 957 of them in Moscow.

Hundreds of posts came pouring in condemning Moscow's most aggressive actions since the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Vladimir Putin called the attack a "special military operation" to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine from "genocide" — a false claim the U.S. had predicted would be a pretext for invasion, and which many Russians roundly rejected.

Tatyana Usmanova, an opposition activist in Moscow, wrote on Facebook that she thought she was dreaming when she awoke at 5:30 a.m. to the news, which she called "a disgrace that will be forever with us now."

"I want to ask Ukrainians for forgiveness. We didn't vote for those who unleashed the war," she said.

As sirens blasted in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, and large explosions were heard there and in other cities, Russians were signing open letters and online petitions demanding the Kremlin halt the assault, which the Ukrainian health minister said had killed at least 57 Ukrainians and wounded dozens more.

"Public opinion is in shock, people are in shock," political analyst Abbas Gallyamov told The Associated Press.

One petition, started by a prominent human rights advocate, Lev Ponomavov, garnered over 150,000 signatures within several hours and more than 330,000 by the end of the day. More than 250 journalists put their names on an open letter decrying the aggression. Another one was signed by some 250 scientists, while 194 municipal council members in Moscow and other cities signed a third.

"I'm worried about the people very much, I'm worried to tears," said Zoya Vorobey, a resident of Korolyov, a town outside Moscow, her voice cracking. "I've been watching television since this morning, every minute, to see if anything changes. Unfortunately, nothing."

Several Russian celebrities and public figures, including some working for state TV, spoke out against the attack. Yelena Kovalskaya, director of a state-funded Moscow theater, announced on Facebook she was quitting her job, saying "it's impossible to work for a killer and get paid by him."

"I know that right now many of you feel desperation, helplessness, shame over Vladimir Putin's attack on the friendly nation of Ukraine. But I urge you not to despair," human rights activist Marina Litvinovich said in a video statement on Facebook, calling for mass protests Thursday evening.

"We, the Russian people, are against the war Putin has unleashed. We don't support this war, it is being waged not on our behalf," Litvinovich said.

But the authorities were having none of that.

In Moscow and other cities, they moved swiftly to crack down on critical voices. Litvinovich was detained

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 69 of 78

outside of her residence shortly after posting the protest call. OVD-Info, a rights group that tracks political arrests, reported that 1,745 people in 54 cities had been detained by Thursday evening, at least 957 of them in Moscow.

Russia's Investigative Committee issued a warning Thursday afternoon reminding Russians that unauthorized protests are against the law.

Roskomnadzor, state communications and media watchdog, demanded that Russian media use "information and data they get only from official Russian sources." Some media reported that employees of certain state-funded companies were instructed not to comment publicly on the events in Ukraine.

Human rights advocates warned of a new wave of repression on dissent.

"There will be new (criminal) cases involving subverters, spies, treason, prosecution for antiwar protests, there will be detentions of journalists and bloggers, those who authored critical posts on social media, bans on investigations of the situation in the army and so on," prominent human rights advocate Pavel Chikov wrote on Facebook.

"It is hard to say how big this new wave will be, given that everything has been suppressed already."

Despite the pressure from the authorities, more than 1,000 people gathered in the center of Moscow Thursday evening, chanting "No to war!" as passing cars honked their horns.

Hundreds also took to the streets in St. Petersburg and dozens in Yekaterinburg.

"This is the most shameful and terrible day in my life. I even was not able to go to work. My country is an aggressor. I hate Putin. What else should be done to make people open their eyes?" Yekaterina Kuznetsova, 40-year-old engineer who joined the demonstration in St. Petersburg, told the AP.

Russia's official line in the meantime remained intransigent. Speaker of the upper house of parliament, Valentina Matviyenko charged that those who spoke out against the attack were only caring about their "momentary problems."

State TV painted the attack in line with what Putin said in his televised address announcing it.

Russia 1 TV host Olga Skabeyeva called it an effort "to protect people in Donbas from a Nazi regime" and said it was "without exaggeration, a crucial junction in history."

Chernobyl no-go zone targeted as Russia invades Ukraine

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — It was among the most worrying developments on an already shocking day, as Russia invaded Ukraine on Thursday: warfare at the Chernobyl nuclear plant, where radioactivity is still leaking from history's worst nuclear disaster 36 years ago.

