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UpComing Events

Monday, Feb. 28

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

Tuesday, March 1

Boys Region 1A at Groton: 6 p.m.: Groton Area vs. Sisseton followed by Milbank playing Florence/Henry City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Friday, March 4

Boys Region 1A game at 6 p.m. (If Groton wins, the game will be played in Groton).

State Debate in Harrisburg

Saturday, March 5

State Debate in Harrisburg

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



"Your children get only one childhood. Make it memorable."

Regina Brett

Tuesday, March 8

Boys SoDak16

Thursday, March 10

End of Third Quarter

Middle School Talent Show, 7 p.m., GHS Gym

Saturday, March 12

Show Choir at Aberdeen Competition

Monday, March 14

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 15

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Thursday, March 17

Spring Break - No School

Friday, March 18

Spring Break - No School

Saturday, March 19

Mitchell Show Choir Competition

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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United Methodist Church

Groton and Conde

Sunday, February 27, 2022

Conde Worship 9:00 AM

Sunday School 10:00 AM

Groton Worship 11:00 AM

Monday, February 28, 2022

Pastor Brandon Lent Study 7:00 PM

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

Bible Study 10:00 AM

Pastor Brandon Lent Study in Conde 6:00 PM

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Community Coffee Hour 9:30 AM

Imposition of Ashes via drive-thru at Front Door
11:30 AM

Sunday, March 6, 2022

Communion in Worship (white)

Conde Worship 9:00 AM

Sunday School 10:00 AM

Groton Worship 11:00 AM

Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Groton

Sunday, Feb. 27

9am Worship

10:15am Sunday School & Grace Alone Study

Monday, Feb. 21

6:30am Bible Study

Wednesday, March 2

6 pm Soup Supper, Host-Executive Board

7 pm Lenten Service, Communion, Ashes

Thursday, March 3

2 pm Nigeria Circle

6 pm Council Retreat

Sunday, March 6

9 am Worship/Comm

Milestones 7th & 8th grade

10:15 Sunday School

10:15 Grace Alone Study

7 pm Choir

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton &

St. Joseph Catholic

Groton and Turton

Weekend Mass Schedule

Saturday 4:30pm Groton

Sunday 8:30am Groton & 11:00am Turton

Weekday

Tues 5:00pm Turton, W-F 8:30am Groton

Confessions:

Sat. 3:45-4:15pm & Sun. 7:45am to 8:15am (G)

Sun. 10:30-10:45am (T)

St. John's Lutheran Church

Groton

Sunday, Feb. 27

8 a.m.: Bible Study

9 a.m.: St. John's Worship

10 a.m.: Sunday School

11 a.m.: Zion Lutheran Worship

Tuesday, March 1

9 a.m.: Quilting

Wednesday, March 2

3:45 p.m.: Confirmation

7:00 p.m.: Ash Wednesday service

Sunday, March 6

8 a.m.: Bible Study

9 a.m.: St. John's Worship with communion

10 a.m.: Sunday School

11 a.m.: Zion Lutheran Worship with communion

To submit your monthly or
weekly church calendar, email
to
news@grotonsd.net

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Krueger places sixth, Ehresmann seventh at state wrestling

B-145: Christian Ehresmann (41-10) placed 7th and scored 8.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Jackson Remmers (McCook Central/Montrose) 50-4 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 41-10 (Dec 5-1)

Cons. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 41-10 won by fall over Miles Renner (Lead-Deadwood) 21-15 (Fall 3:45)

Cons. Round 2 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 41-10 won by decision over Chase VanDerBoom (Newell) 48-11 (Dec 3-2)

Cons. Round 3 - Lucas Hueser (Elk Point-Jefferson) 36-8 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 41-10 (Dec 3-0)

7th Place Match - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 41-10 won by medical forfeit over Thane Simons (Philip Area) 10-4 (M. For.)

B-160: Cole Bisbee (34-15)

Champ. Round 1 - John Callies (Howard) 47-4 won by fall over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 34-15 (Fall 1:06)

Cons. Round 1 - Gunner Brueggeman (Miller/Highmore-Harrold) 31-17 won by fall over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 34-15 (Fall 1:39)

B-285: Lane Krueger (30-12) placed 6th and scored 9.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 30-12 won by fall over Justin Schopp (Lemmon/McIntosh) 25-18 (Fall 3:40)

Quarterfinal - Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 30-12 won by decision over Isaac Suter (Canton) 28-11 (Dec 2-0)

Semifinal - Grady Fey (Redfield) 38-5 won by fall over Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 30-12 (Fall 1:50)

Cons. Semi - Kellen Cassidy (Mt. Vernon/Plankinton/Corsica-Stickney) 36-12 won by fall over Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 30-12 (Fall 3:23)

5th Place Match - Chase Reed (Flandreau) 42-12 won by decision over Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 30-12 (Dec 7-4)

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Three Wolves Advance from NCAA Super Region V Tournament

Moorhead, Minn. – The (RV) Northern State University wrestling team qualified three wrestlers for the NCAA National Championships and finished fourth as a team from the Super Region V Tournament. Cole Huss finished as the runner-up at 197 pounds, while Wyatt Turnquist and Treyton Cacek took third at 149 and 184 pounds.

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Landen Fischer took sixth place at 125 pounds, going 3-3 on the day with wins over Jaden Verhagen (Dec 6-4) of UMary, Trenton McManus (Dec 5-3) of Minnesota State, and Clayson Mele (Dec 10-5) of MSU Moorhead
- Kolton Roth tallied a 3-2 record on the day, taking fourth with victories over Hunter Hays (Fall 3:44) of MSU Moorhead, Cayden Henschel (Dec 10-8) of Parkside, and Brock Luthens (Dec 10-3) of Minnesota State
- Turnquist qualified for the first NCAA Championships of his career with a 3-1 record and third place finish
 - o He opened his day with a 17-0 technical fall win over Robert Shields of SMSU and advanced to the semifinal round
 - o Turnquist fell to regional champion Nick Novak in a 7-1 decision in the semifinals and bounced back with back-to-back victories over Shadi Mitwalli (MD 9-1) of Minot State and Kyle Rathman (Dec 5-0) of Minnesota State
- Kelby Hawkins recorded a fifth place finish at 165 pounds going 3-2 with wins over Michael Smith (Dec 4-2) of Minnesota State, Leo Mushinsky (Dec 3-1) of UMary and Jared Head of St. Cloud State
- Tanner Wiese added a sixth place finish with wins over Carter Marx (TB-3 3-2) of Southwest Minnesota State and Cayden White (Fall 6:08) of Minot State
- Cacek also qualified for the first NCAA Championships of his career at 184 pounds, finishing third with a 3-1 record
 - o The sophomore dropped his opening round match to William Pitzner of St. Cloud State and rattled off three victories over Keegan Berry (Dec 8-3) of Minot, Kolby Kost (Dec 9-8) of Augustana, and Gage Roaldson (Dec 3-1) of MSU Moorhead
- Huss led the way for the Wolves finishing as the 197 pound runner-up with a 3-1 record
 - o He recorded wins over Bodie Garnier (MD 11-3) of Upper Iowa, Dustin Siwsher (Dec 4-2) of Minot State, and Daniel Bishop (SV-1 5-3) of Augustana, before falling to Noah Ryan of St. Cloud State in the championship
- The last time Northern State qualified three for the NCAA Championships was back in 2017 with Joe Gomez, Tyler Stenberg, and Sean Havlovic

FULL RESULTS

- 125 - Landen Fischer (3-3) placed 6th and scored 6.0 team points.
Champ. Round 1 - Landen Fischer (NSU) 3-3 won by decision over Jaden Verhagen (Mary) 14-9 (Dec 6-4)
Quarterfinal - Jackson Stauffacher (Southwest Minn. St.) 12-4 won by decision over Landen Fischer (NSU) 3-3 (Dec 5-3)
Cons. Round 2 - Landen Fischer (NSU) 3-3 won by decision over Trenton McManus (Minnesota St.) 3-5 (Dec 5-3)
Cons. Round 3 - Landen Fischer (NSU) 3-3 won by decision over Clayson Mele (MSU Moorhead) 3-10 (Dec 10-5)
Cons. Semi - Jaxson Rohman (Augustana (SD)) 16-5 won by decision over Landen Fischer (NSU) 3-3 (Dec 6-3)
5th Place Match - Oscar Nellis (Minot St.) 3-2 won by decision over Landen Fischer (NSU) 3-3 (Dec 8-4)
- 133 - Christopher Williams (0-2) place is unknown and scored 0.0 team points.
Champ. Round 1 - Cole Jones (MSUM) 12-9 won by major decision over Christopher Williams (NSU) 0-2

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(MD 9-0)

Cons. Round 1 - Christopher Williams (NSU) 0-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Brandon Meikel (Minot St.) 1-2 won by major decision over Christopher Williams (NSU) 0-2 (MD 10-0)

141 - Kolton Roth (3-2) placed 4th and scored 11.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Justin Sampson (Southwest Minn. St.) 2-6 won by decision over Kolton Roth (NSU) 3-2 (Dec 8-5)

Cons. Round 1 - Kolton Roth (NSU) 3-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Kolton Roth (NSU) 3-2 won by fall over Hunter Hayes (MSU Moorhead) 4-10 (Fall 3:44)

Cons. Round 3 - Kolton Roth (NSU) 3-2 won by decision over Cayden Henschel (UW-Parkside) 0-2 (Dec 10-8)

Cons. Semi - Kolton Roth (NSU) 3-2 won by decision over Brock Luthens (Minnesota St.) 2-2 (Dec 10-3)

3rd Place Match - Tate Murty (Upper Iowa) 13-2 won by decision over Kolton Roth (NSU) 3-2 (Dec 9-2)

149 - Wyatt Turnquist (3-1) placed 3rd and scored 14.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 3-1 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 3-1 won by tech fall over Robert Shields (SMSU) 8-12 (TF-1.5 4:47 (17-0))

Semifinal - Nick Novak (St. Cloud State.) 3-0 won by decision over Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 3-1 (Dec 7-1)

Cons. Semi - Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 3-1 won by major decision over Shadi Mitwalli (Minot St.) 2-2 (MD 9-1)

3rd Place Match - Wyatt Turnquist (NSU) 3-1 won by decision over Kyle Rathman (Minnesota St.) 3-2 (Dec 5-0)

165 - Kelby Hawkins (3-2) placed 5th and scored 10.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Kelby Hawkins (NSU) 3-2 won by decision over Michael Smith (Minnesota St.) 1-2 (Dec 4-2)

Quarterfinal - Kelby Hawkins (NSU) 3-2 won by decision over Leo Mushinsky (Mary) 26-12 (Dec 3-1)

Semifinal - Shane Gantz (UW-Parkside) 3-0 won by decision over Kelby Hawkins (NSU) 3-2 (Dec 4-1)

Cons. Semi - Braydon Ortloff (MSU Moorhead) 6-7 won by fall over Kelby Hawkins (NSU) 3-2 (Fall 4:50)

5th Place Match - Kelby Hawkins (NSU) 3-2 won by medical forfeit over Jared Head (St. Cloud State.) 1-3 (M. For.)

174 - Tanner Wiese (2-3) placed 6th and scored 8.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Tanner Wiese (NSU) 2-3 won in tie breaker - 3 over Carter Marx (Southwest Minn. St.) 11-11 (TB-3 3-2)

Quarterfinal - Cade Mueller (Augustana (SD)) 18-3 won by major decision over Tanner Wiese (NSU) 2-3 (MD 12-0)

Cons. Round 2 - Tanner Wiese (NSU) 2-3 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Tanner Wiese (NSU) 2-3 won by fall over Cayden White (Minot St.) 1-2 (Fall 6:08)

Cons. Semi - Job Ayala (UW-Parkside) 3-1 won by decision over Tanner Wiese (NSU) 2-3 (Dec 7-0)

5th Place Match - Max Bruss (Mary) 28-11 won by decision over Tanner Wiese (NSU) 2-3 (Dec 5-3)

184 - Treyton Cacek (3-1) placed 3rd and scored 10.5 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Treyton Cacek (NSU) 3-1 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - William Pitzner (St. Cloud State.) 1-3 won by decision over Treyton Cacek (NSU) 3-1 (Dec 6-5)

Cons. Round 2 - Treyton Cacek (NSU) 3-1 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Treyton Cacek (NSU) 3-1 won by decision over Keegan Berry (Minot St.) 1-2 (Dec 8-3)

Cons. Semi - Treyton Cacek (NSU) 3-1 won by decision over Kolby Kost (Augustana (SD)) 19-10 (Dec 9-8)

3rd Place Match - Treyton Cacek (NSU) 3-1 won by decision over Gage Roaldson (MSU Moorhead) 7-7

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(Dec 3-1)

197 - Cole Huss (3-1) placed 2nd and scored 14.0 team points.
Champ. Round 1 - Cole Huss (NSU) 3-1 won by major decision over Bodie Garnier (Upper Iowa) 8-14 (MD 11-3)
Quarterfinal - Cole Huss (NSU) 3-1 won by decision over Dustin Swisher (Minot St.) 0-2 (Dec 4-2)

Semifinal - Cole Huss (NSU) 3-1 won in sudden victory - 1 over Daniel Bishop (Augustana (SD)) 19-8 (SV-1 5-3)

1st Place Match - Noah Ryan (St. Cloud State.) 3-0 won by decision over Cole Huss (NSU) 3-1 (Dec 3-2)

285 - Joshua Trumble (0-2) place is unknown and scored 0.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Joshua Trumble (NSU) 0-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Darrell Mason (Minnesota St.) 3-0 won by major decision over Joshua Trumble (NSU) 0-2 (MD 16-6)

Cons. Round 2 - Jordan Baumler (Upper Iowa) 13-10 won by fall over Joshua Trumble (NSU) 0-2 (Fall 2:33)

UP NEXT

The trio of Cacek, Huss, and Turnquist will take on the NCAA Championships March 11 and 12 in St. Louis, Missouri.

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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Wolves Fall to No. 13 Huskies in NSIC Quarterfinals

Sioux Falls, S.D. – The Northern State women’s basketball team fell to No. 13 St. Cloud State 61-50 on Saturday afternoon in the NSIC/Sanford Health Tournament Quarterfinals.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 50, SCSU 61

Records: NSU 13-15 (9-12 NSIC), SCSU 22-3 (19-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 894

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern State entered the first media timeout trailing 11-6, with Kailee Oliverson pacing the Wolves early with four of the team’s first six points
- Following the first quarter media timeout at 4:59, Northern held St. Cloud State scoreless for the remainder of the period and used a 5-0 run to tie the game at 11
- Laurie Rogers converted an and-one opportunity in the first minute of the second quarter to give NSU their first lead of the game at 14-13
- The Wolves used an 18-13 advantage in the second quarter to take a 29-24 lead into the halftime break
- In the first half Northern State shot 48.1 percent from the field compared to 23.7 percent for St. Cloud State, the Wolves defense also held the Huskies to 3-15 (20.0%) shooting from 3-point range in the half
- SCSU started the third quarter on a 12-2 run to take a 36-31 lead entering the media timeout
- After trailing by 11 points, Lexi Roe capped a 7-0 run for the Wolves to get back within four points late in the third period
- Northern State finished the game shooting 38.9 percent from the field, 36.4 percent from 3-point range, and 57.1 percent from the free throw line
- The Wolves out-rebound the Huskies 43-37

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Kailee Oliverson: 16 points, 10 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 block

Rianna Fillipi: 11 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists

Haley Johnson: 9 points, 9 rebounds, 3 assists

Laurie Rogers: 6 points, 9 rebounds, 3 blocks

UP NEXT

The Northern State women’s basketball team finishes the season in the NSIC Quarterfinals and a record of 13-15 (9-12 NSIC). The Wolves finished tenth overall in the NSIC regular season standings and was fifth place in the north division.

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Lana's Annals- a report from Pierre House of Representatives

Greetings. What a busy week we had! It was crossover week, which simply means that the House now has to act on the surviving Senate bills and vice versa.

Our Education Committee heard SB167, of which I am prime sponsor. It clarifies teacher certification and revocation process. Unfortunately, the news lately has addressed 4 teacher revocations. The steps go like this: a complaint (or series of) has been made about a certified staff member. Reports are sent to the Department of Education who then sends it to Professional Standards and Practices Commission for review. If the teacher has been deemed to have violated specific standards set forth, the commission could do one of the following: reprimand or else turn it back to the secretary with determination that there has been a gross violation, to which the Department of Education would then permanently revoke the education certificate. We had to specify the steps as was unclear in statute as to who actually did the revoking.

We also heard SB154, which somewhat changed the qualifications for recipients of a freedom scholarship. Dana Dykhouse (many of you probably know the name as in Dykhouse Stadium at SDSU) was on hand to tell us how his banking organization has donated millions of dollars toward this program. The change in the bill was 1 to allow graduates to have a 2.0 average instead of a 2.5 grade average in order to keep the money as grant status instead of turning into a repayable loan. It was pointed out that in order to graduate from college, one only needs a 2.0 average and that these scholarships are need based. We ended up approving this major change, along with it now becoming a 5 year instead of a 4 year scholarship. I did point out to the committee and to those present that I did not embrace the idea of changing the grade point average. The word 'scholarship' means "high academia" and a 2.0 does not qualify as such. I feel that we need to expect more of our recipients than "bare bones minimum." We need to also promote excellence, not mediocrity. It is my experience that students will deliver whatever one expects of them and nothing is wrong with "raising the bar" to show confidence in their abilities. (now descending off soap box!)

HB1161, a framework which sets up guidance requirements for sober living houses, garnered very limited comment and passed the house floor. I think it is important for guidelines to exist to qualify for state and/or federal funding. By the way, for readers in my area who may not know, there is a new sober living home in the city of Redfield!! I am very pleased that so many community groups pitched together to make it happen. How it works is this: a person who has gotten out of drug or alcohol treatment may transition over to this living arrangement. In order to remain there, the person must be sober and drug free, must be gainfully employed in the vicinity, and must pay rent in order to stay. It really is a great partnership between the individuals and the community. Redfield also has active AA and Narcotics Anonymous groups so this is an added plus for those who are recovering.

HB1045 was hoghoused out of the tax committee. This means the original bill had new language added, in this case, "to provide for the use and sale of marijuana and impose a tax." This did not pass the House, mainly because the representatives did not like surprise bills of this nature. The very next day a filed bill discussing the same subject came to the floor and garnered even less support. Why? Well, some legislators are thinking it is too premature to predict if the voters in the fall will approve the new single subject recreational marijuana bill, some felt a framework could be added next session should it pass, and others who had supported HB1045 were just plain, old mad that their bill did not pass the day before! I thought it may be ok to get a framework in place even though I do not support the drug, nor do our law enforcement nor our family alliance groups.

I spoke on HB1258, a bill which protects an individual from having to provide certain information to obtain various types of employment. (mainly about vaccines). To me it is somewhat of a privacy act. For example, when a teacher is interviewing, the question about whether or not the prospect is planning to live in the district could become a biased question which could "tip the scale" in a negative way. For the same reason, a business person should not ask questions which could also be deemed as biased. Case in point: have you ever had a history of any type of diseases? Could you tell me about your beliefs on injections? It would be more advisable, I think, to have a handbook or outline of duties and rules for the

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job candidate to read and to decide if he/she is a good match for the rules and job description. With the Russian invasions going on in Ukraine and the possible effects it is going to have on our state and nation, is it really prudent to spar over covid injections?.You can decide. If that is " your hill to die on" so be it. I will fry my kettle of fish in another pan! In other words, do as you wish but be ready to accept your results either way.

With that, I will sign off. Here is wishing you a week of health, happiness, and warmer weather!!

Rep. Lana Greenfield

lane.greenfield@gmail.com

lane.greenfield@sdlegislature.gov

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Quarterfinal Action up Next for Northern State Men

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team will face Upper Iowa University in the quarterfinal round of the NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament on Sunday. Tip-off between the Wolves and Peacocks is set for 11 a.m. from the Sanford Pentagon.

GAME & FAN INFORMATION

- » Live video, stat, and audio links are available above or on the full schedule on nsuwolves.com
- » Full tournament information can be found on the tournament page linked above

NORTHERN STATE STORYLINES

- » Northern State heads south with a 20-11 record overall, following a 3-point comeback victory over Minnesota State in the opening round
- » The Wolves are shooting 44.8% from the floor, 33.5% from the 3-point line, and 78.0% from the foul line this season
- » They are averaging 75.0 points, 33.7 rebounds, 14.7 assists, 11.3 turnovers, 6.5 steals, and 2.5 blocks per game
- » NSU jumped into the Central Region rankings this week at No. 10
- » Sam Masten, Jackson Moni, and Jordan Belka were named to the NSIC All-Conference second team on Thursday
- » Masten leads the team averaging 15.6 points and 4.1 assists per game with a 48.8 field goal percentage
- » Jordan Belka follows averaging 14.4 points, as well as a team high 7.0 rebounds per contest
- » Moni and Augustin Reede round out the double figure scorers, averaging 14.3 and 10.4 points per game respectively
- » Reede leads the Wolves with 76 made 3-pointers in 2021-22, shooting 41.5% from beyond the arc
- » Cole Bergan is second on the team with 104 total assists this season and is averaging 8.6 points and 4.2 rebounds per contest
- » Kailleb Walton-Blanden is the Wolves spark off the bench, averaging 6.8 points, 2.5 rebounds, and 1.5 assists per game

UPPER IOWA STORYLINES

- » Upper Iowa heads to the Pentagon with a 24-4 record overall and a first round bye
- » UIU is currently ranked second in the Central Region behind Augustana
- » The Peacocks are shooting 48.1% from the floor, 38.0% from beyond the arc, and 78.1% from the foul line
- » They are averaging 83.4 points, 35.8 rebounds, 12.7 assists, 10.3 turnovers, 6.1 steals, and 3.7 blocks per game; out-scoring their opponents by 9.2 points per contest
- » Jareese Williams and Joe Smoldt led the offense, averaging 18.1 and 17.4 points per game, followed by Jake Hilmer and Lucas Duax averaging 16.4 and 10.0
- » Nick Reid leads the team at the rim, notching 6.5 rebounds per contest, while Hilmer has dished out a team best 111 assists
- » Duax is shooting a team high 55.0% from the floor and Williams leads the team shooting 43.6% from beyond the arc
- » The Peacocks are led by head coach Brooks McKowen in his ninth season at the helm

LAST MEETING

- » The Wolves defeated the Peacocks 90-81 over the 2022 I Hate Winter weekend
- » Jackson Moni and Sam Masten led the team scoring 21 and 20 points respectively, while Cole Bergan led the team off the bench with 16
- » NSU shot a game best 54.0% from the floor
- » Northern is 17-4 all-time against Upper Iowa University

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#517 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

There isn't much change to report in overall trends. The seven-day case average continues to decline and was at 72,754 as of midday today. This is still a huge number, but well off the close to a million we've seen since Christmas. Only one state is reporting an increase, and that may be an artifact of a reporting anomaly; Maine apparently had a backlog of unprocessed results that they're working through now. So it's possible their increase is not a real one; we'll see what happens a few days down the road when those catch-up numbers have worked their way through the system. Total cases are now at 78,714,648; it will likely be early next week before we hit 79 million. Nice not to be reporting that number skyrocketing anymore. I hope we continue to decline.

Hospitalizations are also declining, albeit more slowly. We were at an average of 58,497 at midday. Deaths are stubbornly resisting yet; they're declining, but far more slowly. The seven-day average was at 1868 midday, and the total was 943,312.

In a sad footnote to current trends, even though it is causing less severe disease, the Omicron variant is now responsible for more deaths in the US than Delta (176 percent of the Delta total)—and it's not done yet. We have 14 states this week with higher average deaths today than two weeks ago; those states are Hawaii, Alaska, California, Idaho, Utah, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Maine, West Virginia, and Georgia. It's difficult to rejoice in a milder disease when we have this many coffins lined up.

Among those coffins are more than before of the youngest among us. Children under 5, that is, too young to be vaccinated and some of them (those under 2) unable to wear masks too, have a higher death rate than older children; they account for 35 percent of pediatric deaths even though they account for only 15 percent of pediatric cases. I don't know this for sure, but it seems reasonable to form the assumption their unvaccinated and unmasked state plays a role in that higher death rate. There's also the issue of long-term effects in survivors, among those the development of diabetes and long-Covid, which affects by some estimates 10 to 20 percent of children who are infected. It worries me to see folks just moving on, doing what makes them most comfortable even though that means leaving these vulnerable children behind and their parents to shoulder the burden of protecting them. I remember reading early on that, if this disease had sickened and killed children disproportionately instead of the old, we might have had a much different, more serious response to it. I'm not so sure anymore that this is true. Seems to me that we're willing to sacrifice the children too, as long as we're not inconvenienced and no one's nudging at our liberties. Never thought I'd see that. (I know this is an old person thing to say, but after all, I'm an old person. Sue me.)

Here's something to think about: Early in the pandemic, there were cost-sharing waivers in place from almost every medical insurance plan in the US that greatly limited or entirely eliminated out-of-pocket costs for Covid-19 hospitalization. According to analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation, insurers began to phase out these waivers by November 2020; by April 2021 when vaccinations were widely available, almost half had done so; and by the end of October 2021, over 80 percent of insurers had rolled them back. As of now, more than 90 percent of them have. What that means is, if you're hospitalized with Covid-19 at this point in the pandemic, you're going to get a bill, probably a big one. I haven't seen recent analysis on that cost, but I did read a University of Michigan study published last week in JAMA which found the average out-of-pocket cost as of March 2021 to 16,450 patients for hospitalization with a primary diagnosis of Covid-19 was just about \$4000 for privately-insured patients and over \$1600 for Medicare Advantage patients. Those costs would have increased since then. They varied regionally, but I'm going to guess your average American doesn't really have \$4000 sitting around in their bank account to spend on hospital bills and such. Given the unvaccinated are many times more likely to end up in the hospital than the vaccinated, this should provide impetus to go in for vaccination. I don't kid myself that this will make a difference to those folks who've been avoiding vaccines, but hope springs eternal.

There are two antiviral pills currently authorized in the US and available, molnupiravir and Paxlovid.

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Molnupiravir, produced by Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, is a nucleoside analog, which means it provides look-alike versions of the building blocks of viral RNA for the construction of new viruses in a host cell. Thing is, these look-alikes are defective, so the product RNA is nonfunctional, which renders the replicated viruses harmless. The drug has been looking like a not-great alternative; we talked about this in my Update #490 posted November 28, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5353942794622083>. Its early reports of 50 percent efficacy were downgraded on the back of later data to 30 percent right before the FDA considered its emergency use authorization (EUA) application. It has also been in fairly short supply.

We have some new data on effectiveness in a new study from the Chennai Antiviral Research and Treatment Clinical Research Site in India. The research team took a look at 1218 infected adults with mild symptoms and split them into comparably-sized groups receiving and not receiving molnupiravir. In the group receiving the drug, 1.5 percent needed hospitalization, and 4.3 percent of the group not receiving the drug did, a 65 percent reduction. Before we get too excited, it is important to recognize that the earlier study conducted by the manufacturer (Merck) that showed 30 percent efficacy targeted individuals at high risk for complication, whereas this study did not. Given high-risk patients have (duh!) a higher risk for hospitalization, it's difficult to compare these studies; but both studies showed reductions in hospitalization, reduction in viral load, and improvement in symptoms. If I was infected, at risk for severe disease, and not pregnant, I would consider accepting molnupiravir treatment. There appears to be some risk in terms of human reproduction such that women receiving treatment should be not pregnant and also receiving using effective contraception during and for four days after treatment; male partners of women who could become pregnant should use contraception during and for three months after treatment. Still not a great alternative, but it's something.

We have news on another vaccine, the Sanofi/GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) protein subunit vaccine named Vidprevtyn and produced using genetically-engineered moth cells; it stores at refrigerator temperatures, which adds to its usefulness in many places. I have a little information about this vaccine in my Update #439 posted May 17, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4728575830492119>. We've updated progress here and there along the way and now have phase 3 trial results involving more than 10,000 adults in the US, Asia, Africa, and Latin America showing two doses are something like 58 percent effective in preventing infection, 75 percent effective in preventing moderate to severe disease, and 100 percent effective against severe disease including hospitalizations. Given it was tested against many variants including Omicron, this looks very good. When it was used as a booster after a primary series of other vaccines, recipients showed "a significant increase in neutralizing antibodies" by 18- to 30-fold according to a company statement. No safety issues were identified in the clinical trials. The companies are planning to apply for authorization from the FDA and the European Medicines Agency and plan to publish data from their clinical trials later this year. Given this is on an established vaccine platform, none of that fancy-pants RNA or DNA stuff, it might find greater acceptance among the "it changes your DNA" crowd; I'd certainly market it to them. And as we've said many times before, more vaccines is a good thing; if this is approved, it opens more avenues to get the world vaccinated.

We have a set of new studies of BA.2, the subvariant of Omicron (the original one being BA.1), which are giving us some insight into just how this one is going to work in the world. We know it's around 30 percent more transmissible than BA.1, so it could reasonably be expected to outcompete BA.1 and spread across the world. As cases drop, we're seeing an increase in the proportion of cases represented by BA.2 in at least 43 countries. It appears to evade our monoclonal antibody therapies, but still responds to the antiviral pills we have available, molnupiravir and Paxlovid. It appears that BA.2's ability to lead to hospitalizations and deaths may be impeded by a growing immunity in the population resulting from vaccination and boosters as well as recent Omicron (BA.1) infections. Here's a summary of recent scientific work:

A study from South Africa available in preprint (so not peer-reviewed) where the proportion of cases caused by BA.2 rose from 27 percent to 86 percent in a week this month looked at 96,000 cases. Findings were that about the same proportion of cases with BA.2 were hospitalized as for BA.1, 3.6 percent to

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3.4 percent. There was also no significant difference in hospitalization risk between the two subvariants whether people were vaccinated or not. Similar results were seen in Denmark where BA.2 long ago took over from BA.1. What they're seeing there is not another surge, but a longer tail, something we've talked about before: The decline in Omicron cases is taking longer to play out than expected.

I read another study from the Statens Serum Institut in Denmark where BA.2 is now dominant, also in preprint (so also not peer-reviewed) which evaluated the risk of reinfection with BA.2 after a prior infection with another variant, including BA.1. The researchers looked at more than 140,000 cases that were sequenced from late November to mid-February for cases of reinfection in those who'd been previously infected from 20 to 60 days prior. In those, there were 263 such cases with 190 of them caused by BA.2. Among those, 140 were reinfected with BA.2 following Delta and 47 were reinfected with BA.2 following BA.1. Where BA.2 followed BA.1, most were young and none were over 40; nearly all were unvaccinated. The cases tended to be mild, and none were hospitalized or died. So the findings were that, while reinfections with BA.2 are not impossible, they are rare, occur mostly in the unvaccinated, and are mostly mild. This would mean that BA.2 may not be a large risk population-wide and boosters or Omicron infection should be protective in most individuals, at least for some period of time—it has, after all, been only three months since it turned up in the first place.

I've read another paper in preprint, so not yet peer-reviewed, from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases and some other institutions in South Africa that looked at the breadth of immunity elicited by infection with the Omicron variant. They collected blood from 20 unvaccinated people and seven vaccinated people who were infected with Omicron and tested it in the lab for the ability of their antibodies to bind SARS-CoV-2, to assist in the destruction of infected cells, and in neutralization with respect to variants from earlier stages in the pandemic; the purpose here was to determine whether Omicron infections produce cross-reactive immunity to other variants. Findings were those who were vaccinated and then later infected with Omicron showed good cross-reactivity to other variants, but that, while Omicron does elicit a strong immune response in naïve individuals (those not previously infected or vaccinated), the response is Omicron-specific, that is, the antibodies produced do not cross-react to other variants of concern. This appears to indicate that Omicron infection will, by itself, provide future protection only against Omicron. This has two important implications for us going forward: (1) that infection with Omicron in unvaccinated individuals is unlikely to protect against reinfection with a new variant and (2) that Omicron-specific vaccines are probably not going to be useful in protecting the unvaccinated and will not work better as boosters than existing vaccines. We'll want to remember that this was a very small study and that laboratory tests are not real-world experience, also that there is that whole other arm of the immune response which is not captured by testing antibodies. Still it seems reasonable to conclude it would be foolhardy at the current state of knowledge to consider an Omicron infection in an unvaccinated person as protective for the future—probably not a get-out-of-jail-free card for the my-natural-responses-will-protect-me crowd.

I also read another preprint, likewise not peer-reviewed, reporting on a preliminary study from Israel which examined the potential benefits for fourth doses of mRNA vaccines in the general population. In an open-label controlled study, they gave a fourth dose of an mRNA vaccine to 274 previously vaccinated-and-boosted health care workers who were then screened for SARS-CoV-2 weekly, which makes it unlikely an asymptomatic infection gets missed. The controls were age matched. The additional doses were well-tolerated with no safety signals showing up.

