

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

Today

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.

City Election for Mayor

There will be a Groton city-wide election for mayor. Incumbent Scott Hanlon has a challenger this year, Aaron Grant, for a three-year term. In Ward 1, incumbent David Blackmun did not take out a petition and Kevin Nehls turned in a successful petition for the two-year term. In Ward 2, incumbent Brian Bahr turned in his petition. No one turned in a petition in Ward 3, currently being served by Kristie Flihs.

Incumbent candidates Tigh Flihs, Deborah Gengerke and Travis J. Harder successfully submitted nominating petitions to serve a 3-year term on the Groton Area School District beginning July 1, 2022, Because each of the candidates is unopposed, there will not be an election in our school district.

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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**Region 1A Girls
Basketball on
GDILIVE.COM**

NO TICKET REQUIRED! FREE TO WATCH



**GROTON AREA VS.
SISSETON
SAT., FEB. 26, 6:00**

Good Luck Lady Tigers from the GDILIVE.COM sponsors

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

Guest Speaker
Nicole J Phillips
The Kindness Podcast

*You're
Invited!*

RE:SET

womens conference

SATURDAY, MARCH 5
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

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

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

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

REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT
ONLINE AT ROSEHILLEFC.COM



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Groton defends NEC title

The 2021-22 Northeast Conference boys basketball title ended up in a three-way tie with Groton Area, Hamlin and Clark/Willow Lake. Here are the final standings for the Northeast Conference.

Groton Area	8-2
Hamlin	8-2
Clark/Willow Lake	8-2
Tiospa Zina	6-4
Deuel.....	6-4
Milbank	5-5
Webster	4-6
Redfield	4-6
Sisseton	4-6
Aberdeen Roncalli	2-8
Britton-Hecla	0-10

Hamlin wins Girls NEC Title









Hamlin went undefeated to win the girls Northeast Conference Title with Aberdeen Roncalli taking second.

Hamlin	10-0
Aberdeen Roncalli	9-1
Sisseton	8-2
Milbank	5-5
Groton Area	5-5
Britton-Hecla	5-5
Redfield	4-6
Deuel.....	3-7
Webster	3-7
Clark/Willow Lake	3-7
Tiospa Zina	0-10

Groton hosts Region 1A

Groton Area will play Sisseton at 6 p.m. in the first round of the boys Region 1A tournament scheduled for Tuesday in Groton. The game to follow will have Milbank taking on Florence/Henry.

The number two seed, Clark/Willow Lake, will host the other bracket with the Cyclones taking on Webster at 6 p.m. followed by Tiospa Zina taking on Redfield.

Matchup	Score	Date	Time
#1 - Groton Area High School			
 1 Groton Area	17-3	3/1	12:00 AM CT
 8 Sisseton	9-11		
#2 - Groton Area High School			
 4 Milbank	9-11	3/1	7:30 PM CT
 5 Florence/Henry	8-12		
#3 -			
 2 Clark/Willow Lake	13-7	3/1	TBD
 7 Webster Area	8-12		
#4 - Clark High School			
 3 Tiospa Zina	10-8	3/1	7:30 PM CT
 6 Redfield	8-12		

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Groton's defense shines in win over Aberdeen Christian

Groton Area's defence lived up to its expectations Friday night as the boys basketball team held Aberdeen Christian to its lowest scoring game of the season. Coach Brian Dolan said he expected the senior leadership to step up to the task in what was expected to be a highly contested game as the regular season came to an end. Groton Area defeated the Knights, 60-46.

The game was tied twice with only one lead change and that was in Groton's favor. Groton Area lead, 15-14, after the first period and 31-22 at half time. The Knights closed to within four, 34-30, early in the third quarter but then the Tigers started to pull away, leading, 40-34 after the third quarter, and opening up a double-digit lead in the fourth quarter.

You knew something was going to happen when Jacob Zak stood at the top of the key, motionless, and then with lightning speed zipped through the Aberdeen Christian defensive barrier to the basket. He led the Tigers with 15 points. Then you had senior Kaden Kurtz, when left open, would swish in three three-pointers in the first half and finished the game with 14 points. Lane Tietz was five of five from the free throw line the first half and added a three-pointer in the third quarter to round out the trio of double-digit scorers with 11 points. Tate Larson had nine points while Jayden Zak had seven, Wyatt Hearnen three and Logan Ringgenberg added one point.

Malek Wieker and Kaden Clark each had 12 points to lead the Knights while Ethan Russell had seven and Jackson Isakson added five points.

Groton Area made 20 of 45 field goals for 44 percent, made 15 of 24 free throws for 63 percent, had six turnovers and had 16 team fouls. Aberdeen Christian made 17 of 49 field goals for 35 percent, 11 of 17 from the line for 65 percent, had five turnovers and 17 team fouls with Jackson Isakson fouling out.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Matt's Tree Service, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls and Dacotah Bank.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 44-36. Groton Area led at the quarterstops at 14-5, 23-13 and 34-19. Cole Simon had three three-pointers to have 17 points while Teylor Diegel had two three-pointers and was six of eight from the line for 14 points. Logan Ringgenberg and Cade Larson each had six points and Colby Dunker added a free throw.

Konnar Furman and Blake Rich led the Knights with nine points apiece while Joey Johnson had eight, Josh Schaunaman had six and Garrett Pearson had four points.

The junior varsity game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Sue Gerlach.

The C game had four lead changes and the game was tied six times before the Knights got the upper hand in the fourth quarter and hung on for a 48-45 win. Groton Area led after the first quarter, 8-7, and the game was tied at halftime at 18. The Knights held a 33-30 lead after the third quarter.

Holden Sippel led the Tigers with 14 points while Turner Thompson had nine, Dillon Abeln eight, Blake Paulie six, Caden McInerney had four and Carter Simon and Braxton Imrie each had two points.

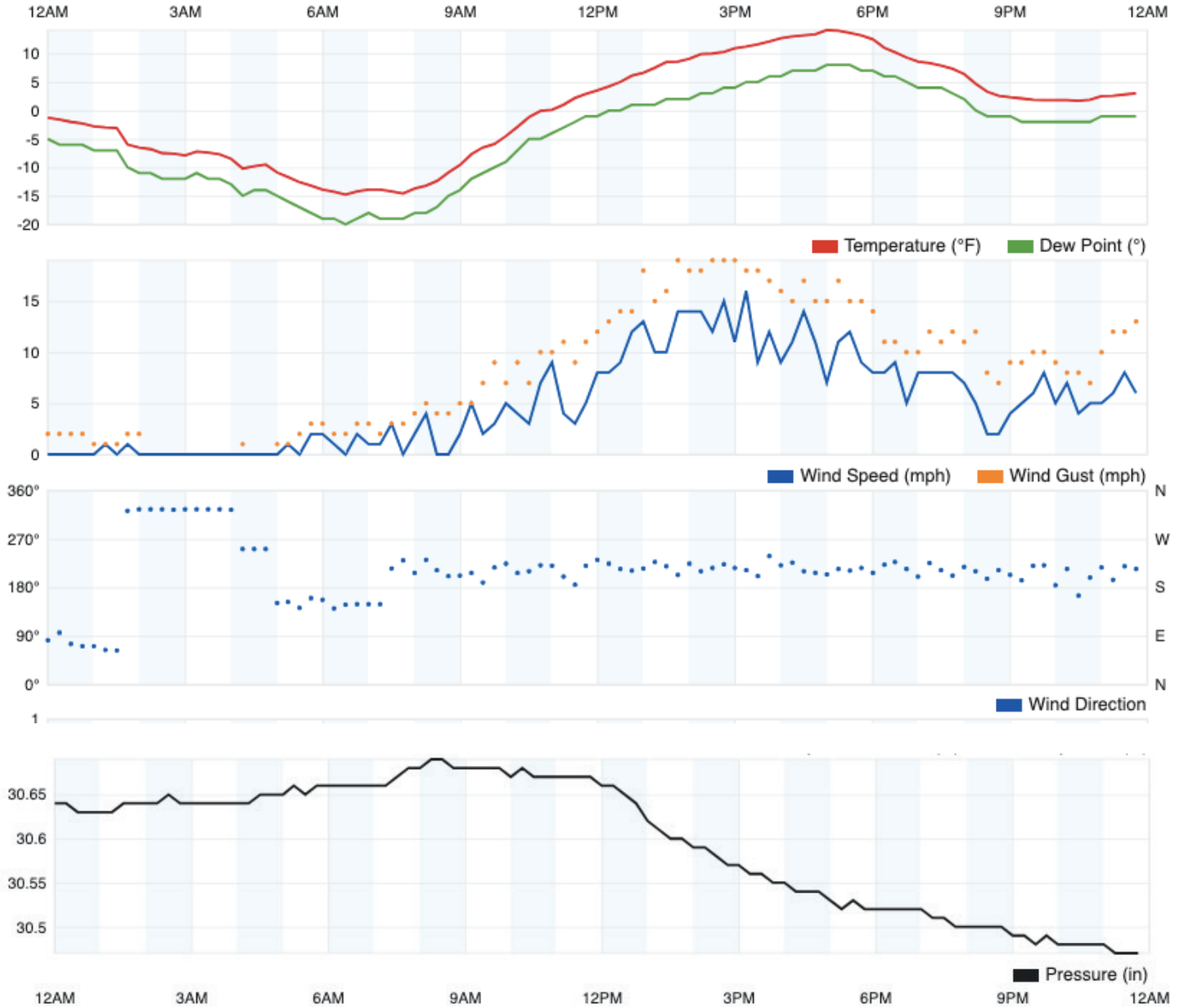
Garrett Pearson led Aberdeen Christian with 21 points followed by Josh Schaunaman with 11, Ellis Russell had 10 and Holden Bartel six.

The C game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Brad and Pam Hanson.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

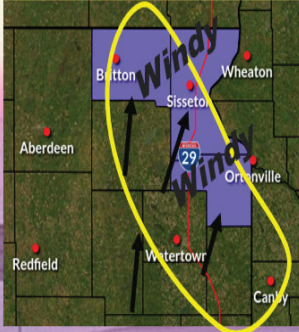


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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Patchy Blowing Snow and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 32 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 29 °F	Low: 10 °F	High: 37 °F


Strongest Gusts In & Around Oval



Windy, blowing snow across portions of north central & northeast SD and west central MN

Winter Weather Advisory for Marshall, Roberts, and Grant Counties
4am to 3pm Saturday

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



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 2/26/2022 4:25 AM

West to southwest winds will increase through the afternoon, but will become especially gusty in the downslope region of the Sisseton Hills where gusts up to 45 mph are possible. This region, which includes I-29, will be particularly prone to blowing snow and periods of reduced visibility. However, all areas with a deep snowpack may experience areas of blowing snow today.

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Today in Weather History

February 26, 1995: Heavy snow fell on the 26th and the 27th in western and central South Dakota near the northern border of the state. McLaughlin received 14 inches, Eureka 12 inches, and McIntosh 11 inches. Snowfall amounts dropped off to two to four inches about 20 miles south of the northern border.

February 26, 1998: A strong area of low pressure moved across central and northeast South Dakota from the morning of the 26th to the morning of the 27th. As the low moved northeast, cold north winds of 25 to 35 mph gusting to 45 mph caused widespread rain to change over to snow. Many roads became icy and poor visibilities in snow and blowing snow, and low wind chills developed. Four to 8 inches of snow fell across the counties bordering the Missouri River and in far western McPherson and far western Edmunds counties. Many area schools were dismissed early or canceled. Some residents, especially West River, lost power during the storm. Many McIntosh residents were without power for over 24 hours. Numerous activities and sports events were canceled. Some car accidents did not result in injury. A semi rolled onto its side northwest of Gettysburg on the 26th. Ranchers also experienced some calving problems as a result of the winter storm. Some snowfall amounts included, 4 inches at Selby, Herreid, and Mobridge, 5 inches at Isabel, 6 inches at Gettysburg, 7 inches about 11 miles east of Hosmer, and 8 inches at McIntosh. Some large drifts also developed, especially West River, as a result of the heavy snow and strong winds.

February 26, 2009: A vigorous, but relatively fast-moving winter storm system tracked across South Dakota Wednesday night and Thursday. Even with the reasonably quick movement of the system, storm total snowfall amounts were quite impressive. In fact, during the peak of the snowstorm, snowfall rates of 1" to 2" per hour were observed! Click [HERE](#) for snowfall amounts.

1910: Parts of Washington State were in the midst of a storm that produced 129 inches of snow at Laconia between the 24th and the 26th, a single storm record for the state. A series of storms, which began on the 23rd, led to a deadly avalanche on the first of March. By late on the 28th, the snow had changed to rain, setting the stage for disaster.

1972: The Buffalo Creek disaster occurred in the Buffalo Creek Hollow of Logan County in West Virginia. A coal slag dam on the Middle Fork of Buffalo Creek burst, sending a fifty-foot wall of water down a narrow valley killing 125 persons and causing 51 million dollars damage. Three days of rain atop a six-inch snow cover caused the dam to break.

1987 - A slow moving storm in the southwestern U.S. spread heavy snow from the southern and central Rockies into the Central High Plains Region. Totals in Colorado ranged up to 62 inches at Purgatory. Colorado Springs CO reported a February record of 14.8 inches of snow in 24 hours. Lander WY received four inches in one hour, 13 inches in seven hours, and a record storm total of 26 inches. High winds created near blizzard conditions at Colorado Springs. Fairplay CO reported 43 inches of snow, with drifts ten feet high. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Eight cities in the central and western U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Lamoni IA with a reading of 67 degrees. Temperatures in North Dakota were as warm as those in Florida. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - An upper level weather disturbance brought snow to parts of the central U.S. which just one day earlier were enjoying temperatures in the 60s. Snowfall totals in Missouri ranged up to nine inches at Rolla. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Unseasonably cold weather followed in the wake of the winter storm in the northeastern U.S. Ten cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Syracuse NY with a reading of 10 degrees below zero. Freezing temperatures in southeastern Virginia caused considerable damage to plants and fruit trees. The barometric pressure reading of 30.88 inches at Wilmington NC was February record for that location. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - A major snowstorm dumps up to 20 inches of snow in the Charlotte metropolitan area. Charlotte's third largest snowstorm on record accumulates 11.6 inches at the airport.

2011: The tallest tree in Wales falls after a wind storm. Located on the Lake Vyrnwy Estate, this 124-year-old Douglas fir stood at 63.7 m (208.9 feet). The tree reportedly was leaning over and had two substantial cracks in the main trunk. This tree would be carved into a giant hand. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the BBC.

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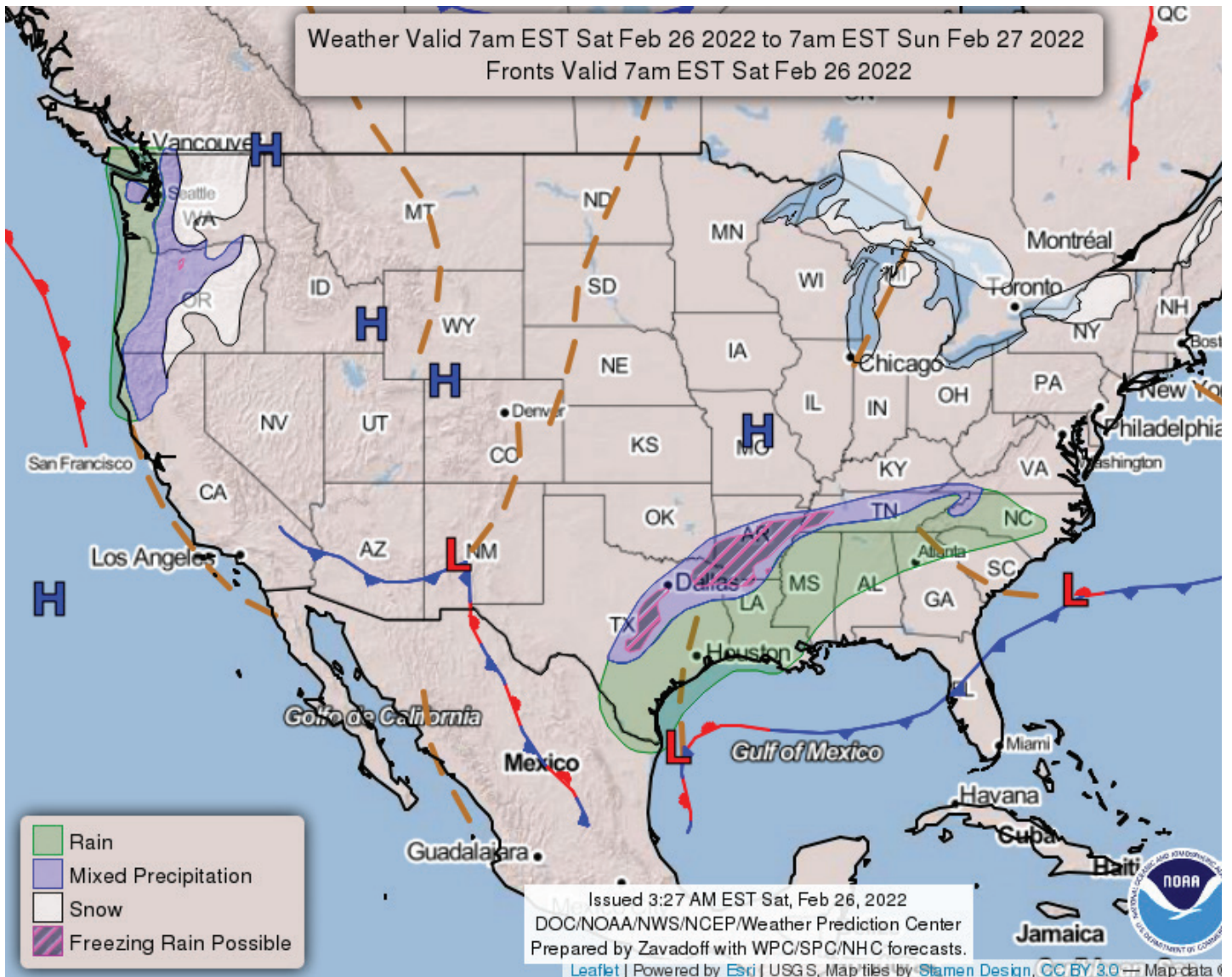
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 14 °F at 5:06 PM
Low Temp: -15 °F at 6:29 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 1:34 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: 65 in 1896
Record Low: -20 in 1962
Average High: 33°F
Average Low: 11°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.57
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.12
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 6:16:38 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:12:02 AM



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BETTER THAN SILVER AND GOLD

A pastor who served people in a ghetto was visiting a family that was going through a difficult time of making ends meet. As he got up to leave, he noticed an old, well-worn Bible on a shelf. As he neared the door, he said, "I saw something in this room that has more value than any amount of money. I wonder if you will ever find it."

A few days later while dusting the shelves, one of the children discovered the Bible. Holding it very carefully, she took it to her Dad, and asked, "Could this have been what the preacher-man saw? Wonder if this is what he meant."

Holding it very carefully, he placed it on the table and took great care to open it. Then he looked down and noticed a verse that was underlined with a red pencil: "The law from Your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold."

He began to weep quietly as his wife and children sat silently around him. Finally, he was able to speak and said, "This is my mother's Bible. Before she died, she gave it to me and asked me to read it every day, and I promised her that I would. But, I let her down, and I've let you - my family - down. Maybe God led us to this difficult time in our lives so we would find this verse she underlined to help us, encourage us, and give us strength."

God works in many strange and subtle ways. He even brings times of difficulty and desperation into our lives to get our attention. He has never promised that our days would always be filled with sunshine and blue skies. But, He has promised that when we look to Him and His Word, we will find salvation, hope, and encouragement.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to realize the wealth we will find in Your Word when we have nothing else left. Then, teach us to mine the riches found there. And Thank You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. Psalm 119:72

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2022 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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

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- 9 Months \$31.95
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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Photo bought for \$250 on eBay shows beginnings of Madison

By MARY GALES ASKREN Madison Daily Leader

MADISON, S.D. (AP) — DeLon Mork and John Hess banter as though they've known one another their whole lives.

"I have yet to see 'the picture' that I have purchased," Mork said. "I think he's holding me hostage."

Mork says this while looking at a black and white computer printout of a photograph. Hess saw the cabinet photo advertised on eBay and was unable to meet the selling price of \$250. His lower bid was rejected.

"Then he came groveling to me," Mork continued, in the same teasing vein.

"We slept on it and then I bought it. All the history nerds are excited," Hess said, continuing the story.

The two men were talking about a photo of Madison they estimate was taken around 1900. Stained and spotted with torn edges, measuring about 4x6 inches, the photo shows a nearly treeless community with a scattering of houses. SD-34 is no more than a one-lane track, the Madison Daily Leader reported.

"It's almost like the birth of a town. We're seeing the very beginning," Hess said.

Looking at the grainy printout, Mork first teases Hess about practicing that line and then asks him where the Dairy Queen would be located. Hess points to an area that appears to be nothing more than a muddy lot in the photo.

"We've been in this location for 58 years and seen a lot of change," Mork said. "It's neat to see Madison prior to that."

In the background, against a hazy horizon, stands Beadle Hall. That building and a men's dormitory that was located near the current site of the Tunheim Classroom Building were used to date the cabinet photo.

Pulling out the book published by Dakota State University to celebrate the 125th anniversary, Hess explained his deductive process. Beadle Hall was constructed in 1886. East Hall, which is not in the photograph, was built in 1901.

"We know it's between 1886 and 1901," he stated. "The men's dorm disappeared, and the Women's Gym was built in 1910."

The nature of the photo, as well as the image, also helps to date the image. Cabinet photos were introduced in the 1860s and were already losing popularity by the 1890s. They eventually disappeared prior to World War I.

Generally, cabinet photos consisted of a sepia photograph – the tone a result of the process used to produce a print from a negative – on paper affixed to cardboard. They were called cabinet photos because they were frequently displayed in cabinets. Initially, Hess didn't know where the photograph was taken. However, working backward from Beadle Hall, he was able to locate several other houses which are still standing.

"What I think is interesting is how many of those are no longer there," he said.

By doing that, he was able to determine the photograph was taken from the top of the Lake County Courthouse. Since the current courthouse was not constructed until 1934, the cabinet photo would have been taken from the original courthouse, a two-story structure with a brick veneer, ashlar stone foundation and large cupola on the roof.

Hess wasn't content with having made that deduction. He wanted a contemporary photo to show how Madison has changed during the intervening decades.

In order to get that from roughly the same perspective, Hess approached Lake County Buildings and Grounds Superintendent Dave Hare. Hess reports that Hare intends to ask Chief Deputy Sarina Talich, a professional photographer, to get a photo from the same vantage site.

Still buoyed up by the excitement of having found the photograph and having located the spot from which it was taken, Hess knocked on the door of one of the historic homes visible in the photograph. He didn't know the owner, and doesn't recall the owner's name, but wanted to show him the photograph.

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"This is probably the oldest picture of this house you will ever see," Hess told the retired farmer. The man now wants a copy of the photo to display in his home.

Meanwhile, Mork is also contemplating plans to display an enlargement of the cabinet photo in the DQ, which is where he and Hess met. Hess was a 15-year-old working for Mork's dad, and Mork was 13, just beginning to learn the ropes.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

15-31-40-56-66, Mega Ball: 4, Megaplier: 3

(fifteen, thirty-one, forty, fifty-six, sixty-six; Mega Ball: four; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$87 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$58 million

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Belle Fourche 69, Mobridge-Pollock 48

Bennett County 53, Oelrichs 46

Brandon Valley 67, Huron 39

Bridgewater-Emery 54, Dell Rapids St. Mary 48

Burke 63, Avon 34

Chamberlain 68, McLaughlin 40

Clark/Willow Lake 75, Arlington 40

Colman-Egan 76, Sioux Falls Lutheran 60

Dakota Valley 73, Lennox 59

Dupree 61, Takini 32

Flasher, N.D. 62, Lemmon 44

Florence/Henry 69, Estelline/Hendricks 58

Great Plains Lutheran 60, Wilmot 36

Groton Area 60, Aberdeen Christian 46

Hamlin 56, Redfield 40

Hanson 54, Elkton-Lake Benton 34

Harding County 66, Bison 49

Harrisburg 61, Brookings 37

Highmore-Harrold 62, Miller 42

Iroquois/Doland 63, Sunshine Bible Academy 53

Jones County 58, New Underwood 47

Langford 54, Waverly-South Shore 43

Leola/Frederick 39, Ipswich 31

Madison 69, Viborg-Hurley 41

Marty Indian 71, Pine Ridge 68

Milbank 51, Aberdeen Roncalli 47

Northwestern 82, Hitchcock-Tulare 62

Philip 75, Kadoka Area 68

Potter County 83, Timber Lake 63

Rapid City Christian 51, Hot Springs 45

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Sioux Falls Christian 62, Tri-Valley 34
Sioux Falls Jefferson 63, Aberdeen Central 54
Sioux Falls Lincoln 78, Rapid City Central 53
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 68, Mitchell 50
Sioux Falls Washington 70, Rapid City Stevens 51
Sisseton 53, Tiospa Zina Tribal 52
Sully Buttes 61, North Central Co-Op 37
Tea Area 81, Beresford 43
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 66, Colome 48
Wakpala 65, Crazy Horse 60
Wall 84, Faith 81
Waubay/Summit 78, Britton-Hecla 55
White River 66, Lyman 56
Yankton 93, Spearfish 57

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brandon Valley 57, Huron 31
Harrisburg 52, Brookings 47
Rapid City Central 45, Sioux Falls Lincoln 43
Sioux Falls Jefferson 65, Aberdeen Central 34
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 56, Mitchell 21
Sioux Falls Washington 57, Rapid City Stevens 44
Spearfish 43, Yankton 40

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

State revokes former teacher's creds over sexual remarks

SIOUX FALLS undefined

The state Department of Education has revoked a former middle school teacher's credentials after a student accused him of making inappropriate sexual remarks.

The Argus Leader reported Friday that the state revoked Jalen Boyd's teaching certificate on Feb. 4.

According to the revocation order, Boyd was a teacher at Whittier Middle School in Sioux Falls. The school district received reports from a female student in April that Boyd played a game with her in which players decide who they'd like to marry, have sex with or kill. The student also alleged that Boyd made comments about students' bodies and rated students and staff members' attractiveness.

Boyd was fired in May. According to the revocation order, he told district officials in October that he was fine with the state revoking his teaching certificate because he no longer wanted to pursue a teaching career.

Judge sets \$1m cash bail for man accused in bar shooting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A judge in Rapid City set \$1 million bail Friday for a man accused of killing another man in a bar earlier this month.

The Rapid City Journal reported Judge Scott Bogue set the bail amount Friday for 45-year-old Timothy Huante. Prosecutors have charged Huante with shooting 30-year-old Dallas Quick Bear in the face at Teddy's Sports Bar on Feb. 20.

Prosecutors requested \$1 million cash bond due to the seriousness of the charge and their belief that Huante might flee if released from custody.

Huante's attorney asked for a \$100,000 cash surety bond to no avail.

South Dakota senators reject sales tax cut proposal

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Senate Republicans on Friday rejected a proposal from the House to cut the sales tax by half a percentage point.

The House passed the proposal this week on a narrow vote, despite Gov. Kristi Noem urging lawmakers to take a more cautious budgeting approach and not siphon off one of the state's largest revenue sources. It would have cut the 4.5% sales tax to 4% over the next two years, representing an estimated \$150 million in annual revenue for the state.

Republicans on the Senate State Affairs committee agreed with the governor's caution and dismissed the proposal. Every Republican on the nine-member committee voted against it, while the lone Democrat cast a dissenting vote.

South Dakota was one of more than two dozen states, both red and blue, looking to give taxpayers and consumers a break amid soaring tax revenue and billions in pandemic aid from the federal government. But Senate Republicans argued that the state already runs on a lean tax structure and cutting it more would endanger funding for salaries for teachers, state employees and government-funded medical providers.

"We're going to have a predictable fiscal cliff when this federal fire hose of cash turns off," said Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck.

