

# 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.

## Vender Fair

A vendor fair has been organized in Groton for March 26, 2022, at the Groton Community Center, from 10 am. – 3 p.m. A variety of crafters and vendors will be available. Proceeds from an auction table will be donated to Make-a-Wish Foundation.

## Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans © 2022 Groton Daily Independent



## Wrestling Official of the Year

Jason Hill, Groton, was honored at the South Dakota State Wrestling Tournament as South Dakota's Wrestling Official of the Year Award.

(Photo Courtesy SDPB)

## Heinrich is new city finance officer

by Dorene Nelson

Doug Heinrich, a native of Watertown, SD but a Groton Area High School graduate, is the new Groton City Finance Officer. Heinrich started working for the city in mid-February.

"I was born in Watertown and lived there until I was about six years old," Heinrich stated. "My parents moved us to Groton in time for me to start first grade."

"I played soccer here in Groton and graduated in 2012," he said. "I live here in Groton, thanks to my grandfather, who's been very kind and helpful."

"My wife Brooklyn and I got married in October, 2021," Doug smiled. "She works at Dollar General."

"I started my college education at Mount Marty, later transferring to Presentation College," Heinrich explained. "I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice and a minor in Social Work."

"Following college graduation, I started working with an attorney where I did mostly clerical work and setting up appointments," he listed.

"Next I worked for the Clerk of Courts in Aberdeen, helping with the maintenance of public records," Heinrich said. "These records must be up-to-date and available for the public."

"Part of my job with the Clerk of Courts started with small claims," he explained. "From there I became involved with criminal court work where I was in charge of taking the minutes during court sessions."

"I enjoyed this kind of work," Heinrich admitted, "especially when it involved pleasant jobs like recording adoptions, marriage licenses, and seeing people graduate from specialty courts."

"I have been accepted and will begin taking online classes in the fall of 2022," he stated. "These classes will be through the University of South Dakota where I plan to earn my Master of Science Administration Degree with an emphasis in Non-profit / Government Organizational Leadership."

"My mom saw the notice for the position of Groton's City Finance Officer and told me about it," Doug smiled. "I am really happy to be working here, especially with April Abeln and Kelli Locke who have been such willing and friendly helpers."

"In addition to the great welcome I received from the office personnel, I really enjoy getting to know the citizens of Groton and am looking forward to being involved with this great community!" he exclaimed.

"The most difficult part of this job is getting used to a different set of legal terms involved in running a city," Doug admitted. "It has been a big change in my life, but I'm getting everything figured out!"



**Doug Heinrich takes over as the new finance officer in Groton. The last time a male sat in that seat was when H.T. Foss was the city auditor.** (Photo by Dorene Nelson)

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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  
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Bary Keith at Harr Motors  
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Groton Dairy Queen  
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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!**

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Guest Speaker  
Nicole J Phillips  
The Kindness Podcast

*You're  
Invited!*

## RESET *womens conference*

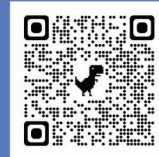
SATURDAY, MARCH 5  
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

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.

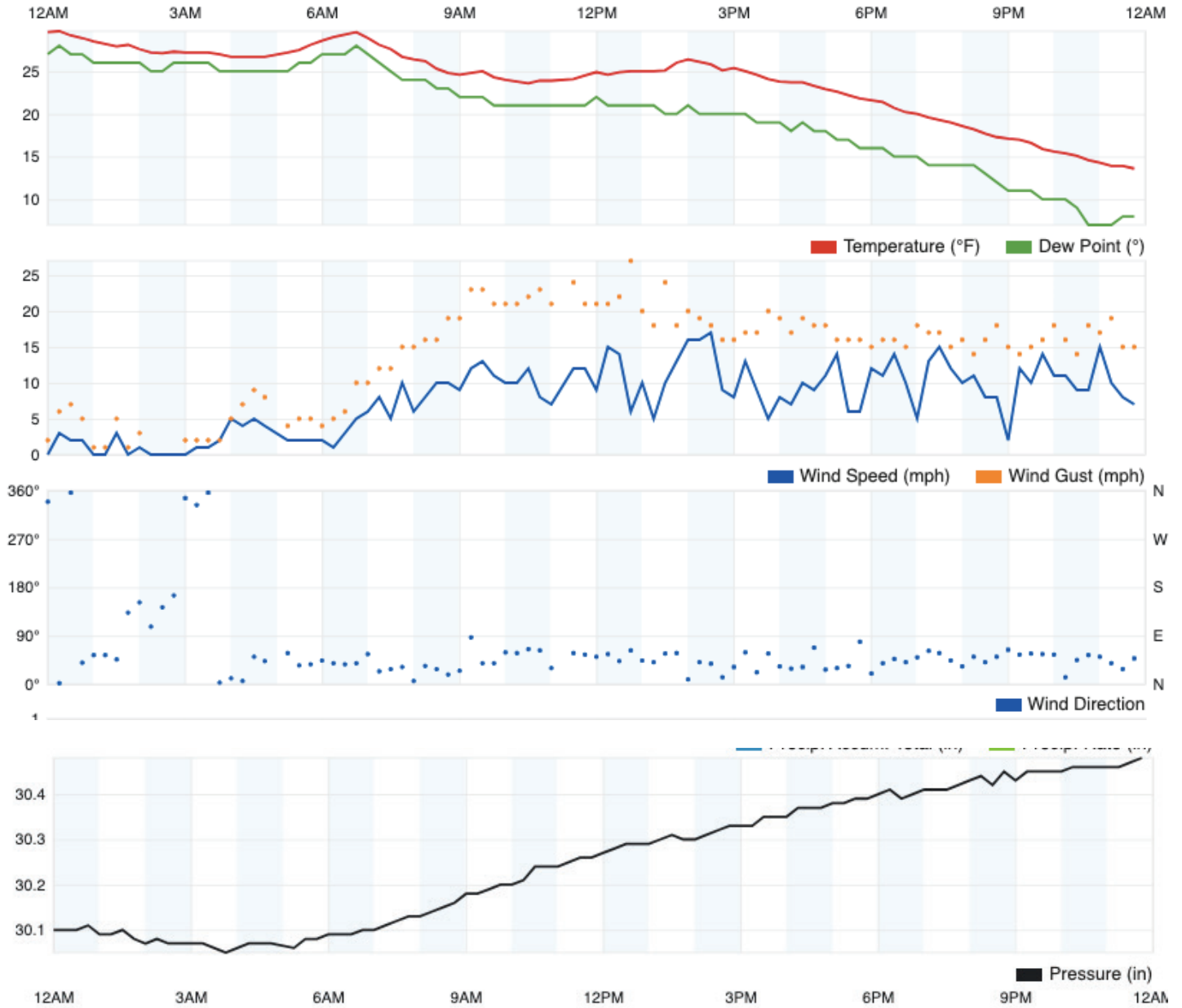
REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT  
ONLINE AT [ROSEHILLEFC.COM](http://ROSEHILLEFC.COM)



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs







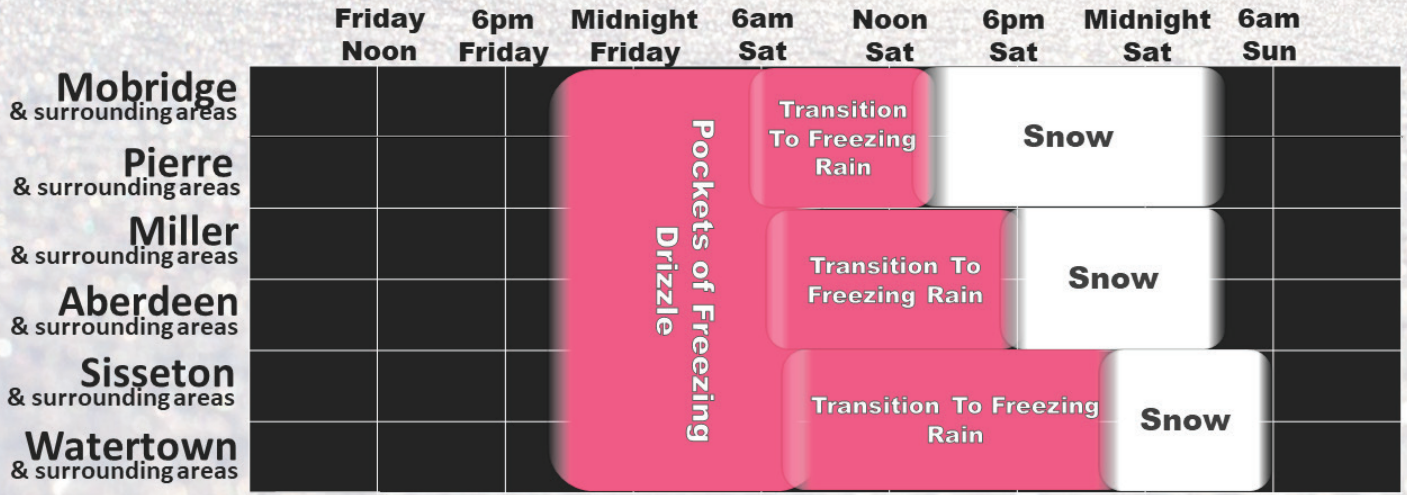
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## Early Spring Storm System Timeline

Low pressure will move up out of Nebraska into Minnesota and Wisconsin Saturday, initially generating drizzle before moving on to freezing rain and then snow. Breezy easterly and northerly winds (about 25-35mph) for Friday & Saturday respectively.



Visit [www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr) for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 3/3/2022 3:14 AM CT



As the storm system gets closer we continue to refine the forecasts, with the general consensus that this will start with pockets of drizzle and freezing drizzle late Friday. Overnight into Saturday drizzle will become more widespread and intense, with ice accumulations possible, before we see the transition to snow from west to east. System will depart, taking moisture with it early Sunday morning.



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## Today in Weather History

March 3, 1994: The melting of a very high snowpack resulted in flooding along the James River, as well as other lowlands and farmland. Widespread problems included damaged roads, washed-out culverts, and flood damage to homes, especially basement flooding.

1896: The temperature in downtown San Francisco, California, fell to 33 degrees, which was the lowest ever for the city in March.

1966 - A tornado hit Jackson, MS, killing 54 persons. (David Ludlum)

1980 - A coastal storm produced 25 inches of snow at Elizabeth City, NC, and 30 inches at Cape Hatteras NC. At Miami FL the mercury dipped to 32 degrees. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1983 - The last of a series of storms to strike the California coast finally came to an end. Waves fifteen to twenty feet high pounded the coast for two days, and in a four day period up to 18 inches of rain drenched the Los Angeles and Santa Barbara area. On the morning of the first, thunderstorms spawned two tornadoes which moved through the Los Angeles area. (Storm Data)

1987 - A storm brought heavy rain and gale force winds to Washington and Oregon. Quillayute WA received 2.67 inches of rain in 24 hours, and winds gusted to 60 mph at Astoria OR. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A small but intense low pressure system roared across west central Mississippi at 90 mph early in the morning. A tornado in southern Mississippi picked up an automobile, carried it 150 feet, and tossed it through the brick wall of an unoccupied retirement home. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Wintry weather prevailed from the southern Rockies to the Upper Great Lakes. Neguanee MI received 19 inches of snow, and up to 24 inches of snow blanketed Colorado. Blizzard conditions were reported in Minnesota. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - An upper level weather disturbance produced snow in the Colorado Rockies, with eight inches reported at Winter Park, and a storm moving off the Pacific Ocean began to spread rain and snow across the western U.S. March continued to start off like a lamb elsewhere around the country. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1991: A significant ice storm coated parts of central and northwestern New York State with up to two inches of ice. The damage was totaled at \$375 million. It was the most costly natural disaster ever in the state up until that time. Nearly half a million people were without power at the height of the storm, and many would not see their power restored until the 16th.

2003 - It was a day of temperature extremes. Miami reached a high temperature of 90 degrees, the earliest observed 90 degree temperature since March 5, 1964. Meanwhile Marquette, MI, dropped to 30 degrees below zero, the lowest temperature ever recorded in the city in March.

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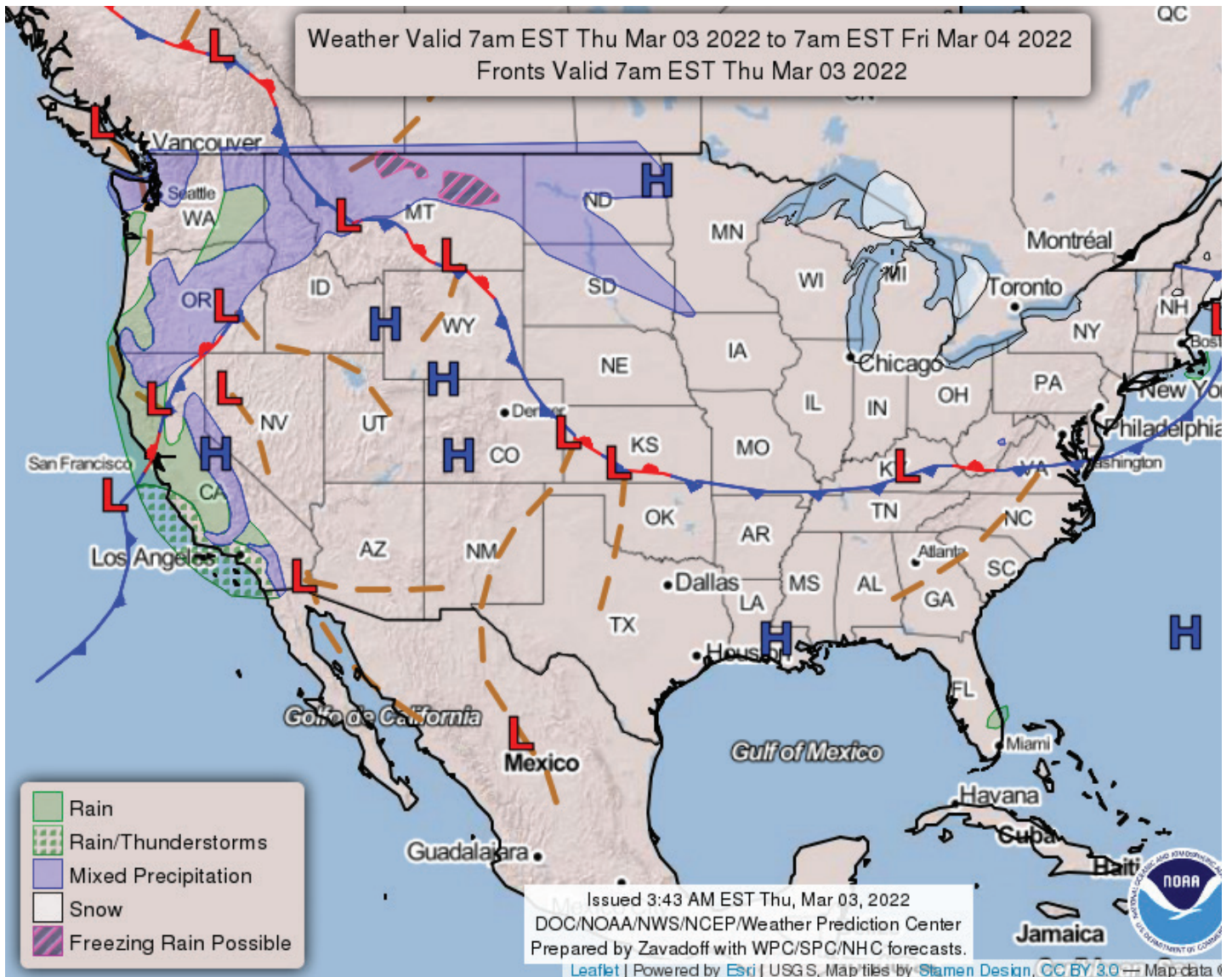
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 30 °F at 12:10 AM**  
**Low Temp: 13 °F at 11:57 PM**  
**Wind: 27 mph at 11:14 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 11 hours, 18 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 72 in 1905  
Record Low: -20 in 2019  
Average High: 35°F  
Average Low: 13°F  
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.07  
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 1.24  
Precip Year to Date: 0.97  
Sunset Tonight: 6:23:33 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:03:08 AM



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## The Lasting Legacy Of The Lord

Voltaire, a famous French philosopher, was also a brilliant atheist. He wrote many articles deriding the Bible. On one occasion he declared, "One hundred years from today the Bible will be a forgotten book!"

Most people have never heard that quote, yet most people have heard of the Bible. After Voltaire died, for nearly 100 years, his home was used as the depository for the French Bible Society. How ironic that Bibles were sold from what once was the place where he lived and wrote his materials proclaiming that God's Word would not last. Yet, it is he who is nearly forgotten while the Bible has become a "bestseller" year after year. That home, by the way, is now a museum.

Others have also attempted to destroy the meaning and the message of the Bible. No one has been successful. It has survived every assault and weathered every storm. It has been banned from continents and burned in public bonfires. It has been ridiculed and rejected, but it is still honored and held in esteem by those who seek the way, the truth, and the life. It has been despised and disputed, debated and denied having relevance in today's world, yet sought for when eternal questions need truthful answers.

