

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

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

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

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



Junior high teams split with Warner

Groton Area's seventh grade team lost to Warner, 25-9. Tristan McGannon had four points, Karsten Flihs three and Ben Hoeft had two points. Alex Mikkelsen had 12 points for Warner while Noah Bakeberg had 11 and Lincoln Kroll 2.

The eighth graders won their game, 49-22. Ryder Johnson led Groton Area with 17 points followed by Keagan Tracy with eight, JD Schwan seven, Logan Warrington six, Gage Sippel four, Keegen Harry and Ben Hoeft each had two and Tristan McGannon one.

Tanner Wolberg had eight points for Warner while Jessiah Baun had six, Alec Mikkelsen had four and Michael Bjorgard and Noah Bakeberg each had two points.

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

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

NO TICKET REQUIRED! FREE TO WATCH



**GROTON AREA VS.
SISSETON
TUES., MAR. 01, 6:00**

Good Luck Tigers from the GDILIVE.COM sponsors

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

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda March 1, 2022 – 7:00pm City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Minutes
3. Bills
4. Department reports
5. Authorization to bid Street Resurfacing
6. Authorization to bid 3-year Garbage Contract
7. Amendment to Personnel Manual Policy 4.10 – Residency Requirement
8. Discussion and possible award of Pool Resurfacing Contract
9. Permission for BNSF to close Railroad Crossing on E. Aspen Avenue
10. Baseball Complex Facilities Use Agreement – High School Spring Baseball
11. Second reading of the Summer Salary Ordinance #759
12. Allied Health Insurance refund for lower-than-expected claim costs
13. Select an Equalization Meeting date March 15th
14. Community Center Surplus Bids
15. Update on Food Bank progress at Community Center
16. April 5-6, 2022 – SDMEA Conference and Technology Expo in Watertown, SD – Todd Gay
17. March 23, 2022 – Election Security Training in Aberdeen, SD – Douglas Heinrich
18. June 7-10, 2022 – SD Human Resource School/SD Finance Officer School in Huron, SD – Douglas Heinrich
19. Reminder – closing for Summer employment applications 5:00 PM 3/11/2022
20. Reminder – SDML District 6 Annual Meeting 3/23/2022, RSVP by 3/9/2022
21. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
22. Adjournment

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This **FREE** event is
**OPEN TO
THE PUBLIC**



HPS is a small non-profit doing **BIG** things!
MISSION: to serve students, coaches & communities through **the power of faith & servant leadership** in 3 ways...
1.) Character Coaching
2.) Distracted Driving Presentations
3.) Therapy Dog Comfort Visits



GHS FCA brings an emotional & impactful presentation by:

Tim Weidenbach

Director of Higher Power Sports

Sunday, March 6th @ 3:30pm

United Methodist Church in Groton, SD

- **94%** of young drivers say they know it is dangerous to drive while using your phone, yet **70%** say they are able to use their phone without it impacting their ability to drive!

ALL ARE WELCOME to hear this engaging speaker,
as seen on **KELOLAND TV!**

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Groton FCA collects nearly 1,500 books for Miller School

The Groton Fellowship of Christian Athletes group raised over \$1000 and collected just shy of 1500 books in a week. Last week, the FCA students volunteered time to wipe down, quality check, sort and count every single book donated by this generous community. Then this past Sunday, 3 car loads of GHS FCA kids volunteered to load the twelve extremely heavy totes, ride along to Miller to deliver them and unload the totes. They were met by the very grateful Miller FCA group of students and staff. Miller then welcomed our FCA group to a tour of their grim current school situation and shared with us their experiences from that terrifying day, the many challenges they have faced since it happened and the blessings they have received because of this adversity. The students further connected by playing some games together and sharing many laughs before heading back North.

GHS FCA is grateful to the many people and organizations who contributed to making the Book Drive such a success. Donation drop off locations included the Groton Wage Memorial Library and each of Groton School offices, with a push for donations during the Parent Teacher Conferences and Book Fair. Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Aberdeen let us have a drop off location there for Aberdeen supporters and the Arbor Spring Retirement Community of Aberdeen raised a significant amount of the money raised. We were overwhelmed by the support and generosity of the community.

Groton Fellowship of Christian Athletes is a fun faith-based group open to any student 6th - 12th grade and emphasises integrity, teamwork and service. They typically meet the first and third Sundays of the month and do at least one organized service project a month together. At the upcoming meeting, FCA is bringing in a big name speaker, Tim Weidenbach, Director of Higher Power Sports out of Sioux Falls. His presentation will be free and open to the public, at 3:30pm at the Groton United Methodist Church. All are welcome! Thank you again to the entire community for your support of Groton Fellowship of Christian Athletes. We have amazing kids here doing great things.



That's life/tony bender Vinyl makes a comeback

I was reading in the newspaper the other day about teenagers who have embraced vinyl records. They, like thousands of seasoned audiophiles, claim records just sound better. Better than MP3 downloads, which compress files to the size of a gnat's butt? I'll go along with that. But better than a really accurate CD player or even "lossless" files streamed from a computer to an expensive DAC (digital to analog converter)? Until they can get the pops and static ticks out of albums, I don't think so.

That isn't to say that I don't have a turntable that cost me five times as much as my first car—a 1967 Pontiac Catalina—and twice as much as my second, a 1963 Chevrolet Impala. That's how I measure my spending—in used car units.

I hauled 300 albums around the country, from North Dakota to Denver to Alaska to South Carolina to North Dakota again, even though I didn't ever play them. Now, I have a nice rack that holds most of my LPs, and on Sundays, I look at the albums and dust the turntable.

A few years back, Dylan became so enamored by my turntable demonstration—the audio equivalent of watching a steam engine at a threshing bee, his mother bought him some Iron Maiden albums and I bought him a beautiful turntable. It makes a good bedside table for his iPod and cell phone.

And you're trying to tell me that teenagers, with the attention span of a goldfish, have suddenly come to appreciate the ritual involved with playing a record? First, you have to light some incense or anything else you deem appropriate to burn. After spending 15 minutes deciding which record to play (sometimes longer, depending on what you have decided to burn) you have to clean the record with a special brush and anti-static fluid, or in my case, vacuum the record (I'm not kidding). Remember to only hold the record like a waiter with a tray, never touching the playing surface.

Then you have to zap it with an anti-static gun that looks like something from Star Trek. Set it on stun for Joni Mitchell; crank it all the way up for Jimi Hendrix. You need to make sure the stylus is brushed clean, line it up perfectly and then, slowly lower the needle. Now, sit worshipfully, for 15 minutes until the record gets to the end of side one, get up and do it all again. Before computer streaming, we were all in much better shape.

There is so much ritual involved, it reminds me of the time I went to a Catholic Church. There was incense, candles, music by Emerson Lake and Palmer, and most of us were in jeans except the odd fellow in an embroidered bed sheet. At the end, we all pooled our money, but no one ever came back with the pizza.

The idea that today's teenagers would embrace such a stodgy ritual really concerned me. There had to be an ulterior motive. After all, this is the generation of nose rings and tattoos. In the 1700's, they would have been pirates. So, I consulted with my friend, Allan Burke, publisher of the Emmons County Record and renowned musicologist. Or is that orthodontist? It's one of those.

We bumped into each other at the Elton John concert in Bismarck last week. Dylan was commenting to me how much more orderly the line was compared to last year's Disturbed concert, which involved the Bismarck Police, the state militia and a SWAT team. And that was just the beer concession. I explained to Dylan that most of the people at the Elton John concert were going to be either old or gay, and though there might be complaints about the décor, it would be a peaceful crowd. Then we ran into Allan.

While Dylan scurried off to find the mosh pit, Allan explained that there was one major reason kids were listening to albums. "You can't play CDs backward," he explained. "How else are they going to get the secret messages from rock stars if they can't play the music backward?"

"I once played Daddy Dewdrop 45 backward," I told him. "It said, 'Chick-a-boom, chick-a-boom.'"

"No, you were playing that one correctly," Allan said.

"But what does it mean?" I hollered after him. But by that time, he had elbowed aside a gray-haired lady in a sequined walker on his way to his seat.

After Dylan returned from his unsuccessful quest, he sniffed as a peculiar odor permeated the air as the show began. "Dad, is that what I think it is?"

"Yes," I said. "That's the smell of Icy Hot. And maybe a touch of horse liniment."

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Viking Free Agency and Combine Preview

By Duane & Jack Kolsrud

The Minnesota Vikings' new regime will have a lot of tough decisions to make in the coming weeks. With the college combine beginning on Monday and free agency just around the corner, Kevin O'Connell and Kwesi Adofu-Mensah will need to put their heads together to make some tough choices.

On the defense, they have four potential starters that are unrestricted free agents. On the top of the list is Anthony Barr. If the Vikings are moving to a 3-4 defense, he would appear to be a good fit to be the right-side edge rusher, especially if they need to move Danielle Hunter due to salary cap issues.

Veteran cornerback Patrick Peterson has indicated he enjoyed playing in Minnesota this past season but that loyalty may have ended with the departure of Mike Zimmer. Keeping Peterson would be a huge boost to the locker room and young defensive backfield. It may be the end for Everson Griffin depending on what happens with Hunter as well as Nick Vigil, who had a vanilla kind of season in his first year with the Vikings.

On the offense, the main guy they could lose is tight end Tyler Conklin. Conklin, who benefitted from the departure of Kyle Rudolph and the season-ending injury to Irv Smith, Jr. may have played himself into a nice deal with a team looking for a solid pass-catching and good blocking tight end. If Smith is not 100% healthy, the Vikings may need to try to resign Conklin as security for next season.

Free agency doesn't matter if the Vikings' starting QB is unwilling to renegotiate his cap-breaking contract that will be worth \$45 million next season. Early indications point to Kirk Cousins not wanting to take a pay cut but this has only come from the rumor mill and never directly from the QB. The wildcard is Cousins played for Kevin O'Connell in Washington and the new coach may have a better relationship with him and could convince him to take a lesser deal to help out the team.

Speaking of free agency, the Vikings will need to be a player in this market as well. Everyone knows they still need to shore up their offensive line and there is an all-pro right guard with ties to O'Connell while in Washington. Brandon Scherff, a perennial pro bowler, has been franchised tag for the past two years and might love nothing more than getting back to his midwest roots. Scherff was an All-American at Iowa and grew up in western Iowa.

On the defensive side of the line, a 3-4 defense will be a big adjustment for this team and only a few positions are locked down- Harrison Smith at safety and Eric Kendricks at linebacker. The defensive line could look very different in a 3-4 as they only need one nose tackle, making Tomlinson or Pierce expendable. For this team to be successful, they need to get back to being a top ten defense.

The Combine- some players to keep an eye on.

Covid protocols threatened to have nearly 50% of the participants boycott the event but as of Wednesday night, it appears the restrictions have been lifted and the combine will go on as planned.

What are the Vikings going to be looking for: early indicators lean toward a shutdown corner or another offensive lineman. Mock drafts have the Vikings taking cornerbacks Derek Stingley, Jr. from LSU, or Ahmad Gardner from Cincinnati with their #12 pick in the draft. If they go for offense, they made it clear this year that center Garrett Bradbury struggled with big defensive lineman and they will be looking hard at players like Tyler Linderbaum from Iowa- considered the top center in the country for the past two seasons. It could be very interesting if the Vikings somehow pair up two Hawkeye All-Americans for many seasons to come.

The next few months will be fun to watch as the new Viking regime will try to make their mark early and take a team that lost a lot of close games in 2021 and gets them back to the playoffs in 2022. The excitement is back- let's see if this young new team of coaches and staff can make it happen.

Guest Speaker
Nicole J Phillips
The Kindness Podcast

*You're
Invited!*

RESET

womens conference

SATURDAY, MARCH 5
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

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

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

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

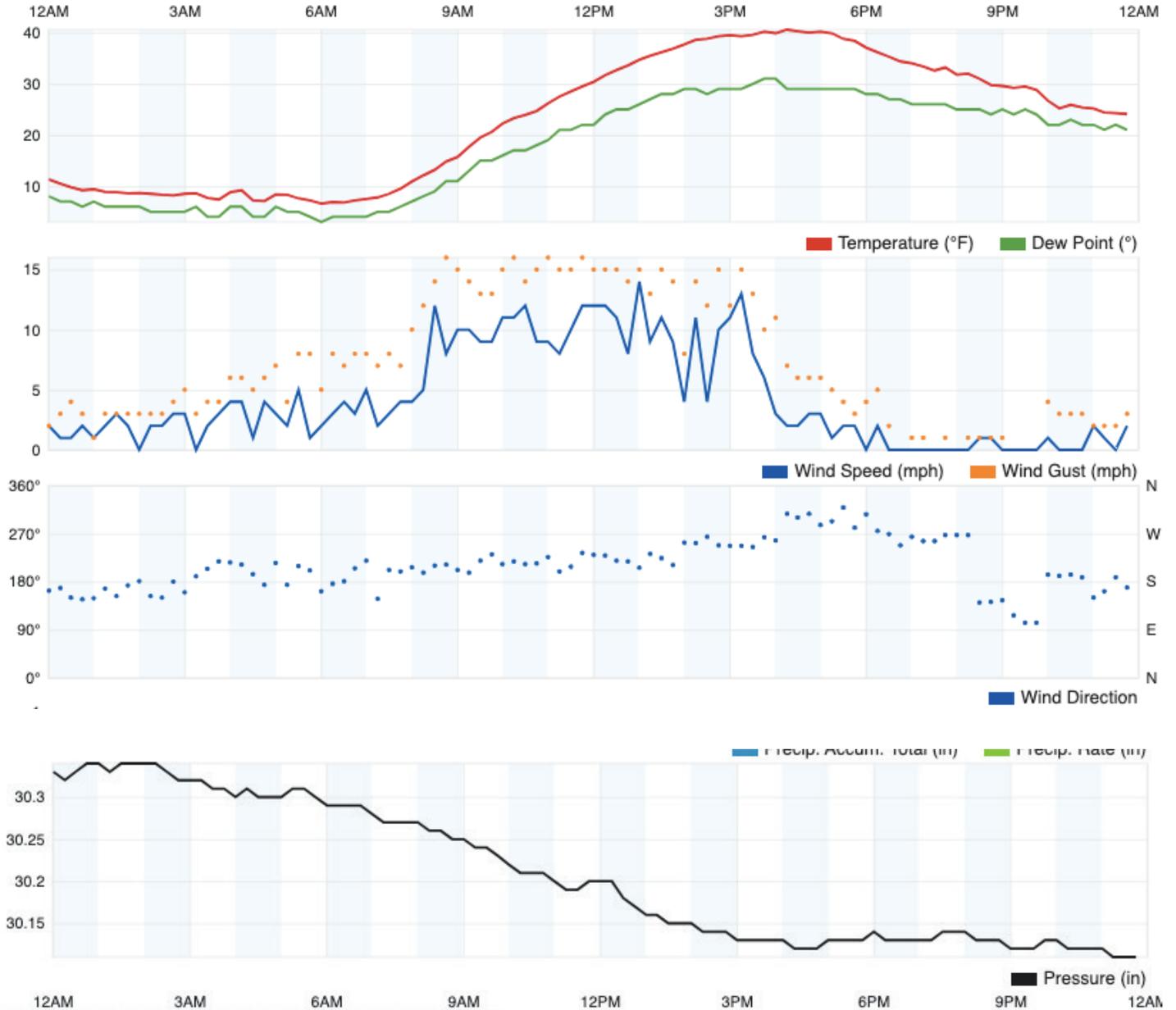
REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT
ONLINE AT ROSEHILLEFC.COM



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Cloudy

High: 34 °F

Tonight



Slight Chance
Freezing Rain
then Mostly
Cloudy

Low: 20 °F

Wednesday



Blustery.
Mostly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance Wintry
Mix

High: 30 °F

Wednesday
Night



Chance Snow

Low: 8 °F

Thursday



Chance Snow

High: 22 °F

Turning Unsettled

Tuesday Wednesday Thursday



27 to 66°

Light
Showers

Tonight



24 to 57°

Breezy

Light

Rain/Snow

Mix

Wed Night



19 to 39°

Breezy

Light Snow

Warmest Temperatures Located Across Central South
Dakota – Coolest For Far Northeast South Dakota &
Western Minnesota.



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 3/1/2022 3:37 AM Central

Mild readings continue for parts of the state today and Wednesday, though not quite as widespread. A series of weak systems will bring light amounts of moisture to our area over the next few days.

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Today in Weather History

March 1, 1970: Freezing rain and drizzle impacted much of South Dakota on March 1, 1970. Ice accumulation up to 1/8 of an inch thick was reported in Rapid City, with heavier amounts in the northwestern part of the state. Some utility lines were broken, but there was no extensive line damage. Also, some schools were closed due to icy roads.

March 1, 1998: An incredible amount of snow falls on Lead, South Dakota from February 25 through March 1. The official storm total was 103 inches for five days.

March 1, 2014: Arctic air combined with strong northwest winds brought bitter cold wind chills to central and northeast South Dakota east of the Missouri River. Bitter wind chills of 35 below to around 40 below occurred. Some of the coldest wind chills include; 39 degrees below zero west of Long Lake; 40 degrees below zero at Highmore; 41 degrees below zero near Roy Lake; and 42 degrees below zero at Summit.

1910: The worst avalanche in US history regarding lives lost occurred in Wellington, Washington. Heavy snow occurred from February 26 through the 28th, which blocked the rail lines. Weather conditions turned on the 28th with a thunderstorm occurring over the area. Just after 1 AM on March 1st, a ten to 14 foot high mass of snow broke free from the mountainside and pushed the trains 150 feet down into the Tye River Gorge. In all, 96 people were killed by this avalanche.

1914 - High winds and heavy snow crippled New Jersey and New York State. Two feet of snow were reported at Ashbury Park, and at New York City the barometric pressure dropped to a record 28.38 inches. The storm caused complete disruption of electric power in New Jersey. (David Ludlum)

1980 - Norfolk, VA, received 13.7 inches of snow to push their season total to a record 41.9 inches exceeding their previous record by more than four inches. (David Ludlum)

1980 - An unusually large Florida tornado, 500 yards in width at times, killed one person and caused six million dollars damage near Fort Lauderdale. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - A ferocious storm battered the Pacific coast. The storm produced heavy rain and gale force winds resulting in flooding and beach erosion, and in the mountains produced up to seven feet of snow in five days. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm crossing the Great Lakes Region produced heavy snow and gale force winds from Wisconsin to northern New England, with eight inches of snow reported at Ironwood MI. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in north central Texas. Baseball size hail was reported at Lake Kickapoo. Hail fell continuously for thirty minutes in the Iowa Park area of Wichita Falls. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - March came in like a lion, with snow and high winds, in the northwestern U.S. Winds gusted to 86 mph in the Rosario Strait of western Washington State. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A series of low pressure systems moving out of the Gulf of Alaska spread high winds and heavy snow across western Alaska. Winds in the Anchorage area gusted to 69 mph at Glen Alps, and Talkeetna was buried under three feet of snow in two days. Valdez received 21.4 inches of snow, raising their total for the winter season to 482.4 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006 - Dallas/Forth Worth Airport breaks a 107-year-old North Texas temperature record after reaching 93 degrees. Mineral Wells reached 97, Wichita Falls 96 and Fort Worth Meacham Airport 90.

2011 - Snowfall across Idaho broke numerous accumulation records. Pierce received 15 inches, Powell 14.5 inches, Potlatch 12 inches and Kellogg and Plummer 7 inches. The same storm created high winds across the Pacific Northwest. A weather station at 10,000 feet on Mount Ranier measures a wind gust of 137 MPH with a sustained 1-minute wind reading of 112 MPH.

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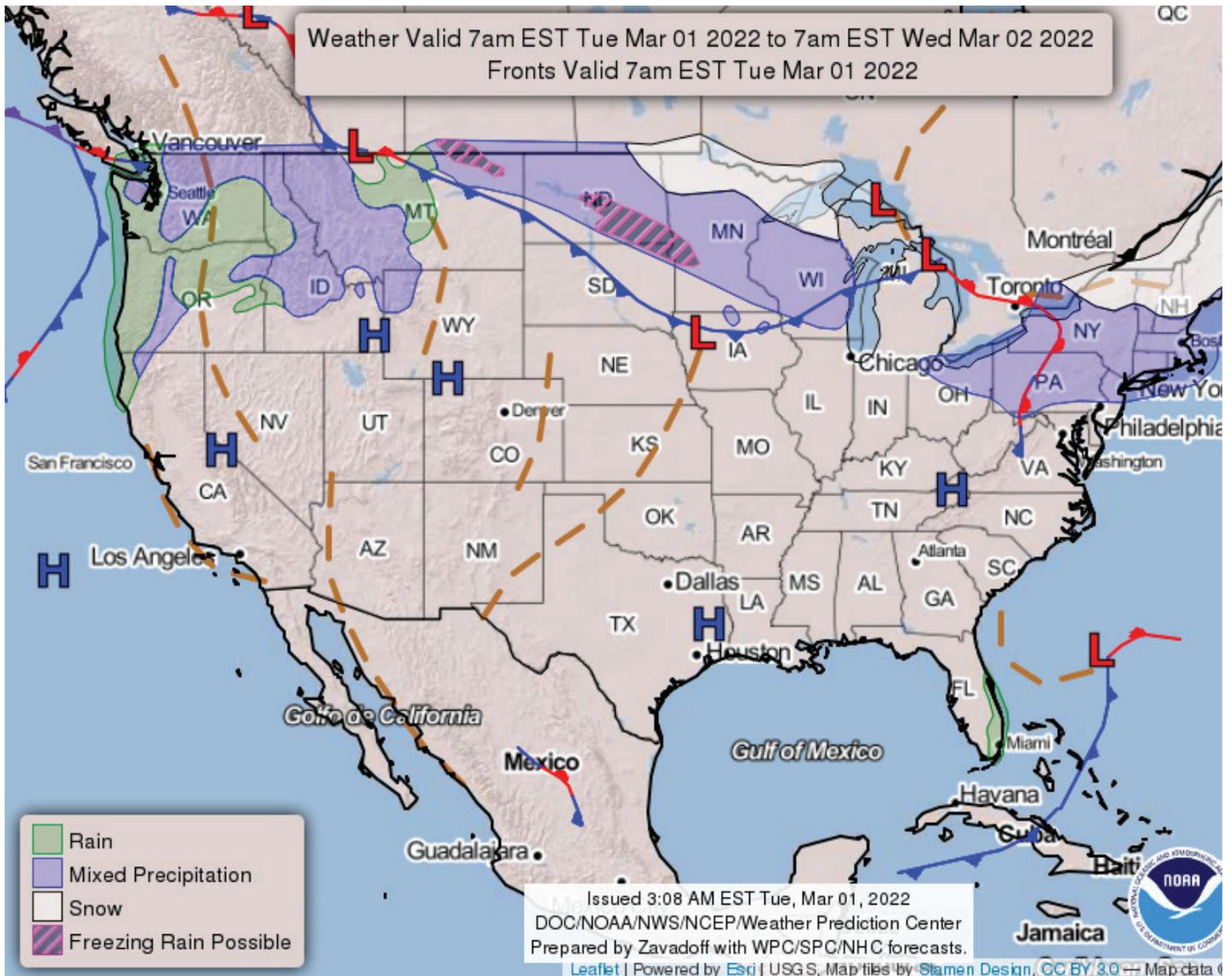
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 50 °F at 2:40 PM
Low Temp: 20 °F at 4:34 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 10:53 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 12 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 73 in 1992
Record Low: -29 in 1962
Average High: 34°F
Average Low: 12°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.02
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.19
Precip Year to Date: 0.97
Sunset Tonight: 6:20:48 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:06:44 AM



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CONTAMINATED CHRISTIANS

My Dad's lack of faith was always a problem for me. He was hardworking and honest, thoughtful and compassionate, and would do anything for his family. But church? That was an entirely different matter. He refused to go to church or have anything to do with anyone who did. That puzzled me.

Our home was always open to those who served the Lord. Missionaries and evangelists and musicians were frequent guests at our evening meal. And although "Pa" would not talk with them as we ate together, he did not interfere with our guests. He did not oppose them nor treat them unkindly. He was simply indifferent to them.

Once, during a revival, my heart was burdened for his salvation. I wanted to know if he was born again. I came home and found him sitting in his favorite chair listening to the news. Fearful of angering him I asked as politely as I could, "Pa, why don't you come to church with Ma and me?"

He turned the radio off and looked at me and said, "I work with those people you go to church with. They do things I would never do. They lie, they cheat, and they steal. No one trusts them. Why would I want to be with them if I do not have to be with them?" He would have nothing to do with "contaminated Christians" unless work dictated it.

The Psalmist wrote, "May I wholeheartedly follow Your decrees, that I may not be put to shame." We face that same problem today. Christians do not "walk their talk" and as a result shame themselves and their Savior.

Prayer: What a tragedy, God, that many who represent You do not do so "wholeheartedly." We don't want to share their shame. Please, revive us now! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: May I wholeheartedly follow Your decrees, that I may not be put to shame. Psalm 119:80

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2022 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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Groton, SD 57445-0034

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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 Monday:

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$102 million

Powerball

07-21-39-47-55, Powerball: 19, Power Play: 2

(seven, twenty-one, thirty-nine, forty-seven, fifty-five; Powerball: nineteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$65 million

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brandon Valley 72, Brookings 38

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 62, Aberdeen Central 57

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class B=

First Round=

Region 1=

Britton-Hecla 62, Wilmot 38

Region 2=

Miller 59, North Central Co-Op 45

Sully Buttes 78, Sunshine Bible Academy 28

Region 3=

Arlington 79, Iroquois/Doland 53

Waverly-South Shore 52, Lake Preston 19

Region 4=

Bridgewater-Emery 60, Sioux Falls Lutheran 36

Mitchell Christian 69, Colman-Egan 59

Region 5=

Alcester-Hudson 36, Freeman 32

Region 6=

Kimball/White Lake 54, Avon 31

Tripp-Delmont/Armour 49, Colome 40

Region 7=

Crazy Horse 61, Edgemont 25

Jones County 75, New Underwood 55

Region 8=

Takini 56, Bison 49

Tiospaye Topa 65, Newell 41

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 62, Aberdeen Central 57

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

US states adding to financial pressure on Russia over war

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Seeking to tighten the financial squeeze on Russia over its war against Ukraine, governors and lawmakers in numerous U.S. states were taking actions Monday to pull state investments from Russian companies while encouraging private entities to do the same.

The effect of sanctions by U.S. states often pales in comparison to national ones, but state officials said they wanted to show solidarity with Ukraine and do what they could to build upon the penalties imposed on Russia by the U.S. government and other Western nations.

Georgia House Speaker David Ralston, a Republican, got a bipartisan standing ovation Monday when he told representatives he would seek to have the state's retirement funds quickly divested from any Russian assets.

"I don't know about y'all, but I don't want one penny of Georgians' money going to subsidize Vladimir Putin," Ralston said. "While our role in international affairs is limited, we make clear we stand with those who want to live in peace."

Some actions have been largely symbolic. The capitols in Arizona, Pennsylvania and Tennessee and the governor's mansion in South Carolina were lit with the blue and yellow colors of Ukraine's flag. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, and Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, issued a joint statement condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine as co-chairs of the presidentially appointed Council of Governors. Oklahoma's Republican-controlled Senate passed a resolution affirming the historical ties between the state and the people of Ukraine and supporting their fight against what it described as "an illegal and violent" Russian invasion.

Other state actions have potential teeth.

On Monday, the Indiana House passed legislation that would block Russian-controlled businesses and nonprofits from acquiring property in Indiana for one year. It now goes to the Senate.

"Indiana will not be a safe haven for ill-gotten Russian funds, nor for its oligarchs trying to find financial shelter in the wake of Putin's unconscionable invasion of Ukraine," Democratic state Rep. Ryan Dvorak said while proposing the amendment last week.

Pennsylvania lawmakers said Monday they will file legislation requiring state pension funds to pull investments connected to the Russian government and its critical supporters. The state Treasury Department also has begun divesting its minimal holdings in Russian-based companies.

In a memo to fellow senators, Democratic state Sen. Sharif Street said Pennsylvania "must wield our economic power to ensure that Russia faces grave consequences for their flagrant violations of international law and human cooperation."

Pennsylvania House Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff, a Republican seeking co-sponsors for the legislation, said state lawmakers "have a moral obligation to ensure that our public fund investments are not inadvertently supporting those who are engaging in an unprovoked invasion of their democratically elected neighbors."

Arkansas lawmakers have filed proposals authorizing banks in the state to freeze the assets of Russian oligarchs and to require a boycott of Russian-made goods. Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson declared Tuesday through Thursday "special days of prayer for Ukraine."

A bipartisan group of California lawmakers said Monday they also will introduce legislation to divest public money from Russian state entities.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul signed an executive order Sunday forbidding her state from doing business with Russia. She ordered state agencies to divest money and assets from companies or institutions aiding Russia in its war against Ukraine. The Democratic governor also said New York would welcome Ukrainian refugees, noting that New York already is home to the largest Ukrainian population in the U.S.

On Monday, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, ordered state offices under his control to terminate government contracts that benefit Russian businesses.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, a Democrat, also has banned state agencies from doing business with Russian state-owned firms and their subcontractors. Colorado's \$61 billion state pension fund is pulling \$8 million

from a Russian state-owned bank identified in federal sanctions.

Governors or other state officials in Connecticut, Indiana, New Jersey, Oregon, Virginia and Washington also have ordered a review of whether any state money is going to Russian companies or investments supporting the Russian government. A North Dakota investment board was due to meet later this week to discuss its investments in Russia.

"If our state can put one brick in the wall around Putin, it will be a good thing, and we intend to do all that we can in this regard," said Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat.

Two prominent Republican governors, Florida's Ron DeSantis and South Dakota's Kristi Noem, who are widely seen as angling for a White House bid, mostly took aim at President Joe Biden rather than issuing executive orders targeting Russia. They criticized his energy policies and said that had made it difficult to slap sanctions on Russia's exports of oil and gas.

Other governors are seeking to sever good-will relationships between their home states and those in Russia.

Republican Gov. Larry Hogan announced Monday that he's dissolving Maryland's decades-old sister-state relationship with Russia's Leningrad region after the invasion of Ukraine. Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, asked the cities of Norfolk and Roanoke to end their sister city partnerships with Russian cities. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, called for an end to its sister state relationship with Stavropol Krai, Russia, and a strengthening of its sister state relationship with Cherkasy Oblast, Ukraine.