Russian forces took control over the site after a fierce battle with Ukrainian national guards protecting the decommissioned plant, Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak told The Associated Press. The condition of the plant's facilities, a confinement shelter and a repository for nuclear waste is unknown, he said.

An official familiar with current assessments said Russian shelling hit a radioactive waste repository at Chernobyl, and an increase in radiation levels was reported. The increase could not be immediately corroborated.

A senior American intelligence official said the U.S. believes Russian forces at Chernobyl were aiming to push to Kyiv, about 130 kilometers (80 miles) south of the plant, to try to link with other Russian forces throughout Ukraine. The officials were not authorized to be publicly named discussing the sensitive matter.

The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, a 2,600-square-kilometer (1,000-square-mile) zone of forest surrounding the shuttered plant, lies between the Belarus-Ukraine border and the Ukrainian capital.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian officers fought to defend it, "so that the tragedy of 1986 will not be repeated." He called it a "declaration of war against the whole of Europe."

Adviser Podolyak said that after an "absolutely senseless attack ... it is impossible to say that the Chernobyl nuclear power plant is safe." He warned that Russian authorities could blame Ukraine for damage to the site or stage provocations from there.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 70 of 78

Ukrainian Interior Ministry adviser Anton Herashenko warned that any attack on the waste repository could send radioactive dust over "the territory of Ukraine, Belarus and countries of the EU."

Russian officials, who have revealed little of their operations in Ukraine and not revealed their goals, did not publicly comment on the battle.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it is following the situation in Ukraine "with grave concern" and appealed for maximum restraint to avoid any action that may put Ukraine's nuclear facilities at risk.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, the IAEA's general director, said Ukraine has informed the Vienna-based agency that "unidentified armed forces" have taken control of all facilities at the plant and that there had been no casualties or destruction at the industrial site. Grossi said it is "of vital importance that the safe and secure operations of the nuclear facilities in that zone should not be affected or disrupted in any way."

Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists in Washington, said, "I can't imagine how it would be in Russia's interest to allow any facilities at Chernobyl to be damaged."

In an interview, Lyman said he is most worried about spent fuel stored at the site, which has not been active since 2000. If the power to cooling pumps is disrupted or fuel-storage tanks are damaged, the results could be catastrophic, he said.

Reactor No. 4 at the power plant exploded and caught fire deep in the night on April 26, 1986, shattering the building and spewing radioactive material high into the sky.

Soviet authorities made the catastrophe even worse by failing to tell the public what had happened, angering European governments and the Soviet people. The 2 million residents of Kyiv weren't informed despite the fallout danger, and the world learned of the disaster only after heightened radiation was detected in Sweden.

The building containing the exploded reactor was covered in 2017 by an enormous shelter aimed at containing radiation still leaking from the accident. Robots inside the shelter work to dismantle the destroyed reactor and gather up the radioactive waste.

It's expected to take until 2064 to finish dismantling the reactors. Ukraine decided to use the deserted zone as the site for its centralized storage facility for spent fuel from the country's other remaining nuclear power plants.

Germany's vice chancellor and economy minister, Robert Habeck, told The Associated Press that Russia would not need to obtain nuclear material from Chernobyl if it wanted to use it for any purpose, because it has enough such material of its own.

Analysis: Putin's war imperils global security arrangements

By JOHN DANISZEWSKI Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — It was the tale of two Vladimirs — one noble, grim and stubbornly open to peace; the other angry, threatening and bellicose — on a day that seemed to presage the demise of the security architecture, consensus and arrangements that have kept Europe and the world, for the most part, stable and secure for three-quarters of a century.

As missiles and a sense of tragedy rained down on the great European plain early Thursday, the eve-of-war remarks of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin showed the starkly opposing poles of this conflict.

Putin, wearing the same clothing and in the same seated position of his history-twisting speech of Monday night, raising the likelihood that the remarks were prepared and taped two days before, announced that Russia is launching a special military operation supposedly in defense of the two breakaway districts of Ukraine that his government has recently declared sovereign.

That he was announcing an attack on a neighboring country and unilaterally abdicating the international agreement that national borders should not be changed by force was glossed over by him. Instead he insisted that Ukraine, the country he likes to call Little Russia, was an existential threat to Big Russia, and preparing to attack his country that is three times its size and vastly better armed.

And in a naked message to the rest of the world, he threatened any foreign country attempting to in-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 71 of 78

terfere with "consequences you have never seen." Not since the time of Nikita Khrushchev has a Russian leader waved Moscow's nuclear sword so brazenly.