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

He argued that between the state's economic growth and a massive influx of federal funds coming over several years, the time is right to scale back the tax.

"You're going to have that ongoing stimulation to the economy for several years," Karr said of federal funding packages making their way into the state budget. "That allows us to pull those dollars out because, at the same time, our economy in South Dakota has organic growth through that whole period."

The proposal was opposed by organizations representing schools and educators, who argued it would jeopardize funding meant to boost teacher pay.

"I just don't know where you're going to fill the hole of \$150 million," Rob Monson, executive director of the School Administrators of South Dakota, told the committee.

Meanwhile, the Senate Taxation committee advanced a separate proposal that would allow counties to levy a temporary tax on business' revenue to pay for bonds used for courthouses, police stations, jails or substance treatment centers. It has already passed the House and will next be considered in the Senate.

Republicans help defeat Arizona abortion pill ban

By BOB CHRISTIE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Three Republicans 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."

Udall was joined by Republican Reps. Regina Cobb of Kingman and Joanne Osborne of Goodyear in voting against the bill. All 28 Democrats present also opposed the bill. One Democrat is on maternity leave

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and did not vote.

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 constitutionally 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. Supreme 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 the court is now considering.

This story has been corrected to show that three Republican House members, not just one, voted against the measure.

Judge recuses herself from Spearfish murder case

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A judge has recused herself from presiding in a case against a Spearfish man

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accused of fatally shooting his wife last month.

Fourth Circuit Judge Michelle Comer says she wouldn't be able to be impartial in the case because she has dealt with the defendant, Dreau Rogers, in drug court. Comer says she also knows the victim and her son, so the case should be reassigned.

The 33-year-old defendant is charged with first-degree murder in the death of 43-year-old Destiny Rogers, as well as nine other felonies, KOTA-TV reported.

A probable cause affidavit says Dreau Rogers told police his wife was shot by another man with whom he was arguing.

Police say they interviewed the other man and say he had an alibi along with text messages and pictures showing he was somewhere else at the time of the shooting.

The affidavit says a gun matching the caliber used in the shooting was found hidden in Dreau's backyard and ammunition matching the caliber was found in the kitchen along with bags of methamphetamine, heroin and fentanyl pills.

Rogers faces the death penalty or life in prison if he's convicted of the murder charge.

Live updates: Protests around the world decry Ukraine attack

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest on the Russia-Ukraine crisis:

TOKYO — From Tokyo to London to Taipei, Ukrainians living abroad and hundreds of protesters have turned out on the streets to join anti-war rallies spreading around the world as Russia's troops pressed toward Ukraine's capital.

Several hundred Ukrainians living in Japan gathered outside of Tokyo's main train stations Saturday, chanting "Stop war!" and "Peace for Ukraine." They held up signs including "No war," "Stop Putin, Stop Russia," while others waved Ukrainian flags. At a separate rally reportedly organized by Russian residents in Japan, several dozen people chanted "Hands off Ukraine!"

In Taiwan, more than 100 demonstrators chanting "Stand with Ukraine" and "Glory to Ukraine" protested outside the Russian representative office in Taiwan on Saturday.

"My family, my friends are now sheltered in their basements because of the air attacks," said Yulia Kolorova, a 49-year-old Ukrainian living in Taiwan. "I just want them to be strong. I just can't imagine how scary it is to see the missiles over your head. It's surreal."

KYIV, UKRAINE — The mayor of the Ukrainian capital is imposing an intensified curfew as Russian troops press on the city.

Mayor Vitaly Klitschko said on Telegram that the curfew will extend from 5 p.m. until 8 a.m. and "all civilians on the street during the curfew will be considered members of the enemy's sabotage and reconnaissance groups."

The previous curfew imposed two days ago was from 10 p.m. until 7 a.m.

ROME — Italian Premier Mario Draghi has called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to make clear the Italian government supports any moves to cut Russia off from the SWIFT international payment system.

A day earlier, Draghi's finance minister raised doubts Italy would go along with such a move because that would complicate payments to the Russians for natural gas. Italy gets some 45% of its gas from Russia.

Draghi's office said the premier told Zelenskyy that Italy "will supply Ukraine with assistance to defend itself." There were no immediate details on such assistance

PARIS — French officials say marines patrolling the English Channel area have intercepted a cargo ship sailing under the Russian flag and escorted it to the port of Boulogne-Sur-Mer for an investigation.

The interception of the ship, carrying cars, early Saturday was triggered by financial sanctions levied days ago against Russia for its invasion of the Ukraine. Maritime spokesperson Veronique Magnin said it

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appeared to be the first such action in the English Channel.

The approximately 130-meter-(427-foot) ship was headed from Rouen, in Normandy, to Saint Petersburg, and was stopped near Honfleur, Magnin said.

Customs officials carrying out the investigation were verifying if the vessel is indeed linked to Russian financial interests, the spokesperson said. The process could take up to 48 hours.

The French government has given maritime officials the power to intercept vessels suspected of contravening the sanctions, she said.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says his country's armed forces are successfully fighting back against Russian troops.

Zelenskyy said in a video released Saturday that Russian attempts to forge into Kyiv have been repelled and Moscow's plan to quickly seize the capital and install a puppet government has been thwarted. In an emotional speech, he accused the Russian forces of hitting civilian areas and infrastructure.

Zelenskyy pushed for Ukraine's urgent ascension to the European Union, saying he discussed the issue with the EU leaders. He also urged cutting Russia from the SWIFT international electronic bank payment system, noting that Germany and Hungary should show "courage" and agree to the move.

Briefly switching to Russian, Zelenskyy hailed Russia's cultural figures who denounced the invasion and urged them to redouble efforts to force the Kremlin to halt the attack. He claimed that thousands of Russian troops were killed and hundreds of those who were taken prisoner "can't understand why they were sent into Ukraine to kill and get killed." "The sooner you say to your government that this war should be immediately stopped, the more of your people will stay alive," he said.

MOSCOW — A senior Russian official has warned that Moscow could react to Western sanctions over its attack on Ukraine by opting out of the last remaining nuclear arms pact and freezing Western assets.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, shrugged off a set of crippling sanctions that the U.S., the European Union and other allies slapped on Russia as a reflection of Western "political impotence."

In comments posted on his page on Russian social media VKontakte, Medvedev said the sanctions could offer Moscow a pretext for a complete review of its ties with the West, suggesting that Russia could opt out of the New START nuclear arms control treaty that limits the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals.

Medvedev also raised the prospect of cutting diplomatic ties with Western countries, saying "there is no particular need in maintaining diplomatic relations" and adding that "we may look at each other in binoculars and gunsights." He pointed at the possibility of freezing Western assets in the country if the West proceeds with threats to freeze Russian assets.

PRAGUE — The Czech Republic's government has approved a plan to send more arms to Ukraine.

The Defense Ministry said it is immediately sending machine guns, submachine guns, assault rifles and pistols together with ammunition worth 188 million Czech crowns (\$8.6 million).

The ministry said the Czechs will transport the weapons and deliver them to a place determined by the Ukrainian side.

The Czech Republic has already agreed to donate some 4,000 pieces of artillery shells worth 36.6 million Czech crowns (\$1.7 million) to Ukraine.

WARSAW, Poland -- The Polish Football Association says it will not play its World Cup qualifying match against Russia due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"No more words, time to act!" said association president Cezary Kulesza on Twitter, saying the move was prompted by the "escalation of the aggression."

The match had been scheduled for March 24.

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KYIV, Ukraine — A rescue worker says at least six civilians were injured by a rocket that hit a high-rise apartment building on the outskirts of the Ukrainian capital.

Petro Prokopov, a firefighter who was taking part in rescue efforts, said the building on the southwestern edge of Kyiv near Zhuliany airport was hit between 16 and 21 floors on Saturday. He said at least six people were injured and apartments on two floors were gutted by fire. Emergency responders have evacuated 80 people.

Kyiv's Mayor Vitali Klitschko posted an image showing a gaping hole on one side of the apartment building.

Separately, Ukraine's Infrastructure Ministry said a Russian missile was shot down before dawn Saturday as it headed for the dam of the sprawling water reservoir that serves Kyiv. "If the dam is destroyed, the flooding will cause catastrophic casualties and losses - including flooding of residential areas of Kyiv and its suburbs," the ministry said.

Russian troops were pressing their attack on the Ukrainian capital, trying to advance on the city from several directions. Russia has repeatedly claimed its assault on Ukraine is aimed only at military targets.

"Let me stress once again that only infrastructure sites of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are being targeted, ruling out damage to residential and social infrastructure," Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov told a briefing Saturday.

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian health minister says that 198 people have been killed and more than 1,000 others have been wounded in the Russian offensive.

Health Minister Viktor Lyashko said Saturday that there were three children among those killed. His statement made it unclear whether the casualties included both military and civilians.

He said another 1,115 people, including 33 children, were wounded in the Russian invasion that began Thursday with massive air and missile strikes and troops forging into Ukraine from the north, east and south.

WARSAW, Poland -- The UN refugee agency says that over 120,000 Ukrainian refugees have left the country since Russia began its attack on its neighboring country this week.

Speaking as Russian troops were engaging in battle with Ukrainian forces in the capital Kyiv on Saturday, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, Kelly Clements, said in an interview on CNN the situation was expected to get worse.

"We now see over 120,000 people that have gone to all of the neighboring countries," she said. "The reception that they are receiving from local communities, from local authorities, is tremendous. But it's a dynamic situation. We are really quite devastated, obviously, with what's to come."

Most are heading to Poland and Moldova, but also to Romania, Slovakia and Hungary.

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron says he is convinced that "this war will last" and warned that Russia's invasion of Ukraine will have tough consequences for Europeans.

Macron told farmers at France's Agricultural Fair in Paris on Saturday that sectors from wine to cereals to exports and energy prices will be affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"War has returned to Europe. This war was unilaterally chosen by Putin," he said of the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin. "This war will last and all the crises that go with it will have durable consequences," Macron said. "We must prepare ourselves with lots of determination and also lots of solidarity."

He said a "plan of resilience" was being put in place, but did not elaborate.

The European Union, along with the U.S. and numerous other countries, has announced sanctions against Russia.

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The Dutch government has shifted its embassy staff out of Ukraine amid Russia's military onslaught on its neighbor.

The foreign ministry announced early Saturday that ambassador Jennes de Mol and his staff, who had already moved from Kyiv to Lviv before Russia's invasion, will relocate to Jaroslaw, Poland.

The ministry said the diplomatic post that is helping Dutch citizens who want to leave Ukraine has been

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moved out of the country because of the deteriorating security situation in Lviv.

LONDON — Britain says Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been slowed by strong Ukrainian resistance. Armed Forces Minister James Heappey said fighting in the capital, Kyiv, was so far confined to "very isolated pockets of Russian special forces and paratroopers."

He said that "the main armored columns approaching Kyiv are still some way off."

He said: "It looks like the Russian plan is nowhere near running to schedule. I think that will be a great cause of concern for President Putin and rather points to the fact that there was a lot of hubris in the Russian plan and that he may be awfully advised."

MOSCOW — The Russian military says it has launched a barrage of cruise missiles at Ukrainian military facilities.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Saturday that the military struck a range of Ukrainian military installations with long-range Kalibr cruise missiles.

He said that since the start of Russia's attack Thursday, the military has hit 821 Ukrainian military facilities, including 14 air bases and 19 command facilities, and destroyed 24 air defense missile systems, 48 radars, seven warplanes, seven helicopters, nine drones, 87 tanks and eight military vessels.

Konashenkov didn't say how many Ukrainian troops were killed and didn't mention any casualties on the Russian side. His claims and Ukraine's allegations that its forces have killed thousands of Russian troops couldn't be independently verified.

Konashenkov claimed that the Russian military has taken full control of the southern city of Melitopol, about 35 kilometers inland from the Azov Sea coast, and said Russia-backed separatists have made significant gains in the eastern region of Donbas.

KYIV, Ukraine — The mayor of the Ukrainian capital says a missile hit an apartment building but no casualties were immediately reported.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said the missile slammed into a high-rise building on the southwestern outskirts of Kyiv near Zhuliany airport on Saturday. He said rescue workers were heading there.

He posted an image on a messaging app, showing a gaping hole on one side of the building that ravaged apartment units and several stores.

Russian troops were pressing their attack on the Ukrainian capital, trying to advance on the city from several directions. The Russian invasion of Ukraine began Thursday with massive air and missile strikes and ground troops moving in from the north, east and south.

KYIV, Ukraine — The mayor of a city south of the Ukrainian capital says that the country's military has fended off a Russian attempt to take control of a military air base.

Natalia Balansynovych, the mayor of Vasylkiv, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Kyiv, said Saturday that Russian airborne forces landed near the city overnight and tried to seize the base. She said fierce fighting also raged on Vasylkiv's central street.

She said that Ukrainian forces repelled the Russian attacks, and that the situation is now calm. Balansynovych said there were heavy casualties, but didn't give any numbers.

KYIV, Ukraine — An adviser to Ukraine's president says that fighting is raging in the capital and in the country's south, and that the Ukrainian military is successfully fending off Russian assaults.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said Saturday that small groups of Russian forces tried to infiltrate Kyiv and engaged in fighting with Ukrainian troops. He said that Russia wants to seize control of the Ukrainian capital and destroy the country's leadership, but said the Russian military has failed to make any gains and that the Ukrainian forces control the situation in Kyiv.

He said Russian forces were also focusing on the country's south, where intense fighting is underway in

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Kherson just north of Crimea, and in the Black Sea ports of Mykolaiv, Odesa and around Mariupol. He said that Russia considers it a priority to seize the south, but it has failed to make any significant gains. "Ukraine hasn't simply withstood it. Ukraine is winning," Podolyak said at a briefing.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has made a renewed assurance that the country's military will stand up to the Russian invasion.

In a video recorded on the street in downtown Kyiv, Zelenskyy said that he hasn't left the city and dispelled claims that Ukraine's military would lay down its weapons.

"We will protect the country," he said. "Our weapon is our truth, and our truth is that it's our land, our country, our children. And we will defend all of that."

KYIV, Ukraine — Kyiv officials are warning residents that street fighting is underway against Russian forces, and they are urging people to seek shelter.

The warning issued Saturday advised residents to remain in shelters, to avoid going near windows or on balconies, and to take precautions against being hit by debris or bullets.

The Ukrainian military said a battle was underway near a military unit to the west of the city center.

Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitschko said new explosions shook the area near a major power plant that the Russians were trying to attack.

TOKYO — A Panamanian-registered cargo ship owned by a Japanese company was hit by a shell off Ukraine's southern coast and one of its 20 crew members suffered a non-life-threatening injury, according to its owner and media reports.

The ship's owner, Nikko Kisen K.K., based in Imabari in western Japan, confirmed media reports Saturday that its bulk carrier Namura Queen suffered damage and that one of its 20 Filipino crew members was injured.

The company gave no further details.

The 47,167-ton ship, which was just off the coast of Ukraine in the Black Sea at the time of the incident, has headed to Turkey to assess the extent of its damage, Kyodo News agency said.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Saturday to discuss the two allies' cooperation over the Russia-Ukraine crisis, including Seoul's participation in a U.S.-led economic pressure campaign against Moscow.

Seoul's Foreign Ministry said Chung and Blinken reaffirmed the allies' "strong condemnation" of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and they urged Russia to immediately cease its takeover attempt.

Blinken thanked South Korea for its support of Ukraine and its willingness to participate in international sanctions against Russia, the ministry said.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was asked to evacuate Kyiv at the behest of the U.S. government but turned down the offer.

Zelenskyy said in response: "The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride," according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation, who described Zelenskyy as upbeat.

Invading Russian forces closed in on Ukraine's capital on Saturday, in an apparent encircling movement after a barrage of airstrikes on cities and military bases around the country.

KYIV, Ukraine — A second Russian Ilyushin Il-76 military transport plane was shot down near Bila Tserkva, 50 miles (85 kilometers) south of Kyiv, according to two American officials with direct knowledge of conditions on the ground in Ukraine.

On Friday, Ukraine's military said it had shot down a Russian military transport plane with paratroopers on board.

According to a statement from the military's General Staff, the first Il-76 heavy transport plane was

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shot down near Vasylkiv, a city 25 miles south of Kyiv. The Russian military has not commented on either incident so far, and the reports could not be immediately verified.

UNITED NATIONS—Russia has vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that Moscow stop its attack on Ukraine and withdraw all troops.

Friday's vote was 11-1, with China, India and the United Arab Emirates abstaining. It showed significant but not total opposition to Russia's invasion of its smaller, militarily weaker neighbor.

The United States and other supporters knew the resolution wouldn't pass but argued it would highlight Russia's international isolation. The resolution's failure paves the way for backers to call for a swift vote on a similar measure in the U.N. General Assembly. There are no vetoes in the 193-member assembly. There's no timetable as yet for a potential Assembly vote.

SYDNEY—Australia is imposing sanctions against all 339 members of the Russian parliament and is considering sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as his Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne also announced on Saturday sanctions against eight Russian oligarchs close to Putin. Australia was also taking steps to imposed sanctions on key figures in the Belarusian government who had aided the Ukraine invasion.

Payne said she was seeking advice from her department on following western allies' example in sanctioning Putin.

"It is an exceptional step to sanction leaders, but this is an exceptional situation," Payne said.

LONDON—British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says he is in "close contact" with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as he hailed "the fierce bravery and patriotism" of Ukraine's government and people.

In a recorded message, Johnson said "the scenes unfolding in the streets and fields of Ukraine are nothing short of a tragedy," calling it bloodshed Europe has not seen in a generation or more.

He said "the people of the United Kingdom stand with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in the face of this unjustifiable assault on your homeland."

Johnson also urged Russians to oppose the invasion, which he called "a tragedy for Russia" as well as for Ukraine.

Speaking in Russian, he said: "I do not believe this war is in your name."

Britain has imposed asset freezes and other sanctions on scores of Russian companies and several oligarchs, and has joined the U.S., Canada and the European Union in slapping sanctions on President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

TORONTO — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is announcing sanctions on Russian President Vladimir Putin, his chief of staff and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Trudeau also says Canada supports the removal of Russia from the SWIFT banking system.

The prime minister is also announcing sanctions against Belarus.

Meanwhile, Canada's largest province is pulling Russian products from shelves from government owned liquor stores. The French-speaking province of Quebec is also considering banning Russian liquor.

UNITED NATIONS—The U.N. plans to seek over \$1 billion in donations for humanitarian relief in Ukraine over the next three months, the world body's humanitarian chief said Friday.

Martin Griffiths said at a news briefing that the exact amount of the appeal is still being decided but will be "well north of \$1 billion."

The U.N. announced Thursday that it was immediately allocating \$20 million to expand its humanitarian operations in Ukraine. Even before Russia's attack this week, the world body estimated about 3 million people were in need of aid after years of fighting between Russian-backed separatists and the Ukrainian

government in the country's east.

Follow AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Russians push toward Ukraine's capital; residents take cover

By YURAS KARMAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and JAMES LaPORTA Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops pressed toward Ukraine's capital Saturday after a night of explosions and street fighting sent Kyiv residents seeking shelter underground. The country's leader refused an American offer to evacuate, insisting he would stay.

"The fight is here," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

Ukrainian officials reported some success in fending off assaults. Skirmishes reported on the edge of the city suggested that small Russian units were trying to clear a path for approaching forces, which a British official said "are still some way off."

Russia claims its assault on Ukraine is aimed only at military targets, but civilians have been killed and injured during Europe's largest ground war since World War II.

A missile struck a high-rise apartment building in the city's southwestern outskirts near one of Kyiv's two passenger airports, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said, leaving a jagged hole of ravaged apartments over several floors. A rescue worker said six civilians were injured.

The mayor extended a 10 p.m.-7 a.m. curfew he imposed two days ago to run from 5 p.m. until 8 a.m. as of Saturday.

"All civilians on the street during the curfew will be considered members of the enemy's sabotage and reconnaissance groups," Klitschko said.

The conflict has already driven hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians from their homes. U.N. officials said more than 120,000 Ukrainians have left the country for Poland, Moldova and other neighboring nations.

Saturday's street clashes followed two days of massive air and missile strikes as Russian soldiers moved in from the north, east and south. The assault pummeled bridges, schools and residential neighborhoods, and resulted in hundreds of casualties.

It was unclear in the fog of war how much of Ukraine was still under Ukrainian control and how much Russian forces have seized. Russia's defense ministry claimed the Russian military had taken full control of the southern city of Melitopol, about 22 miles (35 kilometers) inland from the Azov Sea coast, and said Russia-backed separatists had made significant gains in the eastern region of Donbas.

Western officials believe Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own. The invasion represented Putin's boldest effort yet to redraw the map of Europe and revive Moscow's Cold War-era influence.

Zelenskyy offered renewed assurance Saturday that the country's military would stand up to the Russian invasion. In a defiant video recorded on a downtown Kyiv street, he said he remained in the city and that claims the Ukrainian military would put down arms were false.

"We aren't going to lay down weapons. We will protect the country," the Ukrainian president said. "Our weapon is our truth, and our truth is that it's our land, our country, our children. And we will defend all of that."

In a second video later Saturday, Zelenskyy accused the Russian forces of hitting civilian areas and infrastructure.

The U.S. government urged Zelenskyy early Saturday to evacuate Kyiv but he turned down the offer, according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation. The official quoted the president as saying that he needed anti-tank ammunition but "not a ride."

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Ukraine's health minister reported Saturday that 198 people, including three children, have been killed and more than 1,000 others have been wounded since the Russian offensive started before dawn Thursday. It was unclear whether the figure included both military and civilian casualties.

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Ukrainian officials say hundreds of Russians have been killed in the first days of fighting. Russian authorities released no casualty figures.

The U.N. estimates that up to 4 million could flee if the fighting escalates. Refugees arriving in the Hungarian border town of Zahony said men of fighting age were not being allowed to leave Ukraine.

"My son was not allowed to come. My heart is so sore, I'm shaking, I can't calm down, they did not let him come," said Vilma Sugar, 68.

Many Kyiv residents spent another night in basements, underground parking garages and subway stations, heeding the warnings of city officials.

"We're all scared and worried. We don't know what to do then, what's going to happen in a few days," said Lucy Vashaka, 20, a worker at a small Kyiv hotel.

A British official, Armed Forces Minister James Heappey, said fighting in the capital was so far confined to "very isolated pockets of Russian special forces and paratroopers."

The United States and other global powers moved to freeze the assets of Putin and his foreign minister Friday as part of tougher sanctions on Russia as the invasion reverberated through the world's economy and energy supplies.

Russia remained unbowed, vetoing a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that it stop attacking Ukraine and withdraw troops immediately. The 11-1 vote, with China, India and the United Arab Emirates abstaining, showed significant opposition to Russia's invasion of its smaller, militarily weaker neighbor.

A senior Russian official on Saturday shrugged off the wide-ranging sanctions that the U.S., the European Union and other allies slapped on Russia as a reflection of Western "political impotence."

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council, warned that Moscow could react to the sanctions by opting out of the last remaining nuclear arms pact, freezing Western assets and cutting diplomatic ties with nations in the West.

"There is no particular need in maintaining diplomatic relations," Medvedev said. "We may look at each other in binoculars and gunsights."

NATO, meanwhile, decided Friday to send parts of the alliance's response force to help protect member nations in the east for the first time. NATO did not say how many troops would be deployed but added that it would involve land, sea and air power.

The Biden administration said it was sending Ukraine up to \$350 million in arms and other defensive supplies from U.S. Department of Defense stockpiles, with another \$250 million in defensive support possible. With the latest move, the U.S. has provided about \$1 billion in defensive support to Ukraine over the past year.

Putin has argued that the West left him with no other choice by refusing to negotiate Russia's security demands. Zelenskyy offered Friday to negotiate a key one: that Ukraine declare itself neutral and abandon its ambition of joining NATO.

The Kremlin said it accepted Kyiv's offer to hold talks, but it appeared to be an effort to squeeze concessions out of the embattled Zelenskyy instead of a gesture toward a diplomatic solution.

Isachenkov reported from Moscow. LaPorta reported from Boca Raton, Florida. Francesca Ebel, Josef Federman and Andrew Drake in Kyiv; Jill Lawless in London; Angela Charlton in Paris; Geir Moulson and Frank Jordans in Berlin; Raf Casert and Lorne Cook in Brussels; Vanessa Gera in Warsaw; Nic Dumitrache in Mariupol, Ukraine; Matt Sedensky in New York; Jennifer Peltz at the United Nations; and Robert Burns, Matthew Lee, Aamer Madhani, Eric Tucker, Nomaan Merchant, Ellen Knickmeyer, Zeke Miller, Chris Megerian and Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

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Sanctions swing toward Putin himself as Ukraine anger grows

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin is the latest target of sanctions over the inva-

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sion of Ukraine, with the United States, Canada and European allies announcing they are adding direct measures against him and his foreign minister. Russia on Saturday warned it could react by opting out of its last remaining nuclear arms pact and cutting diplomatic ties.

With Russian forces on the outskirts of Ukraine's capital, diplomatic appeals appeared to come second to imposing financial pain on Russia as global condemnation — and frustration — grew.

"This war will last, and all the crises that go with it will have durable consequences," French President Emmanuel Macron said.

Acknowledging the same, the Biden administration said it was sending Ukraine up to \$350 million in arms and other defensive supplies from U.S. Department of Defense stockpiles, with another \$250 million in defensive support possible. The Czech Republic also approved a plan to send more arms to Ukraine.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Friday said the U.S. was preparing individual sanctions on Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, likely to include travel bans. The announcement came after the European Union announced it intended to freeze Putin's assets, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told NATO leaders his country would sanction Putin and Lavrov.

Psaki said President Joe Biden hadn't planned any more direct diplomatic overtures toward Putin, but "it does not mean we have ruled out diplomacy forever."

She said the U.S. would also newly sanction the Russian Direct Investment Fund, which functions as a sovereign wealth fund meant to draw capital into the Russian economy.

The U.S. measures block Putin and Lavrov, whom the Treasury Department's formal announcement of the sanctions described as Putin's "chief propagandist," from access to any assets within reach of U.S. officials, and bar anyone in the United States from doing business with them. Members of Russia's security council also were sanctioned.

On Saturday, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, said sanctions could offer Moscow a pretext for a review of its ties with the West, suggesting that Russia could cut them altogether. "We may look at each other in binoculars and gunsights," he said. He also suggested that Russia could opt out of the New START nuclear arms control treaty that limits U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals.

The U.S. and European allies earlier announced sweeping asset freezes and other penalties against Russia's banks, state-owned enterprises and elites. On Saturday, triggered by the sanctions, French Marines patrolling the English Channel area intercepted a cargo ship sailing under the Russian flag for an investigation, the Maritime Prefecture said. Spokeswoman Veronique Magnin said it appeared to be the first such action in the Channel.

EU ministers have said further sanctions are possible, including kicking Russia out of SWIFT, the dominant system for global financial transactions. Separately, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Canada supports the removal of Russia from the SWIFT banking system.

Russia has imposed its own measures, announcing the "partial restriction" of access to Facebook after the social media network limited the accounts of several Kremlin-backed media. Russia also vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that Moscow stop its attack on Ukraine and withdraw all troops.

Countries in Asia and the Pacific have joined the U.S., the EU and others in sanctioning Russian banks and leading companies and setting up export controls aimed at starving Russia's industries and military of semiconductors and other high-tech products.

Australia on Saturday said it is imposing sanctions against all 339 members of the Russian parliament as well as eight Russian oligarchs close to Putin and is considering sanctions against Putin and Lavrov.

Japan and South Korea on Saturday said their foreign ministers had spoken with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. But Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi declined to say whether Japan plans to impose sanctions on Putin or Lavrov. South Korea's foreign ministry said Blinken thanked South Korea over its willingness to participate in international sanctions against Russia, without details.

But China, the only friend that might help Russia blunt the impact of sanctions, has continued to denounce sanctions and blamed the U.S. and its allies for provoking Moscow. Beijing, worried about American power in Asia, has increasingly aligned its foreign policy with Russia to challenge the West.

Russian chess legend and opposition politician Garry Kasparov described sanctions that don't directly

hit Putin as merely symbolic.

