

Groton Daily Independent

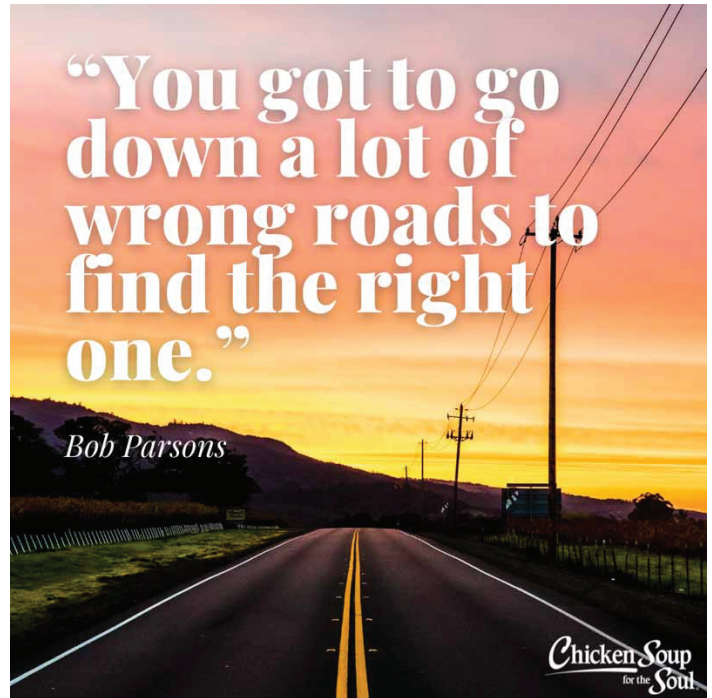
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UpComing Events

- Friday, March 4**
Boys Region 1A game at 7 p.m. Milbank at Groton Area
- 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



Star senior Kason Kurtz takes a moment to stand for a poise with his Tiger fan Emery Blackwood, 1st grade, Groton after their solid win in the first round of the Region basketball tournament. (Courtesy Photo)

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



As Native students continue to struggle in S.D. schools, a Lakota-immersion model emerges

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

For the third time in five years, Native American legislators and supporters of improving Native education in South Dakota have proposed legislation that would allow for creation of state-funded charter schools aimed at immersing students in Lakota Indian language, culture and history.

The latest immersion school bill is one manifestation of a larger, expanding effort to improve education of Native students in South Dakota. Several nonprofit groups and coalitions are seeking change at the legislative level and developing new schools and programs at the community level to improve educational outcomes.

Opponents of the latest Lakota Immersion charter school proposal say the current bill — Senate Bill 139 — siphons too much funding away from school districts where the schools would be located and is not well-written in regard to how the charter schools would be funded, governed and managed.

Senate Bill 139 passed through the Senate Education Committee 6-1 on Feb. 3, and was approved by the full Senate 22-13 on Feb. 9. The measure now heads to the House of Representatives, where it has failed in previous years, and will be heard March 2 by the House Education Committee.

The measure's prime sponsor, Senate Minority Leader Troy Heinert, D-Mission, has provided emotional testimony in his defense of the measure and its potential outcomes for Native youth.

Heinert and others say the consistent failure of the existing public school system shows a great need for reform, and notes that significant research and examples from existing immersion schools show that Native achievement levels and graduation rates improve significantly under the cultural and language-immersion model being presented.

"I'm not saying every kid needs this, because we've had Native students that have gone through the public schools system and gotten along just fine, but we have many more who have struggled and not been successful," Heinert said in an interview with News Watch. "As a former teacher, I have seen kids that had plenty of talent, plenty of ability, but the current schools didn't make any sense to them, and unfortunately, they either dropped out or got into some trouble because we were talking to them in the wrong way."

Finding a path to academic achievement for non-white students in the U.S. has been a challenge for generations and for members of all minority groups. Many factors, including poverty, play a role in lower success levels for minority students.



Two students appear energized by the teachings at the Wakanyeja Tokeyahci Elementary School on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, a Lakota Indian immersion school founded in 2020. Photo: Courtesy

Wakanyeja school

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Native American students have traditionally underperformed in South Dakota public schools by wide margins compared with their white peers and other minority groups in the state. Disparities in performance indicate a clear and consistent ethnic achievement gap, and the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened that gap, according to test scores and other data provided by the State Report Card issued by the Department of Education.

In the 2020-2021 school year, only 14% of Native students were considered proficient in math, compared with 49% of white students. That year, 23% of Native students were proficient in English-language arts, compared with 59% of white students; and in science, only 16% of Native students scored as proficient compared with 48% of white students.

Graduation rates, attendance rates and college/career readiness rates for Native students all lag behind those of their white peers by significant amounts. However, the most telling and worrisome statistic may be the chronic absenteeism rate, which for Native students was 51% in 2020-2021, compared with only 11% for white students. Chronic absenteeism is also tied to poverty, with 32% of economically disadvantaged students chronically absent that year. As evidence of the impacts of the pandemic, Native students saw chronic absenteeism increase to 51% in 2020-21 from 37% in 2018-19, two years before the pandemic.

But supporters of Lakota Immersion in South Dakota say quantitative and qualitative data support the concept that students perform better and feel more comfortable in settings and with curricula that better reflect their identity, culture and history.

On a most basic level, backers of immersion charter schools in South Dakota say it is time to give the concept a try, and that Senate Bill 139, not unlike Senate bills proposed in past sessions, would allow for an experiment they believe can be a game changer in regard to Native student achievement and an overall betterment of life and living standards for Native Americans in South Dakota as adults.

While other immersion schools and educational programs exist on reservations in South Dakota, they tend to be nonprofit institutions that rely on donations and grant awards that can be unsteady and susceptible to the vagaries of the larger economy or giving trends.

Supporters of the measure say adequate, consistent funding levels provided by state support are key to the success of immersion schools and their students.

Charter schools are publicly funded, tuition-free schools run independently of traditional local school districts. The schools often focus on improving achievement in underperforming student populations and may place a greater focus on specific teaching methods or subjects not offered in traditional schools. To date, South Dakota has not allowed charter schools to be created.

The Senate bill bases its proposed curriculum largely on the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards, a set of state-approved concepts that provides a framework for teaching Native history and culture. The 35-page set of lesson plans and instructional guidelines includes teaching aids in history, culture, language, treaties, identity and way of life of Lakota, Dakota and Nakota Sioux Indians.

Opponents of the current Senate bill uniformly stress their support for improving educational achievement for Native students in South Dakota. This year, opponents of SB 139 are making essentially the same arguments as in past years when the immersion charter school concept was proposed.

Opponents this year include the Associated School Boards of South Dakota, the School Administrators of South Dakota, the South Dakota Education Association and a lobbying arm of the largest school districts in the state, including Sioux Falls.

Rob Munson, executive director of the School Administrators of South Dakota, told News Watch that a new law allowing Lakota Immersion schools is not needed because school districts across the state can already open and manage language-immersion schools. As examples, Munson pointed to Sonia Sotomayor Elementary in Sioux Falls, a publicly run and funded K-5 Spanish-language immersion school; and to a Lakota-language immersion class at Canyon Lake Elementary School within the Rapid City Area Schools system.

Munson and other opponents say they support greater attempts to use language immersion as a way to improve education for Native Americans, but are not confident in the funding and governance mechanisms within the proposed legislation.

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"We support it [immersion education], but it can be done today, you just need to work within the parameters of your local school board like they're doing in Sioux Falls and Rapid City," he said.

Munson also said the bill as written could allow a single school to consume a disproportionate amount of an overall school district's budget, including state and federal money and any other revenues, such as from fundraising efforts, concession sales at sporting events or grants given to school districts for other specific purposes.

When it comes to the specific criticism of SB 139, Heinert argues that nothing will change, and nothing will improve for Native students, without a new approach, and that to some extent, it is important to open the immersion schools even if all the details aren't nailed down precisely at the start. Solving any problems that arise, or addressing issues as they reveal themselves, would be a natural part of the development of the schools, he said.

"Nobody is coming forward with any other answers, so at some point we have to try something else," Heinert said.



ABOUT BART PFANKUCH

Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, S.D., is the content director for South Dakota News Watch. A Wisconsin native, he is a former editor of the Rapid City Journal and also worked at newspapers in Florida. Bart has spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and writing coach.

In concluding his Senate committee testimony, Heinert urged lawmakers to be part of a potential solution rather than part of an ongoing problem that is hampering the chances of Native children and adults to be successful.

"We're kind of hung up on the funding issue, and maybe it is all about the money, though it's not to us," he said. "You know where my heart lies, and it's not going to go away ... let's stop being part of the problem and give these kids and these families a chance. That's all I'm asking."



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Groton Area boys advance in region competition

Groton Area avenged an earlier loss to Sisseton by posting a 54-38 Region 1A first round win. The first round of the regions was held in Groton and the Tigers will play Milbank in the second round, Friday, at 7 p.m. at the GHS Arena. Milbank defeated Florence/Henry in the second game, 57-45.

Groton Area jumped out to a 14-3 first quarter lead and led it at half time, 30-10. Groton Area took a 44-25 lead into the fourth quarter.

Lane Tietz, who made five three-pointers in the first encounter, copied that in Tuesday's game with five three-pointers and two free throws for 17 points. Wyatt Hearnen added 11 points while Jacob Zak had nine, Kaden Kurtz seven, Logan Ringgenberg five, Jayden Zak three and Tate Larson two.

Ty Langager scored 10 of his 12 points in

the third quarter while Nate Tchida had seven points, Riley Bravebull six, Jairus Chance five, Jason Fisher four and Parker Hanson and Micah Hamm each had two points.

Groton Area made 11 of 23 in field goals for 48 percent, nine of 21 in three-pointers for 45 percent, made five of 11 free throws for 45 percent off of Sisseton's 13 team fouls, stole the ball 10 times of Sisseton's 19 turnovers, had 20 rebounds, 10 turnovers and 14 assists.

Sisseton made 15 of 35 in total field goals for 43 percent, and made six of eight in free throws for 75 percent off of Groton Area's 12 team fouls.



Kaden Kurtz drives to the basket. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

INDIVIDUAL STATS

Lane Tietz - 17 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Wyatt Hearnen - 11 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 fouls.

Jacob Zak - 9 points, 6 rebounds, 1 assist, 5 steals, 1 foul.

Kaden Kurtz - 7 points, 4 rebounds, 3 assists, 3 fouls.

Logan Ringgenberg - 5 points, 2 rebounds, 1 foul.

Jayden Zak - 3 points, 1 rebound, 3 assists, 3 steals.

Tate Larson - 2 points, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 fouls.

Cole Simon - 1 assist, 1 steal.

Taylor Diegel - 2 assists.

Holden Sippel - 1 foul.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Allied Climate Professionals, Bahr Spray Foam, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Doug Abeln Seed Company, Groton American Legion, Groton Dairy Queen, 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, Weismantel Agency of Columbia.

- Paul Kosel

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**Top Left: Wyatt Hearnen (4) an Tate Larson.
Top Right: Lane Tietz and Jacob Zak.
Bottom Left: Cole Simon.**

(Photos by Paul Kosel)

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

NO TICKET REQUIRED! FREE TO WATCH



**GROTON AREA VS.
MILBANK IN GROTON
FRI., MAR. 04, 7:00**

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

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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!**

Guest Speaker
Nicole J Phillips
The Kindness Podcast

*You're
Invited!*

RESET

womens conference

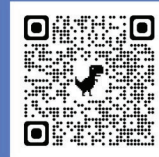
SATURDAY, MARCH 5
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

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.

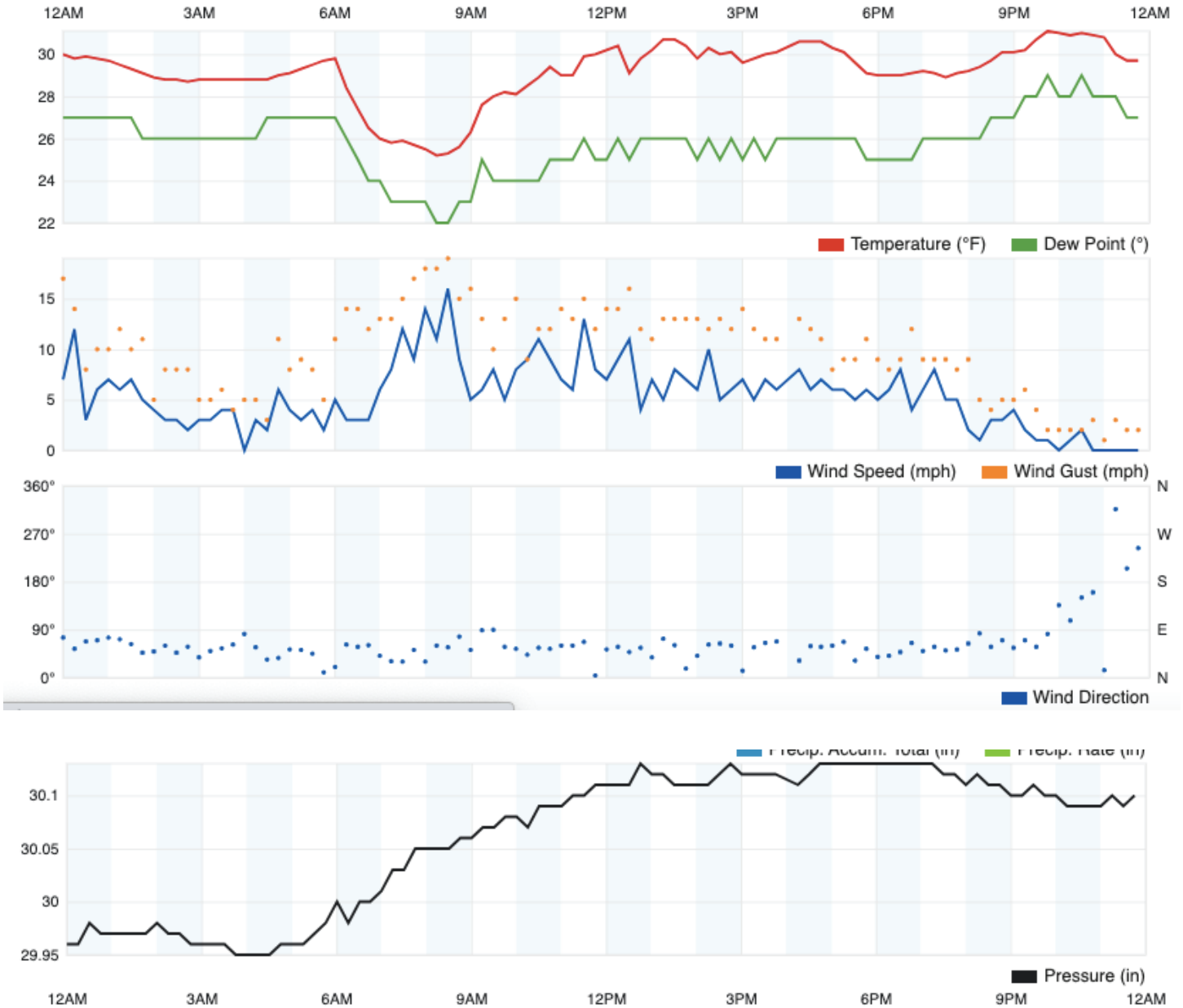
REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT
ONLINE AT ROSEHILLEFC.COM



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Cloudy and Blustery

High: 30 °F

Tonight



Cloudy then Chance Snow

Low: 5 °F

Thursday



Snow Likely

High: 22 °F

Thursday Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 19 °F

Friday



Slight Chance Wintry Mix

High: 33 °F

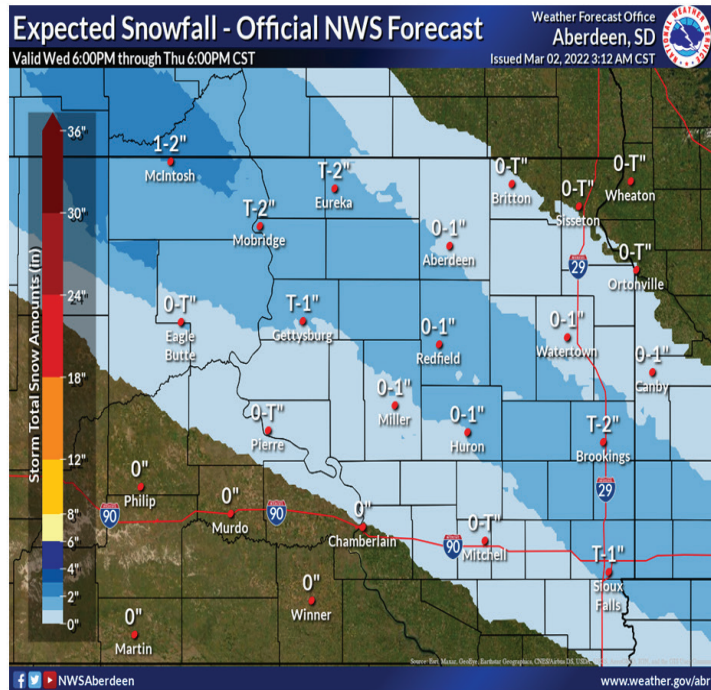


Light Snow Tonight/Thursday

March 2, 2022
3:28 AM

Overview

- Light snow likely tonight/Thursday
- Thursday morning commute may be impacted
- Freezing drizzle/freezing rain possible but impacts are expected to be minimal



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A system will bring light snow to the region tonight and Thursday. Accumulating snow is expected. There could also be a mixture of precipitation types early in the evening.

CONTINUING TO MONITOR A SPRING STORM SYSTEM

TIMING/DETAILS

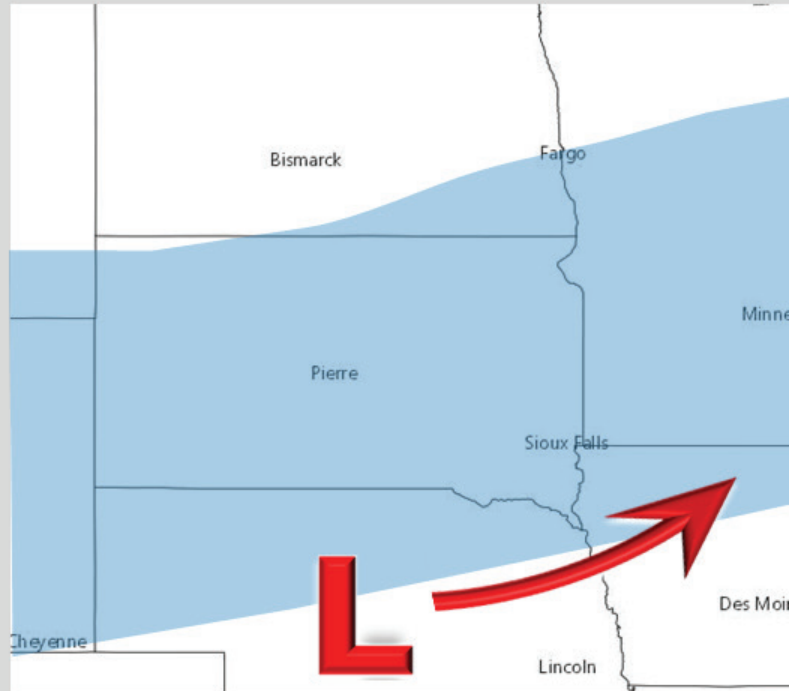
- Friday – Potential For Light Drizzle With Temperatures Around Freezing.
- Saturday – Potential For Freezing Drizzle/Freezing Rain Transitioning to Heavy Wet Snow.
- Sunday – Precipitation Should Be Ending

UNCERTAINTY

- Slight Changes in Track, Timing and Intensity of the System Will Result in Significant Changes to Precipitation Type, Intensity and Accumulations.

BE PREPARED FOR

- Potential for Hazardous Travel Friday Thru Early Sunday – **But Mostly Saturday**. Check for Updates...Consider Alternative Travel Dates...Don't Get Caught Off Guard!



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION 3:47 AM - Wednesday, March 02, 2022

Not much overall change with the storm system but we continue to refine the details. Looks like a better potential for this system to produce some ice for Saturday before changing to snow which is a major concern. Start thinking about alternative travel plans.

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Today in Weather History

March 2, 1966: The blizzard began late on March 2nd in the west and moved very slowly across the state, reaching the extreme east on the 4th, continuing into the 5th. Snow depths ranged from 2 to 4 inches in southeast South Dakota to nearly 3 feet in north-central South Dakota. Winds of 40 to 55 mph with gusts to 70 mph caused widespread blowing snow and near-zero visibilities during the storm. Drifts up to 30 feet were reported in sheltered areas with open fields nearly bare. The storm caused massive livestock losses. Estimated losses were 50,000 cattle, 46,000 sheep, and 1800 hogs. The most substantial losses were in the central and north-central parts of the state. The heavy snow also collapsed many structures. The storm directly caused three deaths due to exposure, and the storm indirectly caused three deaths; 2 due to heart attacks and one by asphyxiation. The blizzard was rated as one of the most severe that has been experienced in South Dakota. Many roads were blocked for days, along with many schools and businesses closed.

March 2, 2007: An area of low pressure moved slowly northeast across the central and northern plains, bringing widespread snowfall along with intense winds. The combination of the falling snow and the existing snow cover resulted in blizzard conditions with visibilities to zero at times. This blizzard event was part of the same upper-level low-pressure trough that brought the heavy snowfall to the area on February 28th. Additional snowfall occurred on March 1st and 2nd across the region as a large area of snow wrapped in from the east. Widespread blizzard conditions developed by noon on March 2nd and continued into the early morning hours of the 3rd. Snowfall amounts, including the snow on February 28th, ranged from 2 inches to as much as 22 inches across central and northeast South Dakota. The heaviest snowfall amounts were across northeastern South Dakota, where total snow depths were in the 25 to 30-inch range. Northwest winds of 30 to 45 mph with gusts near 60 mph brought zero visibilities at times across the area, along with creating large snowdrifts. Schools, businesses, airports, roads, and interstates were closed for up to two days. Travel was not advised across the area. Also, many cars were ditched, along with several accidents. Many travelers were stranded, and several shelters were opened. The Emergency Operations Center was activated in Pierre, and the Governor declared the blizzard area a disaster. Some of the most significant snowfall amounts over the three days included 11 inches at Andover, Hosmer, and Redfield, 12 inches at Webster, 13 inches at Miller, 14 inches at Victor, Groton, and Clark, 15 inches at Castlewood and Summit, 16 inches at Watertown and Roy Lake, 19 inches at Sisseton, 20 inches at Milbank, 21 inches at Bryant, and 22 inches at Clear Lake.