Putin's speech repeated a litany of accusations against the United States, which he called "an empire of lies," and included U.S. allies, or its "satellites" as he called them, part of that empire.

He denounced past U.S. military interventions in Syria, Iraq, Libya and the Balkans. He insisted that the ultimate U.S. end goal was to end Russia's sovereignty.

And he accused the Ukrainians of being a collection of neo-Nazis and far-right nationalists who, he claimed, are aspiring to get nuclear weapons. (In fact, Ukraine voluntarily eliminated the part of the Soviet nuclear arsenal that it controlled in the 1990s, along with Belarus and Kazakhstan.)

Instead of a war of aggression, he said the operation would be a defensive one to save the people of the region known as Donbas. "They left us no choice."

Zelenskyy, in a tailored suit standing in front of a map of Ukraine late Thursday, was not aggressive. He was pleading in a dignified way over Putin's head to the Russian people in their own Russian language: please stop this madness.

It was unlikely many Russians would see Zelenskyy's message. State broadcast media was long ago captured in Putin's Russia. Only those with internet access or who listened to foreign broadcasters on the internet would have heard him.

But they are not stupid. The reality that Russia is launching a war with unknown consequences was reflected in a crash of the Russian stock market and lines at ATMs of Russians eager to take out cash from banks that have been or may soon be sanctioned and cut off from the international financial network.

Nevertheless, Zelenskyy's address was moving. He said that he had tried Wednesday to call Putin directly. "The result was silence."

Instead he switched from Ukrainian to Russian to address Russians directly. He said it was absurd that Ukrainians harbored hatred for their compatriots in the breakaway regions, areas where he grew up and where his best friend lived. How could he be accused of being a Nazi, he asked.

Explaining to Russians who may not be aware that their joint 2,000-kilometer (1,200-mile) border with Ukraine was ringed with nearly 200,000 Russian troops, he said nobody needs a hot war, a cold war or a hybrid war. "The people of Ukraine and the government of Ukraine want peace," he intoned somberly, speaking in a mild tone with the ease and directness of a former television actor.

He said that Ukraine would be ready for whatever is to come.

"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, but our faces," he said.

Within hours, rockets and barrages began falling on military installations all across Ukraine.

Ironically, the forum created after World War II to resolve such threats of conflict, the U.N. Security Council, is currently chaired by Russia, one of the five permanent members that has veto power over any actions.

The emergency Security Council meeting, which was still taking place as Putin announced his intentions, soon broke up with angry words between the envoy from Ukraine and the envoy from Russia. Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia insisted that what was happening was not a war, but a "special military operation."

"Lunatic semantics," responded the Ukrainian ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, outside the meeting.

But on the first day of the assault on Ukraine, everyone seemed to reckon that the world cannot go back to the assured détente and balance of power that kept the European continent mostly free of major warfare between nations since 1945, a long peace that has allowed millions of people to thrive and generations to grow up relatively unscathed by fear of a devastated future.

"Peace on our continent has been shattered," declared Jens Stoltenberg, secretary general of NATO, as reports of first casualties began to trickle in.

For the West, the immediate answer will be imposing harsh sanctions against Putin, his associates and the Russian state. President Joe Biden has ruled out a U.S. military response. But such sanctions will have

an economic cost to Americans, Europeans and people around the globe.

What follows next, as many Ukrainians take to their vehicles to flee the country and others wait to be distributed arms by their government, and as NATO builds up forces in the countries that now face directly the Russian threat, from Estonia to the north to Romania in the south, is unpredictable as in all wars.

Governments are recalculating and internal European quarrels for now are being set aside to adjust to a new reality.

Anna-Lena Lauren, a columnist in Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter, predicted that the attack may mean the end of the aging Putin's near absolute rule.

"The Russian dictator will not survive his catastrophically miscalculated decision in the long run. And history won't be kind," she said.

"A war that will not yield any results, that lacks the support of the people and that leads to bloodshed for a peaceful neighbor to which a large part of the Russians have emotional ties. The madness is complete."

EXPLAINER: Why Putin uses WWII to justify attacks in Ukraine

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Vladimir Putin told the world in the lead-up to Thursday's attacks on Ukraine that his operation aims to "denazify" Ukraine, a country with a Jewish president who lost relatives in the Holocaust and who heads a Western-backed, democratically elected government.