"As long as he controls hundreds of billions of dollars and looks invincible for his cronies in Russia, I don't think that any protest on Russian streets will change anything," Kasparov added in an interview with Sky News.

Associated Press journalists around the world contributed.

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Crime watch: ICC prosecutor is monitoring Ukraine invasion

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The International Criminal Court's prosecutor has put combatants and their commanders on notice that he is monitoring Russia's invasion of Ukraine and has jurisdiction to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

But Prosecutor Karim Khan acknowledged that he cannot investigate the issue that is being most talked-about at this stage of the invasion — the crime of aggression.

Western leaders have widely condemned Russian President Vladimir Putin's order to invade Ukraine. U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday said the invasion "was always about naked aggression, about Putin's desire for empire by any means necessary," while British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called it "Vladimir Putin's war of aggression."

While the global treaty that established the Hague-based court in 2002 has been updated to include the crime of aggression since 2018, Khan said he does not have jurisdiction over that because neither Ukraine nor Russia is among the court's 123 member states.

The only way the court could get jurisdiction over the crime of aggression in the conflict in Ukraine is if the United Nations Security Council were to call on the ICC to investigate.

That "ain't going to happen," said Brendan Plant, a Fellow of the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law and Downing College at the University of Cambridge, because Russia is one of the council's veto-wielding permanent members.

Putin has sought to justify his invasion by warning that pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine faced what he called genocide from Ukrainian forces.

Plant called it a "concocted" legal justification.

"Even if this twisted invocation of the right of self-defense were accepted, it's extremely difficult to see how such a wide-scale invasion, with incursions across multiple sites across the country, well beyond even the most expansive territorial claims of the separatist regions, could be justified as a necessary and proportionate act of self-defense," he said.

While the crime of aggression is out of the global court's reach, crimes committed during the conflict are not.

Khan said his office "may exercise its jurisdiction over and investigate any act of genocide, crime against humanity or war crime committed within the territory of Ukraine." That's because Ukraine, while not a member state, has accepted the court's jurisdiction.

In a warning that could apply to Russia's civilian and military leadership, Khan 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."

He added: "It is imperative that all parties to the conflict respect their obligations under international humanitarian law."

War crimes and crimes against humanity cover numerous offenses committed during armed conflicts including murder, torture, rape and forced expulsions of civilians. Laws governing the conduct of war aim to rein in disproportionate use of force and protect civilians and troops no longer participating in fighting such as prisoners and the wounded. They also prohibit attacks on civilian targets and infrastructure such

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as hospitals and on cultural and religious sites like churches.

Rights group Amnesty International said Friday that Russia's invasion was "marked by indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and strikes on protected objects such as hospitals."

The group made the claim after analyzing photos, video and satellite imagery of three attacks carried out in the early hours of Feb. 24.

"The Russian government, which falsely claims to use only precision-guided weapons, should take responsibility for these acts," said Agnes Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

The ICC was established in 2002 to prosecute individual perpetrators and their commanders responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, in cases where nations are unable or unwilling to hold their own trials. The crime of aggression was added later to the list of offenses in the Rome Statute treaty that founded the court.

While the ICC cannot prosecute anybody for aggression in the Ukraine invasion, there is another avenue, said Carsten Stahn, a professor of international criminal law and global justice at Leiden University.

"We have around 40 states in the world which have actually legislation on the crime of aggression, and some of them could use this legislation also in order to exercise jurisdiction over aggression," Stahn said.

Universal jurisdiction is invoked by some nations in cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity, allowing them to prosecute crimes committed outside their own borders.

One of the highest profile examples of its use was against former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, who was arrested in London in 1998 on a Spanish warrant. He ultimately was not put on trial due to ill health, but his case served as a warning for leaders accused of crimes that they may no longer be able to travel the world with impunity.

Although Ukraine is not a member of the ICC, it has accepted the court's jurisdiction over alleged crimes on its territory dating back to 2013. That acceptance forms the legal underpinning for Khan's warning to combatants that he could prosecute crimes committed during the Russian invasion.

The court already has conducted a preliminary probe into crimes linked to the violent suppression of pro-European protests in Kyiv in 2013-2014 and allegations of crimes in Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and eastern Ukraine.

In December 2020, the then-ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said the probe uncovered indications that "a broad range of conduct constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity within the jurisdiction of the Court have been committed" in Ukraine. However, the court's prosecutors have not yet sought permission from judges to open a full-scale investigation.

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China is Russia's best hope to blunt sanctions, but wary

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China is the only friend that might help Russia blunt the impact of economic sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine, but President Xi Jinping's government is giving no sign it might be willing to risk its own access to U.S. and European markets by doing too much.

Even if Beijing wanted to, its ability to support President Vladimir Putin by importing more Russian gas and other goods is limited.

Relations with Moscow have warmed since Xi took power in 2012, motivated by shared resentment of Washington, but their interests can conflict. While their militaries hold joint exercises, Putin is uneasy about the growing Chinese economic presence in Central Asia and Russia's Far East.

"China-Russia relations are at the highest level in history, but the two countries are not an alliance," said Li Xin, an international relations expert at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law.

In response to the invasion, Washington, Britain, the 27-nation European Union and other Western allies

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have announced or promised sanctions against Russian banks, officials, business leaders and companies, as well as export controls aimed at starving Russia's industries and military of high-tech products.

Xi's government might support Putin within those limits — and Chinese companies might use the situation to pursue better deals — but will balk at openly violating sanctions and being targeted for penalties, experts said.

"China doesn't want to get so involved that it ends up suffering as a result of its support for Russia," said Mark Williams, chief Asia economist for Capital Economics.

Chinese trade with Russia rose to \$146.9 billion last year, but that is less than one-tenth of China's total \$1.6 trillion in trade with the United States and EU.

"It all hinges on whether they're willing to risk their access to Western markets to help Russia, and I don't think they are," said Williams. "It's just not that big a market."

China, the world's second-largest economy, is the only major government not to have condemned the invasion.

"The degree of Chinese support Russia receives is likely to prove a crucial factor in how well it can weather the long-term consequences," wrote Kevin Rudd, a former Australian prime minister and president of the Asia Society, on the Asia Society website.

China's multibillion-dollar purchases of Russian gas for its energy-hungry economy have been a lifeline for Putin following trade and financial sanctions imposed in 2014 over his seizure of Crimea from Ukraine.

Putin's government has spent the past decade trying to expand exports to the Far East to reduce reliance on European markets. Moscow and Beijing both are trying to de-dollarize, or use the U.S. currency less in trade, to reduce their exposure to the American financial system and official pressure.

China bought one-sixth of Russia's total exports last year and two-thirds of that was oil and gas, according to Rajiv Biswas, chief Asia-Pacific economist for IHS Markit.

"China will be an important growth market for Russian energy exports," Biswas said.

China wants more gas, but Moscow can't immediately deliver. Pipelines linking the two countries are fully loaded. They signed a 30-year supply deal last month but said pipes to carry that gas won't be completed for at least three years.

Beijing has shown its self-interest by using pressure on Moscow from the 2014 sanctions as leverage to negotiate lower gas prices in an earlier contract.

"We will not take advantage of others' difficulties," said Li. "But as an economic entity, Chinese companies will strive for the maximum gains with the possible lowest costs."

A Foreign Ministry spokesman didn't answer directly when asked Friday whether China might buy more Russian oil. But he criticized "illegal unilateral sanctions" and said Beijing and Moscow carry on "normal trade cooperation."

"We demand that relevant parties should not damage the legitimate rights and interests of China and other countries," said the spokesman, Wang Wenbin.

Also this week, China announced it would allow imports of wheat from all parts of Russia for the first time. That cannot replace all lost gas revenue if Europe stops buying but could help to buoy incomes of Russian farmers.

Still, that announcement came with a warning that looms as a potential obstacle: Shipments must be kept free of a fungus that led China earlier to avoid Russian wheat.

Moscow also might have undercut Beijing's willingness to help by launching its invasion after Xi endorsed Russian complaints about security and the expansion of the NATO military alliance in a statement with Putin last month.

Xi's government has tried to distance itself from the attack by urging respect for national sovereignty, which Foreign Minister Wang Yi said last weekend includes Ukraine.

While trade deals will go ahead, "China will not side with Russia over its invasion of Ukraine," said Zhang Lihua, an expert on Chinese-European relations at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

In a phone call Friday with Putin, Xi said China "supports Russia and Ukraine resolving this problem through dialogue," state TV reported.

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China's relations with Washington and Europe already are strained by complaints about Beijing's technology ambitions, market access, human rights, Hong Kong and Chinese claims to disputed seas and territory in the Himalayas.

China is accused by the United States and its allies of helping Iran and North Korea evade sanctions, but the scale of violations and penalties have been limited.

Beijing says it complies with a U.N. ban on most trade with North Korea over its nuclear weapons development. But China has been accused of failing to enforce that fully for fear of causing an economic collapse and a refugee crisis on its border.

Chinese-flagged ships are suspected of taking oil to North Korea and exporting its coal, though it isn't clear whether that has approval from Chinese leaders. North Korea is accused of using Chinese brokers to launder stolen cryptocurrency.

Except for tech giant Huawei Technologies Ltd., which was accused of trading with Iran, Chinese violators are small and have few foreign activities that are vulnerable to sanctions.

Western anger over Putin's attack on Ukraine is more intense, suggesting governments will watch closely and enforcement will be more stringent.

Beijing has criticized U.S. threats to impose "secondary sanctions" that hit not just companies or banks dealing with North Korea but their customers and business partners. If Washington were to carry out such secondary sanctions in relation to Ukraine, there would be little China could do to protect state-owned banks and other companies with operations in foreign economies.

Some Chinese oil and gas companies with Russian partners were hurt by earlier sanctions on Moscow, Li said.

"This is what Chinese companies are worried about," Li said.

AP researcher Yu Bing and video producer Caroline Chen in Beijing and Associated Press writers Hyung-Jin Kim in Seoul, South Korea, and David Rising in Bangkok contributed to this report.

Street fighting begins in Kyiv; people urged to seek shelter

By YURAS KARMAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and JAMES LaPORTA Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops stormed toward Ukraine's capital Saturday, and street fighting broke out as city officials urged residents to take shelter. The country's president refused an American offer to evacuate, insisting that he would stay. "The fight is here," he said.

As dawn broke in Kyiv, it was not immediately clear how far the soldiers had advanced. Ukrainian officials reported some success in fending off assaults, but fighting persisted near the capital. Skirmishes reported on the edge of the city suggested that small Russian units were probing Ukrainian defenses to clear a path for the main forces.

The swift movement of the troops after less than three days of fighting further imperiled a country clinging to independence in the face of a broad Russian assault, which threatened to topple the democratic government and scramble the post-Cold War world order.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy offered renewed assurance Saturday that the country's military would stand up to the Russian invasion. In a video recorded on a downtown street, he said he had not left the city and that claims that the Ukrainian military would put down arms were false.

"We aren't going to lay down weapons. We will protect the country," he said. "Our weapon is our truth, and our truth is that it's our land, our country, our children. And we will defend all of that."

The street clashes followed fighting that pummeled bridges, schools and apartment buildings, and resulted in hundreds of casualties. By Saturday morning, when the small Russian units tried to infiltrate Kyiv, Ukrainian forces controlled the situation, Zelenskyy adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said.

U.S. officials believe Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own. The invasion represented Putin's boldest effort yet to redraw the map of Europe and revive Moscow's Cold War-era influence. It triggered new international efforts to end

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the invasion, including direct sanctions on Putin.

Zelenskyy was urged early Saturday to evacuate Kyiv at the behest of the U.S. government but turned down the offer, according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation. The official quoted the president as saying that "the fight is here" and that he needed anti-tank ammunition but "not a ride."

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

City officials in Kyiv urged residents to seek shelter, to stay away from windows and to take precautions to avoid flying debris or bullets.

The Kremlin accepted Kyiv's offer to hold talks, but it appeared to be an effort to squeeze concessions out of the embattled Zelenskyy instead of a gesture toward a diplomatic solution.

The Russian military on Friday laid claim to the southern Ukraine city of Melitopol. Still, it was unclear in the fog of war how much of Ukraine was still under Ukrainian control and how much Russian forces have seized.

As fighting persisted, Ukraine's military reported shooting down an Il-76 Russian transport plane carrying paratroopers near Vasylkiv, a city 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Kyiv, an account confirmed by a senior American intelligence official. It was unclear how many were on board. Transport planes can carry up to 125 paratroopers.

A second Russian military transport plane was shot down near Bila Tserkva, 50 miles (85 kilometers) south of Kyiv, according to two American officials with direct knowledge of conditions on the ground in Ukraine.

The Russian military did not comment on either plane.

The U.S. and other global powers slapped ever-tougher sanctions on Russia as the invasion reverberated through the world's economy and energy supplies. U.N. officials said millions could flee Ukraine. Sports leagues moved to punish Russia, and even the popular Eurovision song contest banned it from the May finals in Italy.

Through it all, Russia remained unbowed, vetoing a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that it stop attacking Ukraine and withdraw troops immediately. The veto was expected, but the U.S. and its supporters argued that the effort would highlight Moscow's international isolation. The 11-1 vote, with China, India and the United Arab Emirates abstaining, showed significant opposition to Russia's invasion of its smaller, militarily weaker neighbor.

NATO, meanwhile, decided to send parts of the alliance's response force to help protect member nations in the east for the first time. NATO did not say how many troops would be deployed but added that it would involve land, sea and air power.

It was unclear how many people overall had died in the largest ground war in Europe since World War II.

Ukrainian officials reported at least 137 deaths on their side from the first full day of fighting and claimed hundreds on the Russian one. Russian authorities released no casualty figures.

U.N. officials reported 25 civilian deaths, mostly from shelling and airstrikes, and said that 100,000 people were believed to have left their homes. They estimate that up to 4 million could flee if the fighting escalates.

Late Friday, U.S. President Joe Biden signed a memo authorizing up to \$350 million in additional security assistance to Ukraine, bringing the total security aid approved for Ukraine to \$1 billion over the past year. It was not clear how quickly the aid would flow.

Zelenskyy's whereabouts were kept secret after he told European leaders in a call Thursday that he was Russia's No. 1 target — and that they might not see him again alive. His office later released a video of him standing with senior aides outside the presidential office and saying that he and other government officials would stay in the capital.

Zelenskyy earlier offered to negotiate on a key Putin demand: that Ukraine declare itself neutral and abandon its ambition of joining NATO. The Kremlin said Kyiv initially agreed to have talks in Minsk, then said it would prefer Warsaw and later halted communications. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said later that Moscow would discuss prospects for talks on Saturday.

The assault was anticipated for weeks by the U.S. and Western allies and denied to be in the works just

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as long by Putin. He argued that the West left him with no other choice by refusing to negotiate Russia's security demands.

Putin has not disclosed his ultimate plans for Ukraine. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov gave a hint, saying, "We want to allow the Ukrainian people to determine its own fate." Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia recognizes Zelenskyy as the president, but would not say how long the Russian military operation could last.

Russian forces invaded the country from three sides after amassing an estimated 150,000 troops nearby. Residents of a Kyiv apartment building woke to screaming, smoke and flying dust. What the mayor identified as Russian shelling tore off part of the building and ignited a fire.

"What are you doing? What is this?" resident Yurii Zhyhanov asked Russian forces. Like countless other Ukrainians, he grabbed what belongings he could, took his mother and fled, car alarms wailing behind him.

Elsewhere in Kyiv, the body of a dead soldier lay near an underpass. Fragments of a downed aircraft smoked amid the brick homes of a residential area. Black plastic was draped over body parts found beside them. People climbed out of bomb shelters, basements and subways to face another day of upheaval.

"We're all scared and worried. We don't know what to do then, what's going to happen in a few days," said Lucy Vashaka, 20, a worker at a small Kyiv hotel.

The Biden administration said Friday that it would move to freeze the assets of Putin and Lavrov, following the European Union and Britain in directly sanctioning top Russian leadership.

Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, called the sanctions against Putin and Lavrov "an example and a demonstration of a total helplessness" of the West.

Isachenkov reported from Moscow. LaPorta reported from Boca Raton, Florida. Francesca Ebel, Josef Federman and Andrew Drake in Kyiv; Angela Charlton in Paris; Geir Moulson and Frank Jordans in Berlin; Raf Casert and Lorne Cook in Brussels; Nic Dumitrache in Mariupol, Ukraine; Matt Sedensky in New York; Jennifer Peltz at the United Nations; and Robert Burns, Matthew Lee, Aamer Madhani, Eric Tucker, Nomaan Merchant, Ellen Knickmeyer, Zeke Miller, Chris Megerian and Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

US sanctions on Russian oligarchs miss richest of rich

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, JOSHUA GOODMAN, SARAH EL DEEB and RICHARD LARDNER Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — The term Russian oligarch conjures images of posh London mansions, gold-plated Bentleys and sleek superyachts in the Mediterranean, their decks draped with partiers dripping in jewels.

But the raft of sanctions on oligarchs announced by President Joe Biden this week in response to the invasion of Ukraine may do little to dim the jet-setting lifestyles of Russia's ultra-rich and infamous — much less force a withdrawal of tanks and troops.

U.S. sanctions target Russian President Vladimir Putin and a handful of individuals believed to be among his closest security advisers, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. But the list is just as notable for who isn't on it — most of the top names from Forbes' list of the richest Russians whose multi-billion-dollar fortunes are now largely intertwined with the West, from investments in Silicon Valley start-ups to British Premier League soccer teams.

Citing the concerns of European allies, the U.S. also didn't impose what was seen as the harshest punishment at its disposal, banning Russia from SWIFT, the international financial system that banks use to move money around the world.

Biden said Thursday the new U.S. sanctions would nonetheless cripple Russia's financial system and stymie its economic growth by targeting Russia's biggest banks, which the Treasury Department said holds nearly 80% of all the country's banking assets.

"Putin is the aggressor. Putin chose this war. And now he and his country will bear the consequences," Biden said, laying out measures that will "impose severe cost on the Russian economy, both immediately and over time."

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But much of the wealth of Russia's richest isn't held in the sanctioned Russian banks. Putin and the oligarchs aligned with him have had decades to stash assets overseas, much of it hidden in ways specifically designed to avoid sanctions.

Though the Kremlin officially reports Putin's income at \$131,900 annually, the Russian president is believed to benefit from many billions in cash and overseas assets held by trusted friends and relatives, many of whom are from his home city of St. Petersburg.

A 2017 study of Russian oligarchs published by the U.S.-based National Economic Bureau estimated that as much as \$800 billion is held by wealthy Russians in the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Cyprus, and similar offshore banking centers. That vast fortune, held by a few hundred ultra-rich individuals, is roughly equal to the wealth of the entire rest of the Russian population of 144 million people.

Some oligarchs have also obtained dual citizenship in Britain and other Western countries, adding legal complications to attempts to unilaterally seize their assets.

An example is Roman Abramovich, a former Russian provincial governor and Putin ally who became a steel and metals magnate. Now a dual Israeli citizen with a net worth estimated at more than \$13 billion, Abramovich has used his fortune to buy the British soccer club Chelsea and homes in London and New York. He and his now ex-wife frequently socialized with Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, the daughter and son-in-law of former President Donald Trump.

Abramovich also owns what is purported to be the world's most expensive superyacht, the 455-foot-long Solaris, which features a helicopter hanger, tennis court, pool and berths for about 100 guests and crew.

Also not on the sanctions list is Alisher Usmanov, another Russian metals tycoon who was an early investor in Facebook. His fortune is estimated at more than \$14 billion.

Usmanov recently sold his stake in the British soccer club Arsenal for a reported \$700 million and, according to Forbes, owns two sprawling estates in London – the Beechwood House and Sutton Place – worth a combined \$300 million. Usmanov's superyacht, Dilbar, measures 512 feet from bow to stern, even longer than Abramovich's.

Daniel Fried, a former U.S. official under both Democratic and Republican administrations who helped craft U.S. sanctions against Moscow in the wake of Putin's 2014 invasion of the Crimean Peninsula, said he was surprised Abramovich and Usmanov weren't on the sanctions list announced Thursday, given their long ties to Putin and visible assets in the West.

But, Fried warned, sanctioning Russian oligarchs would likely have limited impact on persuading Putin to change course in Ukraine.

"He owns them absolutely. He crushed them and they exist only by his sufferance," said Fried. "He can jail them, or kill them, and the notion that the oligarchs can assert influence over Putin is foolish."

Still, he said the opinion of wealthy, educated elites carries some intangible weight that Putin defies at his own risk. While sanctions are unlikely to drive the oligarchs away from Putin, they do raise for them the cost of their continued support.

"They can't stop or vote him out of office. But he's only in total control until he isn't," said Fried, who is now a fellow at the Washington-based Atlantic Council.

The family fortunes of many in Russia's billionaires date back to the 1990s, the turbulent decade after the fall of the Soviet Union. Under the notoriously corrupt presidency of Boris Yeltsin, such key state-controlled assets as oil refineries, steel mills, aluminum smelters and tractor factories were gobbled up by the politically influential, often purchased with the aid of government-backed loans.

Then in 1999 Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned and the then-relatively unknown Putin was appointed as acting president. A former KGB agent, Putin had earlier been appointed by Yeltsin as the head of Russia's FSB, among the country's most powerful spying and security agencies.

Putin has ruled Russia for the last 22 years, crushing those who have dared challenge him.

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, an oil baron once believed to be the wealthiest man in Russia, ran afoul of Putin when he more fully embraced the free market and began criticizing the vestiges of Soviet central planning. Khodorkovsky was arrested by Russian authorities in 2003 and charged with fraud, money laundering and embezzlement. After spending a decade in jail, he was released in 2013 and fled to London, where he

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now leads a foundation, the Dossier Center, dedicated to exposing criminal activity by Kremlin insiders. Boris Berezovsky, a mathematician turned Mercedes dealer who amassed a fortune by acquiring the country's main television channel at the end of the Soviet era, was tried in absentia on charged of fraud and embezzlement after fleeing to London in 2000.

He was found dead on the bathroom floor of his home in southern England in 2013. His daughter said he feared he had been poisoned after losing a major court battle against Abramovich, his former business partner. Originally believed to be a suicide, a coroner recorded the cause of death as inconclusive.

"Every oligarch owes the preservation of their wealth to the Kremlin," said Max Bergmann, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress who also served at the State Department during the Obama administration. "The oligarch class is an important pillar of the Putin regime and is heavily exposed because their assets are held in the West – in villas in the South of France, condos in Trump properties, and in sports teams."

Maria Shagina, a sanctions expert at the Helsinki-based Finnish Institute of International Affairs, said European countries are seeking to insulate their own economic interests from the effects of sanctions, whether that's natural gas piped to Germany, diamonds imported from Siberian mines or Italian luxury cars and designer handbags sold in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

"We see that Europeans don't want to bear any sanctions cost," Shagina said. "It is painful for everyone."

But, the experts said, the sanctions announced this week will cause pain and eventually force the Kremlin to make hard budgetary choices by weakening the Russian economy.

Most Russians are significantly poorer than their Western counterparts. The Russian Federation ranks 83rd in per capita gross domestic product, at a little under \$11,000 per person, according to 2020 data compiled by The World Bank. That's less than a third of the average for the European Union and about one-sixth of per-capita GDP for the United States.

"Putin will have to choose between putting money into his military or paying pensioners," Bergmann said. "So sanctions serve to degrade Putin's power and strength over the long term."

In the meantime, wealthy Russians are investing in cryptocurrencies and using other emerging strategies to protect their fortunes, much like they adapted to an earlier round of U.S. sanctions following Putin's 2014 Crimean invasion.

"Sanctions enforcement is inherently a cat-and-mouse game," said Marhsall Billingslea, who helped set sanctions policy for the Trump administration, "and they've had eight years, ever since Crimea, to set up alternative mechanisms to keep hard currency flowing to the regime."

Edward Fishman, a former State Department official during the Obama administration, said the move to sanction Putin sends a strong signal of support to the Ukrainians who are under fire. But the economic penalties with have no real effect on the Russian leader.

"No sanctions can dramatically decrease Putin's quality of life ... Putin treats the Russian economy as his own personal piggy bank," Fishman said. "President Putin's wealth is derived from the hard-earned wages of Russian taxpayers, as well as Russia's oil exports."

This story was updated to correct the name of the organization Bergmann is affiliated with to the Center for American Progress, not American Progress.

Goodman reported from Miami and El Deeb from Beirut.

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org.

GOP tests midterm message not focused on Trump grievances

By STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The Republican Party's leading conservatives have spent several days in Florida focused on the issues they believe will help the GOP retake control of Congress this fall — and perhaps

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the White House soon thereafter.

Largely unmentioned? Former President Donald Trump and his chief grievances.

Lies about election fraud, the focus of last year's Conservative Political Action Conference, have been an afterthought for the opening days of this year's four-day affair. Some high-profile speakers distanced themselves from Trump's approving rhetoric toward Russian President Vladimir Putin, who launched an invasion of Ukraine shortly before the gathering. Some didn't mention Trump's name.

Instead, those most likely to seek the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 2024 rallied in favor of more parental control of schools, railed against any mention of systemic racism and rejected pandemic-related mandates.

The unified message from more than a half-dozen top elected officials, delivered to thousands of mostly white activists at an annual event not known for moderation, will be tested when Trump delivers the keynote address Saturday night. But with momentum heading toward the 2022 midterms, Republicans are increasingly optimistic they have found a forward-looking strategy to expand the GOP's appeal and win back women and independents who fled the party during Trump's presidency.

"There are people that perhaps have never voted the same way any of you have in a presidential race and they're really angry," Florida Sen. Marco Rubio told conservative activists Friday. "And that's why I believe that for all the negative we've heard, the pendulum is swinging."

Democrats have reason to be concerned if Republicans can stay focused.

The party is clinging to paper-thin majorities in the House and Senate, and voter sentiment has swung in an ominous direction for Democrats since President Joe Biden took office. In an AP-NORC poll conducted Feb. 18-21, 70% of Americans said the country was headed in the wrong direction. As few as 44% said the same in April 2021.

And as public opinion shifts, the GOP is drawing on the same playbook that Virginia's Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin used last fall to win in a state Trump lost by 10 points a year earlier. Youngkin avoided Trump and his biggest grievances, including the false notion that the 2020 presidential election was plagued by mass voter fraud.

It was much the same this week in Florida.

Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley, who tried to block the certification of Biden's electoral victory after the Jan. 6 Capitol attack, sidestepped a question about whether he would challenge Trump in a 2024 prospective matchup.

"I've said I'm not planning to run for president," Hawley told reporters before his speech, which focused on Biden's foreign policy challenges and the teaching of systemic racism.

Hawley also declined to say whether he wants Trump to run again in 2024: "I never give him advice, including on this."

The senator then distanced himself from the Republicans, including Trump, who have offered soft praise for Putin. "That's a mistake. Putin is our enemy. Let's be clear about that," Hawley said.

Trump told supporters at his Florida estate this week that Putin was "pretty smart" for seizing Ukraine.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has also refused to rule out a 2024 presidential bid should Trump run, did not mention the former president in his 20-minute address. Instead, he railed against what he called "Fauci-ism," a reference to leading government health official Anthony Fauci's cautious approach to the pandemic.

After touting his own anti-mask and anti-vaccine policies as governor, DeSantis trained his harshest criticism at the Democratic president. He said Biden "hates" Florida.

"He's had the worst first year of any president since the 1800s," DeSantis said.

Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke about his work in the Trump administration, but he did not repeat his own flattering comments about Putin from earlier in the week, when he called the Russian leader "very capable" and said he has "enormous respect for him."

Pompeo, who reminded attendees of his potential 2024 ambitions by citing a recent trip to Iowa, said those focused on systemic racism, not the nation's foreign adversaries, represent the greatest threat to

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America's future.

"There is no threat greater to the United States than that which emanates inside our republic, emanates inside our school system, if we do not teach our children, the next generation, that we are not a racist nation," Pompeo said.