Findings were that the "fourth COVID-19 mRNA dose restores antibody titers to peak post-third dose titers," but that this additional dose had "low efficacy in preventing mild or asymptomatic infections." There was some follow-up with assessment of cell-mediated responses in a limited number (114) of participants on day 1 before receiving the fourth dose and again on day 14, which showed an increased number of individuals responding on day 14, but no increase in the number of T cells activated in those folks for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and a somewhat larger increase in number of those responding and in number of activated T cells for the Moderna vaccine. It appears that the fourth dose restores some or much of what was lost with time after the third, but does not boost above that; and we generally expect a booster to

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bring you above where you were after the prior dose, so that's not a great signal. There were some data indicating the fourth dose does produce a greater benefit against severe disease and death than against infection, suggesting "older and vulnerable populations who are at higher risk for severe disease may benefit most from a fourth vaccine dose."

These findings are preliminary, and the researchers outlined some future steps they are planning, including longer follow-up to see how durable this boost was. Some scientists are concluding a reformulated vaccine may give a more beneficial effect, but given what we saw above about the likely efficacy of an Omicron-specific vaccine, that's probably not the thing either—maybe some other sort of reformulation which I can't begin to guess. I'm not sure where this whole issue will go in the future, but there's a lot of attention being given to it by researchers and public health authorities. I guess we'll wait and see what else turns up.

I have a report from Tonga. You will recall this is the Southern Pacific Island nation that suffered a tsunami incident to an underwater volcanic eruption which severed a critical cable supplying Internet connectivity to the rest of the world and also brought in aid ships carrying SARS-CoV-2 along with critically-needed supplies. With limited medical resources, the rapid spread of the virus among the community was a serious matter. We should note that an Australian hospital ship stood offshore in case it was needed and vaccination campaigns took off during this time. Three people were killed by the tsunami, many homes were destroyed or damaged, and the drinking water was tainted by volcanic ash.

The latest news is better. The fiberoptic cable has been repaired as of Tuesday and is fully operational, and now attention turns to reestablishing cable connections to outlying islands. The first repair took replacement of 56 miles of cable; this is a mind-boggling concept for me and actually required several companies chipping in cable because no one had enough to do the job. I'm not sure how many more miles will be needed to finish up. Whatever your other feelings about Elon Musk's various activities (and I have a few myself), we should note that he dropped in a lot of SpaceX resources to restore connections in the interim using their Starlink low-orbit satellites, which is certainly a public service. Credit where it's due.

There have been more than 250 cases in the country, but so far no one has died. After an early lockdown, it appears restrictions are easing as things start to look up. Ninety percent of the eligible population 12 and over have had at least two doses of vaccine. That is a huge help. I hope the good news keeps coming.

I have a note on mountain gorillas today. As close genetic cousins of ours, cousins we know can catch many of our other respiratory diseases, they were presumed to be vulnerable to SARS-CoV-2 infection. Because they are listed as a critically endangered species with only something like 1000 individuals left in the wild, all residing in national parks in Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and respiratory infection is a leading cause of death in these animals, their susceptibility to any infection is definitely of interest. Most of these animals have and are quite accustomed to some contacts with humans because scientists interact with them as they track them closely and tourism is used to generate funds for species protection and preservation. As a result, some of the respiratory diseases that periodically sweep through the populations are undoubtedly transmitted from humans. It is impossible to know the cause for every outbreak, but some of them have been pinned on human viruses. There have been guidelines for interacting with these apes set by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 2015 to prevent spread of human infections to the animals; these include maintaining a 23-foot distance and masking near them. Not all countries enforced these—until this pandemic. Everyone who works with them has had a wake-up call, and limits are being strictly enforced. Funny thing happened since then: Sort of like our nonexistent flu season last winter, the rate of respiratory infection in these gorillas plummeted, an effect of these renewed precautions and a downturn in tourism as fewer people traveled. This has two benefits: Not only are infection rates down, but this provides evidence to support the effectiveness of the guidelines in protecting this population of animals. Who knew a pandemic would be good for some species?

And that's it for today. Be well, and we'll talk again.

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Lady Tigers end season with loss to Sisseton

Groton Area's Girls' Basketball Team lost its footing once Sisseton scored 13 straight points in the first quarter and could not recover from the deficit as the Lady Tigers lost in the second round of Region 1A, 56-39. The Redmen led at the quarterstops at 15-5, 32-11 and 40-26.

Cold free throw shooting did not help matters as Groton Area made five of 19 free throws for 26 percent. Sisseton made 10 of 16 free throws for 63 percent.

In field goal shooting, the Tigers made 15 percent of their shots in the first quarter, 14 percent in the second, 50 percent in the third and 29 percent in the fourth. For the game, Groton Area made 11 of 29 field goals for 38 percent and four of 28 three-pointers for 14 percent. Sisseton made 21 of 52 shots for 40 percent.

Groton Area had 18 turnovers while the Redmen had eight. Sisseton had more team fouls, 18-15.

Gracie Traphagen led the Tigers with 12 points followed by Allyssa Locke, Alyssa Thaler and Jaedyn Penning with seven each and Brooke Gengerke, Sydney Leicht and Laila Roberts each had two.

Krista Langager led the Redmen with 20 points followed by Hannah Levenson with 15, Emmalee Nielsen seven, Ruby Rice four, Hailey Nelson three and Veronica Rice and Tara Nelson each had two points.

Groton Area finishes the season with a record of 12-10. Sisseton advances to the SoDak16 with an 18-4 record.

INDIVIDUAL STATS

Allyssa Locke - 7 points, 6 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

Gracie Traphagen - 12 points, 6 rebounds, 2 steals, 4 fouls, 1 block.

Alyssa Thaler - 7 points, 4 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal.

Brooke Gengerke - 2 points, 5 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 foul.

Sydney Leicht - 2 points, 2 rebounds.

Aspen Johnson - 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 fouls.

Jerica Locke - 6 rebounds, 1 assist, 3 fouls.

Jaedyn Penning - 7 points, 6 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

Kennedy Hansen - 3 rebounds.

Laila Roberts - 2 points, 1 steal.

Groton Area had 43 rebounds, eight assists, six steals and 1 block.



THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



When he was in distress, he entreated the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.

🌀 2 CHRONICLES 33: 12,13

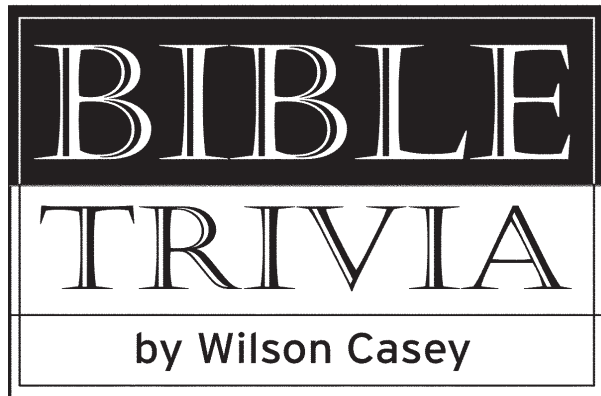
Detail of "The Prayer of Manasseh" (1929) by Hester Sainsbury

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by Healthy Exchanges
On-a-Budget Tuna Loaf

1. Is the book of Malachi in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. How many times was Naaman dipped into the Jordan River when healed of leprosy? *1, 2, 4, 7*

3. In the new creation, the wolf shall feed with the ... ? *Children, Fishes, Lamb, Ox*

4. Which prophet referred to hell the most often? *Amos, Jonah, Habakkuk, Isaiah*

5. What did Noah begin to be after the flood? *Husbandman, Shepherd, Carpenter, Teacher*

6. 1 Peter 5 compares Satan to what animal? *Serpent, Roaring lion, Beheaded calf, Horse*

ANSWERS: 1) Old; 2) 7; 3) Lamb; 4) Isaiah; 5) Husbandman; 6) Roaring lion

Hardcore trivia fan? Visit Wilson Casey's subscriber site at www.patreon.com/triviaguy.

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Just because your pocketbook might be empty -- with having to pay higher gasoline prices -- doesn't mean that you have to eat like you're broke! Look inside your cupboards and you'll probably find that you have most (if not all) these ingredients already on hand.

2 (6-ounce) cans white tuna, packed in water, drained and flaked
3/4 cup dried breadcrumbs
1 cup finely diced celery
1/2 cup finely chopped onion
1/2 cup fat-free mayonnaise
1/4 cup sweet pickle relish

1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Spray an 8-by-8-inch baking dish with butter-flavored cooking spray. In a large bowl, combine tuna, breadcrumbs, celery, onion, mayonnaise and pickle relish. Pat mixture into prepared baking dish.

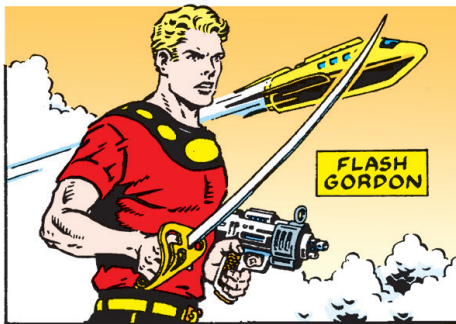
2. Cover and bake for 30 minutes. Uncover and continue baking for 20 minutes. Place baking dish on a wire rack and let set for 5 minutes. Makes 4 servings. Freezes well.

* Each serving equals: 236 calories, 4g fat, 23g protein, 27g carb., 823mg sodium, 2g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 3 Meat, 1 1/2 Starch, 1/2 Vegetable.

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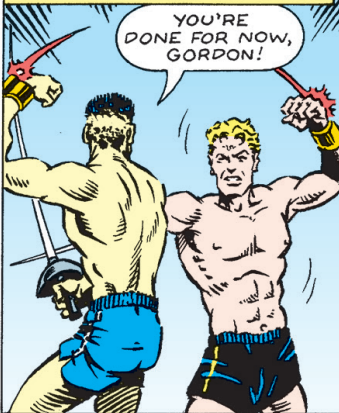


FLASH GORDON

By JIM KEEFE

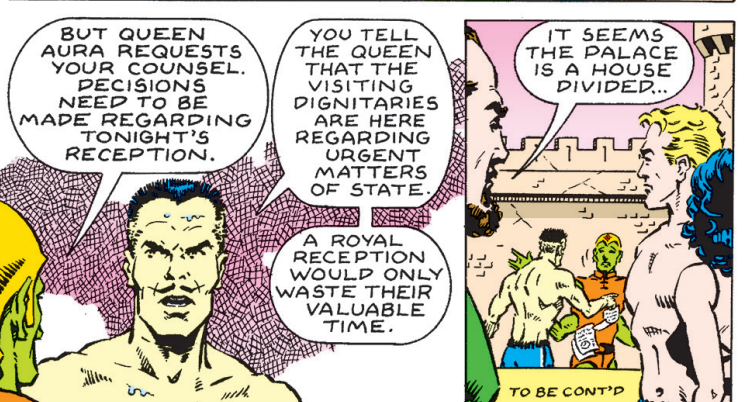
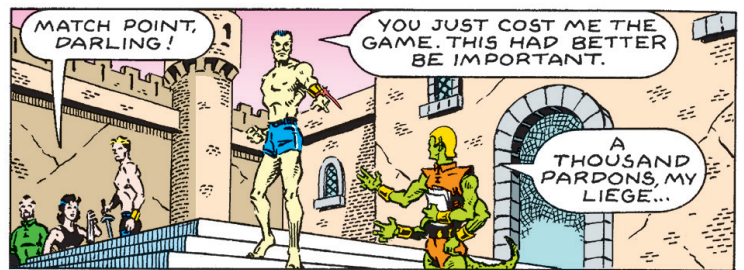
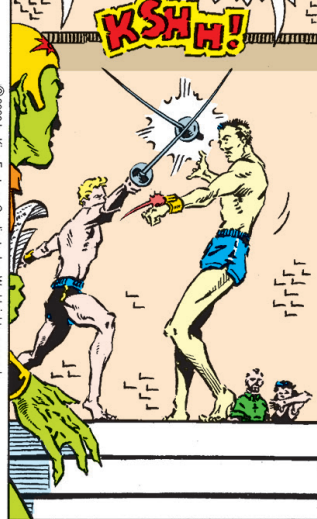
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FLASH AND KING BARIN BATTLING TO THE DEATH?!

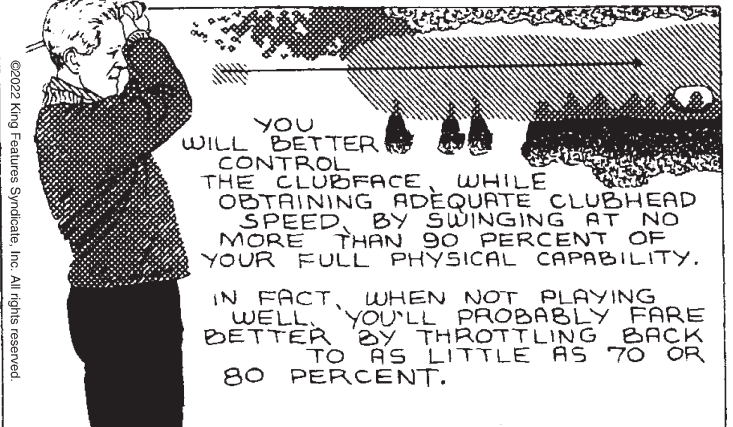
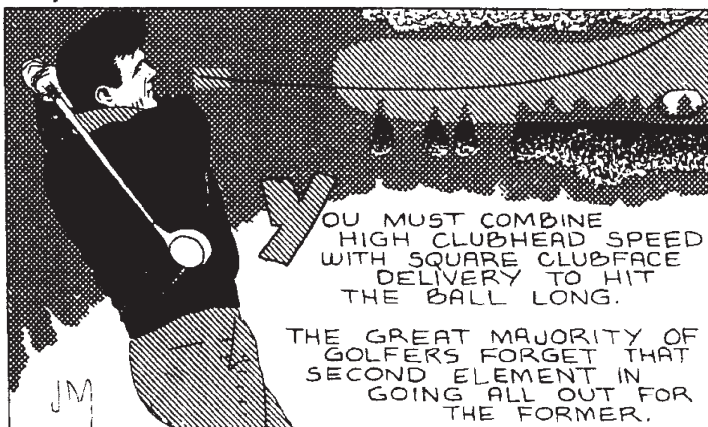


FEAR NOT, FAITHFUL READER - THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM.

KING BARIN! WHA..?!



Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



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Turmeric Supplements Safe to Try for Arthritis



DEAR DR. ROACH: I recently read about turmeric for osteoarthritis. I'm on a limited income. Please tell me more about it, like how much it costs and where I can get it. -- W.C.

ANSWER: Turmeric, a spice that has been used for millennia, is the source of curcumin, which has been shown to improve symptoms of osteoarthritis, at least in short-term studies. It is generally thought to be safe, as most people have no side effects or only occasional stomach upset, nausea or diarrhea.

A theoretical concern is bleeding, in combination with anticoagulants, but this appears to be rare. I have had many patients try curcumin, and it has improved symptoms in about half of those who tried it.

Turmeric is easy to find at any grocery store, but when curcumin is used as a supplement, it is usually combined with other supplements to help with absorption. A common one is piperine, derived from black pepper. It's difficult to use turmeric from food to get a pharmacologic effect. The usual dose is 400-500 mg two or three times daily. A month's supply from a reliable online retailer I found cost about \$10.

DEAR DR. ROACH: My husband has psoriasis on his hands, and he thinks it's from stress. He had psoriasis a long time ago, and now it reappeared. He is stressed because I am sick. Please tell me what cream he can use. Before, he used some good Yugoslavian cream called Vipsogal. -- M.A.M.

ANSWER: Psoriasis is a common skin condition thought to be caused by abnormalities in the immune system. There are several forms, but most people with psoriasis notice plaques or papules on the skin.

Treatment depends on the type and severity of the psoriasis, but the important part is that it needs evaluation before treatment, both to determine the correct diagnosis and assess severity. This includes at least a joint exam for psoriatic arthritis and a careful history to look for other associated conditions, such as in the eye. Severe disease may need systemic therapies, including biological ones.

I looked up Vipsogal and it is a combination of several medicines, especially high-potency steroids. These are the mainstay of treatment for most people with mild to moderate psoriasis and are available in the U.S. and Canada only with a prescription. It's a powerful medicine with the potential for real harm if used incorrectly. Your husband should see a dermatologist.

DR. ROACH WRITES: A recent column on fructose malabsorption in adults may have been confusing. I also mentioned the condition hereditary fructose intolerance, which is very different from the fructose malabsorption I discussed.

HFI is a potentially serious disease, which is usually diagnosed in children and is often unrecognized. It is caused by deficiency of an enzyme called fructose-1-phosphate aldolase, isozyme b. This disorder is diagnosed through sophisticated testing or by genetic analysis. Treatment is complete elimination of fructose from the diet, which is a difficult task.

Fructose malabsorption in adults is a much milder condition. It's treated by avoiding large amounts of fructose by itself (such as in honey, fructose-sweetened foods and fruits containing high net amounts of fructose, such as apples, pears, sweet cherries, prunes, and dates), and avoiding the artificial sweetener sorbitol.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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Worst Roommate Ever (S1) — They say the scariest thing is a brilliant psycho. When that psycho is renting a room in your apartment, that fear is multiplied. Far worse than the lying, emotional hypochondriac roommate of my own freshman year, the subjects in this original miniseries found themselves living with evil personified. All seemed normal at first: the sweet grandmother type who turned out to be a killer, the fun-guy-turned-scammer, the quiet man who used his vast knowledge of the law to ensure he couldn't be evicted while becoming ever more menacing. It'll make you think twice about placing that Craigslist ad. (Netflix)

Joe vs. Carole (NR) — Joe the Tiger King is the gift that keeps on giving. For those who watched the original series, the year-later follow-up, and Joe's sad phone interviews from jail, we now have a satirical dramatic scripted series featuring the craziest characters of the big cat bunch. Based on the podcast "Over My Dead Body," the series centers on the feud between rival wild-cat breeders/rescuers Carole Baskin and Joe Exotic. "Saturday Night Live's" Kate McKinnon is brilliantly cast as Carole, and "Girls" actor John Cameron Mitchell takes on the role of the Tiger King. (Peacock)

Brad's Status (R) — Ever since Greenberg I have had an affinity for Ben Stiller's dramatic endeavors playing the annoying-yet-familiar middle-ager. This Amazon Original stars Stiller as Brad, a GenX dad taking his high school-aged son on prospective college tours. Along the way Brad has a crisis of not just identity but also of life success rank, comparing his career and finances to those of his own college pals. Projecting his regrets on his son, he creates more stress for the boy, who of course has a few astute observances for his

dad, leading him to a full-circle conclusion. Somewhat predictable, but Stiller again gives a skilled, nuanced performance. (Prime Video)

Race Across the World (NR) — Remember back when we had to read paper maps and ask strangers for directions, pay cash for everything, and if you couldn't afford a plane ticket you might just hitch a ride? Apparently those practices are so far removed from our collective psyche that someone made a reality competition show out of them. In this series, teams of two are challenged to get from point A to point B faster than the other teams, and the starting and end points are in different countries. They are given cash, maps and a GPS, but no cellphones are allowed and they are forbidden from flying. The fastest journeyers win a handsome monetary prize. (Discovery+)



Mark Taylor/Peacock

John Cameron Mitchell in "Joe vs. Carole"

Three Identical Strangers (PG-13) — In a twisted psychosocial experiment, a New York adoption agency conspired to separate and adopt out three male triplet babies to three different families, without ever telling any of the families involved. As young adults the triplets found each other by chance, and their truth slowly unraveled. As it did, the joy of discovery gave way to disbelief and anger at having been so manipulated. (Hulu)

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1. Which album contains "Transylvania Boogie" and "Twenty Small Cigars"?
2. Name the group that wrote and released "Tequila Sunrise."
3. Edgar Winter is best known for two songs. What are they?
4. Who released "You Were on My Mind" and "The Pied Piper" in 1966?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "They say that you're a runaround lover, Though you say it isn't so."

Answers

1. "Chunga's Revenge," by Frank Zappa in 1970. It was his third solo album. In all, Zappa released 62

albums during his career.

2. The Eagles, on their 1973 "Desperado" album. The title came from the popular alcoholic drink of the day.
3. "Frankenstein" and "Free Ride," both released in 1972 on his "They Only Come Out at Night" album. "Frankenstein" was released as a b-side single that caught on when DJs started getting requests for it.
4. Crispian St. Peters.
5. "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes," by Bobby Vee in 1962. The song climbed charts around the world, but the only place it reached No. 1 was in Ireland. Vee had 38 Hot 100 chart hits during his career, 10 of which reached the Top 20.

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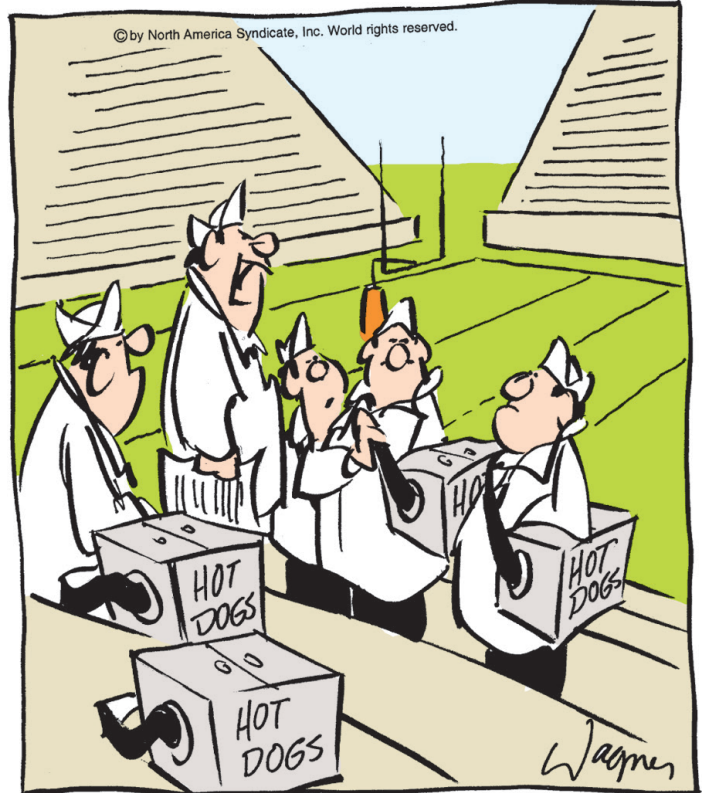
Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by Wagner}



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Wagner

"You're off the hot dog team, Figby! You tested positive for hamburgers!"

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Scrolls are missing. 2. Controls are missing. 3. Cord is shorter. 4. Locket is missing. 5. Cap is different. 6. Word is different.

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- Sometimes, despite the cold weather outside, we're still looking for an icy treat inside. In my family's desert experiments, we've come up with some doozies, but here's one you may not have tried: If you put popsicles in the blender, the creamy result tastes just like yummy sherbet. — JoAnn

- If your lunchbox could be fresher, here's a tip from S.W. in Texas: Spray a piece of bread with vinegar and zip it up in your lunchbox overnight to clear out smells.

- "You don't need to buy a special brush to get at high ceilings and skylights: Simply cover a broom with a pillowcase to clean cobwebs off the ceiling. To clean a skylight, cover a mop with a double layer of paper towels or newspaper, and secure with clips. Spray the paper with window cleaner and heft it up!" — M.E. in Arkansas

- "Here are two more uses for orange peels: Remove all labels and hard parts

of the peels. Toss orange peels in a quart Mason jar. When full, fill with vinegar and set in warm place for two weeks. Strain into spray bottle, then discard peels. Makes an excellent disinfectant and ant killer. Or, dry orange peels. When crisp-dry, break into pieces and toss in a blender, then blend to a powder. Put in airtight container to sprinkle on fruit salads or use for orange zest." — B.C. in New Hampshire

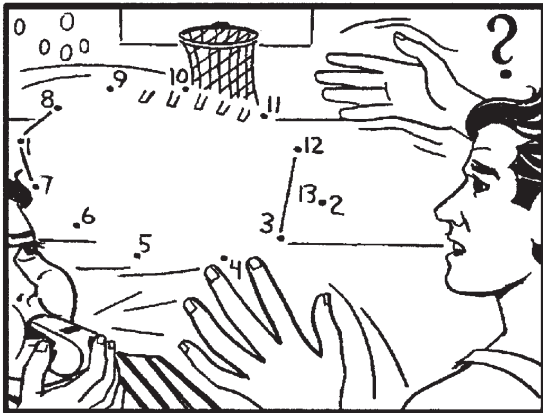
- Pinprick hole in your rubber glove? Put the glove on and paint the hole with nail polish. It'll seal up a small hole, making the glove usable again.

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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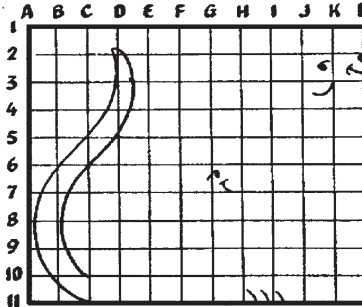
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Junior Whirl

by Hal Kaufman

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HOP-SKIP-JUMP DRAWING CARD

ALL ABOARD for a hop, skip and jump drawing lesson. Simply draw lines in the diagram at left in accord with the following letter-number coordinates:

Draw from 11-C to 11-D to 9-F to 11-G, 11-J, 10-G, 7-G, 7-H, 6-G, 5-H.

Add 6-G to 7-F to 7-E.

Draw from 7-F to 8-G, 6-I, 6-J, 7-K, 5-J, 4-K, 3-K, 3-L, 2-L, 2-K, 1-I, 2-J, 3-J, 4-H, 4-F, 6-C, 10-C.

Use a sharp pencil, draw straight lines.

Be sure to draw in accord with number and letter coordinates.

Add a color or two, if crayons are handy.

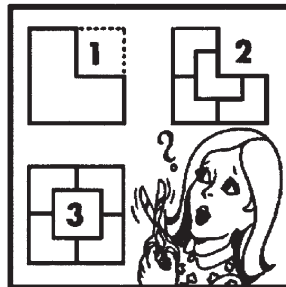
COURT CASE! Hey, I thought we were here to play basketball. What can you draw to complete the picture? Connect dots.

PLANET EX! A certain planet discovered by Wm. Herschel in 1781 was originally called Georgium Sidus, George's Star, after King George III. By what name do we know it now?

We know it as Uranus.

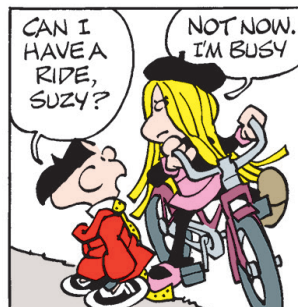
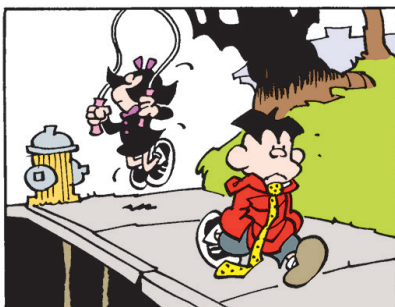
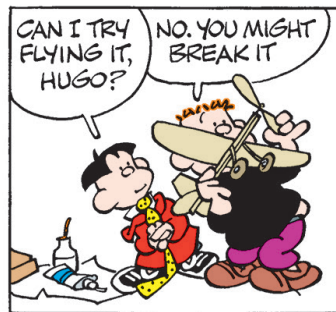
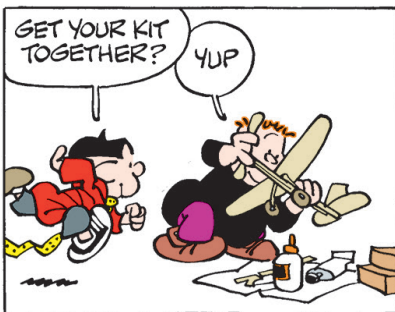
PIECE CORE! A curious, do-it-yourself jigsaw puzzle is suggested for your amusement at right. Remove and discard one corner of a cardboard square (dotted lines of figure 1). Cut remaining portion (fig. 2) into four equal-sized L-shaped segments. Scramble these pieces and ask someone to use them to reform the original square.

Figure 3 shows how pieces may be deployed for a hollowed-out version of the original.



TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Offend
- 5 Vegas lead-in
- 8 Biting remark
- 12 Jacob's twin
- 13 Antlered animal
- 14 Latin love
- 15 Printout
- 17 Earring site
- 18 Roscoe
- 19 More slothful
- 21 Filled fully
- 24 — colada
- 25 Cupid's alias
- 26 Street vendor's vehicle
- 30 Sawbuck
- 31 Attorney's load
- 32 Bee follower
- 33 Barber's offerings
- 35 Panache
- 36 Aachen article
- 37 Utter impulsively
- 38 Architectural style
- 41 Hero sandwich
- 42 Actress Perlman
- 43 Ski lodge cupful
- 48 "A Room of — Own"
- 49 Prior night
- 50 Not so hot?

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15				16					17			
			18				19	20				
21	22	23				24						
25					26				27	28	29	
30				31					32			
33			34						35			
			36					37				
38	39	40					41					
42					43	44			45	46	47	
48					49				50			
51					52				53			

- 51 "Holy cow!"
- 52 Enervate
- 53 Trade
- DOWN**
- 1 "I'm not impressed"
- 2 "This — recording"
- 3 Distant
- 4 Fakes, as figures
- 5 Author Uris
- 6 Jungfrau, for one
- 7 Urban silhouettes
- 8 French novelist
- 9 Mine, to Marcel
- 10 Judicial garb
- 11 Rabbit's title
- 16 Cow's chaw
- 20 &&&&
- 21 Actor Rogen
- 22 Location
- 23 Singer Braxton
- 24 Stickum
- 26 Hindquarters
- 27 Rights advocacy org.
- 28 Bring up
- 29 Bivouac shelter
- 31 Roman 202
- 34 Go over again
- 35 Macaroni shapes
- 37 Tampa Bay NFLer
- 38 Pirate's drink
- 39 "It can't be!"
- 40 Golf props
- 41 Dance move
- 44 Eggs
- 45 Cornfield noise
- 46 Mouths (Lat.)
- 47 Music booster

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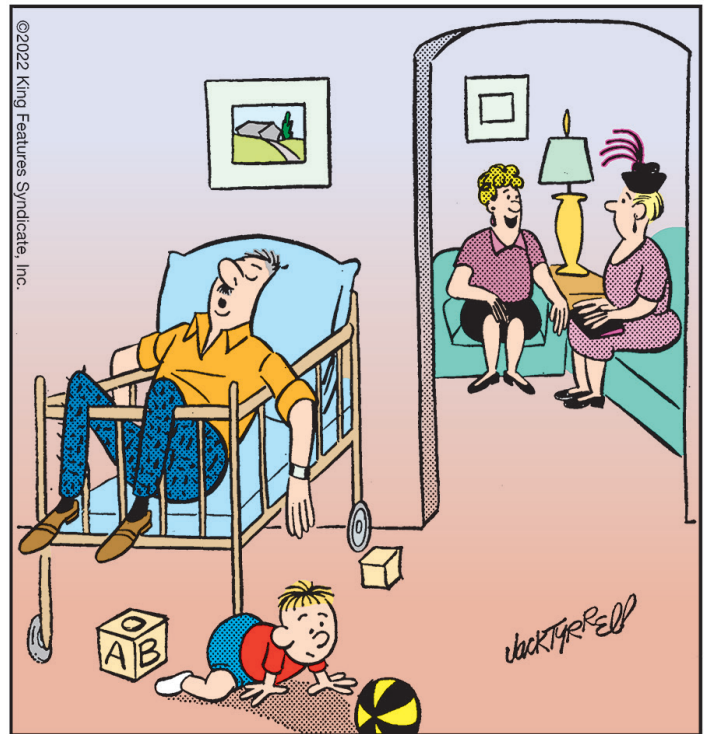
— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

M	I	F	F		L	A	S		B	A	R	B
E	S	A	U		E	L	K		A	M	O	R
H	A	R	D	C	O	P	Y		L	O	B	E
			G	U	N		L	A	Z	I	E	R
S	A	T	E	D		P	I	N	A			
E	R	O	S		H	A	N	D	C	A	R	T
T	E	N		C	A	S	E	S		C	E	E
H	A	I	R	C	U	T	S		E	L	A	N
			E	I	N	E		B	L	U	R	T
G	O	T	H	I	C		S	U	B			
R	H	E	A		H	O	T	C	O	C	O	A
O	N	E	S		E	V	E		W	A	R	M
G	O	S	H		S	A	P		S	W	A	P

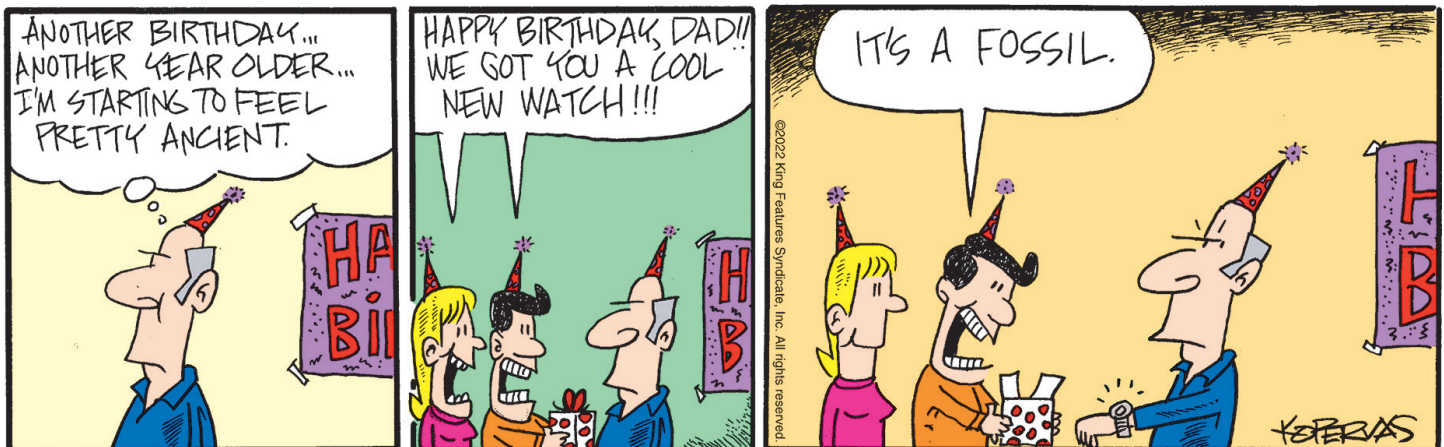
LAFF - A - DAY



"Every night after dinner, Stan likes to spend an hour or so with the baby."