1846 - A great storm hit Virginia and the Carolinas. The storm caused half a million dollars damage, and in North Carolina drowned fifty families and a thousand cattle on Notts Island. (David Ludlum)

1927 - Raleigh, NC, was buried under 17.8 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for that location. Nashville NC received 31 inches of snow. The average snow depth in the state of Carolina was fourteen inches. (The Weather Channel)

1975 - The governor's Tornado in Atlanta did considerable damage to the governor's mansion and surrounding areas resulting in three deaths and 56.5 million dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - A massive winter storm struck the Northern Plains Region. The storm produced up to 33 inches of snow in northeastern South Dakota, at Summit and at Milbank, and also produced high winds which whipped the heavy snow into drifts twenty feet high. (Storm Data)

1987 - A storm in the northeastern U.S. produced heavy snow in Maine, with 16 inches reported at West Grand Lake and Guilford. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. A tornado at Baton Rouge LA injured two persons, and another tornado caused five million dollars damage at the airport in Lafayette LA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Snow and high winds plagued the western U.S. Up to 16 inches of snow was reported south of Seattle WA, and more than two feet of snow blanketed the Sierra Nevada Range of California. Winds gusted to 89 mph at Hidden Peak UT, and reached 92 mph at Peavine CA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Mild weather continued across the northern tier of states. Highs of 52 degrees at Saint Johnsbury VT, 63 degrees at Olympia WA, and 64 degrees at Seattle WA were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

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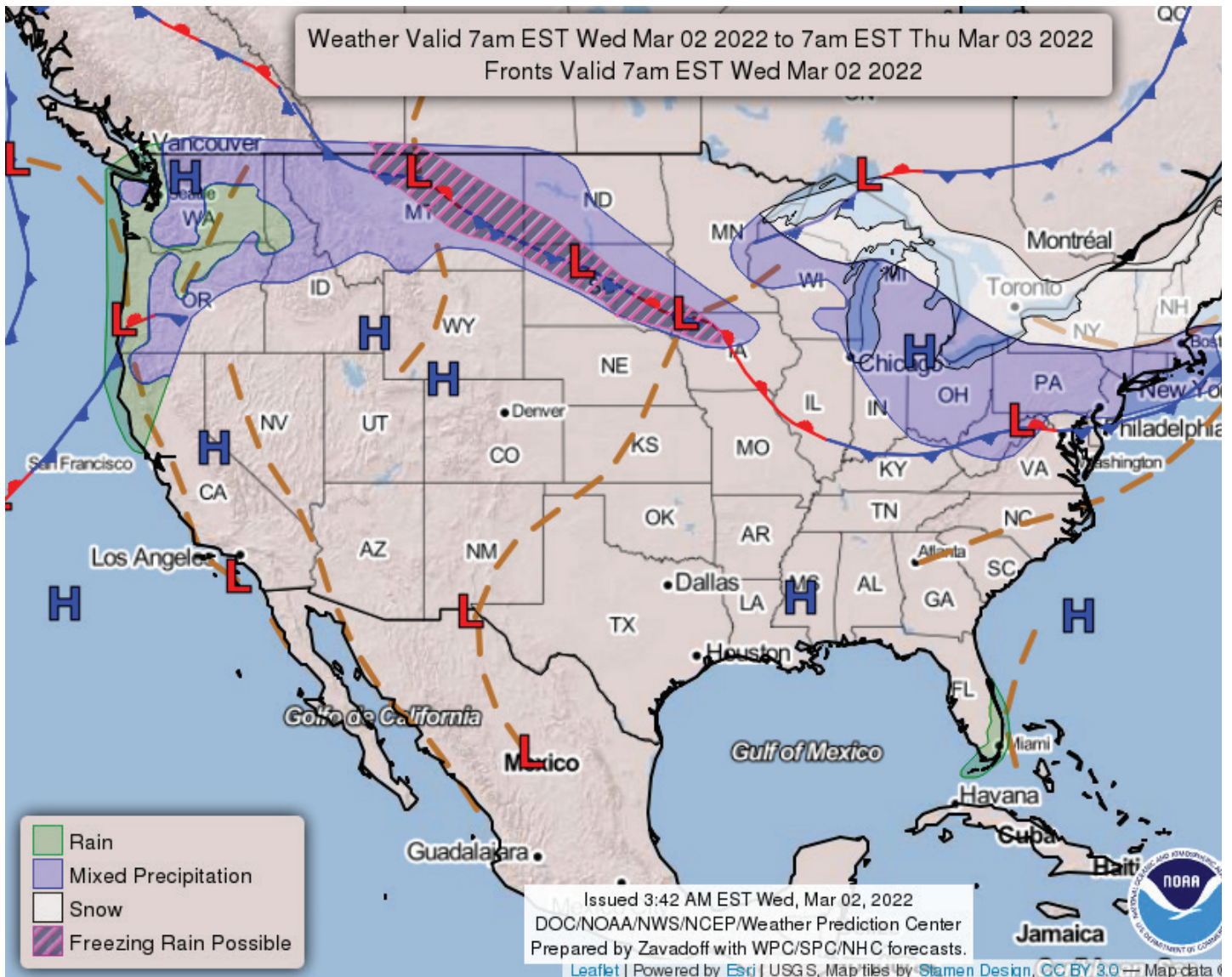
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 31 °F at 9:46 PM
Low Temp: 25 °F at 8:12 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 7:46 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 15 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 67 in 2021
Record Low: -21 in 1913
Average High: 34°F
Average Low: 13°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.05
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.22
Precip Year to Date: 0.97
Sunset Tonight: 6:22:10 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:04:56 AM





A QUESTION WITH NO ANSWER

A radio talk show host in California once asked his listeners a troubling question. "What," he asked, "would you do with the rest of today if you knew it was the last day you had to live?"

Immediately they responded. "I would go to an organ donor bank as soon as possible and donate all of my organs to help others who were dying," said the first caller.

The second one said, "I'd cram as many daring and exciting things as possible in my remaining few hours. I would take every risk since it wouldn't matter if I lived or died. I'd have fun."

"I'd call my wife and children and tell them that I loved them very much and ask them if they needed anything from me before I died," said the third caller.

The fourth caller said, "I'd begin reading my Bible and make sure my heart was right with God before I meet Him. I want everything to be O.K. before we meet."

Each of us has a date with death. We do not know the day or the hour of that final day when our heart will stop beating. The Psalmist reminded us of this fact when he wrote, "How long must your servant wait?" However, no date or hour was revealed. He received no answer.

Whether we have one day or many days is known only to God. He alone has that number in His Book of Life, and He is responsible for the number of days we will live.

But each of us is responsible for making certain that our hearts are right with God before that date arrives. In between "now and then" we are to live each day for Him.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to recognize the uncertainties of life and the certainty of death and make all things right. Your grace and Your judgment are always on time. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: How long must your servant wait? Psalm 119:84a

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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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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

18-22-38-39-50, Mega Ball: 18, Megaplier: 2

(eighteen, twenty-two, thirty-eight, thirty-nine, fifty; Mega Ball: eighteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$102 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$73 million

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A=

Quarterfinal=

Region 1=

Clark/Willow Lake 62, Webster 47

Groton Area 54, Sisseton 38

Milbank 57, Florence/Henry 45

Tiospa Zina Tribal 49, Redfield 43

Region 2=

Deubrook 64, Deuel 48

Flandreau 86, Flandreau Indian 43

Hamlin 75, Elkton-Lake Benton 43

Sioux Valley 60, Great Plains Lutheran 40

Region 3=

Dell Rapids 75, Tri-Valley 67

Madison 55, Garretson 52

Sioux Falls Christian 68, McCook Central/Montrose 38

West Central 70, Baltic 45

Region 4=

Dakota Valley 75, Parker 52

Lennox 77, Canton 46

Tea Area 79, Beresford 46

Vermillion 63, Elk Point-Jefferson 48

Region 5=

Bon Homme 60, Wagner 59

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 85, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 43

Parkston 62, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 47

Region 6=

Chamberlain 75, Dupree 27

Mobridge-Pollock 73, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 71

Stanley County 63, Crow Creek 50

Winner 62, McLaughlin 31

Region 7=

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Little Wound 65, Pine Ridge 49
Red Cloud 80, St. Francis Indian 47
Todd County 60, Bennett County 52
Region 8=
Belle Fourche 58, Hill City 55
Custer 44, Hot Springs 34
Rapid City Christian 72, Lead-Deadwood 38
Class B=
Quarterfinal=
Region 1=
Britton-Hecla 54, Aberdeen Christian 30
Langford 53, Northwestern 42
Warner 51, Aberdeen Roncalli 34
Waubay/Summit 64, Leola/Frederick 47
Region 2=
Faulkton 64, Herreid/Selby Area 44
Ipswich 64, Highmore-Harrold 50
Lower Brule 90, Miller 44
Potter County 72, Sully Buttes 26
Region 3=
Castlewood 59, Arlington 37
DeSmet 78, Waverly-South Shore 27
Estelline/Hendricks 67, James Valley Christian 55
Wolsey-Wessington 70, Hitchcock-Tulare 50
Region 4=
Bridgewater-Emery 61, Dell Rapids St. Mary 47
Chester 58, Canistota 46
Ethan 65, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 53
Howard 70, Mitchell Christian 32
Region 5=
Centerville 59, Gayville-Volin 48
Freeman Academy/Marion 70, Alcester-Hudson 34
Irene-Wakonda 57, Scotland 51
Viborg-Hurley 58, Menno 25
Region 6=
Burke 44, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 38
Corsica/Stickney 48, Marty Indian 44
Gregory 59, Wessington Springs 36
Platte-Geddes 57, Kimball/White Lake 36
Region 7=
Lyman 69, Crazy Horse 42
Philip 47, Kadoka Area 46
Wall 70, Oelrichs 39
White River 86, Jones County 61
Region 8=
Faith 78, McIntosh 34
Harding County 80, Takini 23
Lemmon 78, Wakpala 52
Timber Lake 67, Tiospaye Topa 30

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

South Dakota House rejects resolution criticizing Noem

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House on Tuesday rejected a Republican-sponsored resolution to criticize Gov. Kristi Noem for allegedly interfering in a state agency to aid her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license.

Democrats and a group of Republicans who have sparred with the GOP governor joined to support the resolution, which would have had no force of law. It was rejected on a 29-38 vote in the GOP-controlled House.

The resolution, brought by Republican Rep. John Mills, aimed to call Noem's conduct "unacceptable" and "detrimental" to the morale of state employees for an episode that was first reported by The Associated Press. Mills said he was troubled after hearing of that report and following a subsequent legislative inquiry.

"I thought about the message that was being telegraphed to state employees — a message that said even if something is unethical or possibly illegal, if the governor asks, I've got three choices: I either do what is asked, I quit, or I risk being fired," Mills said in a speech on the House floor.

After the Appraiser Certification Program in July 2020 moved to deny Noem's daughter an appraiser license, Noem held a meeting with her daughter, the program director and other key decision-makers in the agency. Noem's daughter, Kassidy Peters, received an extra opportunity to show her appraiser work could meet federal requirements and she received her license months later.

Shortly after that, the agency's director, Sherry Bren, was pressured to retire. She eventually received a \$200,000 settlement to withdraw an age discrimination complaint.

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

"The resolution is filled with lies," said Noem's spokesman Ian Fury. "Kassidy received no special treatment, and her agreement was in the works before the meeting."

Fury asserted that last year's legislative inquiry "found no wrongdoing," though the committee did not issue any final assessment. Also, three out of the five House lawmakers who served on the committee voted for the resolution.

Fury pointed out that the House speaker could have assigned the resolution to a committee, where it would have had a more robust hearing.

"I'm done talking about this political hit job," Fury said. "The governor is focused on serving the people."

Tuesday's House vote showed an unwillingness by rank-and-file Republicans to openly criticize Noem, despite last year's inquiry in which a legislative committee heard testimony both from Bren and a Cabinet secretary.

One Republican caucus leader, Rep. Chris Johnson, interrupted Mills' floor speech to accuse him of unethical behavior. House Speaker Spencer Gosch shot down Johnson's challenge.

Meanwhile, lawmakers have moved to gain more power to look into settlements after the legislative probe was hampered at times.

Both Bren and Noem's secretary for the Department of Labor and Regulation, Marcia Hultman, last year declined to answer lawmakers' questions about why Bren was pressured to retire. They were both bound by a nondisparagement clause in the \$200,000 agreement.

Both the Senate and House have passed measures to clarify that nondisparagement clauses in settlements cannot be used to stop people from speaking in certain closed-door legislative meetings. Because the Senate made changes to the House version of the bill, both chambers would have to agree on a version before it can be sent to Noem's desk.

A separate state agency, the Government Accountability Board, is also evaluating a complaint from the attorney general against Noem for her conduct. It has given her until April to respond.

South Dakota House 'smokes out' recreational pot bill

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A bipartisan group of South Dakota House lawmakers on Tuesday mounted a last-ditch effort to resurrect a proposal to legalize recreational marijuana through a maneuver called a "smoke out."

"Just for the record, we're smoking out a weed bill," said House Speaker Spencer Gosch, a Republican.

The bill had passed the Senate, but was dismissed by a House committee Monday. The proposal was revived by 26 House lawmakers on the House floor, but pot legalization advocates were still scrambling to find at least 10 more legislators willing to get behind the proposal by Wednesday.

It would legalize recreational possession of up to an ounce of marijuana by people ages 21 and older. The bill would also allow marijuana to be grown, processed and sold.

"It's going to be very close," Republican Rep. Mike Derby said of Wednesday's vote to put the bill on the debate calendar.

He did not support the smoke-out maneuver and declined to say whether he would vote for it to be placed on the debate calendar.

Republican Rep. Tom Pischke, who supported the smoke out, acknowledged the chances of getting 10 more lawmakers on board were slim.

Ukraine war, inflation hurt business outlook in nine states

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Worries about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other concerns undermined the confidence of business leaders in nine Midwest and Plains states, according to a new monthly report released Tuesday.

The report's confidence index fell to its lowest point ever in February when it hit 19.5, falling from January's already low 36.2. The indexes in the report range from 0 to 100 with any score below 50 suggesting a negative outlook. A score above 50 suggests optimism or growth in an index.

"Concerns about the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war, higher interest rates, soaring inflation, and supply chain disruptions combined to hammer business confidence," said Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey.

Businesses are worried that the war in Ukraine will worsen the ongoing supply chain problems and push commodity prices higher, Goss said.

The outlook for the next six months turned especially negative in February even though manufacturing activity continues at a healthy pace in the region today. The overall economic index for the region improved to 64 in February from January's 56.2.

The employment index also improved to 56.6 in February from January's negative 43.6 reading.

But inflation remains high. The wholesale price index declined to 80.5 in February from 87.5 in January.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

SD senators OK bill shielding students from 'discomfort'

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota Senate committee on Tuesday narrowly approved a proposal from Gov. Kristi Noem that would ban public universities from using training that compels people to feel "discomfort" based on their race.

The Republican-controlled Senate Education committee endorsed the bill on a 4-3 vote for consideration by the full chamber, even as several Republicans leveled criticism at it. The House has already passed the proposal, making the Senate vote, which has yet to be scheduled, the final major legislative hurdle for Noem's proposal.

The Republican governor, who has positioned herself for a White House bid, has touted the bill as a ban on critical race theory and a way to ensure "our students are not taught that they are responsible for (the)

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different actions of our ancestors.”

Senate lawmakers heard over an hour of impassioned debate, both from those who championed the bill as a repudiation of critical race theory and critics who say it would put a chill on academic freedom and sanitize the most painful facts of U.S. history.

“What we are seeing is a massive effort to dissuade educators from teaching race and racism,” said Abby Menter, who trains teachers, referring to the nationwide political rallying cry on the fright against so-called critical race theory.

The bill’s actual text makes no mention of the academic framework. It lays out seven “divisive concepts” and bans universities from making students or faculty members adhere to them or promoting them in required trainings.

The proposal drew sharp criticism from leaders of South Dakota’s minority communities, from Oglala Sioux Tribe President Kevin Killer to Julian Beaudion, the director of the South Dakota African American History Museum.

“Your discomfort cannot be used as an excuse not to deal with the issues of humanity,” Beaudion told the committee, adding, “My ancestors picked cotton until their fingers bled” under the threat of beatings and hangings.

Native American educators charged that the governor was sending a message discouraging meaningful discussions of a state history that contains a through line of injustices against Native Americans.

“Should we not teach Manifest Destiny? Because I know what Manifest Destiny did to our people, ” said Democratic Sen. Troy Heinert. “What about the gold rush? ... That was the end of our existence as a free people.”

The bill carves out an exception for academic courses in universities, which proponents insisted allows painful classroom discussions.

“You can teach a class on critical race theory,” Allen Cambon, the governor’s policy adviser told the committee Tuesday, adding that the bill would still allow classroom discussions that may bring up discomfort in students.

But the bill’s stipulations prompted Heinert to call it “one of the largest oxymoron bills I have ever seen.”

Republicans on the committee noted that the Board of Regents supported the proposal because it aligned with how universities already operate.

Republican Sen. Blake Curd cautioned against the government stepping into what is taught or promoted at universities, but cast the deciding vote in support, explaining that the debate was “of such importance” that it should be debated on the Senate floor.

The Senate committee is also considering Noem’s proposal to ban K-12 public schools from public K-12 school curricula that compel students to feel discomfort based on their race. Lawmakers are set to decide on that bill Thursday.

Man guilty in sex trafficking sting gets 14 years in prison

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City man indicted in an undercover sex trafficking sting during the 2020 Sturgis Motorcycle Rally has been sentenced to 14 years in prison.

Christopher Truax was found guilty last November of attempted enticement of a minor using the internet, a federal charge that carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years.

According to prosecutors, Truax set up a time and place to meet a person he thought was a 13-year-old girl after the two texted and chatted online. An undercover agent was posing as the girl.

When Truax went to the predetermined location to meet the girl, he was instead met by law enforcement agents and arrested.

Truax has also been ordered to be under supervised release for the remainder of his life, KELO-TV reported.

He was one of eight men arrested as a result of the undercover sex trafficking operation in August 2020.

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Texas primary sets up Abbott-O'Rourke race as midterms begin

By WILL WEISSERT and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Republican Gov. Greg Abbott will face Democrat Beto O'Rourke after voters in Texas opened what could be a lengthy, bruising primary season poised to reshape political power from state capitals to Washington.

Both easily won their party's nomination for governor on Tuesday. Abbott is now in a commanding position as he seeks a third term, beginning his run with more than \$50 million and campaigning on a strongly conservative agenda in America's largest Republican state. That leaves O'Rourke facing an uphill effort to recapture the magic of his 2018 Senate campaign, when he nearly ousted Ted Cruz.

"This group of people, and then some, are going to make me the first Democrat to be governor of the state of Texas since 1994," O'Rourke told supporters in Fort Worth, where in 2018 he flipped Texas' largest red county. "This is on us. This is on all of us."

Abbott said, "Republicans sent a message."

"They want to keep Texas on the extraordinary path of opportunity that we have provided over the past eight years," his campaign said in a statement.

The GOP primary for state attorney general was more competitive. Former President Donald Trump's endorsement wasn't enough to prevent incumbent Ken Paxton from being forced into a May runoff. He'll face Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush, the nephew of one president and grandson of another, after neither captured a majority of the votes cast. While Paxton won more votes than Bush on Tuesday, his failure to win outright could raise questions about the power of Trump's endorsement as he seeks to reshape the party in his image in other primaries later this year.

Democrats faced challenges of their own. Nine-term U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar was trying to avoid becoming the first Democratic member of Congress to lose a primary this year. He will instead head into a runoff against progressive Jessica Cisneros.

The primary season, which picks up speed in the summer, determines which candidates from each party advance to the fall campaign. The midterms will ultimately serve as a referendum on the first half of President Joe Biden's administration, which has been dominated by a pandemic that has proven unpredictable, along with rising inflation and a series of foreign policy crises. The GOP, meanwhile, is grappling with its future as many candidates seeking to emerge from primaries, including a sizable number in Texas, tie themselves to Trump and his lie that the 2020 election was stolen.

Tuesday marked the state's first election under its tighter new voting laws that, among other changes muscled through by the GOP-controlled Legislature, require mail ballots to now include identification — a mandate that counties blamed for thousands of rejected mail ballots even before Election Day. More than 10,000 mail ballots around Houston alone were flagged for not complying. Technical issues also caused problems in Texas' largest county: Paper jams and paper tears in voting machines would take a couple days to work through while counting, said Isabel Longoria, Harris County's elections administrator.

Several voting sites around Houston were also short-staffed, she said, causing tensions in some locations.

"Democrats and Republicans bickering with each other, stealing each other's machines, hiding each other's paper," Longoria said. "At the end of the day, they were able to help voters."

The primary also tested Republican efforts to more aggressively court Hispanic voters. Counties along the state's border with Mexico, long a stronghold for Democrats, were on track to smash Republican turnout levels compared with recent elections.

That was the latest warning sign for Democrats who are trying to hold the line with Hispanic voters who swung toward Trump in 2020.

Republicans are betting that the Texas primaries will be the first step toward them retaking Congress in November, pointing to Biden's low approval ratings, inflation and anger about the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. Russia's war with Ukraine could also have deep political implications.

Monica Carter, who voted at a polling station in River Oaks, one of Houston's wealthiest neighborhoods, cast her ballot in the Republican primary and said she thought rising rates of crime in many parts of the

country are "out of hand."

"The police force needs to be reinforced," said Carter, 66.

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, after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The fight over the GOP's future is much fiercer than it was 20 years ago, though.

U.S. Rep. Van Taylor of North Texas, for instance, became a target for some on the right after he voted to certify Biden's electoral victory and to create an independent commission to investigate the Capitol insurrection. The Republican was forced into a runoff after facing four primary challengers who largely refused to accept Biden's victory and tried to minimize the mob's Capitol attack.

National Democrats say Trump's outsize 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 among the 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 Medicare for All, Cisneros nearly toppled Cuellar during Texas' 2020 primary.

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 Councilmember who championed a \$15 citywide minimum wage and won the Democratic primary for the open House seat representing Texas' capital.

'Minister No': Lavrov embodies Moscow's steely posture

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — As Russia's top diplomat during the invasion of Ukraine, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is embodying the Kremlin's defiant posture with a mixture of toughness and sarcasm.

While President Vladimir Putin single-handedly shapes the country's foreign policy, Lavrov delivers Moscow's message with a bluntness uncharacteristic of a diplomat.

In the role for nearly 18 years, the 71-year-old Lavrov has seen relations with the West shift from near-friendly to openly hostile, plummeting to a catastrophic new low with Russia's war against Ukraine. The invasion prompted the European Union to freeze the assets of both Putin and Lavrov, among others — an unprecedented blow to Moscow's pride.

Lavrov's tenure as foreign minister is second only to that of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who was in office for 28 years. Like Gromyko, who was nicknamed Mr. Nyet (Mr. No), Lavrov has come to represent the uncompromising face of Kremlin foreign policy vis a vis the West.

He doesn't mince words when defending what he sees as Moscow's interests, and that style must appeal to the tough-talking Russian president.