While Trump was not celebrated by most of the top Republicans on the speaking program, there were exceptions. And many lower-profile speakers praised the former president, repeated his lie that the 2020 election was stolen and downplayed Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

North Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, considered a potential running mate for Trump in 2024, talked about the 2016 presidential election and allegations that Democrats in power "spied" on the Trump campaign. But she pivoted quickly to the future.

"We have some fantastic fighters, like President Donald Trump. But he's not alone. The American people are on our side," Noem said, touting her own efforts as governor to block pandemic-related restrictions.

But even Nigel Farage, a former British politician and one of Trump's top allies abroad, urged conference participants to move past Trump's obsession with his 2020 election loss.

"Does it make sense for the Republican Party to go on talking about the stolen election?" he asked, as some in the crowd shouted, "Yes!" "This message of a stolen election, if you think about it, is a negative, backward-looking message. ... That negative anger must be turned into a positive."

Meanwhile, conference organizers on Sunday will release the results of their annual presidential straw poll, which Trump has dominated in recent years. Matt Schlapp, chair of the American Conservative Union, noted that some other would-be presidential contenders are popular as well.

DeSantis, in particular, was a favorite of the large crowd, which applauded almost every time his name was referenced or his picture appeared on the big screens at the head of the hotel ballroom room.

"Trump looms large," Schlapp said in an interview. "No. 1 is, Does he run again? And it's overwhelming that people want him to. But there's a diversity of opinion."

Another collection of ambitious Republicans, the more aggressive Trump critics, were excluded from the conference altogether. Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie were among them.

Christie addressed the snub during a call Wednesday with reporters on redistricting. He co-chairs the GOP group directing the party's efforts and noted he also chairs fundraising for Republican governors.

"CPAC is a good group of people, but it's one group of people in our party," Christie said when asked about his absence. "I've got plenty of forums to work in the party. ... Those are the efforts that are going to determine how we do this fall in elections, not some conference where we're going to be doing some talking in February."

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin in New York, Nick Riccardi in Denver and Emily Swanson in Washington contributed to this report.

Senators to watch as Supreme Court fight unfolds

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Senate Democrats say they are hoping for a bipartisan vote to confirm Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court.

That won't be easy, but some Republicans have expressed an openness to voting for Biden's nominee, who currently sits on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit and would be the first Black woman on the Supreme Court. Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina voted last year to confirm Jackson for her current position.

As senators review Jackson's record in the coming days and weeks, some Republicans may drop hints about whether they are willing to vote for Jackson, who would replace liberal Justice Stephen Breyer. But senators in both parties often withhold their support until after they meet with the nominee and confirmation hearings are held.

Democrats will also keep an eye on their own moderate flank, Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and

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Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. Neither has indicated, so far, that they would vote against Biden's choice, and they have voted for all his other nominees.

Senators to watch as the confirmation process begins:

SEN. SUSAN COLLINS, R-MAINE

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin made one of his first calls to Collins after Justice Stephen Breyer announced in January that he will retire this summer. The Maine senator, who voted against Justice Amy Coney Barrett, former President Donald Trump's nominee for Supreme Court in 2020, is perhaps Democrats' best chance for a Republican crossover vote.

"I'm reaching out to the Republicans and saying the nominee will be available for you to get to know them," and answer any questions, Durbin said then of his conversation with Collins, who is a moderate. She responded that she appreciated the offer.

Collins has called for Democrats to take the process deliberatively and slowly as they have made clear they want to move swiftly. Asked about Jackson before she was nominated, Collins said she would "certainly give her every consideration" but she had not met her personally and would have to look at her more recent record. On Friday, Collins said she would conduct a "thorough vetting" and meet with the nominee in the coming weeks.

SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM, R-S.C.

Graham pushed Biden to pick a South Carolinian — federal district court Judge J. Michelle Childs. While the White House said Childs was under consideration, the president eventually picked the more experienced Jackson instead.

Unlike almost all of his current colleagues, the mercurial Graham has long said the Senate should confirm a president's nominees, no matter the party. And along with Collins and Murkowski, he is one of the only Republicans to have voted for many of Biden's lower court picks. But he said earlier this month that if the nominee wasn't Childs, whom he considers more moderate than Jackson, his vote would be more "problematic."

Graham said he was also pushing Childs because she had not attended college or law school at Harvard or Yale, unlike Jackson and almost every justice on the court. "The Harvard-Yale train to the Supreme Court continues to run unabated," Graham said in a statement after Biden's announcement on Friday.

SEN. LISA MURKOWSKI, R-ALASKA

Along with Collins, Murkowski is one of the most moderate Republican members of the Senate and has expressed concerns about whether the court could overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade decision guaranteeing a right to an abortion. But she is up for reelection this year in her conservative state, and she has signaled she may not be inclined to cross party lines.

In a statement Friday, she said she looks forward to meeting with Jackson but "I've been clear that previously voting to confirm an individual to a lower court does not signal how I will vote for a Supreme Court justice." She added that "being confirmed to the Supreme Court — the nation's highest tribunal, and a lifetime appointment — is an incredibly high bar to achieve."

In January, she told Alaska station KDLL that "there is a pretty tangible difference between being on a district court, a circuit court and the Supreme Court."

SEN. CHUCK GRASSLEY, R-IOWA

Grassley, the top Republican on the Judiciary panel, is a longtime member of the committee and oversaw the confirmation of two of Trump's three picks as the then-chairman. He will almost certainly vote against Jackson's nomination, but his role will nonetheless be important as Republicans strategize over how much to criticize her and whether to throw up procedural hurdles to slow the nomination.

Durbin has said he and Grassley are good friends and they have stayed in touch through the process. They visited the White House together earlier this month to discuss the pick with Biden, who served in the Senate with both of them.

In a statement Friday, Grassley congratulated Jackson and said he has "no intention of degrading the advice and consent role" of the Senate, referring to the bitter confirmation battles over Trump's three Supreme Court nominees. While some Democrats have speculated that Judiciary committee Republicans

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may boycott a committee vote, a move that could delay the confirmation, Grassley said he intends to "show up and do the job that Iowans pay me to do."

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER MITCH MCCONNELL, R-KY.

Like Grassley, McConnell is unlikely to vote for Jackson. But his comments on her nomination will signal to the rest of the conference how to proceed as they decide how aggressively to oppose it.

In a statement Friday, McConnell questioned Jackson's productivity on the appeals court and the support for her from some liberal advocacy groups. But he has also tried to dissuade his colleagues from bringing up her race after several of them criticized Biden for saying he would nominate a Black woman.

"Honestly, I did not think that was inappropriate," McConnell said earlier this week. He promised the nominee will be "respectfully vetted."

SEN. JOE MANCHIN, D-W.VA., and SEN. KYRSTEN SINEMA, D-ARIZ.

Manchin and Sinema drew the ire of liberal groups, and many of their fellow Democrats, after they helped block a wide-ranging package of Biden's signature policy goals. But that opposition has not carried over to Biden's judicial nominees, as both senators have voted for every single one of them.

Neither has given any indication they will oppose his Supreme Court pick. Manchin said on a West Virginia radio show last month that "It would be the character of the person" that matters, even if the nominee is more liberal than he is. On Friday, Manchin said he will examine Jackson's legal qualifications and judicial philosophy and meet with her "before determining whether to provide my consent."

Sinema said in a statement that Jackson's nomination "represents a historic milestone for our country" and she will consider it based on whether she is "professionally qualified, believes in the role of an independent judiciary, and can be trusted to faithfully interpret and uphold the rule of law."

Domestic woes overshadow European war for some US voters

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

BROOKFIELD, Wis. (AP) — From the Chinese restaurant he runs in the western suburbs of Milwaukee, Charles Yee has watched with alarm this week as Europe confronts the greatest threat to its peace and security since the end of World War II. But, at least for now, he's more troubled by challenges at home.

As the pandemic stretches into its third year, the 62-year-old Brookfield, Wisconsin, native is trying to keep his business running amid a staffing shortage. Disruptions to the supply chain make it hard to keep basic supplies like to-go containers on hand. Perhaps nothing hits Yee harder than the rise in prices fueled by inflation, which makes everything more expensive. He would like a full day off at some point.

The ever-present headwinds make Russia's invasion of Ukraine seem like a distant problem to Yee, who is a Republican. He's not excusing Russian President Vladimir Putin's norm-shattering efforts to topple the government of a neighboring democracy, threatening the lives of civilians in the process. But his own persistent hurdles resonate more deeply to him.

"It's not my top priority," Yee said of the invasion. "I'm just kind of, sort of — you know — getting by."

In one of America's most politically divided states, Yee is not alone. More than a dozen interviews with voters across the demographic and political spectrum on the eve of and immediately after the Russian attack suggest a broad focus on domestic issues, particularly the economy. While Democrats were often quicker to express concern for Ukrainians, they were also reluctant to become too engaged in an overseas conflict.

Harshman Sihra, an 18-year-old Democrat, said he wants "everybody to be safe and healthy."

"But we're really concerned about American citizens first," he said. "So that's great, but us first."

That sentiment poses a challenge for Democrats in a critical election year. President Joe Biden has cast Putin's aggression as a "contest between democracy and autocracy." But if he hopes for his party to prevail in November, he must also keep talking about issues that are more tangible to voters.

That's especially true in a place like Wisconsin, which is home to closely watched races for governor and Senate this year. In one of his first trips outside of Washington after next week's State of the Union address, Biden is expected to travel to Superior, Wisconsin, to highlight the on-the-ground impact of his

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massive infrastructure spending legislation.

The president is balancing the competing priorities as many in the U.S. are deeply skeptical of foreign entanglements after two decades of failures overseas, including the Iraq War and the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan. Just 26% say the U.S. should have a major role in the Russian conflict, according to a poll released this week from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Democrats were more likely than Republicans to think the U.S. should play a major role in the conflict — 32% to 22 % — but were still overwhelmingly opposed.

Like much of the nation, Brookfield is a growing, changing community sorting through the latest crisis that once seemed unthinkable. Long the political epicenter of Republican-heavy Waukesha County, it has become more diverse as families move here from Milwaukee or places beyond Wisconsin, attracted to the schools and access to housing and health care.

That's made the area more competitive for Democrats, who have picked up state legislative seats and eaten into GOP margins in statewide elections.

Regardless of their political views, many in this teeming, diverse suburb are closely following the developments in Ukraine. Few may be more attentive than Lorika Hintz, a 40-year-old small business owner who doesn't identify with either political party. But she's informed by her experience surviving three years of street-level warfare in her Kosovo neighborhood as a teenager in the 1990s.

"People should be concerned. And I know it's far away from us. But it's really going to be bad. I'm most worried about the children," said Hintz, who has a 5-year-old daughter and will vote in a U.S. election for this first time this year.

For Democrat Anne Leggio, an interior designer, the crisis is a primary worry that reminds her of what she has read about the start of World War II.

"I almost have kind of the sense of stomach churning when I hear the news, and I hate it," she said.

But some Republican residents took a more hardline view.

"I'm more concerned about the United States. I know that sounds selfish, but I'm more concerned with what's happening here," said Republican Dina Bernotas, a 35-year-old owner of a Brookfield bar and grill. "Inflation, the lack of border control, the lack of police presence. I'm more concerned with keeping America safe and our cities safe and our communities safe — our people safe — than what's happening overseas."

Retired Milwaukee police officer Bob Chapman was moved by the thought of his grandsons in uniform.

"I don't want them going to Ukraine, based upon what I know, to die for somebody else's situation," said Chapman, a 72-year-old Marine veteran said, as tears welled in his eyes.

One thing that virtually everyone agreed on was that, regardless of whether the U.S. becomes more involved in the conflict, Americans will ultimately feel the consequences of the invasion.

Republican Gary Post, another retired Milwaukee police officer, said he expected market instability prompted by the war to trim his retirement spending power.

"Like the stock markets," said Post, 62, who flies a flag supporting former President Donald Trump in front of his house. "We've already seen ... how things can get disrupted."

Hintz, the immigrant from Kosovo, fears for the waves of desperate Ukrainian refugees to American shores.

"There are going to be humanitarian consequences at home people don't understand," she said.

Even Yee, the Chinese restaurant owner who said he was more focused on his own pocketbook issues, acknowledged the invasion will likely eventually take a toll in the U.S.

"Everything's connected," he said before returning to the kitchen. "Sooner or later, it'll bite us in the butt."

Associated Press journalist Carrie Antfinger in Brookfield, Wisconsin contributed to this report

Live updates: Zelenskyy declines US offer to evacuate Kyiv

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest on the Russia-Ukraine crisis:

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was asked to evacuate Kyiv at the behest of

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the U.S. government but turned down the offer.

Zelenskyy said in response: "The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride," according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation, who described Zelenskyy as upbeat.

Invading Russian forces closed in on Ukraine's capital on Saturday, in an apparent encircling movement after a barrage of airstrikes on cities and military bases around the country.

KYIV, Ukraine — A second Russian Ilyushin Il-76 military transport plane was shot down near Bila Tserkva, 50 miles (85 kilometers) south of Kyiv, according to two American officials with direct knowledge of conditions on the ground in Ukraine.

On Friday, Ukraine's military said it had shot down a Russian military transport plane with paratroopers on board.

According to a statement from the military's General Staff, the first Il-76 heavy transport plane was shot down near Vasylykiv, a city 25 miles south of Kyiv. The Russian military has not commented on either incident so far, and the reports could not be immediately verified.

TOKYO — Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi says he spoke with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on the phone Saturday and they agreed they must respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine properly to prevent it from becoming "a wrong lesson" because of its potential influence in Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

Hayashi declined to comment if Japan plans to join the United States, Britain and the European Union in imposing sanctions on Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Hayashi said Japan will stay in close touch with other Group of Seven members and other international leaders while watching the developments.

Hayashi told reporters that he and Blinken reaffirmed their commitment to work closely with the rest of international society and they agreed it is necessary to reject Russia's unilateral act to change the status quo.

UNITED NATIONS—Russia has vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that Moscow stop its attack on Ukraine and withdraw all troops.

Friday's vote was 11-1, with China, India and the United Arab Emirates abstaining. It showed significant but not total opposition to Russia's invasion of its smaller, militarily weaker neighbor.

The United States and other supporters knew the resolution wouldn't pass but argued it would highlight Russia's international isolation. The resolution's failure paves the way for backers to call for a swift vote on a similar measure in the U.N. General Assembly. There are no vetoes in the 193-member assembly. There's no timetable as yet for a potential Assembly vote.

SOFIA, Bulgaria — Bulgaria on Friday introduced a ban on the entry of Russian aircraft into the country's airspace.

All aircraft licensed by the Russian Federation may not enter the sovereign airspace of the Republic of Bulgaria, including the airspace over its territorial waters, the government announced. The ban is effective starting Saturday.

The government said it took the action in connection with the escalation of the military conflict and in solidarity with Ukraine.

SYDNEY—Australia is imposing sanctions against all 339 members of the Russian parliament and is considering sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as his Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne also announced on Saturday sanctions against eight Russian oligarchs close to Putin. Australia was also taking steps to imposed sanctions on key figures in the Belaru-

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sian government who had aided the Ukraine invasion.

Payne said she was seeking advice from her department on following western allies' example in sanctioning Putin.

"It is an exceptional step to sanction leaders, but this is an exceptional situation," Payne said.

WASHINGTON—Ukraine's top diplomatic envoy in the U.S. is urging countries to sever diplomatic relations with Russia over its invasion of their country.

Ambassador Oksana Markarova's request came in an emergency meeting Friday at the Washington-based Organization of American States, whose members were debating a resolution condemning the military attack ordered by President Vladimir Putin.

"It's hard to imagine that something like this happens in the center of Europe in the 21st Century," an emotional Markarova said during the meeting. She urged delegates to supply Ukraine with defensive weapons and follow the lead of the Federated States of Micronesia, a Pacific island nation that earlier Friday broke all ties with Russia.

Alexander Kim, a senior diplomat at Russia's embassy in Washington, towed closely to the Kremlin's unsubstantiated claim that the military incursion was an attempt to "de-Nazify" a government that had committed scores of atrocities against civilians.

"We are open to diplomacy," Kim told representatives of more than 30 Latin American governments, many of whom have pursued closer relations with Moscow in recent years. "However, diplomacy presumes an ability to negotiate. It is not a tool for blackmailing and imposing the decision of Washington and its satellite states."

LONDON—British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says he is in "close contact" with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as he hailed "the fierce bravery and patriotism" of Ukraine's government and people.

In a recorded message, Johnson said "the scenes unfolding in the streets and fields of Ukraine are nothing short of a tragedy," calling it bloodshed Europe has not seen in a generation or more.

He said "the people of the United Kingdom stand with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in the face of this unjustifiable assault on your homeland."

Johnson also urged Russians to oppose the invasion, which he called "a tragedy for Russia" as well as for Ukraine.

Speaking in Russian, he said: "I do not believe this war is in your name."

Britain has imposed asset freezes and other sanctions on scores of Russian companies and several oligarchs, and has joined the U.S., Canada and the European Union in slapping sanctions on President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

BUDAPEST, Hungary—Hungary's foreign minister has offered Budapest as a possible location for negotiations between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine as Russia's invasion intensifies.

"Budapest can serve as a safe venue for both the Russian and Ukrainian negotiation delegations," Peter Szijjarto said in a video on Facebook late Friday, adding that he had made the proposal to both Russia's and Ukraine's governments, neither of which dismissed it.

"I sincerely hope that an agreement can be reached within a few hours or days to start discussions; the sooner the talks begin, the sooner there will be peace and the fewer people will have to die in the war," Szijjarto said.

BRUSSELS—With a military intervention in Ukraine off the table, countries around the world are looking to heap more financial punishment on Moscow.

The United States, Britain and European Union said Friday they will move to sanction Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The EU's unanimous decision, part of a broader sanctions package, indicated that Western powers

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are moving toward unprecedented measures to try to force Putin to stop the brutal invasion of Russia's neighbor and from unleashing a major war in Europe.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki indicated the U.S. sanctions will include a travel ban.

TORONTO—Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is announcing sanctions on Russian Vladimir Putin, his chief of staff and foreign minister Sergey Lavrov.

Trudeau also says Canada supports the removal of Russia from the SWIFT banking system.

The prime minister is also announcing sanctions against Belarus.

Meanwhile, Canada's largest province is pulling Russian products from shelves from government owned liquor stores.

Ontario Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy says the province joins Canada's allies in condemning the Russian government's act of aggression against the Ukrainian people, and will direct the Liquor Control Board of Ontario to withdraw all products produced in Russia from store shelves.

The French-speaking province of Quebec is also considering banning Russian liquor.

UNITED NATIONS—The U.N. plans to seek over \$1 billion in donations for humanitarian relief in Ukraine over the next three months, the world body's humanitarian chief said Friday.

Martin Griffiths said at a news briefing that the exact amount of the appeal is still being decided but will be "well north of \$1 billion."

The U.N. announced Thursday that it was immediately allocating \$20 million to expand its humanitarian operations in Ukraine. Even before Russia's attack this week, the world body estimated about 3 million people were in need of aid after years of fighting between Russian-backed separatists and the Ukrainian government in the country's east.

Now, "the scale of need in these very, very extraordinary circumstances is going to be of the highest," Griffiths said.

The U.N. issues multiple appeals each year for international donors, mainly governments, to finance humanitarian efforts in trouble spots around the world. Last month, it requested more than \$5 billion for Afghanistan, the largest-ever appeal tied to a single country.

RICHMOND, Va.—Criminal ransomware operators are posting messages on the dark web pledging to launch retaliatory cyberattacks if Russia is attacked.

The ransomware group Conti, which experts say has ties to Russia, said in a note on its dark web site Friday that it would "use all our possible resources to strike back at the critical infrastructures of an enemy."

Ransomware gangs are mostly Russian-speaking and operate with near impunity out of Russia and allied countries.

In a follow up note, the Conti group stressed it was not an ally of any government and said: "we condemn the ongoing war."

Major ransomware attacks in the last year, including against the biggest U.S. fuel pipeline, have underscored how gangs of extortionist hackers can disrupt the economy and put lives and livelihoods at risk. The U.S. government has been warning critical infrastructure entities to prepare for possible attacks and to make sure their defenses are up to date.

Non-state hackers have promised to be active in both sides of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The online collective Anonymous recently pledged to conduct cyberattacks to support Ukraine.

BERLIN—The German government says it plans to deploy troops and the Patriot anti-missile system to Slovakia as part of NATO plans to strengthen the alliance's eastern flank.

The Defense Ministry said Friday that it plans to send an infantry company as part of a combat troop battalion. And it said that Germany also will contribute the Patriot system.

The ministry stressed that the so-called "enhanced vigilance activity battlegroup" has a purely defensive

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function.

Slovakia is a NATO and European Union member that borders Ukraine. Germany already is beefing up its troop contingent in Lithuania, another nation on NATO's eastern flank.

KYIV, Ukraine--Russian troops are bearing down on Ukraine's capital of Kyiv.

Mayor Vitaly Klitschko says five explosions hit an area near a major power plant on the city's eastern outskirts. There was no information on the cause of the blasts, which Klitschko said occurred at intervals of several minutes. No electricity outages were immediately reported.

The invasion of a democratic country has fueled fears of wider war in Europe and triggered worldwide efforts to make Russia stop.

BELGRADE, Serbia—Serbia defied calls from the European Union and the U.S. to join sanctions against Russia, although its autocratic president said that Moscow's assault against Ukraine is against the international law.

With the move, Serbia remains a rare European state together with Belarus not to join Western sanctions introduced against Moscow for its invasion of a sovereign European state.

"Serbia respects the norms of the international law," President Aleksandar Vucic said. "But Serbia also understands its own interests."

Vucic said that Serbia regards the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity as "very wrong," but added it won't join international sanctions against Russia.

Despite formally seeking EU membership, Serbia has been strengthening ties with its traditional Slavic ally Russia. Moscow has been supplying Serbia's armed forces with weapons, leading to more tensions in the Balkans which went through a bloody civil war in the 1990s.

ROME—Thousands of Romans and Ukrainians who live in the Italian capital marched side-by-side to the Colosseum to denounce Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

They took up the call by Rome's mayor to clutch lit candles on Friday evening and walk from the square atop the Capitoline Hill to the ancient arena, a few minutes' stroll away.

Several of the Ukrainians among the marchers wept. They put a hand over their heart while singing the Ukrainian anthem. Others held Ukrainian flags or protest signs or shouted, "hands off our country" or voiced other denunciations of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Among the marchers was Ruslan Yakubovskyy, a Ukrainian.

"I live here, I bought a home here, my family is here, but I am thinking about going back to Ukraine to fight and lend a helping hand," he said. "The situation is so difficult that either it's that the rest of the world is pretending not to see or it doesn't want to see it at all."

City Hall and the Colosseum were illuminated in the colors of the Ukrainian flag, yellow and blue.

WARSAW, Poland - Presidents of NATO's eastern flank member states gathered Friday in Warsaw voiced their support for tough sanctions on Russia and its leaders for the invasion of Ukraine.

Nine presidents of the so-called NATO Bucharest Nine held a security summit with the participation of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. They also remotely join a NATO summit in Brussels.

"There cannot be any 'business as usual' in this situation in relations with Russia because that would have been a betrayal of the principles of the honest, open world," Poland's President Andrzej Duda, said after the talks that he had hosted.

LONDON — Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Britain would introduce sanctions against Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to inflict maximum punishment for invading Ukraine, his Downing Street office said Friday.

Johnson's pledge comes as the European Union approved an asset freeze on Putin and Lavrov. The

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comments from Johnson suggest that Western powers are acting in concert on unprecedented measures to try to force Putin to stop the brutal invasion of Russia's neighbor.

In comments to NATO leaders, the UK leader pressed again for immediate action to exclude Russia from the SWIFT system of financial transactions. European nations have faced criticism for failing to cut Russia off from the global bank payments network in offering sanctions on Thursday.

Johnson said "the world must make certain President Putin would fail in this act of aggression."

TIRANA, Albania—Albania's prime minister on Friday said the tiny Western Balkan country would welcome Ukrainian refugees.

Speaking after a NATO summit Prime Minister Edi Rama said that like all the other NATO member countries, Albania would be ready to welcome a few thousand Ukrainians leaving their country due to the Russian invasion.

Rama did not give any concrete number.

Albania, a NATO member since 2009, has followed the United States and European Union on its stand denouncing Russian invasion.

Albania was the first to offer shelter and then house some 2,400 Afghan evacuees after the Taliban came to power in August last year. Some 300 have already left, mainly for the United States.

BRUSSELS — NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Friday that U.S. President Joe Biden and his counterparts have agreed to send parts of the organization's response force to help protect allies in the east over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking after chairing a NATO meeting, Stoltenberg said the leaders decided to send parts of the NATO Response Force and elements of a quickly deployed spearhead unit. He did not say how many troops would be deployed, but confirmed that the move would involve land, sea and air power.

The NRF can number up to 40,000 troops, but Stoltenberg said that NATO would not be deploying the entire force. Parts of a force known in NATO jargon as the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which is currently led by France, will also be sent.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has released a video of himself and his senior aides in Kyiv to reassure the nation as Russian troops were closing in on the capital.

In the video Zelenskyy recorded in the street outside the presidential office, he said he and his top officials are staying in the capital.

"Our troops are here, citizens are here," Zelenskyy said, adding that "All of us are here protecting our independence of our country. And it will continue to be this way. Glory to our defenders, Glory to Ukraine, Glory to Heroes."

Russian troops bore down on Ukraine's capital Friday, with gunfire and explosions resonating ever closer to the government quarter.

In the fog of war, it was unclear how much of Ukraine remains under Ukrainian control and how much or little Russian forces have seized. The Kremlin accepted Kyiv's offer to hold talks, but it appeared to be an effort to squeeze concessions out of Ukraine's embattled president instead of a gesture toward a diplomatic solution.

ROME — Premier Mario Draghi's Cabinet on Friday formally approved previously announced participation by 250 Italian military forces and 139 land vehicles in NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia, as well as air policing by some 12 aircraft currently deployed in Romania and patrols by an intelligence-gathering aircraft and a refueling aircraft as part of NATO's shoring up of its eastern flank allies in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The government also approved deployment of 235 military forces aboard two or three naval vessels, as well as an aircraft as part of surveillance and intelligence-gathering in the eastern Mediterranean and

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the Black Sea.

Also getting the government's formal OK was the mobilization of 1,350 military personnel, involving 77 land vehicles and two naval vessels – with the second one to be deployed in the second half of the year -- as well as five aircraft as part of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force.

Approval was granted for that force to be increased to as many as 1,970 military personnel. The same Cabinet session also granted authorization to provide at no cost non-lethal military equipment to Ukraine, including protective devices for soldiers and de-mining equipment

BRUSSELS — Latvia's foreign minister says the European Union has agreed to freeze the assets of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov along with other sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.

The move indicates that Western powers are moving toward unprecedented measures to force Putin to stop the brutal invasion of Russia's neighbor and from unleashing a major war in Europe.

Foreign Minister Edgard Rinkevics announced the EU decision Friday in a tweet.

He said another package of sanctions is to be prepared by the EU.

PARIS — The leader of the Belarus opposition in exile says the European Union should slap tougher sanctions on Belarus for its role in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Sviatlana Tiskhanouskaya says Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, a close ally of Russia, has turned her country into "an aggressor" in Ukraine.

She told The Associated Press on Friday that Belarus has become "an aircraft carrier" for the Russian military, carrying troops to Ukraine, re-fueling its war machine and housing soldiers of the invading force.

The United States, the EU, Britain and Canada last year imposed sanctions on Belarusian officials, businesses and several sectors of the economy and the financial system following a brutal crackdown on Lukashenko's opponents. They were protesting his fraudulent re-election for a sixth term.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday called the Belarus government "an accomplice" in Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and said it will also be targeted with sanctions.

WASHINGTON — Russian state broadcaster RT says it was subjected to "massive" denial-of-service attacks after the online collective Anonymous pledged to carry out cyberattacks in support of Ukraine, which is being invaded by Russian forces.

RT said in a statement that the attacks on its websites came from about 100 million devices, mostly based in the U.S. But the broadcaster said it was resolving the issues and its website appeared to be functioning normally Friday.