Several states have expressed a willingness to provide housing to Ukrainian refugees. The Washington state House and Senate each have added amendments to their budget proposals setting aside \$19 million to provide services and temporary housing to refugees who come from Ukraine.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, posted on Twitter over the weekend that he has asked restaurants and retailers "to voluntarily remove all Russian products from their shelves."

Officials in Alabama, Iowa, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia — all states that control the sale of alcohol — have directed Russian-sourced alcohol to be removed from store shelves.

"Utah stands in solidarity with Ukraine and will not support Russian enterprises, no matter how small the exchange," Republican Utah Gov. Spencer Cox said.

Noem's abortion pill limit headed to South Dakota Senate

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Republican senators on Monday advanced a proposal from Gov. Kristi Noem that aims to make the state one of the hardest places to get abortion pills, though its actual enactment depends on a federal court ruling.

Every Republican on the Senate Health and Human Services committee voted to advance the bill for a vote in the full chamber, even as one GOP lawmaker cautioned the Legislature on getting involved in the practice of medicine. The lone Democrat on the committee opposed it.

Shortly after the decision to advance the bill to the Senate floor where a vote has not yet been scheduled, the same committee unanimously rejected a separate proposal, brought by Noem's Republican primary challenger Rep. Steve Haugaard, to ban use of the drugs for abortions altogether.

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

South Dakota's politicians have taken aim at abortion pills after the Food and Drug Administration last year removed a major obstacle for women seeking the pills by eliminating a long-standing requirement that they pick up the medication in person.

Noem's bill would require women seeking an abortion to make three separate trips to a doctor in order to take abortion pills.

Currently, women in South Dakota are required to make two trips. First, for an initial screening, then

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they must wait 72 hours before they can return to the clinic to get both drugs in the two-dose regimen. They can take the second dose at home.

But Noem's bill would add a third mandatory visit that would require women to wait at least a day before returning to the abortion clinic, where they could take the second drug in the regimen.

So far, more restrictions on the pills, which are used for roughly 40% of abortions in the state, have been checked — either through federal courts or concerns in the Republican-controlled Legislature that an all-out ban would affect health care beyond abortions.

When Noem tried to implement a similar restriction through a state rule last year, Planned Parenthood, which operates the state's only clinic that regularly provides abortion services, sued the state. It argued the rule was an unconstitutional violation of abortion rights and would have made it practically impossible for the clinic to provide any medicine-induced abortions.

A federal judge last month halted that rule from being enacted, but Noem has appealed the decision.

In the meantime, her administration has pushed the bill, though with a clause that stipulates most of it wouldn't take effect unless the court battle is resolved in the state's favor. The bill also seeks to boost the penalty for any medical practitioner who prescribes abortion pills beyond what is allowed in law to a felony punishable by two years in prison and a \$4,000 fine.

The Senate vote is the last hurdle Noem's proposal faces in the Legislature.

She has argued she brought the bill out of concern for women's safety.

"What we have seen is that those medicines could be accessed by telephone or the internet between a stranger and someone who is wanting an abortion," the governor said at a news conference last week.

The FDA last year found a scientific review supported broadening access and doing away with the requirement they be picked up in person.

Some Republican lawmakers have also sounded caution on politicians stepping into the domain of writing laws on specific drugs, even if they are supportive of restrictions on abortion access.

"This bill put us in a quandary," Republican Sen. Blake Curd said before voting to advance it.

"It causes me concern when we dictate how medicine is practiced and put that into statute," Curd, who is also a surgeon, added.

Meanwhile, the potential medical implications of Haugaard's bill proved to be too much for Curd and other members of the Senate committee. The state's medical association and doctors raised concerns that it would limit the drugs for other procedures like miscarriage treatment.

Haugaard cast the bill as focused on "the idea that life is important at every stage of the pregnancy," and added language that stipulated it would only apply to abortions.

Senators were not convinced.

"I'm not saying it's OK for abortion by opposing this bill," said Republican Sen. Erin Tobin, a nurse practitioner. "But what I'm saying is that these are very medically complex decisions and women have a right to receive health care."

South Dakota House committee rejects recreational pot bill

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota House Republicans on Monday dismissed a proposal to legalize recreational pot for adults, in a major blow to a bill that aimed to honor the will of voters.

The bill squeaked past the Republican-controlled Senate last week by a single vote with lawmakers reasoning they should stay ahead of a campaign to get recreational marijuana back on the ballot this November. But lawmakers on the House State Affairs committee dismissed the proposal on an eight to three vote.

Marijuana legalization advocates vowed to mount a last-ditch effort to resurrect the proposal on the House floor — a move called a smoke out that would require widespread support from House Republicans.

South Dakota voters passed a constitutional amendment in November 2020 to legalize recreational pot, medical marijuana and hemp. But Republican Gov. Kristi Noem challenged its constitutionality, and the state Supreme Court ruled it should be nullified last year.

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Marijuana legalization advocates then mounted a campaign to bring it back to voters this November, prompting some Republicans to argue they should take hold of the law-making process.

Senate Bill 3, which emerged from a legislative committee that studied the issue last year, would legalize recreational possession of up to an ounce of marijuana by people ages 21 and older. The bill also would allow marijuana to be grown, processed and sold.

Representatives of a fledgling cannabis industry argued that legalizing recreational use would undercut the illegal marijuana market. It would also give homegrown businesses a shot at entering a market that some project could grow to \$500,000 a year.

"Put it in my hands," Josh Wood, who wants to start a cannabis manufacture and sale business in Vermillion, told the committee as he held up a 3 inch (7.5 centimeter) thick binder of compliance regulations for his proposed business.

"I can't screw up Vermillion, South Dakota," he said. "I have lived there my whole life."

But the bill faced opposition from organizations representing law enforcement and doctors who argued that some potent strains are dangerous and should stay illegal for recreational use.

Republican Rep. Tim Goodwin led the move to reject the bill, saying he wouldn't "vote against law enforcement and against federal law."

Meanwhile, the House State Affairs committee dealt a new blow to advocates for medical marijuana, which has been legal in the state since last year.

Republican lawmakers resurrected a pair of proposals and rewrote them into one bill that they said had support from law enforcement groups. Republican Sen. Helene Duhamel, who also works for the Pennington County Sheriff's Office, pushed for the bill revision as way to ensure the state's current pot possession laws are enforced.

The proposals would rid the state's current medical marijuana law of a provision that allows patients with debilitating medical conditions to avoid criminal charges for pot possession if they have not obtained a marijuana identification card. The other would allow agencies other than the Department of Health to inspect and regulate medical marijuana production and retail facilities, opening the door for law enforcement to be involved.

The committee's moves Monday drew sharp criticism from marijuana legalization advocates, who have seen growing clout in the state Capitol.

"If you oppose recreational cannabis legalization, you're wrong about public policy," Matt Schweich, who has directed the marijuana legalization ballot-measure campaigns, posted on Twitter. "If you support criminalizing medical cannabis patients, you're not just wrong about public policy. You are adopting a cruel and heartless position."

Russia-Ukraine War: What to know on Day 6 of Russian assault

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia's war on Ukraine is now in its sixth day, with a miles-long convoy of Russian tanks and armored vehicles inching closer to the Ukrainian capital and fighting intensifying on the ground.

Russia on Tuesday stepped up shelling of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, pounding civilian targets there. Casualties mounted and reports emerged that more than 70 Ukrainian soldiers were killed after Russian artillery recently hit a military base in Okhtyrka, a city between Kharkiv and Kyiv, the capital.

But Ukrainian fighters are putting up a fierce resistance and surprisingly, Russia has not been able to dominate the skies. There are increasing fears that as Russia becomes more isolated under an avalanche of Western sanctions, Vladimir Putin could become even more reckless and set off a world-altering war.

Across Ukraine, civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict with families and children huddled in underground subway stations, basements and other shelters.

The Red Cross appealed Tuesday for 250 million Swiss francs (\$272 million) to help people affected by the war. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Cross federation said they fear "millions of people face extreme hardship and suffering without improved access and a rapid increase in

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humanitarian assistance.”

On Monday, a Ukrainian delegation held talks with Russian officials at the border with Belarus, though they ended with no agreements except to keep talking.

Meanwhile, Western sanctions triggered by the invasion sent the Russian ruble plummeting, leading ordinary Russians to line up at banks and ATMs. And Russian teams were suspended from all international soccer matches, including qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup, pushing the country toward sports pariah status.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE FRONT LINES?

Ukrainian authorities say the center of Kharkiv was hit Tuesday by renewed Russian shelling that struck the administration building along with residential buildings. There was no word on casualties. Previously, officials in Kharkiv, a city of 1.4 million, said at least 11 people were killed and scores were wounded in shelling Monday.

The Russian military convoy threatening Kyiv — a city of nearly 3 million people — is far bigger than initially thought, with satellite images showing it occupying much of a 40-mile (64-kilometer) stretch of road north of the Ukrainian capital. The convoy was no more than 17 miles (25 kilometers) from the city center on Monday, according to satellite imagery from the Maxar company.

Kyiv's outgunned but determined troops have slowed Russia's advance and held onto Kyiv and other key cities — at least for the time being. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — who had earlier cut diplomatic ties with Moscow and declared martial law and whose defiance has drawn much admiration from the West — asked NATO to impose a complete no-fly zone over Ukraine for Russian airplanes, helicopters and missiles.

Britain's deputy prime minister, Dominic Raab, rejected the call Tuesday, saying it would risk widening the war by putting the alliance in direct conflict with Russian forces.

Zelenskyy called the attack Tuesday on Kharkiv's main square “frank, undisguised terror,” blaming a Russian missile and calling it a war crime. “Nobody will forgive. Nobody will forget.”

Over the weekend, Russian artillery hit a military base in Okhtyrka, a city between Kharkiv and Kyiv, where more than 70 Ukrainian soldiers were killed, the head of the region wrote on Telegram, posting photographs of the charred shell of a four-story building and rescuers searching through the rubble.

Ukrainian authorities say Russian forces have blocked Kherson, a major port on the Black Sea. Russian troops have made significant gains along Ukraine's coast in an apparent effort to cut it off from both the Black and the Azov seas.

WHAT ARE ORDINARY UKRAINIANS AND CIVILIANS DOING?

For many, it has meant sheltering in basements and subway stations while Russian forces attack cities and street fights rage. Others have scrambled to escape, leaving homes and husbands, fathers and sons to fight, taking trains and buses or walking for miles to a safer country.

Across Ukraine and in refugee shelters across the borders, parents have struggled to comfort their children. Mothers rock them on subway platforms or carry them for miles in the cold. At one border station in Poland, refugees were met by boxes of donated clothes and toys.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians have sought safety at night in Kyiv's subway system and other makeshift shelters around the country, where parents try to calm their children's fears.

On Monday, U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said her office had confirmed that 102 civilians, including seven children, have been killed in the Russian invasion and 304 others wounded since Thursday, though she cautioned the tally was likely a vast undercount.

WAR SANCTIONS AND WORKAROUNDS

Western officials believe Putin wants to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a compliant regime, reviving Moscow's Cold War-era influence. His comments have raised fears that the invasion of Ukraine could lead to nuclear war, whether by design or mistake.

The United States and the European Union have levied sanctions on Russia's biggest banks and its elite, frozen the assets of the country's Central Bank located outside the country, and excluded its financial institutions from the SWIFT bank messaging system — but have largely allowed its oil and natural gas to continue to flow freely to the rest of the world.

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Sanctions experts expect Russia to try to mitigate the impact of the financial penalties by relying on energy sales and leaning on the country's reserves in gold and Chinese currency. Putin also is expected to move funds through smaller banks and accounts of elite families not covered by the sanctions, deal in cryptocurrency and rely on Russia's relationship with China.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE UNITED NATIONS?

The U.N.'s two major bodies — the 193-nation General Assembly and the more powerful 15-member Security Council — held separate meetings Monday to discuss Russia's war on Ukraine.

The council meeting opened with the news that the United States was kicking out 12 Russian U.N. diplomats whom Washington accuses of spying.

The assembly will give all U.N. members an opportunity to speak about the war and more than 110 signed up to do so, with speeches to continue Tuesday. The assembly, which allows no vetoes, is expected to vote later in the week on a resolution coordinated by European Union envoys, working with Ukraine.

The draft resolution, obtained by The Associated Press, demands that Russia immediately stop using force against Ukraine and withdraw all troops.

Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor said he plans to open an investigation "as rapidly as possible" into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine — both alleged crimes committed before the Russian invasion, but also any new crimes that either side might have committed since the invasion started.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE FLED UKRAINE?

The U.N. refugee agency says that about 660,000 people have fled Ukraine for neighboring countries since the Russian invasion began. The number, given on Tuesday, was up from a count of more than 500,000 a day earlier.

UNHCR spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo said in Geneva that "at this rate, the situation looks set to become Europe's largest refugee crisis this century."

Earlier, when the overall figure still stood at around half a million, she said the count included 281,000 in Poland, more than 84,500 in Hungary, about 36,400 in Moldova, over 32,500 in Romania and about 30,000 in Slovakia. The rest were scattered in other countries, she said.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, has said the U.N. expects the total to reach 4 million in the coming weeks.

Russia pummels Ukraine's No. 2 city and convoy nears Kyiv

By YURAS KARMANAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press
KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian shelling pounded the central square in Ukraine's second-largest city and other civilian targets Tuesday and a 40-mile convoy of tanks and other vehicles threatened the capital — as Ukraine's embattled president accused Moscow of resorting to terror tactics to press Europe's largest ground war in generations.

With the Kremlin increasingly isolated by tough economic sanctions that have tanked the ruble currency, Russian troops advanced on Ukraine's two biggest cities. In strategic Kharkiv, an eastern city with a population of about 1.5 million, videos posted online showed explosions hitting the region's Soviet-era administrative building and residential areas. A maternity ward relocated to a shelter amid shelling.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the attack on Kharkiv's main square "frank, undisguised terror," blaming a Russian missile and calling it a war crime. "Nobody will forgive. Nobody will forget. ... This is state terrorism of the Russian Federation."

As the fighting reached beyond military targets on Day 6 of a Russian invasion that has shaken the 21st century world order, reports emerged that Moscow has used cluster bombs on three populated areas. If confirmed, that would mean the war has reached a worrying new level.

The Kremlin denied Tuesday that it has used such munitions and insisted again that its forces only have struck military targets — despite evidence documented by AP reporters of shelling of homes, schools and hospitals.

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The Russian defense minister vowed Tuesday to press the offensive until it achieves its goals, after a first round of talks between Ukraine and Russia yielded no stop in the fighting. Both sides agreed to another meeting in coming days.

Throughout the country, many Ukrainian civilians spent another night huddled in shelters, basements or corridors. More than a half-million people have fled the country, and the U.N. human rights office said Tuesday that it has recorded the deaths of 136 civilians, including 13 children. The real toll is likely far higher.

"It is a nightmare, and it seizes you from the inside very strongly. This cannot be explained with words," said Kharkiv resident Ekaterina Babenko, taking shelter in a basement with neighbors for a fifth straight day. "We have small children, elderly people and frankly speaking it is very frightening."

A Ukrainian military official said Belarusian troops joined the war Tuesday in the Chernihiv region, without providing details. But Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said he had no plans to join the fight.

With Western powers sending weapons to Ukraine and driving a global squeeze of Russia's economy, President Vladimir Putin's options diminished as he seeks to redraw the global map — and pull Ukraine's western-leaning democracy back into Moscow's orbit.

"I believe Russia is trying to put pressure (on Ukraine) with this simple method," Zelenskyy said late Monday in a video address, referring to stepped-up shelling. He did not offer details of the talks between Ukrainian and Russian envoys, but he said Kyiv was not prepared to make concessions "when one side is hitting another with rocket artillery."

As the talks along the Belarusian border wrapped up, several blasts could be heard in the capital, and Russian troops advanced on the city of nearly 3 million. The convoy of armored vehicles, tanks, artillery and support vehicles was 25 kilometers (17 miles) from the center of the city and stretched about 65 kilometers (40 miles), according to satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies.

"They want to break our nationhood, that's why the capital is constantly under threat," Zelenskyy said, saying that it was hit by three missile strikes on Monday and that hundreds of saboteurs were roaming the city.

Kharkiv, near the Russian border, is another key target. One after the other, explosions burst through a residential area of the city in one video verified by AP. In the background, a man pleaded with a woman to leave, and a woman cried.

Determined for life to go on despite the shelling, hospital workers transferred a Kharkiv maternity ward to a bomb shelter. Amid makeshift electrical sockets and mattresses piled up against the walls, pregnant women paced the crowded space, accompanied by the cries of dozens of newborns.

On the city's main square, the administration headquarters came under Russian shelling, regional administration chief Oleh Sinehubov said. Images posted online showed the building's facade and interior badly damaged by a powerful explosion that also blew up part of its roof. The state emergencies agency said that attack wounded six people, including a child.

Sinehubov said that at least 11 people were killed and scores of others were wounded during Monday's shelling of the city.

Russia's goals in hitting central Kharkiv were not immediately clear. Western officials speculated that it is trying to pull in Ukrainian forces to defend Kharkiv while a larger Russian force encircles Kyiv. They believe Putin's overall goal is to overthrow the Ukrainian government and install a friendly one.

In a worrying development, Human Rights Watch has said it documented a cluster bomb attack outside a hospital in Ukraine's east in recent days. Local residents have also reported the use of the munitions in Kharkiv and the village of Kiyanka near the northern city of Chernihiv, though there was no independent confirmation.

The International Criminal Court chief prosecutor has said he plans to open a Ukraine investigation and is monitoring the conflict.

Meanwhile, flames shot up from a military base northeast of Kyiv, in the suburb of Brovary, in footage shot from a car driving past. In another video verified by AP, a passenger pleads with the driver, "Misha, we need to drive quickly as they'll strike again."

And Ukrainian authorities released details and photos of an attack Sunday on a military base in Okhtyrka,

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a city between Kharkiv and Kyiv, saying more than 70 Ukrainian soldiers were killed along with some local residents. The attack could not be immediately confirmed.

The Russian military's movements have been stalled by fierce resistance on the ground and a surprising inability to dominate Ukraine's airspace.

In the face of that Ukrainian resistance and crippling Western sanctions, Putin has put Russia's nuclear forces on high alert — including intercontinental ballistic missiles and long-range bombers — in a stark warning to the West and a signal of his readiness to escalate the tensions to a terrifying new level. But a senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States had yet to see any appreciable change in Russia's nuclear posture.

Western nations have increased weapons shipments to Ukraine to help its forces defend themselves — but have so far ruled out sending in troops.

Messages aimed at the advancing Russian soldiers popped up on billboards, bus stops and electronic traffic signs across the capital. Some used profanity to encourage Russians to leave. Others appealed to their humanity.

"Russian soldier — Stop! Remember your family. Go home with a clean conscience," one read.

Fighting raged in other towns and cities. The strategic port city of Mariupol, on the Sea of Azov, is "hanging on," said Zelenskyy adviser Oleksiy Arestovich. An oil depot was reported bombed in the eastern city of Sumy.

In the seaside resort town of Berdyansk, dozens of protesters chanted angrily in the main square against Russian occupiers, yelling at them to go home and singing the Ukrainian national anthem. They described the soldiers as exhausted young conscripts.

"Frightened kids, frightened looks. They want to eat," Konstantin Maloletka, who runs a small shop, said by telephone. He said the soldiers went into a supermarket and grabbed canned meat, vodka and cigarettes.

"They ate right in the store," he said. "It looked like they haven't been fed in recent days."

As far-reaching Western sanctions on Russian banks and other institutions took hold, the ruble plummeted, and Russia's Central Bank scrambled to shore it up, as did Putin, signing a decree restricting foreign currency.

But that did little to calm Russian fears. In Moscow, people lined up to withdraw cash as the sanctions threatened to drive up prices and reduce the standard of living for millions of ordinary Russians.

The economic sanctions, ordered by the U.S. and other allies, were just one contributor to Russia's growing status as a pariah country.

Russian airliners are banned from European airspace, Russian media is restricted in some countries, and some high-tech products can no longer be exported to the country. International sports bodies moved to exclude Russian athletes — in the latest blow Tuesday, Russians were barred from international ice skating events.

Many non-Ukrainians flee Ukraine, their fates also uncertain

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

PRZEMYSL, Poland (AP) — All day long, as trains and buses bring people fleeing Ukraine to the safety of Polish border towns, they carry not just Ukrainians fleeing a homeland under attack but large numbers of citizens of other countries who had made Ukraine their home and whose lives have also been upended.

In Przemysl, a town near the border which is the first stopping point for many refugees, there is a visibly large number of Africans and people from Middle Eastern countries.

Ahmed Ibrahim, a 23-year-old Egyptian, arrived carrying his cat in a carrier late Friday, feeling stunned and sick after days of travel. He said he had been studying medicine in Ukraine for five years and had only one year left. He had no idea what his future holds, not even what his next steps are. "What should I do?" he said.

Earlier a Pakistani man got off a bus that had come from Lviv in western Poland in a supermarket park-

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ing lot that is the arrival point for buses. Shaking in the cold he told a volunteer that he wants to go to Germany but has no money. The volunteer asked him if he wanted to be taken to Krakow, a Polish city that would bring him closer to Germany, and he said yes.

The U.N. refugee agency said Tuesday that some 660,000 refugees had already fled from Ukraine into neighboring countries.

"This figure has been rising exponentially, hour after hour, literally, since Thursday," agency chief Filippo Grandi told the United Nations Security Council. "I have worked in refugee crises for almost 40 years and I have rarely seen such an incredibly fast-rising exodus of people — the largest, surely, within Europe, since the Balkan wars."

Most go to Poland, a European Union country that is already home to many Ukrainians who came for work in recent years.

UNHCR figures on Monday had 281,000 people arriving in Poland, more than 84,500 in Hungary, about 36,400 in Moldova, over 32,500 in Romania and about 30,000 in Slovakia.

The U.N. believes up to 4 million refugees could leave Ukraine if the war deteriorates further.

Polish U.N. Ambassador Krzysztof Szczerski said that people of some 125 nationalities had been admitted from Ukraine on Monday morning alone. Most were of course Ukraine. But other nationalities that made up at least 100 people each were: Uzbek, Nigerian, Indian, Moroccan, Kazakh, Pakistani, Afghan, Polish, Belarussian, Iranian, Turkish, Algerian and Russian.

Some non-Ukrainians have complained that they have waited longer in line than Ukrainians and in some cases felt treated poorly.

Kaneka Agnihotri, an Indian student who has lived six years in Ukraine, walked six hours without food to the Shehyni border crossing. There, she said, Ukrainian guards humiliated her and a group of other Indians, telling them to stand up and sit down over and over again and getting close to them with guards.

She told the AP that her group later moved to a different border crossing where they were treated well. Once in Poland, the Poles did everything to help.

There have been some reports that Africans in particular have been treated badly by Ukrainian guards.

Cihan Yildiray, a 26-year-old from Turkey who has been working in Kyiv, said Ukrainians passed through the border checkpoint more easily. He said he saw Black people and Arabs being beaten by Ukrainian guards.

Big tech grapples with Russian state media, propaganda

By DAVID KLEPPER and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Russia's war in Ukraine plays out for the world on social media, big tech platforms are moving to restrict Russian state media from using their platforms to spread propaganda and misinformation.

Google announced Tuesday that it's blocking the YouTube channels of those outlets in Europe "effective immediately" but acknowledged "it'll take time for our systems to fully ramp up."

Other U.S.-owned tech companies have offered more modest changes so far: limiting the Kremlin's reach, labeling more of this content so that people know it originated with the Russian government, and cutting Russian state organs off from whatever ad revenue they were previously making.

The changes are a careful balancing act intended to slow the Kremlin from pumping propaganda into social media feeds without angering Russian officials to the point that they yank their citizens' access to platforms during a crucial time of war, said Katie Harbath, a former public policy director for Facebook.

"They're trying to walk this very fine line; they're doing this dance," said Harbath, who now serves as director of technology and democracy at the International Republican Institute. "We want to stand up to Russia, but we also don't want to get shut down in the country. How far can we push this?"

Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, announced Monday that it would restrict access to Russia's RT and Sputnik services in Europe, following a statement by European Union President Ursula von der Leyen over the weekend that officials are working to bar the sites throughout the EU.

Google followed Tuesday with a European ban of those two outlets on YouTube.

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The U.S. has not taken similar action or applied sanctions to Russian state media, leaving the American-owned tech companies to wrestle with how to blunt the Kremlin's reach on their own.

The results have been mixed.

RT and other Russian-state media accounts are still active on Facebook in the U.S. Twitter announced Monday that after seeing more than 45,000 tweets daily from users sharing Russian state-affiliated media links in recent days, it will add labels to content from the Kremlin's websites. The company also said it would not recommend or direct users to Russian-affiliated websites in its search function.

Over the weekend, the Menlo Park, California-based company announced it was banning ads from Russian state media and had removed a network of 40 fake accounts, pages and groups that published pro-Russian talking points. The network used fictitious persons posing as journalists and experts, but didn't have much of an audience.

Facebook began labeling state-controlled media outlets in 2020.

Meanwhile, Microsoft announced it wouldn't display content or ads from RT and Sputnik, or include RT's apps in its app store. And Google's YouTube restricted Russian-state media from monetizing the site through ads, although the outlets are still uploading videos every few minutes on the site.

By comparison, the hands-off approach taken by TikTok, a Chinese platform popular in the U.S. for short, funny videos, has allowed pro-Russian propaganda to flourish on its site. The company did not respond to messages seeking comment.

One recent video posted to RT's TikTok channel features a clip of Steve Bannon, a former top adviser to ex-President Donald Trump who now hosts a podcast with a penchant for misinformation and conspiracy theories.

"Ukraine isn't even a country. It's kind of a concept," Bannon said in the clip, echoing a claim by Russian President Vladimir Putin. "So when we talk about sovereignty and self-determination it's just a corrupt area where the Clintons have turned into a colony where they can steal money."

Already, Facebook's efforts to limit Russian state media's reach have drawn ire from Russian officials. Last week, Meta officials said they had rebuffed Russia's request to stop fact-checking or labeling posts made by Russian state media. Kremlin officials responded by restricting access to Facebook.

The company has also denied requests from Ukrainian officials who have asked Meta to remove access to its platforms in Russia. The move would prevent everyday Russians from using the platforms to learn about the war, voice their views or organize protests, according to Nick Clegg, recently named the company's vice president of global affairs.

"We believe turning off our services would silence important expression at a crucial time," Clegg wrote on Twitter Sunday.

More aggressive labeling of state media and moves to de-emphasize their content online might help reduce the spread of harmful material without cutting off a key information source, said Alexandra Givens, CEO of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a Washington-based non-profit.

"These platforms are a way for dissidents to organize and push back," Givens said. "The clearest indication of that is the regime has been trying to shut down access to Facebook and Twitter."

Russia has spent years creating its sprawling propaganda apparatus, which boasts dozens of sites that target millions of people in different languages. That preparation is making it hard for any tech company to mount a rapid response, said Graham Shellenberger at Miburo Solutions, a firm that tracks misinformation and influence campaigns.

"This is a system that has been built over 10 years, especially when it comes to Ukraine," Shellenberger said. "They've created the channels, they've created the messengers. And all the sudden now, we're starting to take action against it."

Redfish, a Facebook page that is labeled as Russian-state controlled media, has built up a mostly U.S. and liberal-leaning audience of more than 800,000 followers over the years.

The page has in recent days posted anti-U.S. sentiment and sought to down play Russian's invasion of Ukraine, calling it a "military operation" and dedicating multiple posts to highlighting anti-war protests

across Russia.

One Facebook post also used a picture of a map to highlight airstrikes in other parts of the world.

"Don't let the mainstream media's Eurocentrism dictate your moral support for victims of war," the post read.

Last week, U.S. Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia sent letters to Google, Meta, Reddit, Telegram, TikTok and Twitter urging them to curb such Russian influence campaigns on their websites.

"In addition to Russia's established use of influence operations as a tool of strategic influence, information warfare constitutes an integral part of Russian military doctrine," Warner wrote.

Biden steps to State of the Union lectern at fraught moment

By ZEKE MILLER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing disquiet at home and danger abroad, President Joe Biden will deliver his first State of the Union address at a precipitous moment for the nation, aiming to navigate the country out a pandemic, reboot his stalled domestic agenda and confront Russia's aggression.

The speech Tuesday night had initially been conceived by the White House as an opportunity to highlight the improving coronavirus outlook and rebrand Biden's domestic policy priorities as a way to lower costs for families grappling with soaring inflation. But it has taken on new significance with last week's Russian invasion of Ukraine and nuclear saber-rattling by Vladimir Putin.

Biden, in his remarks, planned to highlight the bravery of Ukrainian defenders and the resolve of a newly reinvigorated Western alliance that has worked to rearm the Ukrainian military and impose sanctions on Russia to cripple its economy.

Biden would speak to "the importance of the United States as a leader in the world, standing up for values, standing up for global norms, but also the efforts that he has undertaken to mitigate how it will impact people here," press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday.

Biden will address a mostly full and mask-optional crowd in the House chamber, one sign of the easing coronavirus threat. But he'll also speak from within a newly fenced Capitol due to renewed security concerns after last year's insurrection.

Rising energy prices as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine risk exacerbating inflation in the U.S., which is already at the highest level in 40 years, eating into the earnings of Americans and threatening the country's economic recovery from the pandemic. And while the geopolitical crisis in Eastern Europe may have helped to cool partisan tensions in Washington, it can't erase the political and cultural discord that is casting doubt on Biden's ability to deliver on his pledge to promote national unity.

Biden will take the speaker's rostrum as Americans are frustrated with his performance as president. A February AP-NORC poll found that more people disapproved than approved of how Biden is handling his job as president, 55% to 44%. That's down from a 60% favorable rating last July.

White House officials acknowledge that the mood of the country is "sour," citing the lingering pandemic and inflation as sources of blame. Biden, in his speech, will highlight the progress from a year ago — with the majority of the country now vaccinated and millions more people at work — but also acknowledge that the job is not yet done, a recognition of American discontent.

Biden aides say they believe the national psyche is a "trailing indicator" and will improve with time. But time is running short for the president, who needs to salvage his first-term agenda to revive the political fortunes of his party ahead of November's midterm elections.

The president was set to highlight investments in everything from broadband access to bridge construction from November's \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law, holding it up as an example of government reaching consensus and delivering change for the American people.

He also planned to appeal to lawmakers to reach a compromise on rival competitiveness bills that have passed the House and Senate, both meant to revitalize high-tech American manufacturing and supply chains in the face of growing geopolitical threats from China.