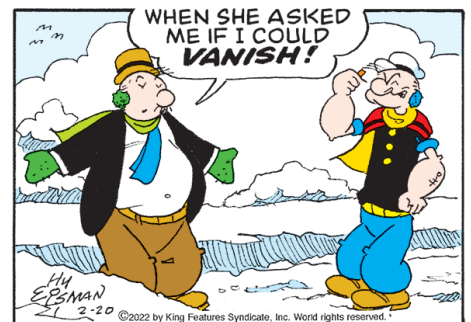
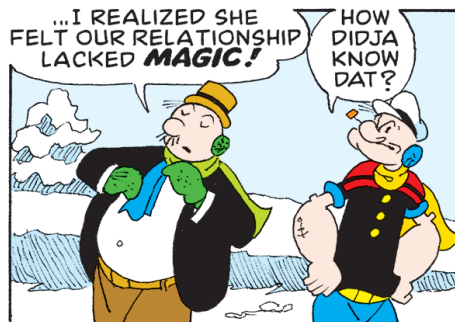
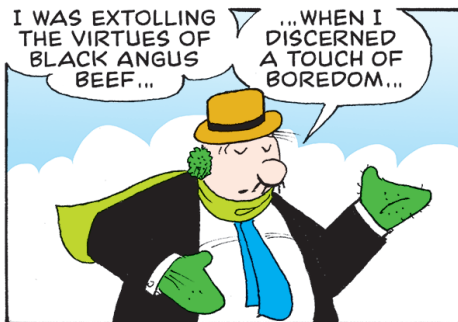
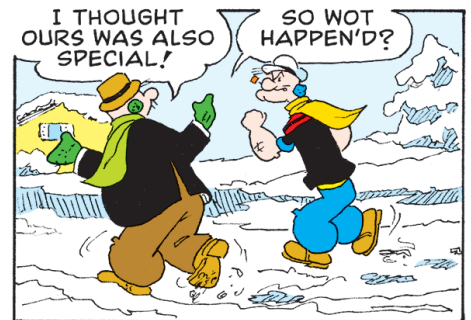
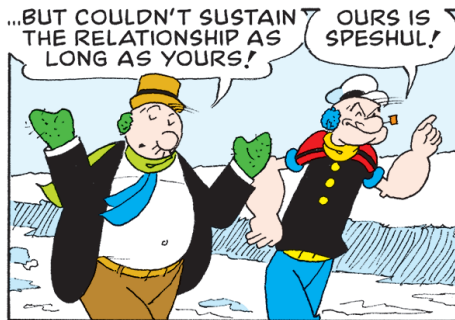
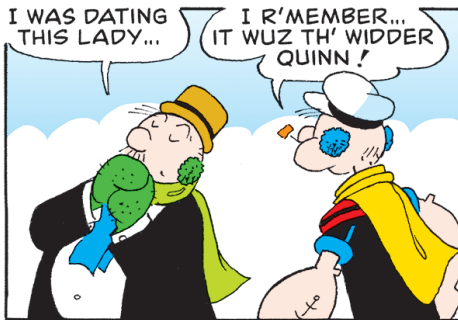
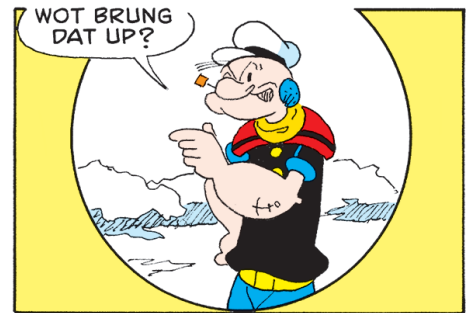
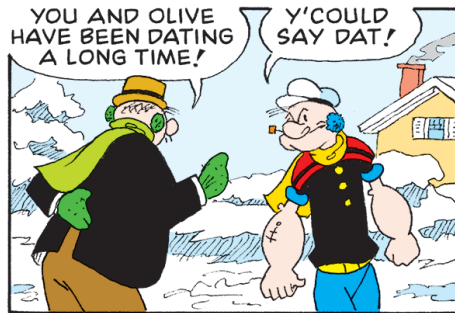
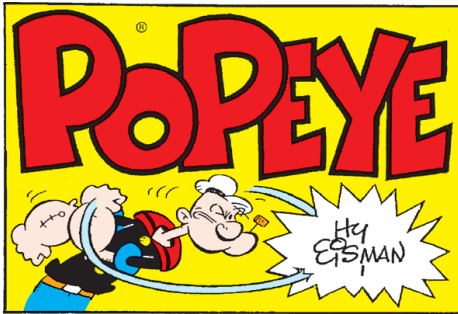
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



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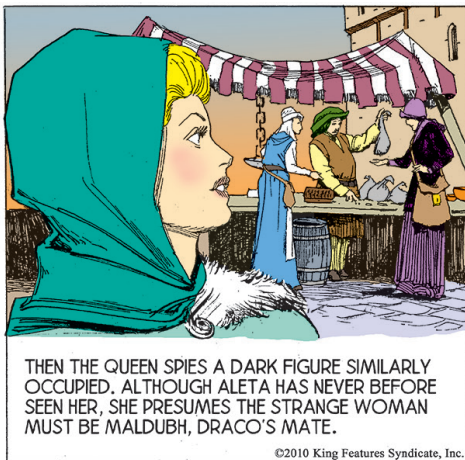
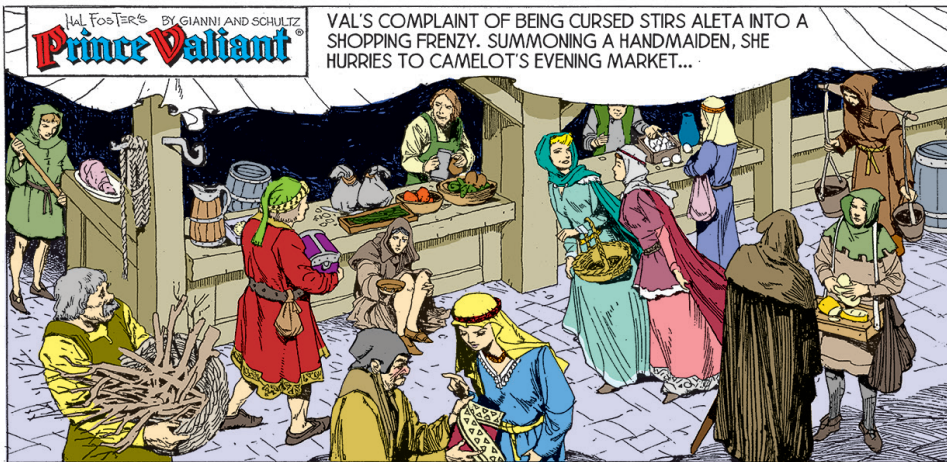
R.F.D.

by Mike Marland



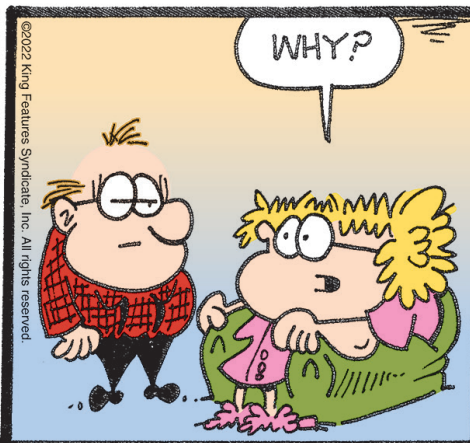
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The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Rebuilding Lost Muscle

A show of hands: How many of us feel that we've lost muscle strength during the pandemic? Unfortunately, the answer is that many of us have, and we're going to have to fight to get it back.

There we were, with regular workout and walking routines, on top of all our other daily activities. Along came COVID and its "stay home" restrictions. There were no more early morning walks at the mall, no more visits to the gym for weight training, no more workout or dance classes ... not even any Tai Chi at the senior center.

And there went our muscle mass.

Getting back to where we were is going to be tough ... but we need to try.

Here are a few thoughts on rebuilding our muscle strength:

- Look to YouTube for exercise videos designed for seniors. You'll find thousands: seated exercises, workouts at home, walking workouts, low impact, beginners and so many more.

- Sit in a kitchen chair and stand up. Sit down again. Stand up. Repeat

10-12 times.

- Invest in hand weights (order them from Amazon and they're delivered right to your door). Don't kid yourself and assume you're ready to wield a pair of 10-pound weights. Start small with 2-pound weights. If you need to order heavier ones, again, be cautious and don't jump up more than 1-2 pounds. Try increasing the number of repetitions day by day. If necessary, use 1-gallon plastic jugs (one in each hand), partially filled with water, as weights.

- If you have stairs in your home, use them to help your leg muscles. Increase the number of times you go up and down each day.

Take it easy, especially at the beginning, but be persistent. Some of us are going to have to fight hard to rebuild the muscle mass we've lost.

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1. On Sept. 1, 1971, what team fielded the first starting nine made up entirely of Black and Latino players in Major League Baseball history?

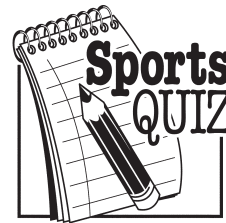
2. What Hawaiian fullback played college football at the University of Utah before his NFL career with the Pittsburgh Steelers (1998-2002) and Jacksonville Jaguars (2003-04)?

3. What Argentine golfer signed an incorrect scorecard and effectively handed the victory to Bob Goalby at the 1968 Masters Tournament?

4. Alois Lutz (1898-1918) of Austria is known for his pioneering contribution to what sport?

5. What member of the National Jewish Sports Hall of Fame was forced to box in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II and had a pro boxing career in the U.S. from 1948-49?

6. What motorsports event, first held in 1964, traditionally takes place in



by Ryan A. Berenz

Eagle River, Wisconsin, on the third weekend in January?

7. What combat sport, originating in Russia in the 1920s, is an acronym for “samozashchita bez oruzhiya,” meaning “self-defense without weapons”?

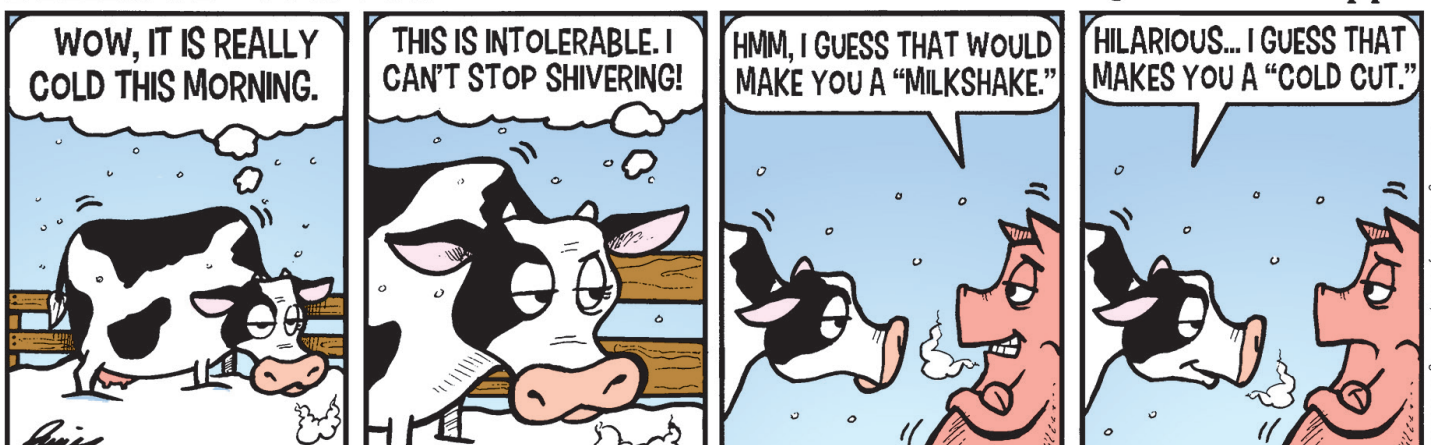
Answers

1. The Pittsburgh Pirates.
2. Chris Fuamatu-Ma’afala.
3. Roberto De Vincenzo.
4. Figure skating.
5. Harry Haft.
6. The World Championship Snowmobile Derby.
7. SAMBO.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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Dog Goes on Strike Against Leashes

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My dog "Perry" tugs, fights and whines when I put a collar and leash on him. He will even flop down and refuse to move. I don't know what to do. — Mike D., Roanoke, Virginia

DEAR MIKE: Oh, that's frustrating! But you can help Perry to tolerate his collar and leash by making some adjustments and rebuilding a positive association with the leash. Here are a few tips to start with:

- Check the fit and comfort of Perry's collar. Sometimes owners buy stylish collars that look great on their pet but are uncomfortable and either too big or too small.

- Consider a chest halter instead of a collar. This provides a supportive fit and when you tug on the leash, pres-

sure is distributed around a dog's torso rather than its neck.

- Re-introduce Perry to the new collar or halter gradually. Show him the new gear while offering a treat at the same time. When he's eating, gently drape the leash over his back. Give lots of praise at the same time. This starts to create positive connections with the new gear.

- Conduct obedience training at home, in 10-minute sessions, while Perry wears the new collar or halter. Review basic commands of "come," "sit," "stay" and "lie down." Leave the leash off at first.

- Add the leash, but don't tug on it. Continue obedience training while Perry wears the new gear. Take the gear off when done.

- Gradually increase the time your dog wears the collar or harness and leash.

This will take patience, lots of love and encouragement. Always be positive with Perry while retraining to the leash. And if, despite these efforts, he still doesn't respond, contact a professional trainer to help you both get through this stuck spot.

Send your tips, questions or comments to ask@pawscorner.com.

Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

2008.

* In 1858, a brawl involving 50 congressmen broke out on the U.S. House floor. It ended when someone knocked off a man's wig, which was then accidentally put on backwards, causing both sides to laugh and stop fighting.

* God and Jesus are the only characters in "The Simpsons" to have five fingers on each hand and five toes on each foot.

* New Zealand is not part of any of the world's seven recognized continents but is instead situated upon the submerged continent of Zealandia.

* Former NASCAR driver Dick Trickle drilled a hole in the front of his safety helmet and installed cigarette lighters in his race cars so that he could smoke while racing. NASCAR permitted it during race caution periods.

* A startup company called Juicero lost \$120 million of investor money after customers realized the contents they put in their \$700 juicing machine, which squeezed bags of pre-sliced vegetables into juice, could actually be squeezed faster by hand.

* In South Korea, children under 17 are banned from playing online games past midnight, which is monitored by their KSSN (Korean Social Security Number).

Thought for the Day: "To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. To not dare is to lose oneself." -- Soren Kierkegaard

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* The movie "The Godfather" does not contain the words "mafia" or "la cosa nostra" because of a deal struck between the producer and the mafia.

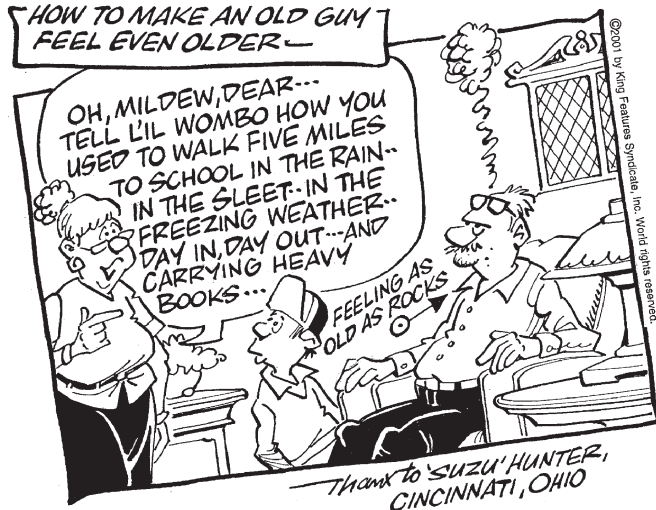
* Limping became a fad in Victorian England when young women admired the genuine limp of Alexandra of Denmark, bride of the Prince of Wales, and went around fake limping (the "Alexandra Limp."). Shopkeepers even sold pairs of shoes with one high and one low heel!

* The stick -- as in a small tree branch -- was inducted into the U.S. National Toy Hall of Fame in

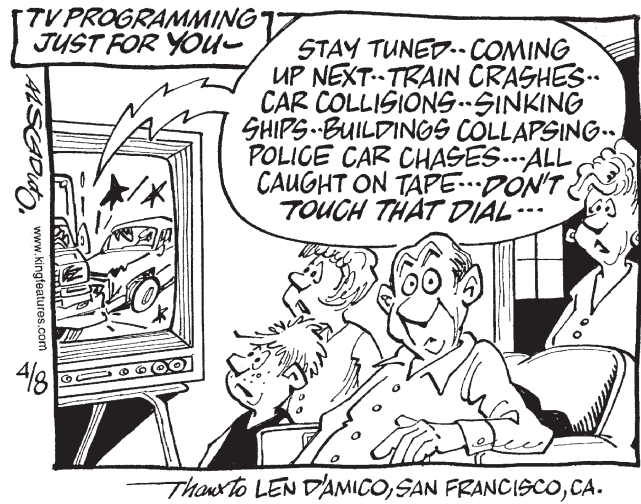
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THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME



BY AL SCADUTO



Papaya is native to Central America and exists in tropical areas throughout the world. The best place to plant papaya is on the south or southeast side of a house, in full sun, with some protection from wind and cold weather. The seedlings will flower after five or six months. Papayas like well-drained soil, and will not tolerate wet conditions. - Brenda Weaver

Source: www.gardeningknowhow.com

VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

Hidden Talent Found in Veterans Village

Another blast of arctic weather was expected any minute and David, the project manager for the tiny homes in the Veterans Village, pushed the trades to bring all three homes under roof before the storm hit. Everyone hustled, knowing that lunch would be provided as soon as they finished their part of the work.

Sarge stood in the coffee shop kitchen talking to one of the veterans employed as a carpenter assistant, who basically carried, toted and measured.

“Can you put together some burgers and coffee for the guys coming in?” Sarge asked. “Nothing fancy, just hot food.”

“That I can,” the carpenter said and got to work pulling ingredients out of the cabinets and fridge.

David blew through the back door, looking for his lost employee. Sarge explained: burgers, coffee, hungry guys.

David nodded and stood watching his carpenter expertly flip burgers, add a pinch of cinnamon to the coffee pot and create a crudite platter with three different dips. “He looks pretty darn confident in this kitchen,” David whispered to Sarge. “Notice that?”

Sarge called out to the carpenter veteran. “Son, what was your MOS in the Army?”

The veteran turned and smiled, spatula in hand. “MOS 92G, sir,” he said. “Culinary Specialist.”

David scratched his head. “Then what are you doing working as a carpenter assistant?”

“Taking care of my family,” the carpenter replied as he moved a burger onto a toasted bun. “I got two kids. Moved here and didn’t know anybody. You had a job. I needed one.”

Sarge pulled out his phone, tapping numbers. “I got a cook here,” he said when the call was answered, “in the guise of a junior wanna-be assistant carpenter. How much could this boy be making at your restaurant? He’s Army trained, so he’ll need a good salary ...”

Ten minutes later, Sarge came back down the stairs and handed the carpenter a piece of paper. “You got an interview tomorrow for sous chef ... whatever that is.”

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CONGRESSMAN
DUSTY JOHNSON
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



Kindness Goes A Long Way

This week, I presented the Strength of South Dakota Award to the Fred Assam Elementary School Student Council, students, and staff in Sioux Fall, South Dakota. The Strength of South Dakota Award was created to celebrate and honor South Dakotans that display unusual perseverance, compassion, and innovation, and are beloved by their community.

The Fred Assam Elementary Student Council challenged all students to “penny wars” during the month of January as a service project to support the Midwest Honor Flight. The Honor Flight is a program that flies World War II, Korea, and Vietnam veterans to Washington, D.C. to see their memorials and meet with their elected officials. The trip serves as a way to thank and honor veterans for their sacrifice and service to our nation.

The student council started the fundraiser with the goal of raising enough money to support three veterans’ trips to our nation’s capital. By the end of the month, the school had raised enough money to send six local veterans to Washington, D.C. The Midwest Honor Flight estimates the cost of one veteran’s trip to be worth \$753. The Fred Assam students raised over \$3,500 for their local veterans.

Now that is kindness. The Fred Assam elementary students’ actions serve as a reminder to all of us of how a little bit of effort by a few people can positively impact the lives of those around you.

On Thursday, I had the honor of meeting these students and presenting the student council, staff, and students the Strength of South Dakota Award. We were joined by local veterans and members of the public. The show of support for these students and our veterans was phenomenal. I am proud to represent such bright, generous, and thoughtful students. I know our futures and our world are in good hands with them.

If you or a veteran you know would like to join the Midwest Honor Flight, you can learn more about the program and apply here: <https://www.midwesthonorflight.org/veterans.html>

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

The Home Stretch

This past Wednesday, the South Dakota Legislature hit one of its biggest milestones of the legislative session: Crossover Day.

Those who follow the Capitol calendar know that bills must successfully pass out of the chamber where they began on Crossover Day. Senate bills must pass the Senate and head to the House, and vice versa. The legislature began with 587 bills, and a handful of bills have now made their way from their first chamber where they began to the other. I have already signed two of the bills I championed in my State of the State address: protecting fairness for women's sports and the repeal of the ridiculous bingo tax.

Other "Governor's bills," as they are colloquially known, have also moved forward. Those include my bills to ban teaching Critical Race Theory and its divisive ideology in both K-12 schools and public universities. The House chamber passed them to the Senate in mid-February.

Earlier this month, the Senate passed my bill extending COVID vaccine exemptions to private employees around the state. If this bill becomes law, employees will become eligible to claim a religious, medical, or natural immunity exemption for a COVID vaccine mandate issued by an employer in the state.

The Senate also supported the state's funding initiative to expand the cybersecurity program at Dakota State University. I testified in committee to support this bill, which would appropriate \$30 million in state funds to double the size of DSU's Beacom College and put the Governor's Cyber Academy in every high school in the state. This \$30M in state funds will be paired with a \$50M private donation and \$10M from the City of Sioux Falls to build a new cyber lab in Sioux Falls as well. The early support that legislators showed for this bill demonstrates that South Dakota is ready to make cyber-research its next big industry.

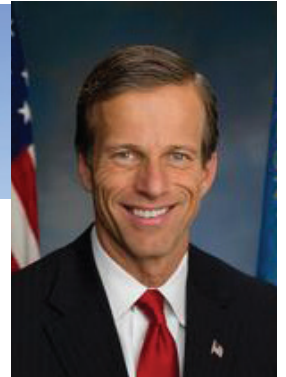
Other important issues passed just before the Crossover deadline, with the House and Senate each debating the merits of big issues facing our state. The Senate discussed and passed my proposal to repeal fees related to obtaining a concealed carry permit for a handgun. The Senate also agreed with my recommendation to invest \$660 million in federal dollars for water, drainage, sewer, and flood control projects around the state. That proposal will move on for consideration by lawmakers in a House Committee.

The Senate also passed a bill that would appropriate funding to build a state-of-the-art shooting range in Rapid City. Meanwhile, the House gave my bill to ban abortions via telemedicine their support, clearing the path for a committee hearing in the Senate. These bills and dozens of others continue to move forward in the legislative process. The clock is ticking down as today marks Day 29 in the 38-day session. And there is one big-ticket item left for lawmakers to hash out: the budget.

Lawmakers have until March 10th to debate and find consensus on how the state will fund its operations for the next fiscal year. In addition to ongoing expenses, lawmakers will consider plans for one-time state and federal dollars for our public schools, infrastructure projects, university workforce programs, and improving the state's public health laboratory.

All of these issues and more will be part of the flurry of activity in the Capitol these final two weeks. The decisions made in these waning days of session have the potential to keep South Dakota riding a wave of responsible, sustainable growth. Together, we will balance our budget and keep making South Dakota safer, stronger, and healthier.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Democrats' Inflation Tax is Hurting Family Budgets

In January, U.S. inflation hit 7.5 percent – the highest inflation since February 1982. Inflation has now been above 5 percent for the past eight months. There are people raising families today who have never experienced this kind of inflation in their entire lifetimes. The average American household spent an estimated \$3,500 more last year as a result of inflation. That's a lot of money for most families in South Dakota, and many of them are hurting.

Everywhere they turn, families are facing higher prices. Whether it's ground beef for the chili, bunk beds for the kids' room, or a new car to accommodate a new addition to the family, higher prices are the order of the day. The price of chicken is up 10 percent, pork is up 14 percent, eggs are up 13 percent, fruit is up 8 percent, and whole milk is up 8 percent, just to name a few. Even the prices for household and family essentials are up. Furniture and bedding are up 17 percent, major appliances are up almost 10 percent, tires are up 14 percent, and used cars and trucks are up 40 percent. Then there's energy prices. Gas prices are up 40 percent, and electricity is up nearly 11 percent.

Inflation is having its biggest impact on those least able to afford it. A recent study found that lower-income households, on average, faced an even greater spending increase in 2021 when compared to higher-income households as a result of inflation. It's no wonder 69 percent of Americans disapprove of the president's handling of inflation.

When President Biden took office last January, inflation was at 1.4 percent – well within the Federal Reserve's target inflation rate of 2 percent. And it might have stayed there, had Democrats not decided that they needed to pass a massive, partisan \$1.9-trillion spending spree under the guise of COVID relief known as the American Rescue Plan – mere weeks after Congress had already passed a major COVID bill.

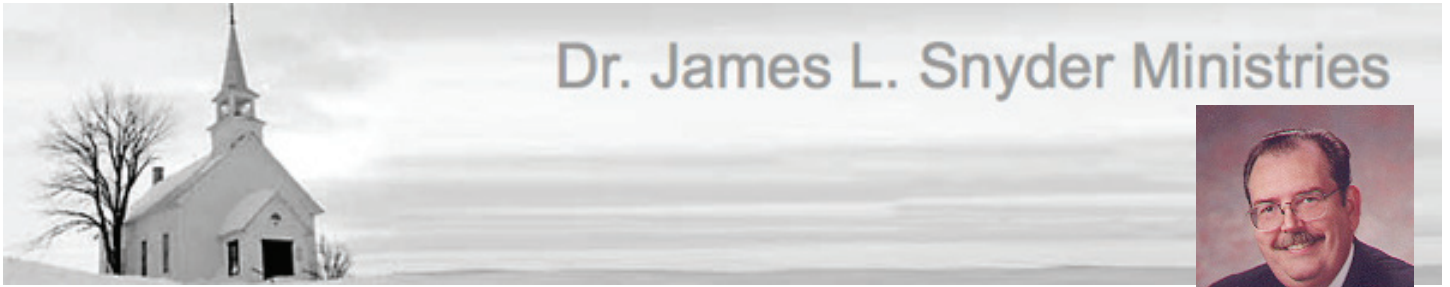
The definition of inflation is too many dollars chasing too few goods and services. And that's exactly the situation Democrats helped create with their American Rescue Plan. They sent too many federal dollars into the economy – and the economy overheated as a result. Despite the fact that it was Democrats' massive March spending spree that helped plunge our economy into this inflation crisis, there are still many Democrats who want to double down on the strategy that helped get us into this mess in the first place. Passing another massive spending spree, which many Democrats want to do, would undoubtedly make this inflation disaster even worse.

Our country's inflation crisis is creating real economic consequences for South Dakota families. Unfortunately, President Biden and congressional Democrats are so focused on passing their radical agenda full of heavy-handed, government-knows-best policies that they cannot be bothered to address issues that are affecting nearly every American family. However, I remain hopeful that the shocking inflation numbers that were released in February will resonate with Democrats and help redirect their attention to issues that are draining Americans' pocketbooks.

It's time for Democrats to recognize that families, small businesses, and our broader economy cannot afford any more reckless government spending.

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What a Crazy World We Live in



Driving home from an appointment across town, my wife and I encountered some crazy driver weaving in and out on the road in front of us. The fact that there was not an accident was somewhat surprising.

"What," The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage exclaimed, "is wrong with people?"

Looking at her and laughing, I said, "People today are crazy!"

Together we laughed, knowing it was true. If there ever has been a time that people were crazy, it is today.

What a crazy world we live in these days. Just when you think it can't get any crazier, it does.

We went shopping at the grocery store one day, and when we came out and got into our vehicle, I was laughing. My wife looked at me and said, "What are you laughing about?"

"That lady in there," I said, still laughing, "was wearing the craziest dress that I've ever seen. She sure was crazy." And I laughed some more.

She looked at me, smiled and said, "You do know that was not a woman, don't you?"

The smile disappeared from my face, and I just stared at her and said, "You got to be kidding?"

I agree that people aren't what they seem to be in real life. There appears to be a crazy virus, and it comes out just a little different for each individual.

It's hard to comprehend the level of craziness that is in our world today. A mask cannot control this crazy virus, but it's a start to cover up that crazy face.

There was some Hollywood celebrity; I don't know who, but when they had their baby said that they would wait until the baby was old enough to make its own decision as to its gender. When I first heard that, I thought they were making a joke, but then I found out they were very serious about it.

When I heard that, I felt sorry for the baby that had to grow up in such a crazy family. If they are crazy about this, what else are they crazy about?

It seems to me that each generation has its own definition of crazy. Each generation gets crazier with their definition probably to out-crazy the former generation.

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Of course, as The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage reminds me, nobody could handle me if there were not so many crazy people out there to compare. So, I think by that "nobody," she was referring to herself.

I admit that in certain areas, I am crazy. But, of course, some think I'm crazy all the way through, which may be entirely accurate.

Someone told me, "One's crazy is another person's laughter." The crazy people out there in the world cause so much laughter.

I'm not sure how you would define crazy. Each person has a different strain of craziness. The best way to define crazy is something that looks and sounds odd to the person watching and listening.

Someone may be looking at me, thinking I'm crazy. But, of course, to a certain degree, they are correct. Everybody is crazy in their own right. So we have a right to be crazy.

As long as my crazy doesn't adversely affect someone else, what's the harm?

I learned a long time ago not to be offended when someone refers to me as crazy. Most of my relatives refer to me as crazy, but I'm never offended.

Just the other day, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage suggested that crazy was inherited. Therefore, it's not my fault that I'm crazy. I can think of several uncles and cousins that are as crazy as crazy can be.

Growing up with these relatives around me, I did not know or understand that their craziness would rub off on me. I just laughed at them and walked away, thinking I was okay.