Anonymous announced a day earlier on Twitter that it is "officially in cyber war against the Russian government" and noted later that the Russian Ministry of Defense website was down.

But it is difficult to attribute a cyberattack to Anonymous or even confirm that someone is a member of a collective that is open to anyone who claims to use hacking for a particular cause.

GIBRALTAR — Punitive measures against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine have spread to a tiny speck of territory on Spain's southern tip, with Gibraltar's government taking steps against Russia Today television.

Gibraltar on Friday announced it was suspending the Russian state broadcaster for spreading "disinformation." It also revoked a visa waiver program for Russian citizens.

The office for Chief Minister Fabian Picardo described Russia Today as a "mouthpiece for the Kremlin" that "will become a dangerous source of disinformation that Gibraltar cannot accept on its networks."

LONDON — Britain's Ministry of Defense says the bulk of Russian forces advancing on the Ukrainian capital Kyiv are more than 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the center of the city.

The ministry said it continues to monitor "sporadic clashes" between Russian and Ukrainian forces in the

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northern suburbs of the capital.

The intelligence update, delivered via Twitter, also said that armored units were forced to open a new route toward Kyiv after failing to capture Chernihiv, a city northeast of the capital near the Belarusian border.

BRUSSELS — Europe's foremost human rights organization has suspended Russia because of its invasion of Ukraine, though it remains a member.

The 47-nation Council of Europe announced Friday that Russia was suspended with "immediate effect" from the Committee of Ministers and the parliamentary assembly "as a result of the Russian Federation's armed attack on Ukraine."

The Strasbourg-based organization said Russia remained a member and continued to be bound to the relevant human rights conventions.

"Suspension is not a final measure but a temporary one, leaving channels of communication open," a statement said.

VIENNA — The International Atomic Energy Agency says the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant reported higher-than-usual radiation levels after being taken over by Russian forces invading Ukraine.

But it said Friday that current radiation levels do not pose a threat to the public.

Ukraine's regulatory authority previously said that increased radiation levels may be due to military vehicles stirring up soil that remains contaminated from the accident in 1986, still known as the worst nuclear disaster in history.

But the measures are "within the operational range measured in the Exclusion Zone since it was established," according to the IAEA.

The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is a 2,600-square-kilometer (1,000-square-mile) area of forest lying between the Belarus-Ukraine border and the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.

Russian forces took control over the site Thursday after a fierce battle with Ukrainian national guards protecting the plant.

MOSCOW — The Kremlin says prospects for possible peace talks between Russia and Ukraine look uncertain due to apparent differences over a venue.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Russian President Vladimir Putin has agreed to send a delegation for talks with Ukrainian officials in Minsk, Belarus, where President Alexander Lukashenko runs a pro-Russian government.

That agreement came in response to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's offer earlier in the day to discuss non-aligned status for Ukraine.

Peskov told reporters that after the parties discussed Minsk as a possible venue, Ukrainian officials changed course and said they were unwilling to travel to Minsk and would prefer to meet in NATO member Poland. They then halted further communication, Peskov said.

Putin has claimed that the western refusal to heed Russia's demand to keep Ukraine out of NATO prompted him to order an invasion of the neighboring country.

PRAGUE -- The Czech Republic's transport minister says his country has banned all Russian airlines from Czech airports, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Martin Kupka said Friday the ban covers all regular flights between Prague and Moscow and Prague and St. Petersburg, as well as charter flights.

Russian planes will also be banned from landing at the western Czech spa town of Karlovy Vary, a popular destination for Russian tourists. The measure becomes affective at midnight.

Additionally, Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said his country will stop issuing visas for Russian citizens and will urge other European Union countries to do the same.

VILNIUS, Lithuania -- Major retail chains in Lithuania started to remove Russian and Belarusian products

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from shelves, a move joined by online shops and widely applauded by the public as a protest against Moscow's decision to invade Ukraine.

Maxima LT, the largest chain in the Baltic nations, said Friday the Russian goods it sells are mainly alcohol, dried products and candy, amounting to millions of euros (dollars) in sales.

Other retailers like drug stores and home suppliers made similar announcements. The Lithuanian postal service said it will not be distributing any more Russian periodicals.

International companies such as IKEA are facing pressure to remove Russian-made goods from sale in the small Baltic country, which fears Russian aggression.

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin has hailed his troops for their courage as they press their offensive across Ukraine and bear down on Kyiv.

Speaking during Friday's meeting of his Security Council, Putin claimed that most Ukrainian military units are reluctant to engage Russian forces.

He said the units offering resistance are mostly volunteer battalions made up of right-wing Ukrainian nationalists.

He offered no evidence for his claims, which could not be independently verified.

Echoing an earlier Russian military statement, Putin accused Ukrainian forces of deploying heavy weapons in urban areas in several big cities, including Kyiv and Kharkiv, to use civilians as shields.

The Russian president urged the Ukrainian military to end their resistance and turn on their leaders.

WARSAW, Poland - European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is in Warsaw for urgent talks with NATO's nine eastern flank members on how to enhance the region's security, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The participants were also due to remotely join a NATO summit in Brussels.

Poland's President Andrzej Duda, hosting the talks between the so-called NATO Bucharest Nine, in his opening speech said that "demons of a great war, unseen since 1945" have returned to Europe.

NATO's eastern flank members fear Moscow could also target them.

FORT STEWART, Ga. — The U.S. Army says 3,800 soldiers from Fort Stewart, Georgia, are among additional forces deploying to Europe following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Troops from the Army post southwest of Savannah, Georgia, "will deploy to reassure NATO allies, deter further aggression against NATO member states and train with host-nation forces," Fort Stewart commanders said in a statement late Thursday.

Fort Stewart is home to the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, which saw multiple combat deployments during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of the 3rd Infantry soldiers heading to Europe are assigned to the division's 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team.

"The Raider Brigade is trained and equipped to deter aggression and to reassure and defend our allies," Col. Pete Moon, the 1st Brigade's commander, said in prepared statement.

The Georgia-based soldiers appear to be among 7,000 additional U.S. forces deploying to Germany to bolster NATO following the invasion of Ukraine. President Joe Biden ordered the deployments Thursday.

MOSCOW — The Kremlin says Russian President Vladimir Putin has told Chinese President Xi Jinping he's ready to send a delegation for talks with Ukrainian officials.

The Kremlin said in its readout of Friday's call that Xi underlined that he "views the Russian leadership's action in the crisis situation with respect."

In a reference to new Western sanctions against Russia over its invasion in Ukraine, the Kremlin noted that Putin and Xi agreed "it's inadmissible to use illegitimate sanctions for achieving selfish goals of certain countries."

Chinese state TV reported that Xi emphasized that China "supports Russia and Ukraine resolving the

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problem through negotiations.”

NEW DELHI — Dozens of parents, relatives and friends of Indian students stranded in Ukraine held a demonstration near the Russian Embassy in New Delhi to demand the students’ immediate evacuation.

Police barricaded the roads leading to the embassy on Friday and asked the protesters to meet Indian Foreign Ministry officials to discuss the repatriation of nearly 16,000 Indians, including students.

Some of the demonstrators held video conferencing calls with some of those stuck in metro trains and bomb shelters in Kyiv.

“We are running low on food and water in a crowded bunker,” one of the callers in Ukraine said.

Indian Embassy officials are now traveling to border areas of Ukraine touching Poland, Romania Slovakia and Hungary to facilitate the exit of Indian nationals so that they can be evacuated to India, said foreign ministry official Harsh Vardhan Shringla.

BRUSSELS — Germany’s foreign minister said Friday that the European Union will take in all people fleeing Ukraine due to the current conflict.

“We need to do everything to immediately take in the people who are now fleeing bombs, fleeing tanks, that’s also what we’ve been preparing for in recent weeks,” Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock told reporters in Brussels.

“We tried everything so this day wouldn’t come,” she said. “And it came because the Russian president chose it, opted for war and against human lives.”

“That’s why we will take in all of the people who are fleeing now,” Baerbock said. “We will bring the people from Ukraine to safety.”

BUCHAREST, Romania — Moldova’s national naval agency says a ship in “neutral waters” of the Black Sea has been hit by a missile, leaving two crew members seriously injured.

The Naval Agency said in a statement that the source of the missile that hit the Moldova-flagged Millennial Spirit on Friday is unknown.

“A fire broke out onboard the ship; the equipment and lifeboats were destroyed,” the agency said in a statement. “The ship’s crew left the ship equipped only with life jackets.”

The agency said that the company that operates the tanker is a Ukrainian legal entity and the crew members are Russian citizens.

Rescue operations were carried out by Ukrainian authorities, the Moldovan agency said.

LONDON — An expert in international trade says he thinks world leaders are reluctant to exclude Russia from the SWIFT system of financial transactions because it is the “nuclear option” of sanctions.

Disconnecting Russia from SWIFT to try to force President Vladimir Putin to end his invasion of Ukraine would have major economic costs for western countries, said Hosuk Lee-Makiyama, director of the European Centre for International Political Economy.

Lee-Makiyama told the BBC that if Russia were cut off for foreign payments for its gas and oil, it would quickly start expropriating the 300 billion euros EU investors have plowed into the country.

“It’s a nuclear option that it’s going to basically exterminate yourself and your enemy,” he said.

World leaders, who have so far ruled out military intervention in Ukraine, have few good options for deterring Putin because he knows they fear a direct confrontation with Russia, Lee-Makiyama said.

MOSCOW — The Kremlin says Russia is ready to send a delegation to Belarus for talks with Ukrainian officials.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Russian President Vladimir Putin is ready to send the delegation in response to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s offer to discuss a non-aligned status for Ukraine.

That indicates Zelenskyy would be willing to negotiate dropping his country’s bid to join NATO, as Russia

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has demanded.

Before the invasion, the West had rejected the demand. Putin claimed the refusal to discuss keeping Ukraine out of NATO prompted him to order a military action in Ukraine to "demilitarize" it.

BANGKOK — Myanmar's ruling military council offered its support Friday for Russia's attack on Ukraine, while the shadow government leading opposition to army rule condemned Moscow's action.

A statement by the spokesman for Myanmar's military government said Russia acted correctly to perpetuate its "sovereignty."

A text message to Myanmar journalists from Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun also said the invasion demonstrated Russia's position as a "world power" helping to keep global relations in balance.

Myanmar's military rulers face armed domestic opposition, and like Russia's leaders now, are the target of strong sanctions from Western governments seeking a return to democratic rule.

Myanmar's National Unity Government, established by lawmakers prevented from taking their seats when the army seized power in February last year, deplored Moscow's action.

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Lithuania's Radio and Television Commission has temporarily suspended the operation of six Russian-language TV channels for their alleged incitement to war and propaganda.

The six TV channels were taken off the air Friday

Planeta RTR, Rossija 24, Belarus 24, NTV Mir, RTR Planeta and Rossiya 24 were suspended for five years, and PBK and TVCI for three years, commission Vice Chairman Ricardas Slapsys told the Baltic News Service.

Lithuania, the most southern of the three Baltic nations, borders Russia's Kaliningrad region to the southwest, Belarus to the east, Latvia to the north and Poland to the south.

Latvia banned several Russian television channels had their right to broadcast in Latvia suspended Thursday for several years.

MOSCOW — The Russian military claims it has taken control of an airport just outside Kyiv, as Kremlin forces bear down on the Ukrainian capital.

The claim could not be independently verified.

Taking possession of the airport in Hostomel, which has a long runway allowing the landing of heavy-lift transport planes, would mean Russia can airlift troops directly to Kyiv's outskirts.

Hostomel is just 7 kilometers (4 miles) northwest of the city.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Friday that the Russian airborne forces used 200 helicopters to land in Hostomel and killed over 200 troops belonging to Ukraine's special forces.

Konashenkov claimed that Russian troops suffered no casualties. That contradicts Ukrainian claims that Russian troops sustained heavy casualties in the fighting there.

BERLIN — Germany's Defense Ministry has confirmed media reports that it is deploying additional military assets to NATO's eastern flank.

German weekly Der Spiegel reported that the deployments included 150 soldiers and about a dozen Boxer armored fighting vehicles, two ships and anti-missile systems.

Ministry spokesman Christian Thiels declined to say Friday exactly how many soldiers were being deployed. But he confirmed that a navy corvette would leave Saturday for patrols in the Baltic while a frigate will be deployed in the Mediterranean, both under NATO command.

Germany is also assessing whether to deploy Patriot anti-missile systems to an eastern European NATO country, Thiels said.

Decisions on deploying further troops could be expected soon, he added.

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.

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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 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

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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 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

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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 organized 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.

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"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.

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 pro-

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tective 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.

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,”

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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.

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AP sources: Administration wants \$6.4B for Ukraine, allies

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration wants Congress to provide \$6.4 billion to pay for an initial U.S. response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, largely for military and humanitarian assistance in the region, three people familiar with the request said Friday.

The largest portions of money would be for the Defense and State departments and for the U.S. Agency for International Development, which distributes civilian foreign aid. Smaller amounts would be for the Treasury and Commerce departments, whose chief roles in the Ukraine crisis will be to apply sanctions against Russia, its financial institutions and state-owned businesses and its leaders, including President Vladimir Putin.

The request, which White House and other administration officials described to congressional aides in a conference call Friday, provides an early look at the costs American taxpayers could bear as a result of Russia's attack on its western neighbor. Those assaults were in their second full day Friday as Russian forces pounded Kyiv, Ukraine's capital.

The administration is seeking \$2.9 billion for State Department, USAID and other programs for security assistance to Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic nations and other Eastern European allies, an administration official said. It would also cover food and other humanitarian assistance, energy and economic aid plus efforts to thwart Russian cyberattacks.

The administration official said there would also be \$3.5 billion for the Defense Department but provided no detail. The sums could change based on events in Ukraine and the needs of allied countries, the people describing the phone call said.

All three people spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it publicly.

The \$6.4 billion was less than the "well above \$10 billion" figure that Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., told reporters he expected earlier Friday. Coons, chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that controls foreign aid and State Department expenditures, had couched his figure by calling it "an initial guess."

Coons had said he expected the administration request to cover the costs of helping millions of Ukrainian refugees who could flee to Poland and nearby NATO countries and supporting those nations' armed forces.

He also seemed to suggest that U.S. aid to Ukraine could continue should it fall to Russian forces, saying there is "strong enthusiasm" for providing money to resupply, train and "whatever other covert and overt support is necessary and appropriate for the Ukrainian resistance."

Coons said the money would also cover the expenses of monitoring and enforcing U.S. sanctions against Russia and for the Pentagon's bills for deploying the 7,000 additional American troops that President Joe Biden has ordered be sent to Europe.

"I expect that there will be a supplemental request well above \$10 billion," Coons told reporters, calling it "an initial guess."

Republican lawmakers would seem likely to strongly support money to help Ukraine and counter Russia, and Coons said he believed the request would get strong bipartisan backing. Spokespersons for leading Republicans did not immediately return requests for comment.

Coons spoke after returning from an extended trip to Germany, Poland and Lithuania, where he and

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other members of Congress discussed the crisis with European leaders.

Biden is expected to address the invasion during his State of the Union address to Congress on Tuesday. Lawmakers, returning from a recess, plan to focus next week on writing bipartisan legislation financing federal agencies for the rest of this year. Leaders hope to approve that roughly \$1.5 trillion measure by March 11, when money temporarily financing government will run out.

It was initially unclear whether the Ukraine money would be part of that broader budget legislation, if not how quickly it would move and whether lawmakers would attempt to attach additional U.S. sanctions against Russia.

Democrats are "looking at" including the Ukraine assistance and extra money for COVID-19 relief in the government-wide budget bill, said a congressional leadership aide who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the process publicly.

Earlier this week, Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., who chairs the House Appropriations subcommittee overseeing foreign aid, said the administration was expecting to need at least \$1 billion for humanitarian assistance and another \$1 billion in loan guarantees for economic support.

With lawmakers trying to wrap up budget work, administration officials have already informally told Congress that they'd like an additional \$30 billion to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. That would include money for vaccines, testing and covering care for the uninsured.

That proposal has drawn strong opposition from the GOP and is expected to face an uphill climb to survive. Republicans say the administration should instead use unspent funds from multi-trillion COVID-19 relief measures already enacted.

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

Sorting fact, disinformation after Russian attack on Ukraine

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Associated Press journalists around Ukraine and beyond are documenting military activity during Russia's invasion. With disinformation rife and social media amplifying military claims and counterclaims, determining exactly what is happening is difficult. Here's a look at what could be confirmed Friday.

Activity with direct witnesses:

- Explosions heard from central Kyiv, about 800 meters (half a mile) from the president's headquarters.
- Multistory apartment building in Kyiv hit by shelling, with major damage, on the eastern side of the Dneiper River that cuts through the capital, 13 kilometers (8 miles) southeast of the government quarter.
- Shooting near a main thoroughfare leading into central Kyiv from the south.
- Ukrainian soldiers evacuating an unmarked military vehicle damaged by gunfire in Kyiv, in the Obolon district about 10 kilometers (6 miles) north of the government quarter.
- Ukrainian military establishing defensive positions at bridges around Kyiv. Armored personnel carriers driving through Kyiv streets. Ukrainian authorities placed snowplows at some spots along Kyiv roads to force traffic to slow down.
- Russian missile launcher seen on the edge of the northeastern city of Kharkiv, shelling heard in the distance.
- A bridge destroyed at Ivankiv, some 60 kilometers (40 miles) northwest of Kyiv.

Announced by Ukrainian and Russian authorities, and others:

- A second Russian military transport plane was shot down Saturday near Bila Tserkva, 50 miles (85 kilometers) south of Kyiv, according to two American officials with direct knowledge of conditions on the ground in Ukraine.
- Russian Airborne Forces on the outskirts of Kyiv early Saturday attacked Ukrainian units on three sides, but Ukrainian troops were able to repel some of the assaults, according to two American officials with direct knowledge of conditions on the ground in Ukraine.
- Ukraine's military said Friday it had shot down a Russian military transport plane carrying paratroopers

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near Vasylykiv, a city 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Kyiv, an account confirmed by a senior American intelligence official. It was unclear how many were on board. Transport planes can carry up to 125 paratroopers. Russia has not commented on the incident.

— A senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of conditions on the ground in Ukraine said the capital city of Kyiv was under missile bombardment late Friday night. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, had no immediate information on what targets might have been hit.

— Russia's military said it has taken over Melitopol, a city in the Zaporizhzhia region in southern Ukraine 50 kilometers (about 31 miles) off of the Azov Sea coast. The claim could not be independently verified.

— Ukraine's nuclear energy regulator said higher than usual gamma radiation levels have been detected in the area around the Chernobyl nuclear plant, site of the world's worst nuclear accident, after it was seized by the Russian military. The International Atomic Energy Agency said the reported levels don't pose any danger to the public. The Russian Defense Ministry said radiation levels in the area have remained normal.

— Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitschko said gunfire and explosions in several parts of the city came as Ukrainian troops were fighting groups of Russian saboteurs. He also said five explosions hit an area near a major power plant on the city's eastern outskirts. No electricity outages were immediately reported.

— U.K. Defense Intelligence Chief Sir Jim Hockenhull says Russia launched a series of strikes on targets in Kyiv overnight and that multiple rocket launchers have been employed in Chernihiv and Kharkiv.

— Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that 137 "heroes," including 10 military officers, had been killed. The Ukrainian military said it has killed over 1,000 Russian troops while fending off Moscow's invasion. The Russian military hasn't reported any casualties during the attack. Neither claim could be independently verified.

— The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights said its staffers have so far verified at least 127 civilian casualties, 25 people killed and 102 injured, mostly from shelling and airstrikes.

— The Russian military said it took control of an airport outside the Ukrainian capital. The airport in Hostomel, a town 7 kilometers (4 miles) from Kyiv, has a runway long enough to receive all types of aircraft, including the biggest cargo planes. Its seizure allows Russia to airlift troops directly to Kyiv's outskirts.

— The Russian Defense Ministry said its forces sealed the cities of Sumy and Konotop in northeastern Ukraine. It said they have knocked out 211 military infrastructure facilities. The claims couldn't be independently confirmed.

— The mayor said a school building was hit by a Ukrainian shell in the rebel-held city of Horlivka in eastern Ukraine, killing its headteacher and a teacher; rebels who hold Donetsk said the city's main hospital was damaged by shelling but there were no casualties.

— Moldova's national naval agency said a Moldovan-flagged ship was hit by a missile in "neutral waters" in the Black Sea, leaving two crew members seriously injured.

— A U.S. defense official said a Russian amphibious assault was underway, and thousands of Russian naval infantry were moving ashore from the Sea of Azov, west of Mariupol. The official said Ukrainian air defenses have been degraded but are still operating, and that about a third of the combat power that Russia massed around Ukraine is now in the country.

— British Intelligence Chief Sir Jim Hockenhull says Russia launched a series of strikes on targets in Kyiv overnight and that multiple rocket launchers have been employed in Chernihiv and Kharkiv.

Follow AP's coverage of the Ukraine crisis at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

EXPLAINER: What does Texas' data on abortions say about law?

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Texas has released data showing a marked drop in abortions at clinics in the state in the first month under the nation's strictest abortion law, but that only tells part of the story.

A study released Friday showing a jump in requests from Texans for abortion pills by mail is helping complete the picture, as will learning more about the number of women who went to clinics outside the state, and how many who were unable to get abortions ended up giving birth.

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"I think a big question is: What's the new composition of how people are accessing abortion care?" said Abigail Aiken, an associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin who studies reproductive health and who led the study looking at requests for abortion medication by mail.

Here's a look at what the numbers that have been released so far do — and don't — tell us:

WHAT DO THE RECENTLY RELEASED NUMBERS SHOW?

Nearly 2,200 abortions were reported by Texas providers in September, the month the state's new law took effect that bans the procedure once cardiac activity is detected, which is usually around six weeks into a pregnancy. There are no exceptions in cases of rape or incest.

That's a 60% drop from the month before.

Researchers note, though, that the number of abortions reported in August — over 5,400 — was higher than usual for that month, likely because clinics were rushing to get women in before the law took effect. So, they say, it's also useful to compare September's data to the same month a year earlier, which shows a drop of 51%.

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission, which released the September figures this month, is releasing data on abortions on a monthly basis.

WHAT DID ABORTION PROVIDERS EXPECT?

Abortion providers had predicted that the law would bar at least 85% of abortions in Texas since, traditionally, most women were at least six weeks into their pregnancy when they had an abortion. And figures from the state show that in 2020, only about 15% of abortions were done at less than six weeks.

So why wasn't there an even bigger drop in abortions in September?

Researchers say a combination of factors were apparently at play, including women scrambling to schedule appointments as soon as possible rather than when it might be most convenient.

"We see people coming to us before they've even done a pregnancy test, before they even know if they're pregnant, because they're so afraid that they might be pregnant and they will be denied an abortion," said Amy Hagstrom Miller, president of Whole Woman's Health, which operates four abortion clinics in Texas.

Also, researchers say, the attention drawn to the new law resulted in an influx of funds to help women pay for out-of-state travel and medical fees.

"We don't see as many people being pushed further into pregnancy because they're trying to figure out how to pay for the abortion," Hagstrom Miller said.

HOW MANY WOMEN ARE GETTING ABORTION PILLS BY MAIL IN TEXAS?

The number of Texas women who are going online to get abortion pills by mail from the overseas non-profit Aid Access sharply increased after the law took effect, according to the study led by Aiken.

"We can't say to what extent exactly as a percentage the gap has been filled, but I think we can say that self-managed abortion has been important in filling it," Aiken said.

The study, published Friday in the medical journal JAMA Network Open, found that Aid Access got 1,831 requests for the pills from people in Texas in September.

During the first week of September, requests per day jumped to about 138 compared to a previous average of 11, the study said. Over the subsequent weeks in September, requests averaged 37 a day. Then, through December, the average was 30 per day.

"It's another demonstration of the fact that just because you restrict abortion, the need for abortion does not magically go away," Aiken said.

The study's authors, who note they can't determine if all the requests resulted in abortions, said it's likely the initial dramatic spike was due to confusion as the law went into effect and some who requested pills may have ended up going to a clinic.

Though a Texas law banning the delivery of such abortion-inducing medication by mail took effect in December, experts say there would be difficulty in stopping providers and suppliers outside of the state and country.

The law says the person taking the pills obtained by mail isn't criminally liable.

"It's not illegal to be the one that orders the pills and uses the pills," said Sara Ainsworth, senior legal and policy director for If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice.

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She added that "it's unclear whether or not that Texas law could be used to go after somebody who mailed drugs into Texas from somewhere else."

HOW MANY WOMEN ARE GOING TO CLINICS OUT OF STATE FOR ABORTIONS?

Abortion clinics from states surrounding Texas have reported sharp increases in the number of patients from Texas since the new law took effect, so much so at times that residents of those states must seek abortions elsewhere.

One clue comes from a research letter published in the Journal of the American Medical Association looking at what happened when Republican Gov. Greg Abbott all but banned abortions for about a month in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Kari White, an associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin who leads the Texas Policy Evaluation Project, which studies the impact of reproductive health policies in Texas, said the research found that during that time the number of women going out of state increased to about 950 compared to about 160 previously.

Planned Parenthood said Thursday that from September through December last year, states surrounding Texas saw a nearly 800% increase in abortion patients from Texas. It declined to provide the actual number of patients that made up that increase.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WHO SOUGHT ABORTIONS HAD TO GIVE BIRTH?

That's unclear, too. Comparing the usual number of births in Texas with the number of births this year may eventually shed some light.

"I think that's a big unknown," White said, "and we won't know it for some time."

WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY ABOUT THE FUTURE?

In a ruling expected later this year, the U.S. Supreme Court has signaled a willingness to weaken or reverse the landmark Roe v. Wade decision guaranteeing a right to an abortion, and more than 20 states already have laws on the books to ban or dramatically restrict abortion if it's overturned.

Restrictions or bans in states surrounding Texas could mean residents would have to travel even farther.

"It could be that Texas is just a taste of what's to come," said Rachel K. Jones, principal research scientist at the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports abortion rights.

Meanwhile, anti-abortion groups in Texas have been celebrating the lives they say have been saved by Texas' law, and anticipating the possibility of Roe v. Wade being overturned.

"Our impact is only just beginning," said Texas Right to Life spokeswoman Kimberlyn Schwartz.

California reps ask US for new water study at former base

By MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press Writer

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. (AP) — Two California congressmembers are asking the federal government to study whether there's evidence that potential toxic and contaminated drinking water at Fort Ord can be tied to specific cancers and other diseases.

"Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to our servicemembers and their families," said Reps. Katie Porter and Jimmy Panetta in a letter to the director of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. "By conducting a new study at Fort Ord, we may guarantee that those harmed while serving our country get the medical care they need."

The request follows an Associated Press report earlier this week about hundreds of people who lived and served near the Army base who are concerned that their health problems might be tied to chemicals there.

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

The AP interviewed nearly two dozen of these veterans and reviewed thousands of pages of documents, and interviewed military, medical and environmental scientists.

There is rarely a way to directly connect toxic exposure to a specific individual's medical condition. Indeed, the concentrations of the toxics are tiny, measured in parts per billion or trillion, far below the

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levels of an immediate poisoning. Local utilities, the Defense Department and some in the Department of Veterans Affairs insist Fort Ord's water is safe and always has been. But the VA's own hazardous materials exposure website, along with scientists and doctors, agree that dangers do exist for military personnel exposed to contaminants.

Responding to AP's report, a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee spokesperson said its chair, Montana Democrat Jon Tester, believes the "VA should take this and any potential toxic exposure among our military men and women seriously, and keep working to provide a fresh look at the possibility of toxic exposures at Fort Ord which may be causing adverse health effects in veterans."

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

AP found the Army knew that chemicals had been improperly dumped at Fort Ord for decades. Even after the contamination was documented, the Army downplayed the risks.

And ailing veterans are being denied benefits based on a 25-year-old health assessment, which Porter and Panetta Friday said needs an update. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry concluded in 1996 that there were no likely past, present or future risks from exposures at Fort Ord.