The speech comes as progress on many of Biden's other legislative priorities remains stalled on Capitol

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Hill, after Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin scuttled the sweeping "Build Back Better" spending bill that Biden championed last fall.

As part of his pitch to voters, Biden will aim to resurrect components of the legislation, but with a new emphasis on how proposals like extending the child tax credit and bringing down child care costs could bring relief to families as prices rise. He was also set to lay out how his climate change proposals would cut costs for lower- and middle-income families and create new jobs.

"The president will absolutely use the word inflation tomorrow and he will talk about inflation in his speech," said Psaki. But she emphasized that Biden was focused on "how people experience it" rather than looking at it as a statistic.

As part of that push, Biden is expected to call for lowering Americans' health care costs, pitching his plan to authorize Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices, as well as an extension of more generous health insurance subsidies now temporarily available through the Affordable Care Act marketplaces where 14.5 million get coverage.

While prospects for congressional passage were slim, Biden also was set to appeal for actions around voting rights, gun control and police reform, which have been hamstrung despite his Democratic majority.

Biden was expected to showcase what he's done so far — for example, acting to crack down on "ghost guns," homemade firearms that lack serial numbers used to trace them and are often purchased without a background check.

On voting rights, legislation stalled after Manchin and Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema denied Senate Democrats the chance to use a workaround that would allow them to pass the bills with their thin 50-50 majority instead of the 60 votes normally required.

The voting legislation written by congressional Democrats would bring in the biggest overhaul of the U.S. elections in a generation by striking down hurdles to voting enacted in the name of election security. Republicans say the changes are not aimed at fairness but at giving Democrats an advantage in elections.

Biden will also push the Senate to confirm Ketanji Brown Jackson to be the first Black woman on the Supreme Court. He nominated her last week.

Ahead of the speech, the physician's office for Congress announced that it was lifting the House's face-covering requirement after the federal government eased its guidelines for mask wearing. Now, mask wearing will be a personal choice in the House chamber, which will be open to all members of Congress, but still no guests.

All those who attend will be required to take a COVID-19 test before Biden's address.

Biden aims to use his remarks to highlight progress made against COVID-19 over the last year and to guide the country into a "new phase" of the virus response that looks more like pre-pandemic life.

Seating for Biden's first address to a joint session of Congress, last April, was capped at about 200 people — about 20% of usual capacity for a presidential presentation. White House aides fretted that a repeat this year would have been a dissonant image from the message the president aims to deliver to the American people.

"I think you're going to see it look much more like a normal State of the Union," said White House chief of staff Ron Klain. "It's going to look like the most normal thing people have seen in Washington in a long time."

While masks are coming off, law enforcement officials reinstalled a fence around the Capitol building. There were no specific or credible threats ahead of Biden's speech, but there had been concerns about trucker convoys heading to Washington to protest pandemic restrictions.

Thousands evacuate worst Australian floods in over a decade

By ROD McGUIRK and JOHN PYE Associated Press

BRISBANE, Australia (AP) — Tens of thousands of people had been ordered to evacuate their homes by Tuesday and many more had been told to prepare to flee as parts of Australia's southeast coast are inundated by the worst flooding in more than a decade that has claimed at least 10 lives.

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Scores of residents, some with pets, spent hours trapped on their roofs in recent days by a fast-rising river in the town of Lismore in northern New South Wales state.

The body of a woman in her 80s was found by a neighbor in her Lismore home on Tuesday, a police statement said. There were no details of how she died.

There were concerns that householders who climbed into their roof spaces through ceiling manholes could become trapped by rising waters.

A police rescue officer had saved an elderly woman from such a roof space that was almost filled with water, Lismore State Emergency Service Commander Steve Patterson said.

"He dived in through a window, noticed the manhole cover was open, when he checked, found a 93-year-old lady with about 20 centimeters (8 inches) left of space before the water hit the top," Patterson told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Dozens of cars were trapped on a bridge in the nearby town of Woodburn over Monday night with both the bridge's approaches submerged.

Up to 50 people were rescued from the bridge early Tuesday, officials said.

"We had no capabilities to get them off in the dark so we just had to make sure that they bunkered down and we went in this morning and got them all out," Woodburn State Emergency Services Commander Ashley Slapp said.

The floodwaters are moving south into New South Wales from Queensland state in the worst disaster in the region since what was described as a once-in-a-century event in 2011.

New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet said there had been 1,000 rescues in his state by Tuesday and more than 6,000 calls for authorities to help.

Perrottet said 40,000 people had been ordered to evacuate, while 300,000 others had been placed under evacuation warnings.

"We'll be doing everything ... we can to get everybody to safety and get these communities right across our state back on their feet as quickly as possible," Perrottet said.

Government meteorologist Jonathan Howe described the amount of recent rainfall in northern New South Wales and southern Queensland as "astronomical."

Nine of the 10 deaths reported so far were in Queensland. A 76-year-old man who disappeared with his vehicle in floodwater northwest of Brisbane on Sunday has since been confirmed dead.

Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll said emergency services held grave concerns for another man in his 70s who fell from his moored yacht in the state capital Brisbane into a swollen river on Saturday.

The cleanup was underway in Australia's third most populous city, despite more storms in the forecast for later in the week, with Brisbane Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner urging people to register for the "Mud Army," as the thousands of volunteers who mobilized to help out after the 2011 floods were dubbed.

Thousands of homes in Brisbane were inundated Sunday, many by destructive surges in swollen creeks in suburbs such as Ashgrove, where Kelvin Barfoot had to evacuate with members of his family, including his 99-year-old mother-in-law, Mina Baker, in a State Emergency Service rescue boat.

The family moved back into the top floor of their two-story home and started removing damaged furniture and electrical appliances that had been covered by almost 1.5 meters (5 feet) of floodwater.

"We thought we were pretty well prepared for it," said Barfoot, who leads a volunteer bush care group which has tallied more than 4,000 hours of planting and weeding along Enoggera Creek over the past six years. "Just unbelievable. When it did start coming in, it went up very quick."

Barfoot said his daughter and her husband swam to the house to help with the rescue after notifying emergency services that her grandmother — who moved to Australia from Christchurch, New Zealand, after earthquakes there in 2011 killed 185 people — needed to get out.

"We were pretty much stuck upstairs at that point," Barfoot said. "That was quite traumatic for my mother-in-law — we got her out (of New Zealand) after the earthquakes, so it was all a bit reminiscent of that for her.

"Now she's back home. She wanted to come home. She was a bit traumatized, but she's tough. She came down and asked me if there was anything to do to help!"

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In a social media post with the hashtag #Rainbomb, Schinner said the national weather agency had confirmed the six-day total rainfall for downtown Brisbane — 792.8 millimeters (31.2 inches) to Monday morning — was significantly higher than the previous record of 655.8 millimeters (25.8 inches) set when flooding devastated the city in 1974.

Rick Threlfall and Steve Hadley, meteorologists who moved from England to Australia and have been living in Newmarket, Brisbane, for almost a decade, were in the process of sandbagging the ground floor of their home but couldn't finish in time to beat the rapidly rising flood.

"Back in the U.K., we do weather warnings for 20 millimeters (1 inch) of rain," Threlfall said. "My weather gauge here has recorded 950 millimeters (37 inches) in three days. Brisbane's average is about 1,200 millimeters (47 inches) for the year, so we've pretty much had 80% of annual rainfall in three days.

"No real escaping the water, I guess."

The extraordinary rainfall comes as the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported this week that vast swathes of Australia have already lost 20% of its rainfall and the country's fire risk has gone beyond worst-case scenarios developed just a few years ago.

Australia's hottest and driest year on record was 2019 which ended with devastating wildfires across southeast Australia. The fires directly killed 33 people and another 400 people were killed by the smoke.

The fires also destroyed more than 3,000 homes and razed 19 million hectares (47 million acres) of farmland and forests.

But two La Nina weather patterns have since brought above-average rainfall to the same regions.

Lesley Hughes, an Australian academic and former lead author of the U.N. IPCC assessment reports in 2007 and 2015, said climate change was expected to overwhelm government systems such as flood responses.

"We can see that our emergency services are struggling already to cope with the floods in northern New South Wales with people stranded on roofs without food for more than 24 hours," Hughes said.

MLB pushes labor-deal deadline to Tuesday for March 31 start

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

JUPITER, Fla. (AP) — Major League Baseball extended its deadline for salvaging opening day and a 162-game season until Tuesday at 5 p.m. after a marathon of 13 bargaining sessions over 16 1/2 hours produced progress toward a deal but left the sides still far apart.

Players and management started their eighth straight day of bargaining Monday at 10 a.m. and didn't recess talks until 2:30 a.m.

They agreed to resume at 11 a.m., leaving them just six hours to reach a deal that would end the lock-out on its 90th day.

Commissioner Rob Manfred had said Monday was the last possible day to forge an agreement that would allow the minimum time needed for spring training in order to play openers as scheduled. The union said it didn't necessarily agree to the timeframe and just as the sides agreed to recess, MLB gave players the new deadline.

"We want to exhaust every possibility to get a deal done," an MLB spokesman said.

The players' association planned to analyze the latest proposals and prepare a response for when talks resume. The union intended to be back in Roger Dean Stadium, the vacant spring training home of the Miami Marlins and St. Louis Cardinals, at 10 a.m. to go over its stances.

The sides agreed, subject to an overall deal, to expand the postseason from 10 to 12 teams, rather than the 14 MLB had hoped for.

On central economics, the sides were still searching for agreement. Management's proposals included:

—Raising the luxury tax threshold from \$210 million to \$220 million this year.

—Setting the new bonus pool for pre-arbitration players at \$25 million annually.

—Raising the minimum salary from \$570,500 to \$675,000 this year, with increases of \$10,000 annually.

Players took the stance that all those figures were insufficient. Entering the day, they had asked for a

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\$245 million threshold this year, rising to \$273 million by the final season of a deal. They had proposed a \$115 million bonus pool.

The union believed there was an understanding on luxury tax rates, which management was proposing to substantially steepen while eliminating higher penalties for recidivist high spenders.

Players' latest proposals contemplated giving up on expanding salary arbitration from the top 22% to 35% by service time of the players with at least two seasons of service and less than three.

Manfred, who attended a bargaining session for the first time on Friday, sat in on two of Monday's meetings, both two-on-two sessions that included union head Tony Clark, Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem and union chief negotiator Bruce Meyer. At the first meeting, which began at 2:45 p.m. and lasted 40 minutes, Manfred told players he wanted to make a deal.

The pace then quickened, with management's bargaining team repeatedly walking from their area in the main part of the stadium to the union in the building beyond the right-field corner that includes the Cardinals clubhouse.

"We're working at it," Manfred said around 6 p.m. after his second session of the day with the union.

The union said MLB kept giving it pieces of paper with new proposals.

Yankees managing general partner Hal Steinbrenner didn't leave the ballpark until 1:30 a.m. Mets pitcher Max Scherzer and free agent reliever Andrew Miller, the two players present, drove away at 2:30 a.m.

Halem and executive vice president Morgan Sword were key figures in the meetings and Colorado Rockies CEO Dick Monfort attended a few. Some of the sessions lasted mere minutes and also included senior vice president Pat Houlihan.

Players and the league had met just six times on core economics during the first 2 1/2 months of the lockout.

Emotions became more heated as the sides pressed for each other's bottom line. Philadelphia star Bryce Harper posted a photo on Instagram altered to show him in a Japanese baseball uniform with the words: "Yomiuri Giants you up? Got some time to kill."

Yankees pitcher Jameson Taillon, who attended negotiations last week, tweeted: "Players are used to their 'threats.' Owners actions have made it clear all along that they have a set # of games where they still make profits/get TV money. They don't want to play. It's sad that these are the guys who drive the direction and 'future' of our amazing sport."

Players would lose \$20.5 million in salary for each day of the season that is canceled, according to a study by The Associated Press, and the 30 teams would lose large sums that are harder to pin down.

Spring training games were to have begun Saturday, but baseball's ninth work stoppage — and first since 1995 — already has led to exhibitions being canceled through March 7.

Not since Aug. 30, 2002, has MLB come this close to losing regular-season games to labor strife. The union was set to strike at 3:20 p.m., but roughly 25 consecutive hours of meetings and caucuses culminated in an agreement at 11:45 a.m.

Hungary's Orban faces pressure to cut close ties with Putin

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Hungary's right-wing nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orban, has for more than a decade nurtured close political and economic ties with Russia, giving him the reputation as the Kremlin's closest European Union ally.

For weeks, as Russian President Vladimir Putin amassed tens of thousands of troops along the borders of Ukraine, Hungary's neighbor to the east, Orban avoided condemning the buildup and spoke emphatically against applying sanctions.

As tensions escalated, Orban even traveled to Moscow, where he met with Putin in the Kremlin, their 12th official visit in as many years, and lobbied for larger shipments of Russian gas.

But when Russia's large-scale invasion commenced last week, Orban for the first time laid responsibility for the tensions and violence on Moscow in what could be a turning point in his more than decade-long,

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pro-Russia approach.

"Russia attacked Ukraine this morning with military force," Orban said hours after the invasion began Thursday. "Together with our European Union and NATO allies, we condemn Russia's military action."

Though Orban neglected to mention Putin by name, or to call the "military action" an invasion, his apparent about-face was long awaited by his critics both in the EU and in Hungary.

It could also be a sign that he realizes his posture toward Moscow is "not rooted on stable fundamentals," said Daniel Hegedus, a fellow for Central Europe at the German Marshall Fund.

"What we see is practically the collapse of Orban's 12-year-long Russia policy," Hegedus told the Associated Press. "I think (Orban) realized that Russia is a security threat in the region."

A formerly communist country that was dominated by the Soviet Union for more than 40 years, Hungary has historically deeply distrusted Moscow, which ordered the brutal repression of an anti-Soviet uprising in 1956 that led to thousands of civilian deaths and some 200,000 refugees fleeing the country.

As the communist system in Eastern Europe neared its end in 1989, Orban, then a 26-year-old anti-communist leading a movement of young liberal democrats, demanded the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary in a speech to several hundred thousand people on Budapest's Heroes' Square.

But in recent years, Orban — whom critics accuse of increasingly authoritarian tactics since entering power in 2010 — has pursued a diplomatic and economic strategy he calls "Eastern Opening," a policy which advances closer ties with autocratic countries to Hungary's east amid what his government sees as Western decline.

As part of that strategy, Orban has initiated a 12 billion-euro (\$13.6 billion) Russian-backed project to add two nuclear reactors to Hungary's only nuclear power plant, financed primarily by a Russian state bank.

His government has also increased Hungary's dependence on Russian natural gas, and in 2019 provided a headquarters in Budapest for the Moscow-based International Investment Bank (IIB), an institution with Soviet roots that critics say could be a conduit for Russian spying.

As the conflict between Russia and Ukraine escalates, Orban faces greater pressure than ever to choose between Moscow and Hungary's Western partners in the EU and NATO military alliance — but is showing increasing signs that he may continue to straddle the line between the two.

The Czech Republic on Friday said it would pull out of the IIB to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, and urged other members of the bank to do the same — which, on Sunday, Hungary's neighbor Romania did.

Also on Friday, Polish prime minister and key Orban ally Mateusz Morawiecki warned in the Financial Times that Putin's aggression in Ukraine would extend to other parts of Eastern Europe if left unchecked, and urged Western countries to end the "era of illusions" about Russia.

"We are seeing that the price of European naivete over Russia is Ukrainian blood," Morawiecki wrote.

Speaking to journalists Saturday at Hungary's border with Ukraine, Orban said his country would support all proposed EU sanctions against Moscow, and acknowledged that Russia's invasion would likely cause changes in his relationship with Putin.

"Of course, we have to adjust everything," Orban said.

Yet as most EU countries have committed to sending military aid to Ukraine as it fends off the Russian assault, Hungary has remained firm in its resolve not to enter the conflict in material terms.

On Monday, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto — on whom Putin bestowed one of the highest Russian state honors last year — announced that Hungary would not allow the transit of lethal arms bound for Ukraine on its territory.

And in a sign that old deals die hard even in times of war, Orban said in an interview with state television that Hungary's Russian-backed nuclear plant expansion and long-term gas contracts "must be left out of the sanctions issue, because otherwise we will pay the price of the war, and nobody wants that."

But there are some in Hungary who want just that. Hours after the Russian invasion began, several thousand demonstrators gathered in front of the Russian Embassy in Budapest to denounce the assault and demand that Orban abandon his ties with Putin.

Chanting "Russians go home!" — a phrase popularized during Hungary's 1956 anti-Soviet uprising and

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echoed by Orban in his famous speech in 1989 — protesters called for the ouster of the IIB from Budapest and the suspension of the nuclear plant expansion.

Peter Marki-Zay, an independent conservative who leads a six-party coalition seeking to defeat Orban's Fidesz party in April elections, criticized Orban for his ties with Putin, and demanded he take a clear stand on his commitment to the EU and NATO.

"Don't try to do business with Putin when it comes to our allies," Marki-Zay said.

Speaking at the protest, Anna Donath, an EU lawmaker and president of the opposition Momentum party, said that Orban had "ignored the will of the Hungarian people" to have a Western-style European democracy.

"For 12 years he has been making friends and doing business with Eastern dictatorships," Donath said.

Climate change brings extreme, early impact to South America

By DIANE JEANTET, MAURICIO SAVARESE and DEBORA REY Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Scientists have long been warning that extreme weather would cause calamity in the future. But in South America — which in just the last month has had deadly landslides in Brazil, wildfire in Argentine wetlands and flooding in the Amazon so severe it ruined harvests — that future is already here.

In just three hours on Feb. 15, the city of Petropolis, nestled in the forested mountains above Rio de Janeiro, received over 10 inches of rainfall — more than ever registered in a single day since authorities began keeping records in 1932. The ensuing landslides swallowed the lives of more than 200 people, and left nearly 1,000 homeless.

A report published Monday by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) corroborates what many on the ground are witnessing with their own eyes. Global warming is altering the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as El Nino and La Nina, the natural heating and cooling of parts of the Pacific that alters weather patterns around the globe. These events have also become more difficult to predict, causing additional damage, the report said.

"Climate change is projected to convert existing risks in the region into severe key risks," the report said.

Until 2020, there was plenty of water, swamps, stagnant lakes and lagoons in Argentina's Ibera Wetlands, one of the largest such ecosystems in the world. But an historic drought of the Parana River dried much of it out; its waters are in the lowest level since 1944. Since January it has been the stage of raging fires.

And this week, 70% of the remote city of Jordao in Brazil's Amazon rainforest was submerged by the overflow of two rivers. It has shattered the lives of thousands of people in the region, including in 32 Indigenous communities.

Central and South America is the second most urbanized region in the world after North America with 81% percent of its population residing within cities. In this context, forests are playing a vital role to stabilize local climates and to help the world meet the ambitious temperature goals set by the 2015 Paris Agreement, experts say.

The entire Amazon rainforest stores between 150 and 200 billion tonnes of carbon in the vegetation and soil, according to Carlos Nobre, a prominent Brazilian climate scientist who has studied the biome for several decades.

"It's a huge reservoir," Nobre told The Associated Press in a phone interview. "If you lose the forest, this carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas, goes into the atmosphere. It is very important to maintain the forest."

But most governments across the region have failed to heed the IPCC's warnings and stop the destruction. Many South American leaders have remained silent about illegal logging and mining activities in sensitive regions. Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has gone further, outright encouraging it both with his words and by weakening environmental agencies and regulation.

Even in Colombia, where President Iván Duque has attempted to rein in illegal logging, a recent increase in forest fires led more than 150 international academics and activists last week to send a letter urging

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the government to take a more aggressive stance.

Indeed, local prosecutors and police have said the region is more and more dependent on activists for preservation, either to prevent deforestation that leads to drastic changes in climate or to deal with the consequences of environmental degradation.

Alejandra Boloqui, 54, manages a private natural reserve in Argentina's Ibera Wetlands, and has been helping firefighters wage their desperate fight against the flames. Last week, she recorded a scene on her phone that overwhelmed her with sadness: a dozen alligators fleeing the flames and walking down a dirt track in search of water.

"When I started filming them, I cried. I felt they were saying to me: 'I've been left without a home, I'm leaving,'" Boloqui told the AP. "It got my attention seeing so many alligators moving together during the day. ... They are very slow reptiles who move at night to avoid heat."

They, along with many other animals, found temporary refuge in a nearby lagoon that had dried up due to lack of rain and has since been artificially refilled with solar water pumps.

Local authorities attributed the fires to the burning of pastures for cattle ranching, which has been prohibited since December. IPCC experts stress in the report that droughts lay the groundwork for blazes that spread rapidly.

Brazil's south and southeast regions last year faced their worst droughts in nine decades, raising the specter of possible power rationing given the grid's dependence on hydroelectric plants. Simultaneously, in Manaus, the largest city in the Amazon, rivers swelled to levels unseen in over a century of record-keeping, flooding streets and houses and affecting some 450,000 people in the region.

This week, with most of Amazonian city Jordao plunged underwater, Indigenous leader and forest guard Josias Kaxinawá is working to bring any support he can to dozens of communities. He spent all day Wednesday rescuing people and their belongings using his small boat equipped with an outboard motor.

The Jordao and Tarauaca rivers join during the rainy season, which Kaxinawá and his neighbors didn't expect for several more weeks. But this time, unlike last year, showers arrived not just too early, but also brutally, he told the AP.

"We are living our worst moment. Flood, rains, winds. Climate change is creating more problems for us. We are losing a lot of stuff, boats, household appliances, every crop we grew last year," Kaxinawá said by phone from Jordao, adding he had never had seen so much rain in his area. "We worry about the future," he said.

He added that the small city's agricultural production is "virtually all destroyed."

This jibes with the IPCC report, which says changes in the timing and magnitude of precipitation along with extreme temperatures are impacting agricultural production across Central and South America.

"Impacts on rural livelihoods and food security, particularly for small and medium-sized farmers and Indigenous Peoples in the mountains, are projected to worsen," the report read.

Acre state's government said at least 76 families have lost their homes in Jordao and around, most of them Indigenous and now living in a local shelter. But Mayor Naudo Ribeiro admitted the count was underestimated.

"This was too fast, there's no way to prepare when it happens like this," Ribeiro told local media.

More than 3,400 kilometers (2,100 miles) away in Petropolis, the Brazilian city ravaged by landslides last week, Mayor Rubens Bomtempo provided journalists with a similar comment just days before.

"This was totally unpredictable," Bomtempo said. "No one could predict rain as hard as this."

The IPCC report suggests events like these will continue to shake the region.

Russia's Syria intervention provided hints for Ukraine war

By ZEINA KARAM, BASSEM MROUE and AJ NADDAFF Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — From a tent in the rebel-held pocket of Syria, Ahmad Rakan has closely followed news of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. More than two years ago, a Russian airstrike destroyed his house in a nearby village during a months-long Syrian government offensive backed by Moscow's firepower that drove him

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and tens of thousands of others from their homes.

"We more than anyone else feel their pain," he said of Ukrainian civilians currently under Russian bombardment.

For the past seven years, Syrians like Rakan have experienced first-hand Russia's military might as it struck opposition strongholds, brokered mass surrender deals and deployed military police across their country, practically rendering it a Russian protectorate on the Mediterranean.

Observers say Russia's brazen military intervention in Syria and the impunity with which it was met emboldened Vladimir Putin. They say it gave him a renewed Middle East foothold from where he could assert Russian power globally, and paved the way for his attack on Ukraine.

"There is no doubt that the Russian intervention in Ukraine is an accumulation of a series of Russian military interventions in Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014 and Syria in 2015," said Ibrahim Hamidi, a Syrian journalist and senior diplomatic editor for Syrian affairs at the London-based Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper.

Putin "believes that America is regressing and China's role is increasing and Europe is divided and preoccupied with its internal concerns ... so he decided to intervene," he said.

Moscow's 2015 decision to join the war in Syria was its first military action outside the former Soviet Union since the federation's collapse. It saved President Bashar Assad's government and turned the tide of the war in his favor, enabling the Syrian leader to brutally reassert control over much of Syria. Russian airstrikes often indiscriminately hit hospitals, schools and markets.

The war-ravaged country became a testing ground for Russian weapons and tactics that it can now bring to bear in Ukraine.

Anna Borshchevskaya, a senior fellow at The Washington Institute focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East, said Russia deployed a "multi-domain" approach in Syria, including long-range precision weapons and large-scale bombing campaigns, along with cyber warfare, disinformation and use of paramilitary forces.

Deploying its air power "has come to define Russia's evolving way of war and Syria was an especially important illustration of this development," she said.

Moscow also showed a canny diplomatic touch in Syria, creating arrangements with the West that forced an implicit acceptance of its intervention. It created joint patrols with NATO member Turkey which backed Syrian rebels, to enforce truces in some areas. It established understandings with Israel that allowed the latter to carry out airstrikes against Iran-linked targets in Syria. It set up a so-called deconfliction line with the U.S. to prevent mishaps between American and Russian planes flying in Syria's skies.

At the same time, it sought to defend Assad on the international scene, dismissing as fabrications Assad's use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs against civilians. Within Syria, Russia added a soft power campaign. In some areas, festivals were put on to popularize Russian culture, Russian national songs were played on Syrian television, self-serving propaganda was churned out and hot meals were served to civilians.

Max, a dual Syrian-Ukrainian national who hails from Syria's coastal province of Latakia, recalled working for a week as a social media troll disseminating the "truth" about Russia's positive actions in Syria. He and other Russian-speaking Syrians worked from an office set up in a local university.

A member of Assad's Alawite ruling sect, he said he and others in his hometown were grateful when Russia intervened militarily in 2015, particularly as Islamic extremists had been approaching the area.

"Then Russians came and the front line was pushed way back," he told The Associated Press in a phone call from Ukraine, where he is now stuck in an Airbnb in a residential area of Kyiv.

Max, who is now working for an international organization in Lebanon, had flown to Ukraine to update his personal documents when he became trapped there by Russia's invasion. He spoke on condition his full name would not be used for his safety.

Today, Max no longer buys into the Russian narrative. Many in his hometown in Syria, though, support Russia's war in Ukraine, as Moscow continues to mount a sophisticated disinformation effort about its invasion.

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Images coming out of Ukraine, including the harrowing mass flight of civilians, are stirring intense and conflicting emotions among Syrians at home and refugees across the globe.

Resentment runs deepest in the northwest province of Idlib, Syria's last opposition-held bastion, where Russian airstrikes continue to this day. In a statement issued Monday, the opposition's civil defense group known as the White Helmets group, deplored Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

"It pains us immensely to know that the weapons tested on Syrians will now be used against Ukrainian civilians," it said, lamenting what it said has been a lack of support from the international community in holding Russia to account in Syria and elsewhere.

"Instead of standing up for international norms, such as those against the use of chemical weapons, the international community has tried to find ways to cooperate with Russia and to this day considers Russia a willing and essential partner in diplomacy," it said.

Borshchevskaya said the lesson Putin took from Syria was that "the West will not oppose his military interventions" and it gave him a success to build on.

"Appetite comes with eating, and with each intervention he has grown increasingly more brazen, culminating in the tragedy we now see unfolding in Ukraine," she said. "Just as what happened in Syria did not end in Syria, what is happening in Ukraine will not end in Ukraine."

Rakan now lives in a tent with his wife and three kids near the Turkish border, where he runs a car spare parts shop. He said he hopes a Russian defeat in Ukraine could have positive repercussions for Syria's opposition.

"We pray for God for victory for the people of Ukraine, and we hope that this war will mark the end of Russia," he said.

"Maybe they (Ukrainians) can achieve the victory that was not achieved in Syria."

Man kills 3 daughters, 1 other, himself at California church

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A man shot and killed his three daughters, their chaperone and himself during a supervised visit with the girls Monday at a church in Sacramento, California, authorities said.

Deputies responding to reports of gunfire around 5 p.m. found five people dead, including the shooter, at the church in the Arden-Arcade neighborhood, said Sgt. Rod Grassmann with the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office.

The victims included three girls ages 9, 10 and 13, Grassmann said.

The shooter was estranged from his daughters' mother, who had a restraining order against him, Sheriff Scott Jones said.

Investigators believe the shooting happened during a supervised visit with the children and that the fourth victim was their chaperone, Jones said.

The shooter's name wasn't immediately released, but officials said he was 39 years old.

An employee of The Church In Sacramento heard the gunshots and called 911, Grassmann said.

Sheriff's officials are investigating it as a domestic violence incident, he said.

Officials didn't know if the family members belonged to the church, which sits on a mostly residential block near a commercial area east of downtown Sacramento.

The Church In Sacramento caters to English, Chinese and Spanish worshippers, according to its website. No events for Monday were listed on its online calendar.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said his office was working with local law enforcement.

"Another senseless act of gun violence in America — this time in our backyard. In a church with kids inside. Absolutely devastating," Newsom said on Twitter.

New Orleans hosts its 1st full-dress Mardi Gras since 2020

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — People are out to party as New Orleans' first full-dress Mardi Gras since 2020 dawns Tuesday, with a day of back-to-back parades through the city and masks against COVID-19 required

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only in indoor public spaces.

Parade routes are shorter than usual, because there aren't enough police for the standard ones, even with officers working 12-hour shifts as they always do on Mardi Gras and the end of the Carnival season leading up to it.

But with COVID-19 hospitalizations and case numbers falling worldwide and 92% of the city's adults at least partly vaccinated, parades are back on after a season without them.

And people are out and ready to let the good times roll.

The crowd Sunday, when the huge Krewe of Bacchus paraded, "was a record for us in the 10 years we've been open," said Thomas Houston, bar manager at Superior Seafood and Oyster Bar, located at the start of the truncated parade route.

He expected similar crowds on Fat Tuesday — a state holiday — if the weather is good. Not to mention Ash Wednesday, when people following the Catholic tradition of meatless Lenten fare are out for seafood.

"It's not just a fun money-making time but you get to see people who've been around for 10 years," he said.

Hotel occupancy, though, is expected to be about 66%, down about 19.5% from 2020, said Kelly Schultz, spokesperson for New Orleans & Co., the official sales and marketing organization for New Orleans' tourism industry.

Parades were canceled last year because officials realized that tightly packed crowds in 2020 had created a superspreader event, making the city an early Southern hot spot for COVID-19.

But "2020 was weird," Houston said, because two people were hit by floats and killed in the week leading up to Mardi Gras and the mayor suspended use of multiple floats hitched behind one tractor.

"Also the coronavirus was sort of looming over us," even though its presence wasn't yet known in New Orleans, Houston said.