The Holocaust, World War II and Nazism have been important tools for Putin in his bid to legitimize Russia's moves in Ukraine, but historians see their use as disinformation and a cynical ploy to further the Russian leader's aims.

Israel has proceeded cautiously, seeking not to jeopardize its security ties with the Kremlin, despite what it considers the sacred memory of the 6 million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust.

Here's a closer look at how the ghosts of the past are shaping today's conflict:

THE WAR THAT DEFINES RUSSIA

World War II, in which the Soviet Union lost an estimated 27 million people, is a linchpin of Russia's national identity. In today's Russia, officials bristle at any questioning of the USSR's role.

Some historians say this has been coupled with an attempt by Russia at retooling certain historical truths from the war. They say Russia has tried to magnify the Soviet role in defeating the Nazis while playing down any collaboration by Soviet citizens in the persecution of Jews.

On Ukraine, Russia has tried to link the country to Nazism, particularly those who have led it since a pro-Russian leadership was toppled in 2014.

This goes back to 1941 when Ukraine, at the time part of the Soviet Union, was occupied by Nazi Germany. Some Ukrainian nationalists welcomed the Nazi occupiers, in part as a way to challenge their Soviet opponents, according to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial. Historians say that, like in other countries, there was also collaboration.

Some of Ukraine's politicians since 2014 have sought to glorify nationalist fighters from the era, focusing on their opposition to Soviet rule rather than their collaboration and documented crimes against Jews, as well as Poles living in Ukraine.

But making the leap from that to claiming Ukraine's current government is a Nazi state does not reflect the reality of its politics, including the landslide election of a Jewish president and the aim of many Ukrainians to strengthen the country's democracy, reduce corruption and move closer to the West.

"In terms of all of the sort of constituent parts of Nazism, none of that is in play in Ukraine. Territorial ambitions. State-sponsored terrorism. Rampant antisemitism. Bigotry. A dictatorship. None of those are in play. So this is just total fiction," said Jonathan Dekel-Chen, a history professor at Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

What's more, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is Jewish and has said that three of his grandfather's brothers were killed by German occupiers while his grandfather survived the war. That hasn't stopped Russian officials from comparing Zelenskyy to Jews who were forced to collaborate with the Nazis during

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 73 of 78

the Holocaust.

HOLOCAUST DISTORTION

Putin's attempts to stretch history for political motives is part of a trend seen in other countries as well. Most prominently is Poland, where authorities are advancing a nationalist narrative at odds with mainstream scholarship, including through a 2018 law that regulates Holocaust speech.

The legislation sought to fight back against claims that Poland, a victim of Nazi Germany, bore responsibility for the Holocaust. The law angered Israel, where many felt it was an attempt to whitewash the fact that some Poles did kill Jews during the German occupation during World War II. Yad Vashem also came out against the legislation.

Havi Dreifuss, a historian at Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem, said the world was now dealing with both Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion, where countries or institutions were bringing forth their own interpretations of history that were damaging to the commemoration of the Holocaust.

"Whoever deals with the period of the Holocaust must first and foremost be committed to the complex reality that occurred then and not with wars over memory that exist today," she said.

ISRAELI INTERESTS

The Holocaust is central to Israel's national identity. The country comes to a two-minute standstill on its Holocaust remembrance day. Schoolchildren, trade groups and soldiers makes regular trips to Yad Vashem's museum. Stories of the last cohort of Holocaust survivors constantly make the news.

Israel has butted heads with certain countries, like Poland, over the memory of the Holocaust. But Israel has appeared more reticent to challenge Putin and his narrative, according to some observers, because of its current security interests. Israel relies on coordination with Russia to allow it to strike targets in Syria, which it says are often weapons caches destined for Israel's enemies.

Israel came under fire from historians in 2020 after a speech by Putin and a separate video presentation at a meeting of world leaders in Jerusalem to commemorate the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, which they said skewed toward his narrative and away from the historical facts.

Israel was conspicuously muted in its criticism of Russia in the lead-up to the attacks on Ukraine. Commentator Raviv Drucker wrote in the daily Haaretz that Israel was "on the wrong side of history" with its response, which initially sought to support Ukraine while not rattling Russia.

On Thursday, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid condemned Russia's attacks as "a grave violation of the international order." But Prime Minister Naftali Bennett stopped short of issuing a public condemnation of Russia's attack.