The Bible is still the most read, the most published and the most translated book ever written. It continues to change lives and provide directions for those who seek a lamp for their feet and a light for their paths.

"Your Word, Lord, is eternal, it stands firm in the heavens," wrote the Psalmist. His truth will last forever!

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for the promises that Your love, mercy, grace, and salvation will last forever. Your promises guide and encourage us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Your Word, Lord, is eternal, it stands firm in the heavens. Psalm 119:89



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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

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All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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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 Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

14-19-20-31-34

(fourteen, nineteen, twenty, thirty-one, thirty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$31,000

Lotto America

08-17-24-26-38, Star Ball: 2, ASB: 3

(eight, seventeen, twenty-four, twenty-six, thirty-eight; Star Ball: two; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$8.4 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$113 million

Powerball

19-37-48-61-63, Powerball: 12, Power Play: 2

(nineteen, thirty-seven, forty-eight, sixty-one, sixty-three; Powerball: twelve; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$73 million

### South Dakota lawmakers pass restrictive abortion pill laws

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Legislature on Wednesday passed a proposal from Gov. Kristi Noem that aims to make the state one of the hardest places in the U.S. to get abortion pills, though it won't actually be enacted unless the state prevails in a federal court battle.

Every Senate Republican voted to pass the bill, sending it to Noem's desk on a 32-2 vote. However, the bill contains language that stipulates most of it won't take effect unless the state convinces a federal judge to lift a preliminary injunction against a similar rule Noem attempted to enact last year.

The bill would require women seeking an abortion to make three separate trips to a doctor in order to take abortion pills and make it clear that women in the state cannot get them through a telemedicine consultation.

The Food and Drug Administration last year permanently removed a major obstacle for women seeking abortion pills by eliminating a long-standing requirement that they pick up the medication in person.

But women in South Dakota are still required to make two trips to an abortion clinic to get the pills. First, for an initial screening, then they must wait 72 hours before they can return to the clinic to get both drugs in the two-dose regimen. They can take the second dose at home.

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

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

A federal judge last month granted a preliminary injunction against the rule, but the state has appealed that ruling.

On the Senate floor Wednesday, Republican Sen. Erin Tobin argued that telemedicine consultations for abortion risked women's health because it would raise the chances doctors miss conditions that could complicate the procedure.

While Noem centered her arguments in the Legislature around women's health, she celebrated its pas-



sage as a clampdown on abortion access.

"With this bill, we will protect both unborn babies and their mothers from this dangerous procedure," she posted on Twitter shortly after it passed the Senate.

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

The agency found complications were rare from the drugs, which are used in about 40% of all abortions in the U.S. The FDA has reported 26 deaths associated with the drug since 2000, though not all of those can be directly attributed to the medication due to existing health conditions and other factors.

"Medication abortion is safe, common and essential health care," Jett Jonelis, the advocacy manager for the ACLU of South Dakota, said in a statement after the Senate vote. "South Dakotans deserve the right to make their own personal decisions about their lives and futures without politicians getting in the middle of the doctor-patient relationship."

## Oil driller invests in carbon-capture pipeline for Midwest

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota's biggest oil driller said Wednesday it will commit \$250 million to help fund a proposed pipeline that would gather carbon dioxide produced by ethanol plants across the Midwest and pump it thousands of feet underground for permanent storage.

Continental Resources, headed by billionaire oil tycoon Harold Hamm, discussed the investment into Summit Carbon Solutions' \$4.5 billion pipeline at an ethanol plant in Casselton, in eastern North Dakota. The plant is one of 31 ethanol facilities across Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and the Dakotas, where emissions would be captured and piped to western North Dakota and buried deep underground.

The Summit project is one of at least two major CO2 pipelines planned for the Midwest. Navigator CO2 Ventures is planning a pipeline that will stretch over 1,200 miles (1,931 kilometers) through Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota and Illinois.

Similar CO2 pipeline plans are being considered elsewhere after the federal government increased tax credits, by 2026, to \$50 for every metric ton of carbon dioxide a company sequesters. Ethanol producers are aiming to make the fuel more marketable along the West Coast and especially California which requires distributors in that state buy only ethanol with a low carbon emissions impact; companies that produce such ethanol can get a higher price.

The Summit pipeline system would extend 2,000 miles (3,219 kilometers) and could move up to 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide a year, said Wade Boeshans, executive vice president of the Iowa-based pipeline developer. That's equal to removing the annual carbon emissions of 2.6 million cars, he said.

Boeshans said the involvement of Hamm likely will help raise capital and boost the project's profile. Hamm's company helped lead a renaissance in the U.S. oil industry through the use of horizontal drilling to free oil trapped in shale rock. Continental is the biggest producer and largest leaseholder in the Bakken shale formation, with more than 1 million acres (404,686 hectares) in North Dakota and Montana.

Hamm told The Associated Press that his company is looking at the pipeline project as more than an investment.

"We feel it's the right thing to do at the right time," Hamm said. "Carbon capture and storage is going to be more and more important every day as we go forward in America."

North Dakota is the nation's No. 3 oil producer behind Texas and New Mexico.

Continental and Summit officials said there are no plans to inject carbon dioxide into old oil wells to boost production, a process that has been largely unsuccessful in North Dakota.

"That is not part of our business plan," Boeshans said.

North Dakota's underground rock formations are ideal for carbon storage, state Geologist Ed Murphy said.

The Trump administration in 2018 gave North Dakota the power to regulate underground wells used for long-term storage of waste carbon dioxide. North Dakota was the first state to be given such power, the Environmental Protection Agency said in announcing the move. The state has since invested heavily in

carbon capture and sequestration technology.

Republican North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum praised the Summit pipeline and other proposed carbon storage projects in North Dakota, which are integral as part of the state's plan to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Boeshans said the company in December began negotiating with landowners along the pipeline's path for easements, though the company would not rule out the use eminent domain if agreements with landowners can't be reached voluntarily.

"Overall, we're making progress with voluntary easements," he said.

The company has not filed permit applications in North Dakota for the pipeline, or for the estimated dozen underground wells needed for storage. The project could employ up to 17,000 people during construction, and lead to 500 permanent jobs when it's expected to come online in mid-2024, Boeshans said.

## Oceti Sakowin school dismissed by SD state House committee

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota House lawmakers on Wednesday dismissed a proposal to fund two new schools structured around Oceti Sakowin language and culture, dealing a blow to Native American educators who have tried for years to get state support to rethink schooling in their communities.

The Republican-controlled House Education committee rejected the bill on a 4-8 vote, all but killing the proposal that had already passed the Senate. It was the third year that Lakota lawmakers have brought the idea to fund the community-based schools through the state's public school system, and the second time the House committee has rejected it.

Democratic Sen. Troy Heinert, who is leaving the Legislature after this year, has spearheaded the proposals, arguing that it would address low education proficiency levels, high dropout rates and high rates of suicide among Indigenous youth.

He pointed to the history of schools trying to assimilate students and said the new schools would instead encourage and foster students' identity, language and culture. The idea for the schools was sparked from Native American Community Academy, a charter school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, that has produced higher graduation rates for Indigenous students than the rest of the state.

"We want them to feel comfortable and to feel safe," said Chante Heart, a mother who also works for the South Dakota Democratic Party. "Where they can smudge, where they can say their names in Lakota."

However, organizations representing public education opposed the bill, arguing that language immersion schools are already possible within the existing structure. They pointed to an initiative in Rapid City public schools to expand opportunities to learn Lakota language and culture.

"What this bill seeks to do, can and is already happening," said Rob Monson, executive director of the School Administrators of South Dakota.

They also criticized the bill as riddled with problems. The state does not allow charter schools, but school groups argued the bill would do just that. It would create problems for distributing funding and school governance, they argued.

Educators in Rapid City and on the Rosebud Indian Reservation were hoping to apply for funding if the bill was enacted. Sarah White, who is president of a group starting the schools called the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition, said the fledgling schools would continue, but with limited impact.

"We're representing students who are coming from some of the poorest communities, not only in South Dakota, but across the entire nation," she said. "And we're asking that leaders, Indigenous leaders of these schools, identify their own resources."

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Black Hills Pioneer Press. February 26, 2022.

Editorial: Helping protect your right to know

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A bill limiting the government's ability to discuss items in executive session has passed through the state House of Representatives.

HB 1087, sponsored by Rep. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, cleans up an unintended consequence of legislation he sponsored which was passed two years ago.

That bill gave local governments the opportunity to discuss, in executive or closed session, items regarding safety of the public.

It authorized discussion by the government away from the public, "Information pertaining to the protection of public or private property and any person on or within public or private property including:

- (a) Any vulnerability assessment or response plan intended to prevent or mitigate criminal acts;
- (b) Emergency management or response;
- (c) Public safety information that would create a substantial likelihood of endangering public safety or property, if disclosed;
- (d) Computer or communications network schema, passwords, or user identification names;
- (e) Guard schedules;
- (f) Lock combinations; and
- (g) Any blueprint, building plan, or infrastructure record regarding any building or facility that would expose or create vulnerability through disclosure of the location, configuration, or security of critical systems of the building or facility."

Those bullet points are all good, common sense exemptions that do not need to be disclosed to the public.

In December 2019, the Belle Fourche City Council used this new exemption to enter executive session to discuss the purchase of a new HVAC system for the rec center. The city also cited contractual matters as a reason to enter executive session.

After several weeks attempting to gain clarification as to why this needed to be discussed in private, with no calls returned, the Black Hills Pioneer file an open meetings complaint.

And then COVID-19 hit, stopping a timely hearing. The South Dakota Open Meetings Commission generally meets quarterly. By the time the commission held its hearing, more than a year had passed.

The Black Hills Pioneer argued that the law applied the entirety of the exemptions. It seemed as if the commission agreed; however, Dwight Gubbrud, the Belle Fourche city attorney who argued on the city's behalf, said that the first sentence of the law absolutely permitted the city to use the exemption in this instance. Ultimately, the Open Meetings Commission agreed, although it told Belle Fourche that its reason to enter executive session for contractual matters was not an authorized reason.

Mark Watson, editor of the Black Hills Pioneer and chair of the First Amendment Committee for the South Dakota Newspaper Association relayed the outcome to Dave Bordewyk, executive director of the newspaper association, who in turn visited with Rep. Reed.

Reed was flabbergasted at the ruling stating the outcome was not the intent of the law.

So, he drafted a new bill, HB 1087, that was introduced this Legislative session.

On Jan. 27 Watson testified to the House Local Government, in support of the bill.

"We didn't disagree that the city needed a new HVAC system, and they needed one immediately, but what we did disagree on was that the city should have conducted its business in the public eye," Watson said following his testimony.

In the law's first sentence, "Information pertaining to the protection of public or private property and any person on or within public or private property including:" that word "including" creates a massive loophole in which governments could exploit to then enter an executive session.

The proposed change in the law reads, "Information pertaining to the protection of public or private property and any person on or within public or private property specific to:" the same bullet points.

This is a good change. It protects sensitive material and information while keeping the governments' business in the public eye.

On Feb. 10, the committee discussed the bill again.

After Reed made an amendment to the bill, taking the proposed language from the open records sec-



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tion of the law to the opening meetings portion of the law, the committee unanimously approved the bill. "Anyone in today's world who believes an air handling system should be discussed in executive session is living in the Stone Age," Rep. Charlie Hoffman, R-Eureka, a member of the committee said immediately before the bill's passing.

We couldn't agree more. The public has an absolute right to know how their tax dollars are being spent. HB 1087 passed through the state House of Representatives and then the Senate. It is now waiting for Gov. Kristi Noem's signature.

Yankton Press & Dakotan. February 28, 2022.

Editorial: Cutting Sales Tax Rate Not Wise Right Now

In terms of state budgeting, we live in strange times. South Dakota lawmakers—who have been coping with lean budgets and tight revenues as a matter of standard operating procedure for years—are now dealing with a major influx of cash due largely to federal COVID-related aid, and they have spent much of this legislative session exploring various ways to allocate the funds.

But this situation will end when that extra federal funding eventually goes away.

With that in mind, the Senate State Affairs Committee made a wise decision last week when it rejected House Bill 1327, a measure passed by the House to cut the state sales tax by half a percentage point.

The House OK'd the bill over the recommendation of Gov. Kristi Noem to approach such an impact on the state's finances with caution. The measure would have cut the state's sales tax from 4.5% to 4%, a move that would have taken an estimated \$150 million of revenue from the state's coffers.

HB1327 would have essentially reversed a law passed in 2016 to increase the sales tax by half a percentage point to 4.5%. (It had stood at 4% since 1969.) The increased revenue was intended to help raise teacher salaries for educators in grades K-12 and technical schools, as well as provide some property tax relief across the board.

Also, some lawmakers had vowed to lower the 4.5% rate if the state won the right to tax online sales, which it eventually did.

The current flushed coffers are not going to last forever, which means the state's funding structure will eventually revert to something approaching normal.

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

Rep. Chris Karr countered by noting that the state's revenue growth, along with the current federal influx to spur it on, has created the right situation to lower the tax.

"You're going to have that ongoing stimulation to the economy for several years," he said. "That allows us to pull those dollars out because, at the same time, our economy in South Dakota has organic growth through that whole period."

Not surprisingly, education groups opposed the bill. Given that state teaching salaries, which had enjoyed a brief surge after the 2016 law went into effect, have since receded back to the bottom of the pack among states, these groups didn't want to see a potential education funding source jeopardized.

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

The bottom line here (literally) is, we're in unfamiliar territory right now regarding state funding. The federal funding will eventually end but it may likely stimulate new economic growth that will pay dividends down the line. But right now, we don't know where those levels will be at when all this shakes out.

Thus, using caution is the proper call.

END

## Wagner man indicted in death of 2-year-old boy

LAKE ANDES, S. D. (AP) — A Wagner man has been indicted by a grand jury in Charles Mix County in last month's death of a 2-year-old boy.

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Thirty-one-year-old Leonard Sharp Fish, also known as Leonard Walking Eagle, was scheduled for a court appearance Tuesday, but it was canceled because of the indictment, according to Charles Mix County State's Attorney Steven Cotton.

Sharp Fish is charged with committing the abuse of, or cruelty to a minor. The felony charge carries a maximum punishment of 15 years in prison and a \$30,000 fine. He also faces two drug-related charges.

Authorities were called to the hospital in Wagner where Calarina Drapeaux had brought her 2-year-old son on Feb. 16, 2022. The child, listed in court documents as T.T., was later pronounced dead at the hospital.

Investigators found extensive bruising on the child and an autopsy revealed old and new fractures, the Yankton Press and Dakotan reported.

According to court documents, Drapeaux told an investigator she lives at a home in Wagner with Sharp Fish and her four children, including the boy who died.

Sharp Fish stated he cooked for the children, took them to school and was providing for the family. He said the three older children fought or wrestled with the 2-year-old, officials said.

Sharp Fish is scheduled to be arraigned March 14 in First Circuit Court at the Charles Mix County Courthouse at Lake Andes.

His attorney, Keith Goehring, declined to comment on the case Wednesday.

## Live updates: France seizes Russian oligarch-linked yacht

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest developments on the Russia-Ukraine war:

PARIS — French authorities say they have seized a yacht linked to Igor Sechin, an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, as part of European Union sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The French Finance Ministry said in a statement Thursday that customs authorities carried out an inspection of the yacht Amore Vero in the Mediterranean resort of La Ciotat.

The boat arrived in La Ciotat on Jan. 3 for repairs and was slated to stay until April 1. When French customs officers arrived to inspect the yacht, its crew was preparing an urgent departure, even though the repair work wasn't finished, the statement said. The boat was seized to prevent its departure.

It says the boat is owned by a company that lists Sechin as its primary shareholder. Sechin runs Russian oil giant Rosneft.

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Hungary's government is insisting it will not allow any arms shipments bound for neighboring Ukraine to cross its territory, as the European Union country receives tens of thousands of refugees from the conflict and frets about the reliability of its energy links to Moscow.

A large Hungarian ethnic minority, around 150,000 people, lives in the western Ukrainian region of Transcarpathia, just across the border.

The prime minister's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyas, says allowing weapons into Ukraine would endanger that minority.

Gulyas said Thursday that some 120,000 refugees fleeing the conflict have crossed into Hungary so far.

Hungary has agreed to all EU sanctions imposed on Russia, Gulyas said. But he argued against allowing sanctions to affect Hungary's energy sector, which relies heavily on Russian natural gas.

Gulyas also said that Hungary will not pull out of the planned Russian-backed expansion of Hungary's only nuclear power plant, which will be financed primarily by a Russian state bank.

BERLIN — A German magazine says it has hired 15 reporters in Ukraine and Russia to cover the war after existing staff waived part of their salaries and the publication received a flood of donations from supporters.

Editor-in-chief Benjamin Friedrich said Katapult magazine is sending its new hires in Ukraine urgently needed equipment such as protective vests, helmets and smartphones to help them do their work. Fourteen of the new hires are women.