As it has for years, the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club will open Fat Tuesday with a parade that started as a mockery of white festivities, with Black float riders in blackface and grass skirts.

Next come the elaborate and fantastical floats of Rex, the self-styled king of Carnival, chosen by a group of high society, old-money businessmen.

After that are the Krewe of Elks and the Krewe of Orleans, a not-quite-endless stretch of homemade floats on long flatbed trailers.

Reading Putin: Unbalanced or cagily preying on West's fears?

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For two decades, Vladimir Putin has struck rivals as reckless, impulsive. But his behavior in ordering an invasion of Ukraine — and now putting Russia's nuclear forces on high alert — has some in the West questioning whether the Russian president has become dangerously unstable.

In recent days, Putin has rambled on television about Ukraine, repeated conspiracy theories about neo-Nazism and Western aggression, berated his own foreign intelligence chief on camera from the other side of a high-domed Kremlin hall where he sat alone. Now, with the West's sanctions threatening to cripple Russia's already hobbled economy, Putin has ordered the higher state of readiness for nuclear weapons, blaming the sanctions and what he called "aggressive statements against our country."

The uncertainty over his thinking adds a wildcard to Russia's war on Ukraine. Western officials must confront Putin as they also wonder whether he comprehends or cares about cataclysmic consequences — or perhaps is intentionally preying on the long-held suspicions about him.

An aide to French President Emmanuel Macron, who spoke with Putin on Monday, said the Russian leader answered Macron "without showing irritation, in a very clinical and a very determined manner."

"We can see that with President Putin's state of mind, there is a risk of escalation," added the aide, who spoke anonymously in line with the French presidency's practice on sensitive talks. "There is a risk of manipulation from President Putin to justify what is unjustifiable."

Foreign leaders have long tried to get inside Putin's head and have been wrong before. And Putin in

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this crisis is showing many of the same traits that he has displayed since becoming Russia's leader. Putin has directed invasions of neighbors, unspooled conspiracy theories and outright falsehoods, and ordered audacious operations like interfering in the past two U.S. presidential elections.

He single-handedly made landmark decisions like the 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, consulting only his narrow inner circle of KGB veterans and keeping everyone else in the dark. He has long been surrounded by lieutenants reluctant to risk their careers by urging caution, let alone voicing adverse opinions.

He has also talked about nuclear war and once mused that such a conflict would end in Russians going "to heaven as martyrs."

Experts say Putin could be using the specter of nuclear conflict to fracture the growing support for Ukraine's defense and to force concessions. His latest comments also suggest the sanctions are working.

"We have to know this is a sign that we're getting to him," said Jim Townsend, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense and a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security. "We just have to take that into account. We have to be cool."

Officials in the U.S. were alarmed by a 5,000-word essay published under Putin's name in July that argued Russians and Ukrainians are one people and blamed any divisions on foreign plots. One Biden administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. government's internal thinking, said the intelligence community was concerned Putin was operating from "an emotional place" and driven by long-simmering grievances.

More recently, Macron went to meet with Putin and had several long phone calls before the invasion. A top official in Macron's office said last week that Putin was "no longer the same," had become "more stiff, more isolated," and at his core had veered into the approach now playing out.

During a five-hour dinner between the two leaders, Putin spent more time railing about NATO expansion and the 2014 revolution in Ukraine than discussing the immediate crisis.

Putin's perceived self-insulation was highlighted in recent official meetings broadcast by state television. He faced foreign leaders and close aides from the opposite end of a long table. No Russian official who spoke gave a dissenting view.

"He's not had that many people having direct inputs to him," said Sen. Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee. "So we're concerned that this isolated individual (has) become a megalomaniac in terms of his notion of himself being the only historic figure that can rebuild old Russia or recreate the notion of the Soviet sphere."

Putin has long been committed to recovering lost glory, suppressing dissent and keeping neighbors in Moscow's orbit. In 2005, he called the collapse of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." Russia has fought a war with Georgia, annexed Ukraine's Crimea, backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, and earlier this year briefly deployed troops to help quell protests in Kazakhstan.

His public dismissals of Ukrainian sovereignty go back many years. In 2008, he is reported to have told President George W. Bush, "George, you have to understand that Ukraine is not even a country."

A year before that, he displayed his anger toward the U.S. and NATO in a pivotal speech at the Munich Security Conference, blasting the alliance's expansion eastward and attacking American military intervention abroad. The U.S. was mired at the time in the Iraq War, launched on the basis of false assertions about Iraq having nuclear weapons capability.

"The United States has overstepped its national borders in every way," Putin said then. "This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations."

Rep. Chris Stewart, a Utah Republican who sits on the House Intelligence Committee, said he had not seen evidence prior to the Ukraine invasion to suggest Putin was behaving irrationally, and he noted that other world leaders in history have been dismissed by outsiders as irrational. Putin, he said, has "an incredible appetite for risk when it comes to Ukraine."

Two years ago, Putin endorsed the latest version of a Russian nuclear deterrent policy that allows for the use of atomic weapons in response to a nuclear attack or aggression involving conventional weapons

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that “threatens the very existence of the state.”

Putin’s associate Dmitry Medvedev, who served as placeholder president when Putin shifted into the prime minister’s seat due to term limits, said in 2019 that a move by the West to cut Russia off from the SWIFT financial system would amount to an effective declaration of war — a signal that the Kremlin may view Western sanctions as a threat on par with military aggression. The sanctions announced in recent days include cutting key Russian banks out of SWIFT. The ruble has since plummeted.

In 2018, Putin told an audience that Russia wouldn’t strike first in a nuclear conflict but theorized about retaliating against an imminent enemy attack, adding with a smirk: “We would be victims of aggression and would get to heaven as martyrs. And they will just die and not even have time to repent.”

James M. Acton, co-director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said he did not believe nuclear war was imminent but there was real potential for escalation. Another possibility was Putin would use increasingly brutal non-nuclear tactics in Ukraine.

Acton suggested finding an “off-ramp” that might allow Putin a perceived victory. In 1962, during the Cuban missile crisis, the U.S. secretly agreed to remove nuclear missiles from Turkey in exchange for the Soviets pulling back from Cuba.

But, Acton added, “I’m not entirely clear whether he in his own mind knows what an off-ramp looks like right now.”

Jeffrey Lewis, an expert on nuclear policy at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, said he wasn’t immediately worried about a nuclear escalation. But one danger of sending public signals about nuclear weapons is that they can be difficult to interpret, Lewis said, just as the world is trying now to understand Putin’s latest moves and intentions.

“He is isolated and making poor decisions and losing,” Lewis said. “And that is dangerous.”

Russia eyes sanctions workarounds in energy, gold, crypto

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The harsh sanctions imposed on Russia and the resulting crash of the ruble have the Kremlin scrambling to keep the country’s economy running. For Vladimir Putin, that means finding workarounds to the Western economic blockade even as his forces continue to invade Ukraine.

Former Treasury Department officials and sanctions experts expect Russia to try to mitigate the impact of the financial penalties by relying on energy sales and leaning on the country’s reserves in gold and Chinese currency. Putin also is expected to move funds through smaller banks and accounts of elite families not covered by the sanctions, deal in cryptocurrency and rely on Russia’s relationship with China.

Right now, “the biggest two avenues that Russia has are China and energy,” said John Smith, former director of Treasury’s financial intelligence and enforcement arm.

The U.S. and EU have levied sanctions on Russia’s biggest banks and its elite, frozen the assets of the country’s Central Bank located outside the country, and excluded its financial institutions from the SWIFT bank messaging system — but have largely allowed its oil and natural gas to continue to flow freely to the rest of the world.

While Russia is likely to turn closer to China to make up for lost supplies of goods and services it normally would get from the West, Smith said, “they’re also betting that their enormous energy supplies will continue to be in demand, particularly during this cold winter. There’s significantly more profit to be made from their energy if they can get it to market.”

Last month, Russia and China signed a 30-year deal that will allow Russia to supply gas to China, though the pipes to carry that gas won’t be completed for at least three years. In addition, China announced last week that it would allow imports of wheat from all parts of Russia for the first time.

However, Smith said the Chinese and others “will be driving incredibly hard bargains” now that Russia has fewer willing buyers, and China will want to avoid being subject to secondary sanctions or sanctions violations enforcement.

On Monday, the U.S. further tightened its sanctions to immobilize any assets of the Russian Central Bank in the United States or held by Americans. The Biden administration estimated the move could impact

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hundreds of billions of dollars of Russian funding.

The latest measures did include a carve-out that authorizes energy-related transactions with the bank. The penalties also do not impact Russia's gold stockpile, which Putin has been accumulating for several years.

Tyler Kustra, an assistant professor of politics at the University of Nottingham who has studied economic sanctions, said Moscow had already been adopting a "Fortress Russia economy" — producing many goods domestically even if it was easier to import them — to shield the economy from sanctions.

Much of Russia's food is produced locally, but some of it doesn't match similar foreign-made items while others can't be substituted, he said.

"My friends in Moscow say, 'Look, they've never really gotten cheese right,'" Kustra said.

An increased reliance on cryptocurrency will be an inevitable avenue for Russia to try to prop up its financial transactions, said David Szakonyi, a political science professor at George Washington University, "but it's unlikely it'll serve as a substitute for corporate transactions over time."

While about 80% of Russia's financial transactions in the past have been done with the dollar, federal law enforcement and Treasury officials are stepping up efforts to "aggressively combat" the misuse of cryptocurrency to evade sanctions, according to a White House official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The official would not comment on whether the Biden administration is weighing targeting Russia-based crypto exchanges for sanctions.

The administration has experience regulating Russian crypto business. Earlier this year, Treasury sanctioned Russia-based SUEX and 25 affiliated cryptocurrency businesses, blacklisting the exchange from the dollar financial system, for allegedly helping criminal hackers clean and cash out their loot. It was the first crypto business to receive that designation.

Ari Redbord, a former Treasury senior adviser who heads government affairs at TRM, which among other things develops analytics on financial crimes, said his organization has identified at least 340 businesses in Russia that could be potentially used as "on and off ramps" for crypto currency.

Redbord said that because of the breadth of the sanctions, the amount of crypto that Russia would need to replace the billions of sanctions "would be very difficult to off-ramp into traditional currency."

Ori Lev, who served as a head of enforcement at Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control during the Obama administration, said that overall, "whether it's using cryptocurrency or relying on China, there are mitigating actions they can take but they can't recreate the financial system."

The Biden administration has argued that China won't be able to make up for the loss of U.S. and European business and that sanctions cutting Russia off from Western sovereign debt markets will be crippling. At the same time, the White House has sought to publicly make the case that Beijing coming to the rescue of Moscow could be detrimental in the long term for China's reputation in Europe and around the globe.

By Monday afternoon, the ruble had cratered and Russians stood in ATM lines for hours as inflation fears exploded.

"I don't know what precise steps they're going to take to mitigate the bite of the sanctions, but it's not going to undo them," Lev said.

Election 2022: Texas primary tests GOP's rightward shift

By WILL WEISSERT and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Voters in Texas will usher in the midterm campaign season with primaries that will test just how far to the right the Republican Party will shift in a state where many in the GOP have already tightened their embrace of former President Donald Trump.

Incumbent Republican Gov. Greg Abbott appears well positioned to secure his party's nomination for another term after Tuesday's voting. Starting the campaign with more than \$50 million, he has built hard-line positions on guns, immigration and abortion.

The GOP primary for attorney general may be more competitive as incumbent Ken Paxton seeks a third term in office. He's facing several challengers, including Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush and U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, who are vowing to restore order to the office. Paxton led a failed lawsuit to

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overturn the 2020 election and has for years faced securities fraud charges and an FBI investigation into corruption allegations. He has broadly denied wrongdoing.

Democrats face challenges of their own after nearly three decades of statewide losses. Former congressman Beto O'Rourke has little competition for the party's gubernatorial nomination, but he faces uphill odds going into the fall. Nine-term U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, meanwhile, is hoping to avoid becoming the first Democratic member of Congress to lose a primary this year. He's facing a much-watched challenge from progressive rival Jessica Cisneros and contending with the fallout of a recent FBI raid on his home. Cuellar has denied any wrongdoing.

Still, in America's largest Republican state, much of the focus will be on the GOP's rightward lurch. The evolution is especially pronounced in Texas, where rapid growth — driven by more than 4 million new residents — has shifted once-solidly red suburbs away from Republicans. But the GOP has countered that with redrawn maps that left fewer competitive congressional districts along with dramatic new restrictions to voting rules.

Already, thousands of mail-in ballot applications — and actual ballots — have been rejected under the state's new requirements. Most of those were due to voters not including newly mandated identification, worrying local elections officials that many won't correct problems to have their vote count.

"Just common sense will tell you there is going to be a number of people who don't cure that ballot," said Bruce Sherbert, the nonpartisan election administrator in Collin County, which is in Dallas' northern suburbs.

This year's primary season is beginning at a pivotal moment in American life.

The U.S. is steadily moving out of the deepest lows of a pandemic that has raged for nearly two years. But that's tempered by inflation reaching a decades-high level and a burgeoning war in Europe. And there are persistent questions about the country's commitment to basic democratic principles after many GOP leaders have tied themselves to Trump's lie that the 2020 election was stolen — a phenomenon especially acute in Texas.

"There really isn't a candidate on the Republican side who is someone who is standing up for the rule of law and supporting the fact that the 2020 election was free and fair and accurate," said Christine Todd Whitman, a former Republican governor of New Jersey who is critical of Trump and is the co-chair of States United Democracy Center, a nonprofit that works to safeguard elections. "It's Texas. What can I say?"

Still, the results Tuesday could have lasting implications. After Texas, primaries in other states won't resume until May. That means results here could be viewed for months as a measure of the nation's political mood.

Republicans are betting that Tuesday will be the first step toward them easily retaking Congress in November, pointing to President Joe Biden's low approval ratings, spiking inflation and the anger about the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

"I don't know how you can fix the incompetence issue," Minnesota Rep. Tom Emmer, head of the National Republican Congressional Committee, said in a recent interview. "I don't think that's going away."

History is also on the GOP's side. The party controlling the White House has lost congressional seats in the first midterm race every election cycle this century except in 2002, amid the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, under President George W. Bush.

But the fight over the party's future is much fiercer than it was 20 years ago.

U.S. Rep. Van Taylor of North Texas, for instance, has become a target for some on the right after he voted to certify Biden's electoral victory and to create an independent commission to investigate last year's insurrection on Jan. 6. The Republican now faces four primary challengers who have largely refused to accept Biden's victory and have tried to minimize the attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Businesswoman Suzanne Harp, one of the Republicans aiming to unseat Taylor, says the left "is using the divisive language of 'domestic terrorism' to subvert attention away from the fraudulent election" and ultimately trying to ensure "President Trump can never run for political office again."

One of the most storied dynasties in Republican politics could also reach its end Tuesday. George P.

Bush, whose father was Florida governor and whose uncle and grandfather were president, is the last of his family in office but may not be able to garner enough support to force a runoff against Paxton, who has been endorsed by Trump.

National Democrats say Trump's still-outsized GOP influence and an economy roaring back from the pandemic may help them counter political precedent. Still, disagreements between the party's progressive and more moderate congressional wings helped doom Build Back Better, a sweeping, Biden-backed spending and social programs package.

Cisneros is one of three Texas progressives who could secure Democratic nominations in House districts blue enough to all but guarantee they'll be headed to Congress.

A 28-year-old immigration attorney who supports fully government-funded health care under Medicare for All, Cisneros nearly toppled Cuellar during Texas' 2020 primary. She still has to overcome long-serving Cuellar's strong name recognition, though.

Cisneros has been endorsed by progressive stalwarts Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, who campaigned with her and with Greg Casar, an Austin city council member who championed a \$15 citywide minimum wage and is favored to win the Democratic nomination for an open House seat representing Texas' capital.

In Dallas, civil rights attorney and state lawmaker Jasmine Crockett has denounced "puppets" of the Democratic establishment and is running for a seat being vacated by longtime congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, who has endorsed her.

Maurice Mitchell, national director of the Working Families Party advocacy group, which has joined leading national progressive organizations in endorsing Cisneros, Casar and Crockett, said all three are young and championed by grassroots organizers in their deeply diverse communities. He said they prove progressive ideas can be popular in a conservative state like Texas and, rather than fueling intraparty squabbles, all might energize Democratic voters.

"They're both rising stars for the progressive movement and rising stars for the Democratic Party," Mitchell said. "If you want to push back on those historical headwinds, you need to be able to produce candidates that can animate your base. And these are three candidates that can do that."

A free-for-all but no crippling cyberattacks in Ukraine war

By ALAN SUDERMAN and FRANK BAJAK Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Russia has some of the best hackers in the world, but in the early days of the war in Ukraine, its ability to create mayhem through malware hasn't had much of a noticeable impact.

Instead, it's Ukraine that's marshalled sympathetic volunteer hackers in an unprecedented collective global effort to make the Kremlin pay for making war on its neighbor. It's a kind of cyber free-for-all that experts say risks escalating a moment already fraught with extraordinary danger after Russian President Vladimir Putin put his nuclear forces on alert.

So far, Ukraine's internet mostly works, its president still able to rally global support via a smartphone, and its power plants and other critical infrastructure still able to function. The kind of devastating cyberattacks thought likely to accompany a large-scale Russian military invasion haven't happened.

"It has not played as large a component as some people thought it might and it definitely has not been seen outside of Ukraine to the extent that people feared," said Michael Daniel, a former White House cybersecurity coordinator. "Of course, that could still change."

It's not clear why Russia hasn't landed a more powerful cyber punch. Russia might have determined that the impact wouldn't be serious enough — Ukraine's industrial base is far less digitized than in Western nations, for one. Or Russia might have determined that it couldn't do serious harm to Ukraine without risking collateral impact outside its borders.

Many cybersecurity experts believe the Kremlin, at least for now, prefers to keep Ukraine's communications open for the intelligence value.

Whatever the reasons, the conflict's early days have been marked by lower-level cyberattacks that ap-

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pear to be done both by freelancers and state actors.

Prior to the invasion, hackers knocked offline or defaced Ukrainian government websites and wiped some servers with destructive malware. Now, an ad hoc army of hackers — some marshaled online by Ukraine's SBU security service — are claiming credit for takedowns and defacements of Russian government and media sites.

A volunteer group calling itself the IT Army of Ukraine has more than 230,000 followers on a Telegram channel and is constantly listing targets for hackers to hit, like Russian banks and cryptocurrency exchanges.

On Monday, Ukraine's SBU made its recruitment of allied volunteer hackers official.

"CYBER FRONT IS NOW OPEN! Help Ukrainian cyber experts hack occupant's platforms!" it said on its Telegram channel, asking for tips on vulnerabilities in Russian cyber defenses, including software bugs and login credentials.

"It is the first time that states have openly called for citizens and volunteers to cyberattack another state," said Gabriella Coleman, a Harvard anthropology professor who has charted the rise of hacktivism.

The move mirrors Ukraine's reliance on its citizens for other areas of defense.

"It shouldn't be surprising that Ukraine is dipping into all possible resources to fight off the Russians, a much stronger foe. Just like civilians are coming out to fight in the street, it doesn't surprise me that they are trying to call forward civilians to support this through the digital space," said Gary Corn, a retired Army colonel who served as general counsel to U.S. Cyber Command.

One hacker group that first appeared last year, the Belarus Cyber Partisans, claimed Monday to have disrupted some rail service in Belarus, the northern neighbor of Ukraine from which several prongs of Russia's military attacked. The group has been trying to frustrate Russian troop and hardware movements through Belarus.

Sergey Voitekhovich, a former Belarusian railway worker who runs a rail-related Telegram group, told The Associated Press that the Cyber Partisans' digital sabotage Sunday paralyzed train traffic in Belarus for 90 minutes. He said electronic ticket sales were still not functioning as of Monday evening.

The Cyber Partisans hack was intended to disrupt Russian troop movements in Belarus and was the second such action in a little over a month. Voitekhovich said the current attack delayed two Russian military trains bound for Belarus from the Russian city of Smolensk. His story could not be independently verified. Voitekhovich chatted with the AP from Poland. He said police pressure had forced him to leave Belarus.

Pro-Russian ransomware criminals from the Conti gang recently pledged on the group's dark web site to "use all our possible resources to strike back at the critical infrastructures of an enemy" if Russia was attacked. Shortly afterward, sensitive chat logs that appear to belong to the gang were leaked online.

As partisans on both sides vow more serious cyberattacks, experts say there are real risks of the situation spiraling out of control.

"De-escalation and peace will be hard enough on their own without outsourced hacking to worry about," said Jay Healey, a cyberconflict expert at Columbia University who has long been opposed to letting the private sector "hack back" against Russian or other state-backed cyber aggression.

Making things more complicated: potential "false flag" operations in which hackers pretend to be someone else when launching an attack, a specialty in cyber conflicts. Attribution in cyberattacks is almost always difficult and could be even more so in the fog of war.

There's already been some spillover in some cyberattacks. Several hours before Russia's invasion, destructive cyberattacks hit Ukraine's digital infrastructure, damaging hundreds of computers with "wiper" malware — including a financial institution and organizations with offices in neighboring Latvia and Lithuania, cybersecurity researchers said.

Microsoft President Brad Smith said in a statement Monday that such attacks on civilian targets "raise serious concerns under the Geneva Convention."

Smith noted that the cyberattacks — like a series of similar attacks in mid-January — "have been precisely targeted, and we have not seen the use of the indiscriminate malware technology that spread across Ukraine's economy and beyond its borders in the 2017 NotPetya attack," referring to a "wiper" that caused

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

The West blames Russia's GRU military intelligence agency for that attack as well some of the other most damaging cyberattacks on record, including a pair in 2015 and 2016 that briefly knocked out parts of Ukraine's power grid.

So far, there's not been anything like that in this conflict. But officials say it could be coming.

"I've been pleasantly surprised so far ... that Russia has not launched more major cyberattacks against Ukraine," Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner said at an event Monday. "Do I expect Russia to up its game on cyber? Absolutely."

Russia slow to win Ukraine's airspace, limiting war gains

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In war, winning quick control of airspace is crucial. Russia's failure to do so in Ukraine, despite its vast military strength, has been a surprise and may help explain how Ukraine has so far prevented a rout.

The standoff in the sky is among the Russian battle shortcomings, including logistical breakdowns, that have thrown Moscow off stride in its invasion.

Typically, an invading force would seek at the outset to destroy or at least paralyze the target country's air and missile defenses because dominance of the skies allows ground forces to operate more effectively and with fewer losses. U.S. military officials had assumed that Russia would use its electronic warfare and cyber capabilities to blind and paralyze Ukraine's air defenses and military communications.

A possible explanation for Russia's failure to do so is that President Vladimir Putin built his war strategy on an assumption that Ukrainian defenses would easily fold, allowing Russian forces to quickly capture Kyiv, the capital, and crush Ukrainian forces in the east and south without having to achieve air superiority.

If that was the plan, it failed, although at this stage the conflict's overall trajectory still seems to favor the larger, better equipped invading force. The invasion is less than a week old, and Russia still hasn't committed to the battle the full force it had assembled on the border. A senior U.S. official said Monday that about one-quarter of the force hasn't crossed into Ukraine.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal military assessments, said Ukraine has retained a majority of its surface-to-air missile systems — used to shoot down aircraft — and a majority of its helicopters and airplanes. One reason they have yet to be destroyed, the official said, may be because Ukraine's air defenses were not centrally located and may have been moved around the country.

It appears that Russian commanders have become frustrated by the pace of their battlefield gains and failure to win full air dominance, the official said. In response they may consider more aggressive, larger-scale attacks against Kyiv and to reduce the significant remaining Ukrainian air defenses.

When he announced his decision to attack on Feb. 24, Putin gave no timetable for completing what he called not a war but a "special military operation." By U.S. estimates he had assembled more than 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders.

"We think that they're a few days behind where they expected to be" at this stage, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Monday, five days into a war that is the largest in Europe since World War II. "It's clear, yes, the Russians have had their own challenges and they have met resistance we don't believe they fully expected."

Philip Breedlove, a retired Air Force general who commanded NATO forces in Europe from 2013 to 2016, said Russia did unleash substantial missile attacks on Ukrainian air defense sites and airfields in the first few days. And yet the Ukrainians have found creative ways to preserve their air and missile defenses.

"I am pleasantly surprised that the air defense capability of Ukraine, even though diminished, has carried on as long as it has," Breedlove said. He added that Russia may yet bring more fighters and bombers into the conflict, even as Ukraine acquires Stinger missiles and other air defense weaponry from Western nations.

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In Breedlove's view, the weaponry provided to Ukraine by the United States and many other countries in recent weeks, including Javelin anti-tank missiles, has given Kyiv an important boost. He recalled that when Western countries in 2014 began providing radars used to detect and pinpoint the origin of artillery and mortar attacks, some questioned whether the Ukrainians could make good use of them.

"It was not long after they had them and started working with them that they were teaching us new tactics, techniques and procedures on how to employ them," said Breedlove, who was NATO chief at the time.

"From what I read and see, the Ukrainians have done a pretty good job of inflicting costs on Russian airborne forces," he said.

More broadly, beyond failing to destroy or ground the Ukrainian air force, the Russians as of Monday had not managed to capture any major Ukrainian city and were advancing far more slowly than planned, Pentagon officials have said in recent days.

Still there were signs of intensified conflict. Fighting raged in towns and cities scattered across the country. The strategic southern port city of Mariupol, on the Sea of Azov, was "hanging on," said Zelenskyy adviser Oleksiy Arestovich. An oil depot was reported bombed in the eastern city of Sumy.

Video from Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, showed residential areas being shelled, with apartment buildings shaken by repeated, powerful blasts.

"There are two basic ways you can describe the slowness of the Russian advance in Ukraine," said Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute, a Washington think tank. "One explanation is deliberate restraint. The other explanation is poor execution. We don't know enough to identify which is the more plausible explanation, but it's important to recognize the Russians have all sorts of options they have not yet brought to bear," including heavier use of cyberattacks against the Ukrainian command and control system and air defenses.

In its latest assessment, the Institute for the Study of War said Moscow has likely recognized that its initial approach failed and is moving additional combat power toward Ukraine.

"The tide of the war could change rapidly in Russia's favor if the Russian military has correctly identified its failings and addresses them promptly, given the overwhelming advantage in net combat power that Moscow enjoys," it said.

From banking to sports to vodka, Russia's isolation grows

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

It's a globalized world — a planet stitched together by intricate supply chains, banking, sports and countless other threads of deep connection. Until it isn't.

Exhibit A: Russia this week, abruptly cut off from the larger world on multiple fronts. Its ability to bank internationally has been curtailed. Its participation in major international sports is crumbling. Its planes are restricted over Europe. Its vodka may no longer be welcome in multiple U.S. states. Even Switzerland, whose very name is shorthand for neutrality, is carefully turning its back on Vladimir Putin.

In barely three days, Russia has become an international outcast because of its invasion of Ukraine, and its leader is finding himself with fewer and fewer foreign friends. What's more, the actions against Moscow are happening in diverse, far-reaching ways that are remarkable for — and in some cases helped along by — the extremely connected world in which we live.

"Something has happened here. It has cascaded in ways no one could have envisioned three or four days ago," said Andrew Latham, a professor of international relations at Macalester College and a geopolitics expert. "It's really a strange, strange thing to be watching."

In just the past three days, a flurry of major moves has happened in rapid fire — both sanctions from governments and actions from the alliances, organizations and people that surround them. Together, in many ways they outdo some of the world's most recent sanctions packages, including those against Iran and North Korea.

European nations, notably united on the issue, have closed their airspace to Russian planes. The SWIFT

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international financial system, which enables billions of dollars in transactions for more than 11,000 banks and other institutions around the world, restricted key Russian banks from its network over the weekend — a potential body blow to Russian finances.

On Monday, world and European bodies suspended Russian teams from all international soccer, including qualifying matches for the 2022 World Cup. This came after the International Olympic Committee called on sports organizations to exclude Russian athletes and officials from international events. When the International Ice Hockey Federation and the National Hockey League announced their own measures against Russia, it was clear that a movement was underway that was more widespread than anything seen in the sports world in decades.

Germany, in an extraordinary move, broke with its post-World War II foreign policy and said it would help send weapons to Ukraine — an action that its chancellor, Olaf Scholz, called “a new reality.” Finland and Sweden, countries that are hardly rash about jumping into the fray, seem to be road-testing positions potentially adversarial to Russia. Switzerland, a nation renowned for its secure banking, is “taking a tougher line with regard to Russia,” the head of its economic affairs department, Guy Parmelin, said Sunday.

Less directly impactful but no less resolute were efforts by several U.S. states — Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Vermont, West Virginia and Maine among them — to purge liquor outlets of Russian vodka and other products. Some states, like Pennsylvania, also took steps Monday toward divesting any Russia-related holdings.

“We must wield our economic power to ensure that Russia faces grave consequences for their flagrant violations of international law and human cooperation,” wrote state Sen. Sharif Street, D-Philadelphia.

The list goes on.

“To begin with, they’re symbolic. But then you see the sheer number of them. They might seem trivial on their own, but the totality of them suggests that the system has swung with this,” said William Muck, a political science professor at North Central College in Illinois and a specialist in international security.

That kind of rapid-fire coalescence won praise Monday from the White House. “President Putin has been one of the greatest unifiers of NATO in modern history. So I guess that is one thing we can thank him for,” press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday.

“I think what we’ve seen over the last few days is a commitment to remain united, and to send a strong message to President Putin that this action — these actions, this rhetoric — is unacceptable and the world is building a wall against it,” Psaki said.

It has all happened with a sweep that dwarfed even post-9/11 sanctions, but also with startling dispatch — which is one of the things that have made it so extraordinary.

A key ingredient: It took place against the backdrop of an instantaneous social media landscape that gave faraway observers a direct and informal pipeline to what was happening both in Ukraine and elsewhere. That’s something that can act as a force multiplier far away when, say, the governor of Maine decides to take vodka-related actions.

“A generation ago, this would have all taken place through ministries of foreign affairs and the 6 o’clock news, but nothing like the speed and interconnectedness of today. I think that’s having an accelerating effect,” Latham said.

Not everyone is racing to isolate Russia. China is not entirely with the rest of the world on the Ukraine issue — unsurprisingly. But the country’s longtime insistence that other countries respect sovereignty above all else — a position designed to deflect any actions against its policies toward Taiwan and Hong Kong and in the South China Sea — could hamstring it eventually. Meanwhile, its very reluctance to participate in punitive actions could be rendered less meaningful by what’s being done by so many others, and it could be sanctioned if it tries to undermine global action.