As I studied my family heritage, I realized that although crazy is inherited through family links, I have an opportunity to choose my crazy. I never thought about that before. But, I am as crazy as I choose to be.

The only challenge I see, at least for me, is the ability to control me and my crazy. I don't want my crazy to control me and get me into trouble I can't handle. But I want to understand my crazy and then use it for profitable purposes.

There is somebody out there in the world who needs to experience me and my crazy to feel good about themselves. They can look at me and think, "I may be crazy, but at least I'm not that crazy." If I can do that each day, I'm doing an incredible amount of work for the human population.

So, the last few years, I've been trying to hone my crazy to have at least some positive results with the people around me.

Thinking about this and looking back over the last few years some of my encouragement has come from people who I first thought were just being crazy. Sometimes crazy does have a purpose.

I thought about a special versus Scripture that addresses this. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

I don't have to know who I'm encouraging but sometimes my crazy activities do in fact encourage somebody along the way. Only in heaven will I realize how many people I have encouraged this way.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: I'm looking to furnish my new apartment and wondering if you could point me toward some sustainable options?

-- B.C., New York, NY

In the U.S., sustainable living has gained momentum in recent years as more and more Americans make conscious efforts to reduce their carbon footprint. Reusable shopping bags, greater recycling, and electric cars are major successes when it comes to greening our everyday lives. And a lesser known but no less substantial contributor to environmental damage comes from a source of our comfort: home furnishings.

Economically speaking, Americans spend nearly \$120 billion on furniture and bedding per year, and 84 percent buy furnishings new. This increased demand, leading to increased production, means that companies looking to cut costs rely on cheaper, less sustainable materials. This results in to furniture that's not built to last and therefore ends up on the curb. In fact, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that nearly nine million tons of furniture enter landfills every year. On top of that, the manufacturing of many of these furnishings consumes considerable amounts of natural resources, and some may contain toxic chemicals that impact both the environment and human health. Fortunately, there are ethical and sustainable options available when it comes to furnishing a home or apartment.

A large number of companies now offer green-friendly products that use sustainable materials and manufacturing methods. Chicago's What WE Make specializes in furniture using reclaimed wood, custom-made-to-order. Masaya & Co. produces handmade tables, chairs, bed frames, dressers and more using sustainable materials and low-impact methods, and for every product sold, the company plants 100 trees in Nicaragua, where products are manufactured. Alabama Sawyer makes furniture from local tree waste, and Emeco makes chairs from recycled materials and uses 100 percent recyclable shipping and packing materials. Medley makes all types of home furnishings with sustainable materials like bamboo and organic latex, free of toxic chemical finishes. Avocado Green Mattress makes eco-friendly bedding with non-toxic materials and ethically sourced labor practices. Etsy partners with sellers who specialize in items crafted with reclaimed plastic fibers, cotton, linen, wool, and responsibly-sourced woods.

Second-hand furniture offers further options for sustainable furnishings. "The most sustainable products are those that already exist," says Nicole Sarto of Stanford magazine. Local charity shop items tend to be quality pickings simply in need of washing or a new paint job. IKEA now has a furniture buyback program, giving store credit for second-hand IKEA furniture that they refurbish and resell. Furniture rental is also an option for sustainably furnishings, especially if a person changes residence frequently.

Beyond furniture, the smaller details of a home or apartment can also be sustainably sourced. Water-saving showerheads, eco-friendly lighting, and energy-saving curtains and blinds are all items to consider when furnishing a space. Like any sustainable lifestyle choice, furnishing a home or apartment is about more than choosing a comfortable couch or chic end table. It's about how the item was made, what it's made with, and where it's ultimately going to end up.



What WE Make's Modern Trestle Dining Table with butterfly joinery makes use of reclaimed old-growth wood from midwestern barns and a green, non-VOC finish.

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South Dakota COVID-19 Report

New Confirmed and Probable Cases

136

Active Cases

5,348
-3,117

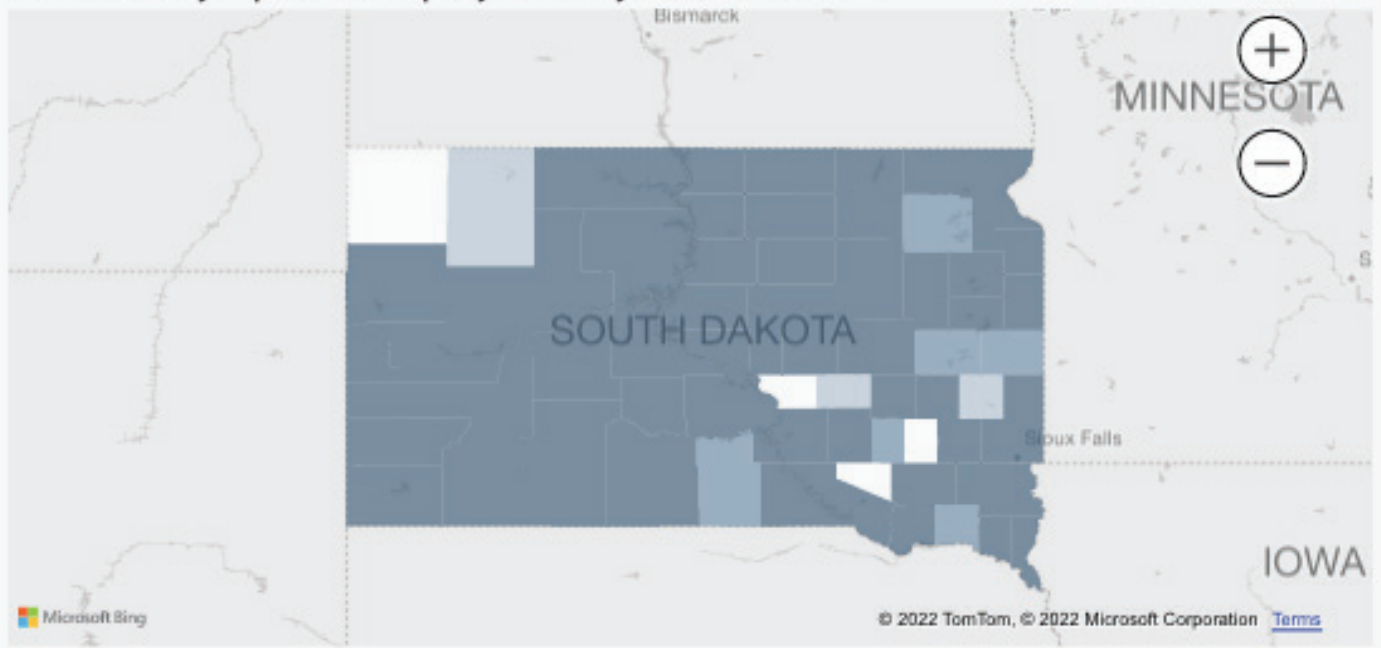
Recovered Cases

227,637

Currently Hospitalized

171

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.

Total Confirmed and Probable Cases

235,787

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 7 Days

11.9%
2/17/2022 - 2/23/2022

Total Tests

2,088,749

Ever Hospitalized

10,561

Deaths Among Cases

2,802

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

259%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

423%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

152%

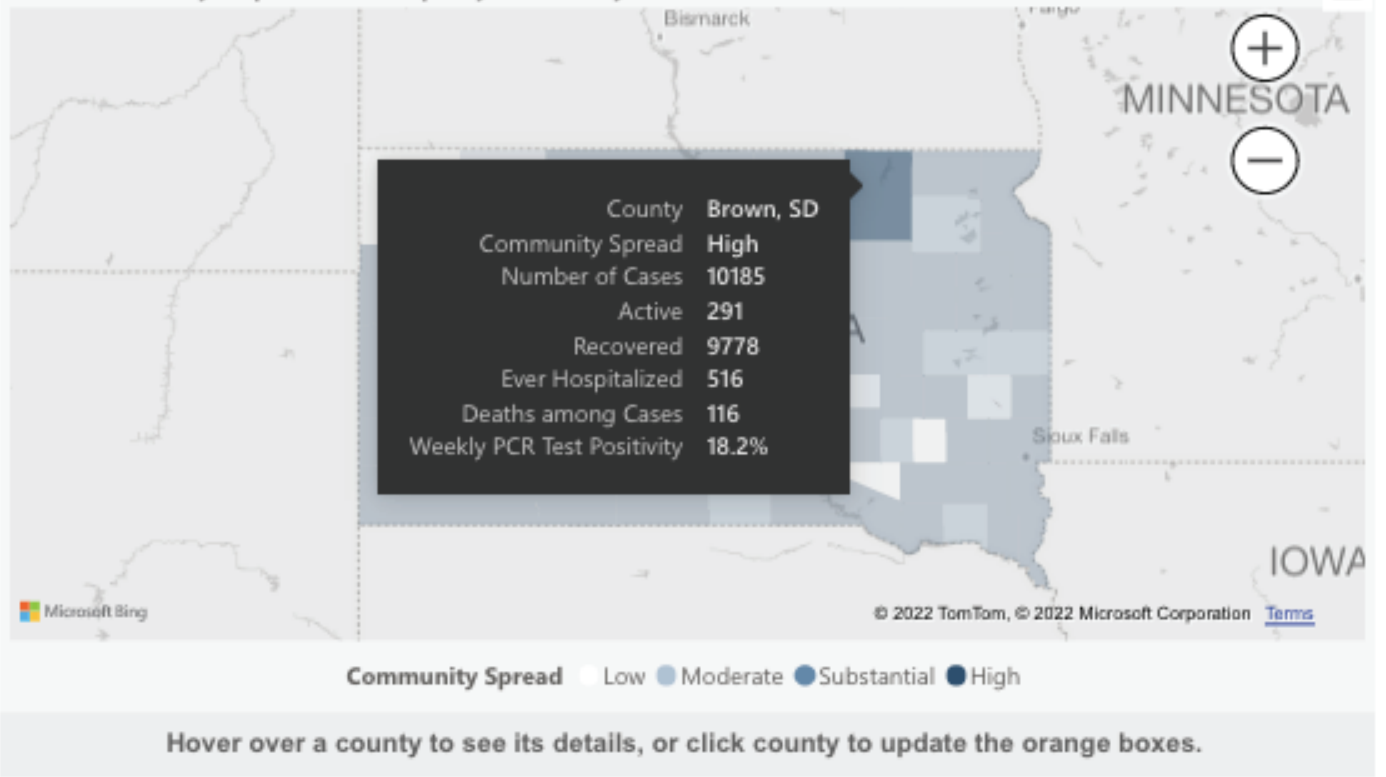
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Brown County COVID-19 Report



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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Day County COVID-19 Report

New Confirmed and Probable Cases

0

Active Cases

39

-27

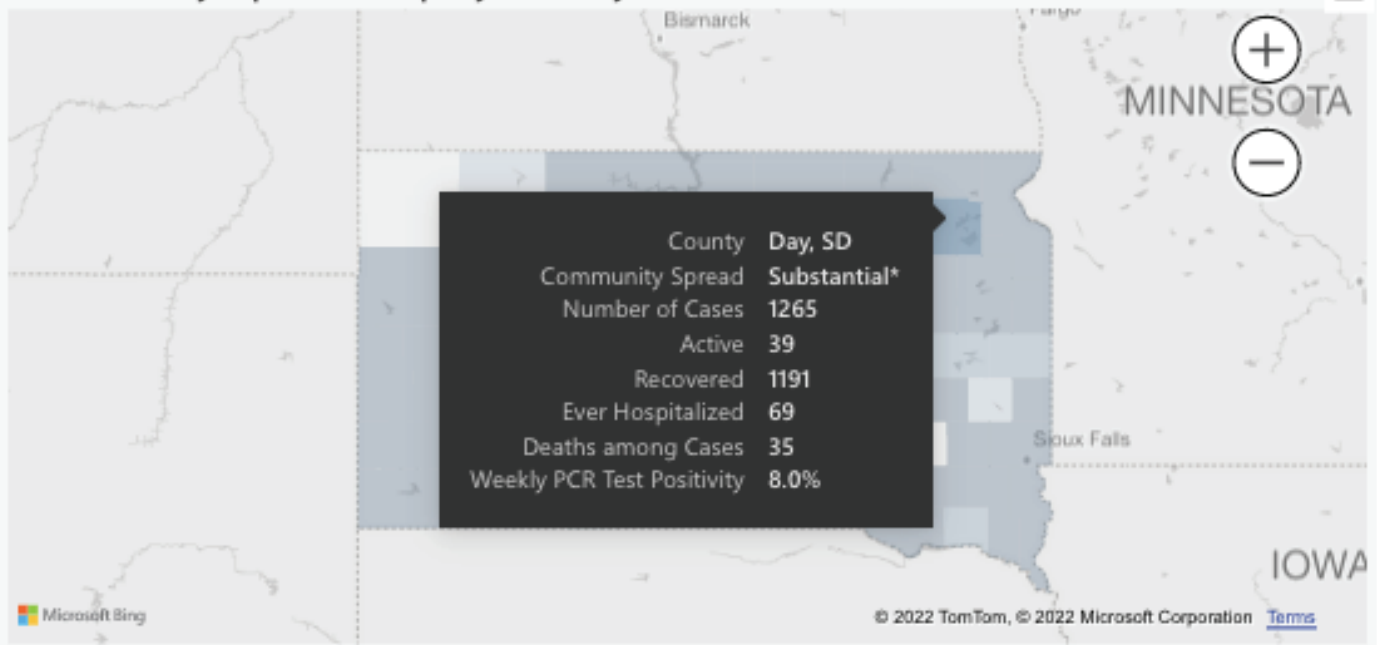
Recovered Cases

1,191

Currently Hospitalized

171

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread: Low Moderate Substantial High

Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.

Total Confirmed and Probable Cases

1,265

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 7 Days

12.5%

2/17/2022 - 2/23/2022

Total Tests

16,336

Ever Hospitalized

69

Deaths Among Cases

35

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

259%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

423%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

152%

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COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Currently Hospitalized	-51	171
Deaths Among Cases	+30	2802
Active Cases		5348
Ever Hospitalized		10561
Recovered Cases		227637
Total Cases		235787

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	124639	1272
Male	111148	1530

VARIANT CASES OF COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Variant	# of Cases
Delta (B.1.617.2 & AY lineages)	1488
Omicron (B.1.1.529 & BA lineages)	636
Alpha (B.1.1.7)	176
Gamma (P.1)	4
Beta (B.1.351)	2

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	15745	2
10-19 years	28644	1
20-29 years	41404	12
30-39 years	40124	48
40-49 years	33103	79
50-59 years	30316	214
60-69 years	24946	450
70-79 years	13045	656
80+ years	8460	1340

RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
Asian / Pacific Islander	3191	1%
Black	5770	2%
Hispanic	10055	4%
Native American	29893	13%
Other	2149	1%
Unknown	5582	2%
White	179147	76%

Groton Area COVID-19 Report

Groton Area School District
 Active COVID-19 Cases
 Updated February 24, 2022; 8:41 AM

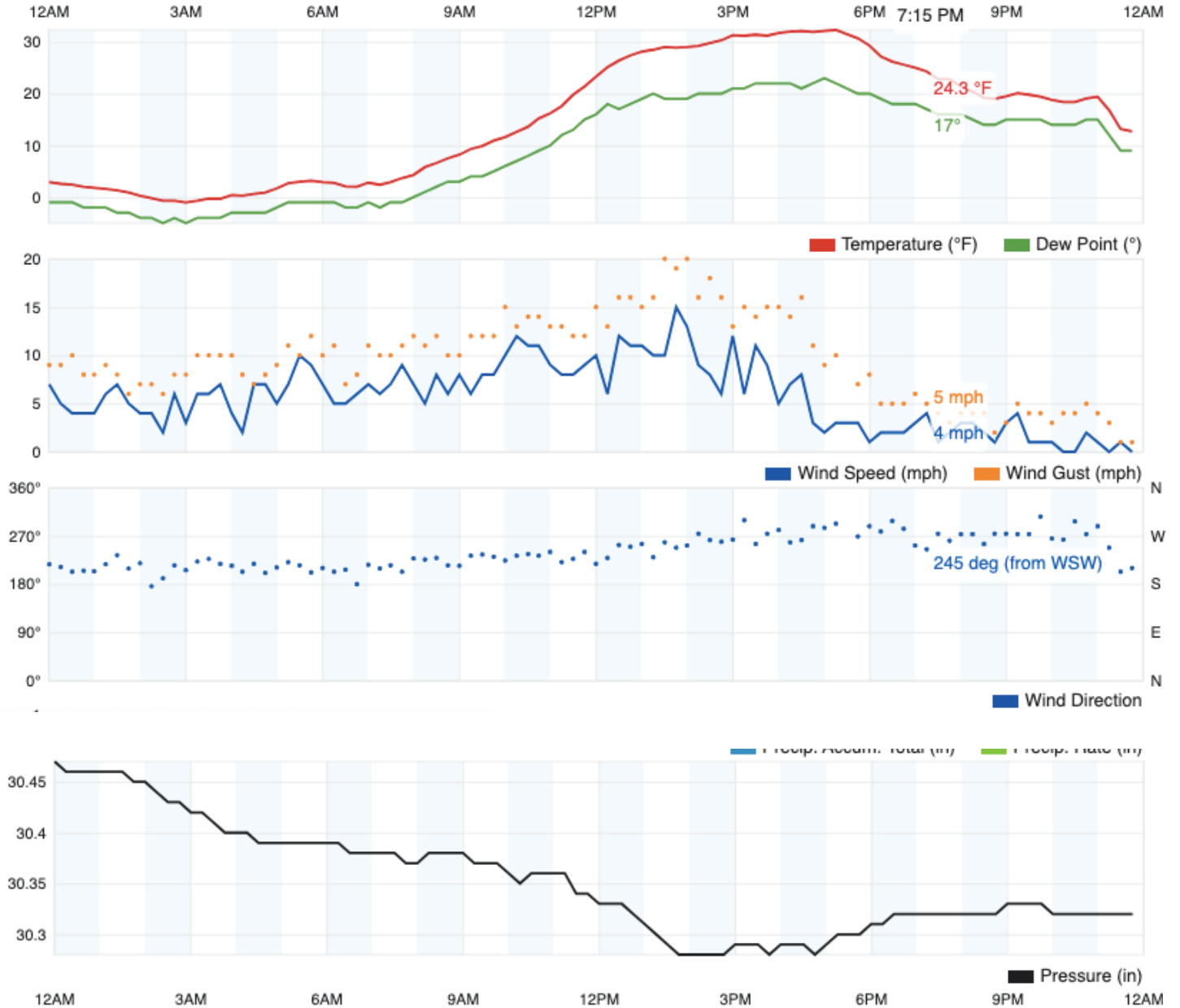
**Decrease of 1
 since last week**

J	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	1	1	S	T
K	G										0	1	2	t	o
														a	t
														f	a
														f	l
0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Change	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	-1

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs






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Today	Tonight	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
				
Sunny	Increasing Clouds	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy
High: 36 °F	Low: 12 °F	High: 40 °F	Low: 18 °F	High: 37 °F

Mild Into March

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
Feb 27 th , 2022	Feb 28 th , 2022	Mar 1 st , 2022
		
25 to 50°	32 to 55°	32 to 60°

High temperatures will be 5 to 20° above average across central SD through at least the middle of the week. Breezy west winds Monday.

The warmest high temps in the ranges above will be across south central SD; coolest across and east of the Prairie Coteau.



Above average precip favored Mar 3-7, cooler temps favored Mar 5-11



Near (northeast SD and west central MN) to above average (central SD) temperatures over the next several days will help melt snow across the area. The next best chance for new snowfall arrives late in the week.

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Today in Weather History

February 27, 1969: Snowfall of up to 15 inches blocked many roads in South Dakota. Freezing rain formed a glaze on many utility lines resulting in extensive damage. The most considerable damage occurred in the north-central part of the state.

February 27, 1996: Across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota, a strong area of low pressure brought 4 to 11 inches of snow from the late afternoon of the 26th to the late evening of the 27th. Along with the snow came strong cold north winds of 20 to 40 mph, creating near-blizzard conditions at times. Wind chills were from 20 below to 60 below. Some schools were closed or started late the 27th, along with some activities canceled. Snowfall amounts included, 4 inches at Sisseton, 5 inches at Aberdeen, Redfield, near Reliance, Wheaton, Browns Valley, Britton, and Gettysburg. Other snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Lebanon, Hoven, Miller, Webster, Eden, Frederick, and Seneca, 7 inches near Chelsea and Mellette, 8 inches at Roscoe and east of Hosmer, Tulare and near Milbank, 9 inches south of Ree Heights, 8 to 10 inches in the Ortonville area, and 11 inches at Wilmot.

1717 - What was perhaps the greatest snow in New England history commenced on this date. During a ten day period a series of four snowstorms dumped three feet of snow upon Boston, and the city was snowbound for two weeks. Up to six feet of snow was reported farther to the north, and drifts covered many one story homes. (David Ludlum)

1969 - A record snowstorm in Maine came to an end. Two to four feet of snow buried southern and central Maine, with a state record of 57 inches reported at West Forks. Drifts covered many single story homes, and the weight of the snow collapsed many roofs. Two to four feet of snow also buried northeastern Vermont and northeastern Massachusetts. In New Hampshire, Mount Washington NH reported 97.8 inches of snow, a record storm total for New England. (24th-28th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1986: It was 99 degrees in Palm Springs, California. This is the highest temperature on record for February. This also occurred on Fe2/26/1986.

1987 - A storm spread heavy snow into the Central High Plains Region, and produced severe thunderstorms in the Southern Plains. Snowfall totals in western Nebraska ranged up to 19 inches at Sydney. Severe thunderstorms in Oklahoma produced baseball size hail at Stringtown and Atoka. A storm in the eastern U.S. produced heavy rain over the Carolinas and heavy snow in the southern Appalachians and piedmont region. Five inches of rain left four feet of water in the streets of Greenville SC. Snowfall totals in southwestern Virginia ranged up to 20 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms along a cold front produced heavy rain in southern California, with up to 2.52 inches reported in Ventura County. Strong winds accompanying the rain gusted to 55 mph in the Tehachapi Mountains. Rapid City SD established a February record with an afternoon high of 75 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Rain and snow prevailed in the southeastern U.S. Up to eight inches of snow blanketed north central Tennessee, and snowfall totals in western North Carolina ranged up to 14 inches at Mount Mitchell. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in southeastern Colorado, with 12 inches reported at Lamar. The same storm produced severe thunderstorms over the Southern High Plains, with wind gusts to 93 mph reported at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. Low pressure brought high winds to the Prince William Sound area of Alaska. Big River Lakes reported wind gusts to 92 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010 - A weak EF0 tornado causes no damage as it moved across California's southern San Joaquin Valley. However it is the only tornado reported in the United States during the month. According to the Storm Prediction Center only five months since 1950 have lacked a tornado report. The Weather Doctor

2010: A magnitude 8.8 earthquake occurred off the coast of central Chili at 3:34 local time. The quake triggered a tsunami that devastated several coastal towns in south-central Chile. Tsunami warnings were issued in 53 countries. Waves caused minor damage in the San Diego area and the Tohoku region of Japan.

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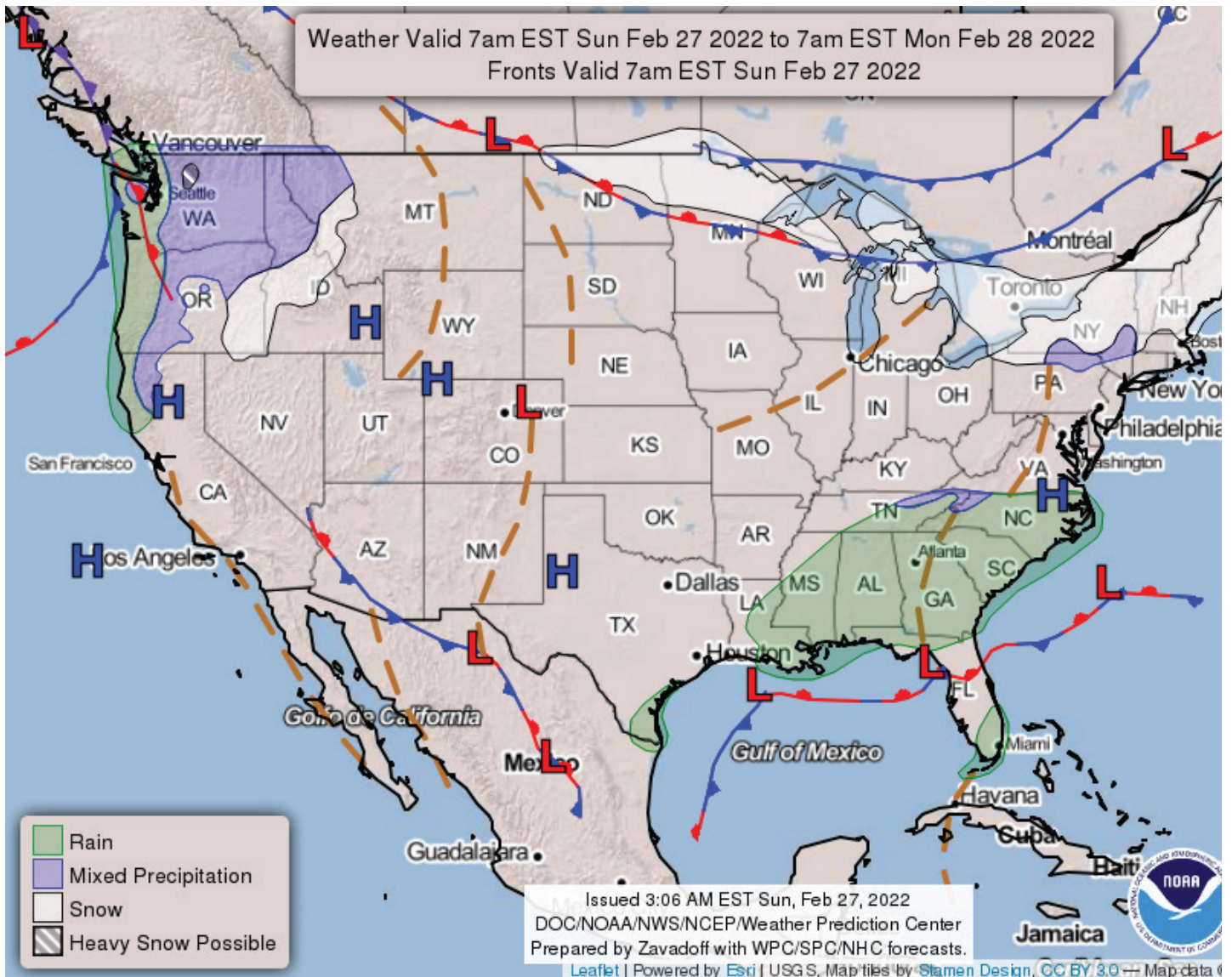
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 32 °F at 5:08 PM
Low Temp: -1 °F at 3:02 AM
Wind: 20 mph at 1:27 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 6 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 68 in 2016
Record Low: -23 in 2001
Average High: 33°F
Average Low: 11°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.59
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.14
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 6:18:02 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:10:16 AM



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When What Is - Is Not Enough

Many doubt that our God is the creator of all that is and that He is in control of what we see as well as what we cannot see. The Psalmist is not one who has any doubt about this fact. He goes far beyond the majestic statement that we hold dear: "In the beginning, God created..." In simple words, he acknowledged that "Your hands," (God) "have made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding that I may learn Your commands." In other words, he realized that he was more than a creature that began in the mud. He was the most important part of God's creation and needed God to give him His understanding of things.

"God," he declared, "You not only took time to make me, but You fashioned me for a specific purpose in this, Your universe. I need You, God, to tell me what that purpose is!"

The word "fashioned" is a term that refers to the work of a potter making an object out of clay. Although the same clay may be used for different vessels or objects, each one has been "fashioned" for a specific purpose. The size, shape, and purpose of each vessel the potter makes are always determined in the mind of the potter before he begins to form it on his wheel.

So, it is with God. His Word tells us that "Before I formed you in your mother's womb I knew you...I set you apart...I appointed you..." Although God has a plan for us, the Psalmist says we must look to Him for that plan and search His Word to understand it. He made us in His image, but we must allow Him to fashion us for the specific purpose He has for us.

Prayer: Father, You made us so You understand us. Please give us an understanding of Your will and a willingness to follow it all the days of our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands. Psalm 119:73

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2022 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

05-09-14-24-25

(five, nine, fourteen, twenty-four, twenty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$27,000

Lotto America

05-13-31-39-48, Star Ball: 2, ASB: 4

(five, thirteen, thirty-one, thirty-nine, forty-eight; Star Ball: two; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$8.2 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$102 million

Powerball

15-32-36-48-64, Powerball: 19, Power Play: 3

(fifteen, thirty-two, thirty-six, forty-eight, sixty-four; Powerball: nineteen; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$58 million

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Huron 58, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 51

Pierre 67, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 52

Rapid City Stevens 43, Sioux Falls Lincoln 37

Sioux Falls Washington 41, Rapid City Central 25

Yankton 53, Sturgis Brown 52

SDHSAA Playoffs=

SoDak Qualifier=

Class A=

Region 1=

Florence/Henry 59, Webster 40

Sisseton 56, Groton Area 39

Region 6=

Crow Creek 65, Dupree 48

Winner 68, Mobridge-Pollock 38

Region 7=

Lakota Tech 84, Pine Ridge 33

Red Cloud 68, Todd County 35

Region 8=

Belle Fourche 50, Rapid City Christian 49

St. Thomas More 54, Hill City 37

Class B=

Region 1=

Aberdeen Christian 49, Warner 44

Aberdeen Roncalli 57, Britton-Hecla 28

Region 2=

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Herreid/Selby Area 55, Miller 49
Sully Buttes 52, Highmore-Harrold 43
Region 6=
Avon 42, Platte-Geddes 28
Corsica/Stickney 44, Gregory 39
Region 8=
Bison 48, Wakpala 41
Faith 39, Harding County 38

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=
Sioux Falls Lincoln 76, Rapid City Stevens 54
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 84, Huron 68
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 63, Pierre 55
Sioux Falls Washington 63, Rapid City Central 42
Yankton 69, Sturgis Brown 34

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

Live updates: Germany boosts defense budget above 2% of GDP

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest on the Russia's invasion of Ukraine:

BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says Germany is committing 100 billion euros (\$112.7 billion) to a special fund for its armed forces, raising its defense spending above 2% of its GDP.

Scholz told a special session of the Bundestag in Berlin on Sunday that it was clear "we need to invest significantly more in the security of our country, in order to protect our freedom and our democracy."

Germany had come under criticism for not investing adequately in its defense budget and not doing enough to respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

On Saturday evening, the German government announced it would be sending weapons and other supplies directly to Ukraine to help troops against invading Russia forces.

BRUSSELS — European Union interior ministers are gathering Sunday for emergency talks on how to cope with an influx of refugees from conflict-hit Ukraine as tens of thousands of people flee across the border into Poland, Hungary, Romania and elsewhere.

The U.N. refugee agency, the UNHCR, estimates that more than 200,000 people displaced by the fighting in Ukraine have fled the country, and that up to four million could flee if the fighting spreads. Poland said Saturday that over 100,000 people had entered from Ukraine in the previous 48 hours alone.

At a meeting in Brussels, the ministers will look at ways to shelter people, how to manage the security challenges that the conflict poses to the EU's external borders, and what kind of humanitarian support can be provided to Ukraine.

Those arriving at the borders are mostly women, children and the elderly. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has banned the departure of men aged between 18 to 60 so they can take up arms against Russian forces.

BRUSSELS — Belgium is joining a growing list of countries closing their airspace to Russian airlines as the West ramps up pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin for ordering an invasion of Ukraine.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo tweeted Sunday that the country "has decided to close its airspace to all Russian airlines."

De Croo says that "our European skies are open skies. They're open for those who connect people, not for those who seek to brutally aggress."

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Russia said Saturday that it was closing its airspace to planes from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Slovenia after they banned Russian planes from their skies. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania, among several other countries, also have a ban in place.

LONDON — British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss says Russian President Vladimir Putin could use “the most unsavory means,” including banned chemical or biological weapons, to defeat Ukraine.

“I urge the Russians not to escalate this conflict but we do need to be prepared for Russia to seek to use even worse weapons,” Truss told Sky News.

She said the International Criminal Court is watching events in Ukraine, and that Putin and the Russian government would face “serious consequences” if it committed war crimes.

Britain has slapped sanctions on Russian banks, companies and oligarchs in response to the invasion, and agreed with the European Union and the U.S. to block some Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial messaging system.

Truss said tough sanctions will have an economic cost on Britain, including in higher energy costs. But she insisted it’s a price worth paying to stop Putin threatening more countries.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY — Russia’s President Vladimir Putin has temporarily lost his most senior official position in world sports.