"It's a bit of a wild effort," Friedrich told The Associated Press in a telephone interview Thursday. The

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magazine hopes to hire a total of 21 staff for the new venture, which will initially be published online in English and Ukrainian, he said.

"Russian would be great too, eventually," Friedrich said, noting that coverage of the war in Russian media is very limited and not often impartial.

Katapult magazine, a quarterly based in the northeast German town of Greifswald, has made a name for itself in recent years explaining complex social issues with easy-to-understand graphics and charts that are widely shared on social media. It claims to have 150,000 print subscribers.

**MOSCOW** — Russia's foreign minister says Moscow is ready for peace talks but will press its effort to destroy Ukraine's military infrastructure, which the Kremlin claims is threatening Russia.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Thursday that the Russian delegation to the talks submitted its demands to Ukrainian negotiators earlier this week and is now waiting for Kyiv's response in a meeting set for Thursday.

Lavrov said that Russia will insist on provisions that Ukraine will never again represent a military threat to Russia. He said it will be up to Ukrainians to choose what government they should have.

Lavrov voiced regret for civilian casualties during the Russian action in Ukraine, which started last week, and insisted that the Russian military is using only precision weapons against military targets.

He tacitly acknowledged that some Russian strikes could have killed civilians, saying that "any military action is fraught with casualties, and not just among the military but also civilians."

**BEIJING** — China is denouncing a report that it asked Russia to delay invading Ukraine until after the Beijing Winter Olympics as "fake news" and a "very despicable" attempt to divert attention and shift blame over the conflict.

"The New York Times report is purely fake news, and such behaviors of diverting attentions and shifting blames are very despicable," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Thursday.

The Times article cited a "Western intelligence report" considered credible by officials, which indicated that "senior Chinese officials had some level of direct knowledge about Russia's war plans or intentions before the invasion started last week," the Times wrote.

China also commented on its decision to abstain in Wednesday's U.N. General Assembly emergency session vote to demand an immediate halt to Moscow's attack on Ukraine and the withdrawal of all Russian troops.

"Regrettably, the draft resolution submitted to the General Assembly emergency special session for vote had not undergone full consultations with the whole membership, nor does it take into consideration the history and the complexity of the current crisis," Wang said.

**BERLIN** — Activists from the Fridays for Future environmental movement are staging protests in dozens of German cities calling for peace in Ukraine.

The group, which has staged large marches in the past calling for greater action against climate change, said it wants to show solidarity with the people of Ukraine following Russia's attack.

The demonstrations, including one in front of the German parliament, are scheduled to take place in 35 cities on Thursday.

Separately, churches across Germany are planning to ring their bells at noon for seven minutes, representing the seven days since the start of the war in Ukraine.

**JERUSALEM** — Israel's prime minister is calling on world leaders to get Russia and Ukraine "out of the battlefield and to the negotiating table" after a week of fighting.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett spoke in English on Thursday at a cyber tech conference in Tel Aviv, less than a day after he spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Israel maintains good relations with both countries. It has condemned Russia's invasion and sent hu-

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humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but the same time has avoided taking a stance that might anger Moscow. Russia and Israel cooperate on military operations in Syria.

Bennett said of the situation in Ukraine that "things are looking bad on the ground right now, but it's important to understand that if world leaders don't act quickly it can get much worse."

**GENEVA** — German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock is backing calls to investigate potential human rights violations committed by Russia in Ukraine, with a view to holding to account those responsible.

In a video message to the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva, Baerbock said that grave abuses "must be prosecuted."

"We urgently need a commission of inquiry on Ukraine to investigate all violations of human rights that have been committed by Russia since its military aggression," she said. "We must stand strong on accountability."

Baerbock also expressed support for activists in Russia, such as the recently closed human rights group Memorial and imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

**COPENHAGEN, Denmark** — A Hercules C130 transport aircraft with some 2,000 anti-tank missiles for Ukraine has taken off from Norway.

The weapons are to help Ukrainian forces resist Russia's invasion, which began last week.

Norway's national news agency NTB said the shipment was being sent from Oslo on Thursday to a third country before being transported to Ukraine.

Also Thursday, Germany's economy ministry approved sending 2,700 anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine, the dpa news agency said.

The agency quoted unnamed Economy Ministry officials saying the weapons are Soviet-made, shoulder-fired Strela surface-to-air missiles left over from East German army supplies.

Germany reversed its previous refusal to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons last week, following Russia's attack.

**LONDON** — A British military expert says the longer Ukrainian cities can hold out against Russian attacks, the fewer troops Moscow will have at its disposal to encircle Kyiv, its main objective.

Jack Watling, an expert in land warfare at the Royal United Services Institute, said Thursday that if cities are able to resist they can draw out the conflict.

"If the conflict protracts, the Ukrainians have more leverage to be able to negotiate," Watling said.

His assessment came as Russia claimed its troops had taken the southern city of Kherson, even as the head of the local administration said he was working to keep the Ukrainian flag flying over the city.

Russian forces pounded Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, overnight and air raid sirens were heard in the capital, Kyiv.

The next phase of the war will test the Ukrainians' commitment and their ability to conduct small-scale offensive actions that disrupt and delay the Russian advance, Watling said.

The challenge will be to prevent cities from being surrounded so they aren't cut off from supplies of food, water and ammunition, he added.

**GENEVA** — The U.N. human rights office says 227 civilians have been killed and another 525 injured in its latest count of the toll in Ukraine in the wake of Russia's military invasion that began a week ago.

The office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights says the tally eclipses the entire civilian casualty count from the war in eastern Ukraine between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces in 2014 — which left 136 dead and 577 injured.

The rights office admits that the figures so far are a vast undercount. It uses a strict methodology and counts only confirmed casualties. Ukrainian officials have presented far higher numbers.

The rights office said in a statement late Wednesday that "real figures are considerably higher, especially in government-controlled territory and especially in recent days, as the receipt of information from some



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locations where intensive hostilities have been going on was delayed and many reports were still pending corroboration.”

Most of the casualties were caused by the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area, including shelling from heavy artillery and multi-launch rocket systems, and airstrikes, the rights office said.

**ATHENS**, Greece — Greek authorities say a convoy of dozens of Greek citizens and staff from the Greek consulate in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Mariupol are making their way toward Ukraine’s western borders.

The convoy of 21 vehicles and more than 80 people left Mariupol on Wednesday, arriving in the town of Zaporizhzhia that night. Greek authorities said the convoy set out again Thursday morning from Zaporizhzhia, heading toward the border with Moldova.

Greek Ambassador Frangiskos Kostelenos, who was heading the convoy, told Greek state television ERT the convoy had been delayed Wednesday by checkpoints and a destroyed bridge but the vehicles had arrived in Zaporizhzhia without serious incident.

A Greek diaspora community in Ukraine lives mainly in the Donetsk Oblast region, in and around Mariupol. Greece’s consulate in Mariupol continues to operate.

**BERLIN** — The German news agency dpa reported that Germany has approved sending 2,700 anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine.

The report quoted unnamed Economy Ministry officials on Thursday saying the weapons are Soviet-made, shoulder-fired Strela surface-to-air missiles left over from East German army supplies.

Germany reversed its previous refusal to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons last week following Russia’s invasion.

Berlin has already authorized sending 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 Stinger surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine.

**LONDON** — Britain’s Ministry of Defense says that a Russian military column heading for Kyiv has made “little discernible progress” over the past three days and remains over 30 kilometers (19 miles) from the center of the city.

The column has been delayed by Ukrainian resistance, mechanical breakdowns and congestion, the ministry said in its daily intelligence briefing Thursday.

Despite heavy Russian shelling, the cities of Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Mariupol remain in Ukrainian hands, the department said. Some Russian forces have entered the city of Kherson, but the military situation remains unclear, it added.

The ministry also noted that Russia has been forced to admit that 498 of its soldiers have been killed in Ukraine and another 1,597 have been wounded. The actual number of those killed and wounded will almost certainly be considerably higher and will continue to rise, it said.

**STOCKHOLM** — Low-cost fashion brand Hennes & Mauritz AB has become the latest company to suspend its activities in Russia and Ukraine, saying it had decided to temporarily pause all sales in its Russian stores and temporarily close its Ukrainian shops “due to the safety of customers and colleagues.”

The Stockholm-based group said Wednesday that it was “deeply concerned about the tragic developments in Ukraine and stand with all the people who are suffering.” It added that it was “in dialogue with all relevant stakeholders.”

H&M said clothes “and other necessities” had been donated and the H&M Foundation, which is privately funded by the founders and main owners of the group, had made donations to Save the Children and to UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency.

**BRUSSELS** — With close to a million refugees already fleeing Ukraine for the eastern nations of the

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European Union, the bloc is bracing for the arrival of many more as the Russian invasion continues.

EU Commissioner Ylva Johansson said Thursday ahead of a special meeting of justice and home affairs ministers that "we have to be prepared for millions of refugees to come to the European Union."

The bloc is already moving toward granting temporary protection to those fleeing war, seeking to give temporary residence permits to refugees and allow them rights to education and work in the 27-nation bloc.

The EU Commission has already promised at least 500 million euros (\$560 million) in humanitarian aid for the refugees. Johansson said the bloc will need funding and equipment.

**LONDON** — Fitch Ratings has downgraded Russia's credit rating, citing a "severe shock" to fundamental conditions due to its invasion of Ukraine.

Fitch said the war has raised risks to financial stability and could undermine Russia's ability to service its government debt. It said that, in turn, will weaken the country's finances and slow its economy, further raising geopolitical risks and uncertainty.

Among other factors, the ratings agency noted sanctions imposed by Western countries that are limiting access to foreign currency needed to repay debt and purchase imports and increased uncertainty over Russia's willingness to pay such debts.

**BEIJING** — Russian and Belarusian athletes have been banned from the Winter Paralympic Games for their countries' roles in the war in Ukraine, the International Paralympic Committee said Thursday in Beijing.

The about-face comes less than 24 hours after the IPC on Wednesday said it would allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete when the Games open on Friday, but only as neutral athletes with colors, flags and other national symbols removed.

The IPC received immediate criticism for its initial decision. It was termed a betrayal that sent the wrong message to Russia's leadership. The IPC also said it was evident that many athletes would refuse to compete against Russians or Belarusians, creating chaos for the Paralympics.

The IPC now joins sports like soccer, track, basketball, hockey and others that have imposed blanket bans on Russians and Belarusians.

**SEOUL, South Korea** — A South Korean pharmaceutical company manufacturing Russia's COVID-19 vaccine says it's bracing for business complications as the U.S.-led West escalates sanctions against Russia over the invasion of Ukraine.

Recently expanded U.S. sanctions include targeted measures against the Russian Direct Investment Fund, a sovereign wealth fund run by a close ally of President Vladimir Putin that globally markets the Sputnik vaccines.

Kim Gi-young, an official from Seoul-based GL Rapha, said the sanctions won't directly impede its production of the shots as the measures aren't aimed at essential medical supplies.

However, the company is concerned about potential problems rising from the financial side as South Korea joins the United States and many European countries in a move to cut off key Russian banks from global payment systems.

"Right now, we are watching how the situation develops," Kim said.

GL Rapha has so far produced 5 million shots of the single-dose Sputnik Light vaccine, but none of them have been used so far as Russia continues to delay rollout plans, Kim said.

GL Rapha also has an agreement with RDIF to produce 150 million shots of the two-dose Sputnik V and is participating in a consortium of South Korean companies that has been contracted to produce another 500 million doses of Sputnik V, but these shots haven't been produced yet.

RDIF has reportedly criticized the U.S. sanctions and said the measures would slow its promotion of Sputnik V.

**MAZYR, Belarus** — A string of seven bus-size Russian military ambulances — their windows blocked with gray shades — pulled up to the back entrance of the main hospital about 30 miles (48 kilometers) from

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the border with Ukraine on Tuesday evening, ferrying casualties from the front.

The convoy was part of what residents and doctors said has in recent days become a steady flow of Russian soldiers wounded in fierce fighting around Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, where a Russian advance has stalled in the face of strong resistance.

A doctor at the hospital — which is in southern Belarus's Gomel region, a main staging ground for Russia's offensive — said injured Russian troops began arriving on Monday. "I hope they don't jail me for sharing this," she said.

GENEVA — The U.N. refugee agency says 1 million people have fled Ukraine since Russia's invasion less than a week ago, an exodus without precedent in this century for its speed.

The tally from UNHCR amounts to more than 2 percent of Ukraine's population on the move in under a week. The World Bank counted the population at 44 million at the end of 2020.

The U.N. agency has predicted that up to 4 million people could eventually leave Ukraine but cautioned that even that projection could be revised upward.

In an email, UNHCR spokesperson Joung-ah Ghedini-Williams wrote: "Our data indicates we passed the 1M mark" as of midnight in central Europe, based on counts collected by national authorities.

On Twitter, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, wrote: "In just seven days we have witnessed the exodus of one million refugees from Ukraine to neighboring countries."

Syria, whose civil war erupted in 2011, currently remains the country with the largest refugee outflows — at more than 5.6 million people, according to UNHCR figures. But even at the swiftest rate of flight by refugees out of Syria, in early 2013, it took at least three months for 1 million refugees to leave that country.

UNHCR spokesperson Shabia Mantoo said Wednesday that "at this rate" the outflows from Ukraine could make it the source of "the biggest refugee crisis this century."

KYIV, Ukraine — In a video address to the nation early Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy gave an upbeat assessment of the war and called on Ukrainians to keep up the resistance.

"We are a people who in a week have destroyed the plans of the enemy," he said. "They will have no peace here. They will have no food. They will have here not one quiet moment."

Zelenskyy didn't comment on whether the Russians have seized several cities, including Kherson.

"If they went somewhere, then only temporarily. We'll drive them out," he said.

He said the fighting is taking a toll on the morale of Russian soldiers, who "go into grocery stores and try to find something to eat."

"These are not warriors of a superpower," he said. "These are confused children who have been used."

He said the Russian death toll has reached about 9,000.

"Ukraine doesn't want to be covered in bodies of soldiers," he said. "Go home."

## Kyiv shrines, memorials with powerful symbolic value at risk

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

Kyiv, bracing for a potentially catastrophic Russian attack, is the spiritual heart of Ukraine.

Among the sites at risk in the Ukrainian capital are the nation's most sacred Orthodox shrines, dating back nearly 1,000 years to the dawn of Christianity in the region.

The sites, along with other landmark shrines in Kyiv, are religiously significant to both Ukrainian Orthodox and Russian Orthodox. They also stand as powerful symbols in the quarrel over whether the two groups are parts of a single people — as Russian President Vladimir Putin has claimed — or are distinct but related Slavic nations.

The landmarks include the golden domed St. Sophia's Cathedral and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, a sprawling underground and above-ground complex also known as the Monastery of the Caves. Others include the multi-towered St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery and St. Andrew's Church.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian officials said Russian forces damaged another monument — Ukraine's main Ho-

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locaust memorial, Babi Yar — prompting international condemnation.

“What will be next if even Babi Yar (is hit)” asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Wednesday. “What other ‘military’ objects, ‘NATO bases’ are threatening Russia? St. Sophia’s Cathedral, Lavra, Andrew’s Church?”

There is no indication the Russians intentionally targeted Babi Yar. Nor is there any confirmation that the Russians plan to target any of the sacred sites in Kyiv. But civilian buildings have already been hit in other cities, and Kyiv’s major shrines sit in elevated locations that could leave them especially vulnerable.

Case in point: The Assumption Cathedral in Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, was damaged in the recent attacks, reportedly with stained-glass windows broken and other decorations damaged. The cathedral, which is under the Moscow-affiliated Orthodox church, was Kharkiv’s tallest building until sometime in the 21st century.

The risk is even greater in Kyiv.

“We’re talking about a very old city,” said Jacob Lassin, a postdoctoral research scholar at the Arizona State University’s Melikian Center for Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies. “The center part is densely packed. Even if you’re trying to hit one thing, you could easily hit something else.”

The symbolic value of the shrines is powerful even to people who don’t share the religious faith they commemorate.

“The idea that the main symbol that stood in your city for 1,000 years could be at risk or could be destroyed is very frightening,” Lassin said.

The symbols matter not only to the Ukrainian people but to Putin, too. He justified the invasion with baseless claims he was countering “neo-Nazism” in Ukraine — this in a country with a Jewish president.

Babi Yar, a ravine in Kyiv, is where more than 33,000 Jews were killed within 48 hours in 1941 when the city was under Nazi occupation. The killing was carried out by SS troops along with local collaborators. It was one of the largest mass killings at a single location during World War II, according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

It is “at once an accursed and a sacred place,” American Jewish Committee CEO David Harris said. Just last year, Zelenskyy took part in the inaugural ceremony of a memorial there.

Whether Kyiv’s Orthodox shrines come under direct attack or receive collateral damage, such an action would be a “total refutation” of another of Putin’s claims — to be defending Orthodox Ukrainians loyal to Moscow’s patriarch, Lassin said.