In 2008, Lavrov famously responded to a reprimand from then British Foreign Secretary David Miliband by snapping: "Who are you to (expletive) lecture me?"

Like his boss, Lavrov has tapped into broad public nostalgia for the country's Soviet-era clout. He has vented anger at the West, depicting the U.S. as arrogant, conceited, treacherous and determined to dominate the world. He has contemptuously dismissed Western allies as stooges obediently toeing Washington's line to deter Russia.

Standing next to British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss after their meeting last month, a grim-faced Lavrov snapped that their talks were like a "conversation between deaf and dumb."

After a lifelong diplomatic career, Lavrov looks visibly bored by daily routine. When he appears before the media, he doesn't bother to hide his irritation at a naive or provocative question, often responding with an air of contempt or plain mockery.

When a CNN reporter in a video call from the Ukrainian capital asked Lavrov whether Moscow wants to topple the Ukrainian leadership, the aide who managed Friday's briefing interrupted and said it wasn't his

turn to put a question. The reporter continued, and an angry Lavrov weighed in: "He's discourteous. He's working in Ukraine now. He's got infected with discourtesy."

Lavrov has particular distaste for photographers, showing annoyance at the clacking of camera shutters.

At one news conference, he muttered an expletive into the microphone in apparent anger at disorderly reporters; the expression became a meme, widely adopted in T-shirt designs for the patriotic audience.

Lavrov has weathered endless waves of speculation that he was on the verge of retirement. Instead, he has become one of the longest-lasting members of Putin's Cabinet and a perennial figure among a changing kaleidoscope of foreign counterparts.

Before becoming foreign minister, he served as Russia's ambassador to the United Nations for 10 years and liked to have informal chats with journalists, trading news and jokes over a cigarette in the U.N. corridors. He writes poetry, sings songs on guitar with friends, and eagerly took part in skits with other diplomats at international events when Russia's ties with the West were less rancorous.

But his smiles and easy ways are a thing of the past now that Lavrov launches daily, angry diatribes against the West over Ukraine, the largest ground conflict Europe has seen since World War II.

On Tuesday, he was barred from flying to Geneva to attend a U.N. conference after European Union members banned Russian planes from their skies as part of bruising sanctions against Moscow.

Lavrov denounced what he called the "outrageous" move in a video address to the U.N. session, charging that "the EU countries are trying to avoid a candid face-to-face dialogue or direct contacts designed to help identify political solutions to pressing international issues."

"The West clearly has lost self-control in venting anger against Russia and has destroyed its own rules and institutions, including respect for private property," Lavrov said. "It's necessary to put an end to the arrogant Western philosophy of self-superiority, exclusivity and total permissiveness."

But Western diplomats from dozens of nations left the room in Geneva as Lavrov came up on the big screen, letting their feet show their anger at Moscow and in effect saying "nyet" to him and Russian diplomacy.

Hong Kong reports record cases; movements may be restricted

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong's leader on Wednesday said people's movements may be restricted during mandatory testing this month of the entire population for the coronavirus, as health officials reported a record 55,353 daily infections and over a hundred deaths.

Chief executive Carrie Lam said authorities are still refining the plan, but that there would be no "complete" lockdown that would prevent entry and exit from the city.

"The extent of it must take into account Hong Kong's circumstances and people's needs," she told reporters.

Hong Kong is planning to test its more than 7 million residents as it grapples with soaring numbers of COVID-19 cases in its worst outbreak of the pandemic, linked largely to the omicron variant.

Officials on Wednesday reported 117 deaths, taking the total number above 1,000. About 80% of the deaths have occurred since late December. Most involved elderly patients who were not fully vaccinated.

"We recorded about 55,000 infections today, which is within our expectation. Recently every two or three days the number of confirmed cases is doubling," said Albert Au, a health officer with the Centre for Health Protection. He said cases have not yet peaked.

U.S. authorities on Wednesday warned Americans against traveling to Hong Kong, with the State Department raising its travel advisory to Level 4 — Do Not Travel — because of rising cases and restrictions imposed by the city and mainland China under their "zero-tolerance" policy toward the coronavirus.

"We especially want to note for families considering traveling to or residing in Hong Kong that in some cases, children in Hong Kong who test positive have been separated from their parents and kept in isolation until they meet local hospital discharge requirements," the travel advisory said.

The surge is threatening to overwhelm Hong Kong's hospitals, with officials saying they have reached maximum bed capacity and some general wards are being converted into isolation areas.

Public mortuaries have also reached full capacity, and help is being sought from the private sector to store bodies, officials say. The Hospital Authority has also ordered refrigerated containers to temporarily store bodies, health officials said.

Supermarket shelves were wiped bare this week as residents stockpiled daily necessities after reports spread of a possible citywide lockdown. Authorities have called for calm and reassured people that food supplies are normal.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin backed Hong Kong's virus control measures.

Wang said the measures "are necessary, science-based and responsible to effectively prevent and control the epidemic and ensure the health of Hong Kong residents and foreigners in Hong Kong."

"We believe that the relevant measures will further build up the international community's confidence in Hong Kong's epidemic control, ensure Hong Kong's safe and orderly interaction with the international community, and provide a more secure and stable business environment for international investors in Hong Kong," Wang said at a daily briefing Wednesday.

Economic dangers from Russia's invasion ripple across globe

By PAUL WISEMAN and DAVID McHUGH AP Economics Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Moscow's war on Ukraine and the ferocious financial backlash it's unleashed are not only inflicting an economic catastrophe on President Vladimir Putin's Russia.

The repercussions are also menacing the global economy, shaking financial markets and making life more perilous for everyone from Uzbek migrant workers to European consumers to hungry Yemeni families.

Even before Putin's troops invaded Ukraine, the global economy was straining under a range of burdens: Surging inflation. Tangled supply chains. Tumbling stock prices.

The Ukraine crisis both magnified each threat and complicated the potential solutions.

"We are actually in uncharted territory," said Clay Lowery, executive vice president at the Institute of International Finance, a trade group of global banks. "We know there are consequences that we cannot predict."

For now at least, the damage to the overall global economy appears to be relatively slight, if only because Russia and Ukraine are not economic powerhouses. Important as they are as exporters of energy, precious metals, wheat and other commodities, the two together account for less than 2% of the world's gross domestic product.

Most major economies have only limited trade exposure to Russia: For the U.S., it's 0.5% of total trade. For China, around 2.4%.

Barring a major escalation of the war — far from impossible — "the effects on the U.S., China and most of the emerging world should be limited," said Adam Slater, lead economist at Oxford Economics. He foresees only a 0.2% drop in global GDP this year.

Still, Russia is a vitally important supplier of oil, natural gas and metals, and higher prices for those commodities are sure to inflict economic damage around the world. Europe relies on Russia for nearly 40% of its natural gas and 25% of its oil.

For the European continent, Russia's war has significantly heightened the likelihood of runaway inflation, another economic setback or both.

Here is a deeper look:

AN ECONOMIC SIEGE

Infuriated by Putin's aggression, the United States and other Western nations have targeted Russia with sanctions of unprecedented breadth and severity for a major economy. They have thrown major Russian banks off the SWIFT international payment system, limited high tech exports to Russia and severely restricted Moscow's use of its foreign currency reserves.

The rapid and unified international retaliation against Russia appeared to catch Putin's regime by surprise.

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"The world — or most of it anyway — is laying economic siege to Russia," wrote Carl Weinberg, chief economist at High Frequency Economics.

The sanctions quickly caused damage. The Russian ruble plunged to a record low Monday. Depositors lined up at ATMs to try to withdraw their money from the embattled banking system. Cut off from Google Pay and Apple Pay, Russians were stuck at ticket booths at Metro rail lines.

The Institute of International Finance foresees the Russian economy enduring a double-digit contraction this year, worse even than its 7.8% drop in the Great Recession year of 2009.

Oxford Economics said evidence from wars ranging from the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war to the 1999 NATO bombing campaign against Serbia suggests that a staggering collapse of the Ukrainian economy of 50% to 60% is possible.

HARD TIMES FOR EUROPE

With its dependence on energy from Russia, Europe's economy is now especially at risk.

Natural gas prices shot up 20% after the war started, on top of earlier increases, and now are roughly six times what they were at the start of 2021. The gas price shock is feeding higher inflation and swelling utility bills. The result is that households have less money to spend, and hopes for a surge in consumer spending resulting from fewer pandemic restrictions and COVID-19 cases have diminished.

Escalating gas prices have caused what economists call "demand destruction" among industrial enterprises, like fertilizer makers, that use a lot of gas and have now slashed production. Farmers are paying more to run machinery and buy fertilizer. Germany's economy, which sagged by 0.7% in the fourth quarter of 2021, would face a technical recession if it shrank again in the first three months of 2022.

The economic downdraft could be offset by an increase in German defense spending. In response to the Russian invasion, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said the government would commit 100 billion euros (\$111 billion) to a special fund for its armed forces and raise defense spending above 2% of GDP.

"The drag from higher prices and the negative confidence affect may lower real GDP growth in the eurozone from 4.3% to 3.7% for 2022," said Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg bank.

NO SUPPLY CHAIN RELIEF

The world's unexpectedly robust recovery from the pandemic recession left companies scrambling to find enough raw materials and components to produce goods to meet surging customer demand. Overwhelmed factories, ports and freight yards have meant shortages, shipping delays and higher prices. Disruptions to Russian and Ukrainian industries could delay any return to normal conditions.

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, noted that Russia and Ukraine together produce 70% of the world's neon, critical in the making of semiconductors. That is especially worrisome because the world, and automakers in particular, are already enduring a shortage of computer chips.

When Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine eight years ago, neon prices shot up 600%, though Zandi notes that chipmakers have since stockpiled neon and sought alternatives to Russian supplies.

Russia and Ukraine together supply 13% of the world's titanium, which is used to make passenger jets and 30% of the palladium, which goes into cars, cellphones and dental fillings, Zandi said. Russia also is a major producer of nickel, used to produce electric car batteries and steel.

"It's impossible for supply chains to catch up," said Vanessa Miller, a partner at Foley & Lardner LLP who specializes in supply chains.

TROUBLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The conflict and sanctions will also do damage to Russia's neighbors in Central Asia. As its own workforce has aged, Russia has turned to younger migrant workers from such countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Those workers' families have come to rely on the money they send home — remittances.

Even at the height of COVID-19 in 2020, remittances from Russia to Uzbekistan topped \$3.9 billion and to Kyrgyzstan \$2 billion, according to the Russian central bank.

"The pressure on the ruble, banking restrictions on foreigners and — in the long run — the collapse of the labor market in Russia will have an immediate and profound economic impact on Central Asia," Gavin Helf, an expert on Central Asia for the U.S. Institute of Peace, wrote this week.

A STRAIN ON FOOD SUPPLIES

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Ukraine and Russia account for 30% of the world's exports of wheat, 19% of corn and 80% of sunflower oil, which is used in food processing. Much of the Russian and Ukrainian bounty goes to poor, unstable countries like Yemen and Libya.

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

Anna Nagurney, a management professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, described the consequences as "extremely troubling."

"Wheat, corn, oils, barley, flour are extremely important to food security," Nagurney said, "especially in the poorer parts of the globe."

With ports, airports and rail lines closed and young Ukrainian men fighting the Russian invasion, she asked, "Who's going to be doing the harvesting? Who'd be doing the transportation?"

RISING PRICES

The Ukraine war coincides with a high-risk moment for the Federal Reserve and other central banks. They were caught off-guard by the surge in inflation over the past year — the consequence, mostly, of the economy's unexpectedly strong recovery.

In January, U.S. consumer prices rose 7.5% from a year earlier, the biggest such jump since 1982. In Europe, figures out Wednesday are likely to show that inflation accelerated to 6% last month from 5.1% in January for the 19 countries that use the euro currency.

Now, the fighting and sanctions that have disrupted Russia trade with the global economy threaten to send prices ever higher, especially for energy: Russia and Ukraine, Zandi said, together produce 12% of the world's oil and 17% of its natural gas.

To combat inflation, the Fed is set to begin raising interest rates when it meets in two weeks, reversing the ultra-low-rate policies it adopted in 2020 to help rescue the economy from the pandemic recession. Likewise, the European Central Bank is gradually withdrawing its pandemic stimulus efforts.

But now? Central bankers must weigh intensifying inflationary pressure against the risk that the Ukraine crisis will weaken economies. In Europe, for now, "any hints of rate hikes are out of the question," Carsten Brzeski, chief of global macro at ING bank.

Yet the Fed, roundly accused of being slow to recognize inflation's resurgence, may continue its shift away from easy-money policies.

Barring a stock market collapse or a broadening of the war beyond Ukraine, Zandi said, "I don't expect any change in the Fed's conduct of monetary policy as a result of the economic cross-currents created by the Russian invasion of Ukraine."

Live updates: Russia ready for new talks, won't say where

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest developments on the Russia-Ukraine war:

MOSCOW — A Kremlin spokesman says a Russian delegation will be ready on Wednesday evening to resume talks with Ukrainian officials about the war in Ukraine.

Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Wednesday that "in the second half of the day, closer to evening, our delegation will be in place to await Ukrainian negotiators."

There was no immediate word from Ukrainian authorities about their plans.

Asked about the location of the talks Peskov said only: "I won't announce the place ahead of time."

Peskov said Putin's culture adviser Vladimir Medinsky remains the main negotiator for Russia.

The first round of talks on resolving the Russia-Ukraine war were held near the Belarus-Ukraine border last Sunday.

They produced no breakthrough, though the two sides agreed to meet again.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused the Kremlin of trying to force him into concessions by continuing to press its invasion.

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BEIJING — China's bank regulator says Beijing won't join the United States and European governments in imposing financial sanctions on Russia.

China is a major buyer of Russian oil and gas and is the only major government that has refrained from criticizing Moscow's attack on Ukraine.

Beijing disapproves of the sanctions, which it believes lack a legal basis and "will not have a good effect," said Guo Shujing, the chairman of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission.

"We will not join such sanctions, and we will keep normal economic, trade and financial exchanges with all the relevant parties," Guo said at a news conference. "We disapprove of the financial sanctions."

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The Ukrainian embassy in the United Arab Emirates says the Gulf country is re-imposing visa requirements on Ukrainians, in an effort to stop anyone fleeing the war against Russia heading there.

The embassy posted on its Facebook page Wednesday that the suspension went into effect March 1. Any Ukrainian passport holders wanting to visit the United Arab Emirates will now need a visa first.

The energy-rich UAE, which relies on Russian and Ukrainian wheat exports, is home to some 15,000 Ukrainian residents among its roughly 8 million foreign residents and 1 million Emirati citizens. Before the coronavirus pandemic, around a quarter-million Ukrainian tourists visited the UAE.

The UAE, like other Gulf Arab states, does not recognize individuals fleeing war and has not permitted refugees from Syria, Iraq and other wars to seek asylum or seek resettlement.

The UAE, which is home to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, abstained in a U.N. Security Council vote late last week condemning Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis is thanking Poland for opening its borders and homes to Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion.

Francis gave a special shout-out to Poland during his Wednesday general audience. The weekly appointment coincided with Ash Wednesday, which Francis has designated as a day for fasting and prayers for peace in Ukraine.

Speaking to Polish pilgrims, Francis said he was "profoundly grateful" for Poland's gestures of solidarity.

"You are the first ones who have supported Ukraine opening your borders, your hearts, the doors of your homes to the Ukrainians who are escaping the war," Francis said. "You are generously offering everything necessary so that they can live in a dignified way despite the dramatic moment."

VIENNA — Russia claims its military has taken control of the area around Ukraine's largest nuclear power plant.

That's according to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog.

It said Wednesday it had received a letter from Russia saying personnel at the Zaporizhzhia plant continued their "work on providing nuclear safety and monitoring radiation in normal mode of operation."

The letter added: "The radiation levels remain normal."

Zaporizhzhia is the largest of Ukraine's nuclear sites, with six out of the country's 15 reactors.

Already, Russia has seized control of the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear power plant, scene of the world's worst nuclear disaster in 1986.

The IAEA says that it has received a request from Ukraine to "provide immediate assistance in coordinating activities in relation to the safety" of Chernobyl and other sites.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's foreign minister says Russia has withdrawn a request to send four warships to the Black Sea through the Turkish straits.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Wednesday that Moscow had agreed to a "friendly request" by Turkey, a NATO member.

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Turkey — which has been trying to balance its close relations with both Ukraine and Russia — announced this week that it will implement an international convention that allows it to shut down the straits to warships belong to warring countries.

The convention provides an exception for warships returning to Black Sea ports they are registered with. Cavusoglu said three of the Russian ships were not registered with Black Sea naval bases.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Norsk Hydro, one of the largest aluminum companies worldwide, says it won't sign new contracts linked to Russian producers until further notice.

It cited the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union and the international community, for its decision.

The company with operations in more than 40 countries said in a statement Wednesday that it has no "business-critical supplies" from Russia or Ukraine.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is appealing to Jews around the world to protest Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in which significant Jewish sites have been hit.

Zelenskyy made the appeal on Wednesday, a day after a Russian missile strike damaged the Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial on the outskirts of Kyiv, where Nazi occupiers killed more than 33,000 Jews over two days in 1941.

Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, said: "I appeal now to all the Jews of the world — don't you see what is happening? Therefore, it is very important that millions of Jews around the world do not remain silent now." Earlier, shelling hit the town of Uman, a significant pilgrimage site for Hasidic Jews.

MADRID — Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is reversing course, saying his government will also provide offensive military equipment directly to Ukraine.

Those supplies will be in addition to what Spain is already sending through the European Union.

Sánchez told parliament Wednesday he is changing Spanish policy because other parties were demanding it and because he wanted political unity around the response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Last week, it sent 20 tons of protective military gear and aid to Kyiv.

Spain contributes to NATO contingents in the Baltics and other allies in eastern Europe.

BEIJING — China says one of its citizens was shot and injured while evacuating from Ukraine.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the incident occurred on Tuesday while the person was leaving on their own. The Chinese Embassy in Kyiv immediately contacted the person to provide assistance.

Wang told reporters at a daily briefing that the injured person is out of danger. He said the embassy is following the person's progress and will continue to provide aid.

Details surrounding the shooting are unclear, pointing to the chaotic situation as hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians and thousands of foreigners seek to escape the fighting.

Beijing has refused to criticize the Russian assault or even describe it as an invasion or war, arguing that NATO and the West had failed to properly address Russia's "legitimate security concerns."

As fighting erupted last week, the Foreign Ministry advised its citizens to display a Chinese flag on their vehicles when venturing out. Just two days later, it advised them instead to show no signs of Chinese nationality, apparently reflecting concerns over a hardening of anti-China rhetoric online.

In a phone call Monday with his Ukrainian counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged Ukraine to fulfill its "international responsibility" in ensuring the safety of Chinese nationals.

KYIV, Ukraine — Videos circulated online of an apparent attack on the regional police and intelligence headquarters in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. It shows a building with its roof blown off and its top floor on fire.

Pieces of the five-story building are strewn across adjacent streets.

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The Ukrainian government's center for strategic communications released images Wednesday of strikes hitting Kharkiv, with balls of fire lighting up the city skyline over populated areas.

Kharkiv resident Marina Boreiko described strikes hitting a neighboring building Tuesday, and her shock at seeing bodies lying in the rubble.

"Today I survived a bombing," she told The Associated Press, repeatedly choking back tears.

"A Russian plane dropped a bomb on the house next door. My boyfriend and I were at home. We felt a strong whistle, and I realized it was flying toward us. We were in the corridor then, and we felt the explosion from there."

As dust rose up, she said, "the first thing I heard was children crying. Our neighbors have three children and the only thing I was thinking about in that moment was, 'God not them, please, only not them.'"

BRUSSELS — The European Union is stepping up aid for Ukraine and is moving toward granting temporary protection to those fleeing Russia's invasion.

The EU Commission announced Wednesday it will give temporary residence permits to the refugees and allow them rights to education and work in the 27-nation bloc.

The move still has to be approved by the member states, but they already expressed broad support over the weekend.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen says "all those fleeing Putin's bombs are welcome in Europe. We will provide protection to those seeking shelter and we will help those looking for a safe way home."

On Tuesday, she already committed at least half a billion euros of the bloc's budget to deal with the humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has expressed concern that Russian attacks could threaten holy religious sites and said Russian troops are trying to "erase our history."

In a speech posted on Facebook, Zelenskyy on Wednesday denounced a Russian strike that hit Holocaust memorial site Babi Yar in Kyiv.

He said: "This is beyond humanity. Such missile strike means that for many Russians our Kyiv is absolute foreign. They know nothing about our capital, about our history. They have orders to erase our history, our country and all of us."

"What will be next if even Babi Yar (is hit), what other 'military' objects, 'NATO bases' are threatening Russia? St. Sophia's Cathedral, Lavra, Andrew's Church?" he asked, referring to sites in Kyiv held sacred by Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox believers around the world.

Zelenskyy also claimed almost 6,000 Russian soldiers have been killed since the invasion began last Thursday. Russia has not released overall casualty numbers and the figure could not be confirmed.

LONDON — Britain's defense secretary has pushed back against calls for NATO to impose a no-fly zone in Ukraine, saying aircraft from both sides would be grounded and that could help Russia's land forces.

Ben Wallace's comments came a day after a Ukrainian journalist confronted Prime Minister Boris Johnson with questions about why NATO had failing to enforce a no-fly zone while civilians were being attacked from the air.

Wallace told Sky News: "You can still have fighting with a no-fly zone, it just won't be in the air."

He said that would allow Russian armored columns to drive around with impunity and not be struck from the air, where currently Ukrainian aircraft and unmanned air vehicles are causing damage on key parts of their logistical chain.

As Wallace was speaking Wednesday, the U.K. Defense Department released its latest intelligence assessment, saying that Russia continued heavy artillery and airstrikes on the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mariupol and Chernihiv in the last 24 hours.

It said Russian forces have reportedly moved into the center of the southern city of Kherson, but overall gains throughout the country have been limited. It said this is probably due to a combination of ongoing

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logistical difficulties and strong Ukrainian resistance.

Wallace also reiterated British opposition to imposing a no-fly zone, saying that it would force NATO pilots to shoot down Russian aircraft, which could spark a wider European war.

He said, "How far does the British public want us to go against a nuclear armed power who may view escalation of all means? So I think we have to realistic here."

MOSCOW — Russia's Defense Ministry claimed Wednesday that Russian aviation disabled the main TV tower in Ukraine's capital in an airstrike, but said the attack did not hit any residential buildings.

Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov did not address deaths from Tuesday's strike or damage to the adjacent Babi Yar memorial to Kyiv's Holocaust victims. He said the attack was aimed at disabling Ukraine's ability to stage "information attacks."

Ukraine's State Service for Emergency Situations said the strikes on the TV tower killed five people and left five more wounded. Ukrainian television stations briefly went down after the strike but were later restored.

Konashenkov also said Russian forces had seized the southern city of Kherson. The claim could not immediately be confirmed.