Vera Michlin-Shapir, a former official at Israel's National Security Council and the author of "Fluid Russia," a book about the country's national identity, said that Israel's regional security concerns were of greater interest than challenging Russia on its narrative.

"Russia can provide weapons systems to our worst enemies and therefore Israel is proceeding very cautiously — you could say too cautiously — because there is an issue here that is at the heart of Israel's security," she said.

Whistleblowers say they're bullied for exposing prison abuse

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the federal Bureau of Prisons faces increased scrutiny over its latest scandal — allegations staff and even a warden sexually abused inmates at a women's prison known as the "rape club" — people striving to hold it accountable say they're being attacked for speaking up.

Whistleblower employees say high-ranking prison officials are bullying them for exposing wrongdoing and threatening to close the women's lockup if workers keep reporting abuse, and members of Congress say they're being stonewalled as they seek to bring greater oversight to the beleaguered bureau.

The Bureau of Prisons' proclivity for silence and secrecy has endured, workers and lawmakers say, even after an Associated Press investigation revealed years of sexual misconduct at the women's prison — the federal correctional institution in Dublin, California — and detailed a toxic culture that enabled it to con-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 74 of 78

tinue for years.

After that reporting, which included accounts of inmates being sent to solitary confinement or transferred to other prisons to silence them, workers and union leaders at the Bay Area lockup and other federal prisons say they're also being threatened for raising alarms about misconduct.

At Dublin, union president Ed Canales says the acting warden, Bureau of Prisons Deputy Regional Director T. Ray Hinkle, shared Canales' confidential emails and home address with the staff after Canales complained to bureau leaders about abuse, corruption and safety issues.

At a federal prison in Mendota, California, union president Aaron McGlothlin says agency officials retaliated by reviving a frivolous disciplinary investigation after he complained about busloads of COVID-19-positive inmates being transferred to his institution. The investigation, he said, stemmed from an erroneous complaint that he was AWOL from work when he'd actually been cleared to spend time on union matters.

At the federal prison complex in Victorville, California, workers said one official has warned them to stay away from whistleblowers or risk being jammed up with disciplinary investigations. Such threats are effective because even the lowest-level disciplinary matter can hinder a worker's move up the ranks, union officials said.

John Kostelnik, the Western region vice president for the correctional workers union, said what's happening to whistleblowers at Dublin, Mendota and Victorville is endemic of a coverup culture deeply ingrained in Bureau of Prisons leadership — aimed more at preserving what's left of the bureau's tattered reputation than sweeping away any employee's transgressions.

"We're responsible for keeping inmates behind the walls, but this agency has created a concept of keeping everything behind the walls. And that's not appropriate," Kostelnik said in an interview.

Four men who've worked at Dublin have been charged with sexually abusing inmates there, including ex-Warden Ray J. Garcia, who's pleaded not guilty. Several others are under investigation.

Federal law protects whistleblower employees from retaliation, but Kostelnik said such protections don't really exist in the cloistered Bureau of Prisons, where wardens control staff discipline and people who speak up are essentially blacklisted. Bosses routinely ask would-be whistleblowers to write memos detailing problems, effectively forcing them to put down their names and compromise anonymity, Kostelnik said.

Without an anonymous, third-party reporting system like other law enforcement agencies have, federal prison whistleblowers "face a full-frontal attack when you report anything of wrongdoing in the facilities, especially if you're reporting management officials," Kostelnik said.

The AP contacted the Justice Department and the Bureau of Prisons with detailed questions about the allegations. The Bureau of Prisons responded with a one-sentence statement, saying it "takes seriously allegations of staff misconduct, including allegations of retaliation by staff, and consistent with our national policy, those allegations are required to be reported, and when warranted, investigations are opened." Hinkle didn't respond to a text message seeking comment.

The Bureau of Prisons has been plagued by crises in recent years, many of them exposed by AP reporting, including criminal activity by employees, critically low staffing levels hampering responses to emergencies, the rapid spread of COVID-19, a failed response to the pandemic and dozens of escapes.

Last week, after AP's reporting on Dublin, the Senate launched a bipartisan working group to scrutinize conditions within the Bureau of Prisons, and Wednesday the leaders of the Senate Judiciary Committee wrote to Attorney General Merrick Garland demanding he take immediate action to reform the bureau.