The International Judo Federation on Sunday cited “the ongoing war conflict in Ukraine” for suspending Putin’s honorary president status.

The Russian president is a keen judoka and attended the sport at the 2012 London Olympics.

The judo federation is rare among Olympic sports bodies for using the word “war” to describe Russia’s invasion of Ukraine ordered by Putin since Thursday. Others have used phrases such as “escalation of conflict.”

A Kremlin-supporting oligarch and longtime friend of Putin, Arkady Rotenberg, remains on the IJF executive committee as development manager.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine’s president says that Russia should be thrown out of the United Nations Security Council following its invasion of his country.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a video message Sunday that the Russian invasion of Ukraine amounts to an act of genocide, saying that “Russia has taken the path of evil and the world should come to depriving it of its U.N. Security Council seat.”

Russia is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, giving it veto power over resolutions.

Zelenskyy said that Russian attacks on Ukrainian cities should be investigated by an international war crimes tribunal and denounced the Russian invasion as “state terrorism.”

He dismissed as lies Russia’s claims that it wasn’t targeting civilian areas.

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israel’s prime minister says the country is sending 100 tons of humanitarian aid to assist civilians caught up in the fighting in Ukraine.

Naftali Bennett told a meeting of his Cabinet Sunday that the aid includes medical equipment and medicine, tents, sleeping bags and blankets.

Bennett did not comment on a report by Israeli public broadcaster Kan which said that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy asked the Israeli leader to mediate talks on ending the crisis with Russia. Bennett’s office confirmed there had been a call but declined to comment on the report. The Ukrainian embassy could not immediately be reached for comment.

Bennett has treaded carefully in his public comments on Russia’s invasion. He has voiced support for Ukrainian civilians but has stopped short of condemning Russia. Israel relies on Russia for security coordination in Syria, where Russia has a military presence and where Israel frequently strikes hostile targets.

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LONDON — Britain's defense ministry says overnight fighting in Kyiv was less intense than the night before, but battles are raging in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv.

The U.K.'s Ministry of Defense has been posting intelligence updates on social media since Russia invaded. It said Sunday that "Ukrainian forces have engaged the remnants of Russian irregular forces within the city of Kyiv for the second night in a row, fighting has been at a lower intensity than the previous evening. "After encountering strong resistance in Chernihiv, Russian forces are bypassing the area in order to prioritise the encirclement and isolation of Kyiv," it said. "Intensive exchanges of rocket artillery overnight have been followed by heavy fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces in Kharkiv."

The ministry said Russian forces are continuing to advance into Ukraine from multiple axis but they are encountering stiff resistance from Ukrainian forces.

GENEVA — The United Nations' refugee agency says the latest count of Ukrainians arriving in neighboring countries now exceeds 200,000.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said on Twitter that the numbers of those fleeing invading Russian troops are constantly changing and another update would be issued later Sunday.

The agency's estimate on Saturday was that at least 150,000 have fled Ukraine into Poland and other countries including Hungary and Romania.

Poland's government said Saturday that more than 100,000 Ukrainians had crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border in the past 48 hours alone.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's president says his country is ready for peace talks with Russia but not in Belarus, which was a staging ground for Moscow's 3-day-old invasion.

Speaking in a video message Sunday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy named Warsaw, Bratislava, Istanbul, Budapest or Baku as alternative venues. He said other locations are also possible but made clear that Ukraine doesn't accept Russia's selection of Belarus.

The Kremlin said Sunday that a Russian delegation had arrived in the Belarusian city of Homel for talks with Ukrainian officials. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the delegation includes military officials and diplomats.

"The Russian delegation is ready for talks, and we are now waiting for the Ukrainians," Peskov said.

Russia invaded Ukraine on Thursday, with troops moving from Moscow's ally Belarus in the north, and also from the east and south.

MOSCOW — The Kremlin says a Russian delegation has arrived in the Belarusian city of Homel for talks with Ukrainian officials.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the delegation includes military officials and diplomats. "The Russian delegation is ready for talks, and we are now waiting for the Ukrainians," Peskov said.

There was no immediate comment from Ukrainian officials, who previously expressed their own readiness for peace talks with Russia but haven't mentioned any specific details on their location and timing.

Russia invaded Ukraine on Thursday, and its troops are closing in on the capital, Kyiv, and making significant gains along the country's coast.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian authorities say Russian troops have entered Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv and fighting is underway in the streets.

Oleh Sinehubov, the head of the Kharkiv regional administration, said Sunday that Ukrainian forces were fighting Russian troops in the city and asked civilians not to leave their homes.

Russian troops approached Kharkiv, which is located about 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) south of the border with Russia, shortly after Moscow launched its invasion of Ukraine on Thursday. But until Sunday, they remained on its outskirts without trying to enter the city while other forces rolled past, pressing their offensive deeper into Ukraine.

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Videos on Ukrainian media and social networks showed Russian vehicles moving across Kharkiv and a light vehicle burning on the street.

TEL AVIV, Israel — An organization that facilitates Jewish immigration to Israel says it is ramping up its efforts along Ukrainian border crossings to absorb what it expects to be a wave of new immigrants fleeing the Russian invasion.

The Jewish Agency for Israel said late Saturday it plans to open six processing facilities along Ukraine's borders with Poland, Moldova, Romania and Hungary. The organization said in a statement it also plans to assist Ukrainian Jews with temporary housing in bordering countries until they can leave to Israel.

The agency said it assisted a group of new immigrants to cross into Poland on Saturday where they are awaiting a flight to Israel.

Israel's Foreign Ministry estimates there are at least 120,000 Jews in Ukraine. Israel also has a sizeable population of Ukrainian emigres.

LOS ANGELES — Elon Musk says his SpaceX company's Starlink satellite internet service is now "active" in Ukraine.

The tech billionaire made the announcement on Twitter in response to a tweet by Ukraine's minister of digital transformation saying that while Musk tries to "colonize Mars," Russia is trying to occupy Ukraine. The minister called on Musk to provide his country with Starlink stations.

In his response Saturday, Musk said: "Starlink service is now active in Ukraine. More terminals en route."

Starlink is a satellite-based internet system that SpaceX has been building for years to bring internet access to underserved areas of the world. It markets itself as "ideally suited" for areas where internet service is unreliable or unavailable.

UNITED NATIONS -- The International Committee of the Red Cross says it is aware of requests by Ukraine's U.N. ambassador and others to repatriate the bodies of Russian soldiers killed in action in Ukraine but has no numbers.

Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya tweeted Saturday that Ukraine has appealed to the ICRC "to facilitate repatriation of thousands of bodies of Russian soldiers" killed during its invasion of Ukraine. An accompanying chart claimed 3,500 Russian troops have been killed.

Kyslytsya tweeted that parents in Russia should have a chance "to bury them with dignity." "Don't let (Russian President Vladimir) Putin hide scale of tragedy," he urged.

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian president's office said Russian forces blew up a gas pipeline in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city.

The State Service of Special Communication and Information Protection warned that the explosion, which it said looked like a mushroom cloud, could cause an "environmental catastrophe" and advised residents to cover their windows with damp cloth or gauze and to drink plenty of fluids.

Ukraine's top prosecutor, Iryna Venediktova, said the Russian forces have been unable to take Kharkiv, where a fierce battle is underway.

The city of 1.5 million is located 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the Russian border.

GENEVA — The United Nations says it has confirmed at least 240 civilian casualties, including at least 64 people killed, in the fighting in Ukraine that erupted since Russia's invasion on Thursday — though it believed the "real figures are considerably higher" because many reports of casualties remain to be confirmed.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs relayed the count late Saturday from the U.N. human rights office, which has strict methodologies and verification procedures about the toll from conflict.

OCHA also said damage to civilian infrastructure has deprived hundreds of thousands of people of access to electricity or water, and produced a map of "humanitarian situations" in Ukraine — mostly in northern,

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eastern and southern Ukraine.

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron has asked his Belarus counterpart to demand that the country, Ukraine's neighbor, quickly order Russian troops to leave.

In a phone conversation Saturday, Macron denounced "the gravity of a decision that would authorize Russia to deploy nuclear arms on Belarus soil," a statement by the presidential palace said.

Macron told Alexander Lukashenko that fraternity between the people of Belarus and Ukraine should lead Belarus to "refuse to be a vassal and an accomplice to Russia in the war against Ukraine," the statement said.

Belarus was one of several axes used by Russia to launch attacks on Ukraine, with Belarus the point to move toward the capital Kyiv, a senior U.S. defense official has said.

MOSCOW -- Russia is closing its airspace to planes from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Slovenia, a move that comes as Moscow's ties with the West plunge to new lows over its invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's state aviation agency, Rosaviatsiya, announced early Sunday that the measure was taken in retaliation for the four nations closing their airspace for Russian planes.

On Saturday, the agency also reported closing the Russian airspace for planes from Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and the Czech Republic in response to them doing the same.

WASHINGTON — The U.S., European Union, and United Kingdom on Saturday agreed to block "selected" Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial messaging system and to impose "restrictive measures" on its central bank in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine.

The measures were announced jointly as part of a new round of financial sanctions meant to impose a severe cost on Russia for the invasion.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she would push the bloc also to "paralyze the assets of Russia's Central bank" so that its transactions would be frozen.

Cutting several commercial banks from SWIFT "will ensure that these banks are disconnected from the international financial system and harm their ability to operate globally," she said.

As a third measure, she said the EU would "commit to taking measures to limit the sale of citizenship—so called golden passports—that let wealthy Russians connected to the Russian government become citizens of our countries and gain access to our financial systems."

COPENHAGEN— Danish newspaper Ekstra Bladet says two freelancers working for the paper were injured when the car they were traveling in was hit by gunfire near the village of Ohtyrka in eastern Ukraine.

The reporter and photographer were taken to a local hospital, Ekstra Bladet said, adding their injuries were not life-threatening. The paper was working with a security firm to have the two journalists evacuated.

Germany commits 100 billion euros to new armed forces fund

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Sunday that Germany is committing 100 billion euros to a special fund for its armed forces, raising its defense spending above 2 percent of GDP.

"It's clear we need to invest significantly more in the security of our country, in order to protect our freedom and our democracy," Scholz told a special session of the Bundestag in Berlin Sunday morning.

The move is a significant one for Germany, which has come under criticism from the United States and other NATO allies for not investing adequately in its defense budget.

Scholz's announcement, which came during a special session of Germany's Bundestag Sunday morning, was the latest in a series of major shifts in German defense and security policy this weekend in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

On Saturday evening, the German government announced it would be sending weapons and other supplies directly to Ukraine, which is fighting to keep Russia from invading its capital city.

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Kamateros lifts South Dakota past Oral Roberts 92-87

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Tasos Kamateros had 23 points as South Dakota edged Oral Roberts 92-87 on Saturday night.

Erik Oliver had 13 points for the Coyotes (18-11, 11-7 Summit League). Kruz Perrott-Hunt and Mason Archambault added 12 points apiece. Perrott-Hunt had eight rebounds.

Elijah Lufile had 15 points and 12 rebounds to pace the Golden Eagles (18-11, 12-6). Francis Lacin had 15 points and Issac McBride scored 14.

The Coyotes tied the season series against the Golden Eagles. Oral Roberts defeated South Dakota 82-73 on Dec. 20.

Scheierman leads S. Dakota St. over Kansas City 86-75

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Baylor Scheierman had 25 points as South Dakota State stretched its winning streak to 18 games, getting past Kansas City 86-75 on Saturday night.

Douglas Wilson had 17 points and seven rebounds for South Dakota State (27-4, 18-0 Summit League). Charlie Easley added 14 points. Zeke Mayo had 12 points.

Josiah Allick tied a season high with 21 points and had seven rebounds for the Roos (19-11, 12-6). Evan Gilyard II added 18 points. Arkel Lamar had 17 points.

The Jackrabbits improve to 2-0 against the Roos for the season. South Dakota State defeated Kansas City 89-57 on Dec. 20.

Russians enter Ukraine's 2nd-largest city, advance on ports

By YURAS KARMANAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Street fighting broke out in Ukraine's second-largest city and Russian troops squeezed strategic ports in the country's south Sunday, advances that appeared to mark a new phase of Russia's invasion following a wave of attacks on airfields and fuel facilities elsewhere in the country.

Following its gains on the ground, Russia sent a delegation to Belarus for peace talks with Ukraine, according to the Kremlin. Ukraine's president suggested other locations, saying his country was unwilling to meet in Belarus because it served as a staging ground for the invasion.

Until Sunday, Russia's troops had remained on the outskirts of Kharkiv, a city of 1.4 million about 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) south of the border with Russia, while other forces rolled past to press the offensive deeper into Ukraine and Ukrainian fighters put up determined resistance.

Videos posted on Ukrainian media and social networks showed Russian vehicles moving across Kharkiv and Russian troops roaming the city in small groups. One video showed Ukrainian soldiers inspecting Russian light utility vehicles damaged by shelling and abandoned by Russian troops on a street.

"We are fighting, fighting for our country, fighting for our freedom because we have the right to do that," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said. "The past night was tough — more shelling, more bombing of residential areas and civilian infrastructure. There is not a single facility in the country that the occupiers wouldn't consider as admissible targets."

Huge explosions lit up the sky early Sunday near the capital, Kyiv, where terrified residents hunkered down in homes, underground garages and subway stations in anticipation of a full-scale Russian assault.

But Ukrainians also volunteered en masse to help defend Kyiv and other cities, taking guns distributed by authorities and preparing firebombs to fight Russian forces.

Zelenskyy denounced Russia's offensive as "state terrorism." He said the attacks on Ukrainian cities should be investigated by an international war crimes tribunal and cost Russia its place as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

"Russia has taken the path of evil, and the world should come to depriving it of its U.N. Security Council seat," he said.

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Officials maintained a 39-hour curfew to keep people off the capital's streets until Monday morning, complicating the task of assessing the intensity of the fighting. Zelenskyy's office said explosions were reported at Kyiv International Airport.

Flames billowed from an oil depot near an airbase in Vasylykiv, a city 37 kilometers (23 miles) south of Kyiv where there has been intense fighting, according to the mayor. Russian forces blew up a gas pipeline to the east in Kharkiv, prompting the government to warn people to cover their windows with damp cloth or gauze as protection from smoke, the president's office said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin hasn't disclosed his ultimate plans, but Western officials believe he is determined to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own, redrawing the map of Europe and reviving Moscow's Cold War-era influence.

The pressure on strategic ports in the south of Ukraine appeared aimed at seizing control of Ukraine's coastline stretching from the border with Romania in the west to the border with Russia in the east. A Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, said Russian forces had blocked the cities of Kherson on the Black Sea and the port of Berdyansk on the Azov Sea,

Cutting Ukraine's access to its sea ports that would deal a major blow to the country's economy. It also could allow Moscow to build a land corridor to Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014 and until now was connected to Russia by a 19-kilometer (12-mile) bridge, the longest bridge in Europe which opened in 2018.

Russia's military also put increasing pressure on strategic ports in the south of Ukraine, blocking the cities of Kherson on the Black Sea and the port of Berdyansk on the Azov Sea

He said the Russian forces also took control of an airbase near Kherson and the Azov Sea city of Henichesk Ukrainian authorities also have reported fighting near Odesa, Mykolaiv and other areas.

Ukraine's health minister reported Saturday that 198 people, including three children, had been killed and more than 1,000 others wounded during Europe's largest land conflict since World War II. It was unclear whether those figures included both military and civilian casualties.

The United Nations' refugee agency said late Saturday more than 200,000 Ukrainians have arrived in neighboring countries since the invasion started Thursday. The U.N. has estimated the conflict could produce as many as 4 million refugees, depending how long it continues.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said a Russian delegation of military officials and diplomats had arrived Sunday in the Belarusian city of Gomel for talks with Ukraine. Zelenskyy on Friday offered to negotiate a key Russian demand: abandoning ambitions of joining NATO.

"The Russian delegation is ready for talks and we are now waiting for the Ukrainians," Peskov said.

Ukraine's president said his country was ready for peace talks but not in Belarus given the Russian ally's role in the invasion.

"Warsaw, Bratislava, Budapest, Istanbul, Baku, we offered all of them to the Russian side and we will accept any other city in a country that hasn't been used for launching missiles," Zelenskyy said. "Only then the talks could be honest and put an end to the war."

Peskov claimed Ukraine had proposed holding talks in Gomel. He added that the Russian military action was going forward pending the talks start.

Zelenskyy's adviser Mykhailo Podolyak dismissed Moscow's offer as "manipulation," adding that "Russia keeps lying" and emphasizing that Ukraine hadn't agreed to talks in the Belarusian city.

As Russia pushes ahead with its offensive, the West is working to equip the outnumbered Ukrainian forces with weapons and ammunition while punishing Russia with far-reaching sanctions intended to further isolate Moscow.

The U.S. pledged an additional \$350 million in military assistance to Ukraine, including anti-tank weapons, body armor and small arms. Germany said it would send missiles and anti-tank weapons to the besieged country and that it would close its airspace to Russian planes.

The U.S., European Union and United Kingdom agreed to block "selected" Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial messaging system, which moves money around more than 11,000 banks and other financial institutions worldwide, part of a new round of sanctions aiming to impose a severe cost on Moscow for the invasion. They also agreed to impose "restrictive measures" on Russia's central bank.

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Responding to a request from Ukraine's minister of digital transformation, tech billionaire Elon Musk said on Twitter that his satellite-based internet system Starlink was now active in Ukraine and that there were "more terminals en route."

Putin sent troops into Ukraine after denying for weeks that he intended to do so, all the while building up a force of almost 200,000 troops along the countries' borders. He claims the West has failed to take seriously Russia's security concerns about NATO, the Western military alliance that Ukraine aspires to join. But he has also expressed scorn about Ukraine's right to exist as an independent state.

A senior U.S. defense official said Saturday that more than half of the Russian combat power amassed along Ukraine's borders had entered the country and Moscow has had to commit more fuel supply and other support units inside Ukraine than originally anticipated. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. assessments.

Russia claims its assault on Ukraine is aimed only at military targets, but bridges, schools and residential neighborhoods have been hit.

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.S., Oksana Markarova, said troops in Kyiv were fighting Russian "sabotage groups." Ukraine says some 200 Russian soldiers have been captured and thousands killed. Moscow has not provided casualty figures.

Markarova said Ukraine was gathering evidence of shelling of residential areas, kindergartens and hospitals to submit to an international war crimes court in The Hague as possible crimes against humanity. The International Criminal Court's prosecutor has said he is monitoring the conflict closely.

World judo body suspends Putin as its honorary president

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Vladimir Putin temporarily lost his most senior official position in world sports on Sunday.

The International Judo Federation cited "the ongoing war conflict in Ukraine" for suspending Putin's honorary president status.

The Russian president is a keen judoka and attended the sport at the 2012 London Olympics.

The IJF is rare among Olympic sports bodies for using the word "war" to describe Russia's invasion of Ukraine ordered by Putin on Thursday. Others have used phrases such as "escalation of conflict."

A Kremlin-supporting oligarch and longtime friend of Putin, Arkady Rotenberg, remains on the IJF executive committee as "development manager."

North Korea fires ballistic missile in resumption of testing

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea launched a ballistic missile into the sea on Sunday, its neighbors said, in a resumption of weapons tests that came as the United States and its allies are focused on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The missile launch was the eighth of its kind this year. Some experts have said North Korea is trying to perfect its weapons technology and pressure the United States into offering concessions like sanctions relief amid long-stalled disarmament talks. North Korea also might view the U.S. preoccupation with the Ukraine conflict as a chance to accelerate testing activity without any serious response from Washington.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said the North Korean missile flew about 300 kilometers (190 miles) at a maximum altitude of about 600 kilometers (370 miles) before landing off North Korea's eastern coast and outside Japan's exclusive economic zone. No damage to vessels or aircraft has been reported, he said.

"If North Korea deliberately carried out the missile launch while the international community is distracted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, such an act is absolutely unforgivable," he told reporters. "Whatever the motives are, North Korea's repeated missile launches are absolutely inexcusable and we cannot overlook considerable missile and nuclear advancement."

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South Korean officials said they detected the launch from the North's capital area and expressed "deep concerns and grave regret" over it.

During an emergency National Security Council meeting, top South Korean officials said the timing of the launch, during Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "is not desirable at all for peace and stability in the world and on the Korean Peninsula," the presidential Blue House said.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command later Sunday condemned the launch and called on North Korea to refrain from further destabilizing acts. A statement said the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea and Japan "remains ironclad," though Sunday's launch didn't pose an immediate threat to U.S. territory and that of its allies.

The launch came a day after North Korea made its first response to the Ukraine war in the form of an article by a government analyst that expressed support for Russia and slammed the United States.

"The basic cause of the Ukraine incident lies in the high-handedness and arbitrariness of the United States, which has ignored Russia's legitimate calls for security guarantees and only sought a global hegemony and military dominance while clinging to its sanctions campaigns," Ri Ji Song, a researcher at a North Korean state-run institute on international politics, said in a post published on the website of the Foreign Ministry.

Ri accused Washington of "arrogance" and "double standards" because it describes its rivals' defense measures as provocations or injustices.

The former Soviet Union was North Korea's biggest aid provider before its disintegration in the early 1990s. Russian President Vladimir Putin has been pushing to restore his country's ties with North Korea in what is seen as a bid to regain its traditional domains of influence and secure more allies to better deal with the United States.

Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said the Biden administration needs to show that it maintains a strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific region, including by responding sternly to Pyongyang's provocations.

"North Korea is not going to do anyone the favor of staying quiet while the world deals with Russia's aggression against Ukraine," Easley said. "Pyongyang has an ambitious schedule of military modernization. The Kim regime's strength and legitimacy have become tied to testing ever-better missiles."

North Korea last month conducted seven rounds of missile tests, a record number of monthly launches since leader Kim Jong Un took power in late 2011. North Korea halted testing activity after the start of the Winter Olympics in China, its last major ally and economic pipeline, earlier this month. Some experts had predicted it would resume launches and possibly test bigger weapons after the Games.

Kim sent a message to Chinese President Xi Jinping after the Olympics calling for further consolidating bilateral ties "into the invincible one" in the face of what he called "the undisguised hostile policy and military threat of the U.S. and its satellite forces."

Xi replied to Kim last week, saying China is ready to strengthen relations, according to North Korea's state media.

U.S.-led diplomacy aimed at convincing North Korea to give up its nuclear program in return for economic and political rewards collapsed in early 2019 when then-President Donald Trump rejected Kim's calls for extensive sanctions relief in exchange for limited denuclearization steps during their second summit in Vietnam.

U.S. officials have since repeatedly called for the resumption of talks without preconditions, but Pyongyang has said it won't return to the negotiating table unless Washington ends its hostility.

Sanctions vs. neutrality: Swiss fine-tune response to Russia

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Russia's invasion of Ukraine has put Switzerland's much-vaunted neutrality to the test — and along with it, the country's traditional role as international intermediary and reputation as a safe haven for the assets of Russia's richest and most powerful.

The Swiss executive branch stopped short of announcing unilateral sanctions against Russian interests

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after Moscow's blistering military action in Ukraine. Instead, the Federal Council opted to fall in line with the European Union and pledge that Russian individuals and companies hit with EU sanctions won't be able to evade them in Switzerland, which is not one of the EU's 27 member states.

The government said Friday that financial "intermediaries" in Switzerland were now banned from starting new business relationships with 363 Russian people and four Russian companies. Any existing business must be reported to the Swiss economic affairs secretariat. Further steps are under consideration.

While hardly a crackdown compared to other Western sanctions aimed at punishing Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine, the impact could be felt. The rich Alpine nation has been the biggest recipient of transactions by Russian private individuals — ahead of Britain, Spain, Luxembourg and the United States, according to a report compiled by the Swiss Embassy in Moscow.

"Switzerland has for years been by far the most important destination worldwide for rich Russians to manage their wealth," the report said, adding that net transfers of Russian taxpayers to Switzerland totaled \$2.5 billion in 2020. The Swiss news agency SDA-ATS reported net transfers of \$1.8 billion in the first half of 2021.

Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin, the head of the federal economic affairs department, noted that Switzerland was bound to follow U.N. sanctions but could decide whether to follow EU sanctions based on criteria such as foreign policy and legal aspects — including legislation that has enshrined "neutrality" into Swiss law.

Swiss authorities are in essence extending measures set up in 2014 after Russia's takeover of Crimea, in which they also sought to ensure that EU sanctions were not dodged in Switzerland, to hundreds more people and businesses — but going further.

"Switzerland is thus taking a tougher line with regard to Russia," Parmelin told reporters in Bern, the capital.

German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said Friday that "every country decides in a sovereign way about its actions ... If you were to ask me whether I'd be happy if Switzerland supported the (EU) sanctions, then I'd clearly say 'yes'."

However, Switzerland is also anxious to safeguard its role as diplomatic go-between for some countries — one of which is Russia. The Swiss government represents the interests of the former Soviet republic of Georgia in Moscow and Russia's interests in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, under an arrangement set up after those two countries broke off bilateral ties during their conflict in 2008.

"It's important to the Federal Council that implementing these measures doesn't cut off talks between Switzerland and the countries affected," said Parmelin. "Switzerland wants to be able to offer its services to the countries in conflict if these countries wish."

"If Switzerland were to automatically adopt the sanctions imposed by the EU or other countries, it could no longer credibly play the traditional role for which it is valued worldwide," he added.

The respected Swiss daily Tages Anzeiger reported Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy asked his Swiss counterpart on Saturday to act as a neutral mediator between Ukraine and Russia, and help work toward a cease-fire between the two countries, notably in the context of a Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva opening Monday. The Swiss Foreign Ministry did not confirm any such communication.

Geneva hosted a summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden in June, as well as a couple of bilateral meetings in recent weeks as tensions brewed over Ukraine. The Swiss relish their role and reputation as a skilled, neutral host for such international gatherings and as a hub for international organizations like the United Nations and the international Red Cross in Geneva.

The push-and-pull felt by the Swiss could grow. Some Western countries announced or were preparing individual sanctions against Putin and his foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, including possible travel bans. Switzerland is unlikely to go that far: Lavrov himself is expected to be on hand in Geneva on Tuesday for a session of the Human Rights Council.

Economic concerns — not just the political neutrality that is enshrined in Swiss law — could also figure into the Swiss calculations.

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Geneva is a major hub for commodities trading like oil and wheat that matter to Russia and Ukraine, and is reported to be a favored stomping ground for Russian oligarchs and other economic elites drawn to low-tax and privacy-minded banks and policies in Switzerland.

The June report by the Swiss Embassy in Moscow said roughly 80 percent of Russia's commodities trade goes through the Swiss financial services centers of Geneva, Zug, Lugano and Zurich. Major Russian energy and commodities firms have offices in Switzerland.

According to the Bank of International Settlements, Russian deposits in Swiss financial institutions totaled the equivalent of nearly \$11 billion at the end of the third quarter last year. That represented about 30 percent of the total Russian deposits overseas of nearly \$36 billion, according to BIS figures.

Ukraine invasion puts Russia's elite sports status at risk

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

Russia spent upwards of \$50 billion to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, then concocted the most elaborate doping scheme in history — all to cement its standing as a global sports superpower.

The country's invasion of Ukraine, coming on the heels of yet another drug scandal that consumed the Beijing Olympics earlier this month, could serve to undermine an athletic dynasty tarnished by cheating and deception, and often countered with only tepid pushback from international sports leaders.

If a further reckoning comes, it would damage Russia's ability to host events domestically and dominate them abroad. It would deliver a financial and a psychological blow. And it would compromise the image that President Vladimir Putin and leaders before him have tried to cultivate — one of a prosperous country fortified by strong athletes who beat their international opponents in the games people play.

Edwin Moses, the American gold-medal hurdler who had a key role in sorting through the Russian scandals, recalled trying to explain Moscow's point of view to anti-doping leaders.

"One thing I was always trying to get across to them was, 'You don't understand how important sports are to them,'" Moses said. "And I'd tell them, 'You don't understand how far they're willing to go to corrupt it.'"

In addition to widespread condemnation from Western governments, Russia's move into Ukraine was largely disparaged by major sports organizations, including the International Olympic Committee.

A number of federations, including skiing, curling and Formula 1, pulled premier events out of Russia. European soccer's governing body UEFA led the way when it relocated this spring's Champions League final from St. Petersburg to Paris. The International Biathlon Union banned Russia from its events. The largest conglomerate of them all, the IOC, condemned the invasion.

One economics professor estimated the financial loss of the Champions League final could be in the tens of millions of dollars, a fraction of what Russia might forfeit from all the relocated events. But, he said, money is a small part of what motivates Putin.

"He's in it for the prestige and power," said Victor A. Matheson of College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass.. "The real thing here is that this is a big blow to his ego. He loves being in charge of things."

Russia's power in the world sports community is most sharply defined by its relationship with the IOC. Even though Putin's country officially was banned from the Beijing Games, it fielded a team of more than 200 athletes competing as members of the "Russian Olympic Committee." They combined to win 32 medals, the second-biggest haul at the Games.

Every bit as notable was that Putin attended the opening ceremony with IOC leader Thomas Bach at Beijing's Bird's Nest stadium. It was a show of defiance: Putin was there, while the U.S. and some of its allies refused to send diplomats to protest China's human rights record. It also underscored how Putin was in good enough standing with the IOC to be present despite the ban.

"In Putin's mind right now, Russia will be at the Olympics again" three years from now in Paris, said Paul Massaro, a senior policy adviser to Congress who works on issues involving sports and international corruption. "But I'm not sure he totally appreciates what a paradigm shift he's created. I don't want to be eating these words, but I actually think Russia could be banned this time."

The Russian government has portrayed the doping investigations as politically driven by the West.

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The IOC's recent condemnation of Moscow over Ukraine focused on the breach of the "Olympic Truce," a U.N.-sanctioned call for world peace that remains in play until March 20, seven days after the close of the Paralympic Games in Beijing.

Despite the rhetoric, Bach would have to reverse years of precedent in his relatively soft treatment of Russia in the country's long-running doping scandals. What steps he takes to back up the IOC's most recent show of displeasure will shape Russia's role in world sports for the next decade or longer.

Potentially working against the country was the sordid doping case involving 15-year-old Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva that consumed the Beijing Games. She tested positive for using a banned heart medication, and the result wasn't announced by anti-doping officials until after she'd won gold as part of the team competition, even though the sample was taken weeks earlier.

That put Bach in the rare position of openly criticizing Russia, a move that, in turn, brought a rebuke from the Kremlin.

The Olympic movement, and international sports in general, have tolerated far worse from Russia, and before that, the Soviet Union. Moses told of traveling to the Soviet Union in the late 1980s — long before anti-doping rules had been globally codified — to try to work out a drug-fighting agreement with Soviets.

"Their reason for setting up a (anti-doping) lab was completely different from our reason," Moses said. "We tried to put a lid on doping. They tried to make sure they didn't get caught. It was the prestige of those athletes winning gold medals. They wanted it, and those athletes would become national heroes and treasures."

Before the IOC's next move, there will be other signals, besides relocating events, about how world sports deals with Russia.

Norwegian politician Linda Helleland, a former vice president at the World Anti-Doping Agency and long-time critic of Russia, said she will promote a policy at the Council of Europe that urges sports organizations to exclude Russian athletes from international competitions. Upcoming events include next month's world figure skating championships, World Cup soccer qualifying this spring and the world track and field championships in Oregon in July.

World Athletics is unique in that it has taken a tough stance in the Russian doping saga since 2015. Russia has been limited to only a handful of athletes at recent major championships, and that is not expected to change before summer.

"We now witness brutal actions in the Ukraine. We can't let Russia get away with it again with no consequences," Helleland said.

The biggest test, however, will be how the IOC responds to Russia's eligibility for the 2024 Summer Games in Paris.

Putin's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine both came directly after the close of the Winter Olympics, with Russia enjoying success on the playing field and a long gap before its next appearance on sports' biggest international stage.

"We've been giving him a free pass for over a decade, so why would Putin not think he could get away with this?" Massaro said. "Of course the Olympics are part of this. And here we are again, and this time, he's crossed the Rubicon in the most profound way."

___ AP Business Writer Mae Anderson contributed.

Russia hits Ukraine fuel supplies, airfields in new attacks

By YURAS KARMAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press
KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia unleashed a wave of attacks on Ukraine targeting airfields and fuel facilities in what appeared to be the next phase of an invasion that has been slowed by fierce resistance. The U.S. and EU responded with weapons and ammunition for the outnumbered Ukrainians and powerful sanctions intended to further isolate Moscow.

Huge explosions lit up the sky early Sunday south of the capital, Kyiv, where people hunkered down in homes, underground garages and subway stations in anticipation of a full-scale assault by Russian forces.