“It would literally be destroying the main seat of Russian Orthodoxy according to his own rhetoric,” Lassin said.

The shrines’ oldest parts date back to the medieval Kievan Rus kingdom, soon after its adoption of Christianity under Prince Vladimir in the 10th century. Putin has claimed the kingdom is the common ancestor of today’s Russia and Ukraine. Ukrainians counter that theirs is a distinct nation now under fratricidal attack from its Slavic neighbor.

The cathedral and nearby monastic complex represent “a masterpiece of human creative genius in both its architectural conception and its remarkable decoration,” says a summary by UNESCO, which lists them as World Heritage Sites.

The cathedral, built under Prince Yaroslav the Wise in the 11th century, was modeled after the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the spiritual and architectural heart of medieval Orthodoxy. The Kyiv cathedral includes mosaics and frescoes as old as 1,000 years, and it was a model for later churches in the region, according to UNESCO.

“The huge pantheon of Christian saints depicted in the cathedral has an unrivaled multiplicity among Byzantine monuments of that time,” UNESCO says.

The Monastery of the Caves, including underground monastic cells, tombs of saints and above-ground churches built across nearly nine centuries, was hugely influential in spreading Orthodox Christianity, according to UNESCO.

Both complexes were endangered and at times damaged by centuries of warfare.



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St. Sophia's, sacred both to Ukraine's two main rival Orthodox churches and to Catholics, is currently a museum and isn't normally used for religious services.

Two of the landmarks are associated with opposing sides in the schism within Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

The monastic complex is overseen by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is affiliated with the Orthodox patriarch of Moscow, though it has broad autonomy. St. Michael's is the base for the more nationalist Orthodox Church of Ukraine. But the Ukrainian leaders of both Orthodox groups have harshly criticized the Russian invasion.

If Kyiv's landmarks are damaged or destroyed, "could it potentially damage morale? Yes," Lassin said. "Could it potentially galvanize people to be more united? Absolutely. ... What I can say is the Ukrainian people are extremely resilient and are fighting back through all of this."

## Ukraine refugee count tops 1 million; Russians besiege ports

By JIM HEINTZ, YURAS KARMANAU, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — More than 1 million people have fled Ukraine following Russia's invasion, in the swiftest refugee exodus this century, the United Nations said Thursday, as Moscow said it was ready for more talks to end fighting even as its forces pressed their assaults on the country's second-largest city and two strategic seaports.

The tally the U.N. refugee agency released to The Associated Press was reached Wednesday and amounts to more than 2% of Ukraine's population being forced out of the country in seven days. The mass evacuation could be seen in Kharkiv, a city of about 1.5 million people where residents desperate to escape falling shells and bombs crowded the city's train station and pressed onto trains, not always knowing where they were headed.

With a column of tanks and other vehicles apparently stalled for days outside the capital of Kyiv, fighting continued on multiple fronts across Ukraine. A second round of talks aimed at ending the fighting was expected later Thursday in neighboring Belarus — though the two sides appeared to have little common ground.

"We are ready to conduct talks, but we will continue the operation because we won't allow Ukraine to preserve a military infrastructure that threatens Russia," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, adding that it would let Ukrainians to choose what government they should have.

Lavrov said that the West has continuously armed Ukraine, trained its troops and built up bases there to turn Ukraine into a bulwark against Russia — repeating Russian claims that it has used to justify its operation in Ukraine.

The U.S. and its allies have insisted that NATO is a defensive alliance that doesn't pose a threat to Russia. And the West fears Russia's invasion is meant to overthrow Ukraine's government and install a friendly government.

Russian forces continued their pressure. Britain's Defense Ministry said Mariupol, a large city on the Azov Sea, was encircled by Russian forces. The status of another vital port, Kherson, a Black Sea shipbuilding city of 280,000, remained unclear.

Russia's forces claimed to have taken complete control of Kherson, which would be the biggest city to fall in the invasion thus far. Britain's Defense Ministry said that was possible, though not yet verified. The mayor said there were no Ukrainian forces in the city — but he said the Ukrainian flag was still flying over it.

Overnight, Associated Press reporters in Kyiv heard at least one explosion before videos started circulating of apparent strikes on the capital.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it had knocked out a reserve broadcasting center in the Lysa Hora district, about 7 kilometers (4 miles) south of the government headquarters. It said unspecified precision weapons were used, and that there were no casualties or damage to residential buildings.

A statement from the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces didn't address the strikes, saying only that Russian forces were "regrouping" and "trying to reach the northern outskirts" of the city.

"The advance on Kyiv has been rather not very organized and now they're more or less stuck," military

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analyst Pavel Felgenhauer told the AP in Moscow.

At least 227 civilians have been killed and another 525 wounded since the invasion began, according to the latest figures from the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. Earlier, Ukraine said more than 2,000 civilians have died, a figure that could not be independently verified.

The U.N. office uses strict methodology and counts only confirmed casualties, and admits its figures are a vast undercount.

Still, the tally eclipses the entire civilian casualty count from the fighting in 2014 in eastern Ukraine between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces — which left 136 dead and 577 injured.

Lavrov voiced regret for civilian casualties, insisting that the military is only using precision weapons against military targets, despite abundant evidence of shelling of homes, schools and hospitals. However, he tacitly acknowledged that some Russian strikes could have killed civilians, saying that “any military action is fraught with casualties, and not just among the military but also civilians.”

In his latest defiant videotaped address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on Ukrainians to keep up the resistance. He vowed that the invaders would have “not one quiet moment” and described Russian soldiers as “confused children who have been used.”

Moscow’s isolation deepened when most of the world lined up against it at the United Nations to demand it withdraw from Ukraine. The prosecutor for the International Criminal Court opened an investigation into possible war crimes. And in a stunning reversal, the International Paralympic Committee banned Russian and Belarusian athletes from the Winter Paralympic Games.

Felgenhauer said with the Russian economy already suffering, there could be a “serious internal political crisis” if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not find a way to end the war quickly.

“There’s no real money to run to fight this war,” he said, adding that if Putin and the military “are unable to wrap up this campaign very swiftly and victoriously, they’re in a pickle.”

Several parts of the country were under pressure.

Ukraine’s military said Russian forces “did not achieve the main goal of capturing Mariupol” in its statement, which did not mention the another important port, Kherson, whose status was unclear.

Putin’s forces claimed to have taken complete control of Kherson, and U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said Thursday that it was “possible — it’s not verified yet — that Russia is in control” there.

A senior U.S. defense official earlier disputed the Russians controlled the city.

“Our view is that Kherson is very much a contested city,” the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Zelenskyy’s office told the AP that it could not comment on the situation in Kherson while the fighting was still going on.

The mayor of Kherson, Igor Kolykhaev, said Russian soldiers were in the city and came to the city administration building. He said he asked them not to shoot civilians and to allow crews to gather up the bodies from the streets.

“We don’t have any Ukrainian forces in the city, only civilians and people here who want to LIVE,” he said in a statement later posted on Facebook.

The mayor said Kherson would maintain a strict 8 p.m.-to-6 a.m. curfew and restrict traffic into the city to food and medicine deliveries. The city will also require pedestrians to walk in groups no larger than two, obey commands to stop and not to “provoke the troops.”

“The flag flying over us is Ukrainian,” he wrote. “And for it to stay that way, these demands must be observed.”

Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko said the attacks there had been relentless.

“We cannot even take the wounded from the streets, from houses and apartments today, since the shelling does not stop,” he was quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying.

Russia reported its military casualties for the first time in the war, saying nearly 500 of its troops have been killed and almost 1,600 wounded. Ukraine did not disclose its own military losses.

Ukraine’s military general staff said in a Facebook post that Russia’s forces had suffered some 9,000 casualties in the fighting. It did not clarify if that figure included both killed and wounded soldiers.

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In a video address to the nation early Thursday, Zelenskyy praised his country's resistance.

"We are a people who in a week have destroyed the plans of the enemy," he said. "They will have no peace here. They will have no food. They will have here not one quiet moment."

He said the fighting is taking a toll on the morale of Russian soldiers, who "go into grocery stores and try to find something to eat."

"These are not warriors of a superpower," he said. "These are confused children who have been used."

Meanwhile, the senior U.S. defense official said an immense Russian column of hundreds of tanks and other vehicles appeared to be stalled roughly 25 kilometers (16 miles) from Kyiv and had made no real progress in the last couple of days.

The convoy, which earlier in the week had seemed poised to launch an assault on the capital, has been plagued with fuel and food shortages, the official said.

On the far edges of Kyiv, volunteers well into their 60s manned a checkpoint to try to block the Russian advance.

"In my old age, I had to take up arms," said Andrey Goncharuk, 68. He said the fighters needed more weapons, but "we'll kill the enemy and take their weapons."

Around Ukraine, others crowded into train stations, carrying children wrapped in blankets and dragging wheeled suitcases into new lives as refugees.

In an email, U.N. refugee agency spokesperson Joung-ah Ghedini-Williams told the AP that the refugee count surpassed 1 million as of midnight in central Europe, based on figures collected by national authorities.

Shabia Mantoo, another spokesperson for the agency, said that "at this rate" the exodus from Ukraine could make it the source of "the biggest refugee crisis this century."

## Disabled orphans fleeing Kyiv received by Poles, Hungarians

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

ZAHONY, Hungary (AP) — Some of Ukraine's most vulnerable citizens have reached safety in Poland through an effort of solidarity and compassion that transcended borders and raised a powerful counterpoint to war.

On Wednesday, a train pulled into the station in Zahony, Hungary carrying about 200 people with severe physical and mental disabilities — residents of two orphanages for the disabled in Ukraine's capital of Kyiv that were evacuated as Russian forces battered the city.

"Territorially, the orphanages are where the rockets flew, where there were bursts of rifle fire. A metro station near the orphanage was blown up," said Larissa Leonidovna, the director of the Svyatoshinsky orphanage for boys in Kyiv. "We spent more than an hour underground during a bombing."

The disabled refugees, most of them children, disembarked the train into the cold wind of the platform and into the arms of dozens of Poles and Hungarians waiting to receive them. From there, they were escorted to four waiting buses, sent from Poland by the Catholic relief organization Caritas.

With the help of the deputy mayor of Kyiv along with the city's child protection office, Caritas organized the evacuation from the capital as a Russian assault intensified.

Overnight, Associated Press reporters in Kyiv heard at least one explosion before videos started circulating of apparent strikes on the city. The targets weren't immediately clear.

Barbara Smyrak, the lead organizer of the Caritas delegation transporting the children, said they will be placed in rehabilitation centers in the southwestern Polish city of Opole after completing the 560-kilometer (350-mile) drive.

The U.N. refugee agency said Thursday that as of midnight in Central Europe, 1 million people had fled Ukraine since the start of Russia's invasion a week ago, an exodus without precedent in this century for its speed.

The tally from UNHCR amounts to more than 2% of Ukraine's population, which the World Bank counted at 44 million at the end of 2020, and the number is growing. The agency has predicted that up to 4 million people could eventually leave Ukraine but cautioned that even that projection could be revised upward.

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While many of those fleeing are able-bodied adults, choosing to brave long and sometimes dangerous journeys to bring themselves and their families to safety, other Ukrainians are at the mercy of their caregivers to deliver them out of danger.

Viktoriya Mikolayivna, deputy director of the Darnytskyy orphanage for girls, said that 216 people had arrived in Zahony, Hungary from the Kyiv orphanages - "the children along with their chaperones."

After leaving Kyiv and traveling by bus toward the Polish border, they encountered miles-long lines of cars carrying other refugees from Ukraine fleeing toward safety in the European Union.

With the prospect of waiting for untold hours, the group redirected their route to Hungary in hopes of finding safety faster.

Leonidovna, the director of the Svyatoshynskyy orphanage for boys, said the day-long journey from Kyiv had been arduous — and there was still another long bus ride to go.

"It is very difficult, you can see that it is very difficult, they all need special care and support," she said of the children.

## Russia's war spurs corporate exodus, exposes business risks

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Auto shipments stopped, beer stopped flowing, cargo ships dropped port calls and oil companies cut their pipelines.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has thrown business plans into disarray and forced a growing number of the world's best known brands — from Apple to Mercedes-Benz and BP — to pull out of a country that's become a global outcast as companies seek to maintain their reputations and live up to corporate responsibility standards.

Investors were drawn to Russia in search of lucrative profits they thought were worth the geopolitical risks. That calculation has changed after Russian President Vladimir Putin launched war in Europe, triggering a wave of global sanctions and export restrictions that have thrown its economy into turmoil and disrupted the operations of multinational corporations there.

"You basically have Russia becoming a commercial pariah," said economist Mary Lovely, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington. "Pretty much no company, no multinational, wants to be caught on the wrong side of U.S. and Western sanctions."

They're also expressing concern about the plight of Ukrainians, showing how they want to be seen coming out on the right side of history.

Complicating companies' push to flee is an order from Moscow temporarily restricting foreign investors from selling Russian assets. Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said Tuesday that it would help investors make "a considered decision" rather than succumb to the political pressure of sanctions. It's not clear how that may affect corporate efforts to exit Russia.

Oil and gas companies, already feeling the heat from climate activists to invest in renewable energy, were among the companies that announced the most rapid and dramatic exits.

Energy firm BP said Sunday that it would abandon its \$14 billion stake in Russian state-owned oil and gas company Rosneft. The next day, Shell said it was leaving its joint venture with state-owned Gazprom and its involvement in the now-suspended Nord Stream 2 pipeline built to carry natural gas to Western Europe.

ExxonMobil said it will pull out of a key oil and gas project and halt any new investment in Russia. All their chief executives said they were shocked and saddened by the increasingly bloody conflict. Smaller energy firms have followed suit.

Companies in other industries signaled they're staying out of the Russian market either out of concern for Ukraine or to comply with Western sanctions.

Toyota is halting production at its St. Petersburg plant that makes RAV4 and Camry models starting Friday because of supply chain disruptions, saying it was watching events "with great concern for the safety of the people of Ukraine."

Mercedes-Benz suspended exports of cars and vans to Russia and manufacturing there. Sweden's Volvo



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Cars said it stopped deliveries because of "potential risks associated with trading material with Russia," including Western sanctions. Ford also suspended operations.

Harley-Davidson halted motorcycle shipments to Russia, saying its thoughts "continue for the safety of the people of Ukraine." Putin famously rode a three-wheeled Harley on a visit to Ukraine in 2010.

Others with more entrenched Russian operations might find it harder to navigate the crisis.

Renault, one of the biggest players in Russia's auto market, said only that it's temporarily suspending production at its Moscow plant through Saturday "due to some logistics issues," without being more specific.

Copenhagen-based Danish brewery group Carlsberg suspended production at two breweries in Ukraine, saying it's "following the situation with great concern" but didn't comment on its extensive Russian operations, including St. Petersburg-based Baltika Breweries, which exports beer worldwide.

Czech brewer Budvar, which counts Russia as one of its five major markets, halted beer deliveries to the country, saying business is not the top priority and that it's looking for ways to help, including finding accommodations for Ukrainian refugees.

"It's really tough to do business in Russia under the best of conditions. Now it's become just crazy. So getting out is a smart business proposal," said James O'Rourke, professor of management at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business, who specializes in reputation management and business communications.

Companies will have to chalk up any losses as the cost of doing business.

"This is like going into business with the Manson family," O'Rourke said, referring to the followers of cult leader Charles Manson. "You honestly do not want your name associated with those people, and it's probably not going to cost you that much to disinvest."

Fast fashion brand H&M paused sales in Russian stores, expressing concern about the "tragic developments." Nike said on its Russian website it can't guarantee deliveries.

The world's biggest shipping company, A.P. Moller-Maersk, will stop making Russian port calls.

Airplane makers Boeing and Airbus stopped supplying parts and service support for Russian carriers. Boeing suspended major operations in Moscow and temporarily closed its Kyiv office.

Even Hollywood studios are delaying the release of new films in Russia, which isn't a leading movie market but typically ranks in the top dozen countries for box office revenue. Warner Bros., the Walt Disney Co. and Sony Pictures cited the "humanitarian crisis."

Tech companies also headed for the door.

Apple said it would stop selling its iPhone and other popular devices inside Russia, while computer maker Dell Technologies "suspended" sales in both Ukraine and Russia.

Google and TikTok blocked Russian state media channels from their platforms after a plea from the European Union. Apple also blocked downloads of the RT News and Sputnik News from its mobile App Store outside Russia.

It's not just sanctions but public sentiment that companies have to respond to as the human costs of the war grow.

Company commitments to environmental, social and corporate governance, known as ESG, are being put to the test. ESG has become a buzzy acronym that's increasingly seen as an important way for corporations to tout responsible business credentials.

"But there can also be an element of greenwashing," where companies say things that make it seem like they hold certain values or are on the right side of ESG issues while their practices and behavior suggest otherwise, Columbia Business School associate professor Vanessa Burbano said.

"Stakeholders like employees and consumers will want to see if companies' actions and behaviors are consistent with the communicated support that companies are expressing for Ukrainians," she said.