Russian forces have faced tougher than expected resistance since invading Ukraine from three sides last week.

MOSCOW — Leading Russian bank Sberbank announced Wednesday it is pulling out of European markets amid tightening Western sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The bank said its subsidiaries in Europe were facing an "abnormal outflow of funds and a threat to the safety of employees and branches," according to Russian news agencies. They did not provide details of the threats.

Authorities in Austria and Czech Republic had taken actions in recent days against Sberbank's activities in Europe.

The move was the latest consequence of Russia's invasion last week, which has led to warfare across Ukraine and unprecedented Western sanctions aimed at isolating Russia's economy.

BOSTON — A firm that tracks cryptocurrency transactions says \$33.8 million in the digital currency has been donated to Ukraine's government and non-governmental organizations there since the start of Russia's invasion, nearly a third of it on Tuesday.

Chief Scientist Tom Robinson of Elliptic said most donations to date have been in bitcoin and ether. Some people are sending non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, to the Ukrainian government's ethereum account.

Ukraine issued a plea for contributions on Twitter last week. To date, it has received 30,000 donations, including \$5.8 million from Gavin Wood, the British programmer who co-founded ethereum. There have been several other donations of more than \$1 million.

Elliptic also warned of scammers tricking unsuspecting cryptocurrency holders wanting to donate to Ukrainian causes.

Elliptic is among firms that help law enforcement track cryptocurrency to combat money laundering.

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is working on a "focused tactical strategy" to make certain that cryptocurrency doesn't become a mechanism that Moscow is able to utilize to avert sanctions, according to a senior administration official.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the yet to be announced move, did not detail an exact timeline for when the new steps on cryptocurrency would be unveiled, but said the area is one of several spaces that the Biden administration officials are looking to shore up as it looks to make certain that sanctions on Russia have maximum impact.

The official said past experiences in Iran and Venezuela with sanctions evasion are informing the administration's efforts. Additional export controls and new sanction targets are also expected to be unveiled in

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the days and weeks ahead to counter Russian sanction evasion efforts, the official said.

Officials have already been on the lookout for the use and creation of front companies and alternative financial institutions that Moscow might try to employ to get around sanctions.

TOKYO — Sony is donating \$2 million as humanitarian aid to Ukraine through the United Nations Refugee Agency and aid group Save the Children.

The Japanese electronics and entertainment company has already said it will halt theatrical releases in Russia. Upcoming films include *Morbius*, starring the Marvel comics hero.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been impacted and hope this crisis will be resolved quickly," Sony Pictures said in a statement.

Earlier this week, Mickey Mikitani, chief executive of Japanese online retailer Rakuten, donated 1 billion yen (\$8.7 million) to the Ukrainian government through the embassy in Japan.

Separately, the Foreign Ministry said the Japanese embassy in Kyiv is closing temporarily, with operations transferred to an office in Lviv, western Ukraine.

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Joe Biden said in his first State of the Union address that the United States is closing its airspace to all Russian flights in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He said the U.S. is working to seize yachts and apartments of Russian oligarchs.

Biden devoted the first 12 minutes of his address to Ukraine. Lawmakers of both parties repeatedly rose to their feet and applauded as he praised the bravery of Ukraine's people and condemned Russia's assault.

He warned of costs to the American economy, as well, but said that without consequences, Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggression wouldn't be contained to Ukraine.

Biden declared that he and all members of Congress, whatever political differences there may be, were joined "with an unwavering resolve that freedom will always triumph over tyranny."

CHICAGO — Airplane manufacturer Boeing says it has suspended major operations in Moscow and temporarily closed its office in Kyiv.

The company said in a statement it is also suspending parts, maintenance and technical support services for Russian airlines.

"As the conflict continues, our teams are focused on ensuring the safety of our teammates in the region," the statement said.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's Defense Ministry says it has evidence that Belarus, a Russian ally, is preparing to send troops into Ukraine.

The ministry statement, posted on Facebook at midnight, said the Belarussian troops have been brought into combat readiness and are concentrated close to Ukraine's northern border.

"During the past 24 hours, according to intelligence findings, there has been significant aircraft activity. In addition, there has been movement of a column of vehicles with food and ammunition" approaching the border," the statement said.

IRVING, Texas — ExxonMobil says it will not invest in new developments in Russia because of Russian military attacks on Ukraine.

The company said in a statement it supports the people of Ukraine as they seek to "defend their freedom and determine their own future as a nation."

ExxonMobil operates the Sakhalin-1 project on behalf of an international consortium of Japanese, Indian and Russian companies. The company says that in response to recent events, they are beginning the process to discontinue operations and developing steps to exit the Sakhalin-1 venture.

Russia takes aim at urban areas; Biden vows Putin will 'pay'

By JIM HEINTZ, YURAS KARMANAU, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press
KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's leader decried Russia's escalation of attacks on crowded cities as a blatant terror campaign, while U.S. President Joe Biden warned that if the Russian leader didn't "pay a price" for the invasion, the aggression wouldn't stop with one country.

"Nobody will forgive. Nobody will forget," Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed after Tuesday's bloodshed on the central square in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, and the deadly bombing of a TV tower in the capital. He called the attack on the square "frank, undisguised terror" and a war crime.

The assault on Kharkiv continued Wednesday, even as Russia said it would be ready to resume talks with the Ukrainian side in the evening. A Russian strike on the regional police and intelligence headquarters, according to the Ukrainian state emergency service. It said three people were wounded.

The strike blew off the roof of the police building and set the top floor on fire, and pieces of the five-story building were strewn across adjacent streets, according to videos and photos released by the emergency service.

Biden used his first State of the Union address to highlight the resolve of a reinvigorated Western alliance that has worked to rearm the Ukrainian military and adopt tough sanctions, which he said have left Russian President Vladimir Putin "isolated in the world more than he has ever been."

"Throughout our history we've learned this lesson — when dictators do not pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos," Biden said. "They keep moving. And the costs and threats to America and the world keep rising."

As Biden spoke, a 40-mile (64-kilometer) convoy of hundreds of Russian tanks and other vehicles advanced slowly on Kyiv, the capital city of nearly 3 million people, in what the West feared was a bid by Putin to topple the government and install a Kremlin-friendly regime.

The invading forces also pressed their assault on other towns and cities, including the strategic ports of Odesa and Mariupol in the south.

As the seventh day of the war dawned Wednesday, Russia found itself increasingly isolated, beset by the sanctions that have thrown its economy into turmoil and left the country practically friendless, apart from a few nations like China, Belarus and North Korea. Leading Russian bank Sberbank announced Wednesday that it is pulling out of European markets amid the tightening Western sanctions.

As fighting raged, the humanitarian situation worsened. Roughly 660,000 people have fled Ukraine, and countless others have taken shelter underground.

The death toll was less clear, with neither Russia nor Ukraine releasing the number of troops lost. The U.N. human rights office said it has recorded 136 civilian deaths, though the actual toll is surely far higher.

One senior Western intelligence official estimated that 5,000 Russian soldiers had been captured or killed in the biggest ground war in Europe since World War II.

Many military experts worry that Russia may be shifting tactics. Moscow's strategy in Chechnya and Syria was to use artillery and air bombardments to pulverize cities and crush fighters' resolve.

Britain's Defense Ministry said it had seen an increase in Russian air and artillery strikes on populated urban areas over the past two days. It also said Kharkiv and Mariupol were encircled by Russian forces and that troops had reportedly moved into the center of a third city, Kherson. Russia's Defense Ministry said it had seized Kherson, though the claim could not be confirmed.

Ukrainian authorities said five people were killed in the attack on the TV tower near central Kyiv. A TV control room and power substation were hit, and at least some Ukrainian channels briefly stopped broadcasting, officials said.

Zelenskyy's office reported that the site of the Babi Yar Holocaust memorial, which is adjacent to the TV tower, was also hit. A spokesman for the memorial said a Jewish cemetery at the site, where Nazi occupiers killed more than 33,000 Jews over two days in 1941, was damaged, but the extent would not be clear until daylight.

Zelenskyy expressed outrage Wednesday at the attack on Babi Yar and concern that other historically

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significant and religious sites, such as St. Sophia's Cathedral, could be targeted.

"This is beyond humanity. Such missile strike means that for many Russians our Kyiv is absolutely foreign," Zelenskyy said in a speech posted on Facebook. "They have orders to erase our history, our country and all of us."

Russia previously told people living near transmission facilities used by Ukraine's intelligence agency to leave their homes. But Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov claimed Wednesday that the airstrike on the TV tower did not hit any residential buildings. He did not address the reported deaths or the damage to Babi Yar.

In Kharkiv, with a population of about 1.5 million, at least six people were killed when the region's administrative building on Freedom Square was hit with what was believed to be a missile. The Slovenian Foreign Ministry said its consulate in Kharkiv, located in another large building on the square, was destroyed.

The attack on the square — the nucleus of public life in the city — was seen by many Ukrainians as brazen evidence that the Russian invasion wasn't just about hitting military targets but also about breaking their spirit.

The bombardment blew out windows and walls of buildings that ring the square, which was piled high with debris and dust. Inside one building, chunks of plaster were scattered, and doors lay across hallways.

Another Russian airstrike hit a residential area in the city of Zhytomyr. Ukraine's emergency services said Tuesday's strike killed at least two people, burned three homes and broke the windows in a nearby hospital. About 85 miles (140 kilometers) west of Kyiv, Zhytomyr is the home of the elite 95th Air Assault Brigade, which may have been the intended target.

In the southern port city of Mariupol, the mayor said the attacks were relentless.

"They have been flattening us non-stop for 12 hours now," Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko was quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying. "We cannot even take the wounded from the streets, from houses and apartments today, since the shelling does not stop."

Boychenko referred to Russia's actions as a "genocide" — using the same word that Putin has used to justify the invasion.

Zelenskyy has mocked Russia's claim that it is going after only military targets, noting that 16 children were killed on Monday.

"Where are the children? What kind of military factories do they work at?" Zelenskyy said.

Human Rights Watch said it documented a cluster bomb attack outside a hospital in Ukraine's east in recent days. Residents also reported the use of such weapons in Kharkiv and Kiyanka village. The Kremlin denied using cluster bombs.

Cluster bombs shoot smaller "bomblets" over a large area, many of which fail to explode until long after they've been dropped. If their use is confirmed, that would represent a new level of brutality in the war.

As the fighting raged, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that a Russian would be ready to resume talks Wednesday evening with Ukrainian officials, a day after Zelenskyy said Russia should stop bombing first.

The first talks between Russia and Ukraine since the invasion were held Monday, but ended with only an agreement to talk again.

Moscow made new threats of escalation Tuesday, days after raising the specter of nuclear war. A top Kremlin official warned that the West's "economic war" against Russia could turn into a "real one."

Inside Russia, a top radio station critical of the Kremlin was taken off the air after authorities threatened to shut it down over its coverage of the invasion. Among other things, the Kremlin is not allowing the fighting to be referred to as an "invasion" or "war."

Ukraine's Defense Ministry said it had evidence that Belarus, a Russian ally, is preparing to send troops into Ukraine. A ministry statement posted early Wednesday on Facebook said the Belarusian troops have been brought into combat readiness and are concentrated close to Ukraine's northern border. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has said his country has no plans to join the fight.

A senior U.S. defense official said that Russia's military progress — including by the massive convoy — has slowed, plagued by logistical and supply problems. Some Russian military columns have run out of

gas and food, the official said, and morale has suffered as a result.

Overall, the Russian military has been stalled by fierce resistance on the ground and a surprising inability to completely dominate Ukraine's airspace.

The immense convoy, with vehicles packed together along narrow roads, would seemingly be "a big fat target" for Ukrainian forces, the senior Western intelligence official said on condition of anonymity. But it also showed Russia was comfortable that they wouldn't come attack by air, rocket or missile, the official said.

New Zealand protesters set fires as police break up camp

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Thick black smoke billowed across the grounds of New Zealand's Parliament and sirens blared on Wednesday as retreating protesters against coronavirus vaccine mandates set fire to tents, mattresses and chairs.

It appeared to be a final act of defiance as police broke up the camp that protesters first set up more than three weeks ago. Police retook control of the Parliament grounds although dozens of protesters remained in nearby streets, some hurling objects at officers. Parliament's once carefully manicured grounds were left scarred, a children's slide in ruins.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said that in planning the operation, police had expected hostility, resistance and violence — but it was another thing entirely to witness it.

"I was both angry and also deeply saddened. To see the Parliament — your Parliament, our Parliament — desecrated in that way, and a children's playground destroyed, by a small group of illegal protesters," Ardern said. "But, as I say, it's not something that will define New Zealand's response to this pandemic."

Earlier, police wearing riot gear and using pepper spray had moved in on hundreds of people who had been occupying the grounds and surrounding streets. Police efforts in the morning focused on the periphery of the protest before turning to the main camp in the afternoon.

It was the most significant use of force to date by authorities against the demonstrators. As they retreated in the afternoon, they tossed objects onto several fires, which police doused with water hoses.

Protesters said in a statement they were united in wanting mandates dropped and to make their own informed choices regarding their health, free from coercion and punishment. They said the vast majority of protesters had been well-behaved and had chosen to camp as a last resort after other options for dialogue were quashed.

The operation began at dawn, when police started telling people over loudspeakers they were trespassing and needed to leave, while officers tore down tents in peripheral areas and a police helicopter circled overhead. Some protesters confronted police and used milk to try and clear their eyes from pepper spray.

Police also towed some of the 300 or so cars, vans and trucks that protesters have used to block streets. The convoy was inspired by similar protests in Canada and has sparked other rallies around New Zealand, leading to a more charged political atmosphere.

Ardern's security detail has been increased after protesters heckled her at events, including as she was leaving a school visit in Christchurch last week.

Police Commissioner Andrew Coster told reporters they had brought in several hundred additional officers from around the country for the operation, which would continue until all the vehicles and tents were gone.

Coster said some protesters had sprayed fire extinguishers and thrown paint at officers as they advanced, and others had used makeshift shields and barricades. He said a laser pointer was aimed at the police helicopter.

By evening, police reported they had towed about 50 vehicles and another 30 had left. They had arrested 65 people for trespassing, causing damage and carrying weapons. And three officers had been treated at a local hospital for non-life-threatening injuries.

Coster said officers decided to move in because previously constructive talks with protest leaders weren't progressing and many genuine protesters had left and been replaced by people more intent on violent confrontation.

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"I was very clear of our approach, which was to de-escalate. There is no interest from anyone here of turning this into a fight," Coster said. "However, this protest has tipped over a balance and it now needs to end."

Ardern on Wednesday said the protest had been fueled by misinformation and conspiracy theories. She also pointed out that COVID-19 had spread at the protest and some protesters had been hospitalized.

Lawmakers across all parties had refused to meet with the protesters.

Last week one protester drove a car toward a police line, narrowly avoiding officers, and police said some of the protesters had thrown human feces at them.

Before Wednesday's operation, police had arrested 132 protesters and laid various charges against some of them.

Protesters have been well organized, setting up tents on the lawns outside Parliament and trucking in portable toilets, crates of donated food, and bales of straw to lay down when the grass turned to mud. They even dug a vegetable garden, set up a day care tent, and assembled makeshift showers as they signaled their intent to stay for a long time.

At one point, Parliament Speaker Trevor Mallard turned on the sprinklers and blasted Barry Manilow tunes in a failed effort to make them leave.

New Zealand is experiencing its biggest outbreak since the pandemic began as the omicron variant spreads. On Wednesday, health authorities reported a record 22,000 new daily cases.

Ardern has said she plans to begin easing virus mandates and restrictions after the peak of the omicron outbreak has passed.

About 77% of New Zealand's population is vaccinated with two doses.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, New Zealand has reported fewer than 100 virus deaths among its population of 5 million, after it imposed strict border controls and lockdowns to eliminate earlier outbreaks.

State of the Union: Biden vows to halt Russia, hit inflation

By ZEKE MILLER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Addressing a concerned nation and anxious world, President Joe Biden vowed in his first State of the Union address Tuesday night to check Russian aggression in Ukraine, tame soaring U.S. inflation and deal with the fading but still dangerous coronavirus.

Biden declared that he and all members of Congress, whatever their political differences, are joined "with an unwavering resolve that freedom will always triumph over tyranny." He asked lawmakers crowding the House chamber to stand and salute the Ukrainians as he began his speech. They stood and cheered.

It was a notable show of unity after a long year of bitter acrimony between Biden's Democratic coalition and the Republican opposition.

Biden's 62-minute speech, which was split between attention to war abroad and worries at home — reflected the same balancing act he now faces in his presidency. He must marshal allied resolve against Russia's aggression while tending to inflation, COVID-19 fatigue and sagging approval ratings heading into the midterm elections.

Aiming to build on momentum from the speech, Biden will head to Wisconsin on Wednesday in an effort to show Americans that his domestic agenda is working. His vice president and Cabinet members will fan out around the country to amplify the message.

Biden heads again to an old bridge set to be repaired — increasingly a symbol for his administration, tangible evidence of the nation that he's working to update. This time, it's a wrought-iron bridge that connects Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin, across the St. Louis Bay.

The bridge will be replaced using funds from the massive infrastructure plan signed into law last year, a signature piece of bipartisan legislation and proof — Biden says — that the GOP and Democrats can still work together.

In Tuesday's speech, Biden highlighted the bravery of Ukrainian defenders and a newly reinvigorated Western alliance that has worked to rearm the Ukrainian military and cripple Russia's economy through

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sanctions. He acknowledged costs to the American economy, as well, but warned ominously that without consequences, Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggression wouldn't be contained to Ukraine.

"Throughout our history we've learned this lesson – when dictators do not pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos," Biden said. "They keep moving. And, the costs and threats to America and the world keep rising."

As Biden spoke, Russian forces were escalating their attacks in Ukraine, having bombarded the central square of country's second-biggest city and Kyiv's main TV tower, killing at least five people. The Babi Yar Holocaust memorial was also damaged.

Biden announced that the U.S. is following Canada and the European Union in banning Russian planes from its airspace in retaliation for the invasion of Ukraine. He also said the Justice Department was launching a task force to go after Russian oligarchs, whom he called "corrupt leaders who have bilked billions of dollars off this violent regime."

"We are coming for your ill-begotten gains," he said, pledging that the U.S. and European allies were after their yachts, luxury apartments and private jets.

Biden pivoted in his speech from the troubles abroad to those at home. Even before the Russian invasion sent energy costs skyrocketing, prices for American families had been rising, and the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hurt families and the country's economy.

Biden outlined plans to address inflation by reinvesting in American manufacturing capacity, speeding supply chains and reducing the burden of childcare and eldercare on workers.

"Too many families are struggling to keep up with the bills," Biden said. "Inflation is robbing them of the gains they might otherwise feel. I get it. That's why my top priority is getting prices under control."

In one sign of national progress on the pandemic, Biden entered the House chamber without a mask, as coronavirus cases decline and new federal guidance tries to nudge the public back to pre-pandemic activities. But there was evidence of ongoing tension as well: The Capitol was newly fenced due to security concerns after last year's insurrection.

Set against disquiet at home and danger abroad, the White House had conceived Tuesday night's speech as an opportunity to highlight the improving coronavirus outlook, rebrand Biden's domestic policy priorities and show a path to lower costs for families grappling with soaring inflation. But events took a turn toward world affairs with last week's Russian invasion of Ukraine and nuclear saber-rattling by Putin.

As is customary, one Cabinet secretary, in this case Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, was kept in a secure location during the address, ready to take over the government in the event of a catastrophe.

The State of the Union is typically an address targeted to a national audience, but this year's had the world watching. In an interview with CNN and Reuters, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Biden to deliver a strong and "useful" message about Russia's invasion. In a show of unity, Ukrainian Ambassador to the U.S. Oksana Markarova joined first lady Jill Biden in the House gallery for the speech.

In a rare discordant moment, Rep. Lauren Boebert of Colorado yelled out that Biden was to blame for the 13 service members who were killed during last August's chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

"You put them in. Thirteen of them," Boebert yelled as Biden mentioned his late son Beau, a veteran who died from brain cancer and served near toxic military burn pits, used extensively in Iraq and Afghanistan. Biden is pursuing legislation to help veterans suffering exposure and other injuries.

While the crisis in Eastern Europe may have helped to cool partisan tensions in Washington, it didn't erase the political and cultural discord that is casting doubt on Biden's ability to deliver.

A February AP-NORC poll found that more people disapproved than approved of how Biden is handling his job, 55% to 44%. That's down from a 60% favorable rating last July.

Biden, used his remarks to highlight the progress from a year ago — with the majority of the U.S. population now vaccinated and millions more people at work — but also acknowledged that the job is not yet done, a recognition of American discontent.

"I have come to report on the state of the union," Biden said. "And my report is this: The state of the union is strong — because you, the American people, are strong. We are stronger today than we were a year ago. And we will be stronger a year from now than we are today."

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Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, selected to give the Republican response, said Biden's address came as a blast from the past with rising inflation, rising crime and a resurgent Russia making it feel more like the 1980s than today.

"Even before taking the oath of office, the president said that he wanted to — quote — make America respected around the world again, and to unite us here. He's failed on both fronts," she said.

Biden used his speech to nudge the country back "to more normal routines" after the coronavirus re-shaped American life.

"It's time for Americans to get back to work and fill our great downtowns again," he declared. He said people will be able to order another round of free tests from the government and that his administration was launching a "test to treat" initiative to provide free antiviral pills at pharmacies to those who test positive for the virus.

Where his speech to Congress last year saw the rollout of a massive social spending package, Biden this year largely repackaged past proposals in search of achievable measures he hopes can win bipartisan support in a bitterly divided Congress before the elections.

The president also highlighted investments in everything from internet broadband access to bridge construction from November's \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law as an example of government reaching consensus and delivering change for the nation.

As part of his pitch to voters, he also put 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 said his climate change proposals would cut costs for lower- and middle-income families and create new jobs.

Biden called for lowering 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 people get coverage.

Biden also appealed for action on voting rights, which has failed to win GOP support. And as gun violence rises, he returned to calls to ban assault weapons, a blunt request he hadn't made in months. He called to "fund the police with the resources and training they need to protect our communities."

He led Congress in a bipartisan tribute to retiring Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer and highlighted the biography of federal judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, his nominee to be the first Black woman on the high court.

UN: Droughts, less water in Europe as warming wrecks crops

By ARITZ PARRA and SERGIO RODRIGO Associated Press

LA HERRADURA, Spain (AP) — "Herders and farmers have their feet on the ground, but their eyes on the sky." The old saying is still popular in Spain's rural communities who, faced with recurrent droughts, have historically paraded sculptures of saints to pray for rain.

The saints are out again this year as large swaths of Spain face one of the driest winters on record. Even as irrigation infrastructure boomed along with industrial farming, the country's ubiquitous dams and desalination plants are up against a looming water crisis scientists have been warning about for decades.