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Flames billowed into the sky before dawn from an oil depot near an air base in Vasylkiv, where there has been intense fighting, according to the town's mayor. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said another explosion was at the civilian Zhuliany airport.

Zelenskyy's office also said Russian forces blew up a gas pipeline in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, prompting the government to warn people to protect themselves from the smoke by covering their windows with damp cloth or gauze.

"We will fight for as long as needed to liberate our country," Zelenskyy vowed.

Terrified men, women and children sought safety inside and underground, and the government maintained a 39-hour curfew to keep people off the streets. More than 150,000 Ukrainians fled for Poland, Moldova and other neighboring countries, and the United Nations warned the number could grow to 4 million if fighting escalates.

President Vladimir Putin hasn't disclosed his ultimate plans, but Western officials believe he is determined to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own, redrawing the map of Europe and reviving Moscow's Cold War-era influence.

To aid Ukraine's ability to hold out, the U.S. pledged an additional \$350 million in military assistance to Ukraine, including anti-tank weapons, body armor and small arms. Germany said it would send missiles and anti-tank weapons to the besieged country and that it would close its airspace to Russian planes.

The U.S., European Union and United Kingdom agreed to block "selected" Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial messaging system, which moves money around more than 11,000 banks and other financial institutions worldwide, part of a new round of sanctions aiming to impose a severe cost on Moscow for the invasion. They also agreed to impose "restrictive measures" on Russia's central bank.

It was unclear how much territory Russian forces had seized or to what extent their advance had been stalled. Britain's Ministry of Defense said "the speed of the Russian advance has temporarily slowed likely as a result of acute logistical difficulties and strong Ukrainian resistance."

A senior U.S. defense official said more than half the Russian combat power that was massed along Ukraine's borders had entered the country and Moscow has had to commit more fuel supply and other support units inside Ukraine than originally anticipated. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. assessments.

The curfew forcing everyone in Kyiv inside was set to last through Monday morning. The relative quiet of the capital was sporadically broken by gunfire.

Fighting on the city's outskirts suggested that small Russian units were trying to clear a path for the main forces. Small groups of Russian troops were reported inside Kyiv, but Britain and the U.S. said the bulk of the forces were 19 miles (30 kilometers) from the city's center as of Saturday afternoon.

Russia claims its assault on Ukraine from the north, east and south is aimed only at military targets, but bridges, schools and residential neighborhoods have been hit.

Ukraine's health minister reported Saturday that 198 people, including three children, had been killed and more than 1,000 others wounded during Europe's largest land war since World War II. It was unclear whether those figures included both military and civilian casualties.

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

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.S., Oksana Markarova, said troops in Kyiv were fighting Russian "sabotage groups." Ukraine says some 200 Russian soldiers have been captured and thousands killed.

Markarova said Ukraine was gathering evidence of shelling of residential areas, kindergartens and hospitals to submit to The Hague as possible crimes against humanity.

Zelenskyy reiterated his openness to talks with Russia in a video message, saying he welcomed an offer from Turkey and Azerbaijan to organize diplomatic efforts, which so far have faltered.

The Kremlin confirmed a phone call between Putin and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev but gave no hint of restarting talks. A day earlier, Zelenskyy offered to negotiate a key Russian demand: abandoning ambitions of joining NATO.

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Putin sent troops into Ukraine after denying for weeks that he intended to do so, all the while building up a force of almost 200,000 troops along the countries' borders. He claims the West has failed to take seriously Russia's security concerns about NATO, the Western military alliance that Ukraine aspires to join. But he has also expressed scorn about Ukraine's right to exist as an independent state.

The effort was already coming at great cost to Ukraine, and apparently to Russian forces as well.

Ukrainian artillery fire destroyed a Russian train delivering diesel to troops heading toward Kyiv from the east, said Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to the interior minister.

The country's Infrastructure Ministry said a Russian missile was shot down early Saturday as it headed for the dam of the sprawling reservoir that serves Kyiv. The government also said a Russian convoy was destroyed. Video images showed soldiers inspecting burned-out vehicles after Ukraine's 101st brigade reported destroying a column of two light vehicles, two trucks and a tank. The claim could not be verified.

Highways into Kyiv from the east were dotted with checkpoints manned by Ukrainian troops and young men in civilian clothes carrying automatic rifles. Low-flying planes patrolled the skies, though it was unclear if they were Russian or Ukrainian.

In addition to Kyiv, the Russian assault appeared to focus on Ukraine's economically vital coastal areas, from near the Black Sea port of Odesa in the west to beyond the Azov Sea port of Mariupol in the east.

Ukrainian soldiers in Mariupol guarded bridges and blocked people from the shoreline amid concerns the Russian navy could launch an assault from the sea.

"I don't care anymore who wins and who doesn't," said Ruzanna Zubenko, whose large family was forced from their home outside Mariupol after it was badly damaged by shelling. "The only important thing is for our children to be able to grow up smiling and not crying."

Fighting also raged in two eastern territories controlled by pro-Russia separatists. Authorities in Donetsk said hot water supplies to the city of about 900,000 were suspended because of damage to the system by Ukrainian shelling.

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. Zelenskyy issued a defiant video recorded on a downtown street, saying he remained in the city.

"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."

Hungary and Poland both opened their borders to Ukrainians.

Refugees arriving in the Hungarian border town of Zahony said men between the ages of 18 and 60 were not being allowed to leave Ukraine.

"My son was not allowed to come. My heart is so sore, I'm shaking," said Vilma Sugar, 68.

At Poland's Medyka crossing, some said they had walked for 15 miles (35 kilometers) to reach the border.

"They didn't have food, no tea, they were standing in the middle of a field, on the road, kids were freezing," Iryna Wiklenko said as she waited on the Polish side for her grandchildren and daughter-in-law to make it across.

Officials in Kyiv urged residents to stay away from windows to avoid debris or bullets.

Shelves were sparsely stocked at grocery stores and pharmacies, and people worried how long food and medicine supplies might last.

The U.S. and its allies have beefed up forces on NATO's eastern flank but so far have ruled out deploying troops to fight Russia. Instead, the U.S., the European Union and other countries have slapped wide-ranging sanctions on Russia, freezing the assets of businesses and individuals including Putin and his foreign minister.

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

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

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Live updates: ICRC asked to repatriate bodies of soldiers

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest on the Russia's invasion of Ukraine:

UNITED NATIONS -- The International Committee of the Red Cross says it is aware of requests by Ukraine's U.N. ambassador and others to repatriate the bodies of Russian soldiers killed in action in Ukraine but has no numbers.

Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya tweeted Saturday that Ukraine has appealed to the ICRC "to facilitate repatriation of thousands of bodies of Russian soldiers" killed during its invasion of Ukraine. An accompanying chart claimed 3,500 Russian troops have been killed.

Kyslytsya tweeted that parents in Russia should have a chance "to bury them with dignity." "Don't let (Russian President Vladimir) Putin hide scale of tragedy," he urged.

Laetitia Courtois, ICRC's permanent observer to the United Nations told The Associated Press Saturday night that the current security situation "is a primary concern and a limitation for our teams on the ground" and "we therefore cannot confirm numbers or other details."

She said "the ICRC can act as a neutral intermediary" on the return of bodies and other humanitarian issues in conflict, including clarifying the fate of missing persons, reuniting families, and advocating for the protection of detainees "within its possibilities."

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian president's office said Russian forces blew up a gas pipeline in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city.

The State Service of Special Communication and Information Protection warned that the explosion, which it said looked like a mushroom cloud, could cause an "environmental catastrophe" and advised residents to cover their windows with damp cloth or gauze and to drink plenty of fluids.

Ukraine's top prosecutor, Iryna Venediktova, said the Russian forces have been unable to take Kharkiv, where a fierce battle is underway.

The city of 1.5 million is located 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the Russian border.

GENEVA — The United Nations says it has confirmed at least 240 civilian casualties, including at least 64 people killed, in the fighting in Ukraine that erupted since Russia's invasion on Thursday — though it believed the "real figures are considerably higher" because many reports of casualties remain to be confirmed.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs relayed the count late Saturday from the U.N. human rights office, which has strict methodologies and verification procedures about the toll from conflict.

OCHA also said damage to civilian infrastructure has deprived hundreds of thousands of people of access to electricity or water, and produced a map of "humanitarian situations" in Ukraine — mostly in northern, eastern and southern Ukraine.

The human rights office had reported early Friday an initial count by its staffers of at least 127 civilian casualties — 25 people killed and 102 injured — mostly from shelling and airstrikes.

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron has asked his Belarus counterpart to demand that the country, Ukraine's neighbor, quickly order Russian troops to leave.

In a phone conversation Saturday, Macron denounced "the gravity of a decision that would authorize Russia to deploy nuclear arms on Belarus soil," a statement by the presidential palace said.

Macron told Alexander Lukashenko that fraternity between the people of Belarus and Ukraine should lead Belarus to "refuse to be a vassal and an accomplice to Russia in the war against Ukraine," the statement said.

Belarus was one of several axes used by Russia to launch attacks on Ukraine, with Belarus the point to move toward the capital Kyiv, a senior U.S. defense official has said.

Macron has pushed persistently to try to claw out a ceasefire amid the war, using the telephone to talk to all sides, diplomacy and sanctions by the European Union.

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MOSCOW -- Russia is closing its airspace to planes from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Slovenia, a move that comes as Moscow's ties with the West plunge to new lows over its invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's state aviation agency, Rosaviatsiya, announced early Sunday that the measure was taken in retaliation for the four nations closing their airspace for Russian planes.

On Saturday, the agency also reported closing the Russian airspace for planes from Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and the Czech Republic in response to them doing the same.

WASHINGTON — The U.S., European Union, and United Kingdom on Saturday agreed to block "selected" Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial messaging system and to impose "restrictive measures" on its central bank in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine.

The measures were announced jointly as part of a new round of financial sanctions meant to impose a severe cost on Russia for the invasion.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she would push the bloc also to "paralyze the assets of Russia's Central bank" so that its transactions would be frozen.

Cutting several commercial banks from SWIFT "will ensure that these banks are disconnected from the international financial system and harm their ability to operate globally," she said.

As a third measure, she said the EU would "commit to taking measures to limit the sale of citizenship—so called golden passports—that let wealthy Russians connected to the Russian government become citizens of our countries and gain access to our financial systems."

COPENHAGEN— Danish newspaper Ekstra Bladet says two freelancers working for the paper were injured when the car they were traveling in was hit by gunfire near the village of Ohtyrka in eastern Ukraine.

The reporter and photographer were taken to a local hospital, Ekstra Bladet said, adding their injuries were not life-threatening. The paper was working with a security firm to have the two journalists evacuated.

BERLIN — Germany officials said Saturday that the country is preparing to close its airspace to Russian planes.

Transport Minister Volker Wissing backs such a measure and has ordered all preparations for this to be undertaken, his ministry said on Twitter.

Hours earlier, a German-registered DHL cargo plane made a sharp turn back out of Russian airspace, according to air traffic monitoring website FlightAware.com.

GENEVA — A respected Swiss newspaper is reporting that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy asked his Swiss counterpart on Saturday to act as a neutral mediator between Ukraine and Russia, and help work toward a ceasefire between the two countries.

Daily Tages Anzeiger said the request of Swiss President Ignazio Cassis came in the context of the upcoming Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva starting on Monday, at which Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is scheduled to attend on Tuesday.

The report, which was not immediately confirmed by the Swiss Foreign Ministry that Cassis also leads, cited Swiss experience with such issues — notably a mediation effort carried out by Switzerland after Russian forces seized control of Crimea in 2014.

Ministry spokesman Andreas Heller told The Associated Press late Saturday that he could not immediately confirm whether any such communication had taken place between the two presidents, but said Switzerland was ready to offer its "good offices" for any such initiative.

MOSCOW — More and more Russians spoke out Saturday against the invasion of Ukraine, even as their government's official rhetoric grew increasingly harsher.

Street protests, albeit small, resumed in the Russian capital of Moscow, the second-largest city of St. Petersburg and other Russian cities for the third straight day, with people taking to the streets despite mass

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detentions on Thursday and Friday. According to OVD-Info, rights group that tracks political arrests, at least 460 people in 34 cities were detained over anti-war protests on Saturday, including over 200 in Moscow.

Open letters condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine kept pouring, too. More than 6,000 medical workers put their names under one on Saturday; over 3,400 architects and engineers endorsed another while 500 teachers signed a third one. Similar letters by journalists, municipal council members, cultural figures and other professional groups have been making the rounds since Thursday.

A prominent contemporary art museum in Moscow called Garage announced Saturday it was halting its work on exhibitions and postponing them "until the human and political tragedy that is unfolding in Ukraine has ceased."

UNITED NATIONS -- The U.N. Security Council will meet Sunday afternoon to hold a procedural vote on a request by Ukraine for an emergency session of the 193-member General Assembly in light of Russia's invasion of its country.

There are no vetoes on a procedural vote in the council, unlike on resolutions. A procedural vote requires approval from nine of the 15 council members.

Council diplomats said approval is virtually certain, and the emergency meeting of the General Assembly is expected to be held on Monday.

Ukraine's U.N. Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya tweeted Thursday that he asked General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid to prepare for an emergency meeting in the coming days.

He said the meeting should be held under the so-called "Uniting for Peace" resolution, initiated by the United States and adopted in November 1950 to circumvent vetoes by the Soviet Union during the 1950-53 Korean War.

The resolution gives the General Assembly the power to call emergency meetings to consider matters of international peace and security when the Security Council is unable to act because of the lack of unanimity among its five veto-wielding permanent members -- the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France.

Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution Friday demanding that Moscow immediately stop its attack on Ukraine and withdraw all troops.

BRUSSELS — The European Union's top diplomat says he's calling an urgent meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers on Sunday to weigh yet more measures against Russia as it wages its military campaign in Ukraine.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted Saturday that "I am convening a virtual meeting of EU foreign ministers tomorrow at 18.00 (Central European Time, 1700 GMT) to adopt further measures in support of Ukraine, against aggression by Russia."

Borrell says he will propose to the ministers that they endorse "a package of emergency assistance for the Ukrainian armed forces, to support them in their heroic fight."

It will be third time the ministers have met in a week. Previously they have endorsed two packages of sanctions; one raft targeting Russians involved in the recognition of two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine, and another hitting Russia's economy, and freezing the assets of the president and foreign minister.

BERLIN — Russia's space agency said Saturday that it is suspending cooperation with its European partners in response to EU sanctions.

In a Twitter post, Roscosmos said it would withdraw its personnel from the European space port in Kourou, French Guiana.

Several European satellites have been launched with Soyuz rockets from Kourou, and more were scheduled over the coming year.

Thierry Breton, a senior EU official who oversees the 27-nation bloc's space policy, said Roscosmos' decision would have "no consequence on the continuity and quality" of its flagship Galileo global positioning system or the Copernicus program of Earth observation satellites.

Breton said the EU would strive to develop the Ariane 6 and VegaC launchers "to ensure Europe's strategic autonomy."

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BERLIN — In a significant shift, the German government said Saturday it will send weapons and other supplies directly to Ukraine and supports some restrictions of the SWIFT global banking system for Russia.

Germany's chancellery announced it will send 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 "Stinger" surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine "as quickly as possible."

"The Russian invasion of Ukraine marks a turning point. It threatens our entire post-war order," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in a statement. "In this situation, it is our duty to help Ukraine, to the best of our ability, to defend itself against Vladimir Putin's invading army."

In addition, the German economy and climate ministry said Germany is allowing the Netherlands to ship 400 German-made anti-tank weapons to Ukraine.

Germany had long stuck to a policy of not exporting deadly weapons to conflict zones, including Ukraine. As recently as Friday, government officials said they would abide by that policy.

The country has faced criticism from Ukrainian officials and other allies that it has not acted decisively enough to help Ukraine fend off the Russian invasion. Previously, Germany contributed 5,000 helmets to Ukraine's defense.

In addition, Germany will send 14 armored vehicles and up to 10,000 tons of fuel to Ukraine.

ROME — The Ukrainian Embassy to the Holy See says Pope Francis spoke by phone on Saturday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The embassy tweeted that "the Holy Father expressed his deepest pain for the tragic events that are taking place in our country."

Zelenskyy tweeted that he thanked the pontiff for "praying for peace in Ukraine and a ceasefire. The Ukrainian people feel the spiritual support of His Holiness."

The pope, who has repeatedly called war folly, has designated March 2, Ash Wednesday, as a day of fasting and prayer for peace.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says he's open for talks with Russia.

Zelenskyy said in a video message Saturday that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Azerbaijan's President İlham Aliyev offered to help organize such talks. He added that "we can only welcome that."

Zelenskyy also said he and Erdogan "agree that a ban on the passage of Russian warships into the Black Sea is very important today," adding that "it has been done." Turkey, however, hasn't announced any ban for Russian warships to move through Turkish Straits following Erdogan's talk with Zelenskyy.

Zelenskyy also said the Ukrainian diplomats have succeeded in persuading the country's European allies to cut Ukraine's allies to cut Russia off SWIFT international payment system, saying it would cost Russia billions of dollars in what he said is a "concrete price for its treacherous invasion of Ukraine."

The U.S. and the European Union officials said kicking Russia out of SWIFT is possible as part of a next round of sanctions, but no such move has been announced yet.

Zelenskyy said that "Ukrainians' readiness to protect our state, our solidarity and courage have thwarted the scenario of occupation of our country."

"The world has seen that Ukrainians are strong, Ukrainians are brave, Ukrainians stand on their land and will not surrender it," he said.

WASHINGTON — The U.S. is weighing sanctioning the Russian Central Bank, a move aimed at targeting more than \$600 billion in reserves that the Kremlin has at its disposal, according to two administration officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The White House hasn't made a final decision on the move, the officials said. The step could cause broad economic impact to the Russian economy, but also have reverberations in the broader global economy.

The White House declined to comment on the report.

___ Matt Lee

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NEW YORK — U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a phone call Saturday that the United Nations is determined to step up humanitarian assistance to the Ukrainian people.

He said he will launch an appeal Tuesday to fund U.N. humanitarian operations in the conflict-wracked country, the U.N. spokesman said.

LITHUANIA — The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have decided to close their airspace to Russian airlines, transport officials in the three countries say.

The legal formulation for the measure is underway and it wasn't immediately clear when precisely the ban would take effect.

Lithuanian Transport Marius Skuodis told media outlets that the goal of the Baltic countries is to issue the ban at the same time.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas tweeted on Saturday that Western nations should isolate Russia both economically and politically after its invasion on Ukraine, saying "there is no place for planes of the aggressor state in democratic skies."

Latvian Transport Minister Talis Linkaits told local news agency LETA that the country's decision to close its airspace to Russian airlines will be made in coordination with Estonia, Lithuania and the EU.

KYIV, Ukraine — The authorities in the Ukrainian capital say a curfew in the city will last through early Monday as Russian troops are pressing the offensive into Kyiv.

The city authorities previously announced the curfew to last from 5 pm to 8 am, but then clarified the order and specified that it will last from Friday afternoon until Monday's morning to keep people indoors through the day Sunday.

The measure comes as the Ukrainian authorities reported fighting with small groups of Russian troops that infiltrated the city. More Russian troops are closing in on Kyiv.

Some grocery stores were open until the curfew went into effect. The array of goods was thin. The concern for now is how long stockpiles will last. Some pharmacies were similarly open, but there were reports that new shipments from distributors had halted.

In addition, the Interfax news agency reported that Ukraine's three major cellphone service providers have blocked access for Russian SIM cards.

MEDYKA, POLAND — Lines of vehicles miles long are clogging border crossings out of Ukraine, as tens of thousands rush to neighboring countries to escape danger from invading Russian troops.

Nearly 120,000 people have so far fled Ukraine into Poland and other neighboring countries in the wake of Russian invasion, the U.N. refugee agency said Saturday. The largest numbers were arriving in Poland, where 2 million Ukrainians have already settled to work in recent years. Poland's government said Saturday that more than 100,000 Ukrainians had crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border in the past 48 hours alone.

One family from Chernivtsi in western Ukraine waited 20 hours before being able to cross the border into Siret in northern Romania.

At the border town of Medyka, the line of vehicles waiting to enter Poland stretched many miles into Ukraine.

WARSAW, Poland — Poland's President Andrzej Duda says the European Union should grant Ukraine the group's membership in an express way.

Duda said on Twitter that Poland is for immediately granting Ukraine the status of a candidate to the 27-member EU. Duda added that Ukraine should have access to EU funds, to help it rebuild from damage caused by Russia's armed invasion. "Ukraine deserves that," Duda tweeted.

In Rome, the Ukrainian ambassador to Rome backed that sentiment, insisting that "Ukraine earned and

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has the right to be a member of the European Union.”

Ambassador Yaroslav Melnyk said Saturday on Italian state TV that “the destiny of Ukraine is the destiny of Europe” and that “when bombs fall in Ukraine that means bombs fall in Europe.”

BUDAPEST — For the second time in three days, several thousand protesters gathered Saturday in Hungary’s capital to demonstrate against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and to urge world leaders to apply sanctions on Moscow.

The protest, organized by Budapest’s Ukrainian community, was attended by Hungarians, Ukrainians, Russians and others and filled one of the city’s main avenues in front of the Russian Embassy.

Dasha Ivashuk, who fled Ukraine into Hungary on Friday night, said she attended the protest to call for an end to the violence.

“I’m here to say we just want to live in peace,” she said. “We don’t want to run from the bombs that are taking place all over Ukraine for the last several days.”

Thousands of people also gathered in Israeli city of Tel Aviv on Saturday evening, protesting the Russian invasion of Ukraine and expressing solidarity with its people.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A senior U.S. defense official says the United States estimates that more than 50% of Russian combat power arrayed along Ukraine’s borders has entered Ukraine. That is up from a U.S. estimate Friday that one-third of the Russian force had been committed to the fight.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. assessments, would not say how many Russian troops that amounts to inside Ukraine, but the U.S. had estimated the total Russian force arrayed near Ukraine at more than 150,000.

The official said advancing Russian forces were roughly 30 kilometers (19 miles) outside Kyiv as of Saturday, and that an unspecified number of Russian military “reconnaissance elements” had entered the capital.

Meanwhile, Britain’s Defense Ministry said Saturday that “the speed of the Russian advance has temporarily slowed likely as a result of acute logistical difficulties and strong Ukrainian resistance.”

“Russian forces are bypassing major Ukrainian population centres while leaving forces to encircle and isolate them,” the ministry said.

—By Robert Burns

BELGRADE, Serbia — Serbian peace activists have held a protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine following the Balkan nation’s decision not to join international sanctions against Moscow.

Serbia has criticized the attack on Ukraine but has remained a rare country in Europe that refused to impose sanctions against its traditional Slavic political ally Russia.

Holding a huge Ukrainian flag, the activists from Women in Black group held banners in Belgrade reading “Stop Putin!” and calling for peace. Ukrainians living in Serbia also joined the gathering.

Serbia is formally seeking European Union membership but the country’s populist authorities have fostered close ties with Russia and China.

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia — Slovenia and the Czech Republic have closed down their airspaces for Russian planes because of the invasion of Ukraine.

Slovenia’s government on Saturday said the ban relates to all aircraft registered in Russia and operators based in Russia and licensed by a competent Russian authority. The decision became effective immediately and will remain in force until needed, the government said.

Saturday’s decision was announced by Czech Transport Minister Martin Kupka a day after the Czech Republic banned all Russian airlines from using Czech airports.

“We’re stepping up our measures against the Russian aggression in Ukraine,” Kupka said.

ROME — Thousands of people have turned out in Milan to protest Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The march in Italy’s business capital appeared to be the largest of similar protests held Saturday in many

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Italian cities. In Milan, many participants held up a 20-by-10 meter (66-by-33 foot) rainbow-hued peace banner – with the enormous cloth sometimes covering their heads – to show opposition to the invasion.

In Rome, several hundred people rallied in a square in the city's historic center in a protest organized by Italian labor leaders.

BEREGSURANY, Hungary — Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has told a news conference that Hungary is accepting all citizens and legal residents of Ukraine, regardless of whether they are subject to military conscription into the Ukrainian armed forces.

"We're letting everyone in," Orban said in the border town of Beregsurany. "I've seen people who have no travel documents, but we're providing them too with travel documents. And we're also allowing in those who have arrived from third countries after the proper screening."

Several thousand refugees fleeing Ukraine have crossed into Hungary in recent days, entering through five border crossings along Hungary's 137-kilometer (85-mile) border with Ukraine.

The move is a significant shift, for Hungary under Orban has in recent years firmly opposed all forms of immigration.

Regarded as Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest ally in the European Union, Orban has pursued close economic and diplomatic ties with the Kremlin. But he said that Russia's invasion of Hungary's neighbor would likely cause changes in his relationship with Putin, and that Hungary was supporting all proposed sanctions against Moscow at the European level.

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.

PARIS — The captain of a Russian cargo ship intercepted early Saturday in the English Channel was formally advised that his vessel breaks European Union sanctions levied days ago for its invasion of Ukraine, France's finance ministry said.

Customs officials examined the Baltic Leader after it was escorted to the port of Boulogne-Sur-Mer before a written contravention was handed to the captain, a ministry statement said.

A spokesperson for the Maritime Prefecture, Veronique Magnin, said the seizure of the ship apparently was the first such action in the English Channel.

The vessel, which was carrying cars, is owned by PSB Lizing, which an official close to Public Affairs Minister Olivier Dussopt said is among Russian companies listed in the EU sanctions. He confirmed that PSB Lizing is a subsidiary of PSB, or Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company

The approximately 130-meter-(426.5 foot) ship was headed from Rouen, in Normandy, to Saint Petersburg, and was stopped near Honfleur,

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."

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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 "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.

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.

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.

Potent protest: Bars drop Russian vodka, promote Ukraine's

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Business Writer

Some bars and liquor stores think they've found a potent way to punish Russia for invading Ukraine: They're pulling Russian vodka off their shelves and promoting Ukrainian brands instead.

"I woke up yesterday morning, and I saw that Russia had invaded Ukraine. You wonder what you can do," said Bob Quay, owner of Bob's Bar in Grand Rapids, Michigan. "The U.S. obviously is putting on sanctions. I thought I would put on sanctions as well."

So he rid his shelves of the old Soviet brand Stolichnaya and started promoting Ukraine's Vektor. "We have a sign above it that says: Support Ukraine."

Quay announced the move on Facebook, and "it blew up. We've got people coming in who've never been in the bar before."

Stoli, owned by the Russian-born tycoon Yuri Shefler, is actually made in Latvia. On its website, Stoli Group says it "stands for peace in Europe and in solidarity with the Ukrainian people."

The Southern Spirits liquor store in Indian Land, South Carolina, is doing a booming business in the Ukrainian vodka Kozak after pulling Russian brands off its shelves.

"It's selling out a lot faster than we thought," said general manager Drew Podrebarac. "It's been awesome."

The Magic Mountain ski resort in Londonderry, Vermont, posted a video on Twitter showing an employee pouring Stolichnaya down the drain and saying: "Sorry, we don't serve Russian products here."

Governors entered the fray, too. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine directed the state's Commerce Department to cease the purchase and sale of Russian Standard, the only Russian vodka sold in Ohio (under the brand names Green Mark and Russian Standard). New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu signed an executive order requiring state liquor outlets to remove Russian-made and branded alcohol, as did Utah Gov. Spencer Cox.

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In Canada, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario on Friday announced that "all products produced in Russia will be removed from LCBO channels," including 679 of its stores across the province. It also promised to accept the return of any Russian products and declared that it "stands with Ukraine, its people, and the Ukrainian Canadian community here in Ontario."

In Grand Rapids, Quay said he may never sell Russian products again. And he's taken another step: "I've ordered a Ukrainian flag, and that will be going up next week."

West unleashes SWIFT bans, more crushing penalties on Russia

By ZEKE MILLER, RAF CASERT, ELLEN KNICKMEYER and KEN SWEET Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States and European nations agreed Saturday to impose the most potentially crippling financial penalties yet on Russia over its unrelenting invasion of Ukraine, going after the central bank reserves that underpin the Russian economy and severing some Russian banks from a vital global financial network.

The decision, announced as Ukrainian forces battled Saturday to hold Russian forces back from Ukraine's capital and residents sheltered in subway tunnels, basements and underground garages, has potential to spread the pain of Western retaliation for President Vladimir Putin's invasion to ordinary Russians far more than previous rounds of penalties.

"Putin embarked on a path aiming to destroy Ukraine, but what he is also doing, in fact, is destroying the future of his own country," EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

The European Union, United States, United Kingdom and other allies have steadily stepped up the intensity of their sanctions since Russia launched the invasion late last week.

While U.S. and European officials made clear they still were working out the mechanics of how to implement the latest measures, and intend to spare Russia's oil and natural gas exports, the sanctions in total potentially could amount to some of the toughest levied on a nation in modern times. If fully carried out as planned, the measures will severely damage the Russian economy and markedly constrain its ability to import and export goods.

The U.S. and European allies announced the moves in a joint statement as part of a new round of financial sanctions meant to "hold Russia to account and collectively ensure that this war is a strategic failure for Putin."

The central bank restrictions target access to the more than \$600 billion in reserves that the Kremlin has at its disposal, and are meant to block Russia's ability to support the ruble as it plunges in value amid tightening Western sanctions.

U.S. officials said Saturday's steps were framed to send the ruble into "free fall" and promote soaring inflation in the Russian economy.

The decline of the ruble would likely send inflation soaring, which would hurt everyday Russians and not just the Russian elites who were the targets of the original sanctions. The resulting economic disruption, if Saturday's measures are as harsh as described, could leave Putin facing political unrest at home.

Analysts predicted intensifying runs on banks by Russians, and falling government reserves as Russians scrambled to sell their targeted currency for safer assets.

The U.S. officials noted that previously announced sanctions have already had an impact on Russia, bringing its currency to its lowest level against the dollar in history and giving its stock market the worst week on record.

Saturday's move also includes cutting key Russian banks out of the SWIFT financial messaging system, which daily moves countless billions of dollars around more than 11,000 banks and other financial institutions around the world.

The fine print of the sanctions was still being ironed out over the weekend, officials said, as they work to limit the impact of the restrictions on other economies and European purchases of Russian energy.

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

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responding too weakly to Russia's 2014 aggression — shelved the idea back then. Russia since then has tried to develop its own financial transfer system, with limited success.

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

Only rarely has the West and its allies fired a full salvo of its available financial weapons on a country. Iran and North Korea, two previous targets, had far smaller roles in the world economy, while Russia, with its enormous petroleum reserves, plays a much bigger role in global trade, and parts of Europe depend on its natural gas.

The disconnection from SWIFT announced by the West on Saturday is partial, leaving Europe and the United States room to escalate penalties later. Officials said they had not fully settled on which banks would be cut off.

Announcing the measures in Brussels, the EU Commission president, von der Leyen, said she would push the bloc to "paralyze the assets of Russia's Central bank" so that its transactions would be frozen. Cutting several commercial banks from SWIFT "will ensure that these banks are disconnected from the international financial system and harm their ability to operate globally," she added.

"Cutting banks off will stop them from conducting most of their financial transactions worldwide and effectively block Russian exports and imports," she added.

Getting the EU on board for sanctioning Russia through SWIFT had been a tough process since EU trade with Russia amounted to 80 billion euros, about 10 times as much as the United States, which had been an early proponent of such measures.

Germany specifically had balked at the measure since it could hit them hard. But Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said in a statement that "after Russia's shameless attack ... we are working hard on limiting the collateral damage of decoupling (Russia) from SWIFT so that it hits the right people. What we need is a targeted, functional restrictions of SWIFT."

As another measure, the allies announced a commitment "to taking measures to limit the sale of citizenship — so-called golden passports — that let wealthy Russians connected to the Russian government become citizens of our countries and gain access to our financial systems."

The group also announced the formation this week of a trans-Atlantic task force to ensure that these and other sanctions on Russia are implemented effectively through information sharing and asset freezes.

"These new sanctions, which include removing several Russian banks from SWIFT and sanctioning Russia's central bank, are likely to cause serious damage to the Russian economy and its banking system," said Clay Lowery, executive vice president of the Institute of International Finance. "While details on how the new sanctions affect energy are still emerging, we do know that sanctions on its central bank will make it more difficult for Russia to export energy and other commodities."

Rachel Ziembra, an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, said that even without a complete SWIFT ban, "these measures will still be painful to Russia's economy. They reinforce the measures already taken earlier this week by making transactions more complicated and difficult."

Ziembra says how much pain the sanctions render on the Russian economy will depend on which banks are restricted and which measures are taken to restrict the ability of the Central Bank to operate.