Some companies went beyond halting deliveries or operations.

Lego, Ford and Volkswagen Group said they would make millions of dollars in charitable donations to support Ukrainian refugees.

## Biden's past Supreme Court experience helped inform choice

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden knows better than anyone the unexpected turns a Supreme Court nomination can take after it lands on Capitol Hill.

As the longtime chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Biden presided over two of the most contentious nominations in modern U.S. history and welcomed the defeat of one of them.

He steered several other candidates to confirmation but was confounded by allegations of sexual harassment against future Justice Clarence Thomas by law professor Anita Hill.

Biden has been involved in the process for so long that he's come full circle with Justice Stephen Breyer — from leading Breyer's Senate confirmation hearing and voting to put him on the court to recently accepting Breyer's retirement after 28 years on the bench and naming a replacement. Biden and Breyer also worked together when Breyer was the committee's chief counsel.

"We were joking with one another when he walked in," Biden said at Breyer's retirement announcement in January. "Did we ever think that he would have served decades on the court and I'd be president of the United States on the day he came in to retire?"

Biden developed his knowledge of the Supreme Court nomination process during his 36-year Senate career, particularly the 17 years he spent as chairman or vice chairman of the Judiciary Committee, which reviews every candidate for the federal judiciary.

White House officials highlighted that experience as Biden deliberated over a small group of candidates, ending with his nomination of federal judge Ketanji Brown Jackson. Jackson began meeting with senators this week.

"He's probably overseen or been engaged with more Supreme Court nominee processes than anyone in history," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

As vice president, Biden helped counsel President Barack Obama on his Supreme Court picks.

"Obama picked him for experience in a number of areas," Ted Kaufman, a longtime member of Biden's inner circle, said in an interview. "This is one of those areas."

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, a veteran Judiciary Committee member who served with Biden, said the president has a "great appreciation of what senators must do, because he's done it."

After four years in the Senate, Biden was assigned to the Judiciary panel in 1977. He took part in confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominees Sandra Day O'Connor in 1981 and Antonin Scalia in 1986, both nominated by President Ronald Reagan. He voted to put both on the court.

Biden also participated in the 1986 hearing to elevate Justice William Rehnquist to the position of chief justice of the United States. He voted against Rehnquist.

Biden became chairman in 1987, but he wanted more after 14 years in the Senate. That June, he announced his candidacy for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination. Then Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell announced his retirement.

Just like that, Biden would preside over the first of five Supreme Court confirmation hearings.

To replace Powell, Reagan tapped Robert Bork, a conservative federal appeals court judge who would have shifted the ideological balance of the nine-member high court firmly to the right. Biden opposed the nomination, differing with Bork over his views on privacy and civil rights.

"I knew enough about Bork to know it would be nearly impossible for him to convince me that he was right for the court," Biden wrote in his 2007 memoir.

He tried juggling the competing demands of his White House ambitions and preparing for Bork's hearing. But after the campaign was engulfed by allegations that he had plagiarized in law school and had not credited a British lawmaker whose remarks he used in his own stump speech, Biden dropped out of the race to focus on keeping Bork off the court, he wrote.

After a contentious hearing that foreshadowed the intense scrutiny that would await future Supreme Court nominees, the committee forwarded Bork's nomination to the full Senate with an unfavorable recommendation, effectively dooming the judge.

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A bipartisan majority of senators had come to oppose Bork, who refused to withdraw and insisted on a floor vote. The Senate rejected him 58-42.

Biden said he felt sorry for Bork.

"There's a guy sitting at home whose whole life has been directed toward being on the Supreme Court," he told his Senate office staff after seeing they had champagne chilling on ice after the vote. "Imagine how he feels when that last vote's been tallied, when he's realized he lost."

Biden earned bipartisan praise for the way he handled the hearing; Bork quit being a judge and began giving speeches accusing the committee of mishandling his nomination.

Reagan eventually settled on federal appeals court judge Anthony M. Kennedy. Biden led Kennedy's hearing before he sailed to Senate confirmation on a 97-0 vote in 1988.

Biden led the hearing for judge David Souter, nominated to the high court by Republican President George H.W. Bush in 1990, and was among senators voting 90-9 to confirm him.

But tensions flared the following year after Bush chose Thomas, a relatively new and conservative Black federal appeals court judge, to replace retiring justice Thurgood Marshall, a lawyer and civil rights activist who was the first Black person to sit on the Supreme Court.

Some had accused Bush of playing politics with the nomination by choosing Thomas, who was opposed by liberals. But some of Thomas' critics didn't want to be seen as being too tough on a Black man.

Committee hearings opened in September 1991, focused on Thomas' legal views. But by then, the Democratic committee staff had begun researching a tip that Thomas allegedly had sexually harassed women he had worked with before he became a judge.

Hill, who had worked with Thomas at the Education Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, had shared her story privately with the committee.

But after the explosive contents of her confidential statement leaked to the news media two days before the Senate was expected to vote to confirm Thomas, Biden came under pressure to reopen the hearings so Hill could testify publicly. Thomas angrily denied her allegations, and Biden refused to allow other women who would have corroborated Hill's claims to also testify in public.

The Senate confirmed Thomas by a vote of 52-48, with Biden against him.

Where Biden was praised for the Bork hearing, he was criticized over Thomas'. Women's groups and women in Congress accused him of not treating Hill's sexual harassment allegations seriously enough while Thomas denounced the process as a "high-tech lynching for uppity Blacks."

Biden went on to chair confirmation hearings for Democratic Supreme Court nominees Ruth Bader Ginsburg in 1993 and Breyer in 1994. He voted to confirm both.

He was on the committee in 2005 but no longer chairman when now-Chief Justice John Roberts was confirmed to the court, and in 2006 when Samuel Alito became a justice. Both were nominated by Republican President George W. Bush. Biden voted against both.

Years later as he considered running for president a third time, Biden said he regretted his decision not to let the other women testify in public during Thomas' hearing, as well as Hill's treatment by the all-white-male committee.

"Anita Hill was vilified when she came forward, by a lot of my colleagues," Biden said in 2018 during an interview on NBC's "Today." "I wish I could have done more to prevent those questions and the way they asked them."

Hill told The Associated Press in an interview last year for her new book that the hearings had harmed not only herself and her family, but also had hurt "any people, any woman, any person who wants to come forward and complain about abuse."

In 2019, before announcing his candidacy for president, Biden telephoned Hill and apologized. Hill said the conversation left her feeling "deeply unsatisfied."

## Neutral Finland, Sweden warm to idea of NATO membership

By JARI TANNER Associated Press

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HELSINKI (AP) — Through the Cold War and the decades since, nothing could persuade Finns and Swedes that they would be better off joining NATO — until now.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has profoundly changed Europe's security outlook, including for Nordic neutrals Finland and Sweden, where support for joining NATO has surged to record levels.

A poll commissioned by Finnish broadcaster YLE this week showed that, for the first time, more than 50% of Finns support joining the Western military alliance. In neighboring Sweden, a similar poll showed those in favor of NATO membership outnumber those against.

"The unthinkable might start to become thinkable," tweeted former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, a proponent of NATO membership.

Neither country is going to join the alliance overnight. Support for NATO membership rises and falls, and there's no clear majority for joining in their parliaments.

But the signs of change since Russia began its invasion last week are unmistakable.

The attack on Ukraine prompted both Finland and Sweden to break with their policy of not providing arms to countries at war by sending assault rifles and anti-tank weapons to Kyiv. For Sweden, it's the first time offering military aid since 1939, when it assisted Finland against the Soviet Union.

Apparently sensing a shift among its Nordic neighbors, the Russian Foreign Ministry last week voiced concern about what it described as efforts by the United States and some of its allies to "drag" Finland and Sweden into NATO and warned that Moscow would be forced to take retaliatory measures if they joined the alliance.

The governments of Sweden and Finland retorted that they won't let Moscow dictate their security policy.

"I want to be extremely clear: It is Sweden that itself and independently decides on our security policy line," Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said.

Finland has a conflict-ridden history with Russia, with which it shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) border. Finns have taken part in dozens of wars against their eastern neighbor, for centuries as part of the Swedish Kingdom, and as an independent nation during the world wars, including two fought with the Soviet Union from 1939-40 and 1941-44.

In the postwar period, however, Finland pursued pragmatic political and economic ties with Moscow, remaining militarily nonaligned and a neutral buffer between East and West.

Sweden has avoided military alliances for more than 200 years, choosing a path of peace after centuries of warfare with its neighbors.

Both countries put an end to traditional neutrality by joining the European Union in 1995 and deepening cooperation with NATO. However, a majority of people in both countries remained firmly against full membership in the alliance — until Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

The YLE poll showed 53% were in favor of Finland joining NATO, with only 28% against. The poll had an error margin of 2.5 percentage points and included 1,382 respondents interviewed Feb. 23 to 25. Russia's invasion began on Feb. 24.

"It's a very significant shift," said senior researcher Matti Pesu from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. "We've had a situation in the past 25-30 years where Finns' opinions on NATO have been very stable. It seems to now to have changed completely."

While noting that it's not possible to draw conclusions from a single poll, Pesu said no similar shift in public opinion occurred after Russia's 2008 war with Georgia and the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, "so this is an exception."

In Sweden, a late February poll commissioned by the Swedish public broadcaster SVT found 41% of Swedes supported NATO membership and 35% opposed it, marking the first time that those in favor exceeded those against.

The Nordic duo, important partners for NATO in the Baltic Sea area where Russia has substantially increased its military maneuvers in the past decade, has strongly stressed that it is up to them alone to decide whether to join the military alliance.

In his New Year's speech, Finnish President Sauli Niinisto pointedly said that "Finland's room to maneuver



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and freedom of choice also include the possibility of military alignment and of applying for NATO membership, should we ourselves so decide.”

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg noted last week that for Helsinki and Stockholm “this is a question of self-determination and the sovereign right to choose your own path and then potentially in the future, also to apply for NATO.”

There are no set criteria for joining NATO, but aspiring candidates must meet certain political and other considerations. Many observers believe Finland and Sweden would qualify for fast-track entry into NATO without lengthy negotiations and membership could be a reality within months.

Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said this week that her Social Democratic Party would discuss possible NATO membership with other parties but didn’t set a time frame. She said everyone agrees that the events of the past weeks have been a game-changer.

“Together we see that the security situation has changed remarkably since Russia attacked Ukraine. It is a fact that we have to acknowledge,” Marin said.

## Tainted water ‘shatters’ Native Hawaiians’ trust in military

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A well-known adage in Hawaiian, *ola i ka wai*, means “water is life.”

Native Hawaiians revere water in all its forms as the embodiment of one of the Hawaiian pantheon’s four principal gods.

The resource is so valuable that to have it in abundance means prosperity. The Hawaiian word for water — *wai* — is repeated in the word for wealth — *waiwai*.

So when the Navy confirmed petroleum from one of its fuel tank facilities had leaked into Pearl Harbor’s tap water, many Native Hawaiians were not just concerned, they were hurt and offended.

“This has been the most egregious assault on a public trust resource in the history of Hawaii,” said Kamanamaikalani Beamer, a former trustee of the Commission on Water Resource Management.

Nearly 6,000 people, mostly those living in military housing at or near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, got sick after petroleum-laced water came pouring out of their taps late last year. Residents worry fresh water for broader Oahu also is in danger because the aging tank system sits above an aquifer that provides drinking water to most of the island and has a history of leaks.

The Navy is working to address the problem. But many say it has deepened a distrust in the military that dates to at least 1893, when a group of American businessmen, with support from U.S. Marines, overthrew the Hawaiian kingdom. More recently, Native Hawaiians fought to stop target practice bombing on the island of Kahoolawe and at Makua Valley in west Oahu.

“The military has a long history of poor stewardship of Hawaii’s natural and cultural resources,” Carmen Hulu Lindsey, chair of the board of trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, said in an email in response to questions. “Time after time the people of Hawaii have been left to clean up after the military ravages our sacred lands — from unexploded ordnance and toxic waste to the loss of cultural and historic sites and endangered species — without even appropriating resources to finance these efforts.”

For some, the water contamination was the last straw.

The crisis has “shattered people’s trust in the military,” said Kawena’ulaokalā Kapahua, a Native Hawaiian political science doctoral student and one of the activists pushing to shut down the tank facility.

“I think this is really pushing people to the edge because we all need water to live,” Kapahua said. “And I think it’s a very scary thought for people that their children or their grandchildren may never be able to drink the water that comes out of the tap.”

Navy officials seemed aware of the distrust when they announced to members of Congress in January the Navy wouldn’t continue fighting Hawaii’s order to defuel the tanks.

“I understand the deep connection that the people of Hawaii, particularly the Native Hawaiian community, have with the lands and waters of Hawaii,” Rear Adm. Blake Converse, deputy commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, said while noting he lived in Hawaii off and on for more than eight years.

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Rear Adm. John Korka, commander of Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, also noted his connection to the islands, sharing which church he worshipped in and the Catholic school his children attended while living in Hawaii. "This is a personal issue for me, and I'm sorry."

Using 2019 Census data, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs estimates that 3,439 Native Hawaiians across the United States serve in the armed forces, which is 0.8% of the total Native Hawaiian adult population in the U.S.

Many see value in the state's relationship with the military, which also provides civilian jobs that are considered desirable alternatives to service work in the tourism industry.

Native Hawaiian Vietnam War veteran Shad Kane said he is troubled by the contaminated water, but it hasn't tested his faith in the military. His trusty pickup truck bears special Hawaii license plates indicating he's a combat veteran. He plans to transfer the plates to his new Toyota Tacoma.

"Yes, I'm bothered by that, but I also know the Navy has a greater responsibility," Kane said. "The Navy wants to do the right thing."

The Navy hasn't determined how petroleum got in the water. Officials are investigating a theory that jet fuel spilled from a ruptured pipe last May and somehow entered a fire suppression system drain pipe. They suspect fuel then leaked from the second pipe Nov. 20, sending it into the drinking water well.

The Navy has been trying to clear petroleum from the contaminated well and pump it out of the aquifer. Officials are also flushing clean water through the Navy's water system — which serves 93,000 people in military homes and offices in and around Pearl Harbor. In the meantime, the Navy put up affected military families in Waikiki hotels.

Beamer, the former water commission trustee, had been calling for the decommissioning of the tanks since 2014, when more than 27,000 gallons (102,200 liters) of fuel leaked from one of tanks.

The Navy "promised us nothing like this would possibly happen," he recalled. "They would never risk the lives of their own. ... They drink out of the same aquifer."

After initially resisting, the Navy said in January it would comply with Hawaii's order to remove fuel from the tank facility, which is used to power many U.S. military ships and planes that patrol the Pacific Ocean. But in February, the Navy lodged an appeal in court.

Rear Adm. Tim Kott, commander of Navy Region Hawaii, said in a statement this week that Navy officials will continue to work with, listen to and learn from the Native Hawaiian community.

"We know we have a lot of work ahead of us to gain the trust of the communities across the island, and in particular Native Hawaiians," he said. "We will continue to work tirelessly to restore community trust and the safe drinking water of our families and neighbors."

U.S. Rep. Kaiuli'i Kahele, a combat pilot who serves as an officer in the Hawaii National Guard, has invoked the Hawaiian word hewa, which can mean sinful or wrong, to describe the Navy water contamination. He has also called it "crisis of astronomical proportions."

He traces his Native Hawaiian family's roots to a small fishing village near the southern tip of Hawaii's Big Island where there's no running water and residents rely on catching rain.

Elders instilled in him that every drop is precious.

"All life originated through having healthy, fresh water," Kahele said.

## Why are COVID vaccination rates still low in some countries?

By VICTORIA MILKO AP Science Writer

Why are COVID-19 vaccination rates still low in some countries?

Limited supplies remain a problem, but experts say other challenges now include unpredictable deliveries, weak health care systems and vaccine hesitancy.

Most countries with low vaccination rates are in Africa. As of late February, 13 countries in Africa have fully vaccinated less than 5% of their populations, according to Phionah Atuhebwe, an officer for the World Health Organization's regional office for Africa.

Other countries with extremely low vaccination rates include Yemen, Syria, Haiti and Papua New Guinea.

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For most of last year, developing nations were plagued by a lack of supplies. Rich countries were hoarding doses and many countries didn't have the facilities to make their own vaccines. COVAX — an initiative to distribute vaccines equally around the world — faltered in delivering shots.

Many rich countries had planned to donate doses once their own populations were vaccinated, but the emergence of the delta and omicron variants spurred booster campaigns that further delayed those plans. Vaccine makers have largely declined to share their formulas or technology, further restricting production.

Other setbacks to vaccinations have also emerged.

"The main problem among countries with low vaccination rates is poor infrastructure to distribute shots," says Dina Borzekowski, director of the Global Health Initiative at the University of Maryland. "What is absent are best practices to get vaccines to populations who typically live without safely managed sanitation systems or reliable electricity."

Donated vaccines are also sometimes delivered close to their expiration dates, giving health officials little time to distribute them, says Sinhye Ha of Doctors Without Borders.