This week’s quick-draw global action is splashy, yes. But will it genuinely matter in the long term? Previous coalitions have come together rapidly but frayed as weeks passed. And the same globalized world that allows for the quick isolation of a government can also provide that same government potential workarounds to lessen the impact of international action.

Nevertheless, the connectedness that allows nations to get stuff done fast seems, in this case, to be approaching entirely new territory as it fashions a 21st-century response to an age-old aggression: the forcible taking of one nation's land by another.

"I didn't think it was possible that the world could be this unified in a globalized system — that you could get everyone on the same page," Muck said. "If we're thinking about, 'Do sanctions work in a globalized world?', I don't think we could have a more perfect test case."

Man kills 3 daughters, 1 other, himself at California church

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A man shot and killed his three daughters, their chaperone and himself during a supervised visit with the girls Monday at a church in Sacramento, California, authorities said.

Deputies responding to reports of gunfire around 5 p.m. found five people dead, including the shooter, at the church in the Arden-Arcade neighborhood, said Sgt. Rod Grassmann with the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office.

The victims included three girls ages 9, 10 and 13, Grassmann said.

The shooter was estranged from his daughters' mother, who had a restraining order against him, Sheriff Scott Jones said.

Investigators believe the shooting happened during a supervised visit with the children and that the fourth victim was their chaperone, Jones said.

The shooter's name wasn't immediately released, but officials said he was 39 years old.

An employee of The Church In Sacramento heard the gunshots and called 911, Grassmann said.

Sheriff's officials are investigating it as a domestic violence incident, he said.

Officials didn't know if the family members belonged to the church, which sits on a mostly residential block near a commercial area east of downtown Sacramento.

The Church In Sacramento caters to English, Chinese and Spanish worshippers, according to its website. No events for Monday were listed on its online calendar.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said his office was working with local law enforcement.

"Another senseless act of gun violence in America — this time in our backyard. In a church with kids inside. Absolutely devastating," Newsom said on Twitter.

Live updates: Official: Artillery kills 70 Ukraine soldiers

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest developments on the Russia-Ukraine war:

KYIV, Ukraine—More than 70 Ukrainian soldiers were killed after Russian artillery hit a military base in Okhtyrka, a city between Kharkiv and Kyiv, the head of the region wrote on Telegram.

Dmytro Zhyvytskyy posted photographs of the charred shell of a four-story building and rescuers searching rubble. In a later Facebook post, he said many Russian soldiers and some local residents also were killed during the fighting on Sunday. The report could not immediately be confirmed.

NEW YORK—Three major Hollywood studios have moved to pause their upcoming theatrical releases in Russia, including rolling out "The Batman" in theaters there this week.

Warner Bros., the Walt Disney Co. and Sony Pictures said Monday that they would "pause" the release of their films in Russia. Each studio has significant upcoming releases that had been set to debut internationally in the coming weeks. "The Batman," one of the year's more anticipated films, launches Friday in North America and many overseas territories.

Warner Bros.' move closely followed a similar decision Monday by the Walt Disney Co. The studio had planned to open the Pixar film "Turning Red" in Russia on March 10. That film is going straight to Disney+ in the U.S.

Sony followed suit, saying it would delay its release of the comic book film "Morbius" in Russia.

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Russia is not a leading market for Hollywood, but the country typically ranks in the top dozen countries globally in box office.

CANBERRA, Australia—Australia will provide Ukraine with \$50 million in missiles, ammunition and other military hardware to fight Russian invaders.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Tuesday elaborated on his country's plans after revealing a day earlier that his government would provide Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy with lethal military equipment. Morrison promised only non-lethal military equipment last week.

"President Zelenskyy said: 'Don't give me a ride, give me ammunition,' and that's exactly what the Australian government has agreed to do," Morrison said.

Australia had committed \$50 million to provide both lethal and non-lethal defensive support for Ukraine through NATO, he said.

"The overwhelming majority of that ... will be in the lethal category," Morrison said.

"We're talking missiles, we're talking ammunition, we're talking supporting them in their defense of their own homeland in Ukraine and we'll be doing that in partnership with NATO," Morrison said.

"I'm not going to go into the specifics of that because I don't plan to give the Russian government a heads up about what's coming their way, but I can assure them it is coming your way," he added.

KYIV, Ukraine—Satellite photos show a convoy of Russian forces north of Ukraine's capital stretching for 40 miles.

The vast convoy of armored vehicles, tanks, artillery and support vehicles was 17 miles (25 kilometers) from the center of Kyiv and stretched for about 40 miles, according to satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies.

The Maxar photos also showed deployments of ground forces and ground attack helicopter units in southern Belarus.

WASHINGTON—Ukraine's ambassador to the U.S. is telling senators her country needs more military weapons as it fights the Russian invasion.

Senators emerged from a Monday evening meeting with Ambassador Oksana Markarova at the Capitol as Congress is preparing supplemental funding to help Ukraine during the crisis. The White House is seeking at least \$6.4 billion in military and humanitarian aid.

"They need more arms," said Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., the chairman of the Intelligence Committee.

"It's David versus Goliath," said Sen. Jim Risch of Idaho, the top Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee. "I think that any human being reading the reports coming out of there realize that this is dire."

Senators in the U.S. are working to provide ammunition such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems to Ukraine -- what Risch called an "all of the above" effort.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says Russian troops have intensified shelling of Ukraine, calling it an effort to force his government into making concessions during talks held Monday.

In a video address late Monday, Zelenskyy says that "the talks were taking place against the backdrop of bombing and shelling of our territory, our cities. Synchronizing of the shelling with the negotiating process was obvious. I believe Russia is trying to put pressure (on Ukraine) with this simple method."

The president gave no details about the hours-long talks themselves. But he says Ukraine is not prepared to make concessions "when one side is hitting each other with rocket artillery."

Zelenskyy says that Kyiv, the capital, remains "a key goal" for the Russians and that Russian forces have also shelled the city of Kharkiv with rocket artillery.

LOS ANGELES — Ukraine's minister of digital transformation says equipment to use SpaceX's Starlink satellite internet service has arrived in his country.

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Mykhailo Fedorov thanked SpaceX founder Elon Musk for the equipment in a Twitter post Monday that was accompanied by a photo of boxes on the back of a truck.

Musk replied with his own tweet saying: "You are most welcome."

The tech billionaire said over the weekend that Starlink was now "active" in Ukraine and more equipment to use it was on the way. That followed a public request from Fedorov for the service.

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.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's president has signed a decree temporarily lifting the requirement for entry visas for any foreigner willing to join Ukraine's International Defense Legion and fight on Ukraine's side against invading Russian troops.

The decree by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy takes effect Tuesday and will remain in effect as long as martial law is in place.

NEW YORK — The National Hockey League is suspending all business dealings in Russia and has ruled out the possibility of holding events there in the near future because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The league issued a statement Monday condemning Russia's actions.

It also says: "We also remain concerned about the well-being of the players from Russia, who play in the NHL on behalf of their NHL clubs, and not on behalf of Russia. We understand they and their families are being placed in an extremely difficult position."

WASHINGTON — The parent company of Facebook and Instagram says it is restricting access to Russia's RT and Sputnik in Europe over concerns the two state-controlled media outlets are being used to spread disinformation and propaganda.

Monday's action by Menlo Park, Calif.-based Meta came after its announcement over the weekend that it was banning ads from Russian state media and had removed a network of 40 fake accounts, pages and groups that published pro-Russian talking points. The network used fictitious persons posing as journalists and experts, but had yet to create much of an audience. Facebook began labelling Russian state-run media in 2020.

RT and Sputnik are part of Russia's sprawling propaganda machine, spreading information that supports Russia's invasion while seeking to undermine and criticize the response by other nations.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian Orthodox bishops are calling on their superior in Moscow to urge Russia's leadership to stop the war in Ukraine.

The Holy Synod — the governing body of bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church -- asked Moscow Patriarch Kirill to call on Russian leaders to stop hostilities. The appeal shows a growing chasm between Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, and his own bishops in Ukraine over the war.

Patriarch Kirill has long had friendly ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In statements to date, he has called for an end to "fratricidal" war in Ukraine, but he has not assigned blame for the conflict and has emphasized a call for Orthodox unity.

While the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is under the ultimate authority of Kirill, it also enjoys considerable autonomy. Its synod also called for divine intervention on behalf of Ukraine's army.

TORONTO — Canada will be supplying Ukraine with anti-tank weapons systems, upgraded ammunition and is banning all imports of crude oil from Russia.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says the shipments are addition to the three previous shipments of lethal and non-lethal equipment. Canada announced this week it would be sending new shipments of military supplies, including body armor, helmets, gas masks, and night-vision goggles.

Canada does not import much oil from Russia.

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Trudeau called for the end to the war, saying its costs would only grow steeper and that those responsible will be held accountable.

UNITED NATIONS -- The United States says it is expelling 12 Russian diplomats at the United Nations for engaging in activities not in accordance with their responsibilities and obligations as diplomats.

U.S. deputy ambassador Richard Mills confirmed the expulsions after Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the U.N. Security Council on Monday afternoon that he had just been informed of "yet another hostile step undertaken by the host country" against the Russian Mission.

Nebenzia called the U.S. expulsions a "gross violation" of the U.N. agreement with the United States as the host of the United Nations and of the Vienna Convention governing diplomatic relations.

BRUSSELS — The European Union has slapped sanctions on 26 more Russians, including oligarchs, senior officials and an energy insurance company, in response to the country's invasion of Ukraine, bringing the total of people targeted to 680.

EU headquarters said those listed include "oligarchs and businessmen active in the oil, banking and finance sectors," government officials, top military brass and "propagandists who contributed to spread anti-Ukrainian propaganda and promote a positive attitude towards the invasion of Ukraine."

The bloc had already imposed an asset freeze on President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. No travel ban was imposed to allow the two men to take part in any diplomatic efforts, should Russia consider bringing an end to the war on its former Soviet neighbor.

EU sanctions now apply to a total of 680 people and 53 entities, which are usually organizations, agencies, banks or companies. Gas Industry Insurance Company SOGAZ was listed Monday.

KYIV, Ukraine — Satellite images show Russian troops are attacking Ukraine on multiple fronts and are advancing on the capital city of Kyiv.

On Monday, a convoy consisting of hundreds of armored vehicles, tanks, artillery and support vehicles was just 17 miles (25 kilometers) from the center of Kyiv. The city is home to nearly 3 million residents.

The images from Maxar Technologies also captured signs of fighting outside Kyiv, including destroyed vehicles and a damaged bridge.

PARIS - France has decided to move its embassy out of the Ukrainian capital, but the French ambassador will remain in the country.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian says the French Embassy, which had been holding out in Kyiv amid war, was being transferred to the western city of Lviv.

Le Drian told French television station BFMTV on Monday that Ambassador Etienne de Poncins would remain in Ukraine. Russia invaded its smaller neighbor on Thursday, drawing international condemnation.

Asked if the ambassador was under threat in the capital, Le Drian said that "the risks and threats were sufficiently important" to transfer the embassy's operations to Lviv, not far from the Polish border.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan insists his country "won't give up" on its relations with either Russia or Ukraine, but says it will implement an international convention that allows Turkey to shut down the straits at the entrance of the Black Sea to the warships of "belligerent countries."

The 1936 Montreux Convention gives Turkey the right to bar warships from using the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus during wartime. Ukraine has asked Turkey to implement the treaty and bar access to Russian warships.

Several Russian ships have already sailed through the straits to the Black Sea in the past weeks and it was not clear how much of an impact Turkey's decision to close down the straits would have on the conflict. The convention, also provides an exception for Black Sea vessels returning to port.

Turkey has criticized Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, but has also been trying to balance its close

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ties to Ukraine with its interests in not upsetting its fragile economic relationship with Russia.

GENEVA -- Russian teams have been suspended from international soccer after the country's invasion of Ukraine.

The decision came Monday from FIFA and UEFA, saying Russia's national teams and clubs were suspended "until further notice."

"Football is fully united here and in full solidarity with all the people affected in Ukraine," FIFA and UEFA said. "Both presidents hope that the situation in Ukraine will improve significantly and rapidly so that football can again be a vector for unity and peace amongst people."

UEFA also ended its sponsorship with Russian energy giant Gazprom.

The move comes as the International Olympic Committee urged sports bodies to exclude Russian athletes and officials from international events, including soccer's World Cup. The Olympic body's call also applied to athletes and officials from Belarus, which has abetted Russia's invasion by allowing its territory to be used to station troops and launch military attacks.

GENEVA — International sports bodies are moving to further isolate Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and push Moscow closer to becoming a pariah on the playing field.

The International Olympic Committee on Monday urged sports bodies to exclude Russian athletes and officials from international events, including soccer's World Cup. The Olympic body's call also applied to athletes and officials from Belarus, which has abetted Russia's invasion by allowing its territory to be used to station troops and launch military attacks.

The IOC said it was needed to "protect the integrity of global sports competitions and for the safety of all the participants."

The decision opened the way for FIFA, the governing body of soccer, to exclude Russia from the World Cup ahead of a qualifying playoff on March 24. Poland already has refused to play the scheduled game against Russia.

MOSCOW — The first round of Ukraine-Russia talks aimed at ending the fighting between Moscow and its smaller neighbor concluded with no immediate agreements.

An aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin says talks with Ukrainian officials lasted nearly five hours.

Vladimir Medinsky headed the Russian delegation in Belarus. He said the two sides "found certain points on which common positions could be foreseen."

Another round of talks was agreed to, Medinsky said.

Mykhailo Podolyak, a top adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, gave few details except to say that the talks, held near the Ukraine-Belarus border, were focused on a possible cease-fire and that a second round could take place "in the near future."

"The next meeting will take place in the coming days on the Polish-Belarusian border, there is an agreement to that effect," Medinsky said.

BERLIN — The European Space Agency says the planned launch of a joint mission with Russia to Mars this year is now "very unlikely" due to sanctions linked to the war in Ukraine.

Following a meeting of officials from its 22 member states Monday, the agency said in a statement that it was assessing the consequences of sanctions for its cooperation with Russia's Roscosmos space agency.

"Regarding the ExoMars program continuation, the sanctions and the wider context make a launch in 2022 very unlikely," it said.

The launch was already postponed from 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak and technical problems.

The mission's goal is to put a lander on the red planet to help determine whether there has ever been life on Mars.

On Saturday, Roscosmos said it was pulling its personnel from the European space port in Kourou, French Guiana.

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CAIRO — The Arab League has voiced concerns about the war in Ukraine, but it refrained from demanding an end to the Russian invasion.

The pan-Arab organization says in a communique Monday it supports all ongoing efforts to resolve the crisis “through dialogue and diplomacy.”

The communique comes after a meeting of representatives of the 22-member Arab League in Cairo.

The communique didn’t mention Russia, which has close ties with regional powers like Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Most governments in the Arab regions have avoided criticizing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The UAE, which holds a temporary seat at the U.N. Security Council, has joined China and India in abstaining during a vote on a U.S. resolution condemning the invasion.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian authorities say at least 44 people have been wounded in fighting in Ukraine’s second-largest city of Kharkiv, and that seven of them died in hospitals.

It wasn’t clear if the casualties, which covered the past 24 hours, were all civilians. The state emergencies agency said the casualties could be higher because the damage from Monday’s shelling of residential areas is still being assessed.

Ukrainian social networks featured videos showing residential quarters hit by a series of powerful explosions amid fighting with Russian forces.

The Russian military has consistently denied targeting residential areas despite abundant evidence of shelling of residential buildings, schools and hospitals.

GENEVA — The Swiss president says Russia’s attack on Ukraine is “unacceptable” and Switzerland will adopt European Union sanctions, including asset freezes, targeting Russians – all but depriving well-heeled Russians of access to one of their favorite havens to park their money.

Ignazio Cassis told a news conference Monday that Russia’s invasion was intolerable on moral and political grounds. Switzerland’s government has been trying to balance its condemnation of Russia’s actions with its history of neutrality and as an intermediary between opposing countries.

Referring to the Swiss executive body, he added: “The Federal Council has decided to take up fully the sanctions of the European Union, including the asset freezes.”

Switzerland is not a European Union member but is all but surrounded by four EU countries: Austria, France, Germany and Italy.

MOSCOW — Russia has closed its airspace to carriers from 36 nations, including European countries and Canada, responding in kind to their move to close their respective airspaces to all Russian aircraft.

The move, announced Monday by the state aviation agency, follows a decision by the EU and Canada over the weekend to close their skies to the Russian planes in response to Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

It added that planes from those countries could only enter Russia’s airspace with special permission.

WASHINGTON, D.C — The State Department has closed the U.S. Embassy in Belarus and is allowing nonessential staff at the U.S. Embassy in Russia to leave the country due to the war in Ukraine.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the suspension of operations at the Minsk embassy and the authorized departure from Moscow in a statement on Monday.

“We took these steps due to security and safety issues stemming from the unprovoked and unjustified attack by Russian military forces in Ukraine,” he said.

BEIJING — China is criticizing the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia over the war in Ukraine, saying that will harm the chances of finding a political settlement.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin on Monday reiterated China’s standard opposition to “unilateral sanctions that have no basis in international law,” despite Beijing’s own use of such measures against countries such as Lithuania over its stance on Taiwan.

"Facts have long proven that sanctions could not help solve problems but create new issues," Wang told reporters at a daily briefing. "It will not only result in a lose-lose or multi-lose situation economically, but also disrupt the process of political settlement."

China, along with India and the United Arab Emirates, abstained in Friday's 11-1 vote on a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that Moscow immediately stop its attack on Ukraine.

Hollywood halts releases in Russia, including 'The Batman'

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Warner Bros. is halting the release of "The Batman" in Russia, just days before it was to open in theaters there, as Hollywood moved to cease distribution plans in the country following Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Warner Bros., the Walt Disney Co. and Sony Pictures said Monday that they would "pause" the release of their films in Russia. Each studio has significant upcoming releases that had been set to debut internationally in the coming weeks. "The Batman," one of the year's more anticipated films, launches Friday in North America and many overseas territories, including Russia.

"In light of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, WarnerMedia is pausing the release of its feature film 'The Batman' in Russia," a spokesperson for the studio said in a statement. "We will continue to monitor the situation as it evolves. We hope for a swift and peaceful resolution to this tragedy."

Warner Bros.' move closely followed a similar decision Monday by the Walt Disney Co. The studio had planned to open the Pixar film "Turning Red" in Russia on March 10. That film is going straight to Disney+ in the U.S. Before Disney's announcement, Warner Bros. had been expected to proceed with the Russian release of "The Batman."

"Given the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and the tragic humanitarian crisis, we are pausing the release of theatrical films in Russia, including the upcoming 'Turning Red' from Pixar," a Disney spokesperson said in a statement. "We will make future business decisions based on the evolving situation. In the meantime, given the scale of the emerging refugee crisis, we are working with our NGO partners to provide urgent aid and other humanitarian assistance to refugees."

Hollywood scramble plans in Russia late Monday, as global pressure mounted to sever business ties with the country over the war in Ukraine. Western economic sanctions sent Russia's ruble plummeting Monday as numerous nations sought to block Russian banks. On Saturday, the Ukrainian Film Academy called for an international boycott of the Russian film industry.

The Motion Picture Association said Monday that it "stands with the international community in upholding the rule of law and condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"On behalf of our member companies, who lead the film, TV and streaming industry, we express our strongest support for Ukraine's vibrant creative community who, like all people, deserve to live and work peacefully," the MPA said in a statement.

Russia is not a leading market for Hollywood, but the country typically ranks in the top dozen countries globally in box office. Sony's recent smash hit "Spider-Man: No Way Home," which has totaled \$1.85 billion in ticket sales worldwide, has grossed \$46.7 million in Russia. Sony's most recent chart-topping release, the Tom Holland adventure "Uncharted," has amassed about \$20 million in Russia over the last two weeks.

After Disney and Warner Bros. made their announcements, Sony followed suit.

"Given the ongoing military action in Ukraine and the resulting uncertainty and humanitarian crisis unfolding in that region, we will be pausing our planned theatrical releases in Russia, including the upcoming release of 'Morbius,'" Sony said in a statement referencing the Spider-Man spinoff slated for early April. "Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been impacted and hope this crisis will be resolved quickly."

Russian forces shell Ukraine's No. 2 city and menace Kyiv

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By YURAS KARMANAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces shelled Ukraine's second-largest city on Monday, rocking a residential neighborhood, and closed in on the capital, Kyiv, in a 40-mile convoy of hundreds of tanks and other vehicles, as talks aimed at stopping the fighting yielded only an agreement to keep talking.

The country's embattled president said the stepped-up shelling was aimed at forcing him into concessions. "I believe Russia is trying to put pressure (on Ukraine) with this simple method," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Monday in a video address. He did not offer details of the hourslong talks that took place earlier, but said that Kyiv was not prepared to make concessions "when one side is hitting each other with rocket artillery."

Amid ever-growing international condemnation, Russia found itself increasingly isolated five days into its invasion, while also facing unexpectedly fierce resistance on the ground in Ukraine and economic havoc at home.

For the second day in a row, the Kremlin raised the specter of nuclear war, announcing that its nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarines and long-range bombers had all been put on high alert, following President Vladimir Putin's orders over the weekend.

Stepping up his rhetoric, Putin denounced the U.S. and its allies as an "empire of lies."

Meanwhile, an embattled Ukraine moved to solidify its ties to the West by applying to join the European Union — a largely symbolic move for now, but one that is unlikely to sit well with Putin, who has long accused the U.S. of trying to pull Ukraine out of Moscow's orbit.

A top Putin aide and head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, said that the first talks held between the two sides since the invasion lasted nearly five hours and that the envoys "found certain points on which common positions could be foreseen." He said they agreed to continue the discussions in the coming days.

As the talks along the Belarusian border wrapped up, several blasts could be heard in Kyiv, and Russian troops advanced on the city of nearly 3 million. The vast convoy of armored vehicles, tanks, artillery and support vehicles was 17 miles (25 kilometers) from the center of the city and stretched for about 40 miles, according to satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies.

The Maxar photos also showed deployments of ground forces and ground attack helicopter units in southern Belarus.

People in Kyiv lined up for groceries after the end of a weekend curfew, standing beneath a building with a gaping hole blown in its side. Kyiv remained "a key goal" for the Russians, Zelenskyy said, noting that it was hit by three missile strikes on Monday and that hundreds of saboteurs were roaming the city.

"They want to break our nationhood, that's why the capital is constantly under threat," Zelenskyy said.

Messages aimed at the advancing Russian soldiers popped up on billboards, bus stops and electronic traffic signs across the capital. Some used profanity to encourage Russians to leave. Others appealed to their humanity.

"Russian soldier — Stop! Remember your family. Go home with a clean conscience," one read.

Video from Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-biggest city, with a population of about 1.5 million, showed residential areas being shelled, with apartment buildings shaken by repeated, powerful blasts. Flashes of fire and gray plumes of smoke could be seen.

Footage released by the government from Kharkiv depicted what appeared to be a home with water gushing from a pierced ceiling. What looked like an undetonated projectile was on the floor.

Authorities in Kharkiv said at least seven people had been killed and dozens injured. They warned that casualties could be far higher.

"They wanted to have a blitzkrieg, but it failed, so they act this way," said 83-year-old Valentin Petrovich, who watched the shelling from his downtown apartment and gave just his first name and his patronymic, a middle name derived from his father's name, out of fear for his safety.

The Russian military has denied targeting residential areas despite abundant evidence of shelling of homes, schools and hospitals.

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Fighting raged in other towns and cities across the country. The strategic port city of Mariupol, on the Sea of Azov, is "hanging on," said Zelenskyy adviser Oleksiy Arestovich. An oil depot was reported bombed in the eastern city of Sumy.

Despite its vast military strength, Russia still lacked control of Ukrainian airspace, a surprise that may help explain how Ukraine has so far prevented a rout.

In the seaside resort town of Berdyansk, dozens of protesters chanted angrily in the main square against Russian occupiers, yelling at them to go home and singing the Ukrainian national anthem. They described the soldiers as exhausted young conscripts.

"Frightened kids, frightened looks. They want to eat," Konstantin Maloletka, who runs a small shop, said by telephone. He said the soldiers went into a supermarket and grabbed canned meat, vodka and cigarettes.

"They ate right in the store," he said. "It looked like they haven't been fed in recent days."

Across Ukraine, terrified families huddled overnight in shelters, basements or corridors.

"I sit and pray for these negotiations to end successfully, so that they reach an agreement to end the slaughter," said Alexandra Mikhailova, weeping as she clutched her cat in a shelter in Mariupol. Around her, parents tried to console children and keep them warm.

For many, Russia's announcement of a nuclear high alert stirred fears that the West could be drawn into direct conflict with Russia. But a senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States had yet to see any appreciable change in Russia's nuclear posture.

As far-reaching Western sanctions on Russian banks and other institutions took hold, the ruble plummeted, and Russia's Central Bank scrambled to shore it up, as did Putin, signing a decree restricting foreign currency.

But that did little to calm Russian fears. In Moscow, people lined up to withdraw cash as the sanctions threatened to drive up prices and reduce the standard of living for millions of ordinary Russians.

In yet another blow to Russia's economy, oil giant Shell said it is pulling out of the country because of the invasion. It announced it will withdraw from its joint ventures with state-owned gas company Gazprom and other entities and end its involvement in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project between Russia and Europe.

The economic sanctions, ordered by the U.S. and other allies, were just one contributor to Russia's growing status as a pariah country.

Russian airliners are banned from European airspace, Russian media is restricted in some countries, and some high-tech products can no longer be exported to the country. On Monday, in a major blow to a soccer-mad nation, Russian teams were suspended from all international soccer.

In other developments:

— The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said he will open an investigation soon into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine.

— Cyberattacks hit Ukrainian embassies around the world, and Russian media outlets.

— The United States announced it is expelling 12 members of Russia's U.N. mission, accusing them of spying.

— The 193-nation U.N. General Assembly opened its first emergency session in decades, with Assembly President Abdulla Shahid calling for an immediate cease-fire and "a full return to diplomacy and dialogue."

The U.N. human rights chief said at least 102 civilians have been killed and hundreds wounded — warning that figure is probably a vast undercount — and Ukraine's president said at least 16 children were among the dead.

More than a half-million people have fled the country since the invasion, another U.N. official said, many of them going to Poland, Romania and Hungary.

Among the refugees in Hungary was Maria Pavlushko, 24, an information technology project manager from a city west of Kyiv. She said her father stayed behind to fight the Russians.

"I am proud about him," she said, adding that many of her friends were planning to fight too.

The negotiators at Monday's talks met at a long table with the blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag on one side and the Russian tricolor on the other.

But while Ukraine sent its defense minister and other top officials, the Russian delegation was led by

Putin's adviser on culture — an unlikely envoy for ending a war and perhaps a sign of how seriously Moscow took the talks.

State of the Union: Amid disputes, common cause for Ukraine

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — They have argued viciously in Congress over just about everything: Whether the Capitol insurrection should be investigated or brushed aside. If the president's choice for the Supreme Court should be the first Black woman. Even over whether or not to wear masks under the dome.

But as lawmakers gather for President Joe Biden's first State of the Union address amid the gravity of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they have mustered a rare and remarkable bipartisan resolve, determined to hold the U.S. and its allies together in the defense of a Western-oriented democracy.

When Biden stands in the House chamber Tuesday evening, trying to make good on what until now has been a faltering attempt to resolve the nation's bitter divisions, he may find that the threat from Russian President Vladimir Putin abroad has become the unexpected force pulling the U.S. political parties toward common purpose.

"I think you will see in the State of the Union, a strong bipartisan support for our president," predicts Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., a Biden ally.

The turn of events is both stunning and fragile. Foreign policy has not been the kind of bipartisan draw it was during the past century, when Congress and the White House worked together as the U.S. dominated the global stage. Factions on the right and left have broken off, most definitively over the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, creating oddball political alliances in the U.S. and chiseling away at a shared mission.

The revival of a robust majority that's largely supportive of Biden's strategy toward Russia is even more striking because it is shaping up as one of the most significant rejections of Donald Trump's embrace of Putin and the former president's praise of Putin's tactics as Russia invaded Ukraine.

"We're all together at this point and we need to be together about what should be done," said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

Still, the State of the Union address may not be free of partisan antics, unfolding against the backdrop of a Congress deeply divided over many issues: a prime-time address to the nation, too tempting for lawmakers looking for attention.

This year is particularly fraught amid ongoing COVID restrictions and a Capitol still largely shuttered to the public in part because of the security concerns in the aftermath of the deadly Jan. 6, 2021, assault by Trump supporters trying to stop Congress from certifying Biden's election.

"It's a big worry of mine," said Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., who said he hoped his side of the aisle is respectful and doesn't yell out "stupid" things.

Tuesday's gathering in the House chamber will be the first time all members are invited since the pandemic outbreak in 2020 and last year's Capitol attack.

Masks will no longer be required, removing one source of friction for those lawmakers who had flouted the guidelines and risked being booted from the session for failing to comply — though COVID tests and social distancing measures will still be required.

But the heavy metal security fence is back up around the Capitol complex, a bow to the "new normal" of threats from within America's own electorate.

At least one Republican, Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, will sit it out rather than participate in what he calls COVID "theater," even as he is deeply involved in monitoring the war in Ukraine. "I'm just not taking any more COVID tests unless I'm sick," Rubio said Monday.

It can't be said that Republicans are fully pleased with Biden's handling of the Ukraine war.

McConnell has been highly critical of the president's runup to the crisis, calling the White House's disastrous exit from Afghanistan last summer a sign of U.S. weakness that opened the door to Putin's invasion.

Leading Republican lawmakers have derided what defense hawks view as Biden's initial reluctance to impose sanctions to deter Putin's advance on Ukraine. Others have criticized the White House climate

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change agenda as creating an energy policy that boosts Russian exports, including via the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Germany, now scrapped over the war.

"We all know what Putin wants, and he said so publicly: He wants to reconstitute the USSR and pull back in his orbit all the countries that were in it before," said Sen. Jim Risch of Idaho, the top Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee. "This is a seminal moment."

But even some of the Trump's staunch supporters are parting ways with the former president after he called Putin's invasion tactics "genius."

Republican Rep. Mo Brooks, who rallied with Trump supporters ahead of last year's assault on the Capitol and has won Trump's endorsement in the Alabama Senate primary, lambasted Putin's invasion as "barbaric and evil."