"Regardless, these sort of escalating sanctions, removing banks from SWIFT, restricting the Central Bank, this will all make it more difficult to get commodities from Russia and will increase the pressure on the financial market."

Meantime, the U.S. Embassy in Russia is warning Americans of multiple reports of non-Russian credit and debit cards being declined in Russia. In a tweet Saturday night, the American Embassy said the problem appears to be related to recent sanctions, imposed on Russian banks following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The embassy says U.S. citizens in Russia should be prepared with alternate means of payment should cards be declined. It also reminded U.S. citizens that the State Department advises against travel to Russia.

CBS' Chris Licht expected to be named as new CNN chief

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — CBS executive Chris Licht, who is currently running Stephen Colbert's late-night show after helping to build two news programs, is expected to become the new president of CNN replacing Jeff Zucker.

Licht will be named as soon as next week to the job, according to an executive familiar with the discussions who spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to speak on personnel. The selection was first reported Saturday by the website Puck. He would not be able to take over until the deal giving CNN new corporate ownership gets federal approval, expected early this spring.

The new chief is executive vice president of special programming at CBS. Before taking over as executive producer at Colbert's "Late Show" in 2016, guiding it to the top of the ratings, Licht ran "CBS This Morning," the network's morning news show.

Before joining CBS in 2012, he was the top behind-the-scenes executive at MSNBC's "Morning Joe" in its formative years.

There was no immediate comment from a representative at WarnerMedia, CNN's corporate parent.

The choice of Licht was made by David Zaslav, CEO of Discovery, which is expected to soon take over WarnerMedia in a corporate deal that is pending approval.

Zucker was forced out as CNN chief earlier this month for violating corporate rules by not telling his superiors about a romantic relationship with Allison Gollust, a top CNN marketing executive. Gollust was later pushed out herself.

Zucker was a hands-on executive who guided CNN through years when it was targeted for criticism by former President Donald Trump, and many of his employees were intensely loyal.

One of Licht's top priorities will be finding a permanent replacement for Chris Cuomo, once CNN's most popular prime-time host. Cuomo was fired in December when the extent of his efforts to help his brother, former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, fight charges of sexual misconduct were revealed.

During Zucker's tenure, several CNN personalities have become more opinionated on the air, and there's been some talk about whether a new chief executive would try to reset things.

Licht, who did not immediately return a message seeking comment on Saturday, took over behind the scenes at Colbert's show when it was floundering. It shot to the top in late-night, in large part behind Colbert's biting attacks on Trump.

He'll also be expected to shepherd the introduction of the CNN+ paid streaming service this spring. The network has been busy hiring new people for CNN+, including former Fox News host Chris Wallace.

CNN's television network, like other news outlets, has lost popularity since the 2020 election sent ratings soaring. But it has shown off its depth as a news organization this past week with its coverage of the Russian attack on Ukraine, which led to praise from Zaslav in an earnings call this past week.

"It becomes very clear as you go around the world and you look at other news channels where people are sitting behind desks and giving their opinion about what's going on, there's a news network that's on the ground with journalists in bulletproof vests and helmets that are doing what journalists do best, which is fight to tell the truth in dangerous places," said Zaslav, an executive at NBC News before taking over at Discovery.

"It's a proud moment for us to watch what's going on there," he said.

Some Americans welcome new CDC mask guidance, others wary

By DON BABWIN and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Grace Thomas is fully vaccinated against COVID-19 but still not ready to take off her mask, especially around the kids at the home day care she runs in Chicago.

But whether the children continue to wear masks remains to be seen after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that healthy people in most areas of the country can safely stop wearing masks as cases continue to fall.

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Thomas, 62, plans to ask parents to have their children wear masks to prevent the day care from being a potential source of transmission, but "you can't make them wear masks if they don't want to," she said.

Many Americans, including parents of school children, have been clamoring for an end to masking while others remain wary that the pandemic could throw a new curveball. Now, states, cities and school districts are assessing Friday's guidance to determine whether it's safe to stop mask-wearing — long after others threw out such mandates and many Americans ignored them.

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker said that the statewide school mask mandate will be lifted Monday in response to the new guidance, although Chicago Public Schools officials said they will continue to require masks "to maintain health and safety measures."

Los Angeles on Friday began allowing people who are vaccinated to remove their masks indoors, and Washington, D.C., had already said it would end its mask mandate on Monday. Washington state and Oregon plan to lift indoor mask mandates in late March.

But the issue still remains politically fraught: Florida's governor on Thursday announced new recommendations called "Buck the CDC" that discourage mask wearing — even though the CDC says the state still has wide areas at high levels of concern.

Christine Bruhn, 79, a retired food science professor at the University of California at Davis, said she'll only take off her mask if she thinks it's safe, usually around vaccinated friends. When she's around a large group of strangers, "I'm wearing a mask," Bruhn said.

"I have been vaccinated and boosted but I don't want to get sick," said Bruhn, who also said she'll continue crossing the street to keep her distance from people without masks if she sees any of them walking toward her.

American Medical Association President Gerald E. Harmon said Friday that he would continue to wear a mask in indoor public settings and urged "all Americans to consider doing the same" because millions are susceptible to severe illness or too young to be vaccinated.

Still, many people appear to be done with masking.

Steve Kelly, a manager of Kilroy's Bar & Grill in downtown Indianapolis, said it seems that neither employees nor customers think much about COVID since Indiana lifted a mask mandate for restaurants.

"It doesn't seem like anybody is wearing masks," he said of his customers, though a few employees still do. And he said people rarely get upset anymore.

"My daughter is 13 and she wears a mask. It's her choice," he said. "Nobody bothers her about it and she wouldn't care if they did."

In central Illinois' Effingham County, mask-wearing — and the animosity between those who do and don't — has plummeted, said David Campbell, vice chairman of the county board. He said about the only places he sees people wearing masks are hospitals and doctors' offices.

"Eighty-five to ninety percent of the people you see on the street, in stores, restaurants, aren't wearing them," said Campbell, 61. "You used to hear people say, 'Why aren't you wearing masks?' but you don't anymore."

Under the new guidance, the CDC says people can stop wearing masks if they live in counties where the coronavirus poses a low or medium threat to hospitals — accounting for more than 70% of the U.S. population.

The agency still advises people, including schoolchildren, to wear masks where the risk of COVID-19 is high, in about 37% of U.S. counties, where about 28% of Americans live. And those with COVID-19 symptoms or who test positive should wear masks, the agency said.

The recommendations do not change the requirement to wear masks on public transportation and in airports, train stations and bus stations, but the guidelines for other indoor spaces aren't binding, meaning cities and institutions may set their own rules.

Two of the nation's largest teachers unions weighed in, with American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten calling the guidance "long-needed new metrics for a safe off-ramp from universal masking." She said many students and teachers have struggled with COVID-19 restrictions.

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But National Education Association President Becky Pringle urged school districts to "act cautiously" and seek input from local educators before making any decisions to end mask-wearing.

Chicago high school teacher Sharon Holmes said she'll continue to wear a mask while teaching and outside the classroom.

"My partner and my daughter both have asthma," said the 53-year-old Holmes. "I just don't feel safe yet, personally."

14 shot at Vegas hookah parlor; 1 dead and 2 critically hurt

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Fourteen people were shot during a party at a Las Vegas hookah lounge early Saturday, including one man who was killed and two others who were critically wounded.

The shooting happened about 3:15 a.m. and preliminary information indicated there was a party during which two people got into an altercation and exchanged gunfire, said police Capt. Dori Koren.

Koren told reporters no arrests have been made and no suspect descriptions were immediately available but that authorities did not believe there was any danger to the general public.

Police went to the hookah bar identified by the Las Vegas Review-Journal as Manny's Glow Ultra Lounge & Restaurant after receiving multiple 911 calls, Koren said.

Officers secured the scene and rendered aid, including applying tourniquets and administering CPR, Koren said.

Investigators were trying to determine the types of gun or guns used in the shooting.

"It's a fairly large scene so it's going to take some time to go through the entire scene," he said. "We're not really sure exactly what kind of weapon was used, or exactly if there were two shooters. We believe there was an exchange of gunfire, but we're still looking into all of information."

The medical aid provided to victims by the officers who initially responded "definitely made a significance in this case," Koren said.

Hookahs are water pipes that are used to smoke specially made tobacco that comes in different flavors.

Hours after the shooting, much of shopping plaza where the shooting occurred remained cordoned off by police tape as officers looked for stray bullets and other evidence.

"My thoughts are with the victim, their loved ones, and all those injured in last night's senseless shooting at a hookah lounge," U.S. Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev., said on Twitter. "We must do more to end gun violence."

Fleeing to the border: Over 150,000 Ukrainians seek refuge

By VANESSA GERA and ADAM PEMBLE Associated Press

MEDYKA, Poland (AP) — Dragging suitcases and carrying children, tens of thousands of Ukrainians rushed to the borders Saturday as invading Russian troops pressed on with their march toward Ukraine's capital of Kyiv.

At least 150,000 people have fled Ukraine into Poland and other neighboring countries in the wake of the Russian invasion, the U.N. refugee agency said Saturday. Some walked many miles through the night while others fled by train, car or bus, forming lines miles long at border crossings. They were greeted by waiting relatives and friends or headed on their own to reception centers organized by neighboring governments.

"The numbers and the situation is changing minute by minute," said Joung-ah Ghedini-Williams, a spokeswoman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. "At least 150,000 people have fled, they are refugees outside of Ukraine. ... At least 100,000 people — but probably a much larger number — have been displaced inside Ukraine."

The agency expects up to 4 million Ukrainians could flee if the situation deteriorates further.

Those arriving were mostly women, children and the elderly after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy banned men of military age from 18 to 60 from leaving. Some Ukrainian men were heading back into Ukraine from Poland to take up arms against the Russian forces.

In contrast to other conflicts around the globe, Russia's unprovoked attack on the Western-looking democracy has ignited a huge outpouring of support for the fleeing Ukrainians. This included an uncon-

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ditional welcome from nations like Poland and Hungary that did not want to accept those fleeing conflict and poverty in the Middle East and Africa.

Regular people were also opening up their homes to refugees and volunteering at welcome centers. In Poland, a Facebook page was formed where people were offered rides in private cars from the border and other help.

Volunteers even came from elsewhere in Europe to pick up refugees, among them a German couple from Hamburg who held up a sign at the Polish border town of Medyka saying they could take three people home with them.

"Our country is not doing anything, and we felt we needed to do something," said Tanja Schwarz, 51.

Despite the goodwill, the crush of people became a very real ordeal.

Jeremy Myers, from Manchester, England, was on vacation in Ukraine with his Ukrainian girlfriend when the war started. They fled Kyiv and waited 23 hours in a fenced-off area where there was no food or water and which was controlled by armed guards on the Ukrainian side.

He witnessed people fighting, getting crushed and a woman who fainted.

"We saw several people get injured, there were no toilets, there was no medical assistance," he said. "You had to stand where you were because if you didn't you lost your place in line."

One family from Chernivtsi in western Ukraine waited 20 hours before being able to cross the border into Siret in northern Romania. Natalia Murinik, 14, cried as she described saying goodbye to grandparents who couldn't leave the country.

"It really hurt, I want to go home," she said.

The largest numbers were arriving in Poland, where 2 million Ukrainians have already settled to work in recent years, driven away by Russia's first incursion into Ukraine when it annexed Crimea in 2014 and seeking opportunities in the booming economy of the European Union neighbor.

Poland's government said Saturday that more than 100,000 Ukrainians had crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border in the past 48 hours alone. Poland declared its border open to fleeing Ukrainians, even for those without official documents, and dropped its requirement to show a negative COVID-19 test.

The line of vehicles waiting to enter Poland at Medyka stretched many miles into Ukraine.

A woman from Lviv named Lena described seeing toys and heavy bags along the way that people had abandoned. She was bringing her four children to safety in Poland and planned to return to join her husband. Like other Ukrainians returning home as their country fights Russia, she would only give her first name.

Even Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, one of Europe's most anti-migrant leaders, traveled to the border town of Beregsurany, where he said Hungary was accepting all citizens and legal residents of Ukraine.

"We're letting everyone in," Orban said.

Among those arriving at that point were a Ukrainian-British family with their dogs. "We can't leave our dogs," said Vlasta Terasova, arriving from Uzhhorod.

On Saturday, Poland sent a hospital train to pick up those wounded in the war in Mostyska, in western Ukraine, and bring them to the Polish capital of Warsaw for treatment. The hospital train left the border town of Przemysl with five carriages to transport the wounded and four others stocked with humanitarian aid for Ukraine's Lviv district.

The U.N. said most Ukrainians were heading to neighboring Poland, Moldova, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia but some even fled into Belarus — from which some Russian forces entered Ukraine. Some planned to head further on to other countries in Europe.

The border post in Siret was crowded with Ukrainians on Saturday and humanitarian groups set up tents a few miles in and offered food and drink to those arriving.

Despite the welcome, teenager Natalia Murinik's family didn't know where they were going next.

"We don't have a clue. We're waiting for our friends, and then we'll think," she said.

In a major shift, Germany will send weapons to Ukraine

VIENNA (AP) — In a significant shift, the German government said Saturday it will send weapons and

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other supplies directly to Ukraine, which is fighting to keep Russia from invading its capital city. Germany is also ready to also support some restrictions of the SWIFT global banking system for Russia, officials said.

Germany's chancellery announced Saturday evening that it will send 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 "Stinger" surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine "as quickly as possible."

"The Russian invasion of Ukraine marks a turning point. It threatens our entire post-war order," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in a statement. "In this situation, it is our duty to help Ukraine, to the best of our ability, to defend itself against Vladimir Putin's invading army."

The news came shortly after the German economy and climate ministry said in a Saturday evening statement that Germany is allowing the Netherlands to ship 400 German-made anti-tank weapons to Ukraine. The government has also approved the shipment of 9 D-30 howitzers and ammunition originally from Estonia.

Germany had long stuck to a policy of not exporting deadly weapons to conflict zones, including Ukraine. As recently as Friday, government officials said they would abide by that policy.

But the country — which has the strongest economy in the 27-nation European Union — has faced criticism from Ukrainian officials and other allies that it has not acted decisively enough to help Ukraine fend off the Russian invasion. Previously, Germany contributed 5,000 helmets to Ukraine's defense, a move that was mocked on Twitter.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the news of weapons shipments, posting praise for Scholz on Twitter: "Keep it up, Chancellor @OlafScholz! Anti-war coalition in action!"

In addition, the German economy and climate ministry said Saturday that Germany will send 14 armored vehicles and up to 10,000 tons of fuel to Ukraine.

"After Russia's shameless attack, Ukraine must be able to defend itself," Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Economy Minister Robert Habeck said in a statement. "The federal government is therefore supporting Ukraine in providing urgently needed material."

And after earlier opposing the prospect of banning Russia from the SWIFT global financial system, Baerbock and Habeck said that Germany supports a "targeted and functional restriction" of SWIFT.

What is needed is a strategy to "limit the collateral damage of decoupling from SWIFT in such a way that it affects the right people," Baerbock and Habeck said.

Separately on Saturday, the United States announced \$350 million in aid to Ukraine, totaling \$1 billion in security assistance since President Joe Biden took office. The additional aid includes "anti-armor, small arms and various munitions, body armor and related equipment," said John Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary. A senior defense official said the assistance, which includes Javelin anti-tank weapons, will be delivered to Ukraine in phases and as soon as possible. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal planning.

Other nations pledged military aid. Italy earlier this week announced it will send nonlethal military equipment such as de-mining equipment and protective devices for soldiers. France announced that requests for equipment by Ukraine are under study. Before the invasion, France supplied some 100 million euros in arms to Ukraine, including short-range defensive missiles, Herve Grandjean, spokesman for the ministry of the armies, said this week.

Anti-war sentiment grows in Russia despite govt crackdown

By DASHA LITVINOVA and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — As Russian troops were closing in on the Ukrainian capital, more and more Russians spoke out Saturday against the invasion, even as the government's official rhetoric grew increasingly harsher.

Street protests, albeit small, resumed in the Russian capital of Moscow, the second-largest city of St. Petersburg and other Russian cities for the third straight day, with people taking to the streets despite mass detentions on Thursday and Friday. According to OVD-Info, rights group that tracks political arrests, at least 460 people in 34 cities were detained over anti-war protests on Saturday, including over 200 in Moscow.

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Open letters condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine kept pouring, too. More than 6,000 medical workers put their names under one on Saturday; over 3,400 architects and engineers endorsed another while 500 teachers signed a third one. Similar letters by journalists, municipal council members, cultural figures and other professional groups have been making the rounds since Thursday.

A prominent contemporary art museum in Moscow called Garage announced Saturday it was halting its work on exhibitions and postponing them "until the human and political tragedy that is unfolding in Ukraine has ceased."

"We cannot support the illusion of normality when such events are taking place," the statement by the museum read. "We see ourselves as part of a wider world that is not divided by war."

An online petition to stop the attack on Ukraine, launched shortly after it started on Thursday morning, garnered over 780,000 signatures by Saturday evening, making it one of the most supported online petitions in Russia in recent years.

Statements decrying the invasion even came from some parliament members, who earlier this week voted to recognize the independence of two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, a move that preceded the Russian assault. Two lawmakers from the Communist Party, which usually toes the Kremlin's line, spoke out against the hostilities on social media.

Oleg Smolin said he "was shocked" when the attack started and "was convinced that military force should be used in politics only as a last resort." His fellow lawmaker Mikhail Matveyev said "the war must be immediately stopped" and that he voted for "Russia becoming a shield against the bombing of Donbas, not for the bombing of Kyiv."

Russian authorities, meanwhile, took a harsher stance towards those denouncing the invasion, both at home and abroad.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, said Moscow may respond to Western sanctions by opting out of the last nuclear arms deal with the U.S., cutting diplomatic ties with Western nations and freezing their assets.

He also warned that Moscow could restore the death penalty after Russia was removed from Europe's top rights group — a chilling statement that shocked human rights activists in a country that has had a moratorium on capital punishment since August 1996.

Eva Merkacheva, a member of the Kremlin human rights council, deplored it as a "catastrophe" and a "return to the Middle Ages."

The Western sanctions imposed new tight restrictions on Russian financial operations, a draconian ban on technology exports to Russia and froze the assets of Putin and his foreign minister. Russian membership in the Council of Europe was also suspended.

Washington and its allies say even tougher sanctions are possible, including kicking Russia out of SWIFT, the dominant system for global financial transactions.

Medvedev was a placeholder president in 2008-2012 when Putin had to shift into the prime minister's seat because of term limits. He then let Putin reclaim the presidency and served as his prime minister for eight years.

During his tenure as president, Medvedev was widely seen as more liberal compared with Putin, but on Saturday he made a series of threats that even the most hawkish Kremlin figures haven't mentioned to date.

Medvedev noted that the sanctions offer the Kremlin a pretext to completely review 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.

The treaty, which Medvedev signed in 2010 with then-U.S. President Barack Obama, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers, and envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance. The pact, the last remaining U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control agreement, had been set to expire in February 2021 but Moscow and Washington extended it for another five years.

If Russia opts out of the agreement now, it will remove any checks on U.S. and Russian nuclear forces

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and raise new threats to global security.

Medvedev also raised the prospect of cutting diplomatic ties with Western countries, charging that "there is no particular need in maintaining diplomatic relations." Referring to Western threats to freeze the assets of Russian companies and individuals, Medvedev warned that Moscow wouldn't hesitate to do the same.

Cracking down on critics at home, Russian authorities demanded that top independent news outlets take down stories about the fighting in Ukraine that deviated from the official government line.

Russia's state communications watchdog, Roskomnadzor, charged that reports about "Russian armed forces firing at Ukrainian cities and the death of civilians in Ukraine as a result of the actions of the Russian army, as well as materials in which the ongoing operation is called 'an attack,' 'an invasion,' or 'a declaration of war'" were untrue and demanded that the outlets take them down or face steep fines and restrictions.

On Friday, the watchdog also announced "partial restrictions" on access to Facebook in response to the platform limiting the accounts of several Kremlin-backed media.

On Saturday, Russian internet users reported problems with accessing Facebook and Twitter, both of which have played a major role in amplifying dissent in Russia in recent years.

In Rio, even a ban can't keep revelers from Carnival streets

By DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — The pandemic may have disrupted Carnival plans in Rio de Janeiro for a second straight year, but revelers who have flocked to the Brazilian city for sun, sea and samba still found ways to party on Saturday.

Thousands defied an official ban on street parties by dancing, singing and mingling to the rhythm of Samba, sometimes as police looked on.

Others attended more formal events that moved indoors this year after City Hall banned "blocos," the tightly packed street parties traditionally thronged by those who cannot or do not want to lay out for pricey tickets for the official parade at the Sambadrome — which this year has been postponed to April because Brazil is still not past the omicron wave.

"I think it's a shame this has to happen this way," said Tulio Brasil, a 29 year-old music marketing director who found one of the unauthorized street parties in the city center.

"It doesn't make sense to crowd everyone into a closed place when the street, an open space, much more airy, is prohibited," he said.

The indoor parties — and the fee to get in — are a heresy for many Brazilians who say that Carnival's block parties are essentially and historically parties by the people and for the people.

"There is great hypocrisy about all this," said Deivid Domênico, a samba composer linked to the Mangueira samba school. "In January, when the omicron wave was peaking, they didn't take any public measures to limit the spread of the virus; bars and restaurants were still open. But they canceled Carnival."

The city's decision to postpone Carnival has frustrated many professionals and creative types whose livelihoods center around one of the largest festivals in the world - especially since large gatherings in enclosed spaces have gone undisturbed.

"Stadiums are full, churches are full, evangelical temples, concerts, bars, restaurants, hotels, AirBnBs," said Rita Fernandes, who leads an association of street blocos from the city's most touristic areas. "This seems quite contradictory, as if the virus only spread on the streets and at Carnival."

Big crowds at concerts such as those held in the past few weeks by Brazil's biggest pop star, Anitta, have puzzled Carnival organizers and revelers alike.

For many, paying to attend "blocos" in an enclosed place just doesn't feel right.

"Carnival here in Rio is a party for black people, it's a party for "favelados" (residents of the city's sprawling working class neighbourhoods), it's a party for homosexuals, it's a party where women are valued, where criticism is made and the government is satirized," Domênico said. "Carnival has roots, Carnival has a history, an essence, which we cannot forget."

Nearly all of Rio's samba schools are closely linked to working class communities. Many of those who

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create Carnival, from costume makers to music composers, from samba schools to security and transport agencies, are feeling the financial hurt.

In February 2020, before the pandemic hit Brazil with full strength, more than 2 million tourists made the trip to Rio, generating 4 billion reais (then about \$1 billion) — a record number, authorities said.

Only about 70,000 people can fit in the Sambadrome each night. Others can attend some of the city's 500 block parties held over a period of 45 to 60 days. Much of the appeal of street parties is the variety of themes: A ny costume, or no costume at all, is fine.

Then the pandemic hit and in 2021, mayors across the Latin America's largest nation were forced to cancel Carnival for the first time in a century. Authorities threatened legal action against those who defied the ban to party, so many groups turned to online events, streaming music and dances for their fans.

But this year, as parts of the world with high vaccination rates have gone back to some sort of normalcy, online events are no longer attractive. "People are tired of it," said Fernandes, from the block parties association.

Indeed, tourists from abroad and across Brazil have turned up in numbers this year in spite of the virus. As of Feb. 24, hotels in Rio were at about 80% capacity, according to Rio's hotel association.

Zelenskyy's unlikely journey, from comedy to wartime leader

JOHN DANISZEWSKI Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — When Volodymyr Zelenskyy was growing up in southeastern Ukraine, his Jewish family spoke Russian and his father once forbade the younger Zelenskyy from going abroad to study in Israel. Instead, Zelenskyy studied law at home. Upon graduation, he found a new home in movie acting and comedy — rocketing in the 2010s to become one of Ukraine's top entertainers with the TV series "Servant of the People."

In it, he portrayed a lovable high school teacher fed up with corrupt politicians who accidentally becomes president.

Fast forward just a few years, and Zelenskyy is the president of Ukraine for real. At times in the runup to the Russian invasion, the comedian-turned-statesman had seemed inconsistent, berating the West for fearmongering one day, and for not doing enough the next. But his bravery and refusal to leave as rockets have rained down on the capital have also made him an unlikely hero to many around the world.

With courage, good humor and grace under fire that has rallied his people and impressed his Western counterparts, the compact, dark-haired, 44-year-old former actor has stayed even though he says he has a target on his back from the Russian invaders.

After an offer from the United States to transport him to safety, Zelenskyy shot back on Saturday: "I need ammunition, not a ride," he said in Ukrainian, according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation.

Russian forces on Saturday were encircling Kyiv in the third day of the war. The chief objective, say military observers, is to reach the capital to depose Zelenskyy and his government and install someone more compliant to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The boldness of Zelenskyy's stand for Ukraine's sovereignty might not have been expected from a man whose biggest political liability for many years was the feeling that he was too apt to seek compromise with Moscow. He ran for office in part on a platform that he could negotiate peace with Russia, which had seized Crimea from Ukraine and propped up two pro-Russian separatist regions in 2014, leading to a frozen conflict that had killed an estimated 15,000.

Although Zelenskyy managed a prisoner exchange, the efforts for reconciliation faltered as Putin's insistence that Ukraine back away from the West became ever more intense, painting the Kyiv government as a nest of extremism run by Washington.

Zelenskyy has used his own history to demonstrate that his is a country of possibility, not the hate-filled polity of Putin's imagination.

In spite of Ukraine's dark history of antisemitism, reaching back centuries to Cossack pogroms and

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the collaboration of some anti-Soviet nationalists with Nazi genocide during World War II, Ukraine after Zelenskyy's election in 2019 became the only country outside of Israel with both a president and prime minister who were Jewish. (Zelenskyy's grandfather fought in the Soviet Army against the Nazis, while other family died in the Holocaust.)

Like his TV character, Zelenskyy came to office in a landslide democratic election, defeating a billionaire businessman. He promised to break the power of corrupt oligarchs who haphazardly controlled Ukraine since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

That this fresh-faced upstart, campaigning primarily on social media, could come out of nowhere to claim the country's top office likely was disturbing to Putin, who has slowly tamed and corralled his own political opposition in Russia.

Putin's leading political rival, Alexei Navalny, also a comedic, anti-corruption crusader, was poisoned by Russian secret services in 2020 with a nerve agent applied to his underwear. He was fighting for his life when he was allowed under international diplomatic pressure to leave for Germany for medical treatment, and when doctors there saved him, he chose to go back to Russia despite certain risk.

Navalny, now in a Russian prison, has denounced Putin's military operation in Ukraine.

Both Zelenskyy and Navalny seem to share a perspective that they must face the consequences of their beliefs, no matter what.

"It's a frightening experience when you come to visit the president of a neighboring country, your colleague, to support him in a difficult situation, (and) you hear from him that you may never meet him again because he is staying there and will defend his country to the last," Polish President Andrzej Duda said Friday.

He spent time with Zelenskyy on Wednesday just before the fighting started, one of many political leaders who have met with the Ukrainian president over the past month, including U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris.

Zelenskyy first came to the attention of many Americans during the administration of President Donald Trump, who in a phone call with Zelenskyy in 2019 leaned on him to dig up dirt on then presidential candidate Biden and his son Hunter that could aid Trump's re-election campaign. That "perfect" phone call, as Trump later called it, resulted in Trump's impeachment by the House of Representatives on charges of using his office, and the threat of withholding \$400 million in authorized military support for Ukraine, for personal political gain.

Zelenskyy refused to criticize Trump's call, saying he did not want to get involved in another country's politics.

Putin's attack, which the Russian president has termed a "special military operation," began early Thursday. Putin denied for months that he had any intent to invade, and accused Biden of stirring up war hysteria when Biden revealed the numbers of Russian troops and weapons that had been deployed along Ukraine's borders with Russia and Belarus — surrounding Ukraine on three sides.

Putin justified the attack by saying it was to defend two breakaway districts in eastern Ukraine from "genocide."

With Russian media presenting such a picture of his country, Zelenskyy recorded a message to Russians to refute the notion that Ukraine is the aggressor and that he is any kind of warmonger: "They told you I ordered an offensive on the Donbas, to shoot, to bomb, that there's no question about it. But there are questions, and very simple ones. To shoot whom, to bomb what? Donetsk?"

Recounting his many visits and friends in the region — "I've seen the faces, the eyes" — he said, "It's our land, it's our history. What are we going to fight over, and with whom?"

Unshaven and in olive green khaki shirts, he has taped other messages to his compatriots on the internet in the last few days to bolster morale and to emphasize that he is going nowhere, but will stay to defend Ukraine. "We are here. Honor to Ukraine," he declares.

In the runup to the Russian invasion, Zelenskyy was critical of President Joe Biden's open and detailed warnings about Putin's intentions, saying they were premature and could cause panic. Then after the war began, he has criticized Washington for not doing more to protect Ukraine, including defending it militarily

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or accelerating its bid to join NATO.

Zelenskyy and his wife, Olena, an architect, have a 17-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son. He said this week that they remained in Ukraine, not joining the exodus of mainly women and children refugees seeking safety abroad.

"The war has transformed the former comedian from a provincial politician with delusions of grandeur into a bona fide statesman," wrote Melinda Haring of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center for Foreign Affairs on Friday.

Though he can be faulted for not carrying out political reforms quickly enough and for dragging his feet on hardening Ukraine's long border with Russia over the last year, Haring said, Zelenskyy "has shown a stiff upper lip. He has demonstrated enormous physical courage, refusing to sit in a bunker but instead traveling openly with soldiers, and an unwavering patriotism that few expected from a Russian speaker from eastern Ukraine."

"To his great credit, he has been unmovable."

Trayvon Martin's mother: 'Don't give up' fight for justice

NEW YORK (AP) — The mother of Trayvon Martin used the 10th anniversary of her son's death Saturday to urge those who sought justice for her family to continue to fight.

"I never do anything on the 26th, I never even plan anything on the 26th of February," Sybrina Fulton said at the weekly meeting of the National Action Network, the civil rights organization founded by the Rev. Al Sharpton in Harlem.

She told an audience that included Sharpton and Mayor Eric Adams that she wanted to be there to support her supporters. Adams, a New York state senator at the time, was among several Black lawmakers who wore hooded sweatshirts to a 2012 legislative session to call attention to the 17-year-old's death in Sanford, Florida.

Trayvon Martin had been wearing a similar sweatshirt when he was fatally shot on his way back from a store while visiting his father in a gated community in the Orlando suburb. George Zimmerman, a member of the community's neighborhood watch, confronted the teenager and shot him after reporting him to authorities as a suspicious person.

Zimmerman, who told authorities that Martin had attacked him, was acquitted of second-degree murder in 2013.

The shooting refocused attention on race and justice in the United States. Sharpton, who early on met with Martin's family and their attorney Ben Crump as they worked to draw attention to his death, on Saturday compared Martin's legacy to that of Emmett Till, the Chicago teen whose lynching in Mississippi in 1955 stoked the civil rights movement.

"Today is a bittersweet day," said Fulton, who with her family created the Trayvon Martin Foundation to raise awareness of gun violence. "I thank God for all the Trayvon Martins that you don't know, all the young ladies who have been shot and killed and our Black and brown boys who have been shot and killed and you don't know their names. Thank you for standing up for them. Thank you for praying for them. Thank you for supporting them. They need you. They need your voice. And if you don't do anything else, don't give up."

Adams praised Fulton for "turning pain into purpose."

'Wonderful feeling': Eriksen's comeback after heart recovery

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

LONDON (AP) — On a weekend crying out for an uplifting moment from sports, Christian Eriksen provided it.

Just seeing Eriksen resuming his competitive footballing career, 259 days after collapsing mid-game with a cardiac arrest, was a moment to rejoice in west London on Saturday.

Even the opposition Newcastle players joined in the applause as Eriksen came on for his Brentford debut

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during Saturday's Premier League game. It was seven minutes into the second half when the moment came for the playmaker to remove his grey training bib and appear for the first time on this field in a red-and-white striped Brentford jersey.

"I'm one happy man," he said after a game tinged with the frustration of a 2-0 loss. "To go through what I've been through, being back is a wonderful feeling."

The substitution had a link to that traumatic day at the European Championship when Eriksen had the world fearing the worst when he collapsed during Denmark's opening game against Finland. The Brentford player who Eriksen came on for was Mathias Jensen. It was Jensen who replaced Eriksen in the team when that June tournament game resumed later in the day despite the distress of the star being in the hospital with an uncertain fate.

After being resuscitated on the field in Copenhagen and regaining consciousness, Eriksen was later informed he was "gone from this world for five minutes." Now Eriksen has resumed his professional playing career after being fitted with an implantable cardioverter defibrillator.