"We are facing a drastic situation," said Juan Camacho, a farmer in the southern province of Granada, as he looked hopelessly at withered leaves of avocado plants and their fruits, smaller than usual this year.

Not far from his orchard, the region's largest reservoir is down to 15% of its capacity following over two months without a drop of rain. And at least half of that, Camacho said, "is just muddy water, completely useless."

Declining agricultural yields in Europe — and the battle for diminishing water resources, especially in the southern continent — are perils that lie ahead as global temperatures continue to rise, the world's top climate scientists said this week.

Their conclusions are part of a report by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released Monday. The panel's periodic assessments inform policymaker decisions about how to prevent the planet from warming beyond the 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 Fahrenheit) already gained since industrial times.

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For Europe, heat and flooding in addition to agricultural losses and water scarcity will be major climate impacts, the report said. And while European awareness of global warming motivates policymakers to do more, scientists say the ambition and execution of solutions vary greatly from country to country.

Extreme heat, floods and droughts will lead to widespread disruption of the economy, including damage to infrastructure and energy supplies, the need for more air conditioning and greater water demand, the report warned.

As warming rises faster in Europe than the global mean, panelists paint a picture of a continent divided in two: an increasingly arid south, struggling with desertification and competing for scarcer water — and a north adopting a more traditional Mediterranean climate that could provide some increased crop yields and forest growth, but with risks of its own.

If temperatures rise an additional 1.9 degrees Celsius (3.4 Fahrenheit), corn harvest losses could reach 50%, especially in southern Europe, the report warned. Harvests of wheat, meanwhile, could increase in the north as long as warming doesn't exceed 2 degrees since pre-industrial levels — or 0.9 degrees above the current average temperature.

But this is no silver lining. From a continental perspective, the report says that due to combined heat and drought, "substantive agricultural production losses are projected for most European areas over the 21st century, which will not be offset by gains in Northern Europe."

"There are some vegetables and warm climate crops that might see benefits in the short term," Rachel Licker, a climate expert at the Union of Concerned Scientists, told The Associated Press. "But the major cereal crops, the major commodities, the major crops that are exported and really form the basis of a lot of the economy are the ones that are likely to be negatively affected."

Europe will also suffer other negative impacts. Coastal damage is projected to increase at least tenfold by the end of the century — and, if the 3 degree Celsius (5.4 Fahrenheit) warming threshold is reached, "damage costs and people affected by precipitation and river flooding may double."

For some coastal communities it will be "an existential threat," the report said, adding that traditional lifestyles of the Sami and the Nenets peoples are already under threat in the European Arctic.

Inequality is expected to grow within and among countries as the continent sees more deaths from heatstroke, unbearable summers and irreparable damage to ecosystems.

Joaquín Montes, 50, is among those set to lose more. He is one of roughly 10 million farmers in the European Union who feed 440 million consumers inside and outside the bloc.

Sandwiched between the tourist-magnet Costa del Sol and the Sierra Nevada range in southern Spain, the ravines where Montes' custard apple and avocado orchards sit should have plenty of water.

But with 41% less rain since October than average for the same period between 1980 and 2010, dams contain almost no water. Private ponds that are supposed to last farmers through summer are exhausted. And, with no fresh water replenishing aquifers, salty seawater is making them useless.

"Us farmers, we are used to dealing with drought," said Montes, who learned the job from his father when he was 14. "But every year we see less and less rain. I fear for my livelihood."

Environmentalists say landowners who switched from traditional crops to profitable but thirsty ones such as avocados or mangoes are the tip of a larger problem: industrial-scale, single-crop agriculture that has displaced smaller, traditional farmers.

"The model is one of ill-planning and pure false developmentalism," said Julio Barea, a geologist and water campaigner with the environmental group Greenpeace.

In Spain, the surface of arable land devoted to intensive agriculture with irrigation has increased to a quarter of the total in recent decades, according to official Agriculture Ministry figures, taking over terrain once used for rain-fed crops.

"We are hitting the wall of having no water," Barea said. "And it's going to be catastrophic. We need to change our mindset."

As water scarcity hits southern Europe first, followed by Western and Central Europe, the U.N. report says irrigation will continue to be a solution for some to feed a warming continent, but it will be limited

by water availability.

Additional means for watering crops won't even be an option to consider in places like Spain's southeast, according to food systems expert Marta Rivera-Ferre, who helped review the report.

"The elevated risk of drought there has to let us think again about how best to adapt," she said.

Patrick Verkooijen, chief executive of the Rotterdam-based Global Center on Adaptation, said the report's message is "that for many now the time is already adapt or die."

"The cost of inaction is much higher than the cost of action when it comes to making agriculture and food systems climate-resilient," he said.

Ukrainian maternity ward moves to basement for shelter

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

MARIUPOL, Ukraine (AP) — In a makeshift maternity ward in the basement of a Ukrainian hospital, new mother Kateryna Suharokova struggled to control her emotions as she held her son while doctors upstairs raced to treat victims of Russian shelling.

"I was anxious, anxious about giving birth to the baby in these times," the 30-year-old said, her voice trembling. "I'm thankful to the doctors, who helped this baby to be born in these conditions. I believe that everything will be fine."

The basement of the maternity hospital in Ukraine's coastal city of Mariupol transformed into a bomb shelter and nursery as Russian forces escalated their attacks on crowded urban areas Tuesday. Workers bundled one newborn and carried him down flights of stairs to the basement, where a dimly lit room cramped with beds and cribs sheltered workers and patients.

A similar scene unfolded in Kharkiv, where a maternity ward was moved into a bomb shelter. Mothers there rocked newborns in cradles amid mattresses piled against the windows for protection.

Britain's Defense Ministry said it had seen an increase in Russian air and artillery strikes on populated urban areas in the past few days. Mariupol was one of three cities — along with Kharkiv and Kherson — encircled by Russian forces, the ministry said.

An industrial center on the Azov Sea, Mariupol is seen as a key target for Russian forces for its economic value and its location, which would help Russia establish a land corridor between the Crimean Peninsula and the Russian mainland.

Shelling casualties streamed into the Mariupol maternity hospital, including the body of a young man on a stretcher.

Oleksandr Balash, the head of the anesthesiology department, called to an Associated Press video journalist and lifted a sheet covering the deceased.

"Do I need to say more? This is just a boy," Balash said. "These are all peaceful citizens who were injured in ... a regular neighborhood."

Another woman, bleeding from the mouth, called out in pain as she was treated. Medical professionals performed surgery on others injured during the shelling, and medics transported a man from an ambulance to a gurney so he could be treated.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the latest attacks a brazen campaign of terror.

In Kharkiv, at least six people were killed when the region's administrative building on Freedom Square was hit with what was believed to be a missile. The attack on Ukraine's largest plaza — the nucleus of public life in the city of about 1.5 million — was seen by many Ukrainians as evidence that the Russian invasion wasn't just about hitting military targets but also about breaking their spirit.

Overall death tolls from the fighting remained unclear, but a senior Western intelligence official estimated that more than 5,000 Russian soldiers have been captured or killed. Ukraine has given no overall estimate of troop losses.

Space junk on 5,800-mph collision course with moon

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The moon is about to get walloped by 3 tons of space junk, a punch that will carve out a crater that could fit several semitractor-trailers.

The leftover rocket will smash into the far side of the moon at 5,800 mph (9,300 kph) on Friday, away from telescopes' prying eyes. It may take weeks, even months, to confirm the impact through satellite images.

It's been tumbling haphazardly through space, experts believe, since China launched it nearly a decade ago. But Chinese officials are dubious it's theirs.

No matter whose it is, scientists expect the object to carve out a hole 33 feet to 66 feet (10 to 20 meters) across and send moon dust flying hundreds of miles (kilometers) across the barren, pockmarked surface.

Low-orbiting space junk is relatively easy to track. Objects launching deeper into space are unlikely to hit anything and these far-flung pieces are usually soon forgotten, except by a handful of observers who enjoy playing celestial detective on the side.

SpaceX originally took the rap for the upcoming lunar litter after asteroid tracker Bill Gray identified the collision course in January. He corrected himself a month later, saying the "mystery" object was not a SpaceX Falcon rocket upper stage from the 2015 launch of a deep space climate observatory for NASA.

Gray said it was likely the third stage of a Chinese rocket that sent a test sample capsule to the moon and back in 2014. But Chinese ministry officials said the upper stage had reentered Earth's atmosphere and burned up.

But there were two Chinese missions with similar designations — the test flight and 2020's lunar sample return mission — and U.S. observers believe the two are getting mixed up.

The U.S. Space Command, which tracks lower space junk, confirmed Tuesday that the Chinese upper stage from the 2014 lunar mission never deorbited, as previously indicated in its database. But it could not confirm the country of origin for the object about to strike the moon.

"We focus on objects closer to the Earth," a spokesperson said in a statement.

Gray, a mathematician and physicist, said he's confident now that it's China's rocket.

"I've become a little bit more cautious of such matters," he said. "But I really just don't see any way it could be anything else."

Jonathan McDowell of the Harvard and Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics supports Gray's revised assessment, but notes: "The effect will be the same. It'll leave yet another small crater on the moon."

The moon already bears countless craters, ranging up to 1,600 miles (2,500 kilometers). With little to no real atmosphere, the moon is defenseless against the constant barrage of meteors and asteroids, and the occasional incoming spacecraft, including a few intentionally crashed for science's sake. With no weather, there's no erosion and so impact craters last forever.

China has a lunar lander on the moon's far side, but it will be too far away to detect Friday's impact just north of the equator. NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter will also be out of range. It's unlikely India's moon-orbiting Chandrayaan-2 will be passing by then, either.

"I had been hoping for something (significant) to hit the moon for a long time. Ideally, it would have hit on the near side of the moon at some point where we could actually see it," Gray said.

After initially pinning the upcoming strike on Elon Musk's SpaceX, Gray took another look after an engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory questioned his claim. Now, he's "pretty thoroughly persuaded" it's a Chinese rocket part, based not only on orbital tracking back to its 2014 liftoff, but also data received from its short-lived ham radio experiment.

JPL's Center for Near Earth Object Studies endorses Gray's reassessment. A University of Arizona team also recently identified the Chinese Long March rocket segment from the light reflected off its paint, during telescope observations of the careening cylinder.

It's about 40 feet (12 meters) long and 10 feet (3 meters) in diameter, and doing a every two to three minutes.

Gray said SpaceX never contacted him to challenge his original claim. Neither have the Chinese.

"It's not a SpaceX problem, nor is it a China problem. Nobody is particularly careful about what they do with junk at this sort of orbit," Gray said.

Tracking deep space mission leftovers like this is hard, according to McDowell. The moon's gravity can alter an object's path during flybys, creating uncertainty. And there's no readily available database, McDowell noted, aside from the ones "cobbled together" by himself, Gray and a couple others.

"We are now in an era where many countries and private companies are putting stuff in deep space, so it's time to start to keep track of it," McDowell said. "Right now there's no one, just a few fans in their spare time."

AP FACT CHECK: Biden's State of Union is off on guns, EVs

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER, HOPE YEN and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden related a faulty Democratic talking point about guns in his first State of the Union speech, made his plan on electric vehicles sound more advanced than it is and inflated the sweep of his infrastructure package. On several fronts, he presented ambitions as achievements.

A look at some of his claims Tuesday night and a glance at the Republican response:

COVID-19

BIDEN: "Severe cases are down to a level not seen since July of last year."

THE FACTS: Biden overstated the improvement, omitting a statistic that remains a worrisome marker of the toll from COVID-19.

While hospitalizations indeed are down from last summer, deaths remain high. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID tracker shows 289 deaths on July 1, 2021. This past Monday the CDC tracker reported 1,985 deaths.

GUNS

BIDEN, asking Congress to pass measures he said would reduce gun violence: "Repeal the liability shield that makes gun manufacturers the only industry in America that can't be sued, the only one."

THE FACTS: That's false. While gun manufacturers do have legal protections from being held liable for injuries caused by criminal misuse of their weapons thanks to the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, they are not exempt or immune from being sued.

The law lays out exceptions where manufacturers or dealers can be held liable for damages their weapons cause, such as defects or damages in the design of the gun, negligence, or breach of contract or warranty regarding the purchase of a gun.

Families of victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, sued gun maker Remington, alleging "wrongful marketing" of firearms, and last month agreed to a \$73 million settlement.

ECONOMY

BIDEN, promoting his \$1 trillion infrastructure law: "We're done talking about infrastructure weeks. We're now talking about an infrastructure decade. ... We'll build a national network of 500,000 electric vehicle charging stations."

THE FACTS: Not so fast.

The bipartisan legislation approved by Congress ended up providing just half of the \$15 billion that Biden had envisioned to fulfill a campaign promise of 500,000 charging stations by 2030.

Biden's Build Back Better proposal aimed to fill the gap by adding back billions to pay for charging stations. But Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., in December declared that bill dead in its present form due to cost.

Administration officials now say the infrastructure law will help "pave" the way for up to 500,000 charging outlets by 2030. That's different than charging stations, which could have several outlets. They say private investments could help fill the gap. Currently there are over 100,000 EV outlets in the U.S.

The Transportation Department's plan asks states to build a nationwide network of EV charging stations

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that would place new or upgraded ones every 50 miles along interstate highways. The \$5 billion in federal money over five years relies on cooperation from sprawling rural communities in the U.S., which are less likely to own EVs due to their typically higher price.

States are expected to start construction as early as fall.

BIDEN, on Intel's plans for new factories in central Ohio: "Up to eight state-of-the-art factories in one place, 10,000 new jobs."

THE FACTS: His statement is premature. That many factories are not imminent and may or may not ever be built.

Earlier this year, Intel announced it would open two factories expected to employ 3,000 people. The other 7,000 positions the project is slated to create are temporary construction jobs. It is also planning a chip foundry business that makes chips designed by other firms. Construction is expected to start this year.

Intel has raised the possibility of constructing up to six more factories over the next decade, which could bring the total number of factory workers up to 10,000. But that is only a prospect, years away.

BIDEN: "The pandemic also disrupted the global supply chain ... Look at cars last year. One third of all the inflation was because of automobile sales. There weren't enough semiconductors to make all the cars that people wanted to buy. And guess what? Prices of automobiles went way up ... And so we have a choice. One way to fight inflation is to drag down wages and make Americans poorer. I think I have a better idea to fight inflation. Lower your costs and not your wages. Folks, that means make more cars and semi conductors in America. More infrastructure and innovation in America. More goods moving faster and cheaper in America ... Instead of relying on foreign supply chains let's make it in America."

THE FACTS: It's dubious to suggest that more domestic manufacturing means less inflation.

Manufactured products made overseas, particularly in countries such as China or Mexico where wages are lower, are generally cheaper than U.S.-made goods.

Biden also places too much weight on supply chain disruptions from overseas as a factor in the worst inflation in four decades. Although those problems indeed have been a major factor in driving up costs, inflation is increasingly showing up in other areas, such as rents and restaurant meals, that reflect the rapid growth of the economy and wages in the past year and not a global supply bottleneck. Those trends are likely to keep pushing up prices even as supply chains recover.

INFRASTRUCTURE LAW

BIDEN on the infrastructure bill: "The single biggest investment in history was a bipartisan effort."

THE FACTS: No, it wasn't that historic.

Biden's infrastructure bill was big, adding \$550 billion in fresh spending on roads, bridges, and broadband Internet over five years. But measured as a proportion of the U.S. economy, it is slightly below the 1.36% of the nation's gross domestic product that was spent on infrastructure, on average, during the first four years of the New Deal, according to an analysis by the Brookings Institution. It is even further below the roughly 2% spent on infrastructure in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

REPUBLICAN RESPONSE

IOWA GOV. KIM REYNOLDS, criticizing the Biden administration's handling of immigration and boasting about Republican governors' attention to the issue: "We've actually gone to the border — something that our president and vice president have yet to do since taking office."

THE FACTS: Not true. Vice President Kamala Harris visited the border last year. Biden hasn't gone yet.

Harris toured a Customs and Border Protection processing center in El Paso, Texas, and met migrant children there. She also stopped by an intake center on the border and held a discussion with local community organizations.

The half-day trip in June came after months of criticism from Republicans and some in her own party

over her absence and that of Biden from the border at a time when immigration officers have logged record numbers of encounters with migrants attempting to cross into the U.S.

UN: Africa, already suffering from warming, will see worse

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

Although Africa has contributed relatively little to the planet's greenhouse gas emissions, the continent has suffered some of the world's heaviest impacts of climate change, from famine to flooding.

Yet from its coral reefs to its highest peaks, the reverberations of human-caused global warming will only get worse, according to a new United Nations report

The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted Monday that Saharan flooding, heat and drought will increase, Africa's rich array of wildlife and plants will decline and glaciers on its most iconic mountains will disappear in coming decades.

On a continent already grappling with high poverty levels and food insecurity, the panel warned that fishermen and farmers will feel the pain of future climate change on their lives and livelihoods.

In Kenya, farmer Safari Mbuvi already is trying to weather his country's a four-year drought — and watching his crops fail, again and again.

"Since I was young, my father used to get a bounty harvest in this farm, but now, there seems to be a change in climate and the rains are no longer dependable," he said. "I will not harvest anything, not even a single sack of maize is possible. ... And I am not the only one. Every farmer in this area has lost everything."

Warming temperatures will weaken Africa's food production system by leading to water scarcity and shorter growing seasons, the U.N. report said. Yields of olives, sorghum, coffee, tea and livestock production are expected to decline.

"Agricultural productivity growth has been reduced by 34% since 1961 due to climate change more than any other region," the panel said.

Climate change, along with conflicts, instability and economic crises, has contributed to hunger. Since 2012, the undernourished population in sub-Saharan Africa has increased by 45.6%, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. And in 2020, approximately 98 million people suffered from acute food insecurity and needed humanitarian assistance in Africa, said the Global Report on Food Crises by the World Food Programme.

If the world warms just another degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2050, an additional 1.4 million African children will suffer severe stunting from malnutrition that limits growth and cognitive development, the IPCC said.

"The lack of food and under-nutrition are strongly linked with hot climates in the sub-Saharan area and less rainfall in West and Central Africa," the panel said in a FAQ document. "Climate change can undermine children's education attainment, thus reducing their chances for well-paid jobs or higher incomes later in life."

Jean Paul Adam, who heads the climate change division at the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa, said, "Africa constitutes 17% of global population but only accounts for less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions. This is the region of the world already being severely impacted of climate change plus having an extremely low adaptive capacity."

Climate change has a major social injustice component, with the poor hit harder by pollution from the rich, said former Ireland President Mary Robinson, now with The Elders, a Nelson Mandela- founded group of senior statesmen. "All of the injustices are captured by looking at the region of Africa."

Drought is a problem that hits the continent particularly hard. While only 7% of the world's disasters were drought related, they caused slightly more than one-third of the disaster deaths, "mostly in Africa," the IPCC report said.

Droughts have also reduced Africa's hydropower by about 5% compared to the long-term average, hindering growth, the report said.

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"When we look at impacts, it isn't just that Africa is getting hit with the droughts and cyclones and the sea level rise and the disruption of rainfall patterns," said Canadian climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist for The Nature Conservancy. "It's that their vulnerability is so much higher than a lot of other places."

Scientists say it is impossible to untangle Africa's poverty and harm from climate change.

"Africa gets the short shrift because it's in some ways more vulnerable to physical impacts, but also because there's going to be a lot of people living on less than a dollar a day," said climate scientist Zeke Hausfather of the Breakthrough Institute.

Monday's report said sea-surface temperatures are projected to rise, threatening fragile marine ecosystems, including East African coral reefs. The report warns of threats posed to livelihoods of 12.3 million people who depend on fisheries.

The report said global warming also will hit Africa's famous wildlife and highest mountains.

It predicted glacier ice covers on the Ruwenzori Mountains and Mount Kenya would be gone by 2030 and that Mount Kilimanjaro would lose its around 2040.

By 2100, the report said, climate change is expected to lead to loss of more than half of African bird and mammal species — and a 20% to 25% decline in the productivity of Africa's lakes and plant species. Increased damage to coral reefs from pollution and climate change is expected to harm fisheries and overall marine biodiversity.

In the coming decades, Africa's mainland, islands and coastal cities will be exposed to climate change risks that can seriously undermine economic sectors such agriculture, tourism, transportation and energy.

The report predicts reduced frequency of Category 5 cyclones, although it says they are projected to be more intense with high impacts upon landfall.

By 2030, the report projects that 108 to 116 million people in Africa will be exposed to sea-level rise — and that without adaptation measures, 12 major coastal cities will suffer a total of \$65 billion to \$86.5 billion in damages.

Rapid African urbanization, inadequate infrastructure as well growth of informal settlements will expose more people to climate hazards, the report said.

It noted that sub-Saharan Africa is the only region that has recorded increasing rates of flood mortality since the 1990 — and that millions of people were displaced by weather-related causes in 2018 and 2019.

"A lot of cities are completely unprepared for the scale of the challenges ahead, or even actively making the situation worse," said Kaisa Kosonen a senior policy advisor at Greenpeace Nordic. "Real action on climate change requires resilient urban development and justice."

UN: Climate change to uproot millions, especially in Asia

By VICTORIA MILKO and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — The walls of Saifullah's home in northern Jakarta are lined like tree rings, marking how high the floodwaters have reached each year -- some more than four feet from the damp dirt floor.

When the water gets too high, Saifullah, who like many Indonesians only uses one name, sends his family to stay with friends. He guards the house until the water can be drained using a makeshift pump. If the pump stops working, he uses a bucket or just waits until the water recedes.

"It's a normal thing here," Saifullah, 73, said. "But this is our home. Where should we go?"

As the world's most rapidly sinking major city, Jakarta demonstrates how climate change is making more places uninhabitable. With an estimated one-third of the city expected to be submerged in the coming decades — in part because of the rising Java Sea — the Indonesian government is planning to move its capital some 1,240 miles (2,000 kilometers) northeast to the island of Borneo, relocating as many as 1.5 million civil servants.

It's a huge undertaking and part of the mass movement of people that is expected to accelerate in the years ahead.

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A staggering 143 million people will likely be uprooted over the next 30 years by rising seas, drought, searing temperatures and other climate catastrophes, according to an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report published Monday by the United Nations.

In Asia, governments are already scrambling to deal with it.

One in three migrants in the world today comes from Asia, which leads the world in the number of people being displaced by extreme weather, largely storms and flooding, according to the report. With rural villages emptying out and megacities like Jakarta at risk, scientists predict migration flows and the need for planned relocations will only grow.

"Under all global warming levels, some regions that are presently densely populated will become unsafe or uninhabitable," the report said.

By one estimate, as many as 40 million people in South Asia may be forced to move over the next 30 years because of a lack of water, crop failure, storm surges and other disasters.

Rising temperatures are of particular concern, said Stanford University environmental scientist Chris Field, who chaired the U.N. report in previous years.