The bureau's treatment of whistleblowers and its resistance to transparency, as documented by workers and lawmakers, has only invited more scrutiny.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., who visited Dublin last week after reading AP's investigation, says she's taking a larger congressional contingent to inspect the prison after Hinkle prevented her from speaking one-on-one with inmates and staff.

"When I read the article, I was both astonished and disgusted," Speier said in an interview. "I wanted to go and visit to determine for myself what the circumstances were. I would categorize the visit as woefully inadequate and unsatisfactory."

Speier said she won't stop until the Bureau of Prisons faces significant oversight and will "go to the high-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 75 of 78

est levels of the Justice Department and the White House if necessary, to make sure we have the access we want."

During her visit, Speier said, Hinkle tried to block her from speaking with several inmates who reported abuse and instead sent her to speak with others he'd picked. She said he dismissively called sexual abuse committed by employees "an embarrassment."

Speier said she told him: "This isn't an embarrassment. This is a toxic work environment. It is a reprehensible set of circumstances."

Afterward, in an email to Dublin staff obtained by the AP, Hinkle alleged Speier "mistreated" prison workers and treated one employee "as though she had committed a crime."

"I can only assume the Congresswoman was referring to a recent AP article that painted our institution in broad strokes," Hinkle wrote in the email. "Although I recognize her right to believe what she believes, I do not recognize her right to blindly categorize all the hard working staff at FCI Dublin who choose to be law-abiding public servants every single day they report to duty."

Hinkle said Speier had surprised him and other officials by asking to speak privately with inmates — an assertion the congresswoman disputes — and said they blocked her from doing so because having those conversations could "compromise an active investigation or case."

In another recent all-staff email, the acting warden floated the possibility of replacing or renovating the Dublin prison, citing infrastructure and safety concerns.

In a recent closed-door meeting, however, union leaders said officials threatened to shut down Dublin if workers didn't stop speaking up about misconduct.

"They were very clear that us reporting is what's going to close it down, that our actions are what's going to close it down," Kostelnik said.

He said prison officials raised Dublin's maintenance costs, some of the highest of any federal prison, as a pretext for a possible closure. The facility, 21 miles (34 kilometers) east of Oakland, opened in 1974. It has about 760 inmates and more than 200 employees.

"Now all of a sudden they want to bring that up, that it's costing us all this money," Kostelnik said. "But it was all related to 'Well, if you guys keep doing this,' basically saying, 'We have the reason to shut it down because it's costly, but because you guys are exposing this, we're just gonna shut it down.'"

As 'stealth omicron' advances, scientists are learning more

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

The coronavirus mutant widely known as "stealth omicron" is now causing more than a third of new omicron cases around the world, but scientists still don't know how it could affect the future of the pandemic.

Researchers are slowly revealing clues about the strain, a descendant of omicron known as BA.2, while warily watching it become ever more prevalent.

"We're all keeping an eye on BA.2 just because it has done particularly well in some parts of the world," including parts of Asia, Africa and Europe, said Dr. Wesley Long, a pathologist at Houston Methodist in Texas.

This week, a technical advisory group for the World Health Organization advised public health authorities to monitor it as a distinct omicron strain.

Early research suggests it spreads faster than the original omicron and in rare cases can sicken people even if they've already had an omicron infection. There's mixed research on whether it causes more severe disease, but vaccines appear just as effective against it.

Overall cases are falling in some places where the variant is becoming more prevalent, offering some hope that the latest troubling version of the virus won't send cases skyrocketing again as experts try to learn more.

WORLDWIDE SPREAD

BA.2 has been found in more than 80 countries and all 50 U.S. states.

In a recent report, the WHO said BA.2 was dominant in 18 countries and it represented about 36% of

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 76 of 78

sequenced omicron cases submitted in the most recent week to a publicly available international database where scientists share coronavirus data. That's up from 19% two weeks earlier.

In the United States, BA.2 caused about 4% of COVID cases during the week ending Feb. 19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The percentage was lower in some regions and higher in others – hitting about 7% in New England.

WHAT'S KNOWN

BA.2 has lots of mutations. It's been dubbed "stealth" because it lacks a genetic quirk of the original omicron that allowed health officials to rapidly differentiate it from delta using a certain PCR test. So while the test can detect a BA.2 infection, it looks like a delta infection.

Initial research suggests BA.2 is more transmissible than the original omicron — about 30% more contagious by one estimate.