But in a nod to the non-interventionist strain that runs deep in both left and right flanks, Brooks added, "While Putin's Ukrainian invasion and murders are heinous, this is first and foremost a problem for Western Europe to resolve."

Congress will face tests ahead, starting with Biden's request for at least \$6.4 billion in supplemental funding to help Ukraine, which will require cooperation from both parties.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., said the Trump voices remain "a big part of the Republican Party nationally, but at least so far on Capitol Hill, especially in the Senate, I think you've got an overall bipartisan consensus. I hope it stays that way."

Black female WWII unit recognized with congressional honor

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — The House voted Monday to award the only all-female, Black unit to serve in Europe during World War II with the Congressional Gold Medal.

The 422-0 vote follows a long-running campaign to recognize the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. The Senate passed the legislation last year. The unit, known in short as the Six Triple Eight, was tasked with sorting and routing mail for millions of American service members and civilians. Only a half-dozen of the more than 850 members are still alive.

"It's overwhelming," Maj. Fannie Griffin McClendon, who is 101 and lives in Arizona, said when told of the vote. "It's something I never even thought about it. I don't know if I can stand this."

The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was credited with solving a growing mail crisis during its stint in England and, upon their return, serving as a role model to generations of Black women who joined the military.

But for decades, the exploits of the 855 members never got wider recognition. But that has changed, starting several years ago.

A monument was erected in 2018 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to honor them, and the 6888th was given the Meritorious Unit Commendation in 2019. A documentary "The Six Triple Eight" was made about them. There is talk of a movie. Retired Army Col. Edna Cummings was among those advocating for the 6888th.

"The Six Triple Eight was a trailblazing group of heroes who were the only all-Black, Women Army Corps Battalion to serve overseas during World War II," said Wisconsin Rep. Gwen Moore, who sponsored the bill after being contacted by the daughter of 6888th members Anna Mae Robertson.

"Facing both racism and sexism in a warzone, these women sorted millions of pieces of mail, closing massive mail backlogs, and ensuring service members received letters from their loved ones," she continued. "A Congressional Gold Medal is only fitting for these veterans who received little recognition for their service after returning home."

The House also voted Monday night to rename the Central Park Post Office in Buffalo as the "Indiana Hunt-Martin Post Office Building" after veteran Indiana Hunt-Martin, a member of the 6888th. Hunt-Martin died in 2020 at the age of 98.

"Throughout her life and military service, Indiana Hunt-Martin experienced racism and sexism firsthand, but no amount of discrimination prevented her from serving her country," New York Democratic Rep. Brian

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Higgins, who sponsored the post office bill and also was a co-sponsor of the Congressional Gold Medal bill, said in a statement. "Her courage and bravery paved the way for future generations of African American women serving in the military."

The 6888th was sent overseas in 1945, a time when there was growing pressure from African-American organizations to include Black women in what was called the Women's Army Corps and allow them to join their white counterparts overseas.

The unit dodged German U-boats on their way to England and scrambled to escape a German rocket once they reached a Glasgow port.

They were deployed to unheated, rat-infested airplane hangars in Birmingham, England, and given a daunting mission: Process the millions of pieces of undelivered mail for troops, government workers and Red Cross workers. The mountains of mail had piled up and troops were grumbling about lost letters and delayed care packages. Thus their motto, "No Mail, Low Morale."

They cleared out a backlog of about 17 million pieces of mail in three months — half the time projected. The battalion would go on to serve in France before returning home. And like so many Black units during World War II, their exploits never got the attention afforded their white counterparts.

Despite their achievements, the unit endured questions and criticism from those who didn't support Black women in the military.

Housing, mess halls and recreation facilities were segregated by race and sex, forcing them to set up all their own operations. The unit commander, Maj. Charity Adams, was also criticized by a general who threatened to give her command to a white officer. She reportedly responded, "Over my dead body, sir."

Many of the women had plenty of success after getting out of the military.

Elizabeth Barker Johnson was the first female to attend Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina on the GI Bill. She took part in the school's graduation ceremony at the age of 99 — 70 years after getting her degree. Hunt-Martin worked for the New York State Department of Labor for 41 years.

McClendon joined the Air Force after the military was integrated and retired in 1971. She was the first female to command an all-male squadron with the Strategic Air Command. Another unit member, the late Doris Moore, became the first Black social worker in New Hampshire, her family said.

"This is a long-overdue honor and recognition for the women of the Six Triple Eight, including New Hampshire's own Doris Moore," New Hampshire Democratic Rep. Chris Pappas said in a statement. "Doris and her sisters in arms were trailblazers and patriots who answered the call to service. It's even more remarkable that their sacrifice and service in defense of freedom came at a time when many of the very freedoms they fought for were not yet available to them."

US says it is expelling 12 Russian diplomats for espionage

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United States announced Monday it is expelling 12 members of the Russian Mission at the United Nations, accusing them of being "intelligence operatives" engaged in espionage.

The Biden administration's action came on the fifth day of Russia's invasion of neighboring Ukraine, which has sparked condemnation from the United States and dozens of other countries.

The U.S. Mission to the United Nations said in a statement that the Russian diplomats "have abused their privileges of residency in the United States by engaging in espionage activities that are adverse to our national security."

The mission said the expulsions have been "in development for several months" and are in accordance with the United States' agreement with the United Nations as host of the 193-member world body.

Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told The Associated Press, when asked his reaction to the U.S. saying the Russians were engaged in espionage: "They always do. That's the pretext all the time when they announce somebody persona non grata. That is the only explanation they give."

Did he expect Russia to reciprocate? "That's not for me to decide but in the diplomatic practice, that's a normal thing," he said.

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The expulsions were first confirmed by U.S. deputy ambassador Richard Mills after Nebenzia told the U.N. Security Council on Monday afternoon that he had just been informed of "yet another hostile step undertaken by the host country step against the Russian Mission."

Nebenzia, who was presiding as this month's council president at a session to discuss the dire humanitarian consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, called the U.S. expulsions a "gross violation" of the U.N. agreement with the United States and of the Vienna Convention governing diplomatic relations.

"We'll see how events develop within the context of this decision," he said.

Mills then confirmed the expulsions, saying the Russian diplomats "were engaged in activities that were not in accordance with their responsibilities and obligations as diplomats."

He said they are also in accord with the U.S.-U.N. agreement. Nebenzia countered that this was "not satisfactory."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki responded to the Russian ambassador's characterization of the expulsions as a "hostile act" by saying: "I think the hostile act is committing espionage activities on our own soil."

According to the U.N. diplomatic directory, Russia has 79 diplomats accredited to the United Nations. The U.S. Mission did not name those who are being expelled or state how long they are being given to leave the country.

California, Oregon, Washington to drop school mask mandates

By JOCELYN GECKER and ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Schoolchildren in California, Oregon and Washington will no longer be required to wear masks as part of new indoor mask policies the Democratic governors of all three states announced jointly on Monday.

"With declining case rates and hospitalizations across the West, California, Oregon and Washington are moving together to update their masking guidance," the governors said in a statement. There are more than 7.5 million school-age children across the three states, which have had some of the strictest coronavirus safety measures during the pandemic.

The new guidance will make face coverings strongly recommended rather than a requirement at most indoor places in California starting Tuesday and at schools on March 12, regardless of vaccination status. In Washington and Oregon, all the requirements will lift on March 12. In all three states, the decision of whether to follow the state guidance will now rest with school districts.

The milestone, two years in the making, comes as much of the country relaxes public health orders, including school mask mandates, in an effort to restore normalcy and boost economic recovery. The changes reflect a growing sense that the virus is not going away and Americans need to learn to live with it. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, announced Sunday that the state's masking requirements in schools would be lifted by March 2. New Jersey, Delaware, Massachusetts and others recently made similar adjustments to ease restrictions for schools.

The announcements signal a turning point that is poignant in its timing, coming almost exactly two years after American cities began shutting down to prevent COVID-19's spread. California was the first state to announce a shutdown with stay-at-home orders in March 2020, followed soon after by other states.

"Two years ago today, we identified Oregon's first case of COVID-19," Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said in the statement. "On the West Coast our communities and economies are linked. Together, as we continue to recover from the Omicron surge, we will build resiliency and prepare for the next variant and the next pandemic."

Earlier this month, California became the first state to formally shift to an endemic approach to the coronavirus with Gov. Gavin Newsom's announcement of a plan that emphasizes prevention and quick reaction to outbreaks over mandated masking and business shutdowns.

Newsom has come under growing pressure from Republicans and other critics to ease the school mandate, which has increasingly become a polarizing issue among parents, with some questioning why it's

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still necessary when masks are no longer required in other public places.

The powerful California Teachers Association said it expected a mixed reaction to the announcement. "While some students are ready to immediately remove their masks, others remain very afraid," CTA President E. Toby Boyd said in a statement. The union has more than 300,000 members. "Change is never easy, and today's announcement is bound to disrupt and destabilize school communities."

A handful of California school districts have already dropped mask mandates for students in recent weeks in open defiance of the state mandate. Meanwhile, a survey published last week by the UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies found that more than 60% of California parents still support wearing masks in schools.

In Connecticut, Monday marked the first day of classes since the state ended its school mask mandate. Kindergarten teacher Rochelle Brown said 15 of her 17 students came to school wearing masks, and she is still wearing a mask in class herself.

"This is normalcy for them," said Brown, a teacher at Poquonock Elementary School in Windsor, Connecticut, where a lot of her students have never known school without a mask. "I didn't really hear a lot of conversation with the kids saying, 'Oh, there's that child, they're not wearing their mask.' They just did what they normally do every day."

The West Coast announcements come after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased the federal mask guidance Friday, essentially saying the majority of Americans don't need to wear masks in many indoor public places, including schools. Federal mask mandates still apply in high-risk indoor settings such as public transportation, in airports and in taxis.

The new CDC guidelines are based on measures focused more on what's happening at hospitals than on test results. The CDC said that more than 70% of Americans live in places where the coronavirus poses a low or medium threat to hospitals and therefore can stop wearing masks in most indoor places.

The CDC had endorsed universal masking in schools regardless of virus levels in the community since July, but it is now recommending masks only in counties at high risk.

Based on that criteria, 16 of Oregon's 36 counties fall under the "high" level of transmission. Dr. Dean Sidelinger, Oregon's state epidemiologist, said he hopes community leaders will use the CDC framework in "guiding their decisions" about masking.

California and Washington also have several counties still listed as high risk, but projections show that case numbers and hospitalizations will continue to drop over the coming weeks, officials said.

"We're turning a page in our fight against the COVID virus," Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said Monday during a news conference.

Inslee said in a separate statement that he expects many businesses and families to continue choosing to wear masks. "As we transition to this next phase, we will continue to move forward together carefully and cautiously," he said.

One Putin move and behold: West's unity tightens overnight

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Within days, Russian President Vladimir Putin has achieved what remained out of the grasp of the European Union for many decades — to jointly buy and send weapons to a war zone — and restored something that was broken for years — trans-Atlantic unity.

For years, Putin could sit back and relish in unseemly scenes of Western disunity — ranging from the Britain's Brexit move out of the EU in 2016, Hungary's long-standing antipathy towards its EU headquarters and, equally, the rift created by former President Donald Trump that has far from fully healed under Joe Biden.

For Putin, the timing seemed perfect for his invasion of Ukraine since it had the potential of opening the cracks of division even further, with a war on the continent forcing everyone far outside their diplomatic comfort zone.

"And just as Vladimir Putin thought that he would destroy European unity, exactly the opposite thing has happened," European Council President Charles Michel said in an interview with a small group of reporters

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on Monday.

"Cooperation is solid as a rock," he said. "This is demanded by the circumstances of history. Demanded by circumstances that none of us could have imagined," Michel added.

Washington could not agree more. "President Putin has been one of the greatest unifiers of NATO in modern history, so I guess that is one thing we can thank him for," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

Richard Haass, president of the New York-based think tank Council on Foreign Relations, said it was "stunning" how European politics have been transformed in recent days.

"Putin has done what no one in the West could do, which is revive the concept of the West," Haass said.

On Monday, Biden was leading another videoconference with EU, Britain and other Western leaders to solidify a common package of sanctions that are unprecedented in scope and unity. Over the weekend, Brussels and Washington announced financial sanctions within minutes of each other, all targeting the central bank and cutting Russia out of much of the SWIFT international financial transaction system.

The Europeans also closed their airspace to Russian planes, and they all agreed on a list of Russian oligarchs to hit. Seeing the West gel together instead of break apart, Putin on Monday went to the old lingo that the West loved to use itself in the Cold War days of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

Centering his wrath on Washington, he described Western allies as U.S. "satellites which humbly fawn on it, kowtow to it, copy its conduct and joyfully accept the rules it offers to follow."

"So it's fair to say that the entire Western bloc formed by the U.S. to its liking represents an empire of lies," Putin said.

Western powers will take such unity as a compliment these days, and it was unheard of before Putin started massing troops on Ukraine's border.

Especially, the stance within the 27-nation EU is a sea change that was achieved within a few ebbs and flows.

"This is a watershed moment," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in the wake of Sunday's decision for the EU "to finance the purchase and delivery of weapons and other equipment to a country that is under attack."

This is the same European Union based on a post-World War II peace project that would only turn swords into plowshares to recreate a welfare continent of unprecedented riches. It was that same European Union that received the Nobel Peace Prize 10 years ago for what it could achieve without the use of weapons.

It was also the same bloc that for years has vaunted the value of what it calls soft power — diplomacy, aid, cultural exchanges — instead of the raw power that comes through the barrel of a gun.

All this change in barely a week. Now, Michel says: "There is no space for weakness and we need to show a firmness."

Nowhere has the change been more pronounced than in Germany, the EU's leading economic power but also a country that has been reluctant to invest heavily in military power, in large part because of its militaristic past which resulted in the horror of World War II.

Germany has faced persistent criticism over recent years for failing to meet a NATO target of spending 2% of gross domestic product on defense. On Sunday, though, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced that Germany would commit 100 billion euros (\$113 billion) to a special fund for its armed forces and raise defense spending above 2% "from now on, year for year."

Scholz also has done an about-face on Germany's refusal to export weapons to conflict zones, pledging to send anti-tank weapons and surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine.

"If our world is different, then our policy must be different as well," Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said. The policy U-turn was executed by a government led by center-left Social Democrats sometimes criticized as being soft on Russia and a Green party that has a pacifist heritage

That world changed as well for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban — often seen as the EU's version of an autocrat leader much like Putin is. For years, he has been railing against the EU as meddling, was friends with Putin and was seen as someone who could break the bloc from within.

Especially since EU sanctions against Russia require unanimity among all 27, the moment beckoned. Still

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Hungary, fell in line as much as the others when it came to sanctions — within days.

"I spoke immediately with Viktor Orban when we faced this new situation and I can tell you, it was less difficult than expected to have the support of Hungary," Michel said.

It might still be early days in the war though and tougher moments might lie ahead with even bigger decisions to make, especially since Putin and his circle have had time for many years to prepare for any eventuality.

"They do have the ability to keep going for some time despite the pain," said Amanda Paul of the European Policy Center think tank. "So it means that the West will need to be very committed and very determined to keep pushing and pushing."

New normal: Fence is up, Guard on standby for State of Union

By COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The fencing around the U.S. Capitol is back up for the president's State of the Union address on Tuesday. Police cars with flashing lights are stationed at major intersections and highways. The U.S. National Guard is on standby.

It's the new normal.

While there are no specific or credible threats related to President Joe Biden's speech, law enforcement officials are taking no chances following the events of Jan. 6, 2021, when a violent mob caught the District of Columbia by surprise and successfully stormed the U.S. Capitol, briefly disrupting the certification of Biden's 2020 presidential victory.

Since then, the U.S. Capitol Police, charged with protecting lawmakers and anyone else in and around the Capitol, has beefed up security for planned protests in the area. And this time, officials are also preparing for trucker convoys that are planning protests against pandemic restrictions beginning this week, though officials aren't concerned about serious security issues with the possible protests.

Modeled after recent trucker protests in Canada, separate truck convoys have been planned through online forums. Many have different starting points, departure dates and routes, though some may arrive in time for the State of the Union address. Others may arrive afterward.

At least two of the announced trucker convoys have fizzled due to a lack of participation. But the largest, known as the People's Convoy, had reached Oklahoma and was heading east on Monday with the intention of reaching the capital by Saturday, March 5.

The State of the Union address is designated as a "national special security event," which clears the way for communication, funding and preparation between multiple agencies in Washington, including the Capitol Police, Pentagon, Homeland Security and District-area police. Other such events are the Super Bowl and the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. The U.S. Secret Service is in charge of the event.

The event takes months to plan and officials begin discussing how to improve security as soon as the previous year's event ends. Law enforcement officials never go into too much detail so would-be attackers aren't tipped off. But law enforcement officials always take into account recent events — from the insurrection to trucker protests and other free speech demonstrations.

This work includes enhanced intelligence sharing and operational planning, a Critical Incident Response Plan for the U.S. Capitol, and a regional security assessment. Police in the nation's capital have mobilized additional officers and put the department's civil disturbance unit on alert for at least the next week, two law enforcement officials told the AP. The officials could not publicly discuss details of the preparations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Investigators have been monitoring online chatter, which includes an array of general threats against elected officials but there are no specific or credible threats against the event, the officials said.

U.S. Capitol Police Chief Thomas Manger said Sunday the fencing is being erected around the Capitol grounds "out of an abundance of caution."

The fence had been a stark symbol of the fear that many in the Capitol felt after the Jan. 6 mob pushed its way past overwhelmed police officers, broke through windows and doors and ransacked the Capitol. It remained up for several months, a reminder of how divided the nation was, and how much work Biden

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had before him in trying to repair the damage.

The fencing greatly disrupted the daily lives of residents living near the Capitol, and Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, Washington's non-voting delegate in the House of Representatives, has said she doesn't want the fence to stay up indefinitely this time.

"I will ensure that the fencing comes down as soon as possible to restore freedom of movement for District of Columbia residents and the general public," Norton said in a statement last week.

Since the fence first came up and went down, it's been re-installed once, briefly, for a rally in September that was organized to support people who remained jailed in connection with the insurrection. Law enforcement officers and members of the media vastly outnumbered the protesters and only a few incidents were reported. But Manger and other law enforcement officials said they'd rather take heat for being over-prepared than relive the nightmare of being vastly outnumbered by a violent mob.

Manger said Capitol Police have also requested additional assistance from outside law enforcement agencies before Tuesday's address, in addition to the request for help from the National Guard.

Metropolitan Police Department Chief Robert Contee said Monday that his department is closely monitoring the shifting information and would be devoting additional policing in a rolling state of heightened alert over the next few weeks.

"We regularly handle peaceful demonstrations and welcome all to the nation's capital to exercise their First Amendment rights," Contee said. But he warned that the multiple security departments were "prepared to take swift law-enforcement actions for violations of our local and federal laws, if necessary."

Many Capitol riot cases could hinge on 1st trial's outcome

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department launched one of the largest and most complex criminal investigations in its history after a mob of Donald Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol over a year ago. Now it's time for a jury to hear some of the government's evidence about the unparalleled attack on American democracy.

The first trial for one of the hundreds of Capitol riot prosecutions begins this week, with jury selection starting Monday in the case against Guy Wesley Reffitt. The Texas man is charged with bringing a gun onto Capitol grounds, interfering with police officers guarding the building, and threatening his teenage children if they reported him to authorities. Jurors could hear attorneys' opening statements as soon as Tuesday.

Reffitt's trial may be a bellwether for many other Capitol riot cases. A conviction would give prosecutors more leverage in plea talks with rioters facing the most serious charges. An acquittal may lead others to wait for their own day in court.

Reffitt "truly is the canary in the coal mine," said Gregg Sofer, a former federal prosecutor who served as U.S. attorney for the Western District of Texas from October 2020 to February 2021.

"It'll really be interesting to see how strong a case the government has and whether or not they're relying on evidence that, when pushed and tested, stands up. It's going to have a huge impact going forward," added Sofer, now a partner at the law firm Husch Blackwell.

Reffitt is a member of a militia-style group called the "Texas Three Percenters," according to prosecutors. The Three Percenters militia movement refers to the myth that only 3% of Americans fought in the Revolutionary War against the British.

On Jan. 6, 2021, Reffitt was armed with a handgun in a holster on his waist, carrying zip-tie handcuffs and wearing body armor and a helmet equipped with a video camera when he and others charged at police officers on the west side of the Capitol, according to prosecutors.

"This action caused the police line guarding the building to retreat closer to the building itself; soon after this, law enforcement was overwhelmed, and rioters flooded the building," prosecutors wrote in a court filing.

Reffitt retreated only after an officer pepper sprayed him in the face, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors believe Reffitt took at least two firearms with him to Washington: an AR-15 rifle and a Smith

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& Wesson pistol. When FBI agents searched Reffitt's home in Wylie, Texas, they found a handgun in a holster on a nightstand in the defendant's bedroom. Prosecutors say photos and video of Reffitt during the riot show a handgun holster on his right hip, with what appears to be a silver object inside the holster.

On the morning of Jan. 6, Reffitt said he planned to "do the recon and then come back for weapons hot" and sent messages about meeting at a "rendezvous point," according to prosecutors.

"These messages, along with the weapons that Reffitt carried and the gear he wore, make clear that the defendant did not come to D.C. with the intention to engage in peaceful activity," prosecutors wrote.

The siege resulted in the deaths of five people, including a police officer. The Justice Department says more than 235 rioters have been charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement, injuring over 100 officers. Rioters caused over \$1 million in damage to the Capitol.

The Justice Department says its investigation has generated an unprecedented volume of evidence, with hundreds of thousands of documents and thousands of hours of videos to share with defense attorneys. Shared files total more than nine terabytes of information and would take over 100 days to view, the department says.

More than 750 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the riot. Over 200 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanors carrying a maximum sentence of six months' imprisonment. More than 100 riot defendants have been sentenced. And at least 90 others have trial dates this year.

Philadelphia-based defense attorney Justin Danilewitz, who was a federal prosecutor in New Jersey from 2012 to 2017, said a conviction in Reffitt's case may lead to a flurry of guilty pleas by other riot defendants.

"And that can benefit defendants on occasion because it's better than the alternative if the alternative is a conviction following a trial," Danilewitz added.

An acquittal could inspire other defendants to "dig in their heels" and either push for a better plea offer from prosecutors or gamble a trial of their own, he said.

Defense attorney William Welch has said there is no evidence that Reffitt damaged property, used force or physically harmed anybody. In a May 2021 court filing, Welch said none of the videos or photos shows a gun in Reffitt's possession at the Capitol.

"In fact, neither of the police officers interviewed by the government said anything about a firearm," he wrote.

Reffitt has been jailed since his arrest in Texas less than a week after the riot. He faces five counts: obstruction of an official proceeding, being unlawfully present on Capitol grounds while armed with a firearm, transporting firearms during a civil disorder, interfering with law enforcement officers during a civil disorder, and obstruction of justice.

The obstructing justice charge stems from threats that he allegedly made against his son, then 18, and daughter, then 16, after returning home from Washington. Reffitt told his children to "choose a side or die" and said they would be traitors if they reported him to law enforcement, prosecutors said.

"He predicted future political violence in statements both to his family and to fellow militia members, bragged to fellow militia members about his involvement in the riot, recruited other rioters into the militia, and ordered bear spray and riot shields to his home to prepare for further violence," prosecutors wrote.

Messages recovered from Reffitt's cellphone indicate he planned to joined an armed insurrection on Jan. 6 and intended to occupy the Capitol, prosecutors said.

"We had thousands of weapons and fired no rounds yet showed numbers. The next time we will not be so cordial," he wrote, according to prosecutors.

Presiding over Reffitt's trial is U.S. District Judge Dabney Friedrich, who was nominated by President Donald Trump in 2017. Friedrich already has sentenced nine rioters who pleaded guilty.

Friedrich individually questioned more than 30 prospective jurors on Monday, asking them how closely they have followed news coverage of the Capitol riot. Some said they had formed strong, negative opinions about the events of Jan. 6 but could strive to be fair and impartial.

The judge disqualified several members of the jury pool who said they would have difficulty setting aside their opinions or emotions about the riot. One of them, a man who lives near the Capitol, said the riot felt like "an attack on my home in some sense."

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"It was a very scary time," he told the judge, Jury selection is scheduled to resume Tuesday. The judge said she hopes to empanel a jury to hear opening statements later in the day.

Prosecutors expect to call about a dozen witnesses, including three Capitol police officers who interacted with Reffitt and an officer who was in charge of the U.S. Capitol Police command center.

Jurors will see videos that captured Reffitt's confrontation with police. Prosecutors also have audio recordings of Reffitt talking about the riot inside his home after returning home.

"We made a point. That was a historic day," Reffitt said during one of the recorded conversations, according to prosecutors. "And guess what? I'm not done yet. I got a lot more to do. That's the beginning."

Reffitt's son, daughter and a fellow Texas Three Percenter group member also are listed as government witnesses. The group member traveled with Reffitt to Washington and back to Texas between Jan. 4 and Jan. 8, 2021.

"During the drive (to Washington), Reffitt talked about 'dragging those people out of the Capitol by their ankles' and installing a new government," prosecutors wrote.

A court filing that refers to the other militia member by the initials "R.H." says the man will tell jurors he was given immunity from prosecution in exchange for his testimony.

Welch has said Reffitt worked as a rig manager and as a consultant in the petroleum industry before COVID-19 restrictions effectively shut down his business.

In LA's Eastern European diaspora, solidarity for Ukraine

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Thousands of miles from where they were born, Russian Anastasia Shostak and Ukrainian Andrew Berezin developed a friendship in Los Angeles because of their shared Jewish faith.

Now they have yet more in common: Both are feverishly working to get their families out of their respective homelands and into Israel after Russia launched its war against Ukraine, and both turned out over the weekend in their adopted hometown to protest the invasion.

Los Angeles is home to many from the Eastern European diaspora, a place where Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Romanians, Georgians, Moldovians, Estonians and Lithuanians often pray, work, shop and eat together. The war triggered by Russia's invasion has resulted in raw and painful emotions in the pews of shared houses of worship and in the broader community.

Berezin, a software engineer, said that for years the community has been united by common bonds of faith, culture and history, but lately things have felt "strange."

"We may be from Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus or Moldova, but we've considered each other brother nations," he said. "We never thought each other as separate because of our shared legacy. I feel like now we're forced to separate. It feels like 'us' against 'them' now, and it's not good."

At Berezin's urging, his parents and 90-year-old grandmother crammed themselves and prized possessions into a tiny sedan and drove over 1,200 miles to Poland, where they await paperwork to join his sister in Israel.

On Sunday he was one of hundreds of demonstrators who turned out to wave flags, march and hold vigil in antiwar protests staged in both Hollywood and Santa Monica.

Shostak was among the numerous Russians who came to add their voices in opposition to their home country's actions. She and others openly proclaimed their disgust, sadness and remorse over the invasion.

Shostak, who helps run a program called Caring for Jews in Need at the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, has family in both Russia and Ukraine. She said she feels "guilty" even though she has never seen eye to eye with the Russian government or President Vladimir Putin.

"I know (Russians and Ukrainians) are friends here, but deep down there is probably that resentment of your country attacking my country," she said. "My country is the aggressor here. It's important for me to get out there and say I support my Ukrainian brothers and sisters. We need to say we're not enemies."

Like Berezin, Shostak fears for her parents' safety and is working to get them from Russia to Israel.

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There are also Russians in the community who support Putin's actions, though they're generally keeping quiet on the issue, careful to avoid offending neighbors with whom they have bonded over the years.

John Khrikyan, who worships alongside Ukrainians and counts many of them as friends, said in a phone interview that Putin is justified in attacking what Khrikyan considers an anti-Russian and corrupt government.

"Historically it's one people, one culture and one nation," he said of Russia and Ukraine. "I believe Ukraine should be an independent country. But we should be friends, not enemies."

"I'm proud to be Russian," Khrikyan said.

At local houses of worship, solidarity with Ukraine was the order of the day Sunday.

About 50 people attended a special morning service at Saint Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Church, a few miles northwest of downtown LA. Worshipers bowed their heads in prayer, and a few shed tears from closed eyes.

"I came here to show my support for Ukraine," said Liana Ghica, who dressed in the blue, yellow and red of her native Romania for the occasion. "This is not just about Ukraine but the future of our world, our freedom and the future of our children. It's about human rights."

In an emotional sermon, the Rev. Vasile Sauciu denounced the invasion as "madness" and "evil." He likened it to the biblical battle of David against Goliath and said the underdog Ukraine will emerge victorious, as David did.

"(Ukraine) doesn't have much, but we have the right purpose, the right motive," said Sauciu, who was born in Romania but has many Ukrainian family members and identifies as a Ukrainian priest. "I hope our good neighbors support us and remember that this pestilence can go beyond Ukraine. Good people must stand up for what is right."

Some at the service were praying for loved ones serving in Ukraine's armed forces.

Iryna Hetman-Piatskova cradled her cellphone in her palm as she looked at a photo of her son in fatigues, sent from the front lines.

"My plea is to the mothers of Russia to call their sons back home, to stop the war," she said tearfully. "From one mother to another, ask your sons to stop attacking."

And Natalia Blanco recalled speaking this weekend with her brother, who is in the Ukrainian army.

"He told me he is trying to be strong, but it's hard to see other soldiers dying," she said, holding back tears.

Lana Worth, a first-generation Russian American who counts both Russians and Ukrainians among her family, said she has been torn and doesn't wish to take sides.

"Do I hate my right hand or left hand?" she said. "Ours is a small world. Hating each other is not an option."

At the Santa Monica protest, held a few blocks from the Pacific Ocean on the city's Third Street Promenade, demonstrators gathered in the afternoon.

Katrina Repina held her infant daughter in one hand and a sign in the other that read: "I'm Russian, I'm sorry."

"I don't support Putin," she said. "My heart bleeds when I see all the news. I feel the Ukrainian people's pain, and I wish I can take that pain away."

Repina came to the protest with Hanna Husakova, a Ukrainian. The two connected via Instagram, and common bonds of language and culture were stronger than the war between their countries.

"Katrina asked me if I wanted to be her friend. She asked me, 'Do you hate me because I'm Russian?'" Husakova said. "I said, 'Absolutely not.' What's going on here is between governments, not people."

Jonas Gavelis, a Lithuanian native who moved to Santa Monica five months ago after winning the green card lottery, donned a T-shirt emblazoned with the slogan "I'm not Ukrainian but I support Ukraine." He worried that the fighting could spill beyond borders, and his home country could be next in Putin's sights.