Some countries also lack materials like syringes to inject the shots or ways to keep the vaccines at the right temperature.

Vaccine hesitancy fueled by misinformation and a distrust of governments has also contributed to low vaccine uptake in some countries, says Atuhebwe.

## **Biden risks progressives, Blacks with pivot to the center**

By STEVE PEOPLES, ALAN FRAM and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is signaling an election-year shift to the center, embracing a strategy he hopes will protect fragile Democratic majorities in Congress. But he's risking a revolt from key voices across his party's sprawling coalition.

In his first State of the Union address Tuesday night, the Democratic president embraced Republican calls to strengthen the nation's southern border and barely mentioned climate change. He glossed over concerns about voting rights and spent little time heralding his historic decision to nominate the first Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court. On domestic issues, he was perhaps most blunt in disavowing the push from some Black Lives Matter activists to "defund the police."

The calculated messages, threaded through one of the most important speeches of Biden's young presidency, marked a clear effort to reset the political climate for Democrats. Polls suggest the party is losing support from almost every demographic at the outset of the 2022 campaign. But Biden's effort to stabilize the party could alienate the coalition of Black people, young people, progressives and independents who delivered him the presidency in 2020 and will be needed again this year.

His address intensified a debate inside the party about how best to proceed this year, with many veteran lawmakers embracing Biden's tone while younger, more progressive critics on the left warned he wasn't connecting with the Democrats' most loyal voters.

There was particular frustration with Biden's declaration that the nation's police need more funding, seen by some as a tone-deaf overture to white voters at the expense of millions of Black Americans still waiting for the president to deliver promised policing reforms almost two years after George Floyd's murder.

"Our party often, we target the white moderate, we target the white independent. And I get it, right. Those are the swing voters and we want to get them. But we continue to underestimate Black and brown people," said Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-N.Y. "I liked 95% of the speech, maybe even 97%, but he missed an opportunity to bring Black voters in more and voters of color in more."

Beyond Washington, Melina Abdullah, a grassroots director for Black Lives Matter, was more frank in her criticism. Slapping down those on the left wanting to "defund" the police, Biden three times called for funding as Democrats and Republicans gave him a standing ovation.

"It's appalling that he would say it, that he would repeat it, and he would say it with such exuberance," Abdullah said, warning of dire political consequences. "They think we don't have a choice. Maybe we won't vote for Republicans, but we will stay home. And that's something that Democrats can't afford to have

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happen.”

For now, the White House is betting that Democrats have more to gain by siding with voters in the middle who are worried about the nation’s rising crime rates than with those focused on police brutality. And public polling indicates that a significant portion of voters of color do support increased funding for law enforcement.

“That’s absolutely fine,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said of Biden’s explicit opposition to calls for defunding the police. “First of all, nobody in our caucus ever said that before the last election. But the Republicans wanted to tattoo something that was said outside to our members.”

“I think he spoke for all of us,” said No. 2 House Democratic leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland.

“He was trying to dispel what is a false scenario that the Republicans have tried to create since a couple of our members out of 223 or 4 said they were for defunding the police,” Hoyer said. “Democrats are not for defunding the police.”

But some of the most prominent progressives in Congress insisted Biden wasn’t speaking for them when it comes to policing.

“I’m not going to change how I feel,” Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., said Wednesday. “I’m not going to stop saying defund the police at all.”

Only 34% of Americans say the things Biden has done in office are good for Americans, according to a February AP-NORC poll. Nearly as many — 29% — say he’s been bad for Black Americans. Another 36% say he’s been neither good nor bad.

That’s a decline from the first few months of his presidency, when 50% said in a poll in late April and early May that things he was doing were good for Black Americans.

As the midterm campaign begins, such tension within the Democratic Party is unlikely to subside. In a potential preview of what’s to come, nine-term incumbent Texas Rep. Henry Cuellar failed to clear the 50% threshold in Tuesday’s Democratic primary and will face progressive challenger Jessica Cisneros in a runoff election in May.

Despite an energized progressive wing, Democratic pollster Jeff Pollock suggested Biden’s focus on the center is smart politics.

“The data shows if there is softening in Biden’s numbers, it is coming from the middle: centrist Republicans, centrist Democrats, independents who are in the middle,” he said. “And they’re also the ones who happen to swing the elections, including the midterms.”

“If Joe Biden is aiming things at the center, I’m all for it,” Pollock added.

Even under the best of conditions, history suggests that Biden’s party is likely to lose its House and Senate majorities come November. If the Democratic Party cannot unify its disparate factions, the losses could be staggering.

And even as the Democratic strategists applauded Biden, younger African Americans and progressive activists said his strategy left them feeling angry and alienated.

John Paul Mejia, a spokesman for the Sunrise Foundation, a national youth organization focused on climate change, criticized Biden for largely ignoring that issue and other priorities for young people including student loan debt.

“Biden needs to have some respect for the people and issues that got him into power,” he said.

And like other activists, Paul Mejia said he was most disturbed by Biden’s call to fund the police. He called it “absolutely disgusting.”

“I understand the messaging tactic there,” he said. “But I don’t think Biden should be stabbing the backs of loads of organizers and activists who participated in the uprisings over the summer and got him into office.”

## Biden plan would tackle chronic gaps in mental health care

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden’s new plan to expand mental health and drug abuse treatment would pour hundreds of millions of dollars into suicide prevention, mental health services for youth,



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and community clinics providing 24/7 access to people in crisis.

Unveiled as part of his State of the Union speech, Biden's plan seeks to shrink America's chronic gap in care between diseases of the body and those of the mind. Health insurance plans would have to cover three mental health visits a year at no added cost to patients.

But for such a big move, Biden must win backing from lawmakers of both parties. Mental health and substance abuse are linked problems in every congressional district, with rising rates of depression and anxiety in the coronavirus pandemic. Some senior Republicans have expressed support in principle for government action, but it's too early to say where they'll end up.

"And let's get all Americans the mental health services they need," Biden said in his speech Tuesday night. "More people can turn for help. And full parity between physical and mental health care if we treat it that way in our insurance."

That's been the unrealized goal of federal health care laws dating back nearly 25 years, said Hannah Wesolowski of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. "This represents an important agenda that impacts every American," said Wesolowski, referring to Biden's plan.

For months, lawmakers have been signaling interest. In the Senate, the Finance Committee and the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee have held hearings with a bipartisan focus. In the House, the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Ways and Means Committee also held hearings. Those four panels do most of the work of Congress on health care.

Such sustained attention is rare, advocates say. "I cannot remember a time when every committee of jurisdiction has held hearings on mental health," said Charles Ingoglia, president of the National Council for Mental Wellbeing. "Sometimes we have gone years between dedicated hearings on mental health."

Now the White House is trying to draw lawmakers out, weaving strands from the Capitol Hill debate into an ambitious package, and adding its own priorities.

"I think he highlighted a few key areas where we have good work to do," Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska said in her reaction to Biden's speech.

"He spoke to the issue of mental health and what more needs to be done," she added.

Biden's plan includes a special focus on school-age youth. Kids adapted differently to remote learning in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, and those who lacked technology resources were in danger of falling behind. Isolation was hard on teenagers. The White House says Biden's upcoming budget will call for \$1 billion to help schools hire counselors, psychologists and other health workers. The budget will also propose \$5 million for research on the effects of social media on kids. Seconding bipartisan sentiment in Congress, Biden is calling for curbs on social media companies' ability to collect data on children.

The coverage policies of health insurance plans would also get closer attention. The White House says Biden's budget will call for insurers to cover "robust behavioral health services with an adequate network of providers." Three free behavioral health visits a year would be part of it.

This July, the government will launch a new suicide prevention hotline number — 988. Biden's plan calls for nearly \$700 million to bolster local crisis centers that can handle follow-up. The idea is to address such basics as operating hours and staffing in preparation for an expected increase in calls when three-digit dialing takes effect.

The plan also calls for making permanent an experimental program that has expanded access to 24/7 mental health and substance abuse services. It's called Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, modeled on federally funded community health centers that have become a foundation for basic medical care in low-income communities. The behavioral health centers rely on peer counselors who have survived their own trauma to pull others out of crisis. The approach has bipartisan support.

Undergirding Biden's plan is an effort to increase the number of mental health professionals by devoting \$700 million to programs that provide training, scholarships and educational loan repayment. Expanding the mental health workforce was a focus of Senate Finance Committee hearings. Biden also wants to establish professional standards for peer counselors, filling an emerging frontline role.

If it all comes together, Dr. Megan Ranney says she would expect to see relief for the emergency rooms where she practices in Providence, Rhode Island. People with mental health and substance abuse prob-

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lems would have more ways to get help before things escalate out of control and the police or a relative have to bring them to the hospital as a last resort.

"The crisis doesn't happen overnight," said Ranney. "It's usually something that has been smoldering for a while. And then when it does get bad enough, they have nowhere to go and they end up spending days to weeks in the emergency department."

## Refugee count tops 1 million; Russians besiege Ukraine ports

By JIM HEINTZ, YURAS KARMANAU, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The number of people sent fleeing Ukraine by Russia's invasion topped 1 million on Wednesday, the swiftest refugee exodus this century, the United Nations said, as Russian forces kept up their bombardment of the country's second-biggest city, Kharkiv, and laid siege to two strategic seaports.

The tally from the U.N. refugee agency released to The Associated Press amounts to more than 2% of Ukraine's population being forced out of the country in less than a week. The mass evacuation could be seen in Kharkiv, where residents desperate to get away from falling shells and bombs crowded the city's train station and tried to press onto trains, not always knowing where they were headed.

In a videotaped address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on Ukrainians to keep up the resistance. He vowed that the invaders would have "not one quiet moment" and described Russian soldiers as "confused children who have been used."

Moscow's isolation deepened when most of the world lined up against it at the United Nations to demand it withdraw from Ukraine. And the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court opened an investigation into possible war crimes.

With fighting going on on multiple fronts across the country, Britain's Defense Ministry said Mariupol, a large city on the Azov Sea, was encircled by Russian forces, while the status of another vital port, Kherson, a Black Sea shipbuilding city of 280,000, remained unclear.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces claimed to have taken complete control of Kherson, which would make it the biggest city to fall yet in the invasion. A senior U.S. defense official disputed that.

"Our view is that Kherson is very much a contested city," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Zelenskyy's office told the AP that it could not comment on the situation in Kherson while the fighting was still going on.

The mayor of Kherson, Igor Kolykhaev, said Russian soldiers were in the city and came to the city administration building. He said he asked them not to shoot civilians and to allow crews to gather up the bodies from the streets.

"We don't have any Ukrainian forces in the city, only civilians and people here who want to LIVE," he said in a statement later posted on Facebook.

The mayor said Kherson would maintain a strict 8 p.m.-to-6 a.m. curfew and restrict traffic into the city to food and medicine deliveries. The city will also require pedestrians to walk in groups no larger than two, obey commands to stop and not to "provoke the troops."

"The flag flying over us is Ukrainian," he wrote. "And for it to stay that way, these demands must be observed."

Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko said the attacks there had been relentless.

"We cannot even take the wounded from the streets, from houses and apartments today, since the shelling does not stop," he was quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying.

Russia reported its military casualties for the first time since the invasion began last week, saying nearly 500 of its troops have been killed and almost 1,600 wounded. Ukraine did not disclose its own military losses but said more than 2,000 civilians have died, a claim that could not be independently verified.

In a video address to the nation early Thursday, Zelenskyy praised his country's resistance.

"We are a people who in a week have destroyed the plans of the enemy," he said. "They will have no peace here. They will have no food. They will have here not one quiet moment."

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He said the fighting is taking a toll on the morale of Russian soldiers, who "go into grocery stores and try to find something to eat."

"These are not warriors of a superpower," he said. "These are confused children who have been used."

Meanwhile, the senior U.S. defense official said an immense column of hundreds of tanks and other vehicles appeared to be stalled roughly 25 kilometers (16 miles) from Kyiv and had made no real progress in the last couple of days.

The convoy, which earlier in the week had seemed poised to launch an assault on the capital, has been plagued with fuel and food shortages, the official said.

On the far edges of Kyiv, volunteers well into their 60s manned a checkpoint to try to block the Russian advance.

"In my old age, I had to take up arms," said Andrey Goncharuk, 68. He said the fighters needed more weapons, but "we'll kill the enemy and take their weapons."

Around Ukraine, others crowded into train stations, carrying children wrapped in blankets and dragging wheeled suitcases into new lives as refugees.

In an email, U.N. refugee agency spokesperson Joung-ah Ghedini-Williams told the AP that the latest data indicates the refugee count surpassed 1 million as of midnight in central Europe, based on figures collected by national authorities.

Shabia Mantoo, another spokesperson for the agency, said that "at this rate" the exodus from Ukraine could make it the source of "the biggest refugee crisis this century."

A large explosion shook central Kyiv on Wednesday night in what the president's office said was a missile strike near the capital city's southern railway station. There was no immediate word on any deaths or injuries.

Russian forces pounded Kharkiv, Ukraine's biggest city after Kyiv, with about 1.5 million people, in another round of aerial attacks that shattered buildings and lit up the skyline with flames. At least 21 people were killed over the past day, said Oleg Sinehubov, head of the Kharkiv regional administration.

Several Russian planes were shot down over Kharkiv, according to Oleksiy Arestovich, a top adviser to Zelenskyy.

"Kharkiv today is the Stalingrad of the 21st century," Arestovich said, invoking what is considered one of the most heroic episodes in Russian history, the five-month defense of the city from the Nazis during World War II.

From his basement bunker, Kharkiv Mayor Igor Terekhov told the BBC: "The city is united and we shall stand fast."

Russian attacks, many with missiles, blew the roof off Kharkiv's five-story regional police building and set the top floor on fire, and also hit the intelligence headquarters and a university building, according to officials and videos and photos released by Ukraine's State Emergency Service. Officials said residential buildings were also hit, but gave no details.

The head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency warned that the fighting poses a danger to Ukraine's 15 nuclear reactors.

Rafael Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency noted that the war is "the first time a military conflict is happening amid the facilities of a large, established nuclear power program," and he said he is "gravely concerned."

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

In New York, the U.N. General Assembly voted to demand that Russia stop its offensive and immediately withdraw all troops, with world powers and tiny island states alike condemning Moscow. The vote was 141 to 5, with 35 abstentions.

Assembly resolutions aren't legally binding but can reflect and influence world opinion.

The vote came after the 193-member assembly convened its first emergency session since 1997. The only countries to vote with Russia were Belarus, Syria, North Korea and Eritrea. Cuba spoke in Moscow's

defense but ultimately abstained.

Ukraine's U.N. Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya said Russian forces "have come to the Ukrainian soil, not only to kill some of us ... they have come to deprive Ukraine of the very right to exist." He added: "The crimes are so barbaric that it is difficult to comprehend."

Russia ramped up its rhetoric. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reminded the world about the country's vast nuclear arsenal when he said in an interview with Al-Jazeera that "a third world war could only be nuclear."

In the northern city of Chernihiv, two cruise missiles hit a hospital, according to the Ukrainian UNIAN news agency, which quoted the health administration chief, Serhiy Pivovar, as saying authorities were working to determine the casualty toll.

In other developments:

— A second round of talks aimed at ending the fighting was expected Thursday, but there appeared to be little common ground between the two sides.

— The price of oil continued to soar, reaching \$112 per barrel, the highest since 2014.

— Russia found itself even more isolated economically as Airbus and Boeing said they would cut off spare parts and technical support to the country's airlines, a major blow. Airbus and Boeing jets account for the vast majority of Russia's passenger fleet.

## Indian students in Ukraine in fear as Russian invasion grows

By KRUTIKA PATHI and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian student Abrar Sheikh has been waking up to the loud thuds of bombs that have pummeled Sumy, a city in northeastern Ukraine near the Russian border, for the last three days. When he hears the sounds of shelling, he rushes to a nearby bunker, praying the bombs don't find him.

On Tuesday, the blare of the bombs became louder. The food inside the bunker got scarcer and the cries of children inside grew.

"At that moment, all I could think of was my family," Sheikh, 22, said by cellphone from the underground bunker on Wednesday, his voice thick with fear.

"Sometimes the bunker goes all silent after we hear the sound of the bombs and I think, 'Is this it?'" he said. "At night we pull the curtains in our rooms to keep them dark, hoping Russian troops don't know we are inside."

Thousands of Indians studying in Ukraine have suddenly found themselves in the midst of the war after Russia invaded the country last week, with many hunkered inside bunkers and fearful of what lies ahead.

Pressure on the Indian government to pull out its citizens has intensified in recent days, especially after one student died in shelling in Kharkiv on Tuesday. The government says about 17,000 out of an estimated 20,000 Indian citizens in Ukraine have left the country and that India is trying to evacuate the rest to nearby countries from where they can be flown back home. Many of those who remain stranded are in conflict areas such as Kharkiv and Sumy.

Sheikh, a medical student at Sumy State University, has been trying to leave the city for several days. But shelling by Russian forces has left him and about 500 other Indian students in the city trapped.