But vaccines can protect people from getting sick. Scientists in the United Kingdom found that they provide the same level of protection from both types of omicron.

A bout with the original omicron also seems to provide "strong protection" against reinfection with BA.2, according to early studies cited by the WHO.

But getting BA.2 after infection from the original omicron strain is possible, says new research out of Denmark. Study authors noted 187 total reinfections, including 47 with BA.2 occurring shortly after a bout the original strain, mostly in young, unvaccinated people with mild disease. They concluded that such reinfections do occur but are rare. Like other early studies on BA.2, this one has been posted online but not reviewed by independent scientists.

DOES BA.2 MAKE YOU SICKER?

A Japanese lab study suggests that it could, based on experiments with hamsters. Researchers concluded that the risk for global health "is potentially higher" from BA.2 and proposed that it be given its own Greek letter – a designation for globally significant "variants of concern." WHO's technical group said BA.2 should remain under the omicron umbrella.

Though the severity experiments were conducted in animals, the study is "not something to discount," said Dr. Eric Topol of Scripps Research Translational Institute. "We should keep an open mind and keep assessing this."

But scientists are finding something different when they look at people. An initial analysis in Denmark showed no differences in hospitalizations for BA.2 compared with the original omicron, which tends to generally cause milder disease than the delta variant. More recently, researchers in South Africa found much the same: a similar risk of hospitalization and severe disease with the original omicron variant and BA.2.

"We always have to interpret studies in animals with caution," Long said. "I place more weight in studies of actual patients and what they're experiencing."

HOW WILL BA.2 AFFECT THE PANDEMIC?

No one knows for sure.

COVID-19 cases are dropping globally, including in some of the places where BA.2 is prevalent.

"The timing of the upswings and downswings in cases remains unclear," said Louis Mansky, director of the Institute for Molecular Virology at the University of Minnesota.

It's difficult for researchers to predict how much BA.2 will change caseloads because it is spreading in communities with varying levels of protection from vaccines and prior infections. Some experts believe BA.2 is unlikely to spark new surges but may slow COVID declines in some places.

WHO officials stress that the pandemic isn't over and urge countries to remain vigilant.

Doctors said individuals should do the same and remember that vaccines and boosters offer excellent protection against the worst effects of COVID-19, no matter the variant.

"For people who aren't boosted, please get boosted. For people who aren't vaccinated, it's never too late," Long said. "Your best defense against COVID is still the vaccine."

Over half of U.S. abortions now done with pills, not surgery

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 77 of 78

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

More than half of U.S. abortions are now done with pills rather than surgery, an upward trend that spiked during the pandemic with the increase in telemedicine, a report released Thursday shows.

In 2020, pills accounted for 54% of all U.S. abortions, up from roughly 44% in 2019.

The preliminary numbers come from the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights. The group, by contacting providers, collects more comprehensive abortion data than the U.S. government.

Use of abortion pills has been rising since 2000 when the Food and Drug Administration approved mifepristone — the main drug used in medication abortions.

The new increase “is not surprising, especially during COVID,” said Dr. Marji Gold, a family medicine physician and abortion provider in New York City. She said patients seeking abortions at her clinic have long chosen the pills over the medical procedure.

The pandemic prompted a rise in telemedicine and FDA action that allowed abortion pills to be mailed so patients could skip in-person visits to get them. Those changes could have contributed to the increase in use, said Guttmacher researcher Rachel Jones.

The FDA made the change permanent last December, meaning millions of women can get a prescription via an online consultation and receive the pills through the mail. That move led to stepped-up efforts by abortion opponents to seek additional restrictions on medication abortions through state legislatures.

The procedure includes mifepristone, which blocks a hormone needed for pregnancy to continue, followed one or two days later by misoprostol, a drug that causes cramping that empties the womb. The combination is approved for use within the first 10 weeks of pregnancy, although some health care providers offer it in the second trimester, a practice called off-label use.

So far this year, 16 state legislatures have proposed bans or restrictions on medication abortion, according to the Guttmacher report.

It notes that in 32 states, medication abortions must be prescribed by physicians even though other health care providers including physician assistants can prescribe other medicines. And mailing abortion pills to patients is banned in three states — Arizona, Arkansas and Texas, the report says.

According to the World Health Organization, about 73 million abortions are performed each year. About 630,000 abortions were reported to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2019 although information from some states is missing. Guttmacher’s last comprehensive abortion report dates to 2017; the data provided Thursday comes from an update due out later this year.