"Ukraine has supported Lithuania when we needed them," Gavelis said. "Now, it's our turn to show our support."

520,000+ refugees have fled Ukraine since Russia waged war

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BEREGSURANY, Hungary (AP) — The mass exodus of refugees from Ukraine to the eastern edge of the European Union showed no signs of stopping Monday, with the U.N. estimating more than 520,000 people have already escaped Russia's burgeoning war against Ukraine.

Long lines of cars and buses were backed up at checkpoints at the borders of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and non-EU member Moldova. Others crossed the borders on foot, dragging their possessions behind them.

Several hundred refugees were gathered at a temporary reception center in the Hungarian border village of Beregsurany awaiting transport to transit hubs, where they would be taken further into Hungary and beyond.

Maria Pavlushko, 24, an information technology project manager from Zhytomyr, 100 kilometers (60 miles) west of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, said she was on a skiing holiday in the Carpathian mountains when she got word from home that Russia's invasion had begun.

"My granny called me saying there is war in the city," she said.

Pavlushko plans to travel from Hungary to Poland, where her mother lives. But her grandmother is still in Zhytomyr, she said, and her father stayed behind to join the fight against the invading Russian forces sent in by Vladimir Putin.

"I am proud about him," she said. "A lot of my friends, a lot of young boys are going ... to kill (the Russian soldiers)."

Many of the refugees in Beregsurany, as in other border areas in Eastern Europe, are from India, Nigeria and other African countries, and were working or studying in Ukraine when the war broke out.

Masroor Ahmed, a 22-year-old Indian medical student studying in Ternopil in western Ukraine, came with 18 other Indian students to the Hungarian border. He said they hoped to reach the capital of Budapest, where India's government has organized an evacuation flight for its citizens.

While Ternopil had not yet experienced violence when they left: "It might be that there is bombing next hour, next month or next year. We are not sure, that's why we left that city."

Hungary, in a turnaround from its long-standing opposition to immigration and refusal to accept refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, has opened its borders to all refugees fleeing Ukraine, including third-country nationals that can prove Ukrainian residency.

As part of an agreement with some foreign governments, Hungary has set up a "humanitarian corridor" to escort non-Ukrainian nationals from the border to airports in the city of Debrecen and the capital, Budapest.

Priscillia Vawa Zira, a Nigerian medical student in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, said she fled toward Hungary as the Russian military commenced an assault.

"The situation was very terrible. You had to run because explosions here and there every minute," she said.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, speaking by video to the U.N. Security Council, said more than 520,000 refugees had fled Ukraine, a number he said "has been rising exponentially, hour after hour."

The U.N. expects the total to reach 4 million in the coming weeks, Grandi said.

In Poland, which has reported the most arrivals at more than 280,000, trains continued to bring refugees into the border town of Przemysl on Monday. In winter coats to protect them against near-freezing temperatures, many carried small suitcases as they exited the station.

Polish U.N. Ambassador Krzysztof Szczerski, speaking at the General Assembly, said that in addition to Ukrainians, those coming in Monday included people of some 125 nationalities, including Uzbeks, Nigerians, Indians, Moroccans, Pakistanis, Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, Turks and Algerians.

Otoman Adel Abid, a student from Iraq, fled to Poland from the western Ukrainian city of Lviv after he said panic broke out among many in the city.

"Everyone ran to buy some food and we heard bombs everywhere," he told The Associated Press. "After

that we directly packed our bag and clothes and some documents and we ran to the train station.”

Natalia Pivniuk, a young Ukrainian woman from Lviv, described people crowding and pushing to get on the train, which she said was “very scary, and dangerous physically and dangerous mentally.”

“People are under stress ... and when people are scared they become egoist and forget about everything,” she said. “People are traumatized because they were on that train.”

Maxime Guselnikov was leaving Poland to return to Ukraine to take up arms against Russia, he said, adding that his wife and daughter are still in Kyiv along with friends and colleagues.

“I return to Kyiv to fight,” he said. “The Russians came to kill our brothers, soldiers, our children, mothers, sons. I go to take revenge for it. I should react.”

Many of those fleeing Ukraine were traveling on to countries further west.

Aksieniia Shtimmerman, 41, arrived with her four children in Berlin Monday morning after a three-day journey from Kyiv.

Sitting on a bench inside the German capital’s main train station, she attempted to decipher a leaflet with instructions and maps on how to reach a shelter for new arrivals.

As she tried to comfort her crying 3-year-old twin boys, Shtimmerman said she had worked in telecommunications at a Kyiv university but was now only seeking a place where she and her children could eat, sleep and rest.

“I grabbed my kids on Friday morning at 7 a.m. to run away from the war,” Shtimmerman said. “I can’t even count anymore how many different trains we took until we arrived here.”

Germany’s interior ministry said 1,800 refugees from Ukraine had arrived by early Monday, but that the number was constantly growing as more trains from Poland arrived.

In the Romanian town of Siret, the EU commissioner for home affairs, Ylva Johansson, visited a border crossing where thousands of refugees were entering from neighboring Ukraine.

Johansson, who visited some of the humanitarian stations at the border, commended the “heartwarming” cooperation between volunteers and the authorities, and said the EU is united “in a way we have never seen before.”

She said it was a “very difficult time where we see war in Europe again, where we see aggression, invasion from Putin towards a sovereign, neighboring country.”

Europe is “showing that we are based on other values than Putin,” she said.

Trump appeals ruling forcing him to testify in NY probe

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump has appealed a judge’s decision requiring he answer questions under oath in New York state’s civil investigation into his business practices — a widely expected move that’s likely to prolong the fight over his testimony by months.

Lawyers for Trump and his two eldest children filed papers on Monday with the appellate division of the state’s trial court, seeking to overturn Manhattan Judge Arthur Engoron’s Feb. 17 ruling. They argue ordering the Trumps to testify violates their constitutional rights because their answers could be used in a parallel criminal investigation.

In an eight-page ruling, Engoron set a March 10 deadline for Trump and his children, Ivanka and Donald Trump Jr., to sit for depositions. Lawyers for the Trumps asked the appellate court for a stay to spare them from questioning while it considers the matter.

The court did not set a date for arguments. It typically issues decisions several months after that, but could be inclined to rule on an expedited basis given the urgency of New York Attorney General Letitia James’ investigation and the Trumps’ desire to swiftly overturn Engoron’s ruling.

A message seeking comment was left with James’ office. In a statement on Friday, as lawyers for the Trumps were preparing their appeal, the attorney general signaled she was ready for a long fight to get them to testify.

“Donald J. Trump, Donald Trump, Jr., and Ivanka Trump were ordered by the court to comply with our

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lawful investigation into Mr. Trump and the Trump Organization's financial dealings," James said in the statement. "While they have the right to seek a delay, they cannot deter us from following the facts and the law wherever they may lead. Make no mistake: My office will continue to pursue this case without fear or favor because no one is above the law."

Trump did not immediately comment on the appeal. In a statement following Engoron's decision, he called the ruling "a continuation of the greatest Witch Hunt in history."

"THERE IS NO CASE!" he said, claiming he's unable to get a fair hearing in New York "because of the hatred of me by Judges and the judiciary" and accusing James' office of "doing everything within their corrupt discretion to interfere with my business relationships, and with the political process."

James, a Democrat, has said her investigation has uncovered evidence Trump's company, the Trump Organization, used "fraudulent or misleading" valuations of assets like golf courses and skyscrapers to get loans and tax benefits.

In his ruling, Engoron wrote: "A State Attorney General commences investigating a business entity, uncovers copious evidence of possible financial fraud, and wants to question, under oath, several of the entities' principals, including its namesake. She has the clear right to do so."

If Engoron's decision is upheld it could force Trump into a tough decision about whether to answer questions, or stay silent, citing his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. Anything Trump says in a civil deposition could be used against him in the criminal probe being overseen by the Manhattan district attorney's office.

At a hearing prior to Engoron's decision, Trump's lawyers argued that having him sit for a civil deposition is an improper attempt to get around a state law barring prosecutors from calling someone to testify before a criminal grand jury without giving them immunity.

A lawyer for the attorney general's office told Engoron that it wasn't unusual to have civil and criminal investigations proceeding at the same time, and Engoron rejected a request from lawyers for the Trumps to pause the civil probe until the criminal matter is over.

Last summer, spurred by evidence uncovered in James' civil investigation, the Manhattan district attorney's office charged Weisselberg and the Trump Organization with tax fraud, alleging he collected more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation. Weisselberg and the company have pleaded not guilty. The future of the criminal probe was thrown into question last week when the two prosecutors leading it abruptly quit.

Lawyers for the Trumps asked the appellate court Monday to consider three questions:

— whether James' office is violating their rights by issuing subpoenas for their testimony while also participating in the criminal investigation;

— whether protections for grand jury witnesses under state law, such as immunity, can be "eviscerated, if the same agency involved in the criminal investigation simply opens a 'civil' investigation into the very same matters";

— and whether Engoron erred in rejecting the Trumps' contention that James has engaged in selective prosecution.

Engoron, in his ruling, said the thousands of pages of evidence he's reviewed in the case shows there's sufficient basis for continuing the investigation and undercuts "the notion that this ongoing investigation is based on personal animus, not facts and law."

Cherokee on a smartphone: Part of a drive to save a language

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

By itself, being able to read smartphone home screens in Cherokee won't be enough to safeguard the Indigenous language, endangered after a long history of erasure. But it might be a step toward immersing younger tribal citizens in the language spoken by a dwindling number of their elders.

That's the hope of Principal Chief Richard Sneed of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, who's counting on more inclusive consumer technology — and the involvement of a major tech company — to help out.

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Sneed and other Cherokee leaders have spent several months consulting with Lenovo-owned Motorola, which last week introduced a Cherokee language interface on its newest line of phones. Now phone users will be able to find apps and toggle settings using the syllable-based written form of the language first created by the Cherokee Nation's Sequoyah in the early 1800s. It will appear on the company's high-end Edge Plus phones when they go on sale in the spring.

"It's just one more piece of a very large puzzle of trying to preserve and proliferate the language," said Sneed, who worked with members of his own western North Carolina tribe and other Cherokee leaders who speak a different dialect in Oklahoma that is more widely spoken but also endangered.

It's not the first time consumer technology has embraced the language, as Apple, Microsoft and Google already enable people to configure their laptops and phones so that they can type in Cherokee. But the Cherokee language preservationists who worked on the Motorola project said they tried to imbue it with the culture — not just the written symbols — they are trying to protect.

Take the start button on the Motorola interface, which features a Cherokee word that translates into English as "just start." That's a clever nod to the casual way Cherokee elders might use the phrase, said Benjamin Frey, a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"It could have said 'let's get started' in many different ways," Frey said. "But it said 'halenagwu' — just start. And that's very Cherokee. I can kind of see an elder kind of shrugging and saying, 'Well, I guess let's do it.' ... It reminds me very fondly of how the elders talk, which is pretty exciting."

When Motorola thought of incorporating Cherokee into its phones, Frey was one of the people it reached out to. It was looking to incorporate a language that the U.N.'s culture agency, UNESCO, had designated as among the world's most endangered but also one that had an active community of language scholars it could consult.

"We work with the people, not about the people," said Juliana Rebelatto, who holds the role of head linguist and globalization manager for Motorola's mobile division. "We didn't want to work on the language without them."

Motorola modeled its Cherokee project on a similar Indigenous language revitalization project Rebelatto helped work on in Brazil, where the brand — part of China-based parent company Lenovo — has a higher market share than it does in the U.S. The company last year introduced phone interfaces serving the Kaingang community of southern Brazil, and the Nheengatu community of the Amazonian regions of Brazil and neighboring countries.

Several big tech companies have expressed interest in recent years in making their technology work better for endangered Indigenous languages, more to show their good will or advance speech recognition research than to fulfill a business imperative.

Microsoft's text translation service recently added Inuinnaqtun and Inuktitut, spoken in the Canadian Arctic, and grassroots artificial intelligence researchers are doing similar projects throughout the Americas and beyond. But there's a long way to go before digital voice assistants understand these languages as well as they do English — and for some languages the time is running out.

Frey and Sneed said they recognize that some Cherokee will have concerns about tech companies making a product feature of their work to preserve their language — whether it's a text-based interface like Motorola's or potential future projects that could record speech to build a voice assistant or real-time translator.

"I think it is a danger that companies could take this kind of material and take advantage of it, selling it without sharing the proceeds with community members," Frey said. "Personally, I decided that the potential benefit was worth the risk, and I'm hoping that that will be borne out."

Frey didn't grow up speaking Cherokee, largely due to his grandmother's experiences of being punished for speaking the language when she was sent to boarding school. For over 150 years, Indigenous children in the U.S. and Canada were taken from their communities and forced into boarding schools that focused on assimilation.

She and others of her generation were beaten for speaking the language, had her mouth washed out

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with soap and was told that "English was the only way to get ahead in the world," Frey said. She didn't pass it on to Frey's mom.

"This was a 13,000-year chain of intergenerational transfer of a language from parents to children that was broken because the federal government decided that English was the only language that was worthwhile," he said.

Only about 225 of the roughly 16,000 members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians spoke Cherokee fluently as their first language at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Now I think we're down to 172 or so," said Sneed, the principal chief. "So we've lost quite a few in the last couple of years."

The Oklahoma-based Cherokee Nation has more speakers — an estimated 2,000 — but they are still a fraction of the more than 400,000 people who comprise what is the largest of the 574 federally recognized tribes in the U.S.

Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said in a statement Monday that incorporating the language into technology products is "a win not just for Cherokee Language preservation, but for the perpetuation of all Native languages."

Frey hopes the new tool will be a conversation-starter between older Cherokee language speakers and their tech-savvy grandkids. It complements language immersion programs and other homegrown activism that's already happening in North Carolina and Oklahoma. He said it will take more than text-based smartphone interfaces to really make a difference.

"If the youth today are watching TikTok videos, we need more TikTok videos in Cherokee," said Frey. "If they're paying attention to YouTube, we need more YouTubers creating content in Cherokee. If they're trading memes online, we need more memes that are written in Cherokee."

"We do have to make sure that the language continues to be used and continues to be spoken," said Frey. "Otherwise, it could die out."

Europe welcomes Ukrainian refugees — others, less so

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — They file into neighboring countries by the hundreds of thousands — refugees from Ukraine clutching children in one arm, belongings in the other. And they're being heartily welcomed, by leaders of countries like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Moldova and Romania.

But while the hospitality has been applauded, it has also highlighted stark differences in treatment given to migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa, particularly Syrians who came in 2015. Some of the language from these leaders has been disturbing to them, and hurtful.

"These are not the refugees we are used to... these people are Europeans," Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov told journalists earlier this week, of the Ukrainians. "These people are intelligent, they are educated people.... This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists..."

"In other words," he added, "there is not a single European country now which is afraid of the current wave of refugees."

Syrian journalist Okba Mohammad says that statement "mixes racism and Islamophobia."

Mohammad fled his hometown of Daraa in 2018. He now lives in Spain, and with other Syrian refugees founded the first bilingual magazine in Arabic and Spanish. He described a sense of déjà vu as he followed events in Ukraine. He also had sheltered underground to protect himself from Russian bombs. He also struggled to board an overcrowded bus to flee his town. He also was separated from his family at the border.

"A refugee is a refugee, whether European, African or Asian," Mohammad said.

The change in tone of some of Europe's most extreme anti-migration leaders has been striking — from "We aren't going to let anyone in" to "We're letting everyone in."

Those comments were made only three months apart by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. In

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the first, in December, he was addressing migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa. In the second, this week, he was addressing people from Ukraine.

Some journalists, too, are being criticized for descriptions of Ukrainian refugees. "These are prosperous, middle-class people," an Al Jazeera English television presenter said. "These are not obviously refugees trying to get away from areas in the Middle East... in North Africa. They look like any European family that you would live next door to."

The channel issued an apology saying the comments were insensitive and irresponsible.

CBS news apologized after one of its correspondents said the conflict in Kyiv wasn't "like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European" city.

As more and more people scrambled to flee Ukraine, several reports emerged of non-white residents, including Nigerians, Indians and Lebanese, getting stuck at borders. Unlike Ukrainians, many non-Europeans need visas to get into neighboring countries. Embassies around the world were scrambling to assist their citizens in getting through.

Videos shared on social media under the hashtag #AfricansinUkraine allegedly showed African students being kept from boarding trains out of Ukraine, to make space for Ukrainians.

The African Union in Nairobi said Monday that everyone has the right to cross international borders to flee conflict. The continental body said "reports that Africans are singled out for unacceptable dissimilar treatment would be shockingly racist and in breach of international law."

It urged all countries to "show the same empathy and support to all people fleeing war notwithstanding their racial identity."

Polish U.N. Ambassador Krzysztof Szczerski said at the General Assembly on Monday that assertions of race- or religion-based discrimination at Poland's border are "a complete lie and a terrible insult to us."

"The nationals of all countries who suffered from Russian aggression or whose life is at risk can seek shelter in my country," he said.

Szczerski said people of some 125 nationalities had been admitted to Poland on Monday morning from Ukraine, including Ukrainian, Uzbek, Nigerian, Indian, Moroccan, Pakistani, Afghan, Belarussian, Algerian and more. Overall, he said, 300,000 people have arrived during the crisis.

When over a million people crossed into Europe in 2015, support for refugees fleeing wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan was relatively high at first. There were also moments of hostility — such as when a Hungarian camerawoman was filmed kicking and possibly tripping migrants along the country's border with Serbia.

Still, back then, Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, famously said "Wir schaffen das" ("We can do it"), and the Swedish prime minister urged citizens to "open your hearts" to refugees.

Volunteers gathered on Greek beaches to rescue exhausted families crossing on boats from Turkey. In Germany, they were greeted with applause at train and bus stations.

But the warm welcome soon ended after EU nations disagreed over how to share responsibility, with the main pushback coming from Central and Eastern European countries like Hungary and Poland. One by one, governments across Europe toughened migration and asylum policies, earning the nickname "Fortress Europe."

Just last week, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees denounced the increasing "violence and serious human rights violations" across European borders, specifically pointing the finger at Greece.

Last year hundreds of people, mainly from Iraq and Syria but also from Africa, were left stranded in a no man's land between Poland and Belarus as the EU accused Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko of luring thousands of foreigners to its borders in retaliation for sanctions. At the time, Poland blocked access to aid groups and journalists. More than 15 people died in the cold.

Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean, the European Union has been criticized for paying Libya to intercept migrants trying to reach its shores, helping to return them to abusive and often deadly detention centers.

"There is no way to avoid questions around the deeply embedded racism of European migration policies when we see how different the reactions of national governments and EU elites are to the people trying

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to reach Europe," Lena Karamanidou, an independent migration and asylum researcher in Greece, wrote on Twitter.

Jeff Crisp, a former head of policy, development and evaluation at UNHCR, agreed that race and religion influenced treatment of refugees.

"Countries that had been really negative on the refugee issue and have made it very difficult for the EU to develop coherent refugee policy over the last decade, suddenly come forward with a much more positive response," Crisp noted.

Much of Orban's opposition to migration is based on his belief that to "preserve cultural homogeneity and ethnic homogeneity," Hungary should not accept refugees from different cultures and different religions.

Members of Poland's conservative nationalist ruling party have echoed Orban's thinking, saying they want to protect Poland's identity as a Christian nation and guarantee its security.

These arguments have not been applied to their Ukrainian neighbors, with whom they share historical and cultural ties. Parts of Ukraine today were once also parts of Poland and Hungary. Over 1 million Ukrainians live and work in Poland and hundreds of thousands more are scattered across Europe. Some 150,000 ethnic Hungarians also live in Western Ukraine, many of whom have Hungarian passports.

"It is not completely unnatural for people to feel more comfortable with people who come from nearby, who speak the (similar) language or have a (similar) culture," Crisp said.

In Poland, Ruchir Kataria, an Indian volunteer, told The AP on Sunday that his compatriots got stuck on the Ukrainian side of the border crossing into Medyka, Poland. In Ukraine, they were initially told to go to Romania, hundreds of kilometers away, he said, after they had already made long journeys on foot to the border, not eating for three days. Finally, on Monday they got through.

Ruble plummets as sanctions bite, sending Russians to banks

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, DAVID MCHUGH and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Ordinary Russians faced the prospect of higher prices and crimped foreign travel as Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine sent the ruble plummeting, leading uneasy depositors to line up at banks and ATMs on Monday in a country that has seen more than one currency disaster in the post-Soviet era.

The Russian currency plunged about 30% against the U.S. dollar after Western nations announced unprecedented moves to block some Russian banks from the SWIFT international payment system and to restrict Russia's use of its massive foreign currency reserves. The exchange rate later recovered ground after quick action by Russia's central bank.

But the economic squeeze got tighter when the U.S. fleshed out the sanctions to immobilize any assets of the Russian central bank in the United States or held by Americans. The Biden administration estimated that the move could impact "hundreds of billions of dollars" of Russian funding.

U.S. officials said Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, European Union and others will join in targeting the Russian central bank.

"We are in uncharted territory of throwing all these nuclear options of sanctions at Russia at the same time over the weekend," said Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, a banking trade group. "Throwing them all together at once like this will have a very significant effect."

Russians wary that sanctions would deal a crippling blow to the economy have been flocking to banks and ATMs for days, with reports on social media of long lines and machines running out. People in some central European countries also rushed to pull money from subsidiaries of Russia's state-owned Sberbank after the Russian parent bank was hit with international sanctions.

Moscow's department of public transport warned city residents over the weekend that they might experience problems with using Apple Pay, Google Pay and Samsung Pay to pay fares because VTB, another Russian bank facing sanctions, handles card payments in Moscow's metro, buses and trams.

Entrepreneur Vladimir Vyaslov found that flights were blocked for his overseas trip on a student visa. He was considering driving to another country and flying from there.

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"I have been in disagreement with the decisions of all the authorities for a very long time and that is why I store all my money only in currencies, and I am skeptical towards Sberbank, VTB, to national banks in general," he said. "I can't say I was ready (for sanctions) but I was as ready as possible being a citizen of the Russian Federation."

A sharp devaluation of the ruble would mean a drop in the standard of living for the average Russian, economists and analysts said. Russians are still reliant on a multitude of imported goods, and the prices for those items are likely to skyrocket, such as iPhones and PlayStations. Foreign travel would become more expensive as their rubles buy less currency abroad. And deeper economic turmoil will come in the coming weeks if price shocks and supply chain issues cause Russian factories to shut down due to lower demand.

"It's going to ripple through their economy really fast," said David Feldman, an economics professor at William & Mary in Virginia. "Anything that is imported is going to see the local cost in currency surge. The only way to stop it will be heavy subsidization."

Russia has moved to produce many goods domestically, including most of its food, to shield the economy from sanctions, said Tyler Kustra, an assistant professor of politics and international relations at the University of Nottingham. He expected some fruits, for example, that can't be grown in Russia "are going to be suddenly much more expensive."

Electronics will be a pain point, with computers and cellphones needing to be imported and the cost going up, said Kustra, who studies economic sanctions. Even foreign services like Netflix might cost more, though such a company could lower its prices.

The auto sector, a major employer, is "being hit very quickly with the ban on the import of microchips and other parts," said Chris Weafer, chief executive of Macro-Advisory, a Eurasia strategic advisory company.

As long as even a few Russian banks were spared from the SWIFT cutoff, he said, Russia would still be able to keep exporting, show modest growth this year and earn enough to subsidize or bail out big companies or employers.

"So it really does critically depend on whether SWIFT remains open or whether that last channel is closed," Weafer said.

After the West sanctioned Russia for seizing Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in 2014, Russia's central bank cleaned up weak banks and prepared for a possible worsening of penalties.

"So there's not need to fear any kind of immediate crisis or collapse" this year, he said. "It's clearly only if these sanctions get tighter and extend over several years, the situation would clearly deteriorate over that period."

The ruble slide conjured ugly memories of previous crises. The currency lost much of its value in the early 1990s after the end of the Soviet Union, with inflation and loss of value leading the government to lop three zeros off ruble notes in 1997. Then came a further drop after a 1998 financial crisis in which many depositors lost savings and yet another plunge in 2014 due to falling oil prices and Crimea sanctions.

On Monday, Russia's central bank sharply raised its key interest rate to 20% from 9.5% in a desperate attempt to shore up the ruble and prevent a run on banks. It also said the Moscow stock exchange would remain closed.

European officials said at least half of Russia's estimated \$640 billion hard currency pile, some of which is held outside Russia, would be paralyzed. That dramatically raised pressure on the Russian currency by undermining financial authorities' ability to support it by using reserves to purchase rubles.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described the sanctions as "heavy," but argued that "Russia has the necessary potential to compensate the damage."

The steps taken to support the ruble are themselves painful because raising interest rates can hold back growth by making it more expensive for companies to get credit. Russians who have borrowed money, such as homeowners with mortgages or business owners who have taken out loans, also could get hit by doubled interest rates, experts said.

The ruble sank about 30% against the U.S. dollar early Monday but steadied after the central bank's move. Earlier, it traded at a record low of 105.27 per dollar, down from about 84 per dollar late Friday, before recovering to 94.60.

At cartel extermination site; Mexico nears 100k missing

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

NUEVO LAREDO, Mexico (AP) — For the investigators, the human foot -- burned, but with some fabric still attached -- was the tipoff: Until recently, this squat, ruined house was a place where bodies were ripped apart and incinerated, where the remains of some of Mexico's missing multitudes were obliterated.

How many disappeared in this cartel "extermination site" on the outskirts of Nuevo Laredo, miles from the U.S. border? After six months of work, forensic technicians still don't dare offer an estimate. In a single room, the compacted, burnt human remains and debris were nearly 2 feet deep.

Uncounted bone fragments were spread across 75,000 square feet of desert scrubland. Twisted wires, apparently used to tie the victims, lie scattered amid the scrub.

Each day, technicians place what they find -- bones, buttons, earrings, scraps of clothing -- in paper bags labeled with their contents: "Zone E, Point 53, Quadrant I. Bone fragments exposed to fire."

They are sent off to the forensic lab in the state capital Ciudad Victoria, where boxes of paper bags wait their turn along with others. They will wait a long time; there are not enough resources and too many fragments, too many missing, too many dead.

At the Nuevo Laredo site -- to which The Associated Press was given access this month -- the insufficiency of investigations into Mexico's nearly 100,000 disappearances is painfully evident. There are 52,000 unidentified people in morgues and cemeteries, not counting places like this one, where the charred remains are measured only by weight.

And people continue to disappear. And more remains are found.

"We take care of one case and 10 more arrive," said Oswaldo Salinas, head of the Tamaulipas state attorney general's identification team.

Meanwhile there is no progress in bringing the guilty to justice. According to recent data from Mexico's federal auditor, of more than 1,600 investigations into disappearances by authorities or cartels opened by the attorney general's office, none made it to the courts in 2020.

Still, the work goes on at Nuevo Laredo. If nothing else, there is the hope of helping even one family find closure, though that can take years.

That's why a forensic technician smiled amid the devastation on a recent day: She had found an unburnt tooth, a treasure that might offer DNA to make an identification possible.

When Jorge Macías, head of the Tamaulipas state search commission, and his team first came to the Nuevo Laredo site, they had to clear brush and pick up human remains over the final 100 yards just to reach the house without destroying evidence. They found a barrel tossed in a trough, shovels and an axe with traces of blood on it. Gunfire echoed in the distance.

Nearly six months later, there are still more than 30,000 square feet of property to inspect and catalog.

The house has been cleared, but four blackened spaces used for cremation remain. In what was the bathroom, it took the technicians three weeks to carefully excavate the compacted mass of human remains, concrete and melted tires, said Salinas, who leads work at the site. Grease streaks the walls.

Macías found the Nuevo Laredo house last August when he was looking for more than 70 people who had disappeared in the first half of the year along a stretch of highway connecting Monterrey and Nuevo Laredo, the busiest trade crossing with the United States.

The area was known as kilometer 26, a point on the highway and the invisible entrance to the kingdom of the Northeast cartel, a splinter of the Zetas. There are small shops with food and coffee. Men sell stolen gasoline and drugs. Strangers are filmed with cell phones. The power poles lining the highway farther north have been blasted with large-caliber weapons.

Most who disappeared here were truck drivers, cabbies, but also at least one family and various U.S. citizens. About a dozen have been found alive.

Last July, Karla Quintana, head of the National Search Commission, said the disappearances appeared

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to be related to a dispute between the Jalisco New Generation cartel, which was trying to enter the area, and the Northeast cartel, which wanted to keep them out. It's not clear if the victims were smugglers of drugs or people, if some were abducted mistakenly or if the goal was simply to generate terror.

The phenomenon of Mexico's disappearances exploded in 2006 when the government declared war on the drug cartels. For years, the government looked the other way as violence increased and families of the missing were forced to become detectives.

It wasn't until 2018 -- the end of the last administration -- that a law passed, laying the legal foundations for the government to establish the National Search Commission. There followed local commissions in every state; protocols that separated searches from investigations, and a temporary and independent body of national and international technical experts supported by the U.N. to help clear the backlog of unidentified remains.

The official total of the missing stands at 98,356. Even without the civil wars or military dictatorships that afflicted other Latin American countries, Mexico's disappeared are exceeded in the region only by war-torn Colombia. Unlike other countries, Mexico's challenge still has no end: authorities and families search for people who disappeared in the 1960s and those who went missing today.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's government was the first to recognize the extent of the problem, to talk of "extermination sites" and to mount effective searches.

But he also promised in 2019 that authorities would have all the resources they needed. The national commission, which was supposed to have 352 employees this year, still has just 89. And Macías' state commission has 22 positions budgeted, but has only filled a dozen slots. There the issue isn't money; the difficulty is finding applicants who pass background checks.

Disappearances are considered the perfect crime because without a body, there's no crime. And the cartels are expert at ensuring that there is no body.

"If a criminal group has total control of an area they do what we call 'kitchens,' because they feel comfortable" burning bodies openly, Macías said. "In areas that are not theirs and where the other side could easily see the smoke, they dig graves."

In 2009, at the other end of the border, a member of the Tijuana cartel confessed to having "cooked" some 300 victims in caustic lye. Eight years later, a report from a public university investigation center showed that what officially had been a jail in the border city of Piedras Negras, was actually a Zetas command center and crematorium.

Perhaps the largest such site was yet another border setting near the mouth of the Rio Grande called "the dungeon," in territory controlled by the Gulf cartel. The memory still stirs Macías. The first time he went he saw "pelvis, skulls, femurs, everything just lying there and I said to myself, 'It can't be.'"