They are about 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the Russian border. But they are hundreds of kilometers and at least 10 hours away from Ukraine's western border, considered to be safer, where Indian officials have so far focused their evacuation efforts. Evacuation flights have taken off from countries bordering western Ukraine, such as Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, with more scheduled. A group of Indian Cabinet ministers has flown to these countries to help with rescue efforts.

But for those stuck in the eastern region, there appears no safe way out yet. India has sent a team from its embassy in Moscow to Belgorod, a Russian city close to the border with Ukraine, foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said Tuesday. "This team is in place and ready to see whatever we can do to extract our students and citizens from the Kharkiv and Sumy area," he said.

India has asked all its citizens to immediately leave Kharkiv after receiving information from Russia, External Affairs Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said. They have been advised to move to three safe



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zones about 15 kilometers (9 miles) away using any means, including on foot, he said. Bagchi did not describe the information provided by Russia.

In Sumy, about 180 kilometers (110 miles) from Kharkiv, an oil depot was reportedly bombed, railway tracks have been destroyed, and there is fighting in the streets, students said.

"We cannot leave. We have no way of getting to the western part. There is no train or bus or any transport to take us there," said Chandra Reddy, 22, another medical student at Sumy State University.

Reddy said he was in touch with Indian authorities, who urged him to stay put for now.

He said he risked his life on Tuesday to go to a nearby grocery store, leaving the bunker where he has spent most of his time over the last six days. He quickly bought packets of rice, vegetables and fruit — enough to last a few days — before rushing back.

On the same day, Indian student Naveen S. Gyanagoudar was killed in Kharkiv when he left his bunker to go buy food.

"When I heard that, it hit me that I had just done the same thing, that this can be me next," Reddy said.

Approximately 18,000 Indian students were in Ukraine, most of them studying medicine. The state-run universities are popular with Indian students for their high-quality education at affordable prices, and as an alternative to India's overcrowded and competitive public universities.

Following the invasion last week, a number of Western and Asian countries slapped sanctions on Russia, but India sought to appear neutral. It has refrained from criticizing Russia or directly acknowledging Ukraine's sovereignty, instead pushing for diplomacy and dialogue. On Wednesday, it abstained from voting on a U.N. General Assembly resolution demanding an immediate halt to Moscow's attack on Ukraine — similarly, it abstained from voting on a U.N. Security Council resolution last week. Experts said the decision didn't signal support for Moscow, but reflected India's historic partnership with Russia, a Cold War ally it continues to rely on for energy, weapons and support in conflicts with neighbors.

Stranded Indians have appealed for help on social media. In one video, a crying student begged the Indian government for assistance. Another showed dozens of students walking toward crowded borders where they waited for hours before being allowed into neighboring countries.

Such images have sparked sharp criticism of the government's rescue operation, with some, including opposition political leaders, saying India should have reacted sooner.

India issued an advisory on Feb. 15 telling those who didn't have essential work in Ukraine to consider leaving temporarily — four days after the United States urged all Americans to leave immediately.

Government officials have rejected the criticism. Many have rushed to New Delhi's airport in recent days to welcome returning students with flowers.

Nimshim Zimik, who returned to India on Tuesday, said she spent a week in a basement in the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia, ready with her luggage and essential documents. At night, she and her friends took turns sleeping.

"But we could never really sleep knowing that a bomb could fall anytime on us," she said.

On Saturday, with no signs of help arriving, Zimik decided to leave the city.

She and 53 other students contacted a Ukrainian driver and left early in the morning. But the bus broke down midway, forcing them to walk almost 10 kilometers (6 miles) to the Romanian border.

She was finally evacuated in a special flight from Romania on Tuesday.

"It's like a dream," she said. "Arriving here feels like a very heavy load has been lifted off me."

## Texas still working through rejected ballots after primary

By PAUL J. WEBER and ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas Republicans promised new voting rules would make it "easier to vote and harder to cheat." But as the dust settled Wednesday on the nation's first primary, voters in both parties had their ballots caught by the changes.

By and large, Texas' primary that put the 2022 midterm election season in full swing saw no significant issues at polling locations Tuesday under typically low turnout. But although most races were decided by

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Wednesday, counties that had rejected thousands of mail ballots for not complying with Texas' strict new election law still do not know how many will end up counting.

That answer is still likely days away, and for Republicans who rushed to put in place new voting laws across the U.S. after the 2020 elections, the stakes go beyond Texas as the GOP pushes back against accusations of trying to suppress likely Democratic voters. But there is little question the changes in Texas caused hurdles for even Republican voters, who accounted for roughly 40 percent of all mail-in ballots.

"Texans are the ones feeling the impact now, but unfortunately this is just a preview of what could happen in other states," said Mimi Marziani, president of the Texas Civil Rights Project, which has sued Texas over the law.

Republicans broadly expressed satisfaction with the debut of the tougher rules and looked ahead to November, when another provision under Texas' sweeping new law will give expanded powers to partisan poll watchers.

The rate of rejected ballots around Houston was nearly 30% — some 11,000 ballots — as polls opened Tuesday. Harris County is a Democratic stronghold, but ballots for both Republican and Democratic voters were flagged for not having the required new identification, said Leah Shah, a spokeswoman for the county elections office.

Texas Secretary of State John Scott, an appointee of Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, and others in the GOP have said the rejections were likely a matter of most voters being unfamiliar with the new requirements and would become less of an issue over time.

"We looked at it as the fact that the law is definitely working," said Rick Barnes, the GOP chairman of Tarrant County, the largest red county in Texas. "It's the first round of it, so it may take a little education moving forward. But again, I think that those percentages came down and we're comfortable with the reality of it all."

One struggle for both parties in Texas was finding enough poll workers to keep voting locations open and moving. Parties are responding for staffing their own primaries in Texas, and large counties from the Texas border to Dallas had locations that were unable to open on time because of having not enough poll workers.

Barnes compared the problem of finding poll workers right now to employers struggling to fill jobs but said he expected to have enough poll watchers, which is generally a lesser time commitment, for "every single hour, every single poll" come November.

The new rules in Texas also banned drive-thru voting, 24-hour polling locations and prohibits elections officials from proactively sending mail ballot applications to voters. Many of the measures targeted Harris County, where just after polls closed Tuesday, Scott's office announced delays in vote counts. Harris County disputed that delays in reporting were a concern.

The law was signed last fall by Abbott, who GOP voters overwhelmingly nominated again. Overall, there were few surprises in Texas' primary, although one came Wednesday when Republican Rep. Van Taylor abruptly dropped his reelection bid after admitting to having an affair about a year ago.

David Becker, a former attorney in the Justice Department who is now executive director of the nonprofit Center for Election Innovation & Research Center, said the Texas law created unnecessary redundancies that tripped up voters.

"Navigating the election process is not supposed to be a game of gotcha," he said.

In the Dallas suburbs, Collin County on Wednesday reported that 800 of more than 5,300 received ballots had been flagged for rejection, mostly over signature and identification requirements.

Bruce Sherbet, the elections administrator in Collin County, said it will be a question of how many are fixed in time to help the county determine how much more education is needed for voters to lower rejection rates in the future.

"It went as well as we could expect," Sherbet said.

**States launch probe into TikTok's effect on kids' health**

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By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — State attorneys general have launched a nationwide investigation into TikTok and its possible harmful effects on young users' mental health, widening government scrutiny of the wildly popular video platform.

The investigation was announced Wednesday by a number of states led by California, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Jersey, Tennessee and Vermont.

U.S. lawmakers and federal regulators have criticized TikTok, citing practices and computer-driven promotion of content they say can endanger the physical and mental health of young users. The platform has an estimated 1 billion monthly users and is especially popular with teens and younger children.

Last month, Texas opened an investigation into TikTok's alleged violations of children's privacy and facilitation of human trafficking.

"Our children are growing up in the age of social media — and many feel like they need to measure up to the filtered versions of reality that they see on their screens," California Attorney General Rob Bonta said in a news release. "We know this takes a devastating toll on children's mental health and well-being."

Bonta said the investigation aims determine if TikTok is violating the law in promoting its platform to young people.

Government officials and child-safety advocates maintain that TikTok's computer algorithms pushing video content to users can promote eating disorders and even self-harm and suicide to young viewers.

TikTok has said it focuses on age-appropriate experiences, noting that some features, such as direct messaging, are not available to younger users. The company says it has tools in place, such as screen-time management, to help young people and parents moderate how long children spend on the app and what they see.

"We care deeply about building an experience that helps to protect and support the well-being of our community, and appreciate that the state attorneys general are focusing on the safety of younger users," the company said Wednesday. "We look forward to providing information on the many safety and privacy protections we have for teens."

Early last year, after federal regulators ordered TikTok to disclose how its practices affect children and teenagers, the platform tightened its privacy practices for users under 18.

As its popularity has swelled, TikTok has come under a barrage of criticism from state officials, federal regulators, consumer advocates and lawmakers of both parties. Republicans have especially homed in on the company's ties to China. TikTok is owned by Beijing-based ByteDance.

"TikTok threatens the safety, mental health and well-being of our kids," Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington, the senior Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said at a hearing Tuesday.

Late last year a similar coalition of state attorneys general began an investigation into the Instagram photo-sharing platform, owned by Facebook parent Meta Platforms, and its effects on young people. The action came after former Facebook product manager Frances Haugen revealed internal company research showing apparent harm to some teen users of Instagram.

In his State of the Union address on Tuesday night, President Joe Biden asked Congress to bolster privacy protections for children, including by banning advertising targeted at them and with measures aimed at reducing the promotion of content that contributes to addiction.

Critics of TikTok have pointed, for example, to incidents around the country that came to light last fall in which students vandalized school bathrooms and other equipment, and stole supplies — apparently in response to a viral TikTok challenge called "devious licks." Also last fall, The Wall Street Journal reported that teenage girls had been seeking medical care for the sudden onset of tics, such as jerky motions and verbal outbursts; doctors said TikTok videos on Tourette syndrome could be a factor.

## US House 'staunchly, proudly' passes resolution for Ukraine

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The House has overwhelmingly approved a resolution “steadfastly, staunchly, proudly and fervently” in support of Ukraine.

Lawmakers said Wednesday that history was watching the way the world responds as Ukrainians fight to save their Western-style democracy from invasion by Russia. With intensifying urgency, many in Congress said more must be done to help Ukraine and cut off Russian President Vladimir Putin’s ability to wage war.

In the Senate, Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., was also introducing a resolution that would back Ukraine’s claim in international court that Putin and his “cronies” have committed war crimes.

“The camera of history is rolling on all of us today,” Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-N.Y., the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, said during a House floor debate.

Meeks urged his colleague to provide a unanimous vote to overwhelmingly show “whether or not we stood up and stood out to protect freedom.”

The resolve comes after the blue and yellow colors of the Ukraine flag were on view in the House chamber for President Joe Biden’s State of the Union speech Tuesday night, a display of bipartisan common ground for the often divided Congress.

While resolutions do not carry the force of law, Congress is working quickly to produce a supplemental funding package of at least \$6.4 billion of military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine.

Lawmakers warned the war was taking an ominous turn as Russian troops encircled Kyiv and other major Ukraine cities, and citizens took up arms to stop the invasion.

The resolution approved by the House says it “stands steadfastly, staunchly, proudly and fervently behind the Ukrainian people in their fight against the authoritarian Putin regime.”

It calls for an immediate cease-fire and the removal of Russian forces from Ukraine, pledges U.S. support for the Ukrainian resistance and vows to provide “significant additional aid and humanitarian relief to Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia’s aggression.”

Only three of the House members who voted were against the resolution: Republicans Paul Gosar of Arizona, Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Matt Rosendale of Montana.

Amid criticism over his vote, Gosar tweeted: “Talk to me when our border is secure.” Along a similar line, Rosendale has proposed banning aid to Ukraine until the U.S.-Mexico border is secured. Massie, in tweets citing several concerns with the resolution, said its call for additional and immediate “defensive security assistance” could include American boots on the ground or U.S. enforcement of a no-fly zone.

The Senate unanimously approved a similar measure in support of Ukraine last month.

Graham said Wednesday that he is introducing a new resolution to hold Putin and those around him accountable for the assault on Ukraine in international courts.

“Enough of the murder, enough of the destruction and carnage,” Graham said Wednesday in a press conference at the Capitol.

Graham said of Putin: “The world has let him get away with too much for too long.”

A former military lawyer, Graham is introducing a measure that would back Ukraine’s claim in international court of war crimes by Putin. He is joined by Ukraine-born Rep. Victoria Spartz, R-Ind., who has spoken passionately in favor of a U.S. role in saving her country.

Congress largely backs Biden’s strategy of economic sanctions against Russia, even as lawmakers push for more. Many want Biden to cut off Russian oil exports to the U.S. as a way to clip Putin’s economy and deprive him of resources. Lawmakers of both parties want to send Ukraine more ammunition, anti-aircraft weapons and other military and relief aid.

## Russians start feeling the heat of Ukraine war sanctions

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — In the days since the West imposed sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, ordinary Russians are feeling the painful effects — from payment systems that won’t operate and problems withdrawing cash to not being able to purchase certain items.

“Apple Pay hasn’t been working since yesterday. It was impossible to pay with it anywhere — in a bus,



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in a cafe," Moscow resident Tatyana Usmanova told The Associated Press. "Plus, in one supermarket they limited the amount of essential goods one person could buy."

Apple announced that it would stop selling its iPhone and other popular products in Russia along with limiting services like Apple Pay as part of a larger corporate backlash to protest the invasion.

Dozens of foreign and international companies have pulled their business out of Russia. Major car brands halted exports of their vehicles; Boeing and Airbus suspended supply of aircraft parts and service to Russian airlines; major Hollywood studios halted their film releases; and the list will likely keep growing.

That's on top of the United States and other Western nations hitting Russia with sanctions of unprecedented breadth and severity. 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.

Russians in Moscow and other cities talked to The AP about how those moves have played out in their daily lives, pointing to problems with converting rubles into foreign currency, long lines at ATMs and certain bank cards failing them.

Irina Biryukova in Yaroslavl, in a city about 250 kilometers northeast of Moscow, said she could only deposit a limited amount of money into her bank account through the bank ATMs.

"The majority of ATMs (of this bank) don't work to deposit (money)," Biryukova said.

Food prices, according to some businesses, have started soaring, too.

"All the main ingredients we prepare our products from have gone up in price by 30-40%," said Ilya Oktavin, who runs delivery service at a Perm sushi bar.

Certain goods are also harder to come by because of actions by companies like Nike, which on Tuesday night halted online sales with a statement on the company's website saying it "can't guarantee delivery of the goods to shoppers in Russia." On Wednesday, H&M announced suspending "all sales" in the country.

Kremlin critics are painting a bleak picture for Russia.

"We're facing growing prices, mass layoffs, delays in payment of benefits or pensions," opposition politician Yulia Galyamina wrote on Facebook Wednesday. "Shortages of medicines and medical equipment. Aging and impoverished car and aircraft fleet. ... We'll be remembering the 1990s as hardly the worst time. But I have only one question: for what?"

In what looked like an effort to prevent panic, Russian authorities on Tuesday launched a special website, titled "We're explaining," that talks about how various areas of life are functioning under the pressure of sanctions. Worrying reports, like the ones anticipating a spike in prices, or saying that certain services don't work, are debunked on the website as "fake."

Some Russians, in the meantime, say that it's not so much the sanctions that worry them, but the deadly attack Russia waged on a neighboring country.

"You know, sanctions bother me the least. I'm worried about Russia killing people in Ukraine," said Moscow resident Ivan Kozlov. "I wish it stopped the war no sane person with a conscience and capable of mercy and compassion in Russia wants."

Anti-war sentiment in Russia has been widespread. Thousands of people have signed open letters and online petitions demanding to stop the invasion, with the most widely supported online petition garnering over 1 million signatures in several days.

Russians across the country have been taking to the streets almost every day since the attack started last Thursday. More than 7,000 protesters have been detained in the past week, according to OVD-Info, rights group that tracks political arrests, with nearly 600 arrests taking place on Wednesday.

## Manchin fans faint hopes for stalled social, climate bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pivotal Sen. Joe Manchin floated the broad outlines Wednesday of a reconfigured social and environment package that aims half its resources at reducing federal deficits, a day after President Joe Biden suggested refocusing his own more ambitious but stalled plan.

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Manchin, D-W.Va., whose opposition doomed Biden's 10-year, roughly \$2 trillion measure in December, provided no figures or details. But in briefly describing his ideas to reporters, he provided a faint flicker of hope that Democrats might revive some version of Biden's marquee legislative priority this election year.

Even so, by saying he wanted half the package to be for deficit reduction and controlling inflation, Manchin was suggesting a major reshaping of the legislation that would leave less room for Democratic priorities, leaving its prospects uncertain. The entire effort has drawn unanimous Republican opposition, and it was sidelined in the evenly divided Senate after Manchin said before Christmas that he opposed a version of the bill that the House had passed.

"If you want to talk, don't you think you should get your financial house in order," Manchin said. "If they're not serious about inflation and debt, then it would be hard for me to negotiate on anything."