"There are relatively few places on Earth that are simply too hot to live now," he said. "But it's beginning to look like in Asia, there may be more of those in the future and we need to think really hard about the implications of that."

No nation offers asylum or other legal protections to people displaced specifically because of climate change, though the Biden administration has studied the idea.

People leave their homes for a variety of reasons including violence and poverty, but what's happening in Bangladesh demonstrates the role climate change also plays, said Amali Tower, who founded the organization Climate Refugees.

Scientists predict as many as 2 million people in the low-lying country may be displaced by rising seas by 2050. Already, more than 2,000 migrants arrive at its capital of Dhaka every day, many fleeing coastal towns.

"You can see the actual movement of people. You can actually see the increasing disasters. It's tangible," Tower said.

The migration flows can be slowed if countries like the United States and European nations act now to drop their greenhouse gas emissions to zero, she said. Others say richer countries that produce more emissions should offer humanitarian visas to people from countries that are disproportionately impacted.

Dealing with climate migrants will become a major policy issue for Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America as well over the next few decades, according to the U.N. report. Most people will be moving from rural areas to cities, especially in Asia where two-thirds of the population could be urban in 30 years.

"It's essentially people migrating from rural areas and then probably squatting in a slum somewhere," said Abhas Jha, a practice manager with the World Bank's Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management in South Asia.

The migration doesn't have to cause a crisis, said Vittoria Zanuso, executive director of the Mayors Migration Council, a global group of city leaders.

In northern Dhaka, for example, officials are building shelters for climate migrants and improving the water supply. They also are working with smaller cities to be designated "climate havens" that welcome migrants, Zanuso said.

The influx of a new work force offers smaller cities an opportunity for economic growth, she said. And it prevents migrants who may be fleeing villages threatened by rising seas from seeking refuge in a city with scarce water supplies and basically "swapping one climate risk for another."

In coming years, she said helping prepare cities for the influx of migrants will be key: "They are on the frontlines."

MLB cancels opening day after sides fail to end lockout

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

JUPITER, Fla. (AP) — Major League Baseball's financial fight cost regular-season games for the first time in 27 years when often acrimonious talks to end a management lockout collapsed Tuesday and Commissioner Rob Manfred scrapped March 31 openers.

With owners and players unable to agree on a contract to replace the collective bargaining agreement that expired Dec. 1, Manfred canceled the first two series for each of the 30 teams, cutting each club's schedule from 162 games to likely 156 at most. A total of 91 games were erased.

"We exhausted every possibility of reaching an agreement before the cancellation of games," Manfred said during a news conference in the left-field corner of Roger Dean Stadium as fans outside the spring training home of the Miami Marlins and St. Louis Cardinals chanted: "We want baseball!"

Five miles away and 90 minutes later, the players' association held its own news conference at a hotel, with union head Tony Clark and chief negotiator Bruce Meyer flanked by pitchers Max Scherzer and Andrew Miller — both members of the union's eight-man executive subcommittee — and Noah Syndergaard seated among about a dozen players in the audience.

"This has been making in the years, seeing things that have happened over the course specifically of this last CBA," Scherzer said, "things that have happened to different players in certain situations, that we absolutely have to have corrections."

Manfred vowed players will not receive salary or major league service for games missed, exacerbating already visceral anger of the roughly 1,200 players locked into a contest of will against 30 controlling owners. Manfred maintained daily interleague play made rescheduling impossible.

"To say they won't reschedule games if games are canceled or they won't pay players for those games that are canceled is solely their position," Meyer said. "We would have a different position."

Talks that began last April went nowhere, and MLB locked out players Dec. 2 in the sport's first work stoppage since 1995. There were just six economic negotiating sessions over the next 2 1/2 months in New York, but more intensive talks began Feb. 21 in Florida.

After 13 negotiating sessions over 16 1/2 hours Monday, the sides recessed at 2:30 a.m. having made progress but still far apart on key economic issues.

Tone changed with the daylight, and the league sent the players what it termed a "best offer" on the ninth straight day of talks. The union held a Zoom call of 30-40 players and reacted angrily with a rejection. Both sides said they were leaving town, and there was no date scheduled for bargaining to resume.

At 5:07 p.m. of the lockout's 90th day, Manfred declared the opposite of play ball!

"Against that backdrop of growing revenues and record profits for owners of the league," Clark said, "players seek and deserve nothing more than fundamental fairness."

Baseball's ninth work stoppage will be the fourth causing regular-season games to be canceled, leaving ballparks quiet from Fenway Park to Dodger Stadium.

Caught in the crossfire of the money fight, players said they would only discuss — but not commit to — possible on-field changes that Manfred says are needed, such as pitch clocks and the elimination of defensive shifts. An expanded postseason was another casualty — for now.

"Manfred gotta go," tweeted Chicago Cubs pitcher Marcus Stroman.

The bulk of fan ire on social media was aimed at Manfred, who was spotted practicing his golf swing between bargaining sessions by an Associated Press photographer Tuesday. Others were upset that Manfred was laughing and jovial with reporters at his news conference announcing the cancellation.

"Have no clue how he has the ability to laugh about anything right now," Los Angeles Angels pitcher Michael Lorenzen tweeted. "Mind is blown."

Players are angry payrolls decreased by 4% from 2015 through last year and many teams jettisoned a portion of high-priced veteran journeymen in favor of lower-priced youth.

"The game has suffered damage for a while now. ... The game has been manipulated," Clark said. "The value inherent and how players are respected and viewed has changed. Players have been commoditized,

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monetized in a way that is really hard to explain.”

Some clubs gave up on competing in the short term to better position themselves for future seasons.

“We have been screaming for years about competition issues,” Miller said.

The sport will be upended by its second shortened season in three years following a 2020 schedule cut to 60 games because of the pandemic. The disruption will create another issue if 15 days are wiped out and stars such as Shohei Ohtani, Pete Alonso, Jake Cronenworth and Jonathan India would be delayed an extra year from free agency.

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

The first 86 games of the 1973 season were canceled by a strike over pension negotiations, the 1981 season was fractured by a 50-day midseason strike over free agency compensation rules that canceled 713 games, and a strike that started in August 1994 over management’s attempt to gain a salary cap canceled the final 669 regular-season games and the World Series. It also led to a three-week delay of the 1995 season, when schedules were cut from 162 games to 144.

The most contentious proposals involve luxury tax thresholds, the size of a new bonus pool for pre-arbitration players and minimum salaries.

MLB proposed raising the tax threshold from \$210 million to \$220 million in each of the next three seasons, \$224 million in 2025 and \$230 million in 2026.

“We have a payroll disparity problem,” Manfred said, “and to weaken the only mechanism in the agreement that’s designed to promote some semblance of competitive balance is just something that I don’t think the club group is prepared to do right now.”

Players asked for \$238 million this year, \$244 million in 2023, \$250 million in 2024, \$256 million in 2025 and \$263 million in 2026.

“We’re seeing it act as a salary cap,” Scherzer said. “The San Diego Padres have the higher payroll than the New York Yankees.”

MLB offered \$25 million annually for a new bonus pool for pre-arbitration players, and the union \$85 million this year, with \$5 million yearly increases.

“There’s dollars to be allocated toward them that would fairly compensate their contributions on the field, more so than what’s on the table,” Scherzer said.

MLB proposed raising the minimum salary from \$570,500 to \$700,000 this year, with increases of \$10,000 annually, and the union asked for \$725,000 this year, \$745,000 in 2023, \$765,000 in 2024 and increases for 2025 and 2026 based on the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners.

“The last five years have been very difficult years from a revenue perspective for the industry given the pandemic,” Manfred said.

Stocks fall, oil tops \$100 a barrel as Ukraine war rages

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets slid Wednesday and oil prices surged more than \$5 per barrel as Russian forces stepped up attacks on Ukrainian cities.

Shanghai, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul declined as President Vladimir Putin’s invasion fueled fears of global economic turmoil. Sydney gained.

Wall Street’s benchmark S&P index lost 1.5% on Tuesday, deepening a two-month-old skid.

The war is adding to worries about global economic growth in the face of plans by the Federal Reserve and other central banks to fight surging inflation by raising interest rates.

“The conspiracy of geopolitical uncertainty and stagflation-type impulses is a brutal shock,” Tan Boon Heng of Mizuho Bank said in a report.

Investors await more clues about possible rate hikes when Fed Chair Jerome Powell speaks Wednesday before Congress.

Oil prices rose despite an agreement by the United States and other major governments in the Interna-

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tional Energy Agency to release 60 million barrels from strategic reserves to stabilize supply.

Benchmark U.S. crude jumped another \$5.09 to \$108.45 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It rose \$7.69 on Tuesday to \$103.41.

Brent crude, the price basis for international oils, gained \$5.33 to \$110.28 per barrel in London. It soared \$7 the previous session to \$104.97.

"Markets dismissed the notion that 60 million barrels of strategic reserves released will be consequential to the risks of Russian supply jeopardized," said Tan of Mizuho. "Russia pumps more than that in just six days."

Late Tuesday, President Joe Biden announced he was joining U.S. allies in closing the country's air space to Russian aircraft.

In an annual State of the Union speech, Biden said he would try to cushion the impact of higher oil prices on Americans. "I will use every tool at our disposal to protect American businesses and consumers," Biden said.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo lost 1.7% to 26,378.25 and the Shanghai Composite Index shed 0.5% to 3,468.56. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong sank 1.1% to 22,500.09 and the Kospi in Seoul was off less than 0.1% at 2,697.85.

Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 added 0.3% to 7,114.80 after government data showed Australia's economy grew by 3.4% in the final three months of 2021 over the previous quarter and consumer spending was strong.

New Zealand and Singapore declined while Jakarta and Bangkok advanced.

Moscow's attack on Ukraine and Russian threats of retaliation in response to Western sanctions also have roiled global markets for wheat and other commodities.

Economists say Asian economies are less exposed to the war than Europe but those that need imported oil will be hit by rising global prices, adding to inflation pressure and depressing business and consumer activity.

Russia is the No. 2 global crude exporter, behind Saudi Arabia. Any potential disruption in supply could boost prices and add to persistent inflation pressures around the world.

Prices of wheat, of which both Russia and Ukraine are important exporters, have risen more than 20% over one month ago.

Investors shifted money into the safe haven of government bonds, pushing up their market price and narrowing the yield, or the difference between the current price and the payout at maturity.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell by an unusually wide margin, to 1.73% from Monday's 1.83%.

The value of Russia's ruble fell further to 0.9 U.S. cents despite the Russian central bank's decision Monday to raise interest rates to defend the currency.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 declined to 4,306.26. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 1.8% to 33,294.95. The Nasdaq composite slid 1.6% to 13,532.46.

JPMorgan Chase fell 3.8% and Bank of America slid 3.9%.

More than 70% of the stocks in the S&P 500 closed lower. Technology, industrials and communication companies were among the biggest drags on the benchmark index.

Energy stocks rose. Occidental Petroleum jumped 7%.

Companies were cutting ties with Russia. Apple said Tuesday it has stopped selling its iPhone and other popular products there. BP and Shell are pulling out of investments in the Russian oil industry.

The dollar gained to 115.00 yen from Tuesday's 114.86 yen. The euro advanced to \$1.1129 from \$1.1123.

Cultural backlash intensifies against Russia over invasion

By NICOLE WINFIELD and JAKE COYLE Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The cultural backlash against Russia's invasion of Ukraine intensified Tuesday as the Cannes Film Festival said no Russian delegations would be welcome this year and the Venice festival announced free screenings of a film about the 2014 conflict in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region.

The announcements by Europe's two premier film festivals came on the heels of other high-profile pro-

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tests in the arts, including Hollywood's decision to pull films scheduled for release in Russia and the Munich Philharmonic's decision to fire chief conductor Valery Gergiev. The orchestra, joined by other orchestras and festivals linked to Gergiev, cited his support for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his refusal to reject the invasion.

Cannes, which is scheduled for May, is the most global of film festivals and its international village of flag-waving pavilions annually hosts more than 80 countries from around the world.

In a statement, festival organizers said the ban on any official Russian delegation or individuals linked to the Kremlin would remain "unless the war of assault ends in conditions that will satisfy the Ukrainian people."

The festival didn't rule out accepting films from Russia. In recent years, Cannes has showcased films from filmmakers like Kirill Serebrennikov, even though the director hasn't been able to attend. Serebrennikov is under a three-year travel ban after being accused of embezzlement by the Russian government in a case that was protested by the Russian artistic community and in Europe.

Hollywood continued pulling its films out of Russian theaters. After the Walt Disney Co., Warner Bros. and Sony announced they would halt distributing films in Russia, including Warner's highly anticipated "The Batman," Paramount Pictures announced likewise on Tuesday. That includes upcoming releases like "Sonic the Hedgehog 2" and "The Lost City."

The Venice Film Festival, meanwhile, said it was organizing free screenings of the film "Reflection," about the conflict in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region as a sign of solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

The screenings are scheduled for next week in Rome, Milan and Venice.

The film, which was presented in competition at Venice last year, tells the story of a Ukrainian surgeon who is taken prisoner by Russia during the Donbas conflict in eastern Ukraine. In 2014, Russia threw its weight behind an insurgency in the mostly Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine region known as Donbas, where Russia-backed rebels seized government buildings and proclaimed the creation of "people's republics."

"Reflection" shows the horrors of war as well as the surgeon's efforts to rebuild relationships after he was freed.

It was directed by Ukrainian director Valentyn Vasyanovych, whose film "Atlantis" in 2019 was also set in eastern Ukraine and dealt with similar issues of war and trauma. "Atlantis" won the Best Film award in the experimental Orizzonti section of the Venice Film Festival 2019 and was Ukraine's candidate for the Oscars.

Earlier this week, the art exhibition of the Venice Biennale, of which the annual film festival is a part, announced the curator and artists of Russia's pavillion had quit their positions to protest the war in Ukraine.

Last week, the European Broadcasting Union announced Russia would not be allowed to enter an act for this year's Eurovision Song Contest, to be held in Turin in May.

The 2016 winner of the Eurovision contest was Ukrainian singer Jamala, who won with a song about the 1944 deportations of Crimean Tatars by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. On Tuesday, it emerged that she had fled Ukraine for Turkey with her own two children.

A Crimean Tatar, Jamala told reporters in Istanbul that she never imagined that she would end up sharing the same fate as her grandmother, who she said "had just 15 minutes to pack" during the forced deportations of 1944.

The singer said she left Kyiv for Ternopil, in western Ukraine, where she thought her family would be safe, but decided to cross into Romania when she woke up to the sound of explosions there too. Her husband, like all men aged 18-to-60, remained in Ukraine.

Satellite photos show Iran had another failed space launch

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran likely suffered another failed launch of a satellite-carrying rocket in recent days attempting to reinvigorate a program criticized by the West, even as Tehran faces last-minute negotiations with world powers to save its tattered nuclear deal in Vienna.

Satellite images from Maxar Technologies seen by The Associated Press show scorch marks at a launch

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pad at Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's rural Semnan province on Sunday. A rocket stand on the pad appears scorched and damaged, with vehicles surrounding it. An object, possibly part of the gantry, sits near it.

Successful launches typically don't damage rocket gantries because they are lowered prior to takeoff. Iran also usually immediately trumpets launches that reach space on its state-run television channels, and it has a history of not acknowledging failed attempts.

Separate images from Planet Labs PBC suggest the attempted launch likely occurred sometime after Friday. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment, nor did the U.S. military and the White House.

The rocket involved appears to have been Iran's Zuljanah satellite launch vehicle, said Jeffrey Lewis, an expert at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies who first noticed the attempted launch with colleagues.

The gantry apparently damaged in the launch resembled another that was previously used in a successful launch last year of a Zuljanah, named after a horse of Imam Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and a key figure in the Shiite faith who was massacred with his fighters at Karbala in the 7th century.

It remains unclear what could have caused the blast. The first two stages of a Zuljanah are solid fuel, but its final stage is liquid and would have needed to be fueled on the launch pad, Lewis said.

"This just looks like it got interrupted, like something exploded," Lewis told the AP.

Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space. The program has seen recent troubles, however. There have been five failed launches in a row for the Simorgh program, another satellite-carrying rocket. A separate fire at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in February 2019 also killed three researchers, authorities said at the time.

The launch pad used in the latest launch remains scarred from an explosion in August 2019 that even drew the attention of then-President Donald Trump. He later tweeted what appeared to be a classified surveillance image of the launch failure.

The successive failures raised suspicion of outside interference in Iran's program, something Trump himself hinted at by tweeting at the time that the U.S. "was not involved in the catastrophic accident." There's been no evidence offered, however, to show foul play in any of the failures, and space launches remain challenging even for the world's most-successful programs.

Meanwhile, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard in April 2020 revealed its own secret space program by successfully launching a satellite into orbit. The head of the U.S. Space Command later dismissed the satellite as "a tumbling webcam in space" that wouldn't provide Iran vital intelligence — though it showed Tehran's ability to successfully get into orbit.

This launch, however, comes as Western diplomats warn time is ticking down to restore Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran drastically limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. Trump unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018, setting the stage for years of tensions and mysterious attacks across the wider Mideast.

President Joe Biden, however, did not mention Iran in his State of the Union speech that largely focused on the Russian war on Ukraine.

The U.S. has alleged Iran's satellite launches defy a U.N. Security Council resolution and has called on Tehran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran, which long has said it does not seek nuclear weapons, previously maintained that its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component. U.S. intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran abandoned an organized military nuclear program in 2003.

Today, Tehran enriches uranium up to 60% purity — a short technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90% and far greater than the nuclear deal's 3.67% cap. Its stockpile of enriched uranium also continues to grow and international inspectors face challenges in monitoring its advances.

While Iran's former President Hassan Rouhani dialed back the country's space program for fears of alienating the West, new hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi has instead focused on jumpstarting the program.

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Iran has a series of satellites it plans to launch and Iran's Supreme Council of Space recently met for the first time in 11 years.

Russia takes aim at urban areas; Biden vows Putin will 'pay'

By YURAS KARMANAU, JIM HEINTZ, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces escalated their attacks on crowded urban areas Tuesday in what Ukraine's leader called a blatant campaign of terror, while U.S. President Joe Biden vowed to make his Russian counterpart "pay a price" for the invasion.

"Nobody will forgive. Nobody will forget," Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed after the bloodshed on the central square in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, and the deadly bombing of a TV tower in the capital.

Biden used his first State of the Union address to highlight the resolve of a reinvigorated Western alliance that has worked to rearm the Ukrainian military and adopt tough sanctions, which he said have left Russian President Vladimir Putin "isolated in the world more than he has ever been."

"Throughout our history we've learned this lesson — when dictators do not pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos," Biden said. "They keep moving. And the costs and threats to America and the world keep rising."

Biden devoted the first 12 minutes of his Tuesday evening address to Ukraine, with lawmakers of both parties repeatedly rising to their feet and applauding as he praised the bravery of Ukraine's people and condemned Putin's assault.

As Biden spoke, a 40-mile (64-kilometer) convoy of hundreds of Russian tanks and other vehicles advanced slowly on Kyiv, the capital city of nearly 3 million people, in what the West feared was a bid by Putin to topple the government and install a Kremlin-friendly regime.

The invading forces also pressed their assault on other towns and cities, including the strategic ports of Odesa and Mariupol in the south.

Day 6 of the biggest ground war in Europe since World War II found Russia increasingly isolated, beset by the sanctions that have thrown its economy into turmoil and left the country practically friendless, apart from a few nations like China, Belarus and North Korea.

As the fighting in Ukraine raged, the death toll remained unclear. One senior Western intelligence official estimated that more than 5,000 Russian soldiers had been captured or killed. Ukraine gave no overall estimate of troop losses.

The U.N. human rights office said it has recorded 136 civilian deaths. The real toll is believed to be far higher.

Britain's Defense Ministry said it had seen an increase in Russian air and artillery strikes on populated urban areas over the past two days. It also said three cities — Kharkiv, Kherson and Mariupol — were encircled by Russian forces.

Many military experts worry that Russia may be shifting tactics. Moscow's strategy in Chechnya and Syria was to use artillery and air bombardments to pulverize cities and crush fighters' resolve.

Ukrainian authorities said five people were killed in the attack on the TV tower, which is near central Kyiv and a short walk from numerous apartment buildings. A TV control room and power substation were hit, and at least some Ukrainian channels briefly stopped broadcasting, officials said.

The bombing came after Russia announced it would target transmission facilities used by Ukraine's intelligence agency. It urged people living near such places to leave their homes.

Zelenskyy's office also reported a missile attack on the site of the Babi Yar Holocaust memorial, near the tower. A spokesman for the memorial said a Jewish cemetery at the site, where Nazi occupiers killed more than 33,000 Jews over two days in 1941, was damaged, but the extent would not be clear until daylight.

In Kharkiv, with a population of about 1.5 million, at least six people were killed when the region's Soviet-era administrative building on Freedom Square was hit with what was believed to be a missile.

The Slovenian Foreign Ministry said its consulate in Kharkiv, located in another large building on the

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square, was destroyed in the attack.

The attack on Freedom Square — Ukraine's largest plaza, and the nucleus of public life in the city — was seen by many Ukrainians as brazen evidence that the Russian invasion wasn't just about hitting military targets but also about breaking their spirit.

The bombardment blew out windows and walls of buildings that ring the massive square, which was piled high with debris and dust. Inside one building, chunks of plaster were scattered, and doors, ripped from their hinges, lay across hallways.

"People are under the ruins. We have pulled out bodies," said Yevhen Vasylenko, an emergency official.

Zelenskyy pronounced the attack on the square "frank, undisguised terror" and a war crime. "This is state terrorism of the Russian Federation," he said.

In an emotional appeal to the European Parliament later, Zelenskyy said: "We are fighting also to be equal members of Europe. I believe that today we are showing everybody that is what we are."

Another Russian airstrike hit a residential area in the city of Zhytomyr, the town's mayor said. Ukraine's emergency services said Tuesday's strike killed at least two people, set three homes on fire and broke the windows in a nearby hospital. About 85 miles (140 kilometers) west of Kyiv, Zhytomyr is the home of the elite 95th Air Assault Brigade, which may have been the intended target.

Zelenskyy said 16 children had been killed around Ukraine on Monday, and he mocked Russia's claim that it is going after only military targets.

"Where are the children? What kind of military factories do they work at? What tanks are they going at?" Zelenskyy said.

Human Rights Watch said it documented a cluster bomb attack outside a hospital in Ukraine's east in recent days. Residents also reported the use of such weapons in Kharkiv and Kiyanka village. The Kremlin denied using cluster bombs.

Cluster bombs shoot smaller "bomblets" over a large area, many of which fail to explode until long after they've been dropped. If their use is confirmed, that would represent a new level of brutality in the war and could lead to further isolation of Russia.

The first talks between Russia and Ukraine since the invasion were held Monday, but ended with only an agreement to talk again. On Tuesday, Zelenskyy said Russia should stop bombing first.