Global numbers on rates of medication versus surgical abortions are limited. Data from England and Wales show that medication

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Feb. 25, the 56th day of 2022. There are 309 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Feb. 25, 1964, Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) became world heavyweight boxing champion as he defeated Sonny Liston in Miami Beach.

On this date:

In 1901, United States Steel Corp. was incorporated by J.P. Morgan.

In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving Congress the power to levy and collect income taxes, was declared in effect by Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox.

In 1919, Oregon became the first state to tax gasoline, at one cent per gallon.

In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser became Egypt’s prime minister after the country’s president, Mohammed Naguib, was effectively ousted in a coup.

In 1957, the Supreme Court, in *Butler v. Michigan*, overturned a Michigan statute making it a misdemeanor

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 233 ~ 78 of 78

to sell books containing obscene language that would tend to corrupt "the morals of youth."

In 1973, the Stephen Sondheim musical "A Little Night Music" opened at Broadway's Shubert Theater.

In 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos fled the Philippines after 20 years of rule in the wake of a tainted election; Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency.

In 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, 28 Americans were killed when an Iraqi Scud missile hit a U.S. barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

In 1994, American-born Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein opened fire with an automatic rifle inside the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank, killing 29 Muslims before he was beaten to death by worshippers.

In 1997, a jury in Media, Pennsylvania, convicted chemical fortune heir John E. du Pont of third-degree murder, deciding he was mentally ill when he shot and killed world-class wrestler David Schultz. (Du Pont died in prison in December 2010 while serving a 13- to 30-year sentence; he was 72.)

In 2010, in Vancouver, the Canadian women beat the United States 2-0 for their third straight Olympic hockey title.

In 2020, U.S. health officials warned that the coronavirus was certain to spread more widely in the United States; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged Americans to be prepared. President Donald Trump, speaking in India, said the virus was "very well under control" in the U.S.

Ten years ago: A gunman killed two American military advisers with shots to the back of the head inside Afghanistan's heavily guarded Interior Ministry as protests raged for a fifth day over the burning of Qurans at a U.S. army base. Lynn D. "Buck" Compton, 90, a veteran whose World War II exploits were depicted in the television miniseries "Band of Brothers," died in Burlington, Washington.

Five years ago: Democrats chose former Labor Secretary Tom Perez as their new national chairman during a meeting in Atlanta. A man accused of driving drunk plowed into a Mardi Gras parade crowd, injuring more than 30 people (Neilson Rizzuto later pleaded guilty to 11 felony counts of negligent vehicular injuring and 14 related misdemeanor counts; he was sentenced to roughly three years behind bars.) Actor Bill Paxton, 61, died in Los Angeles.

One year ago: The Senate parliamentarian ruled that an increase in the minimum wage would have to be dropped from the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill that Democrats were trying to push through Congress. At a Senate hearing to examine wages at major companies, Costco's CEO said the company would increase its starting wage to \$16 an hour, surpassing most of its main competitors.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ann McCrea is 91. Actor Tom Courtenay is 85. Former CBS newsman Bob Schieffer is 85. Actor Diane Baker is 84. Actor Karen Grassle is 80. Former talk show host Sally Jessy Raphael is 80. Former professional wrestler Ric Flair is 73. Humorist Jack Handey is 73. Movie director Neil Jordan is 72. Rock singer-musician/actor John Doe (X) is 69. Rock musician Dennis Diken (The Smithereens) is 65. Rock singer-musician Mike Peters (The Alarm; Big Country) is 63. Comedian Carrot Top is 57. Model and actor Veronica Webb is 57. Actor Alexis Denisof is 56. Actor Tea (TAY'-ah) Leoni is 56. Actor Lesley Boone is 54. Actor Sean Astin is 51. Singer Daniel Powter is 51. Latin singer Julio Iglesias Jr. is 49. R&B singer Justin Jeffre is 49. Actor Anson Mount is 49. Comedian-actor Chelsea Handler is 47. Actor Rashida Jones is 46. Country singer Shawna Thompson (Thompson Square) is 44. Actor Justin Berfield is 36. Actors James and Oliver Phelps ("Harry Potter" movies) are 36. Actor Jameela Jamil is 36. Rock musician Erik Haager (Carolina Liar) is 35.