Authorities have recovered more than 1,100 pounds of bones at the site so far.

According to the Tamaulipas state forensic service, some 15 "extermination sites" have been found. There are also burial sites: In 2010, graves containing 191 bodies were found along one of the main migratory routes through Tamaulipas to the border. In 2014, 43 students disappeared in the southern state of Guerrero. Only three have been identified from pieces of burnt bones.

Most of the extermination sites have been found by family members who follow up leads themselves with or without the support and protection of authorities. Such search groups exist in nearly every state.

For the families, the discoveries inspire both hope and pain.

"It brings together a lot of emotions," said a woman who has been searching for her husband since 2014 and two brothers who disappeared later. Like thousands of relatives across Mexico, she has made the search for her loved ones her life. "It makes you happy to find (a site), but at the moment you see things the way they are, you nosedive."

The woman, who requested anonymity because of safety concerns, was present for the discovery of two sites last year. When she entered the Nuevo Laredo location with Macías, she could only cry.

A few months earlier, she had found the site in central Tamaulipas where she believes her loved ones

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are. That day, accompanied by the state search commission and escorted by the National Guard, they entered the brush in search of a drug camp.

"I'm not well psychologically after that," she said as she showed photos of the deep graves where burnt remains were buried, some wrapped in barbed wire. They recovered around a thousand teeth, she said.

On a recent day in Nuevo Laredo, gloved hands sifted through the dirt, separating out bits of bone: a piece of a jaw, a skull fragment, a vertebra.

The work is hard. The forensic technicians clear brush and then dig. Some days the temperature hovers around freezing, others it's above 100 degrees. They wear head-to-toe white protective suits and are constantly guarded.

Security is a concern, and so authorities have separated the search function from the investigations -- the cartels appear less concerned with those just looking for bones, though anything they find could eventually become evidence in a prosecution. Each day before dusk, they are escorted to a safe house and don't leave except to return the next day to the site.

When cartel violence exploded in Tamaulipas in 2010, the capital's morgue had space for six bodies. In a single massacre that year, a cartel killed 72 migrants. In those days, the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights denounced serious negligence in Tamaulipas's forensic work.

Pedro Sosa, director of the state's forensic services, said that their way of working changed radically in 2018 with the establishment of the identification team. But it's not enough. "A single forensic anthropologist in the whole state is not compatible with all of this work."

It can take four months for the Nuevo Laredo remains to be cleaned, processed and arrive to the genetic lab. It can take longer if something urgent emerges like in January of last year, when nearly 20 people -- mostly migrants -- were incinerated in an attack near the border.

Even if they manage to extract DNA, identification isn't assured because the profile will only automatically be crossed with a state database. A federal genetic database still doesn't exist.

It could be years before even non-genetic information is added to one of the national databases. In 2020, the federal auditor said that that system had only 7,600 registered disappeared and 6,500 registered dead.

Though the federal law calls for a system in which various databases can interact, that doesn't exist, said Marlene Herbig, of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Each state or federal database of fingerprints or genetic profiles is like an island, despite calls for bridges to connect them.

No one can estimate how much money is needed or how many years it could take to see significant results in Mexico's efforts to locate and identify the disappeared.

Herbig offered a clue: A similar effort mounted on the island of Cyprus took 10 years to identify 200 disappeared in the conflict between Greece and Turkey during the latter half of the last century. And there are many thousands more missing in Mexico than there were in Cyprus.

"This issue is a monster," Macías said.

Pandemic fears are fading along with omicron: AP-NORC poll

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

Omicron is fading away, and so are Americans' worries about COVID-19.

As coronavirus pandemic case numbers, hospitalizations and deaths continue to plummet, fewer people now than in January say they are concerned that they will be infected after the rise and fall of the wildly contagious virus variant, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Just 24% say they are "extremely" or "very" worried about themselves or a family member contracting COVID-19, down from 36% in both December and January, when omicron caused a massive spike in infections and taxed public health systems. Another 34% say they are somewhat worried. More than 140,000 deaths in the U.S. have been attributed to COVID-19 since omicron became the dominant strain of the coronavirus in mid-December.

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In Lincoln, Nebraska, trucking dispatcher Erica Martinez said she let down her guard last summer, before the deadly delta variant took hold, then “stopped doing a lot of the social stuff” when cases spiked again during successive waves of delta and omicron. Now, with virus numbers falling rapidly, she said she is more comfortable about socializing than she has been in months.

“I feel like the country is desperately trying to recover from the last two years,” said Martinez, 36. “I think there will always be new variants popping up, left and right. I think, sadly, this is going to be the new norm for society,” with people taking fewer or more precautions as cases ebb and flow.

That’s a widespread attitude; most Americans think the virus will stick around as a mild illness, according to a January AP-NORC poll. Just 15% think COVID-19 will largely be eliminated when the pandemic is over.

Signs the nation is ready to move on from the biggest COVID-19 wave to date are everywhere. Statewide mask mandates have all but disappeared, and on Friday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it’s no longer recommending indoor masking for most Americans, based on current data.

Cities are lifting vaccine requirements to enter bars, restaurants and entertainment venues. Companies are bringing workers back to the office. California said it’s taking an “endemic” approach to the virus that leans on prevention and swift containment of outbreaks.

“I think it’s reasonable and appropriate for people to live their lives a little more as the risk of infection goes down but to do it in a way that recognizes that, at some point, we’re going to have another wave,” said Dr. David Dowdy, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “And we’re going to need to be willing to buckle down just a little bit in the future.”

Worries about infection have dipped among both vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans. Still, roughly two-thirds of vaccinated Americans say they are at least somewhat worried about COVID-19 infection. About 4 in 10 unvaccinated Americans say the same.

Amie Adkins, of Gassaway, West Virginia, who is unvaccinated, said she was “surrounded” by omicron but never worried about getting it, counting on a mask and good hygiene to protect herself. Data shows unvaccinated people are at much higher risk for serious illness and death than people who got the shot.

“Even after all that, if we’re going to get something, we’re going to get it, and there’s nothing we can do about. So there’s no use worrying about it,” said Adkins, a 43-year-old stay-at-home mom.

Public support for masking requirements also has ticked down, though Americans are still more likely to favor than oppose requiring masks in public, 50% to 28%, in the new poll. In August 2021, 55% were in favor. Support was much higher, at roughly three-quarters of the public, in 2020.

George Reeves, an 83-year-old semiretired electrical engineer in Raleigh, North Carolina, said his mask might soon come off.

“It’s a risk-reward kind of thing,” said Reeves, who is vaccinated. “There’s some guesswork involved, but is it worth the hassle? Probably pretty soon it won’t be worth the hassle of messing with masks.”

More broadly, concern about the spread of infectious diseases as a threat to the U.S. has fallen sharply from a clear majority just six months ago, according to the poll.

About half of Americans now say they are “extremely” or “very” concerned about the threat posed by infectious diseases, down from roughly two-thirds in August. Still, only about 2 in 10 are not concerned.

The current level of concern is similar to an AP-NORC poll in January 2019, well before the global pandemic.

Dave Pitts, a computer engineer and college math and science tutor in Denver, is vaccinated, doesn’t socialize much and wears a mask when he goes out, so he’s not that worried about getting COVID-19. But Pitts — who spent three miserable weeks battling influenza in the 2009 H1N1 pandemic — predicts infectious disease will continue to pose a huge threat to the country.

He worries about a new, even deadlier variant of the coronavirus.

“I think we’re in a better position now, but I think the minute spring break hits, we’re going to see something worse show up,” he said. “I think humanity’s too dumb to be free of this just yet.”

The U.S. is still reporting about 66,000 new, confirmed infections per day as the pandemic enters its third year.

In North Carolina, Reeves’ restaurant gift certificates have been collecting dust for two years. He said

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that will soon change as the virus eases its grip.

"After getting vaccinated, the probability of a bad result is really low. I'm reasonably well protected," he said.

Martinez, the Nebraska transportation dispatcher, said she looks forward to "actually taking a vacation now, a vacation to try to feel as normal as possible. Maybe Mexico. Mexico sounds wonderful right now."

Gonzaga, Arizona remain atop AP Top 25 in week of changes

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Sports Writer

The top six and seven of the top nine teams in the AP Top 25 lost on the same day last week, an unprecedented day of chaos that led to some big changes in this week's poll — everywhere but at the top.

Gonzaga and Arizona remained the top two teams in the poll released Monday, holding steady despite both losing their most recent games.

The Zags received 43 first-place votes from the AP's 61-person media panel after being a unanimous pick last week. No. 3 Baylor had four first-place votes and No. 4 Duke picked up 11. Auburn rounded out the top five.

Gonzaga, Arizona, Auburn, Purdue, Kansas and Kentucky all lost on Saturday, marking the first time in the AP poll era (1948-49) that the top six teams lost on the same day. No. 9 Texas Tech also lost, setting another record for most top-10 teams losing in one day.

"It's kind of life in late February and early March, especially on the road," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said after the Zags' 67-57 loss to No. 19 Saint Mary's to close out their regular season.

Baylor was the biggest beneficiary of its Saturday win, moving up seven spots after beating Kansas 80-70. The Jayhawks fell one spot to No. 6 with the loss.

Auburn lost three spots from last week after losing to No. 13 Tennessee. No. 7 Kentucky fell a spot after losing to No. 14 Arkansas and Purdue dropped four places to No. 8 with its loss to Michigan State.

Got all that?

In all, every team but four got shuffled in this week's poll; only Gonzaga, Arizona, No. 14 Houston and No. 16 Southern California held steady.

No teams fell out or moved into the poll, but things are getting awfully interesting with conference tournaments just around the corner.

BATTLING BEARS

Baylor, the reigning national champion, looked like a good bet to get back to the Final Four at the start of the season after opening 15-0 while holding the No. 1 spot in the AP Top 25 for five weeks.

Then things got a little shaky.

The Bears lost consecutive home games for the first time since 2015-16, then injuries began piling up, including a gruesome leg injury to forward Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua.

After tumbling down the poll, Baylor may be finding its footing. The Bears won a rematch over Oklahoma State in Stillwater and did the same against Kansas on Saturday, improving to 10-1 against top-10 teams the past two seasons.

"I know our team looked a little bit different in the beginning of the year than we do now but don't count these guys out," Baylor coach Scott Drew said. "They persevere."

RISING/FALLING

Baylor's jump was the biggest of the week by gaining seven spots. Tennessee, Arkansas and Saint Mary's all climbed four spots.

No. 17 UCLA and No. 20 Illinois had the biggest drops (five spots). The Bruins lost to Oregon before beating Oregon State last week and the Illini lost to No. 23 Ohio State before knocking off Michigan.

CONFERENCE WATCH

The Big Ten and Southeastern conferences led the way again this week, each with five teams ranked. The Big 12 had four ranked teams, with the Pac-12 and Big East getting three each. The West Coast Conference had two ranked teams for the second straight week, with the Atlantic Coast, American Athletic

and Ohio Valley conferences at one each.

Waiting, fearing, singing: A night sheltering in Ukraine

By YURAS KARMANAU and MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — When the children start crying, the adults start playing Ukrainian folk songs, or make up fairy tales to chase away the fear. Food and water are sometimes scarce. Everyone hopes for peace.

These are the vagaries of life in makeshift shelters around Ukraine, where families try to protect the young and old and make conditions bearable amid the distant clatter of bullets, missiles or shells outside.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens rushed to spend yet another night in Kyiv's subway network as air raid sirens howled Sunday. Among those taking refuge in shelters are some Associated Press journalists bearing witness to how Ukrainians are coping with the war tearing their country apart, like piano teacher Alla Rutsko.

"A terrible dream ... It seems to me that all this is not happening to me. The eyes see, but the mind refuses to believe," said Rutsko, 37, sitting on an air mattress in Kyiv's Pecherskaya subway station.

"On the fourth night, I can even sleep and dream," she said. "But waking up is especially hard."

She focused her thoughts on her grand piano and her fears of losing it — "an excellent instrument, inherited from my grandfather, survived the last war."

The fighting is still raging in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Mariupol, where Ukrainian forces have so far thwarted the Russian military from taking the strategic stronghold on the Azov Sea.

"God forbid that any rockets hit. That's why we've gathered everyone here," said local volunteer Ervand Tovmasyan, who helped organize a shelter in the basement of a city gym. His young son clung to him.

The workout equipment lining the walls contrasts sharply with the gym's revised purpose. The shelter has seen shortages in drinking water, food and gasoline for generators since the fighting began last week, so residents are bringing what they can to stock up.

Many at the shelter remembered shelling in 2014, when Russia-backed separatists briefly captured the city. Anna Delina survived that, and went on to have two children. Now she's doing the best she can to comfort them with soothing words and caresses as they cuddle under blankets on a cold gym floor.

"Now the same thing is happening, but now we're with children," she said.

Countless human moments shaped by war are playing out across Ukraine.

In Kramatorsk in the country's east, a couple embraces on a station platform before the woman boards a train heading west, hoping for safety. Refugees slump from exhaustion after crossing into Poland.

While Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, waits for the expected Russian onslaught, the platform at Kyiv's Pecherskaya subway station where residents sleep is lined with baby carriages interspersed with pet carriers.

At first, authorities barred pets, but then they turned a blind eye. Anxious cats and dogs now huddle alongside their owners.

Denis Shestakov, a 32-year-old architect, made up a fairy tale to ease his 5-year-old daughter Katya's fears.

"But how can you explain it to a dog? He began to lose his fur from stress," he said.

"You can get used to a nightmare," he said, trying to shrug the pressure off. "And this is also a nightmare."

Despite the shortages, the lack of privacy and all the challenges that come with life on an underground railway platform, complaining comes hard to families.

"It's much harder for soldiers at the front. It's embarrassing to complain about the icy floor, drafts and terrible toilets," said 74-year-old Irina, who would not give her last name. Her grandson Anton is among those fighting in eastern Ukraine.

The internet mostly works and everyone reads the news. The potential participation of Belarus in the war on the side of Russia has become one of the most discussed topics.

"Oh, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians can hardly be called brothers now," said Dmitro Skorobogaty, a 69-year-old engineer. Then he added, "though you can't choose your relatives."

Citizens are constantly warned about Russian saboteurs reportedly trying to provoke panic in Kyiv.

Police squads descend into the subway station, check documents, distribute water, and, among other

things, advise people whether it's safe to step out.

Amid the din of parents singing folk songs to their children, foreign students from Africa joined some Ukrainians in singing the melodic national anthem: "Ukraine has not died yet, Glory to Ukraine!"

A flicker of hope is still nurtured by those taking shelter.

"There is hope (for negotiations) because everyone wants peace, and some kind of result so that civilians aren't being killed," said Delina, the mother of two small children.

Robert Pattinson helps a new Batman emerge from the darkness

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Robert Pattinson isn't morally opposed to superhero films. But he wasn't exactly seeking them out before "The Batman" came along, either.

The 35-year-old who seemed to emerge as a fully formed superstar in mega franchises like "Harry Potter" and "Twilight" has for the past decade or so found himself chasing edgier fare, smaller movies with interesting directors and roles where he could stretch and disappear behind an archaic New England accent, as in "The Lighthouse," the unkempt beard of an explorer in "The Lost City of Z" or the shock of messily bleached hair that accompanies him on a never-ending chase in "Good Time," to name a few.

The strange thing is that it was "Good Time," a \$2 million movie, and its frenetic, freefall energy that convinced director Matt Reeves that Pattinson needed to be his Batman. It was 2017 and Reeves, the man who brought freshness and grit to the last two "Planet of the Apes" films, had raised his hand to usher in a new iteration of the dark knight while Ben Affleck was in the process of hanging up his cape. Reeves started writing the movie for Pattinson, not having the faintest idea whether it would hold any interest.

Luckily, in Pattinson's mind, Batman preceded and existed outside of the "superhero craze." Growing up in England, he remembers watching the cartoon, the Adam West series (which he swears was still running replays in the UK when he was a child in the 1990s) and coveting his costume and Happy Meal toys. Then there were the films.

"No other movie has been so thoroughly reinvented in so many different ways," Pattinson said. "Tonally, it's kind of they're not part of the same series. It exists as a different kind of legacy."

The idea Reeves had was to go back to Batman's detective roots, crafting a 1970s style noir a la "Chinatown" or "The French Connection" meets classic "Warner Bros.' gangster pic" where Batman and Gordon hunt for a Zodiac-like killer who leaves riddles addressed to Batman at the crime scenes around Gotham.

"Not wanted to not reinvent the franchise, but in some ways, take it back to its origins, which is in mystery and detective work," said Jeffrey Wright, who plays Gordon. "He wanted to celebrate Batman as the world's greatest detective."

Reeves knew he couldn't do a straight origin story — the public has seen Martha Wayne's scattered pearls more than enough times — so he decided to drop the audience in a place where Bruce has only been Batman for a little over a year.

"You have to fulfill what people love about Batman," Reeves said. "You're going to have a Batmobile chase, you're going to have spectacle, fights, he's going to come out of the darkness in the suit... all of that is critical. But you have to do something that's fresh, too."

This hero version is more recluse than playboy and he's not spending his precious few off hours bodybuilding, either. Reeves said he saw him as a little out of control and a little "strung out," like an addict who goes out every night searching for street fights and sleeps during the day.

"We find him at a place where he's not yet perfected himself, declaring himself an agent of vengeance," Reeves said.

To play opposite Batman, Zoë Kravitz was cast as Selina Kyle, the femme fatale with a traumatic past who is on her way to becoming Catwoman. The chemistry between Pattinson and Kravitz, who are longtime friends, was "immediately apparent," Reeves said.

"I think they're very attracted to each other, and they also push each other's buttons," Kravitz said. "Both of them are people who have been alone for a very long time... it's scary for them to feel vulnerable or

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to care about somebody.”

They also enlisted a slew of veteran actors to round out the corrupt world of Gotham, including John Turturro as Carmine Falcone, Paul Dano as Edward Nashton/The Riddler, Andy Serkis as Alfred and a prosthetics-disguised Colin Farrell as Oz/The Penguin.

“I just had carte blanche to just experiment and play,” said Farrell, who as a longtime Batman fan was even a little awestruck seeing Pattinson in “the suit” for the first time.

Production began in the UK in January 2020 and things were going well until the world shut down in March 2020. With about 25% of “The Batman” shot, Reeves even wondered if they’d get to finish. They resumed five months later, with several pauses because of COVID-19 cases, and finally wrapped in March 2021.

“I didn’t realize how much work it had actually been,” Pattinson said. “I looked like I had been living under a rock... I hadn’t literally seen the sun in about 18 months. I kind of only feel like I’m vaguely coming back to normal now.”

Now after several release delays, the film is finally coming to theaters worldwide on March 4. The anticipation is always high for a Batman film, but “The Batman” is carrying more than the weight of a normal blockbuster on its shoulders, from the enormous box office pressures to how the audience is going to receive Pattinson and the new direction for the franchise, which includes plans for more movies and a spinoff series.

But Pattinson thinks the pressure “is great.”

“Sometimes you can put so much effort into something and then no one even cares, so to know that there’s a kind of ravenous kind of audience,” Pattinson said, taking a beat and smiling before adding, “hopefully.”

“People are going to have an opinion on whether or not you did it right,” he said. “That’s exciting.”

UN climate report: ‘Atlas of human suffering’ worse, bigger

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Deadly with extreme weather now, climate change is about to get so much worse. It is likely going to make the world sicker, hungrier, poorer, gloomier and way more dangerous in the next 18 years with an “unavoidable” increase in risks, a new United Nations science report says.

And after that watch out.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report said Monday that if human-caused global warming isn’t limited to just another couple tenths of a degree, an Earth now struck regularly by deadly heat, fires, floods and drought in future decades will degrade in 127 ways, with some being “potentially irreversible.”

“The cumulative scientific evidence is unequivocal: Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health,” says the major report designed to guide world leaders in their efforts to curb climate change. Delaying cuts in heat-trapping carbon emissions and waiting on adapting to warming’s impacts, it warns, “will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.”

Today’s children who may still be alive in the year 2100 are going to experience four times more climate extremes than they do now even with only a few more tenths of a degree of warming over today’s heat. But if temperatures increase nearly 2 more degrees Celsius from now (3.4 degrees Fahrenheit) they would feel five times the floods, storms, drought and heat waves, according to the collection of scientists at the IPCC.

Already at least 3.3 billion people’s daily lives “are highly vulnerable to climate change” and 15 times more likely to die from extreme weather, the report says. Large numbers of people are being displaced by worsening weather extremes. And the world’s poor are being hit by far the hardest, it says.

More people are going to die each year from heat waves, diseases, extreme weather, air pollution and starvation because of global warming, the report says. Just how many people die depends on how much

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heat-trapping gas from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas gets spewed into the air and how the world adapts to an ever-hotter world, scientists say.

"Climate change is killing people," said co-author Helen Adams of King's College London. "Yes, things are bad, but actually the future depends on us, not the climate."

With every tenth of a degree of warming, many more people die from heat stress, heart and lung problems from heat and air pollution, infectious diseases, illnesses from mosquitoes and starvation, the authors say.

The report lists mounting dangers to people, plants, animals, ecosystems and economies, with people at risk in the millions and billions and potential damages in the trillions of dollars. The report highlights people being displaced from homes, places becoming uninhabitable, the number of species dwindling, coral disappearing, ice shrinking and rising and increasingly oxygen-depleted and acidic oceans.

Some of these risks can still be prevented or lessened with prompt action.

"Today's IPCC report is an atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement. "With fact upon fact, this report reveals how people and the planet are getting clobbered by climate change."

The panel of more than 200 scientists puts out a series of these massive reports every five to seven years, with this one, the second of the series, devoted to how climate change affects people and the planet. Last August the science panel published a report on the latest climate science and projections for future warming, branded "code red" by the United Nations.

Climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe of The Nature Conservancy, who wasn't part of the latest report, calls it the "Your House is on Fire" report.

"There's real existential threats," report co-chair Debra Roberts of South Africa told The Associated Press.

Since the last version of this impacts panel's report in 2014, "all the risks are coming at us faster than we thought before," said report co-author Maarten van Aalst, a climate scientist for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, mentioning floods, droughts and storms. "More of it will get really bad much sooner than we thought before."

"Every bit of warming matters. The longer you wait... the more you will pay later," said report co-chair Hans-Otto Poertner of Germany told the AP in an interview.

Since 2008, weather disasters have forced about 20 million people a year out of their homes as climate change refugees, with the future looking even grimmer in some places, according to the report.

By 2050, a billion people will face coastal flooding risk from rising seas, the report says. More people will be forced out of their homes from weather disasters, especially flooding, sea level rise and tropical cyclones.

"Some regions that are presently densely populated will become unsafe or uninhabitable," the report says. And it says that small islands face that "overarching significant risk" of no longer being livable.

And eventually in some places it will become too hot for people to work outdoor, which will be a problem for raising crops, said report co-author Rachel Bezner Kerr of Cornell University.

Some of these climate change harms have been warned about for years, even decades, and have become reality, now written in the past and present tenses. Others are still warnings about future woes fast approaching.

Monday's 36-page summary, condensed from more than 1,000 pages of analysis, was written by scientists and then edited line-by-line by governments and scientists with that final summary approved by consensus Saturday during a two-week virtual conference that occurred while Russia invaded Ukraine. In the final hours, a Ukrainian delegate made an impassioned plea that the war not overshadow the climate change report, some authors said.

"Climate change isn't lurking around the corner waiting to pounce. It's already upon us raining down blows on billions of people," United Nations Environment Programme Director Inger Andersen said.

Study authors said much of Africa, parts of Central and South America, small islands and South Asia are "hot spots" for the worst harm to people and ecosystems.

The report has a new emphasis on the mental health toll climate change has taken, both on people displaced or harmed by extreme weather and on people's anxiety level, especially youths worried about

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their futures.

If the world warms just another nine-tenths of a degree Celsius from now (1.6 degrees Fahrenheit), the amount of land burned by wildfires globally will increase by 35%, the report says.

And the rest of the living world won't be spared either, with the report warning of climate change extinctions. Already two species — the mammal Bramble Cays melomys in Australia and Central America's golden toad — have gone extinct because of climate change.

"The risk of extinction in biodiversity hotspots increases by about tenfold as warming rises from 1.5 to 3 degrees Celsius," said Poertner, the German co-chair.

With just one more degree Celsius of warming (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit), 20% of the world's species will become endangered, representing "severe biodiversity risk," the report says.

One of the biggest changes in the report from previous versions emphasizes how crucial a key temperature threshold is scientifically and for people and how exceeding it, even if only a few decades, can cause permanent damage.

In the 2015 Paris agreement, the world adopted a goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times, which was then further cemented when a special IPCC report in 2018 showed massive harms beyond that 1.5 degree mark. This new report found that threshold is even more important, but scientists do note that the world does not fall off a cliff after that mark.

Because the world is already 1.1 degrees (2 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial time and emissions are still rising, not falling, the vast majority of future scenarios show temperatures are on track to shoot well above 1.5 degrees, hitting the mark in the 2030s. So some officials began to count on going over that threshold and coming back down a decade or so later with still-to-be-proven expensive technology to suck carbon out of the air or by some other means.

Monday's report says that if that overshoot happens, "then many human and natural systems will face additional severe risks... some will be irreversible, even if global warming is reduced."

Countries need to do more to adapt to warming, with rich countries needing to do a better job giving financial help to poorer nations to adjust to climate change caused mostly by the developing world, the report says. But there are limits to what adapting can accomplish and sometimes — like in the case of sea walls — technical fixes to lessen harms in one place will make it worse somewhere else, the report says.

"This has to be a whole of society response. Not a single individual, community, city or government can opt out," South African co-chair Roberts said in a Monday press conference. "While action is happening, it's not rapid enough and it's uneven."

Amid all the danger signs, experts said they want to shy away from doom.

"Fear is not a good advisor and never is," German vice chancellor and minister for climate and economy Robert Habeck told the AP. "Hope is the right one."

Hayhoe said what's needed is realism, action and hope.

"It's really bad and there's a good chance that it will get worse," Hayhoe said. "But if we do everything we can, that will make a difference. Our actions will make the difference... That's what hope is."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 1, the 60th day of 2022. There are 305 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 1, 1974, seven people, including former Nixon White House aides H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, former Attorney General John Mitchell and former assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian, were indicted on charges of conspiring to obstruct justice in connection with the Watergate break-in. (These four defendants were convicted in January 1975, although Mardian's conviction was later reversed.)

On this date:

In 1815, Napoleon, having escaped exile in Elba, arrived in Cannes, France, and headed for Paris to

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begin his "Hundred Days" rule.

In 1867, Nebraska became the 37th state as President Andrew Johnson signed a proclamation.

In 1893, inventor Nikola Tesla first publicly demonstrated radio during a meeting of the National Electric Light Association in St. Louis by transmitting electromagnetic energy without wires.

In 1932, Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., the 20-month-old son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh, was kidnapped from the family home near Hopewell, New Jersey. (Remains identified as those of the child were found the following May.)

In 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, back from the Yalta Conference, proclaimed the meeting a success as he addressed a joint session of Congress.

In 1954, four Puerto Rican nationalists opened fire from the spectators' gallery of the U.S. House of Representatives, wounding five members of Congress.

In 1966, the Soviet space probe Venera 3 impacted the surface of Venus, becoming the first spacecraft to reach another planet; however, Venera was unable to transmit any data, its communications system having failed.

In 1971, a bomb went off inside a men's room at the U.S. Capitol; the radical group Weather Underground claimed responsibility for the pre-dawn blast.

In 2005, Dennis Rader, the churchgoing family man accused of leading a double life as the BTK serial killer, was charged in Wichita, Kansas, with 10 counts of first-degree murder. (Rader later pleaded guilty and received multiple life sentences.) A closely divided Supreme Court outlawed the death penalty for juvenile criminals.

In 2010, Jay Leno returned as host of NBC's "The Tonight Show."

In 2015, tens of thousands marched through Moscow in honor of slain Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, who had been shot to death on Feb. 27.

In 2020, state officials said New York City had its first confirmed case of the coronavirus, a woman in her late 30s who had contracted the virus while traveling in Iran. Health officials in Washington state, announcing what was believed at the time to be the second U.S. death from the coronavirus, said the virus may have been circulating for weeks undetected in the Seattle area.

Ten years ago: Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley signed a measure legalizing same-sex marriage in his state, effective January 2013. Online publisher and conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart died in Los Angeles at age 43.

Five years ago: Former Montana Rep. Ryan Zinke was sworn in as secretary of the Interior Department by Vice President Mike Pence, hours after being confirmed by the Senate.

One year ago: Vernon Jordan, who rose from humble beginnings in the segregated South to become a champion of civil rights before reinventing himself as a Washington insider, died at 85. Pennsylvania's Republican Party expressed its disapproval of U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey over his vote to convict Donald Trump during Trump's second impeachment trial, but stopped short of issuing a more serious censure. Twitter said it had begun labeling tweets that included misleading information about COVID-19 vaccines, and that it would use a "strike system" to remove accounts that repeatedly violate its rules. An American father and son wanted by Japan for helping former Nissan Chairman Carlos Ghosn escape from the country in a box while facing financial misconduct charges were handed over to Japanese custody. (Michael Taylor would be sentenced to two years in prison; his son Peter was sentenced to one year and eight months.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Robert Clary is 96. Singer/actor Harry Belafonte is 95. Rock singer Mike D'Abo (Manfred Mann) is 78. Former Sen. John Breaux, D-La., is 78. Rock singer Roger Daltrey is 78. Actor Dirk Benedict is 77. Actor-director Ron Howard is 68. Country singer Janis Oliver (Sweethearts of the Rodeo) is 68. Actor Catherine Bach is 67. Actor Tim Daly is 66. Singer-musician Jon Carroll is 65. Rock musician Bill Leen is 60. Actor Bryan Batt is 59. Actor Maurice Benard is 59. Actor Russell Wong is 59. Actor Chris Eigeman is 57. Actor George Eads is 55. Actor Javier Bardem (HAH'-vee-ayr bahr-DEHM') is 53. Actor Jack Davenport is 49. Rock musician Ryan Peake (Nickelback) is 49. Actor Mark-Paul Gosselaar is 48. Singer Tate Stevens is 47. Actor Jensen Ackles is 44. TV host Donovan Patton is 44. Actor Joe Tippett is 40. Ac-

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tor Lupita Nyong'o is 39. Pop singer Kesha (formerly Ke\$ha) is 35. R&B singer Sammie is 35. Pop singer Justin Bieber is 28.