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

Congress has been weighing legislation this month that would recognize some potential health impacts from some military toxic exposures, particularly burn pits. And the Wounded Warrior Project released findings from a survey of about 18,000 registered members that found 98% of wounded veterans reported exposure to hazardous or toxic substances during military service.

'Stand your ground' laws proliferate after Trayvon spotlight

By CURT ANDERSON and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — The "stand your ground" self-defense law had been in effect in Florida for more than six years when it became part of the national vocabulary with the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012. When the 17-year-old was fatally shot, Florida was still one of the few states with the law that removes the duty to retreat before using deadly force in the face of danger.

Now, upward of 30 states have some form of the law and recent research indicates they are associated with more deaths — as many as 700 additional firearm killings each year, according to a study published this week in the journal JAMA Network Open.

The study found that stand your ground laws in those states could be associated with a national increase of up to 11% in homicide rates per month between 1999 and 2017. The largest increases, between 16% and 33%, were in Southern states including Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Louisiana, the study found.

"These findings suggest that adoption of ('stand your ground') laws across the U.S. was associated with increases in violent deaths, deaths that could potentially have been avoided," the study's authors concluded.

Advocates for the laws, especially the National Rifle Association, have argued they act as a crime deterrent by ensuring a person can protect themselves and others against a would-be assailant.

Florida was first in the nation in 2005 to adopt such a law. It was in force when Martin was fatally shot by self-appointed neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman on Feb. 26, 2012. Martin was Black; Zimmerman had a white father and Hispanic mother.

The initial police report said Zimmerman called authorities to report a suspicious person, a guy who, he said, "looks like he's up to no good." He followed Martin despite instructions not to do so. In the confrontation that followed, Zimmerman would tell authorities, Martin attacked him, forcing him to use his gun to save himself. Zimmerman was allowed to go free.

Martin's parents questioned Zimmerman's version of events and eventually the news media and others picked up on the case. Zimmerman was arrested six weeks later after then-Florida Gov. Rick Scott ap-

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pointed a special prosecutor to the case.

Zimmerman's lawyers opted not to pursue a "stand your ground" claim before trial, which could have resulted in dismissal of murder charges against him and immunity from prosecution. But the law was essentially used as his self-defense argument during the trial, which resulted in his acquittal.

Civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who was involved in the Martin case, called the Florida law "a virtual get-out-of-jail-free card that is essentially a license to kill."

Today the battle rages. Gun-rights supporters argue people should not have to try to retreat before defending themselves, said Alan Gottlieb, founder of the Second Amendment Foundation. He pointed to a Florida homeowner who recently shot and killed a man suspected of shooting a police officer as the man tried to break into his house. While that case could have been covered by other self-defense laws, Gottlieb said "stand your ground" laws offer reassurance.

"It's made a very big difference in self-defense situations," he said.

Three new states passed laws last year removing the duty to retreat: Ohio, Arkansas and North Dakota, where its sponsor said the legislation "ensures someone will not have to run away prior to protecting themselves or their family."

Six more loosened requirements to carry guns in public by removing the requirement to get a permit, the largest number of any single year. More than 20 states now allow permitless carry.

The U.S. Supreme Court also is expected to issue a ruling this session on whether New York's restrictive gun permitting law violates the Second Amendment right to "keep and bear arms." The law's defenders have said striking it down would lead to more guns on the streets of cities including New York and Los Angeles.

Gun control activists say the increasing presence of guns and laws like "stand your ground" are a deadly combination.

"Laws like 'stand your ground,' or shoot first laws, give people like Jordan's killer, my son's killer, the idea that you can shoot first and ask questions later," said Rep. Lucy McBath, who entered politics after her son Jordan Davis was slain at a Florida gas station in 2012 by a white man who was angry over the loud music the Black teenager and his friends had been playing in their car. Michael Dunn used the "stand your ground" law in his defense, but was convicted and is serving a life sentence.

Likewise, Rovina Billingslea's family has never been the same. Her cousin Jasmine McAfee, a mother of two, was killed at the hands of an intimate partner near Orlando about four years ago. The shooter was later acquitted under "stand your ground" law, leaving her family reeling.

"There was no justice, no closure, just pain," Billingslea said.

There are new efforts to push back against the measures against a backdrop of rising gun violence: Lawmakers from 19 states have signed on to a new task force aimed at amending or repealing the laws, especially in Georgia, Kansas and Pennsylvania, as well as Florida. The push is backed by Everytown for Gun Safety and Moms Demand Action, whose founder Shannon Watts said they should be called "shoot first laws" since they differ significantly from other self-defense laws already on the books.

Since the Martin slaying, Florida has amended its "stand your ground" law to shift the burden of proof from the person claiming self-defense to the prosecutor handling the case.

Prosecutors and many police organizations have opposed the laws, contending they can protect criminals and hinder the ability to bring justice to fatal shootings.

"Stand your ground' laws provide safe harbors for criminals and prevent prosecutors from bringing cases against those who claim self-defense after unnecessarily killing or injuring others," said David LaBahn, president and CEO of the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, in testimony to Congress.

In Florida, an ongoing trial in which a retired police captain is accused of murder in the 2014 shooting of a man inside a movie theater hinged initially on a "stand your ground" claim. A judge denied that claim for the former captain, Curtis Reeves, and that was upheld on appeal.

Reeves, however, is still claiming self-defense in the killing of Chad Oulson following a dispute over Oulson's use of a cellphone during movie previews. The shooting happened after Oulson tossed a bag of popcorn at Reeves.

So far, that has not qualified as a "stand your ground" defense.

"The evidence will show that's no reason to kill another person," said Assistant State Attorney Scott Rosenwasser in an opening statement this week. "This was an intentional and purposeful shooting."

Whitehurst reported from Salt Lake City.

This story corrects the name of the journal. It is JAMA Network Open, not the Journal of the American Medical Association.

John Landy, pursuer of Bannister's 4-minute mile, dies at 91

By DENNIS PASSA AP Sports Writer

John Landy, an Australian runner who dueled with Roger Bannister to be the first person to run a four-minute mile, has died. He was 91.

Landy's family on Saturday said the former athlete, who also became governor of Australia's Victoria state, had died at his home in Castlemaine after a long battle with Parkinson's disease.

"Dad passed away peacefully on Thursday surrounded by what he loved most: his family and the Australian bush," Landy's son Matthew Landy said. "We are going to really miss him. He was not only a wonderful husband, but a wonderful father and he lived a wonderful life."

Landy took up competitive running to help him get fit to play Australian rules football, only becoming serious about it after making a state track and field squad in 1951.

Later he was to make world headlines as he vied with Englishman Bannister to become the first man to run under four minutes for the mile.

Bannister was the first to achieve the feat, in a time of 3 minutes, 59.4 seconds at Oxford, England on May 6, 1954. Less than two months later, in Finland, Landy improved on Bannister's world record when he ran the mile in 3:57.90.

Those two times preceded the 1954 Empire Games in Vancouver where Landy and Bannister, the world's two fastest milers, met face-to-face in a showdown billed as the Race of the Century. The Englishman won and soon after retired to become a neurologist.

At the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, Landy was the favorite to win the "metric mile," the 1,500 meters. But it was in the lead-up to those Games that Landy earned his place in Australian sporting history.

Running in the Australian Mile Championship in 1956, Landy was in a strong position when fellow athlete Ron Clarke tripped and fell in front of him with about a lap and a half to go.

Landy leaped over Clarke and then turned back to help his rival to his feet, a gesture that cost him valuable seconds and around 50 meters. After checking on Clarke, he began running again and circled the field to win the race that assured him a place in Australia's Olympic team.

Landy never made a big deal of the gesture, describing it as "that silly race when I whizzed back to Ron Clarke."

"I reacted on the spur of the moment," Landy told the Australian Associated Press. "I ran down his arm with my spikes when I was jumping over him. That's why I went back. A lot of people seemed to think it was the most significant thing I ever did in running. It wasn't."

Landy won bronze in the 1,500 at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, finishing third behind Ron Delany of Ireland and Klaus Richtzenhain of Germany.

World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said in a statement that Landy was one of the great pioneers of the golden age of middle-distance running in the 1950s.

"He lit the spark that led to the legendary chase for the four-minute mile between 1952 and 1954 and was one of main protagonists in that quest," said Coe, the two-time 1,500-meter Olympic gold-medal winner. "Ultimately Roger Bannister got there first but was also the first to recognize that Landy's excellence inspired him to reach that historic landmark."

Landy went on to work in the field of agricultural science, a subject he studied at Melbourne University,

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and held various positions in sporting and community organizations.

In 2001 he became governor of Victoria — representing the British royalty in the state — a post he held for five years.

Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates said: "If Australia needed a role model, it is John Landy."

"His rivalry with Roger Bannister, as the pair closed on the sub four-minute mark for the mile, captured not only Australia's imagination, but that of the world."

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/hub/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

US, Europe step up Russia sanctions to target Putin directly

By RAF CASERT, AAMER MADHANI and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The United States and European allies said Friday they were stepping up sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine by adding measures directly targeting President Vladimir Putin and his foreign minister, putting diplomatic appeals to one side as Russia's forces closed on Ukraine's capital.

The move by the U.S., the European Union and Britain sends "a clear message about the strength of the opposition to the actions" by Putin, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said. On a day when explosions and gunfire were sounding in Kyiv's capital, and Pope Francis went to Russia's embassy in Rome to personally appeal for an end, the sanctions were part of growing global condemnation of the offensive.

Asked by reporters if U.S. President Joe Biden has planned any more direct diplomatic overtures toward Putin, whose ground and air forces are pushing an offensive on Ukraine's key cities, Psaki said no.

"I would say that a moment where a leader is ... in the middle of invading a sovereign country is not the moment where diplomacy feels appropriate," Psaki told reporters at a White House briefing. "It does not mean we have ruled out diplomacy forever."

Psaki said the U.S. was preparing individual sanctions on Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, likely to include travel bans. The announcement came hours after the European Union announced it intended to freeze Putin's assets, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told NATO leaders his country would also sanction Putin and Lavrov.

Psaki said the U.S. would also newly sanction the Russian Direct Investment Fund, which functions as a sovereign wealth fund meant to draw capital into the Russian economy.

The U.S. and European allies announced sweeping asset freezes and other penalties Thursday against Russia's banks, state-owned enterprises and elites, but they spared Russia's leader and foreign minister in that round.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the Biden administration's talks internally on the matter, said there was debate among administration officials about whether to include Lavrov in the sanctions, as some wanted to ensure a path for diplomatic contact remained open.

While the sanctions to be imposed would not ban contact between, for example, Putin and Biden, or U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Lavrov, they put a new chill on what had been weeks of repeated diplomatic efforts with Russia as Putin built up forces on Ukraine's borders. The debate on including Lavrov went back and forth, and was one of the reasons the individual sanctions were not announced with Thursday's other measures.

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.S., Oksana Markarova, called the allies' decision to freeze the assets of Putin himself the right one.

"It was President Putin's decision to attack Ukraine. ... And he is the one responsible for the war that the Russian Federation is now waging on us," Markarova told reporters at Ukraine's embassy in Washington.

Friday's U.S. measures block Putin and Lavrov, whom the Treasury Department's formal announcement of the sanctions described as Putin's "chief propagandist," from access to any assets within reach of U.S. officials, and bar anyone in the United States from doing business with them. Members of Russia's security council also were sanctioned.

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It was unclear what the practical impact on the two men would be and how important their assets in Europe were.

"I can assure you that if you got major assets and all of a sudden you can't get hold of them, it will cost you," said EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell.

EU ministers have said that even further sanctions were still possible, including booting Russia out of SWIFT, the dominant system for global financial transactions.

"The debate about SWIFT is not off the table, it will continue," Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn said.

Admonishing Russia further, the Council of Europe suspended Russia from the continent's foremost human rights organization. The 47-nation council said Russia remained a member and continued to be bound by the relevant human rights conventions.

Undeterred in the game of punitive sanctions, Russia started its own tit-for-tat measures, banning British flights to and over its territory in retaliation to a similar U.K. ban on Aeroflot flights.

Russian authorities also announced the "partial restriction" of access to Facebook after the social media network limited the accounts of several Kremlin-backed media.

Yet with the Kremlin's eyes fully targeted on expanding the attacks on Ukraine, almost all the action was still going one way.

In terms unheard since the Cold War, threats were flying from all sides and ran through society.

In a sign of papal anger, Pope Francis went to the Russian Embassy to "express his concern about the war," the Vatican said. It was an extraordinary, hands-on gesture, since usually popes receive ambassadors and heads of state in the Vatican.

The May 28 UEFA Champions League final, the Super Bowl of European soccer, was stripped from St. Petersburg and will move Paris. Formula One dropped this season's Russian Grand Prix at Sochi in protest.

And in pop culture, the wildly popular Eurovision song contest banned Russia from the May finals in Turin, Italy.

Countries in Asia and the Pacific have joined the U.S., the EU 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.

Taiwan announced Friday that it would join in economic sanctions, although it did not specify what those would be. They could potentially be focused on export control of semiconductor chips, of which Taiwan is the dominant producer.

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

"The Chinese government is following through on easing trade restrictions with Russia and that is simply unacceptable," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison complained. "You don't go and throw a lifeline to Russia in the middle of a period when they're invading another country."

Associated Press writers Foster Klug in Tokyo, Nicole Winfield in Rome and Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report, along with other AP journalists around the world.

Follow AP's coverage of the Ukraine crisis at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Sentence, state trial loom for ex-cops in Floyd's killing

By AMY FORLITI and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Three former Minneapolis police officers convicted of violating George Floyd's civil rights face federal sentences that one expert says could range from less than five years in prison to as

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much as the 25 years prosecutors are seeking for their former colleague Derek Chauvin.

A comprehensive process to determine that could take months. Meanwhile, the officers have a right to appeal their convictions, and they face a state trial in June for allegedly aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter. A federal investigation into the Minneapolis Police Department is also ongoing.

Here's a look at what's next:

WHAT HAPPENED?

After a monthlong trial, a federal jury on Thursday convicted former Minneapolis officers Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane of violating Floyd's civil rights.

All three 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 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 during the killing, which was caught on video and sparked protests around the world.

Chauvin was convicted last year on state charges of murder and manslaughter and was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in prison. He later pleaded guilty to federal civil rights violations.

NOW WHAT?

The federal probation office will conduct a pre-sentence investigation, which involves interviewing defendants and gathering investigative materials from the government, said John Marti, a former federal prosecutor.

The defendants' histories, educations, criminal records, financial histories and family situations are among the factors that will be considered, Marti said. Probation officials will then look at federal guidelines to make preliminary determinations about potential sentences.

Defense lawyers and prosecutors can object, and if there are factual disputes, the judge will hold an evidentiary hearing. He'll ultimately make the final decision on guidelines and the sentence.

The process can take months. Chauvin pleaded guilty in mid-December and no sentencing date has been set. In one recent Minnesota case involving a defendant convicted in a mosque bombing, the sentencing happened nine months later.

WHAT COULD THEY FACE?

Jurors determined that the officers' offenses resulted in Floyd's death, and that finding opened the door for a longer sentence.

A federal civil rights violation that results in death is punishable by life in prison or even death. But the death penalty isn't an option in this case because prosecutors would have had to have sought the attorney general's permission and gone through a review process before the trial, and they didn't.

That means life would be the maximum, but such sentences are rare in civil rights cases. Complicated formulas for the federal guidelines indicate that the officers would get much less.

WHERE IT GETS COMPLICATED

The guidelines can be calculated in different ways. There are sentencing guidelines for the civil rights offenses the men were convicted of, but those offenses could also be cross-referenced with another crime — such as murder — and the guidelines for those other crimes could be used, said Mark Osler, a former federal prosecutor and professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law.

"If they don't cross-reference, the guideline range is likely to be under five years," Osler said. "If they do cross-reference, it's likely to be the same as what Chauvin got." Chauvin's plea agreement calls for 20 to 25 years and says that a "base offense level" of second-degree murder was used to calculate that range.

The "guideline score" from the probation office doesn't bind the judge, but it's "anchoring" and is usually what a judge will rely on, Osler said.

Whether or not the underlying offense is cross-referenced with murder "will matter more than anything else" in figuring out the defendants' potential sentences, Osler said.

Marti agreed the underlying offense will be an issue of debate. He said Chauvin pleaded guilty to causing Floyd's death, but "he was the killer." As for the others, the jury found that Floyd died because they failed to do what they were required to, and the court must evaluate their culpability.

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"I think the law and the guidelines are going to advise that they receive a sentence less than Derek Chauvin, but ultimately it's going to be up to the court," he said.

CAN THEY APPEAL?

Absolutely, and Marti predicts they will: "This is the one bet that's 100% certain," he said.

The defendants can also file post-verdict motions asking for a new trial or for the judge to set aside the jury's verdict. Defense attorneys laid the groundwork for such motions and for an appeal throughout the trial as they made objections.

Attorneys for Lane and Kueng declined to comment when asked about their next steps. An attorney for Thao did not respond to a Friday message.

STATE TRIAL

All three men face charges of aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter in state court. That's set for June.

Osler said it's possible the parties could avoid a trial and agree to wrap the state case into the federal sentence.

"There could be basically a settlement that incorporates a joint recommendation for the federal sentence and a plea and anticipated settlement in the state case," he said.

But Marti believes the state trial will proceed. He said if the three former officers enter a plea in state court, it would undermine any federal appeals. He also said the defense attorneys are not the type to back down unless there was an offer from the state and federal governments for minimal punishment, and he doesn't think either would offer leniency.

John Stiles, a spokesman for Attorney General Keith Ellison, said: "We're preparing for a June state trial as planned."

OTHER INVESTIGATIONS

The Minneapolis Police Department is still the subject of two separate investigations. A federal one is examining whether the agency has a pattern or practice of unconstitutional or unlawful policing. That investigation was said to be looking at use of force, the handling of misconduct allegations and the department's current system of accountability, among other things.

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights is looking into the police department's policies and practices over the past decade to see if it engaged in systemic discriminatory practices. A message inquiring about the status of the state investigation was not returned Friday.

Find AP's full coverage of the killing of George Floyd at: <https://apnews.com/hub/death-of-george-floyd>

CDC: Many healthy Americans can take a break from masks

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

Most Americans live in places where healthy people, including students in schools, can safely take a break from wearing masks under new U.S. guidelines released Friday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention outlined the new set of measures for communities where COVID-19 is easing its grip, with less of a focus on positive test results and more on what's happening at hospitals.

The new system greatly changes the look of the CDC's risk map and puts more than 70% of the U.S. population in counties where the coronavirus is posing a low or medium threat to hospitals. Those are the people who can stop wearing masks, the agency said.

The agency is still advising people, including schoolchildren, to wear masks where the risk of COVID-19 is high. That's the situation in about 37% of U.S. counties, where about 28% of Americans live.

The new recommendations do not change the requirement to wear masks on public transportation and indoors in airports, train stations and bus stations. The CDC guidelines for other indoor spaces aren't binding, meaning cities and institutions even in areas of low risk may set their own rules. And the agency says people with COVID-19 symptoms or who test positive shouldn't stop wearing masks.

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But with protection from immunity rising — both from vaccination and infection — the overall risk of severe disease is now generally lower, the CDC said.

"Anybody is certainly welcome to wear a mask at any time if they feel safer wearing a mask," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a news briefing. "We want to make sure our hospitals are OK and people are not coming in with severe disease. ... Anyone can go to the CDC website, find out the volume of disease in their community and make that decision."

Some states, including Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey, are at low to medium risk while others such as West Virginia, Kentucky, Florida and Arizona still have wide areas at high levels of concern.

CDC's previous transmission-prevention guidance to communities focused on two measures — the rate of new COVID-19 cases and the percentage of positive test results over the previous week.

Based on those measures, agency officials advised people to wear masks indoors in counties where spread of the virus was deemed substantial or high. As of this week, more than 3,000 of the nation's more than 3,200 counties — greater than 95% — were listed as having substantial or high transmission under those measures.

That guidance has increasingly been ignored, however, with states, cities, counties and school districts across the U.S. announcing plans to drop mask mandates amid declining COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

With many Americans already taking off their masks, the CDC's shift won't make much practical difference for now, said Andrew Noymer, a public health professor at the University of California, Irvine. But it will help when the next wave of infection — a likelihood in the fall or winter — starts threatening hospital capacity again, he said.

"There will be more waves of COVID. And so I think it makes sense to give people a break from masking," Noymer said. "If we have continual masking orders, they might become a total joke by the time we really need them again."

The CDC is offering a color-coded map — with counties designated as orange, yellow or green — to help guide local officials and residents. In green counties, local officials can drop any indoor masking rules. Yellow means people at high risk for severe disease should be cautious. Orange designates places where the CDC suggests masking should be universal.

How a county comes to be designated green, yellow or orange will depend on its rate of new COVID-19 hospital admissions, the share of staffed hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients and the rate of new cases in the community.

Taking hospital data into account has turned some counties — such as Boulder County, Colorado — from high risk to low.

Mask requirements already have ended in most of the U.S. in recent weeks. Los Angeles on Friday began allowing people to remove their masks while indoors if they are vaccinated, and indoor mask mandates in Washington state and Oregon will be lifted in late March.

In a sign of the political divisions over masks, Florida's governor on Thursday announced new recommendations called "Buck the CDC" that actually discourage mask wearing.

In Pennsylvania, acting health secretary Keara Klinepeter urged "patience and grace" for people who choose to continue masking in public, including those with weakened immune systems. She said she'll keep wearing a mask because she's pregnant.

State health officials are generally pleased with the new guidance and "excited with how this is being rolled out," said Dr. Marcus Plescia of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

"This is the way we need to go. I think this is taking us forward with a new direction going on in the pandemic," Plescia said. "But we're still focusing on safety. We're still focusing on preventing death and illness."

The CDC said the new system will be useful in predicting future surges and urged communities with wastewater surveillance systems to use that data too.

"If or when new variants emerge or the virus surges, we have more ways to protect ourselves and our communities than ever before," Walensky said.

Associated Press writer Michael Rubinkam contributed.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Biden nominates Jackson, first Black woman, to Supreme Court

By COLLEEN LONG, MICHAEL BALSAMO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday nominated federal appeals court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court, the first Black woman selected to serve on a court that once declared her race unworthy of citizenship and endorsed American segregation.

Introducing Jackson at the White House, Biden declared, "I believe it's time that we have a court that reflects the full talents and greatness of our nation."

With his nominee standing alongside, the president praised her as having "a pragmatic understanding that the law must work for the American people." He said, "She strives to be fair, to get it right, to do justice."

In Jackson, Biden delivered on a campaign promise to make the historic appointment and further diversify a court that was made up entirely of white men for almost two centuries.

He also chose an attorney who would be the high court's first former public defender, though she possesses the elite legal background of other justices as well.

Jackson would be the current court's second Black member — Clarence Thomas, a conservative, is the other — and just the third in history. She would replace liberal Justice Stephen Breyer, 83, who is retiring at the end of the term this summer, so she won't change the court's 6-3 conservative majority.

Jackson would join the court as it weighs cutbacks to abortion rights and will be considering ending affirmative action in college admissions and restricting voting rights efforts to increase minority representation.

She would be only the sixth woman to serve on the court, but she would join three others already there, including the first Latina, Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

In brief remarks, Jackson thanked Biden, saying she was "humbled by the extraordinary honor of this nomination." She highlighted her family's first-hand experience with the entirety of the legal system, as judges and lawyers, an uncle who was Miami's police chief and another who was imprisoned on drug charges.

She also spoke of the historic nature of her nomination, noting she shared a birthday with Constance Baker Motley, the first Black woman to be confirmed to the federal bench.

"If I'm fortunate enough to be confirmed as the next associate justice of the Supreme Court United States, I can only hope that my life and career, my love of this country and the Constitution, and my commitment to upholding the rule of law and the sacred principles upon which this great nation was founded, will inspire future generations of Americans," she said.

Jackson, 51, once worked as one of Breyer's law clerks early in her legal career. She attended Harvard as an undergraduate and for law school, and served on the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the agency that develops federal sentencing policy, before becoming a federal judge in 2013.

Her nomination is subject to confirmation by the Senate, where Democrats hold the majority by a razor-thin 50-50 margin with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tie-breaker. Party leaders have promised swift but deliberate consideration.

Friday's ceremony was attended only by White House staff, Jackson's family and news media, in part because the Senate is out of session this week.

Everyone wore masks because of the pandemic, Biden and Jackson removing theirs to speak. He bent to pull out a lectern step for her to stand on as she made her remarks.

Her introduction came two years to the day after Biden, then struggling to capture the Democratic presidential nomination, pledged in a South Carolina debate to nominate a Black woman if presented with a vacancy.

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Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin said in a statement that the panel will "begin immediately" to move forward on consideration of an "extraordinary nominee." Senators have set a tentative goal of confirmation by April 8, when they leave for a two-week spring recess. Hearings could start as soon as mid-March.

That timeline could be complicated by a number of things, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the extended absence of Democratic Sen. Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico, who suffered a stroke last month and is out for several weeks. Democrats would need Lujan's vote to confirm Biden's pick if no Republicans support her.

Once the nomination is sent to the Senate, it is up to the Senate Judiciary Committee to vet the nominee and hold confirmation hearings. After the committee approves a nomination, it goes to the Senate floor for a final vote.

Biden and Senate Democrats are hoping for a bipartisan vote on the nomination, but it's unclear if they will be able to win over any GOP senators after bitterly partisan confirmation battles under President Donald Trump. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, one of three Republicans who voted to confirm Jackson to the appeals court last year, had pushed Biden to nominate a different candidate from his home state, Judge J. Michelle Childs, who also was favored by home-state Rep. James Clyburn, a Biden ally.

Graham said earlier this month his vote would be "very problematic" if it were anyone else, and he expressed disappointment in a tweet Friday. Previewing a likely Republican attack line, he and several others on the right said Biden was going with the choice of the "radical left."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said he looked forward to meeting with Jackson and "studying her record, legal views and judicial philosophy." But he noted he had voted against her a year ago.

Biden has said he was interested in selecting a nominee in the mold of Breyer who could be a persuasive force with fellow justices. Although Breyer's votes tended to put him to the left of center on an increasingly conservative court, he frequently saw the gray in situations that colleagues were more likely to find black or white.

"Justice Breyer — the members of the Senate will decide if I fill your seat," Jackson said Friday, praising the retiring justice's "civility, grace, pragmatism and generosity of spirit."

"But please know that I could never fill your shoes," she said.

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said, "With her exceptional qualifications and record of evenhandedness, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson will be a justice who will uphold the Constitution and protect the rights of all Americans, including the voiceless and vulnerable."

As part of his search process, Biden, a longtime chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, also interviewed Childs and California Supreme Court Judge Leandra Kruger, according to White House press secretary Jen Psaki, saying all three interviews took place on Feb. 14. As part of his process, Biden also consulted with a range of legal experts and lawmakers in both parties and delved deeply into the finalists' legal writings.

Biden called Jackson late Thursday to inform her that she was his choice, Psaki said, and he informed Democratic congressional leaders Friday morning.

Jackson serves on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, a position that Biden elevated her to last year from her previous job as a federal trial court judge. Three current justices — Thomas, Brett Kavanaugh and John Roberts, the chief justice — previously served on the same appeals court.

Jackson was confirmed to that post on a 53-44 Senate vote, winning the backing of three Republicans: Graham, Maine's Susan Collins and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski.

In one of Jackson's most high-profile decisions, as a trial court judge she ordered former White House Counsel Don McGahn to appear before Congress. That was a setback to Trump's efforts to keep his top aides from testifying. The case was appealed, and a deal was ultimately reached for McGahn's testimony.

As an appeals court judge, she was part of a three-judge panel that ruled in December against Trump's effort to shield documents from the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

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Jackson was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Miami. She has said that her parents, Johnny and Ellery Brown, chose her name to express their pride in her family's African ancestry. They asked an aunt who was in the Peace Corps in Africa at the time to send a list of African girls' names and they picked Ketanji Onyika, which they were told meant "lovely one."