"As for dialogue, I think yes, but stop bombarding people first and start negotiating afterwards," he told CNN.

In his speech, Biden announced that the U.S. was joining several other countries in closing its airspace to Russian planes. He also warned the country's oligarchs that the Department of Justice was assembling a task force to investigate any crimes they committed.

"We are joining with our European allies to find and seize your yachts, your luxury apartments, your private jets," he said. "We are coming for your ill-begotten gains."

Biden trumpeted the toll global measures had taken on the Russian economy already, including a stock market plunge and currency devaluation.

Moscow made new threats of escalation, days after raising the specter of nuclear war. A top Kremlin official warned that the West's "economic war" against Russia could turn into a "real one."

Inside Russia, a top radio station critical of the Kremlin was taken off the air after authorities threatened to shut it down over its coverage of the invasion. Among other things, the Kremlin is not allowing the fighting to be referred to as an "invasion" or "war."

Roughly 660,000 people have fled Ukraine, and countless others have taken shelter underground. Bomb damage has left hundreds of thousands of families without drinking water, U.N. humanitarian coordinator Martin Griffiths said.

"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 in the north, without providing details. But just before that, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said his country had no plans to join the fight.

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A senior U.S. defense official said that Russia's military progress — including by the massive convoy — has slowed, plagued by logistical and supply problems. Some Russian military columns have run out of gas and food, the official said, and morale has suffered as a result.

Overall, the Russian military has been stalled by fierce resistance on the ground and a surprising inability to completely dominate Ukraine's airspace.

The immense convoy, with vehicles packed together along narrow roads, would seemingly be "a big fat target" for Ukrainian forces, the senior Western intelligence official said on condition of anonymity.

"But it also shows you that the Russians feel pretty comfortable being out in the open in these concentrations because they feel that they're not going to come under air attack or rocket or missile attack," the official said.

With men fighting in Ukraine, women and children flee alone

By JUSTIN SPIKE and VANESSA GERA Associated Press

TISZABECS, Hungary (AP) — Of the hundreds of refugees gathered on the grounds of a village school in eastern Hungary, almost all were women and children who left their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons behind to fight in Ukraine's resistance to the deadly Russian invasion.

"I have brothers, they are fighting now," said Olga Skliarova, a 34-year-old resident of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv. "Men are not allowed to cross the border, so they helped us to get to the border and went back to Kyiv to fight."

The exodus of refugees from the war in Ukraine is rapidly growing in the eastern countries of the European Union, with more than 675,000 people fleeing to neighboring countries since the Russian invasion began — a number that will only grow, according to the U.N. refugee agency.

Shabia Mantoo, a spokeswoman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, said Tuesday that "at this rate, the situation looks set to become Europe's largest refugee crisis this century."

An order from Ukraine's government prohibiting men aged 18- to 60-years-old from leaving the country — so as to keep them available for military conscription — means that many women and children must seek safety on their own.

Irina Yarimchuk, an accountant from the western Ukrainian town of Kalush, traveled the five hours to the Hungarian village of Tiszabecs early Tuesday with her 14-year-old son and 1-year-old daughter.

Through tears, she said her brother had joined the Ukrainian army, and she was "very worried about his life."

"I love you so much. Keep yourself strong. We will win, and we will see you soon, I hope," she said in an emotional message to her brother, who is stationed near Ukraine's border with Belarus.

After a missile hit the nearby Ivano-Frankivsk airport as the Russian invasion began Thursday, Yarimchuk — who is planning to stay with relatives in Prague — spent her days and nights shuttling her family from their home to a bomb shelter as air raid sirens blared every few hours.

"From that day ... we stay outside our home every evening," she said of the five panicked nights before she left. "I was afraid for my children."

Skliarova recounted keeping a full backpack of clothes and emergency supplies that she brought with her each time she took shelter in her Kyiv apartment building basement.

"It's an evil, evil feeling," she said. "Scary, stress, shock. Every hour in the night, we got up to run into the basement. We slept dressed to get up and run."

In Poland, too, it was largely Ukrainian women arriving with their children as Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces intensified their attacks on civilian targets in a campaign that is becoming deadlier for children.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the European Parliament on Tuesday that Russian forces had killed 16 children the day before as he appealed to EU leaders to accept Ukraine in the bloc.

Among those fleeing was Oxana Sereduk, who arrived by car in Medyka, Poland, with her two daughters and grandchildren Tuesday morning. Her daughter Mariana drove the car, sometimes with her 16-month-

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old baby sitting on her lap and nursing.

"I am mostly afraid for the children," Sereduk said.

Maria Lisicka took her two children and fled when shelling began in Lutsk, western Ukraine. "I will do everything for my children," she said. "I didn't want to take them away, I wanted them to be at home, but what can be done? I want their psyche to be normal. The most important thing is children. I don't care about the rest."

At the bus station in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, Pavlo Bilodid wiped away tears as he kissed his wife and 2-year-old daughter Maria goodbye, helping them board the bus to Poland.

Wrought with emotion as three generations of the female members of his family made the trip to safety, he told The Associated Press they had fled Kyiv after fighting there intensified.

"Sorry," he said, taking a moment to compose himself. "It's terrible, because it was so unexpected and nobody was prepared for this situation, and we believe that we will see them soon. I'm sure that we will see them soon."

Bilodid, 33, and his father stayed behind.

"We're staying here and we have to volunteer and we will do here what we can do here in Lviv, and if we will need, we will go to Kyiv to fight," he said.

Ukrainian singer Jamala, who won the 2016 Eurovision contest with a song about the 1944 deportations of Crimean Tatars by Josef Stalin, was also among those who fled Ukraine with her two children.

A Crimean Tatar, Jamala, who escaped to Turkey, told reporters in Istanbul that she never imagined she would share the same fate as her grandmother, who she said "had just 15 minutes to pack" during the forced deportations of 1944.

The singer said she left Kyiv for Ternopil, in western Ukraine, where she thought her family would be safe, but decided to cross into Romania when she woke up to the sound of explosions there too. Her husband remained in Ukraine.

Back in Hungary, many of the women and children at the school in Tiszabecs hoped to reach destinations in the Czech Republic and Poland, but difficulties arose arranging transport from the remote village on the Ukrainian border.

"Our biggest lack in recent days has been transportation," said Lajos Revesz of Hungarian Baptist Aid, which is running the reception center at the school.

Volunteers from several countries in the region have begun arriving in Tiszabecs to bring newly-arrived refugees farther into the EU.

Ivan Mursha, a native of Khust in western Ukraine who lives in Brno, Czech Republic, drove more than seven hours to offer free rides to anyone wishing to join him.

"We are all Ukrainians. We must unite and help each other," Mursha said.

Skliarova, before departing for Brno in Mursha's 12-passenger van, said that her cousin's 15-year-old son was shot by Russian forces on Monday while riding in a car in Brovary, on the outskirts of Kyiv. The boy, she said, survived.

When asked what she expects to find when she returns to Kyiv, she said simply: "Ruins."

"I think someone has to stop" Putin, she said. "I think there must be at least one person in the world who can stop this paranoiac. He's ill."

Pfizer shots protect kids from severe COVID even in omicron

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine gave children 5 and older strong protection against hospitalization and death even during the omicron surge that hit youngsters especially hard, U.S. health officials reported Tuesday.

New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention come a day after a study of New York children suggested the vaccine may not be as effective in 5- to 11-year-olds as in older kids -- especially at blocking milder infections. That data raised the question of whether kid-sized doses given to those under 12 might be too low.

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But the CDC said data from multiple other states suggests the issue isn't children's ages or dose size — it's omicron. Vaccination generally is less effective against the hugely contagious omicron variant than earlier versions of the coronavirus — and vaccinations for 5- to 11-year-olds began just weeks before omicron began circulating.

"As a parent of a very young child, I think I would do everything to keep them out of the emergency department in the middle of the night," said CDC epidemiologist Ruth Link-Gelles. "What we see from the data that we have is that the vaccine continues to provide good protection against more severe outcomes."

Pediatricians say the back-and-forth results may seem confusing but that parents need to understand the shots are still the best way to prevent serious illness.

"If you're vaccinated, you may get a mild infection and we're just going to have to learn to live with that," said Dr. Paul Offit of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

He said the New York study was too small to draw conclusions and also can't account for variables such as infections going uncounted in kids tested at home instead of a clinic. He said youngsters admitted to his hospital with severe COVID-19 are the unvaccinated "and it's hard to watch."

The CDC reported Tuesday that between April and early January there were nine deaths related to COVID-19 among vaccinated children ages 5 to 17 — compared to 121 deaths among unvaccinated children that age.

Also, the CDC examined pediatric hospitalizations in 10 states from last April to the end of January. The vaccine proved 74% effective against hospitalization in 5- to 11-year-olds. Only two vaccinated children were hospitalized compared to 59 unvaccinated children.

In comparison, the vaccine was 92% to 94% effective against hospitalization in 12- to 15-year-olds and 16- to 17-year-olds. Most of the hospitalizations in the adolescents occurred when the earlier delta variant was dominant, while most of the hospitalizations of those younger than 12 occurred during the omicron wave, which started in early December.

Tuesday's study also found that during the time when omicron was predominant, the vaccine was 51% effective in preventing emergency room or urgent-care visits by 5- to 11-year-olds. That was fairly similar to the 45% effectiveness for 12- to 15-year-olds who'd gotten their second dose months earlier.

What about less serious outcomes?

A report released Monday from researchers with New York's state health department analyzed health records week-by-week from early December through the end of January. Vaccine effectiveness against any COVID-19 infection dropped from 68% to just 12% by the height of omicron's wave. But among kids 12 and older, that effectiveness dropped to just 51%.

Remarkably, the data suggested 12-year-olds appeared to have the most protection of any age -- prompting the researchers to ask if maybe the dose should be reexamined.

The Pfizer shots are the only vaccine available to U.S. children, and those ages 5 to 11 receive one-third of the dose given to everyone 12 and older. Also, everyone 12 and older is urged to get a booster dose to rev up protection against omicron.

The CDC's latest study didn't track infections the same way, but Link-Gelles said surveillance data from 29 other states doesn't suggest a difference between the younger and older kids.

Unvaccinated 5- to 11-year-olds were 1.3 times more likely to get COVID-19 in January -- at the height of the omicron surge -- than vaccinated youngsters, according to new CDC data. For 12- to 17-year-olds, the unvaccinated were 1.5 times more likely to get COVID-19 than their vaccinated peers that month.

It's disappointing that protection against infection isn't higher, and it may take more research to tell if younger children might fare better with a different dose, said Dr. Richard Besser, a pediatrician and president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, who wasn't involved with the new studies.

Pfizer currently is testing a booster dose for 5- to 11-year-olds.

But meanwhile, "we do know that these vaccines are safe, we do know they reduce the risk of hospitalization," Besser stressed.

Activism grows nationwide in response to school book bans

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and HILLEL ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Until a year ago, Stephana Ferrell's political activism was limited to the occasional letter to elected officials.

Then came her local school board meeting in Orange County, Florida and an objection raised to Maia Kobabe's graphic novel "Gender Queer: A Memoir." And the county's decision last fall to remove it from high school shelves.

"By winter break, we realized this was happening all over the state and needed to start a project to rally parents to protect access to information and ideas in school," says Ferrell, a mother of two. Along with fellow Orange County parent Jen Cousins, she founded the Florida Freedom to Read Project, which works with existing parent groups statewide on a range of educational issues, including efforts to "keep or get back books that have gone under challenge or have been banned."

Over the past year, book challenges and bans have reached levels not seen in decades, according to officials at the American Library Association, the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) and other advocates for free expression. Censorship efforts have ranged from local communities such as Orange County and a Tennessee school board's pulling Art Spiegelman's graphic novel "Maus," to statewide initiatives.

"There are some books with pornography and pedophilia that should absolutely be removed from K through 12 school libraries," says Yael Levin, a spokeswoman for No Left Turn in Education, a national group opposed to what it calls a "Leftist agenda" for public schools that has called on Attorney General Merrick Garland to investigate the availability of "Gender Queer" among other books. "Now we're not talking about a public library or bookstores. We're talking about K through 12 school libraries, books that are just pornographic and with pedophilic content."

According to PEN America, which has been tracking legislation around the country, dozens of bills have been proposed that restrict classroom reading and discussion. Virtually all of the laws focus on sexuality, gender identity or race. In Missouri, a bill would ban teachers from using the "1619 Project," the New York Times magazine issue which centers around slavery in American history and was released last fall as a book.

The responses have come from organizations large and small, and sometimes from individuals such as Ferrell.

The American Civil Liberties Union, PEN America and the NCAC have been working with local activists, educators and families around the country, helping them "to prepare for meetings, to draft letters and to mobilize opposition," according to PEN America's executive director, Suzanne Nossel. The CEO of Penguin Random House, Markus Dohle, has said he will personally donate \$500,000 for a book defense fund to be run in partnership with PEN. Hachette Book Group has announced "emergency donations" to PEN, the NCAC and the Authors Guild.

Legal action has been one strategy. In Missouri, the ACLU filed suit in federal court in mid-February to prevent the Wentzville school district from removing such books as "Gender Queer," Nobel laureate Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" and Keise Laymon's memoir "Heavy." The civil liberties union has also filed open records requests in Tennessee and Montana over book bans, and a warning letter in Mississippi against what it described as the "unconstitutionality of public library book bans."

Vera Eidelman, staff attorney with the ACLU Speech, Privacy and Technology Project, cited the U.S. Supreme Court's 1982 ruling declaring that "local school boards may not remove books from school library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books." The tricky area, Eidelman acknowledged, is that schools officials are allowed to ban books for reasons other than not approving of the viewpoints the books express. Officials might determine, for instance, that the book is too profane or vulgar.

"The problem is just that often our definitions, for example, of vulgarity or age appropriateness, are for lack of a better word, mushy, and they can also hide or be used as pretext for viewpoint-based decisions by the government," she said.

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Two anti-banning initiatives were launched in Pennsylvania. In Kutztown, eighth grader Joslyn Dffenbaugh formed a banned book club last fall that began with a reading of George Orwell's "Animal Farm." The Penridge Improvement Project has started a drive to purchase books that have been removed from schools, including Leslea Newman's "Heather has Two Mommies" and Kim Johnson's "This is My America," and place them in small free libraries around the district.

The wave of bans has led to new organizations and to a change of focus for existing groups. Katie Paris, an Ohio resident and the founder of Red, Wine & Blue, a national network of politically engaged "PTA mamas and digital divas" founded in 2019, said that last year she began receiving calls from members begging for help as debates over "critical race theory" erupted.

Red, Wine & Blue started online sessions it calls Trouble Maker Training, which includes such guidance as "Present a calm face to counter the yelling and shouting" and "Own individual freedom: You can decide what is right for your child, but you don't get to dictate what's right for other families." Red, Wine & Blue also launched a website that tracks book bans, raised about \$65,000 to organize against bans and is organizing an event in March featuring authors of banned books and parents from communities where books are being challenged.

"We think education works best when it's parents and teachers working together," says Paris, the mother of 7- and 3-year old boys. "And if you don't want your child to have access to a book, then opt them out. That's fine. You just don't want to just take that opportunity away from my kids."

Trying to get a book restored is often like other kinds of community activism — letter writing, speeches, attending meetings.

Meenal McNary is a member of the Round Rock Black Parents Association, based about 20 miles from Austin, Texas. The association was founded in 2015 after a Black teenager was slammed to the ground by a police officer, but more recently became active in diversifying the curriculum and fighting efforts to remove books. Last year, a parent's objection led to Round Rock school district officials considering whether "Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You," by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds, should be taken off middle school reading lists.

"We worked with a middle school teacher who started a petition, and that gained a lot of traction, with more than a 1,000 signatures," McNary says. The district followed a three-step review process — culminating with a school board vote — during which McNary and others helped organize people into writing letters, turning up for board meetings and telling others about the petition.

"We had children speaking up in favor of this book, even though it was traumatic for some of them to read," McNary says. "We had everyone from middle school students to grandmothers and grandfathers stating their reasons why this should remain on the shelves. The board ended up voting in our favor and the book is still there."

Nations agree to release 60M barrels of oil amid Russian war

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — The International Energy Agency's 31 member countries agreed Tuesday to release 60 million barrels of oil from their strategic reserves — half of that from the United States — "to send a strong message to oil markets" that supplies won't fall short after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The board of the Paris-based IEA made the decision at an extraordinary meeting of energy ministers chaired by U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm. She said in a statement that U.S. President Joe Biden approved a commitment of 30 million barrels and that the U.S. is ready to "take additional measures" if needed.

The group's "decision reflects our common commitment to address significant market and supply disruptions related to President Putin's war on Ukraine," Granholm said.

Russia plays an outsized role in global energy markets as the third-largest oil producer. Its exports of 5 million barrels of crude per day amount to about 12% of the global oil trade. Some 60% goes to Europe and another 20% to China.

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So far, U.S. and European sanctions have not barred oil or gas exports and have included exceptions for transactions to pay for oil and gas. Western leaders are reluctant to restrict Russian oil exports at a time when global energy markets are tight and high prices are fueling inflation in developed economies.

But the invasion has still shaken markets worldwide. On Tuesday, oil prices soared, with U.S. benchmark crude surpassing \$106 per barrel — the highest price since 2014.

"The situation in energy markets is very serious and demands our full attention," IEA executive director Fatih Birol said. "Global energy security is under threat, putting the world economy at risk during a fragile stage of the recovery."

Last month, the IEA said global demand for oil was 100.2 million barrels a day in the fourth quarter of 2021. Demand is expected to grow to an average of 100.6 million barrels a day this year, as restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19 are eased, the IEA said.

Besides the United States, other members of the organization include Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Japan and Canada. IEA members hold emergency stockpiles of 1.5 billion barrels of oil. The release amounts to 4% of stockpiles, or roughly 2 million barrels per day for 30 days.

It's only the fourth time in history that the IEA has done a coordinated drawdown since the reserves were established in the wake of the Arab oil embargo in 1974.

From the U.S. perspective, the price of crude oil determines a big portion of what drivers pay to fill up their cars with gasoline. The national average for a gallon of gas is \$3.61, which is 26 cents more than a month ago and 90 cents more than a year ago, according to motor club federation AAA.

In 2021, the U.S. imported roughly 245 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products from Russia — a one-year increase of 24% over 2020. Nearly 8% of U.S. imports of crude oil and petroleum products that year came from Russia, based on data from the statistical arm of the U.S. Energy Department.

In November, Biden announced a release of 50 million barrels of oil in coordination with other energy-importing countries, but the measure had only a fleeting impact on oil prices, which have continued to rise.

Stewart Glickman, an oil analyst for CFRA Research, said the latest release from the SPR would only be partially helpful, because most of the reserves are light oil, while the U.S. largely imports a heavier grade of oil from Russia.

"Refiners plan around a certain blend of crudes, so you can't always just swap out one for another easily," he said.

Granholm stressed the need to invest in renewable energy as a way to reduce dependence on Russian oil and natural gas.

To that end, Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia called on Biden and the oil industry to take immediate action "up to and including banning crude oil imports from Russia."

"If there was ever a time to be energy independent, it is now," said Manchin, who supports fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas that are his crucial to his energy-producing state.

A target of Trump's ire, Raffensperger fights for reelection

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — As former President Donald Trump sought to lay blame for his 2020 election loss, Georgia's secretary of state emerged as one of his main targets. Now, with a Trump-endorsed challenger in the Republican primary, Brad Raffensperger is fighting to keep his job.

The secretary of state emerged from relative obscurity into the national spotlight when he insisted that Georgia's election had been accurate and secure, and refused to bend to pressure from Trump to overturn Joe Biden's victory in the state. Raffensperger says he's running for reelection based on his record of integrity as a principled conservative.

"I've shown that I'll stand and make the hard decisions and I'll do what is right, and that's what I'm called to do," he said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

Months after Raffensperger certified Biden's victory, Georgia U.S. Rep. Jody Hice, a conservative Trump loyalist and former pastor, announced he would run against Raffensperger in the May 24 Republican pri-

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mary and quickly secured the former president's endorsement. Two others — former Alpharetta Mayor David Belle Isle and former county Probate and Magistrate Judge T.J. Hudson — are also challenging Raffensperger from the right.

It's hardly surprising that Raffensperger has drawn primary challengers, Emory University political science professor Andra Gillespie said, noting that polls have shown many Republican voters in Georgia believe there was widespread voter fraud and question the 2020 election results.

"His role in terms of standing up to Trump, while earning him some respect nationally, certainly doesn't necessarily garner any sort of plaudits from the Trump wing of the Republican party in the state," she said.

State and federal officials, including Trump's own attorney general, have said there was no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 election. But that hasn't stopped the proliferation of conspiracy theories and false claims.

Trump endorsed Raffensperger during a general election runoff in 2018. But as Georgia's presidential votes were counted, recounted and recounted again — and even after the results were certified — the president unleashed his fury. He called the secretary of state an "enemy of the people" and vowed to campaign against him. In a now-infamous Jan. 2, 2021, phone call, Trump pressed Raffensperger to "find" enough votes to shift the election outcome in his favor.

But Trump wasn't the only Republican to turn on Raffensperger. Then-U.S. Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, facing a January 2021 runoff election they ultimately lost to Democratic challengers, called on the secretary of state to resign. Georgia GOP Party Chairman David Shafer has repeatedly disparaged Raffensperger's handling of the 2020 election.

Raffensperger has pushed back on the narrative that the election was stolen, citing investigations that have found no widespread fraud and the many unsuccessful lawsuits filed by Trump and his allies.

"Me and all my other friends on the right side of the aisle were disappointed," Raffensperger said. "But yup, those were the numbers. President Trump did come up short."

Prominent Republicans have continued to criticize Raffensperger, citing a legal settlement and emergency election measures put in place because of the pandemic. In a sweeping election overhaul passed last year, Republican lawmakers stripped the secretary of state of his chairmanship and voting power on the State Election Board.

In Georgia and elsewhere, Raffensperger also won praise — including from some Democrats — for standing up to the president and others in his party. But Emory professor Gillespie noted that the law didn't leave him much choice: "Morally, ethically, legally, he did the right thing."

When voting rights activist and Democratic candidate for Georgia governor Stacey Abrams appeared on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" just after the recording of the call between Trump and Raffensperger was leaked in January 2021, she cautioned against celebrating Raffensperger.

"Lionizing Brad Raffensperger is a bit wrongheaded," she said. "This man is not defending the right of voters. He's defending an election that he ran."

Abrams has often accused Raffensperger and other Republicans of suppressing voting rights, particularly for people of color. The secretary of state has responded by asserting that Democrats' claims of voter suppression are as harmful as claims by Trump and his supporters that the 2020 election was stolen.

Although challengers to incumbents don't typically fare well in primaries, the committed party voters who show up for such contests could favor Hice, University of Georgia political science professor Charles Bullock said.