Brentford was already trailing 2-0 to Newcastle when Eriksen entered with the west London club having to cope with 10 men after a first-half sending off. While Eriksen couldn't inspire a comeback, he did help to limit the damage, watched in the stadium by not only his family but also the doctors who oversaw the recovery.

"What they've been through is even tougher than what I've been through," he said about his family.

The game ended with a moment of normality involving Eriksen. The former Tottenham player wasn't going over to the referee at the full-time whistle to share a heart-warming moment with Mike Dean but to clearly remonstrate, gesticulating with his hands.

Eriksen's last domestic match was completing a title-winning season with Inter Milan last May. Now he is at Brentford to help the club stay in the Premier League after a result that leaves the team three points above the relegation zone.

"For everyone involved in football it was a big moment," said fellow Dane Thomas Frank, the Brentford manager. "It was fantastic to see he got a big reception."

Brentford stepped in to sign the free agent in the January transfer window after Eriksen's need for an ICD meant he had to leave Inter Milan due to Italian medical regulations.

Now, after featuring in two warm-up games recently for Brentford without fans, Eriksen has made his competitive return to action — with playing at the World Cup in November his target.

"Hopefully now we should only talk about his feet," Frank said, "and talk about football instead of everything else."

Prayers and despair: Ukrainians in the US decry invasion

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

The Rev. Myron Myronyuk stayed up all night at home in Pennsylvania as his twin brother tried to flee Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, only to turn back because the road out was choked with traffic. His in-laws, also in Ukraine, told him they couldn't get basics like bread and milk.

There was little Myronyuk could do but pray that his loved ones would survive the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A sense of helplessness overcame Ukrainians in America as the war unfolded half a world away, with little chance their loved ones in Ukraine would find refuge in the U.S. any time soon. For now, they are trying to donate money and supplies, desperately seeking advice from immigration attorneys about how to get family here and pleading for world leaders to intervene more forcefully.

"I say, 'We're praying for you, we wish you to be safe, go to a safe place,'" said Myronyuk, pastor of St. Vladimir Ukrainian Catholic Church in Scranton, Pennsylvania. "We have to continue to pray and ask God for help," he said, but "there's not much else we can do here."

Demonstrators gathered in Manhattan's Times Square and near the Russian Federation's mission to the United Nations on Thursday, waving blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flags and denouncing Russian President

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Vladimir Putin. About 100 people took to an overpass in Chicago, putting their hands to their hearts as the Ukrainian national anthem blared from a big speaker.

"The worst part is we cannot help them any more. We would send money, but everything is closed," said Chicago resident Hrustyna Klym, who has been in the U.S. for 15 years and has family in Ukraine. Klym volunteers with an organization that has regularly sent clothes, magazines, money and other items to help Ukraine's needy, particularly wounded soldiers, but she said there's no way to donate directly now.

At Ukrainian Village Food & Deli in the Cleveland suburb of Parma Heights, Mila Radeva, 39, said her father — who lives near the Ukrainian port city of Odessa — had taken shelter in his basement as explosions rocked the area.

"A lot of people are going to die," said a worried Radeva, who emigrated to the U.S. 20 years ago. Asked if her father and other relatives might flee to another country, she said: "There's no place for them to run."

Ekaterina Mouratova, a Miami immigration attorney, said Thursday was "a crazy day," with phone calls and emails from Ukrainians and Russians seeking refuge in the United States. Ukrainians hope to flee Russian troops, while Russians worry they may get drafted and have bank accounts frozen in a wartime economy.

She offered little encouragement, predicting Poland would be a far more realistic possibility for escape. "There is no effective legal mechanism to bring people here," she said.

Ukrainians could potentially flee their country, fly to Mexico from Europe as tourists, and enter the U.S. by land to claim asylum, as a growing number of Russians have done over the last year, Mouratova said. Fleeing war, however, is not considered legal grounds for asylum.

Ukrainians could also be eligible for refugee resettlement — under which up to 125,000 can be accepted in the U.S. this year after being approved abroad — but processing has been slow as U.S. authorities focus on Afghans seeking to flee Taliban rule.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the U.S. was prepared to accept Ukrainian refugees, "but we certainly expect that most if not the majority will want to go to Europe and neighboring countries."

Immigration advocates urged the Biden administration to grant Temporary Protected Status to Ukraine, a form of reprieve for its citizens already in the United States. The U.S. has granted TPS to 12 countries afflicted by war or natural disaster.

Chicago immigration attorney Natalia Blauvelt, who also fielded calls from desperate Ukrainian clients, potential clients and friends, said they are "absolutely devastated, extremely sad.... They are panicking because of what is happening in Ukraine, and many of them don't know what to do and help their relatives."

More than 1 million people in the U.S. report Ukrainian ancestry, according to the Census, with sizable populations in New York City, Chicago, Seattle, Sacramento and Los Angeles.

Oksana Bilobran, an attorney in Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, came to the U.S. from Ukraine 17 years ago. She and others have been urging elected officials to do more to support Ukraine, including securing a no-fly zone over the country and providing humanitarian protection for Ukrainians currently in the U.S. so they don't have to return.

They are also working on ways to support Ukraine financially, since apps like Venmo and PayPal aren't readily available there.

"We need to up our fundraising to provide necessities, because the Ukrainian military is no match for the Russian army, so we need to provide as much help as we can here," she said.

In Philadelphia, the United Ukrainian American Relief Committee — formed in World War II to help resettle Ukrainian refugees — pivoted to a wartime footing once again, readying a container packed with clothing, diapers, wheelchairs, medical supplies and personal hygiene items. Donations had increased over the past several weeks as Russia massed its military on Ukraine's doorstep, according to the executive director, Motrja Watters.

The group plans to send the container to Ukraine, or Poland if Russia blocks humanitarian aid. Watters, whose parents were born in Ukraine, said relief groups are coordinating their response so aid is delivered as effectively as possible.

"Everybody's trying to get a grip on the how and the where the needs are in Ukraine," she said. "We're working around the clock... There are so many people already injured, families already split up, and those are the people we need to help right now."

No notes, same logo: Dr. Oz's campaign is like his TV show

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

NEWTOWN, Pa. (AP) — The banners and big red video screen all said Dr. Oz, the host gave a rousing introduction and in strode the candidate, Mehmet Oz, to take up the microphone and become the center of attention for more than an hour.

Welcome to Oz's campaign for U.S. Senate, where the celebrity heart surgeon and former host of daytime TV's "Dr. Oz Show" is making his way around Pennsylvania in town hall-style settings that seem very much like the TV studio where he once presided.

Even his campaign logo looks just like his TV show logo.

At one recent event, he spent more than a half-hour confidently telling people about himself and the world according to Oz, no teleprompter and no notes.

He kicked it off, with a bit of self-awareness for a guy who has barely ever lived in Pennsylvania and is being hit by attack ads daily on TV.

"I know this is not a pep rally," he said, pacing in front of seated rows in an events room at the Newtown Athletic Club in suburban Philadelphia. "It really is for you to understand who I am, which is exactly what I want. I want skeptical people kicking the tires. 'Is this guy legit? Does he represent my values? Yeah, I know him from television, but what is he really about?'"

Then he took questions, campaign aides with microphones picking their way through the crowd of well over 200.

Oz checked one questioner's blood pressure. He high-fived another. Afterward, he spent 45 minutes signing autographs and posing for photos.

Oz is, at least in part, relying on his celebrity and comfort speaking to people extemporaneously to help distinguish himself from his Republican competitors heading into the May primary and position himself as a strong contender for the fall general election.

The strategy is similar to the one used to great effect by Donald Trump, a former television star himself, during his successful 2016 presidential bid.

But it's unclear whether Oz can harness broad appeal — many have never seen his TV show — and the daytime talk show vibe may lack heft at a moment when the country is facing economic headwinds and a burgeoning war in Europe.

Oz's themes — "a dose of reality" or "the doctor is in" — spin off his TV doctor reputation.

To a great extent, Oz's political campaign comes off as an extension of his TV show, a 13-year enterprise that he has conjured as a long and successful battle to advocate for the health care needs of average people by going against the medical establishment.

The show, he tells the crowd, "had tremendous success. A hundred countries. Number one health show in the world for 13 years. The shows have 10 Emmy Awards, so I'm proud of what we achieved."

But, to do it, he said, "I had to fight hard for you and you and you and you. ... What's important is, when your audience is in a predicament, will you go to war for them? Will you become a porcupine and fight back and do what's right, even if it has mortal risks to you? And I did, and I have the scars to prove it."

Late last year, Oz — a longtime New Jersey resident who rocketed to fame on Oprah Winfrey's show — announced that he was running as a Republican for Pennsylvania's open U.S. Senate seat, one of the country's premier races that could determine control of the Senate next year.

He has led off his campaign with a lengthy critique of how the government and medical establishments handled COVID-19, trampolining from the early days of the pandemic when he became a regular guest on Fox News.

Like his competitors, he has largely concentrated his interviews with conservative media outlets.

But where his competitors for the Republican nomination have looked to standard campaign fare, Oz has out-flanked them with showmanship.

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His rivals boast about endorsements while Oz generated coverage by challenging Dr. Anthony Fauci to a televised debate.

"Doctor to doctor," he said.

And while rivals committed to candidate forums, he skipped them. Oz instead found time for bigger stages: getting a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and speaking at this week's Conservative Political Action Conference in Florida.

By all accounts, Oz is leading polls, although public polling is scant and the rest is internal campaign polling. He is also wealthy.

Exactly how wealthy is not clear, since he requested an extension to file a financial disclosure statement to the Senate.

But Oz, 61, told Sunday's audience that he put \$10 million of his own money into a race that features a multi-million-dollar TV smackdown between him, former hedge fund CEO David McCormick and a McCormick-aligned super PAC that is fueled by Wall Street cash.

Oz faces skeptics.

He is dogged by accusations that he was a charlatan selling quack treatments and miracle cures for profit on his TV show. On Fox News, he played up the possibility that the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine could be a COVID-19 cure.

For a Republican Party accustomed to electing white Christians, Oz would be the first U.S. senator who is a Muslim and possibly the first to maintain dual citizenship. He was born in the United States to Turkish parents, married an American who is Christian and raised his children as Christians.

There's the carpetbagging accusations.

Oz is supposedly renting from his in-laws in suburban Philadelphia after moving from his impressive, longtime home in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, that overlooks Manhattan, where he until recently filmed his TV show and practiced medicine.

Otherwise, he grew up in Wilmington, Delaware, and went to medical school in Philadelphia. If he loses in Pennsylvania, he could run again in New Jersey in 2024.

Then there are questions about whether he adheres to strict Republican positions on things like guns and abortion.

"I've got a concealed carry and I've got a lot of guns," he said Sunday. "I know how to use them."

Still, he told a questioner, "there are mental health issues we've got to be serious about as gun owners."

On abortion, "I believe life starts at conception," he told a questioner who said she canvasses for pro-life causes.

The crowd leaving the event seemed convinced.

Bernice Sikora, 78, never saw one of Oz's shows, but said she liked his energy, sincerity and common sense.

Bob and Eileen Walker will vote for him. Eileen, 75, has watched Oz's show for years and likes his advocacy for "alternative health care." Bob, 73, heard what he wanted to hear from Oz on issues like illegal immigration.

They know Oz has barely lived in Pennsylvania, but they don't care: they spend a lot of time in New Jersey, too, at their shore house.

Carpetbagging was on the minds of some there.

"That's what I wanted to come here for," said Jennifer Spillane, 47. "To see if he was believable."

Oz was, she said, although she is still undecided who she will vote for. Then she headed over to get in line to take a photo with the celebrity doctor.

Rejection or welcome: Transgender Catholics encounter both

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

For transgender Catholics across the United States, retaining their faith can entail complex calculations. They face rebukes from some fellow Catholics, including many bishops, yet find full acceptance in some

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premises of the church.

A small but growing number of parishes have formed LGBTQ ministries or support groups and warmly welcome transgender people on their own terms. Yet within the past two years, at least six Catholic dioceses have issued guidelines targeting trans people with restrictions and refusing to recognize their gender identity.

"Many of our bishops are anti-science. ... They are cold and cruel," said Sister Luisa Derouen, a retired nun who has ministered to transgender people. "You can't respect people and deny their existence at the same time."

The latest policy targeting trans Catholics was issued by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in January. It bars church personnel from using trans people's preferred pronouns that reflect their gender identity.

Objecting to trans-supportive "gender theory," the policy stipulates that "all interactions and policies, parishes, organizations, and institutions are to recognize only a person's biological sex."

Among other measures, it says parishes, schools and other Catholic organizations in the archdiocese must require people to use bathrooms associated with their birth gender and adhere to dress codes on the same basis.

And a broader policy issued in July by the Diocese of Marquette, which encompasses Michigan's Upper Peninsula, said pastors should deny trans, gay and nonbinary Catholics the sacraments — such as baptism and Communion — "unless the person has repented." It was signed by Bishop John Doerfler.

But in some other parishes around the country, a different, more welcoming face of the church is on display.

Just a few weeks before the Marquette policy was issued, the Church of Our Lady of Grace in Hoboken, New Jersey, celebrated its annual Pride Mass in support of the LGBTQ community. Delivering part of the homily at the invitation of the priest, Alexander Santora, was Christine Zuba, a transgender woman from New Jersey.

"We are not disordered, confused or a fad," Zuba said, sharing with other worshippers the decades-long journey that led her to come out six years earlier at age 58. "We are not trying to defy God, nor to play God."

"By staying visible, not only outside these walls but inside our churches, we change hearts and minds, one person at a time," she concluded. "Once in a while we may get thrown out, but if that happens, we're not going away. We're coming right back in."

Santora, a priest for 40 years, said the other worshippers rose and applauded.

"Our church was opened in 1878," Santora said. "I wanted Christine to be on that pulpit."

A lifelong Catholic, Zuba said she knew from age 4 that she was different. When she finally decided to come out five decades later, she was grateful that a nearby parish, Saints Peter and Paul in Turnersville, New Jersey, welcomed her. She serves there as a eucharistic minister.

Yet she knows that much of the Catholic hierarchy, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, rejects the concept of gender transition.

"These bishops and priests don't understand that when they turn someone away, they're losing parents, children, groups of friends who say this is not the church we want to belong to," Zuba said.

Lynn Discenza, a 64-year-old transgender woman, grew up in a churchgoing Italian American family in West Hartford, Connecticut, and gave seminary a try before pursuing a career in aerospace design.

She considers herself fortunate, after transitioning two years ago, to be part of a welcoming Catholic church in the area — Saint Patrick-Saint Anthony Church in Hartford. She is a co-leader of its LGBTQ ministry.

Particularly moving, Discenza said, was a Nov. 21 observance marking the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance, which commemorates people killed due to anti-trans violence. She thanked the other worshippers for their support, and they responded with applause.

The pastor, Timothy Shreenan, highlighted the commemoration in the church bulletin.

"We must always stand up against hatred in all its forms, and not allow others' fears (or phobias) to be a reason for hatred," he wrote. "Rather, we must continue to learn more about the experience of others and to become more tolerant and accepting of one another."

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Discenza hopes that grassroots activism on behalf of greater inclusivity will accelerate as more parishes add LGBTQ ministries.

"The change is going to come from the ground up, and some of the old bishops will die away," she said.

For young transgender Catholics, the conflicting approaches of individual churches and clergy can pose challenges to both them and their parents.

Eli Musselman of Philadelphia, who turns 19 in March and came out as transgender almost four years ago, said he felt a strong connection with his faith as a boy and many of his friends supported him.

But the pastor of the family's longtime parish declined to refer to him with masculine pronouns and he had anxiety attacks in church due to some parishioners' "nasty looks," prompting the family to switch to a parish that made them feel at home.

"A place that had once been a safe haven for me had become a place of dangers," said Musselman, now a freshman at the Jesuit-run St. Josephs University, where students and most professors, with one hurtful exception, have been supportive.

"But since coming out," he added, "my spirituality has grown. ... I feel whole for the first time in my life."

"I lost some really good friends," said his mother, JoEllen Musselman. "I felt I was constantly making apologies to people, and I got tired of that."

After embracing Catholicism as a convert after her marriage, she now has mixed feelings. Though determined to remain active in the church and advocate for greater inclusivity, she remains skeptical about the topmost Catholic leaders.

"They're flawed," she said. "If it wasn't for Christ, the church would collapse, because we humans screw everything up."

At the highest level of Catholic leadership, Pope Francis' position can best be described as two-sided.

On one hand, he has personally ministered to trans Catholics, receiving them in the Vatican and encountering them as an archbishop in Argentina, and he has said the Catholic Church must accompany them. However, he has repeatedly denounced "gender theory" and what he calls the "ideological colonization" in some schools that teaches children they can change their biological sex at will.

Francis spoke at length on the issue during a 2016 press conference, stressing the need to avoid "gender ideology" but reasserting the need to minister to trans Catholics. "But please don't say 'The pope sanctifies trans!' Please!"

Luisa Derouen, the retired nun who has ministered to more than 250 transgender people since 1999, received permission from her superiors in 2014 to write about that work. But that was on condition she not identify herself or her congregation, the Dominican Sisters of Peace. She did so under a pseudonym, which she ultimately abandoned in 2018 to publicly speak out on behalf of trans people and "give witness to their dignity and worth as human beings."

In a recent interview, Derouen said friction over transgender inclusion is likely to intensify.

"There has never been a time in the American church when Catholic hierarchy has had less moral credibility," she said. "The people in the pews are taking responsibility for doing their own homework and recognizing that we are all God's people."

Michael Sennett, a 26-year-old transgender man, sees that happening at the Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, where he is communications director.

The unwelcoming attitude of some bishops discourages him, but he's heartened by advances, including the formation of a support group called LGBTQ+ Catholics.

"Overall I marvel at the progress," Sennett said. "People are speaking up as never before, joining forces. ... The laity is finding more power."

Path to war in Ukraine was laid in months of plans, warnings

By LORI HINNANT, MSTYSLAV CHERNOV, AAMER MADHANI and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press
The week before Russia attacked, a Ukrainian soldier peered through a periscope from the bottom of his trench. Mud seeped into his boots, his clothes and every crack in his gear as he walked the narrow

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space where he had spent his days for the past 10 months.

Zakhar Leshchyshyn was just 23. He had no memory of Ukraine as anything but a fully independent country. But now he was charged with helping to keep it that way, posted at Ukraine's eastern front line since early last spring, when 100,000 Russian land and naval forces first encircled most of his country.

"These wars for territory are madness," he said, "but probably this is human nature."

Within days, Ukraine was engulfed by what the soldier in the trench saw as humanity's dark impulse. The largest invasion Europe has seen since World War II has imperiled a young democracy while risking geopolitical instability far beyond the flashpoints of the new war.

In the conflict's earliest days, each side has managed to surprise the other. Russia unleashed a broader, larger invasion than almost anyone had predicted. And Ukraine, at least by U.S. and other Western accounts, has put up a more tenacious fight than many thought possible against the neighboring superpower. Fortunes can turn at any moment.

"It's not apparent to us that the Russians over the last 24 hours have been able to execute their plans as they deemed that they would. But it's a dynamic, fluid situation," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Friday.

And so it has been for much of the past year. Russia alternately added and subtracted troops along the border, diplomacy seemed to make progress until it didn't, Russian President Vladimir Putin seemed restrained, then not, then maybe, then not.

The path to war was convoluted — but also inexorable.

AN EARLY MARKER

It was back on March 31 of last year when the U.S. military raised an alert of a "potential imminent crisis" arising from Russian drills near the Ukrainian border. Not long after, Russian troops were ordered back to their permanent bases and the sense of alarm eased.

But those orders also required Russian troops to leave their heavy weaponry in Crimea and the Voronezh region bordering Ukraine, where it would already be in place if the forces returned — which they did. The reprieve was brief for Leshchyshyn's unit and for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had tweeted that the redeployment "proportionally reduces tension."

Soon afterward, U.S. President Joe Biden agreed to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva, a summit widely seen as a reward for suspending the drills. But by the end of summer, it was clear that Putin's military plans were just getting started — even if they hadn't quite taken shape yet.

When Zelenskyy visited Washington on Sept. 1, he came away with a pledge of \$60 million in military aid.

IN THE TRENCH

Leshchyshyn's life in the deserted front-line village of Zolote continued as before, circumscribed by the labyrinth of trenches he commanded. The monotony of four-hour shifts on guard was broken by periodic exchanges of fire with Russia-backed separatists, and by the news he caught on his mobile phone.

Roots poked out along the walls of the trench, but they were never enough to hold up the mud when a shell exploded nearby. Those not on guard duty shored up the sides with hand shovels.

When they returned to their basement barracks in a house with no roof, the same shovels scraped the congealed mud from their boots. When night fell, the village was dark and quiet enough that Leshchyshyn's men and the separatists sometimes shouted curses at each other from their respective trenches.

By early November, the mud was back, thick enough to weigh down the soldiers' boots. So were the Russian troops — 90,000 of them again near the border, with more on the way from all corners of the world's largest country.

ALARM IN WASHINGTON

The warnings from the Biden administration grew more pointed, and for the first time, U.S. intelligence officials started sharing specifics with Zelenskyy, European officials and eventually the public.

The White House realized that it was looking at the beginnings of what would probably turn into an enormous crisis by October. Officials were seeing a cascade of worrying intelligence strains, including troop movements, that suggested that Putin was looking to move on Ukraine.

Biden wanted Putin to know what he knew. He sent CIA Director Bill Burns to Moscow to warn Kremlin

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officials that the U.S. was fully aware of their troop movements. The White House made the calculation that the CIA chief's travels, normally closely held, needed to be advertised far and wide.

"We wanted it to be known that he was there and understood by the Russians that we were starting to put them on notice and that we were going to do so publicly as well as privately," said a senior administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Soon after that trip, administration officials decided they needed to accelerate intelligence sharing. They also began discussions with allies about sanctions should Russia invade.

In early December, national security officials shared information from an intelligence document with the press showing at least 70,000 Russian troops had massed near the Ukraine border. Much of the information could be gleaned independently but White House officials thought it was crucial to get the information out in the open "with U.S. government branding."

So began a name-and-shame campaign in which the White House national security officials widely distributed a series of plots they contend Putin was weighing to set a pretext for an invasion of Ukraine.

Critics of U.S. intelligence — Russian officials among them — recalled past failures like the infamously false identification of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq nearly 20 years ago and the unexpectedly swift fall of Kabul last year.

In mid-November, a senior European diplomat spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss confidential briefings. The diplomat was unconvinced by U.S. intelligence findings.

"We see the military build-up, at the same time, we don't have any intelligence that there's something like military action, or that Russians would be trying to become militarily active, so we don't share this opinion, even though the Americans have said so," the diplomat said. "We don't see that there is intention on Putin's part so far."

At NATO, Germany blocked efforts to help Ukraine acquire military equipment. France and Germany objected to launching NATO's crisis management system, but eventually relented at a NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Latvia on Dec. 1. The move was essentially symbolic. The system is used to identify whether there is a crisis and launch preliminary planning to respond.

PUTIN'S GUESSING GAME

With some satisfaction, Putin said the military buildup has caused a "certain stress" in the West. "It's necessary to keep them in that condition for as long as possible" to secure long-term security guarantees for Russia, he added.

He laid down his demands on Dec. 15: a ban on NATO membership for Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations, a halt to the deployment of NATO weapons in those countries and a rollback of NATO forces from Eastern Europe. Meanwhile Russian troops kept arriving in Belarus to Ukraine's north and on its eastern frontiers where heavy weaponry had been stockpiled since the spring.

Zelenskyy continued to play down the troop movements, noting that Ukraine had been facing threats from Russia and the separatists since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea. On Jan. 10, Russia's deputy foreign minister insisted there were "no plans, intentions or reasons to attack Ukraine."

The U.S. did not believe it.

Two days later, the United States and NATO rejected Russia's demands, and the movement of troops and weapons accelerated. Ukrainian government websites went down en masse, many displaying a warning from the suspected Russian-linked hackers: "Be afraid and expect worse."

On Jan. 20, Russia announced sweeping naval drills off the coast of Ukraine and Biden said publicly he believed Russia planned an invasion.

On Feb. 4, Putin flew to Beijing, ostensibly for the Olympic Games although Russian athletes were banned from competing under their nation's flag because of years of doping scandals. He and Chinese President Xi Jinping reaffirmed their support for each other's foreign policy, including Russia's backing of China's claim to Taiwan.

The unspoken message: These two world powers were on the same page or a similar page, and China would not stand with most of the rest of the world against Putin's designs on Ukraine.

MACRON TRIES

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By then, 150,000 Russian troops had all but surrounded Ukraine and the United States had all but abandoned hope for a diplomatic solution. French President Emmanuel Macron attempted a last-ditch intervention. Flying first to Moscow to meet Putin, where the men sat across an absurdly long marble table, then to Kyiv, Macron tried fruitlessly to stave off war.

Publicly Macron said Putin assured him that Russia would not escalate the crisis. But privately he described the Russian leader as "more rigid, more isolated and fundamentally lost in a sort of ideological and security drift," according to a senior French official.

The American warnings grew increasingly frantic, but life in Kyiv — Ukraine's capital and its largest population center — continued as usual because, Zelenskyy insisted, Ukrainians would not yield to panic.

On Feb. 16, a Wednesday, Ukraine held a "day of national unity" after a date floated as the potential Russian attack failed to materialize. Russia's ambassador to the European Union, Vladimir Chizhov, accused Westerners of "slander" for alleging an invasion was afoot and joined other Russian officials in ridiculing Biden's prediction that it could start as soon as that Wednesday. "Wars in Europe rarely start on a Wednesday," Chizhov said sarcastically.

But Zelenskyy ordered Ukrainian soldiers to be restrained and give Russia no excuses to attack. Shelling and gunfire at the front lines with the separatists increased exponentially, according to international monitors, but Ukrainian troops were told not to return fire.

BLINKEN: 'IT'S UNFOLDING'

On Feb. 17, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken laid out "what the world can expect to see unfold. In fact, it's unfolding right now."

First, he said, there would be a staged provocation. Then would come a theatrical high-level meeting of the Russian government, followed by a proclamation that Russia must defend ethnic Russians in Ukraine. Then, he said, the attack would begin, with Kyiv a main target. Events would largely, perhaps fully, prove him right.

"We've been warning the Ukrainian government of all that is coming," Blinken said, looking directly at the camera. "And here today, we are laying it out in great detail, with the hope that by sharing what we know with the world, we can influence Russia to abandon the path of war and choose a different path while there's still time."

On the night of Feb. 19, the separatist leaders released near-simultaneous videos announcing a general evacuation of women, children and the elderly. One of those pro-Russia separatists showed video of what he said was a car bomb exploding his personal vehicle — ostensibly, proof that Ukrainian troops were provoking a war.

The destroyed 4X4, however, was a suspiciously older model and metadata showed the videos were actually filmed three days earlier.

Putin summoned his top security officials and, in a dramatic pre-recorded meeting televised nationwide, asked them to explain one by one whether Russia should recognize the separatists and help them. One by one they agreed; there was little prospect that they would not.

Hours later, the Kremlin released yet another pre-recorded video, this time of Putin alone, cataloging Russian grievances against Ukraine, NATO, the United States and Europe. An independent Ukrainian nation, he said, was a fiction. Without evidence, he accused Ukraine of genocide and of seeking nuclear weapons. Russia, he insisted, had every right to attack such a country.

"I would now like to say something very important for those who may be tempted to interfere in these developments from the outside," he added. "They must know that Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history."

GLOBAL SUPPORT BUT NO TROOPS

The attack began before dawn on Feb. 24 — Thursday in Ukraine but, as it happens, still Wednesday in Washington.

It opened with the firing of more than 100 land- and sea-based missiles in the first hours, said a senior U.S. official who was not authorized to be identified and spoke on condition of anonymity. The official said the main targets of the air assault were barracks, ammunition warehouses, and 10 airfields. Russian

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ground forces began moving in from Belarus around noon.

Sanctions from the U.S. and Europe came down with hours, but Zelenskyy, in hiding in the besieged capital on Friday, pleaded for more.

He spoke by phone with many foreign leaders. They expressed solidarity and offered help. None offered what he most wanted — troops to come to his country's aid and a no-fly zone to protect Ukraine's skies.

He told several of them these phone calls might be his last.

"The Ukrainian president started by saying he's reporting from a country where he doesn't know how long it's going to exist," Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer related from his call. "And he's reporting as president without knowing how long he's going to be alive."

In an impassioned speech, Zelenskyy implored his people to be firm in their resistance.

"This morning we are defending our state alone, as we did yesterday," he said. "The world's most powerful forces are watching from afar. Did yesterday's sanctions convince Russia? We hear in our sky and see on our earth that this is not enough."

Did Leshchyshyn, the young soldier, hear Zelenskyy's cry? Did he survive the first days of the war? It cannot be determined. He spoke to the AP in the trenches a week ago; he has not responded to messages since.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Feb. 27, the 58th day of 2022. There are 307 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 27, 1922, the Supreme Court, in *Leser v. Garnett*, unanimously upheld the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which guaranteed the right of women to vote.

On this date:

In 1807, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born in Portland, Maine.

In 1933, Germany's parliament building, the Reichstag (RYKS'-tahg), was gutted by fire; Chancellor Adolf Hitler, blaming the Communists, used the fire to justify suspending civil liberties.

In 1939, the Supreme Court, in *National Labor Relations Board v. Fansteel Metallurgical Corp.*, effectively outlawed sit-down strikes.

In 1942, the Battle of the Java Sea began during World War II; Imperial Japanese naval forces scored a decisive victory over the Allies.

In 1951, the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, limiting a president to two terms of office, was ratified.

In 1973, members of the American Indian Movement occupied the hamlet of Wounded Knee in South Dakota, the site of the 1890 massacre of Sioux men, women and children. (The occupation lasted until the following May.)

In 1991, Operation Desert Storm came to a conclusion as President George H.W. Bush declared that "Kuwait is liberated, Iraq's army is defeated," and announced that the allies would suspend combat operations at midnight, Eastern time.

In 1997, divorce became legal in Ireland.

In 1998, with the approval of Queen Elizabeth II, Britain's House of Lords agreed to end 1,000 years of male preference by giving a monarch's first-born daughter the same claim to the throne as any first-born son.

In 2006, former Newark Eagles co-owner Effa Manley became the first woman elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

In 2010, in Chile, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake and tsunami killed 524 people, caused \$30 billion in damage and left more than 200,000 homeless.

In 2020, U.S. stocks posted their worst one-day drop since 2011, as worldwide markets plummeted amid growing anxiety about the coronavirus; the Dow tumbled nearly 1,200 points. President Donald Trump declared that a widespread U.S. outbreak of the virus was not inevitable, even as top health authorities

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at his side warned that more infections were coming.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama urged the nation's governors at the White House to invest more state resources in education, saying a highly skilled workforce was crucial for the U.S. to remain competitive with other countries. Three students were shot to death in a Chardon, Ohio, high school cafeteria by a 17-year-old who later received three life terms in prison.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump proposed a huge \$54 billion surge in U.S. military spending for new aircraft, ships and fighters in his first federal budget while slashing big chunks from domestic programs and foreign aid to make the government "do more with less." The Senate confirmed billionaire investor Wilbur Ross as commerce secretary by a vote of 72-27.

One year ago: The U.S. got a third vaccine to prevent COVID-19, as the Food and Drug Administration cleared a Johnson & Johnson shot that worked with just one dose instead of two.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Joanne Woodward is 92. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader is 88. Actor Barbara Babcock is 85. Actor Debra Monk is 73. Rock singer-musician Neal Schon (Journey) is 68. Rock musician Adrian Smith (Iron Maiden) is 65. Actor Timothy Spall is 65. Rock musician Paul Humphreys (Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark) is 62. Country singer Johnny Van Zant (Van Zant) is 62. Rock musician Leon Mobley (Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals) is 61. Basketball Hall of Famer James Worthy is 61. Actor Adam Baldwin is 60. Actor Grant Show is 60. Actor Noah Emmerich is 57. Actor Donal Logue (DOH'-nuhl LOHG) is 56. R&B singer Chilli (TLC) is 51. Rock musician Jeremy Dean (Nine Days) is 50. Country-rock musician Shonna Tucker is 44. Chelsea Clinton is 42. Actor Brandon Beemer is 42. Rock musician Cyrus Bolooki (New Found Glory) is 42. Rock musician Jake Clemons (Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band) is 42. R&B singer Bobby V is 42. Singer Josh Groban is 41. Banjoist Noam (cq) Pikelnny is 41. Rock musician Jared Champion (Cage the Elephant) is 39. Actor Kate Mara is 39. TV personality JWoww (AKA Jenni Farley) is 36. Actor Lindsey Morgan is 32.