Jackson traces her interest in the law to when she was in preschool and her father was in law school and they would sit together at the dining room table, she with coloring books and he with law books. Her father became an attorney for the county school board and her mother was a high school principal. A brother, nine years younger, served in the Army, including in Iraq, and is now a lawyer, too.

Associated Press writers Mark Sherman, Jessica Gresko and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

In trans people, GOP candidates find latest 'wedge issue'

By JEFF McMILLAN and MARC LEVY Associated Press

SCRANTON, Pa. (AP) — Dr. Mehmet Oz leans in to ask a little girl, "Do you remember when your parents thought you were a boy?"

The question was but a few seconds of a full 2010 episode of "The Dr. Oz Show" that focused on the experience of raising transgender children. But the clip now appears in an attack ad aired by a super PAC supporting one of his Republican primary opponents in the crowded and high-stakes race for U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania.

Another campaign ad, from Republican U.S. Senate candidate Vicky Hartzler in Missouri, targets transgender people in sports and has her referring to an NCAA athlete — Ivy League championship-winning University of Pennsylvania swimmer Lia Thomas — by her deadname and saying "women's sports are for women, not men pretending to be women."

And on Wednesday, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican who is running for reelection, ordered the state's child welfare agency to investigate reports of gender-confirming care for kids as abuse.

Derision and disparagement of transgender people, and even of those perceived as their allies, are proliferating on the airwaves and in statehouses across the country as 2022 election campaigns heat up. It's a classic strategy of finding a "wedge issue" that motivates a political base, political observers say.

"They are just weaponizing the fact that most everyday Americans don't yet realize that they know someone who is transgender," said Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. "It is easy to fall for a myth about a group of people you don't know, and that's just human. ... It's just really unfortunate to now see a group of politicians try to use that to their own advantage."

Republicans use it because public opinion is on their side, said Neil Newhouse, a veteran Republican pollster.

The idea of restricting transgender athletes resonates with parents of high school athletes, motivates the Republican base, and carries swing voters by 2 to 1, Newhouse said.

In a primary, a Republican candidate can use it to establish their conservative credentials and to come out first or forcefully enough to own the issue, Newhouse said. Or it can be used to push a rival to the left, he said.

Asked for comment on the ad, which does not mention sports, Oz's campaign — using inaccurate terminology to describe transgender women — said only that the celebrity surgeon doesn't believe that "biological males should compete in women's sports."

The efforts to make political hay of transgender and other LGBTQ people extend well beyond just campaign ads.

At least 10 states have banned transgender athletes from participating in sports in a way that is consistent with their gender identity.

Indiana is poised to be the 11th, although federal courts have blocked laws in Idaho and West Virginia. And then there are states that are banning or investigating gender-confirming treatment, such as Texas.

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The political framing is often around protecting girls, which is probably designed to broaden its appeal, Proctor and others said.

"It's good messaging. Who doesn't want to protect children?" said Don Haider-Markel, a University of Kansas political science professor.

Although examples like Lia Thomas are few across the country, Hartzler — who cites her experience as a high school athlete and coach — said in an interview that the issue of trans athletes is ad-worthy in a Senate race because it is a "representation of the wokeness that is being inflicted upon us from all sides and has gone beyond common sense."

A spokesperson for University of Pennsylvania athletics said Thomas would not comment on the ad.

The NCAA in January adopted a sport-by-sport approach for transgender athletes to document testosterone levels before championship selections. For high school sports, states have a hodgepodge of policies.

In Pennsylvania, the TV ad from the super PAC supporting Republican David McCormick tries to characterize Oz as a "Republican in Name Only," or not conservative enough.

The super PAC, Honor Pennsylvania, has received millions of dollars from conservative billionaire Ken Griffin.

The ad rips a few seconds from the episode and presents it without the context of a show that looked at transgender children from a measured standpoint, with input from a pediatrician and their parents on the kids' newfound happiness.

The clip in the attack ad stops after Oz gently asks the girl, from a military family, if she remembers when her parents thought she was a boy. The full episode continues:

"A little bit," the girl answers.

"Talk to me about that a little bit," Oz says. "What do you remember?"

The girl's mother, sitting next to her, says: "Like, how did it make you feel when I used to take you and get your hair cut at the barber shop on base?"

"It made me very angry," Josie answers.

"You did not like your hair cut," the mother says. "Why not?"

Josie answers: "Because I'm a girl, not a boy."

A political consultant to Honor Pennsylvania did not return messages asking how that makes Oz not conservative enough. A McCormick campaign spokesperson did not return messages asking whether McCormick agrees with the ad's attack.

Josie and her mother could not be located for comment on being featured years later in a political attack ad.

"I think it's incredibly sad when a political leader finds that the only way that they can get themselves elected to office is by attacking vulnerable children and their parents," said Lisa Middleton, the transgender mayor of Palm Springs, California. "Of all the issues that are before us in this world and this country today ... to make it more difficult for a transgender child and their parents to navigate their life to adulthood is irresponsible. It's un-American."

Republicans aren't the only party that uses wedge issues — Democrats often cast the wealthy in a negative light for political gain.

But the GOP's targeting of transgender people may have a shelf life, just as both parties' efforts against same-sex marriage shifted along with public opinion, said Paul Goren, a political psychology professor at the University of Minnesota. If it doesn't pay off with electoral wins, he said, then Republicans will move on.

In Texas, Abbott's letter came just a week before the state's Republican primary, the nation's first for the 2022 cycle. It aligns with a recent legal opinion from state Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican who is also running for reelection, that is directed at gender-confirming treatments incorporating puberty blockers and hormone therapy.

An Arkansas law banning such treatments for anyone under 18 years old has been blocked by a federal

judge, while other states are considering similar legislation.

Pushback in Texas is coming from civil liberties groups, medical professionals and district attorneys in some counties.

Kimberly Shappley, a Texas nurse and mother of an 11-year-old transgender girl, Kai, said she was distraught and had begun looking for a job in another state. The family has already been on edge for years over efforts to prevent transgender children from using public bathrooms that match their identity, she said.

"As the parent of a trans kid, I can tell you that our close-knit community is just a wreck," Shappley said on a video news conference organized by the American Civil Liberties Union. "It's just been a lot of tears. It's been a lot of, 'Do we have our documents in order? Do we have our plan in place? Is this the time we have to move?'"

But it's hard to know where to go, she said.

"The whole United States is on fire with anti-trans legislation. It's not just Texas," Shappley said. "What is the safe place that you think trans kids can live right now? Because there's not that many left."

Levy reported from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Associated Press writer Jim Salter in St. Louis and AP Television Writer Lynn Elber in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

In trans people, GOP candidates find latest 'wedge issue'

By JEFF McMILLAN and MARC LEVY Associated Press

SCRANTON, Pa. (AP) — Dr. Mehmet Oz leans in to ask a little girl, "Do you remember when your parents thought you were a boy?"

The question was but a few seconds of a full 2010 episode of "The Dr. Oz Show" that focused on the experience of raising transgender children. But the clip now appears in an attack ad aired by a super PAC supporting one of his Republican primary opponents in the crowded and high-stakes race for U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania.

Another campaign ad, from Republican U.S. Senate candidate Vicky Hartzler in Missouri, targets transgender people in sports and has her referring to an NCAA athlete — Ivy League championship-winning University of Pennsylvania swimmer Lia Thomas — by her deadname and saying "women's sports are for women, not men pretending to be women."

And on Wednesday, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican who is running for reelection, ordered the state's child welfare agency to investigate reports of gender-confirming care for kids as abuse.

Derision and disparagement of transgender people, and even of those perceived as their allies, are proliferating on the airwaves and in statehouses across the country as 2022 election campaigns heat up. It's a classic strategy of finding a "wedge issue" that motivates a political base, political observers say.

"They are just weaponizing the fact that most everyday Americans don't yet realize that they know someone who is transgender," said Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. "It is easy to fall for a myth about a group of people you don't know, and that's just human. ... It's just really unfortunate to now see a group of politicians try to use that to their own advantage."

Republicans use it because public opinion is on their side, said Neil Newhouse, a veteran Republican pollster.

The idea of restricting transgender athletes resonates with parents of high school athletes, motivates the Republican base, and carries swing voters by 2 to 1, Newhouse said.

In a primary, a Republican candidate can use it to establish their conservative credentials and to come out first or forcefully enough to own the issue, Newhouse said. Or it can be used to push a rival to the left, he said.

Asked for comment on the ad, which does not mention sports, Oz's campaign — using inaccurate terminology to describe transgender women — said only that the celebrity surgeon doesn't believe that "biological males should compete in women's sports."

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The efforts to make political hay of transgender and other LGBTQ people extend well beyond just campaign ads.

At least 10 states have banned transgender athletes from participating in sports in a way that is consistent with their gender identity.

Indiana is poised to be the 11th, although federal courts have blocked laws in Idaho and West Virginia. And then there are states that are banning or investigating gender-confirming treatment, such as Texas.

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NATO leaders agree to bolster eastern forces after invasion

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden and his NATO counterparts agreed Friday to send thousands of troops, backed by air and naval support, to protect allies near Russia and Ukraine in response to President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade.

Speaking after chairing a NATO summit, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the 30-nation organization will send parts of the NATO Response Force and elements of a quickly deployable spearhead unit to the alliance's eastern flank. It's the first time the force has been used to defend NATO allies.

Stoltenberg did not say how many troops would be sent or where they might go, but he did confirm that the move would involve land, sea and air power.

In response to Europe's biggest security crisis in decades, Stoltenberg said, "We are now deploying the NATO Response Force for the first time in a collective defense context. We speak about thousands of troops. We speak about air and maritime capabilities."

"There must be no space for miscalculation or misunderstanding. We will do what it takes to protect and defend every ally, and every inch of NATO territory," he said.

The NRF can number up to 40,000 troops, but Stoltenberg said that NATO would not be deploying the entire force. Parts of a spearhead unit known in NATO jargon as the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, which is currently led by France, will also be sent.

The announcement came after NATO members, ranging from Russia's neighbor Estonia in the north down around the west of conflict-hit Ukraine to Bulgaria on the Black Sea coast, triggered urgent consultations Thursday about their security amid concerns from the invasion.

"We will continue to take all measures and decisions required to ensure the security and defense of all allies," the leaders said in a statement. "We will make all deployments necessary to ensure strong and credible deterrence and defense across the alliance, now and in the future."

The world's biggest security organization previously had around 5,000 troops stationed in the Baltic

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countries — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — and Poland, but has significantly beefed up its defenses over the past three months.

Germany said Friday that it plans to deploy troops and a Patriot anti-missile system to Slovakia, which is a member of NATO and one of the countries to have triggered the urgent consultations, as part of an “enhanced vigilance activity battlegroup.”

NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, U.S. General Tod D. Wolters, said the new contributions “represent a flexible, combat credible force that can be employed in multiple ways and we are utilizing fully their inherent agility.”

He also thanked the U.S. and Canada for recent commitments to deploy an extra 7,640 troops, including an armored brigade combat team, artillery units, a naval frigate, and surveillance aircraft. It was not immediately clear whether those troops were part of the NRF deployment.

Some of NATO’s 30 member countries are supplying arms, ammunition and other equipment to Ukraine, but NATO as an organization isn’t. It won’t launch any military action in support of Ukraine, which is a close partner but has no prospect of joining.

The Baltic members, however, have said the West should “urgently provide Ukrainian people with weapons, ammunition and any other kind of military support to defend itself as well as economic, financial and political assistance and support, humanitarian aid.”

NATO began beefing up its defenses in northeastern Europe after Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Recently, some members have also sent troops, aircraft and warships to the Black Sea region, near allies Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

Short-term, NATO has also activated an emergency planning system to allow commanders to move forces more quickly. Surveillance aircraft have also begun patrols inside allied territory.

As the leaders prepared for their virtual summit, pro-Ukraine demonstrators rallied outside NATO’s headquarters in Brussels. Dozens of Ukrainians living in the Belgian capital chanted “Putin, Terrorist,” “Close the Sky Down” and “Stop Putin, Stop War.”

“We are fighting for the whole democratic world here. If we don’t stop them in Ukraine, they will go next to the European Union. They will be at your door,” said Artemii Sattarov, draped in a Ukrainian flag. That is why we are asking here to close the (airspace), to provide military help to Ukraine.”

Video reporter Mark Carlson in Brussels and Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed.

Follow AP’s coverage of the Ukraine crisis at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

EXPLAINER: What does Ukraine invasion mean for energy bills?

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Even as gunfire sounded in Ukraine’s capital, natural gas kept flowing normally Friday through the major pipelines from Russia to Europe. But the invasion and accompanying sanctions are casting a shadow over longstanding energy ties, both for the coming weeks and longer term.

The world is already facing high energy prices and a supply crunch that has hit consumers with high utility bills and pain at the gasoline pump. Russia’s attack on Ukraine has whipsawed energy markets, not least because Europe depends on Russian supplies of natural gas. Russia is also a major oil producer.

Here are key things to know about the invasion’s impact on energy:

WHAT’S THE SITUATION WITH OIL AND GAS PRICES?

A barrel of U.S. benchmark crude oil shot past \$100 Thursday after Russia invaded Ukraine. Natural gas prices also soared, even as operators say pipelines operated as usual.

Prices for both dropped after U.S. and European officials said sanctions against Russia would not interrupt energy supplies or payments through banks for shipments of oil and gas.

Nonetheless, fears of a supply interruption have rattled people and the markets. Some gasoline stations in Poland saw lines or ran out of gas Friday as people afraid of the fighting in neighboring Ukraine rushed

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to fill their tanks. A government spokesman said Poland has plenty of fuel reserves.

Russia accounts for more than 30% of Europe's gas for home heating, industry and generating electricity, and other potential supply sources are not adequately prepared to bridge the gap if Russian gas is curtailed, Rystad Energy analysts say.

"A complete halt to gas exports from Russia is highly unlikely, but gas piped through Ukraine — which represents 8% of European supply — is very much at risk," they said.

Supplies of liquefied natural gas brought by ship from the U.S. has helped relieve some of Europe's gas shortage this winter, but it's expensive.

Meanwhile, natural gas prices in the U.S. are approximately 60% higher than a year ago, according to Rystad.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR CONSUMERS?

The conflict is adding to the surging energy prices already plaguing Europe and the U.S., crimping consumer spending and holding back economic growth. If oil prices rise to \$120 per barrel and gas prices remain elevated, inflation would rise and slow economic growth this year, analysts at Berenberg bank say.

Some analysts believe regular gasoline could climb to \$4 a gallon on average in the U.S. in the coming months.

"That's going to create a lot of anxiety with consumers, and our government hasn't come up with a solution to help families with rising gasoline prices," said Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association.

Lower-income families are hardest hit by high gasoline prices, because they're more likely to have to drive to work, he said. "How do ordinary Americans plan for this? Their budgets are already tight."

In Europe, governments have rolled out cash subsidies for consumers hit by higher utility bills. Some heavy users of gas have shuttered or throttled back production, such as producers of fertilizer, which has become more expensive in turn.

Farmers have seen higher costs to fuel their equipment and those costs will turn up in food prices as well. Some people who switched to discount providers — which rely on energy from wholesale markets — have been sticker-shocked with sharply higher bills or had their contracts canceled when the supplier faced losses from high prices.

Many U.S. households also are struggling with high home heating bills, spending 40% more on home heating oil and natural gas compared with the same time last year.

WHY DIDN'T SANCTIONS TARGET OIL AND GAS FROM RUSSIA?

U.S. officials went out of their way to say that they are not seeking to block Russia's energy shipments despite it being a mainstay of Russia's budget and thus a chief source of funding for the Russian military attacking Ukraine.

The reason: global energy supplies are tight and prices are high. Cutting off Russian oil would send prices soaring and worsen the inflation plaguing the U.S. and Europe, while Europe would struggle to replace Russian gas.

COULD GAS SUPPLIES BE TOTALLY CUT OFF?

Europe is the biggest customer for Russia's state-owned gas giant Gazprom, with 83% of its sales in 2020.

Gazprom has sought to diversify by selling to China. But pipelines link much of its gas to Europe, and Russia has few liquefied gas terminals that would let it send gas to any destination with an import terminal. New connections to China are years away.

"Russia's capacity to divert gas flows to China is very limited now and by the time it grows, the EU will have other options," said Alicia Garcia Herrero, chief economist for the Asia Pacific region at Natixis bank.

Says Rystad Energy: "Russian gas exports bring in more than \$300 million for the Kremlin each day — revenues they cannot afford to lose."

That's why analysts have regarded a total gas cutoff by Europe or Russia as unlikely. The two sides need each other.

Russia's also a major supplier of crude oil to Europe, supplying more than 2 million barrels a day to be refined into gasoline, diesel fuel and used by industrial firms.

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Russian oil could be made up more easily than gas, analysts say. If there were supply disruptions, U.S. companies could, in theory, increase oil production and export more oil to Europe, while sanctioned Russian oil might wind up in China.

WHAT'S IT MEAN LONG TERM?

The war has intensified questions about Europe's gas dependence on Russia.

"The events of the last days show the imprudence of not having diversified our sources of energy and our providers in recent decades," said Italian Premier Mario Draghi in parliament Friday.

Europe's shortage of gas reserves this winter came about partly because Gazprom didn't sell extra gas beyond its long-term contracts. That led to concerns that Russia was willing to use gas as leverage.

The German government took a big step after the invasion by freezing the approval process for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which the U.S. opposed as increasing Europe's reliance on Russia.

Yet finding new energy supplies will take years. Europe continues to need natural gas to fire its electricity plants until renewables are built up enough and to make up for falling domestic production. Analysts at Energy Intelligence say tight supply will likely keep prices high through the mid-2020s.

The long-term answer is to double down on developing renewable energy to fight climate change, said Claudia Kemfert, energy expert at the German Institute for Economic Research in Berlin.

"We are in a new era. There is a day before Russia invaded Ukraine and a day after," Kemfert said. Prices for fossil energies are rising, and we are paying the price of the delayed energy transition."

"The best answer to fossil fuel wars is a significantly accelerated energy transition. It will bring peace."

AP Business Writer Cathy Bussewitz contributed to this report from New York.

Prices are up everywhere with inflation. Except in my 401(k)

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Inflation does not discriminate. Just like it's squeezing everybody's wallet, it's hitting almost every investment in a retirement account.

Stocks have been shaky this year, with the S&P 500 at one point dropping more than 10% from its record, mostly because of inflation worries. Bond prices have also tumbled. Before gold's recent spurt due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the metal with a reputation as an inflation protector was coming off its worst year in the last six, even though inflation surged to the highest level in generations.

The reality is that no perfect playbook exists for how to invest in a high-inflation world. But many on Wall Street do see areas of the market that could hold up better than others, if not outright succeed.

It marks a turnaround for investors, who got used to years of low inflation that didn't dent their earnings very much, said Gargi Pal Chaudhuri, head of iShares Investment Strategy, Americas, at investment giant BlackRock. "Going forward, I think that level that used to be 1.5% to 2% is likely to be closer to 3%, and you need to start thinking about where you can move," she said.

That doesn't mean investors need to start day-trading their retirement accounts, after a long-term buy-and-hold strategy worked so well for years. But they may want to shade their portfolios in certain directions, including parts of the stock and bond markets that can actually benefit from inflation. Here's a look at some of the options:

— BONDS LESS THREATENED BY INFLATION

Bonds are supposed to be the safe part of anyone's portfolio. But when inflation is high, the fixed payments they'll make in future years will buy less stuff.

Expectations keep rising for how many times the Federal Reserve will hike interest rates this year to slow inflation, with prices for consumers 7.5% higher in January than a year earlier. When rates rise, newly issued bonds pay more, and the bonds already sitting in bond funds' portfolios suddenly look less attractive, forcing down their prices. Vanguard's Total Bond Market Index fund has already lost 4.2% this year, as of Thursday.

It may be a shock to lose money on bonds, but investors shouldn't abandon them, Chaudhuri said.

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"At the end of the day, the bonds are still giving you that ballast," she said. "They are still that ultimate diversifier that will still work in an environment where stocks are going down significantly."

Higher rates typically hit the longest-term bonds harder, because they lock investors in at lower rates for longer. Shorter-term bonds can offer some protection.

The U.S. government offers some bonds that protect against rising prices. When an investor buys Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities, also called TIPS, the principal rises and falls over time with the consumer price index. So do the interest payments based on that principal amount. The downside is that TIPS are still offering negative yields, with the 10-year TIPS recently around negative 0.50%.

Another type of bond from the government, called an I-bond, may be more lucrative. It pays interest made up in two parts: one that rises and falls with inflation, which resets twice a year, and another that's set when the bond is purchased. I-bonds available now are paying nothing on that second part, but the first is so high that they're currently paying a composite annual rate of 7.1%. These bonds also come with limits, though, and can't be cashed out for a year. Investors also lose three months of interest payments if they cash out before five years.

— COMMODITIES THAT CAN SPARKLE

Some commodities have performed well during high-inflation periods over prior decades. Surprisingly, gold isn't always one of them.

Its price fell about 4% last year, even when inflation was accelerating quickly. And it yo-yoed through early 2022, before worries about Russian aggression against Ukraine sent it surging.

"Once inflation is already high, gold's hedging power is not as strong" against inflation, said Rich Weiss, chief investment officer, multi-asset strategies, at American Century Investments.

That may be because the Fed's usual medicine for high inflation - higher interest rates - can hurt gold. When bonds are paying more in interest, investors may be less willing to park their money in gold, which pays them nothing.

Other commodities have had stronger track records. "That's almost tautological," Weiss said, because rising prices for oil and other commodities are often some of the main reasons for inflation spikes.

Some on Wall Street suggest considering investments that track a broad range of commodities, such as some specialty ETFs, though they can have higher expenses than stock and bond funds.

— STOCKS THAT RISE WITH INFLATION

If prices for oil and other commodities are rising with inflation, so likely will the prospects for the companies that are producing them. That's why several strategists suggest focusing on energy stocks in particular.

Within the S&P 500, energy stocks have surged more than 22% this year, when the overall index is down a little more than 8%.

Other areas of the market that look relatively less expensive are also likely better bets in a world with high inflation and rising rates, say strategists at UBS Global Wealth Management. Stocks that look expensive, such as big tech stocks following their strong yearslong run aided by low interest rates, are likely to get hit harder.

Financial stocks haven't been hit as hard as the rest of the market this year because higher long-term rates are raising expectations for bigger profits from making loans. But even there, risk remains. Banks tend to make the most money when they can borrow money cheaply at short-term rates and lend it out at more expensive long-term rates. If that gap closes, they may be set for pain.

Stocks from emerging markets have also shown well in past instances of high inflation, in part because many of those companies are producers of commodities. They also look cheaper than the U.S. stock market, which has been the world's dominant force for years.

"COVID has prevented us from traveling overseas physically," American Century's Weiss said, "but you definitely want to start traveling overseas with your assets."

Key inflation gauge hit 6.1% in January, highest since 1982

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

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WASHINGTON (AP) — An inflation gauge that is closely monitored by the Federal Reserve jumped 6.1% in January compared with a year ago, the latest evidence that Americans are enduring sharp price increases that will likely worsen after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The figure reported Friday by the Commerce Department was the largest year-over-year rise since 1982. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, core inflation increased 5.2% in January from a year earlier.

Robust consumer spending has combined with widespread product and worker shortages to create the highest inflation in four decades — a heavy burden for U.S. households, especially lower-income families faced with elevated costs for food, fuel and rent.

At the same time, consumers as a whole largely shrugged off the higher prices last month and boosted their spending 2.1% from December to January, Friday's report said, an encouraging sign for the economy and the job market. That was a sharp improvement from December, when spending fell. Americans across the income scale have been receiving pay raises and have amassed more savings than they had before the pandemic struck two years ago. That expanded pool of savings provides fuel for future spending.

Inflation, though, is expected to remain high and perhaps accelerate in the coming months, especially with Russia's invasion likely disrupting oil and gas exports. The costs of other commodities that are produced in Ukraine, such as wheat and aluminum, have also increased.

President Joe Biden said Thursday that he would do "everything I can" to keep gas prices in check. Biden did not spell out details, though he mentioned the possibility of releasing more oil from the nation's strategic reserves. He also warned that oil and gas companies "should not exploit this moment" by raising prices at the pump.

On Friday, oil prices were steady after they had reached \$100 a barrel in volatile trading on Thursday, before falling back to \$92, about where they had started the day. Still, economists at JPMorgan have forecast that oil could reach \$110 a barrel as Russia's invasion of Ukraine escalates. Economists at BMO Capital Markets have estimated that each \$10-a-barrel increase translates into a 0.4 percentage point rise in inflation.

A separate report Friday showed that orders for long-lasting factory goods rose sharply in January, led by a rise in demand for airplanes. The figures indicate that many companies are willing to invest more in industrial equipment and other goods, a sign of confidence in the economy.

"Overall, the real economy appears to be in stronger health than we feared," said Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics, a forecasting firm.

Incomes were unchanged last month, largely because the monthly child tax credit payments that were included in Biden's \$1.9 trillion financial support package expired. A new study concluded that the end of the payments led to a jump in child poverty.

But wages and salaries rose 0.5% from December to January, Friday's report showed. And Social Security payments increased because a large cost-of-living adjustment, reflecting last year's jump in inflation, took effect.

Russia's invasion and the likely resulting rise in inflation have increased pressure on the Federal Reserve, which is expected to raise interest rates by a quarter-point as many as five or six times this year beginning in March. The Fed's delicate task — to raise rates enough to restrain inflation, without going so far as to tip the economy into recession — has now become more difficult.

Higher gas prices typically accelerate inflation, which would heighten the need for rate increases. But costlier gas can also weaken the economy by slowing consumer spending, something that would normally lead the Fed to leave rates unchanged.

Fed officials are acknowledging that the invasion of Ukraine has complicated the economic outlook, but say that so far they are sticking with their plans for rate hikes.

Loretta Mester, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, said Thursday that she supported a series of rate hikes beginning in March. But she said the Fed should remain flexible: Faster rate hikes might be needed, she said, if inflation hasn't begun to fade by mid-year, or more gradual increases if inflation is slowing.

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"The implications of the unfolding situation in Ukraine for the medium-run economic outlook in the U.S. will also be a consideration," she said. Other Fed officials have offered similar remarks this week.

Late Thursday, Fed governor Christopher Waller said he would support a half-point rate hike in March if inflation remains high. Most other Fed policymakers, though, have indicated that they're inclined to favor a more typical quarter-point hike.

Fed officials want inflation to fall back to its 2% target, as measured by the Commerce Department's gauge, released Friday. A separate measure, the consumer price index, released two weeks ago, showed that inflation reached 7.5% in January from a year earlier, also a four-decade high.

In December, Fed officials projected that inflation would decline to just 2.6%, according to their preferred measure, by the end of this year, which most economists see as increasingly unlikely. The Fed will release updated projections at its March meeting.

January's data show inflation was already picking up before the invasion. From December to January, prices rose 0.6%, up from 0.5% in the previous month.

A Federal Reserve report Friday showed that inflation has spread beyond pandemic-affected industries, such as new and used cars, in which prices have jumped at double-digit annual rates. More than three-fifths of all goods and services are now showing price gains of at least 3% a year, the Fed said, nearly double the pre-pandemic level. At the same time, that is still far below the proportion in the 1970s, when more than 90% of goods and services reflected price increases at least that high, the report said.

There are early indications that consumer spending has stayed healthy in February, boosted by the rapid fading of the omicron wave of the coronavirus. JPMorgan Chase said that spending on its credit cards for airline tickets, hotel rooms, and restaurant meals rose in the first half of this month.

The JPMorgan Chase Institute also recently released data showing that cash balances remain elevated among their customers, including those with lower incomes. Bank account balances for Americans with less than \$26,000 in income were 65% higher at the end of last year than they were two years before.

The combination of higher pay and enhanced savings suggests that Americans may be able to keep spending at a solid pace in the coming months, thereby sustaining the economy's inflationary pressures.

J&J, distributors finalize \$26B landmark opioid settlement

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

CAMDEN, N.J. (AP) — Drugmaker Johnson & Johnson and three major distributors finalized nationwide settlements over their role in the opioid addiction crisis Friday, an announcement that clears the way for \$26 billion to flow to nearly every state and local government in the U.S.