"The fact that Trump remains an important factor for a lot of Republicans and that he has put his stamp of approval on a challenger does enhance Hice's prospects," Bullock said.

Hice has been raising more money than Raffensperger in recent months, bringing in just over \$1 million in the reporting period that ended Jan. 31, compared with Raffensperger's \$322,000. But Hice has been spending money faster, ending the period with about \$648,000, compared with Raffensperger's \$513,000. Belle Isle, who lost to Raffensperger in the Republican primary in 2018, raised more than \$212,000 during the period and had about \$112,000 on hand. Hudson reported raising \$26,000 and had about \$7,500 in the bank.

Raffensperger wasn't the only Georgia official to draw Trump's ire for refusing to interfere with the state's election results. Trump has also vowed vengeance against Gov. Brian Kemp, endorsing former senator Perdue in the Republican primary in that race.

But Kemp may be in a better position to fend off a Trump-backed challenge by emphasizing economic achievements or other parts of his job, Gillespie said.

"It's harder for Brad Raffensperger to run away because elections are his job," she said. "So if people are incensed by the results of the 2020 election and how it was handled, he's going to be the one that's going to bear the brunt of that criticism amongst Republicans."

Although the secretary of state has other responsibilities, including corporate registration and professional licensing, the role of chief elections officer gets the most attention.

Hice, who supported a Texas lawsuit seeking to overturn Biden's victory in Georgia and other states and voted against his Electoral College victory, has embraced unproven allegations of voter fraud. He told the AP recently, "I believe if we had an accurate count, I believe Trump won Georgia."

Raffensperger dismisses attacks from people, including his primary opponents, who question his handling of the 2020 election: "I'm standing on the truth. They're standing on lies. The truth always wins."

EXPLAINER: What danger do cluster bombs pose?

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Rights groups and observers say Russia is using cluster bombs in its invasion of Ukraine, a charge Moscow denies. If confirmed, deployment of the weapon, especially in crowded civilian areas, would usher in new humanitarian concerns in the conflict, Europe's largest ground war in generations.

Proponents of banning cluster bombs say they kill indiscriminately and endanger civilians long after their use. From Syria and Yemen to the Balkans, Afghanistan and Southeast Asia, unexploded ordnance from cluster bombs continues to kill and maim people years or even decades after the munitions were fired.

Though many countries have joined a global convention limiting their use, cluster munitions are still used in conflict zones around the world.

Here is a closer look at the weapon and why its use sparks particular concern:

WHAT IS A CLUSTER BOMB?

Cluster bombs are weapons that open in the air, releasing submunitions, or "bomblets," that are dispersed over a large area, intended to wreak destruction on multiple targets at once. Cluster bombs can be delivered by planes, artillery and missiles, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Beyond the initial harm caused by the munitions upon impact, bomblets have a high rate of failure to explode, up to 40% in some recent conflicts, according to the ICRC.

That leaves swaths of land dotted with bomblets that could explode. Return to normal life in those areas becomes hazardous, particularly in heavily populated areas. Some formerly war-torn countries spend years trying to clear unexploded cluster bomblets.

IS USING THEM A WAR CRIME?

Use of cluster bombs itself does not violate international law, but using them against civilians can be a violation. As in any strike, determining a war crime requires looking at whether the target was legitimate and if precautions were taken to avoid civilian casualties.

"The part of international law where this starts playing (a role), though is indiscriminate attacks targeting civilians," Human Rights Watch's associate arms director Mark Hiznay told The Associated Press. "So that's not necessarily related to the weapons, but the way the weapons are used."

A convention banning the use of cluster bombs has been joined by more than 120 countries who agreed not to use, produce, transfer or stockpile the weapons and to clear them after they've been used.

Russia and Ukraine have not joined that convention. Neither has the United States.

WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN USED?

The bombs have been deployed in many recent conflicts.

Syrian government troops have often used cluster munitions — supplied by Russia -- against opposition strongholds during that country's civil war, frequently hitting civilian targets and infrastructure.

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Israel has used cluster bombs in civilian areas in south Lebanon, including during the 1982 invasion that saw Israeli troops reach the capital Beirut.

During the monthlong 2006 war with Hezbollah, Human Rights Watch and the United Nations accused Israel of firing as many as 4 million cluster munitions into Lebanon. That has left unexploded ordnance that threatens Lebanese civilians to this day.

The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen has been criticized for its use of cluster bombs in the war with the Iran-backed Houthi rebels that has ravaged the southern Arabian country.

In 2017, Yemen was the second deadliest country for cluster munitions after Syria, according to the U.N. Children have been killed or maimed long after the munitions originally fell, making it difficult to know the true toll.

The last large-scale American use of cluster bombs was during the 2003 Iraq invasion, according to the Pentagon. The U.S. initially considered cluster bombs an integral part of its arsenal during the invasion of Afghanistan that began in 2001, according to HRW. In the first three years, it is estimated the U.S.-led coalition dropped more than 1,500 cluster bombs in Afghanistan.

The U.S. Defense Department had been due by 2019 to stop use of any cluster munitions with a rate of unexploded ordnance greater than 1%. But the Trump Administration rolled back that policy, allowing commanders to approve use of such munitions.

Cluster munitions were also used in the Balkan wars in the 1990s. In the 1980s the Russians made heavy use of cluster bombs during its 10-year invasion of Afghanistan. As a result of decades of war, the Afghan countryside remains one of the heaviest mined countries in the world.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN UKRAINE?

Russian forces have "most definitely" used cluster bombs in Ukraine, Human Rights Watch's Hiznay said.

He pointed to at least two instances: a missile attack that hit outside a hospital in the town of Vuhledar on the first day of the invasion last week. and another Monday on Ukraine's second largest city, Kharkiv, with a population of 1.4 million.

Hiznay retweeted photos of what he said was unexploded 9N235 cluster submunitions scattered around in Kharkiv. Human Rights Watch said four people were killed in the Vuhledar strike.

Rights groups have said three people were killed after Russian cluster bombs hit near a pre-school in the northeastern city of Okhtyrka. The open-source intelligence group Bellingcat says that its researchers found cluster munitions in that strike as well as multiple cluster attacks in Kharkiv.

Amnesty International said Russian forces have a "shameful record of using cluster munitions in populated areas."

Justin Bronk, a research fellow at Royal United Services Institute, a London defense think tank, said images of munitions parts recovered from residential areas of Kharkiv are "concrete evidence" that Russia is using cluster bombs.

"Their use suggests the Russians are trying to break morale, inflict terror on the on the civilian population and the defenders in order to try and force a negotiation or just retreat," he said.

Russia denies using cluster munitions in Ukraine.

Jury foreman: Ahmaud Arbery killers showed `so much hatred`

ATLANTA (AP) — The Black man who served as foreman of the jury that convicted three white men of federal hate crimes in the killing of Ahmaud Arbery said he believes the guilty verdicts show that while acts of racial violence still occur in the U.S. "we're moving in the right direction."

"Wrong is wrong and right is right," Marcus Ransom told The New York Times in an interview published Tuesday. "No matter what it is, you've got to have consequences. No one is above laws."

Ransom, a 35-year-old social worker, was the only Black man on the jury that spent a week in a Brunswick, Georgia, courtroom hearing the hate crimes case in U.S. District Court. Jurors deliberated less than four hours before finding each of the defendants guilty on all counts Feb. 22.

Father and son Greg and Travis McMichael armed themselves and used a pickup truck to chase Arbery,

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a 25-year-old Black man, after spotting him running in their neighborhood Feb. 23, 2020. A neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, joined the pursuit in his own truck and recorded cellphone video of Travis McMichael blasting Arbery with a shotgun.

Ransom, who lives about three hours from coastal Glynn County where Arbery died and the trial was held, said he was shocked by the graphic video that leaked online two months after the slaying. Still, he said he did not pay much attention to the case prior to the trial because he had been dealing with the death of his grandmother.

During the trial, federal prosecutors walked the jury through roughly two dozen racist text messages and social media posts, mostly by Travis McMichael and Bryan. Ransom said he was not shocked by the racist slurs the men used.

"I've experienced racism on different levels," he said.

But Ransom said he cried when prosecutors showed a video Travis McMichael had shared online that mocked a young Black boy dancing. He also shed tears in the jury box while having to watch police body camera footage of Arbery bleeding on the ground, twitching and gasping, after the shooting. And he wiped tears from his eyes again after the verdicts were read and he was asked to stand in court and confirm them.

Ransom said he was disturbed by the indifference the McMichaels showed Arbery as he was dying in the street, and was stunned that Bryan had joined them to pursue a Black man whom Bryan later told police he had never seen before and did not know why he was being chased.

"Just seeing that it was so much hatred that they had, not only for Ahmaud, but to other people of the Black race," Ransom said. "It was a lot to take in."

None of the defendants testified at the hate crimes trial. Ransom said he watched each of the three defendants closely during the trial, looking for signs of remorse. He said he found none.

When the case ended and the jury prepared to begin deliberations, Ransom said, the others quickly chose him to serve as foreman.

"No one really voiced exactly why," he said.

He said deliberations were businesslike. No one argued that the McMichaels or Bryan were innocent, he said, and nobody strongly disagreed that the evidence showed Arbery was chased and killed because he was Black — a finding necessary to convict the defendants of hate crimes.

The jury returned the hate crime convictions not quite three months after the McMichaels and Bryan were found guilty of murdering Arbery by a Georgia state court. All three were sentenced to life in prison in the murder case, with no chance of parole for the McMichaels.

U.S. District Court Judge Lisa Godbey Wood has yet to schedule sentencing in the federal case, where each defendant again faces a potential life sentence.

Heat wave a glimpse of climate change's impact in N. America

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The U.S. Pacific Northwest was in the throes of a record-shattering heat wave last summer when a woman in her 70s was wheeled into an emergency room with symptoms of a life-threatening heat stroke.

Desperate to cool her, Dr. Alexander St. John grabbed a body bag, filled it with ice from the hospital kitchen and zipped the woman inside. Within minutes, her body temperature dropped and her symptoms improved.

"I've never had to do that before. It was surreal," said St. John. "Twenty years ago, it seems like we would talk about climate change as something that would happen over the coming generations — and all of a sudden it seems to be accelerating to the point where we're all experiencing it in real time."

The technique was used to save several other patients at Seattle's Harborview Medical Center during the five-day heat wave last June that saw temperatures spike as high as 118 degrees Fahrenheit (48 degrees Celsius) in some places and killed an estimated 600 people or more across Oregon, Washington and western Canada.

The sweltering stretch across the normally cool region offers a glimpse of the types of extreme weather

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events that will accelerate in North America within 30 years without a coordinated effort to slow climate change, according to a United Nations report released this week. Even if global warming is limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius, people across the U.S., Mexico and Canada will be at increasing risk of catastrophic weather events.

The report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change lays out how worsening global warming will endanger people's health, drive food insecurity, spur economic upheaval and trigger migration from increasingly uninhabitable places. Low-income and minority populations will be the hardest hit, according to the report, exacerbating existing inequities.

In the West, the report forecasts intensifying drought, extreme heat and wildfires. The Gulf Coast is expected to get more destructive hurricanes and rising sea levels. In the Midwest and Northeast, heavier rains are expected to cause more flooding and damage to crops.

In the summer of 2019, flooding in the U.S. Midwest and South disrupted barge traffic on the Mississippi River and damaged cropland in Ohio and Indiana. A different downpour and flood months earlier crippled Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska.

The economic impacts will be profound. Warming water and ocean acidification will disrupt commercial fisheries, extreme heat will mean lower yields of key crops such as corn and soybeans and drought will cause livestock losses as animals have less ground to forage, the report found.

Since 1980, there have been 35 floods not associated with hurricanes in the U.S. that have caused more than \$1 billion in damage and more than half of those have been since 2010, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"We're exposed to untold damage," said Kathleen Miller, a lead author of the report's North America chapter who studies the economic impacts of climate change at the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

"It's time to step up and start thinking about what are our priorities and how can we address these mounting threats," she said.

The report still holds out hope that people can slow climate change — or at least adapt to blunt its effects. Prioritizing society's most vulnerable will have the greatest impact on climate resiliency, it said.

The type of adjustments cited in the report are already underway in the Pacific Northwest, which was not built for hot weather. In Seattle, for example, 44% of homes have air conditioning.

After last summer's deadly heat wave, Portland officials are considering alarm systems in public housing that would alert building managers when temperatures climb above 100 degrees. City officials also approved a plan to distribute 15,000 heat pumps, which are an energy-efficient way to cool spaces. Oregon lawmakers are also considering \$15 million in funding to boost distribution air purifiers, air conditioners and heat pumps.

Longer-term discussions in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere include painting roof tops white and using lighter-colored pavement to repel sunlight, planting more trees in urban centers and creating neighborhood cooling hubs that could also be social spots.

The measures will be key for the groups hit hardest by last summer's deadly heat wave — the elderly living alone, the disabled and the poor.

None of those who died in Portland had central air conditioning, more than half lived in apartments and 10% lived in mobile homes, according to data released by Multnomah County. The city's light-rail train stopped working, making it difficult for low-income residents to reach cooling centers hastily set up in public libraries.

An analysis of data from 1,000 residences found the average temperature in richer homes was 75 degrees, compared with 125 degrees in poorer homes, said Vivek Shandas, a climate professor at Portland State University.

That shows how those with resources can "further isolate themselves and safeguard themselves," he said.

Renee Salas, an emergency room doctor and a fellow at Harvard University's Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment, noted that health risks are increasingly not only from heat, but from worsening wildfires that send smoke plumes thousands of miles across North America and rising temperatures that could foster the spread of diseases by mosquitoes and ticks such as dengue fever, West Nile and

Lyme disease.

Adaptation will mean considering climate change as a secondary diagnosis for many patients and treating it accordingly, Salas said. In the future, doctors might write prescriptions for air purifiers or heat pumps the way they do for medications and a national system of health records could help keep medical treatment consistent for patients who become climate refugees.

"There are so many things that we can do in order to optimally identify who's most at risk and to then help protect them," she said. "The time to do that is now, when we're already beginning to see the impact."

'Undisguised terror': Russia's Kharkiv strike chills Ukraine

KHARKIV, Ukraine (AP) — In the dust, debris and the dead lying in Kharkiv's central Freedom Square, Ukrainians on Tuesday saw what might become of other cities if Russia's invasion isn't countered in time.

Not long after sunrise, a Russian military strike hit the center of Ukraine's second-largest city, badly damaging its symbolic Soviet-era regional administration building. Closed-circuit television footage showed a fireball engulfing the street in front of the building, with a few cars rolling out of the billowing smoke.

"You cannot watch this without crying," a witness said in a video of the aftermath, verified by The Associated Press.

An emergency official said the bodies of at least six people had been pulled from the ruins, and at least 20 other people were wounded. Two bodies lay side by side on the cobblestones near an abandoned car. One was barefoot and wrapped in a blanket. The other, in military-colored clothing, had a clenched fist.

It wasn't immediately clear what type of weapon was used or how many people were killed, but Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said there were dozens of casualties.

Zelenskyy called the attack on the Freedom Square "frank, undisguised terror. Nobody will forgive. Nobody will forget. This attack on Kharkiv is a war crime."

It was the first time the Russian military had hit the center of the city of 1.5 million people whose residential neighborhoods have been under shelling fire for days. The Ukrainian emergency service said it had put out 24 fires in and around Kharkiv caused by shelling, and it had disabled 69 explosive devices.

The attack Tuesday also hit a tent encampment on the central square that had been set up to collect aid for the volunteer Ukrainian fighters who have rushed to Kharkiv's defense. In recent days, volunteer guards had occupied the regional administration building as part of those efforts. It was feared that some volunteers were now among the dead.

The crumpled tents remained a flash of yellow and blue in the vast gray square.

"It's just barbarity, that's how I see this war," said Boris Redin, one of the encampment's coordinators. "(The Russians) are surely losing because they don't have any other arguments besides missiles and heavy weapons."

At the administration building itself, windows were blown out. Ceilings had collapsed. Concrete dust added another layer of grim, gray desperation. A nearby car was crushed.

As soot-faced emergency responders picked through the debris, there was fresh anger.

"This is for those who were waiting for a Russian peace! This is what you wanted, yes? Many injured," one said.

The Russian military has denied targeting Ukrainian civilians, despite abundant evidence that it is shelling residential buildings, schools and hospitals.

"(The military) takes all measures to preserve the lives and safety of civilians," Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Tuesday. "I would like to stress that strikes are carried out only on military targets and uses exclusively precision weapons."

Unconvinced by such assurances, one Kharkiv hospital has moved its maternity ward to a bomb shelter, where pregnant women paced in the gloom. The cries of dozens of newborns echoed off the thick concrete walls. Electrical cables dangled. Rolled-up mattresses were placed against windows to protect residents from glass shards if explosions land nearby.

As the shelling in Kharkiv intensified, one family spent a fifth day in another shelter beneath the city.

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Water bottles and backpacks were stocked in the basement. A military-style helmet hung on a shelf, and underneath it a boy looked at a phone. Boredom mixed with fear.

"It is a nightmare, and it seizes you from the inside very strongly. This cannot be explained with words," said Ekaterina Babenko, the mother of the family.

She could hardly believe the Russian attack was occurring in Kharkiv and tearing its neighborhoods apart.

"My friend who lives in the suburb Gorizont, a few hours ago, the house next to hers was hit and several floors were destroyed," Babenko said. "And for some time, there was no connection with her. Those were scary minutes, very scary."

For her family and others still sheltering in the city close to the Russian border, the world above was changing too quickly to comprehend. Warehouses, homes, garages, cars, all were burning.

"Sveta, let's go," one man urged in a video that showed the shelling Monday of a residential area in Kharkiv.

"Go, I'll catch up with you," the woman says.

"Leave, for God's sake!" the man pleaded.

Other residents were already flowing west, hoping to leave Ukraine altogether.

Thousands evacuate in worst Australian floods in a decade

By ROD McGUIRK and JOHN PYE Associated Press

BRISBANE, Australia (AP) — Tens of thousands of people were ordered to evacuate their homes by Tuesday and hundreds of thousands more were told to prepare to flee as parts of Australia's southeast coast were inundated by the worst flooding in more than a decade. At least 10 people have died.

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

Scores of residents, some with pets, spent hours trapped on their roofs by a fast-rising river in the town of Lismore in the state's north.

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.

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 were 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.

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

Government meteorologist Jonathan Howe described the 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 floodwaters northwest of Brisbane on Sunday has since been confirmed dead.

Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll said another man in his 70s remained missing after falling from his moored yacht in the state capital Brisbane into a swollen river on Saturday.

The cleanup was underway in Brisbane, Australia's third most populous city, despite more storms forecast for later in the week. Brisbane Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner urged 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 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.

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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 water.

"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!"

Schrinner said the six-day rainfall in downtown Brisbane — 792.8 millimeters (31.2 inches) through 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 Nation's 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 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.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 2, the 61st day of 2022. There are 304 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 2, 1962, Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points for the Philadelphia Warriors in a game against the New York Knicks, an NBA record that still stands. (Philadelphia won, 169-147.)

On this date:

In 1861, the state of Texas, having seceded from the Union, was admitted to the Confederacy.

In 1877, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was declared the winner of the 1876 presidential election over Democrat Samuel J. Tilden, even though Tilden had won the popular vote.

In 1917, actor, producer, director and bandleader Desi Arnaz was born in Santiago de Cuba.

In 1932, the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, which moved the date of the presidential inauguration

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from March 4 to Jan. 20, was passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification.

In 1939, John Ford's classic Western "Stagecoach," starring Claire Trevor and John Wayne, opened in New York.

In 1943, the three-day Battle of the Bismarck Sea began in the southwest Pacific during World War II; U.S. and Australian warplanes were able to inflict heavy damage on an Imperial Japanese convoy.

In 1955, nine months before Rosa Parks' famous act of defiance, Claudette Colvin, a Black high school student in Montgomery, Alabama, was arrested after refusing to give up her seat on a public bus to a white passenger.

In 1985, the government approved a screening test for AIDS that detected antibodies to the virus, allowing possibly contaminated blood to be excluded from the blood supply.

In 1989, representatives from the 12 European Community nations agreed to ban all production of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons), the synthetic compounds blamed for destroying the Earth's ozone layer, by the end of the 20th century.

In 1990, more than 6,000 drivers went on strike against Greyhound Lines Inc. (The company, later declaring an impasse in negotiations, fired the strikers.)

In 1995, the Internet search engine website Yahoo! was incorporated by founders Jerry Yang and David Filo.

In 2011, the Supreme Court ruled, 8-1, that a grieving father's pain over mocking protests at his Marine son's funeral had to yield to First Amendment protections for free speech in a decision favoring the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas.

Ten years ago: Some 40 people were killed by tornadoes that struck Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio. Major League Baseball expanded its playoff format to 10 teams, adding a second wild card in each league.

Five years ago: Under intensifying pressure, Attorney General Jeff Sessions abruptly agreed to recuse himself from any investigation into Russian meddling in America's 2016 presidential election, acting after revelations he twice spoke with the Russian ambassador during the campaign and failed to say so when pressed by Congress. The Senate confirmed retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson as secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and former Texas Gov. Rick Perry to be energy secretary.

One year ago: FBI Director Chris Wray told senators that the attack on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump was "domestic terrorism"; Wray warned of a rapidly growing threat of homegrown violent extremism. Thirteen people were killed when an SUV carrying 25 people collided with a semitruck on a California highway near the U.S.-Mexico border. (A Mexican man was charged with organizing a smuggling run in which the SUV drove through a hole in a border fence.) Texas became the biggest state to lift its mask rule, joining a growing movement to loosen COVID-19 restrictions despite pleas from health officials not to do so. The business responsible for preserving the legacy of children's author Dr. Seuss said six of his books would no longer be published because of racist and insensitive imagery. Bunny Wailer, the last surviving founding member of the legendary reggae group The Wailers, died in his native Jamaica at 73.

Today's Birthdays: Actor John Cullum is 92. Former Soviet President and Nobel peace laureate Mikhail S. Gorbachev is 91. Actor Barbara Luna is 83. Author John Irving is 80. Actor Cassie Yates is 71. Actor Laraine Newman is 70. Former Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., is 69. Former Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is 67. Singer Jay Osmond is 67. Pop musician John Cowsill (The Cowsills) is 66. Former tennis player Kevin Curren is 64. Country singer Larry Stewart (Restless Heart) is 63. Rock singer Jon Bon Jovi is 60. Blues singer-musician Alvin Youngblood Hart is 59. Actor Daniel Craig is 54. Actor Richard Ruccolo is 50. Rock singer Chris Martin (Coldplay) is 45. Actor Heather McComb is 45. Actor Rebel Wilson is 42. Actor Bryce Dallas Howard is 41. Former NFL quarterback Ben Roethlisberger is 40. Actor Robert Iler is 37. Actor Nathalie Emmanuel is 33. Country singer Luke Combs is 32. Singer-rapper-actor Becky G is 25.