Taken together, the settlements are the largest to date among the many opioid-related cases that have been playing out across the country. They're expected to provide a significant boost to efforts aimed at reversing the crisis in places that have been devastated by it, including many parts of rural America.

Johnson & Johnson, AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson announced the settlement plan last year, but the deal was contingent on getting participation from a critical mass of state and local governments.

Friday was the deadline for the companies to announce whether they felt enough governments had committed to participate in the settlement and relinquish the right to sue. The four companies notified lawyers for the governments in the case that their thresholds were met, meaning money could start flowing to communities by April.

"We're never going to have enough money to immediately cure this problem," said Joe Rice, one of the lead lawyers who represented local governments in the litigation that led to the settlement. "What we're trying to do is give a lot of small communities a chance to try to change some of their problems."

While none of the settlement money will go directly to victims of opioid addiction or their survivors, the vast majority of it is required to be used to deal with the epidemic. The need for the funding runs deep.

Kathleen Noonan, CEO of the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers, said a portion of the settlement

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money should be used to provide housing to people with addictions who are homeless.

"We have clients who have a hard time staying clean to make it in a shelter," she said. "We would like to stabilize them so we can help them recover."

Dan Keashen, a spokesman for Camden County government, said officials are thinking about using settlement money for a public education campaign to warn about the dangers of fentanyl. They also want to send more drug counselors into the streets, put additional social workers in municipal courts and pay for anti-addiction medications in the county jail.

Officials across the country are considering pumping the money into similar priorities.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom's proposed budget calls for using \$50 million of the state's expected \$86 million share this year for youth opioid education and to train treatment providers, improve data collection and distribute naloxone, a drug that reverses overdoses.

In Florida's Broward County, home to Fort Lauderdale, the number of beds in a county-run detoxification facility could be expanded from 50 to 70 or 75, said Danielle Wang French, a lawyer for the county.

"It's not enough, but it's a good start," she said of the settlement.

With fatal overdoses continuing to rage across the U.S., largely because of the spread of fentanyl and other illicitly produced synthetic opioids, public health experts are urging governments to use the money to ensure access to drug treatment for people with addictions. They also emphasize the need to fund programs that are proven to work, collect data on their efforts and launch prevention efforts aimed at young people, all while focusing on racial equity.

"It shouldn't be: ready, set spend," said Joshua Sharfstein, a former secretary of the Maryland Department of Health who is now a vice dean of public health at Johns Hopkins University. "It should be: think, strategize, spend."

In a separate deal that also is included in the \$26 billion, the four companies reached a \$590 million settlement with the nation's federally recognized Native American tribes. About \$2 billion is being set aside for fees and expenses for the lawyers who have spent years working on the case.

New Brunswick, New Jersey-based Johnson & Johnson has nine years to pay its \$5 billion share. The distributors — Conshohocken, Pennsylvania-based AmerisourceBergen; Columbus, Ohio-based Cardinal Health; and Irving, Texas-based McKesson — agreed to pay their combined \$21 billion over 18 years. To reach the maximum amounts, states have to get local governments to sign on.

The settlements go beyond money. J&J, which has stopped selling prescription opioids, agrees not to resume. The distributors agree to send data to a clearinghouse intended to help flag when prescription drugs are diverted to the black market.

The companies are not admitting wrongdoing and are continuing to defend themselves against claims that they helped cause the opioid crisis that were brought by entities that are not involved in the settlements.

In a joint statement, the distributors called the implementation of the settlement "a key milestone toward achieving broad resolution of governmental opioid claims and delivering meaningful relief to communities across the United States."

The requirement that most of the money be used to address the opioid crisis contrasts with a series of public health settlements in the 1990s with tobacco companies. In those cases, states used big chunks of the settlement money to fill budget gaps and fund other priorities.

The amount sent to each state under the opioid settlement depends on a formula that takes into account the severity of the crisis and the population. County and local governments also get shares of the money. A handful of states — Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Washington and West Virginia — have not joined all or part of the settlement, mostly because they have their own deals or are preparing for trial.

In Camden, Lisa Davey, a recovery specialist for Maryville Addiction treatment Center, was at a needle exchange this week handing out naloxone, a drug that reverses overdoses, and asking people if they wanted to start treatment.

Davey said she wants to see detoxification and treatment programs receive more funding to keep people in them for longer. As it is, she said, users can detox and be back out on the streets in search of drugs

within days.

"They need more time to work their recovery," she said.

A man picking up clean needles who asked to be identified only as Anthony P. said he was 46 and had struggled with addiction since he was a teenager. He said he'd like to see an effort to cut off fentanyl and related synthetic opioids that are driving overdose death rates from the drug supply.

"Fentanyl's got to go," he said.

Martha Chavis, president and CEO of Camden Area Health Education Center, which runs the needle exchange, said one need is offering services like hers in more places. Now, users from far-flung suburbs travel into Camden to get clean needles and kits to test their drugs for fentanyl.

The settlement with J&J and the three distributors marks a major step toward resolving the vast constellation of lawsuits in the U.S. over liability for an epidemic that has been linked to the deaths of more than 500,000 Americans over the past two decades.

Other companies, including business consultant McKinsey and drugmakers Endo, Mallinckrodt and Teva, have reached national settlements or a series of local ones. OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma and a group of states are in mediation through U.S. Bankruptcy Court to try to reach a nationwide settlement.

The crisis has deepened during the coronavirus pandemic, with U.S. opioid-related deaths reaching a high of more than 76,000 in the 12 months that ended in April 2021, largely because of the spread of fentanyl and other lab-made drugs. A recent report from a commission by The Lancet medical journal projected that 1.2 million Americans could die of opioid overdose between 2020 and 2029 without policy changes.

John F. Kelly, a professor of psychiatry in addiction medicine at Harvard Medical School, said he wants to see money from the settlements go not just for treatment, recovery and support efforts but also to build systems designed to prevent this sort of epidemic from happening again.

"Some kind of national board or organization could be set up ... to prevent this kind of lack of oversight from happening again -- where industry is allowed to create a public health hazard," he said.

This story has been corrected with Johnson & Johnson saying it has nine years to pay its share of the settlement, not 10 years.

IOC urges sports bodies to cancel events in Russia, Belarus

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — The International Olympic Committee urged sports bodies Friday to cancel or move all events they plan to hold in Russia and Belarus, and stop using the countries' flags and national anthems.

The request from the Olympic body came after UEFA moved the Champions League final from St. Petersburg to suburban Paris, and after the governing body of skiing and Formula One pulled upcoming races from Russia.

Volleyball, shooting and hockey all have world championships scheduled to be held in Russia. Hockey is a favorite sport of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his home city of St. Petersburg is scheduled to host the worlds in May 2023.

Russia breached the Olympic Truce by invading Ukraine on Thursday, only four days after the closing ceremony of the Winter Games in Beijing. Some of the Russian troops entered Ukraine from Belarus, Russia's ally.

It was the third Russian breach of the Olympic Truce in the past 14 years. Russia invaded Georgia during the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and annexed Crimea shortly after the end of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

The IOC statement signaled a toughening of the Olympic body's position on Russia. IOC president Thomas Bach has long been seen as forgiving of Russian doping scandals and too close to Putin.

Bach implored countries to "give peace a chance" in his opening and closing ceremony speeches in Beijing as Putin — who went to China and attended the opening ceremony on Feb. 4 — sent troops and

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military hardware to the borders of Ukraine in Russia and Belarus.

The IOC has ultimate authority over the Olympics but recognizes the independence of the governing bodies of individual sports to organize their own events and pick hosts.

Those bodies, the IOC said Friday, "should take the breach of the Olympic Truce by the Russian and Belarussian governments into account and give the safety and security of the athletes absolute priority."

Russia's national soccer team is also scheduled to host a World Cup qualifying playoff match against Poland on March 24 in Moscow, with a second home game five days later if it wins. FIFA is still weighing if or where Russia can play, though UEFA said Friday the country's teams could not host games in its competitions.

In May, Russia is scheduled to host a week-long conference of global sports officials in Ekaterinburg for one of their first in-person gatherings since the pandemic started. That event, known as Sportaccord, is likely to be canceled in the coming days.

The governing body of volleyball has pressed ahead with staging this year's men's world championships from Aug. 26-Sept. 11 in cities across Russia even though the tournament falls within the two-year period of sanctions in fallout from the country's state-backed doping scandal.

Among the sanctions imposed by the Court of Arbitration for Sport in December 2020 in the doping scandal was that Russia should lose hosting rights to world championships. However, the sanction came with a loophole stating "unless it is legally or practically impossible to do so."

Another sanction was the banning of Russia's national identity — flag, anthem and country name for its athletes and teams — at Olympics and world championships. It does not apply to regional events such as European championships.

On Friday, the IOC said the flags and national anthems of Russia and Belarus should not be used at any international sports events.

"The IOC expresses its deep concerns about the safety of the members of the Olympic community in Ukraine and stands in full solidarity," it said.

The IOC also gave "full support" to the International Paralympic Committee for the Winter Paralympics, which open next month in Beijing. Russian athletes are set to compete there, though the team name is banned like at the Olympics.

In its statement, the IOC gave no indication of its intentions regarding the Russian team for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Bach has consistently opposed blanket bans for any nation, though the Olympic Charter, a book of rules which guides the IOC, states it is the "authority of last resort on any question concerning the Olympic Games."

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/hub/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Honesty, reassurance: How to talk to kids about Ukraine

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The pandemic, mass shootings, natural disasters, terror attacks. There's been plenty of tragedy and anxiety for parents to sort through with their kids. Add Russia's escalating invasion of Ukraine to the list.

With events rapidly unfolding on TV and across social media, child development experts urge parents to check in with children of all ages but not to worry if those conversations are brief.

"For children under the age of 7, it might just be acknowledging that something is happening between Ukraine and Russia and ask, 'Have you heard anything?' Take the child's lead," said Janine Domingues, a clinical psychologist at the nonprofit Child Mind Institute in New York.

For all ages, honesty is paramount, she and others said.

"Overall, just provide reassurance, that this is what we know right now. Let them know you don't know all the answers but here are some places we can go," Domingues said.

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Around the globe, from the U.S. to Western Europe, Japan to South Korea and Australia, countries immediately denounced the Kremlin as Thursday's fighting raised fear, sending stocks tumbling and oil prices surging. President Joe Biden slapped Russia with some of the broadest and toughest financial penalties the world's largest economy can muster.

Karina Serio, 16, in Cecil County, Maryland, hopes to major in Russian and European studies when she goes to college. For now, as a high school sophomore, she helps Ukrainian kids with their English through an online volunteer organization and moderates a group chat of up to 600 Ukrainian youth at a time on the Telegram app.

"I think it's scary," she said. "You know, right now I'm sitting here in my nice house and there's people my age sitting in their apartments listening to sirens go off. They can't sleep. They don't know what to do. And I feel bad, like, what can I do?"

Janice Torres in Brooklyn is among parents already fielding questions from their kids.

"She asked why they are having a war? And if the kids are in school," Torres said of her 8-year-old daughter. "She saw me crying as I watched a video of a dad letting his kid go on a bus. She told me that she's glad America is not at war. She doesn't want to go on a bus without us."

Dr. Gene Beresin, executive director of the free online resource hub The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, said young children, tweens and even older teens have some basic questions in common when it comes to war, whether they verbalize them or not: Am I safe? Are you, the people taking care of me, safe? How will this affect my day-to-day life?

Though the invasion, for U.S. kids, is playing out several thousand miles from home, social media and television coverage can make it seem just next door.

"Many, many, many children who witnessed 9/11 on TV, who witnessed the Oklahoma bombing on TV, who witnessed the Challenger disaster on TV, got post-traumatic stress disorder. The media is huge," Beresin said.

That's why some experts warn against leaving TV coverage on constantly as the invasion plays out. For very young children, unplugging from screens altogether for a while could help. Preschool kids may need more TLC time with a parent or caregiver while they work through their emotions, Beresin said.

"They know things are troubled. They know things are problematic. They may ask you if you're worried. Kids of all ages may ask if you're worried. And frankly, you got to be honest. You can say, 'Yes, I am, but we can manage this. We can get through this.' I would indulge them a little bit," he said.

Andrea Barbalich is editor-in-chief of The Week Junior, a weekly newsmagazine for kids ages 8-14 with 100,000 subscribers in all 50 states. She and her staff have been covering Ukraine.

"We're very calm in our tone and we're selective in the facts that we present," she said. "We avoid very frightening and upsetting information and focus on the helpers wherever we can. Right now, for example, there are thousands of people around the world and many governments working together to stop the conflict and end the fighting. There are people on the ground who are helping people who are injured. There will be humanitarian aid for people who need it."

The issue she shipped Tuesday, before the latest outbreak of fighting, focused on troops amassing at the borders, outlined the shared history between Russia and Ukraine and explained the position of the U.S. Next week's issue will take on the invasion.

"We've heard from a tremendous number of parents already who have thanked us for covering the story so forthrightly, and they are telling us that they appreciate our calm and factual approach because their children are frightened and they weren't sure what to say," Barbalich said.

For kids, said Dr. Nick Hatzis of the outpatient mental health care facility Compass Health Center in Chicago, the most important step for parents is to "create a space that allows for listening." Conversation on Ukraine may be exactly what some kids want and exactly what others might not, he said.

"There's going to be a lot of back and forth," said Hatzis, medical director for child and adolescent programs. "We want to make sure that we are actively promoting our routines, our schedules, participating in the meaningful activities in our lives and in our kids' lives."

Follow Leanne Italie on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/litalie>

Treasury: Most COVID rental aid went to low-income residents

By MICHAEL CASEY and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than 80% of the billions of dollars in federal rental assistance aimed at keeping families in their homes during the pandemic went to low-income tenants, the Treasury Department said.

It also concluded Thursday that the largest percentage of tenants receiving pandemic aid were Black followed by female-led households. In the fourth quarter of 2021, Treasury found that more than 40% of tenants getting help were Black and two-thirds of recipients were female-headed households. The data was consistent with what Treasury saw throughout the year.

"This is money that flows from Treasury to every state and territory in the country, and we really have seen a real focus on delivering these dollars," said Noel Andrés Poyo, the deputy assistant secretary for Community Economic Development at Treasury. "It has been encouraging from my point of view to see states that are very diverse and to see these agencies lean into something really hard, it was really tough to stand up these programs, this data reflects where the need was."

According to the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, those most likely to face eviction are low-income women, especially women of color. Domestic violence victims and families with children are also at high risk for eviction.

"It's really encouraging to see so much of the rental assistance reaching those most in need: women, Black renters, and low-income households in particular," Peter Hepburn, a research fellow at the Eviction Lab, said. "These are the groups that face highest risk of eviction and who were most severely affected by the economic impacts of the pandemic. They're the ones that this money was meant to help."

Lawmakers approved \$46.5 billion in Emergency Rental Assistance last year. After early challenges getting the funds out, the pace of distribution has picked up significantly in recent months. Throughout 2021, over \$25 billion has been spent and obligated. That represents 3.8 million payments to households, Treasury said Thursday.

The agency's findings on beneficiaries showed their efforts to reach low income communities the past year had paid off.

Among other things, Treasury recommended states and localities make applications multi-lingual and introduced flexible guidelines that allow tenants to self-attest for their income. It also targeted harder-to-reach communities and worked to promote the rental assistance program in Black and Spanish media.

"A year later, Treasury is pleased to report that the vast majority of rental assistance has gone to keeping the lowest-income families in their homes during the pandemic," Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in a statement. "This wasn't by accident, and we continue to use every lever to ensure these funds are distributed equitably and encourage state and local grantees to increase ease of access."

A good example has been Oregon, which said it went beyond Treasury guidance in how funds would be prioritized such as whether a household lives in a census tract with a high percentage of low income renter at risk of experiencing housing instability or homelessness. Applications are available in five languages and priority given to those most in need, not those who are first to apply.

"Our collective efforts to ensure these funds reach the lowest income and most marginalized people is clearly working," Diane Yentel, CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, said. "Households that received assistance were predominantly very low and extremely low income and disproportionately people of color."

Casey reported from Boston.

Attacks from within seen as a growing threat to elections

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

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Election officials preparing for this year's midterms have yet another security concern to add to an already long list that includes death threats, disinformation, ransomware and cyberattacks — threats from within.

In a handful of states, authorities are investigating whether local officials directed or aided in suspected security breaches at their own election offices. At least some have expressed doubt about the 2020 presidential election, and information gleaned from the breaches has surfaced in conspiracy theories pushed by allies of former President Donald Trump.

Adding to the concern is a wave of candidates for state and local election offices this year who parrot Trump's false claims about his loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

"Putting them in positions of authority over elections is akin to putting arsonists in charge of a fire department," said Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, a Democrat and former law school dean who serves as Michigan's top elections official.

Experts say insider threats have always been a concern. But previously, the focus was mostly on what a volunteer poll worker or part-time employee could do to a polling place or county system, said Ryan Macias, who advises officials at the federal, state and local levels on election security. Now the potential harm extends to the very foundation of democracy — conducting fair elections.

"Since 2020, the coordinated efforts to have threat actors run for office, apply to be election officials and volunteer as a poll worker or observer should be treated as national security concerns," Macias said.

The potential risks posed by insider attacks run from granting unauthorized access to sensitive information to planting malware within election systems.

While insider threats are the hardest to guard against, Macias said measures are in place to recover from an attack. Most of the country relies on paper ballots filled out by hand or with the use of a voting machine, so there should be a paper record of each ballot cast. In addition, post-election checks are designed to identify potential manipulation or discrepancies in the vote.

This year, voters in 25 states will elect their state's chief election official, and several races feature candidates who dispute the outcome of the 2020 presidential contest despite no evidence of widespread fraud or a coordinated scheme to steal the election.

Some voters also will decide who will run their local elections as the next county clerk. It's these local election offices that have experienced security breaches.

In Mesa County, Colorado, authorities are investigating whether unauthorized people were granted access to county voting equipment. State officials began investigating after the county's voting system passwords appeared on a conservative website. Because each county has unique passwords maintained by the state, officials identified them as belonging to Mesa County, where Trump won nearly 63% of the vote.

Clerk Tina Peters — a Republican elected in 2018 — then appeared at a "cybersymposium" hosted by Trump ally Mike Lindell, the MyPillow CEO who has sought to prove that voting systems were somehow manipulated to favor Democrats.

At that event a copy of Mesa County's election management system — which is used for designing ballots, configuring voting machines and tallying results — was distributed. Experts have described the unauthorized release as serious, potentially providing a "practice environment" to probe for vulnerabilities.

Peters, in an interview, said she made the copy of a county voting system hard drive to preserve "the evidence of how you get to the result of an election, who came in, who made changes, who did what." She denied knowledge of how a copy came to be distributed at the Lindell event and would not say who was with her when the copy was made.

"I didn't go in to try to address some conspiracy theory," Peters told The Associated Press. "It's just my responsibility to protect, and solely my responsibility to protect election records."

A grand jury in Mesa County is reviewing the case. Meanwhile, Peters has announced plans to run for secretary of state, overseeing elections for Colorado.

Elsewhere in Colorado, state officials are investigating after the election clerk in Elbert County, southeast of Denver, indicated he made two copies of a voting system hard drive last summer.

An attorney for Dallas Schroeder said in a written response to the state that Schroeder believes he had a "statutory duty to preserve election records" and was concerned that a visit by state officials to prepare

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for the 2021 elections “might erase or alter electronic records of the November 2020 election.”

There has been no indication of widespread fraud or other major irregularities following the 2020 election in Colorado or elsewhere.

In Ohio, federal and state authorities are investigating after network data purportedly from the Lake County Board of Elections in suburban Cleveland was made available online along with other data by people seeking to show the 2020 election was somehow manipulated.

A state analysis determined the data wasn't from the Board of Elections at all, but rather a network that runs other county business. Secretary of State Frank LaRose, a former Republican state lawmaker who serves as Ohio's chief election official, said it showed only “innocuous traffic,” such as between a county computer and a printer, but was used to suggest something nefarious.

“They grabbed that and they said, ‘Oh, look, here's evidence,’” LaRose said. “It was evidence of nothing, and they were nowhere close to the Board of Elections.”

In Michigan, the secretary of state's office recently announced a potential security breach at an election office in Roscommon County, in the rural northern part of the state, where someone is suspected of gaining unauthorized access to voting systems. State authorities are investigating.

Experts said these types of security breaches have so far been few and most election officials are experienced, neutral professionals who follow the rules and want no part of conspiracy theories.

But, they said, any official found to be undermining elections and breaking the law must be held accountable. No charges have been brought so far in any of the breaches being investigated in Colorado, Ohio and Michigan.

“One of the keys to combatting insider threats is that there are consequences, and we haven't seen that yet,” said Matt Masterson, a former top election security official during the Trump administration.

In advance of this year's midterm elections, federal officials who oversee election security say they have conducted training with officials on ways they can limit access to voting systems to reduce the chances of an insider threat.

In Ohio, state election officials credited additional cybersecurity measures put in place in 2019 with preventing the attempted breach in Lake County, which Trump won in 2016 and 2020. A state order required that election-related systems be separated from county networks to better protect them.

In Michigan, Benson said her office is “keeping a close eye — closer than ever before” on local election officials and is prepared to stop anyone who tries to jeopardize election security.

In Colorado, Secretary of State Jena Griswold recently announced a set of temporary rules she said were designed to address “emerging security risks,” specifically citing the cases in Mesa and Elbert counties.

The new rules reduce the number of county employees with access to the election management system and require that they be identified in the county's security plan filed with the state. Proof of background checks must be provided to the state for anyone present as voting systems are prepared for an election.

“Undoubtedly, we will see more insider threats to come,” said Griswold, a Democrat. “States have to prepare themselves.”

Associated Press writers Julie Carr Smyth in Columbus, Ohio, and David Eggert in Lansing, Michigan, contributed to this report.

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

By ANDREW DRAKE Associated Press

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

Many civilians, horrified to find their lives at risk, started to flee during the attack's first hours. Amid the smoke and the screeching of car alarms on Friday, Zhyhanov and his family packed and joined them.

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"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 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 air raid sirens. Then came the news that Russian forces had advanced to the capital's outskirts.

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

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

Armored personnel carriers drove down the city's streets. Soldiers on empty bridges established defensive positions. Residents stood uneasily in doorways of apartment buildings, watching.

Outside a monastery, a woman lifted her hands toward a mural of saints and appeared to pray. In the port city of Mariupol, a young girl named Vlada wished for the assault to stop.

"I don't want to die," she said. "I want all of this to end as soon as possible."

Uncertainty compounded the fear. On a street in the Obolon district, Associated Press journalists saw a military truck disabled, its tires deflated. The truck had no apparent insignia, and it was not clear if it was a vehicle that Ukraine's general staff claimed had been stolen by Russian forces aiming to disguise themselves as local ones.

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

In the city of Horlivka, in the territory held by pro-Russian rebels, a body covered with a blanket lay outside a house that had been hit. A man standing nearby spoke on the phone.

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

The U.N. human rights office said it was receiving increasing reports of civilian casualties, with at least 25 deaths verified, mostly from shelling and airstrikes. "The figures, we fear, could be much higher," agency spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said.

The urge to run away grew. Some civilians approached borders on foot, wheeling luggage behind them. "It's unfortunate that we got here in our old age, facing a war," said Marika Sipos, who had left her home in Koson. She wiped her eyes.

At 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.

Some hesitated to leave, 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, appeared undecided.

"It's 50-50 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 could return home.

Follow AP's coverage of the Ukraine crisis at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Biden, Europe waiting on key SWIFT 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.

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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.-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

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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.

Associated Press writers Jill Lawless in London and Lisa Mascaro in Washington contributed to this report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Feb. 26, the 57th day of 2022. There are 308 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 26, 1993, a truck bomb built by Islamic extremists exploded in the parking garage of the North Tower of New York's World Trade Center, killing six people and injuring more than 1,000 others. (The bomb failed to topple the North Tower into the South Tower, as the terrorists had hoped; both structures were destroyed in the 9/11 attack eight years later.)

On this date:

In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte escaped from exile on the Island of Elba and headed back to France in a bid to regain power.

In 1904, the United States and Panama proclaimed a treaty under which the U.S. agreed to undertake efforts to build a ship canal across the Panama isthmus.

In 1942, "How Green Was My Valley" won the Academy Award for Best Picture of 1941, beating out nine other films, including "The Maltese Falcon" and "Citizen Kane."

In 1945, authorities ordered a midnight curfew at nightclubs, bars and other places of entertainment across the nation.

In 1952, Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced that Britain had developed its own atomic bomb.

In 1966, South Korean troops sent to fight in the Vietnam War massacred at least 380 civilians in Go Dai hamlet.

In 1987, the Tower Commission, which had probed the Iran-Contra affair, issued its report, which rebuked President Ronald Reagan for failing to control his national security staff.

In 1998, a jury in Amarillo, Texas, rejected an \$11 million lawsuit brought by Texas cattlemen who blamed Oprah Winfrey's talk show for a price fall after a segment on food safety that included a discussion about mad cow disease.

In 2005, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak ordered his country's constitution changed to allow presidential challengers in an upcoming fall election.

In 2014, Republican Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer vetoed a bill pushed by social conservatives that would have allowed people with sincerely held religious beliefs to refuse to serve gays.

In 2016, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie stunned the Republican establishment by endorsing Donald Trump for president.

In 2020, the World Health Organization reported that the number of new coronavirus cases outside China had exceeded the number of new infections in China for the first time.

Ten years ago: Trayvon Martin, 17, was shot to death in Sanford, Florida, during an altercation with neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, who said he acted in self-defense. (Zimmerman was

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later acquitted of second-degree murder.) The black-and-white silent film "The Artist" won best picture at the Academy Awards, as well as best actor for its star, Jean Dujardin (zhahn doo-zhahr-DAN'); Meryl Streep won best actress for "The Iron Lady."

Five years ago: At the 89th Academy Awards, "Moonlight," an LGBT coming of age drama, won three Oscars, including best picture of 2016 (in a startling gaffe, the musical "La La Land" was mistakenly announced as the best picture winner before the error was corrected). Joseph Wapner, the retired Los Angeles judge who presided over "The People's Court" from 1981 to 1993, died at age 97. Kurt Busch won the Daytona 500, surviving a crash-filled season opener to win the race for the first time in 16 tries.

One year ago: U.S. health advisers endorsed a one-dose COVID-19 vaccine from Johnson & Johnson. A newly declassified U.S. intelligence report concluded that Saudi Arabia's crown prince likely approved the killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Lady Gaga's two French bulldogs, which had been stolen by thieves who shot and wounded their walker, were recovered unharmed; Los Angeles police said a woman brought the dogs to an LAPD station. (The woman would eventually be charged as one of two alleged accomplices to the three men accused of carrying out the attack.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor-director Bill Duke is 79. Singer Mitch Ryder is 77. Actor Marta Kristen (TV: "Lost in Space") is 77. Rock musician Jonathan Cain (Journey) is 72. Singer Michael Bolton is 69. The president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (REH'-jehp TY'-ihp UR'-doh-wahn), is 68. Actor Greg Germann is 64. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., is 64. Bandleader John McDaniel is 61. Actor-martial artist Mark Dacascos is 58. Actor Jennifer Grant is 56. Rock musician Tim Commerford (Audioslave) is 54. Singer Erykah Badu (EHR'-ih-kah bah-DOO') is 51. Actor Maz Jobrani (TV: "Superior Donuts") is 50. R&B singer Rico Wade (Society of Soul) is 50. Olympic gold medal swimmer Jenny Thompson is 49. R&B singer Kyle Norman (Jagged Edge) is 47. Actor Greg Kinnear is 45. Rock musician Chris Culos (O.A.R.) is 43. R&B singer Corinne Bailey Rae is 43. Pop singer Nate Ruess (roos) (fun.) is 40. Former tennis player Li Na is 40. Latin singer Natalia Lafourcade is 38. Actor Teresa Palmer is 36.