Democrats had argued the House-approved bill was mostly paid for and said it would help families cope with inflation by providing them with more federal help.

Manchin said there have been "no formal talks" over resuscitating the effort and said he has not discussed his ideas with the White House. He has said for months that the House-approved bill would fuel inflation, but he did not say Wednesday what he meant by using the legislation to curb price increases that have rippled across the economy.

Manchin said he wanted to raise revenue by boosting taxes on the rich and corporations and by curbing prices of the prescription drugs that Medicare buys for its beneficiaries. The savings not used for deficit reduction could go for a priority like using tax credits and other incentives to reduce pollutants that contribute to global warming.

All of those were in the Biden-backed bill that Manchin derailed in December. But the sidelined legislation was much broader, also including initiatives like enhanced child tax credits, health care subsidies and free pre-school.

In his State of the Union address Tuesday, Biden suggested a rebranded version of that package, though he used no numbers. He said the measure would help families cope with rising expenses and emphasized it should restrict drug prices, combat climate change and help with child care costs.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., a progressive who clashed repeatedly with Manchin over the social and environment bill, didn't rule out accepting a smaller package if it included accomplishments like reducing prescription drug and child care costs. But he seemed reluctant to bow to Manchin's proposals.

"Mr. Manchin doesn't, last I heard, run the United States Senate. Our job is to bring forth the legislation that the American people want. Mr. Manchin can vote no," Sanders said.

"A lot of discussions going on among senators," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said when asked if Biden's words had prompted new movement on the push.

## Democrats see 'no reason to wait' on Supreme Court vote

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson began courting senators on Capitol Hill Wednesday, making her case for confirmation in private meetings as Democrats worked to move her through the Senate within weeks.

Senate Democrats concerned about their narrow 50-50 majority — Vice President Kamala Harris breaks the tie — announced Wednesday that Jackson's hearings will begin March 21, just three weeks after President Joe Biden nominated her to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer. With a goal of an April confirmation, they are using Justice Amy Coney Barrett's quick confirmation ahead of the 2020 presidential election as a model for Jackson, who would be the first Black woman to serve as a justice in the court's 200-plus year history.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin called the quick confirmation process "a contemporary standard" on Wednesday after he met with Jackson in his office, while acknowledging that part of the reason for the rapid timeline was because of his party's tenuous hold on the Senate.

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"There's no reason to wait," Durbin said, even though Breyer has said he won't leave the bench until summer. He noted that the committee is also familiar with Jackson, who was just confirmed as an appeals court judge last year and had been confirmed by the Senate two times before that.

The sped-up timeline is just one byproduct of increased partisanship, and a decade of gradual rules changes, in the once-collegial Senate. The majority party knows it can win confirmation with a simple majority, and bipartisan outreach is more symbolic than necessary. While the Senate once took up to two months to review cases and credentials before questioning a nominee, Republicans held hearings just two weeks after Barrett's nomination to replace the late liberal icon Ruth Bader Ginsburg as the presidential election loomed.

Senators will have a bit more time to review Jackson's record, but not much.

There has been little pushback from Republicans, who confirmed Barrett and two other justices, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, while they controlled the Senate and President Donald Trump was in office. While few GOP senators are expected to vote for Jackson, and several have questioned whether she is too liberal, they are not spending much political energy to oppose her, so far.

Texas Sen. John Cornyn, a GOP member of the Judiciary panel, said, "I don't think there's a lot of mystery involved," since Jackson isn't new to the committee.

"Given the fact that she's not going to change the balance, the ideological balance on the court, I think people will be respectful, and they'll do their due diligence and ask questions, but I think we all have a pretty good idea what the outcome is likely to be, unless there's a big surprise," Cornyn said.

So far, there have been few surprises with Jackson, who has been a federal judge for nine years and is well-liked by members of both parties.

After his own meeting with Jackson, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said the Senate will move her nomination "fairly but expeditiously."

He gushed about the nominee to reporters, saying she is "an optimistic person" who tries to see all sides of an issue. He said they spoke some about her judicial philosophy but mostly about her life and her family.

"You can see it when you meet her that she has real empathy," Schumer said. "I think it's very important in a judge because you're having two sides clashing over whatever the issue is, to be able to empathize and walk in the other person's shoes."

Jackson also met with Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell and Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary panel. Referring to pitched partisan battles for Trump's three nominees, especially Kavanaugh, Grassley told reporters ahead of his meeting that Republicans would treat Jackson with "dignity and fairness, and most importantly thoroughness."

As is tradition, the hearings this month will last four days, with opening statements March 21 and testimony and questioning the next two days. The fourth day will include testimony from outside witnesses.

Biden spoke about Jackson and honored Breyer in his State of the Union speech Tuesday evening, calling the nominee "one of our nation's top legal minds, who will continue Justice Breyer's legacy of excellence."

In addition to her time as a federal judge, Jackson, 51, once worked as one of Breyer's law clerks and served on the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the agency that develops federal sentencing policy.

Biden said she was a "consensus builder," noting her work as a private litigator and as a federal public defender, and pointed out that she comes from a family of public school educators and police officers.

While Democrats can win Jackson's confirmation without Republicans, assuming the caucus is present and healthy, they are still hoping to win some GOP votes. Durbin has said he is working toward that goal, predicting that "about half a dozen" GOP votes may be in play.

Only Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina voted to confirm Jackson to the appeals court last year. While Collins has appeared open to voting for Jackson again, Murkowski said in a statement last week that her previous vote did not mean she would be supportive this time.

Graham had pushed for a different candidate from his home state, federal Judge J. Michelle Childs, and expressed disappointment that she was not Biden's pick.

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Schumer said Jackson is someone who should appeal to all sides, noting her past as a public defender and support from some police groups, for example.

He said he hopes that when Republicans meet her, "they will be as wowed as I was. She's an amazing person."

## Ukraine war upends Biden's agenda on energy, climate change

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Russian troops move deeper into Ukraine, President Joe Biden is taking steps to rein in rising energy costs even if those moves run counter to his agenda for addressing climate change.

Biden announced on Tuesday that he is releasing 30 million barrels of oil from U.S. strategic reserves as part of a 31-nation effort to help ensure that supplies will not fall short after Russia's invasion of its European neighbor. The release follows ones ordered in November that also were coordinated with U.S. allies.

"These steps will help blunt gas prices here at home," Biden said in his State of the Union address. The U.S. stands ready to do more if necessary to protect American businesses and consumers, he said.

The focus on high gas prices and increased oil flow is a far cry from Biden's pledge to wean Americans off oil and other fossil fuels and cut planet-warming emissions in half by 2030.

Still, it reflects political realities.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shaken markets worldwide. Oil prices have soared, with U.S. benchmark crude surpassing \$110 per barrel — the highest price in a decade.

Biden's \$2 trillion social and environmental policy bill, which includes about \$550 billion for climate change efforts, has been stalled for months in the evenly divided Senate. It remains unclear when or if the bill will come up for a vote or what would be included in it.

Biden's hourlong speech Tuesday night touched only lightly on climate and offered no new policy initiatives to address global warming.

The omission was especially notable coming days after a new U.N. report warned that climate change is about to get significantly worse and will likely make the world sicker, hungrier, poorer, gloomier and far more dangerous.

The White House says all tools remain on the table, but harsh U.S. sanctions against Russia do not target its energy sector, despite bipartisan calls to ban Russian oil imports, at least temporarily. Banning Russian imports could restrict global oil supplies and "raise prices at the gas pump for Americans," White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said Wednesday. "That's something that we're very aware of."

"If there was ever a time to be energy independent, it is now," countered Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and a prominent supporter of fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas that are crucial to his energy-producing state.

In 2021, the U.S. imported roughly 245 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products from Russia — a one-year increase of 24%, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

"It makes no sense at all for us to rely on energy from a country that is actively engaging in acts of war against a freedom-seeking democracy — Ukraine — when we are blessed with abundant energy resources right here in America," Manchin said Tuesday in comments that were echoed across the political spectrum.

Liberal Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass., a longtime climate hawk, introduced legislation to ban imports of Russian oil and petroleum products. "We cannot criticize Europe for its reliance on Russian energy as we pour dirty oil money into Russia," Markey said.

Republicans, seizing the political advantage, clamored for Biden to immediately reverse policies that they said have slowed U.S. energy production — including cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada and a moratorium on new oil and gas leases on public lands and waters.

"Biden must end his war on American energy production so the United States and our allies can have access to affordable, secure energy," said Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, the second-ranking House Republican. He and other Republicans urged severe sanctions on Russian energy production to take away leverage and funding that Russian President Vladimir Putin used to attack Ukraine.



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"America's energy dominance is our strongest weapon against Putin," said Republican Reps. Bruce Westerman of Arkansas and Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington state.

The pair introduced a bill Tuesday that would require Biden to make an "energy security plan" within 30 days and force him to "unleash America's oil and natural gas production to offset Russian imports" that would be banned under the legislation. Westerman is the top Republican on House Natural Resources Committee while McMorris Rodgers is the senior GOP member on House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Some Democrats, seeking ways to ease pain at the pump and nervous about a potential voter backlash in the November elections, are pushing Biden to temporarily suspend the federal gas tax. A bill to do that is co-sponsored by Democratic Sens. Mark Kelly of Arizona and Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, both in tight races for reelection.

The White House has yet to state a position on a gas tax holiday, but a spokesman said officials are "coordinating actively with major energy consumers and producers," with the goal of providing "relief at the gas pump for American households and businesses." Gas prices averaged nearly \$3.65 a gallon on Wednesday, up 93 cents from a year ago, according to the AAA motor club.

It was just last fall that Biden's boasted of historic progress on addressing global warming at a U.N. climate conference in Scotland.

Now, the Ukraine war "seems likely to consume bandwidth that administration officials might otherwise devote to energy transition," said Kevin Book, an energy analyst and managing director at ClearView Energy Partners.

"Regime change appears to be crowding out climate change, and for good reason," Book said in an email. "The world is warming slowly, but (Ukraine) is boiling over."

Jonathan Elkind, who served as assistant energy secretary for international affairs under President Barack Obama, said that while the war inevitably will "dominate over everything" in the short term, the climate crisis will remain a key focus for Biden and his administration.

"We don't have a choice of either/or. We need to do both. The climate doesn't fix itself in the meantime," said Elkind, now a senior research scholar at Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan of Alaska made no mention of climate when he called for Biden to end "a holy war against American energy." Biden's policies are "driving up the price of energy for working families, laying off workers in my state ... and empowering dictators like Putin," Sullivan told Fox News.

Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo ridiculed Biden's climate envoy, former Secretary of State John Kerry, who said before the invasion that a war in Ukraine could "divert" world attention from climate change.

"You're going to lose people's focus, you're going to lose big-country attention because they will be diverted, and I think it could have a damaging impact," Kerry told the BBC last week.

Pompeo, who served under President Donald Trump, called Kerry's comment "music to Vladimir Putin's ears to think that America is focused on climate change while the Ukrainian people are dying in Europe."

Environmental groups said Kerry's comments were being distorted. Even as the world's attention remains focused on Ukraine, the climate crisis continues, they said. Concern over Russian oil and gas shows the importance of boosting renewable energy such as solar and wind power, said Tiernan Sittenfeld of the League of Conservation Voters.

The conflict in Ukraine "underscores the need to get off fossil fuels once and for all. We do need to do all these things at once," she said.

The American Petroleum Institute, the industry's top lobbying group, said U.S. companies play a crucial role in supporting European allies with U.S. exports. Nearly 70 percent of U.S. liquefied natural gas exports went to Europe in January, a trend industry officials expect to continue.

"American energy leadership can serve as a stabilizing force while strengthening global energy security," said Mike Sommers, the group's president and CEO.

## **Abramovich selling Chelsea in fallout from Russia's invasion**

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

LONDON (AP) — Faced with the threat of financial sanctions targeting Russians, Chelsea owner Roman

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Abramovich announced Wednesday he is trying to sell the Premier League club that became trophy-winning machine thanks to his lavish investment.

The decision by the billionaire oligarch to sell his most high-profile asset is one of the clearest signs yet that Russia's business elite are feeling the repercussions of President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine. Owning Chelsea has made Abramovich a household name in Britain and politicians have been demanding that he be included on the list of wealthy and influential Russians hit with British sanctions because of the war.

"Please know that this has been an incredibly difficult decision to make, and it pains me to part with the club in this manner," Abramovich said in a statement. "However, I do believe this is in the best interest of the club."

One potential buyer had already gone public to reveal Abramovich was trying to sell with a price tag of at least \$2.5 billion floated. Swiss billionaire Hansjorg Wyss claimed he "received an offer on Tuesday to buy Chelsea from Abramovich" along with three other people.

However, Abramovich insisted that "the sale of the club will not be fast-tracked but will follow due process."

Abramovich said he will not be asking to be repaid 1.5 billion pounds (\$2 billion) in loans he has granted the club during 19 years of injecting cash to elevate the team into one of the most successful in Europe. The set of every major trophy was completed last month when Chelsea won the Club World Cup.

"I have instructed my team to set up a charitable foundation where all net proceeds from the sale will be donated," he said. "The foundation will be for the benefit of all victims of the war in Ukraine."

Abramovich has faced calls to condemn Russia's attack on Ukraine, which he so far has not done.

Parliamentary privilege had been used by Labour Party legislator Chris Bryant to claim in the House of Commons that Abramovich was already looking to sell London properties, speculating that "he's terrified of being sanctioned."

Abramovich has not commented on any attempts to seize his assets, which grew from the fortune he made in oil and aluminium during the chaotic years that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The speed of Abramovich's pending exit from Chelsea is striking as he was trying to instigate a plan this past weekend to relinquish some control in order to keep the club under his ownership, announcing plans to shift the "stewardship and care" of the club to its foundation trustees.

"I hope that I will be able to visit Stamford Bridge one last time to say goodbye to all of you in person," Abramovich said. "It has been a privilege of a lifetime to be part of Chelsea FC and I am proud of all our joint achievements. Chelsea Football Club and its supporters will always be in my heart."

Chelsea had won the league title only once — in 1955 — when Abramovich bought the club in 2003. Helped by a number of expensive signings, the club won the Premier League title two years later and has added four more since then, most recently in 2017.

The haul of 18 trophies in 19 years also includes two Champions League titles and the Club World Cup success he was in Abu Dhabi to witness last month.

His last public visit to a match at Stamford Bridge was last year after also hosting Israeli President Isaac Herzog at the stadium in November.

Abramovich rarely speaks publicly but did give an interview to Forbes last year, in part explaining the purchase of Chelsea in 2003 for 140 million pounds including 75 million pounds of debt.

"In hindsight, especially with the public profile it would bring me, maybe I would have thought differently about owning a club," Abramovich was quoted as telling Forbes. "But, at the time, I just saw this incredible game and that I wanted to be a part of that in one way or another."

Abramovich was the first of the mega-rich owners to enter English football, starting a trend that has continued with Manchester City benefiting from Abu Dhabi investment since 2008 and Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund buying Newcastle last year.

It is unclear how the sale will affect Chelsea's finances. There is a long-term need to revamp Stamford Bridge to generate more income from fans and corporate backers. Chelsea has the smallest and most dated stadium of the Premier League's most successful clubs, with plans for a rebuild of the 41,000-capac-

ity venue put on hold by Abramovich in 2018 as British-Russian diplomatic tensions deepened.

Abramovich has not had a British visa since 2018 when a renewal application was taking longer than usual to go through and was withdrawn. That came at a time when Britain pledged to review the long-term visas of rich Russians in the aftermath of the poisonings of Russian former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the English city of Salisbury. Britain blamed Russia for the pair's exposure to a nerve agent, an allegation Moscow denies.

Abramovich's connections to Putin have been the subject of speculation for years.

In 2012, a High Court judge in London highlighted Abramovich's connections to Putin in a ruling related to a legal battle. Judge Elizabeth Gloster said Abramovich had "very good relations" and "privileged access" to Putin though adding he could not "pull the presidential strings." Abramovich has denied taking any orders from Putin.

The ripples of the war also led to the loss of key Russian-linked sponsorship at another Premier League club on Wednesday.

Everton suspended deals with firms owned by Alisher Usmanov, a Russian metals tycoon who has been sanctioned by the European Union. Usmanov's firms include USM which has the naming rights to the training ground and paid 30 million pounds (\$40 million) for the same rights to a new stadium being built in Liverpool.

## **New Biden pandemic plan: Closer to normal for the nation**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's time for America to stop letting the coronavirus "dictate how we live," President Joe Biden's White House declared Wednesday, outlining a strategy to allow people to return to many normal activities safely after two years of pandemic disruptions.

One highlight is a new "test to treat" plan to provide free antiviral pills at pharmacies to people who test positive for the virus.

The 90-page National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan spells out initiatives and investments to continue to drive down serious illness and deaths from the virus, while preparing for potential new variants and providing employers and schools the resources to remain open.

"We know how to keep our businesses and our schools open with the tools that we have at our disposal," said White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients.

Meanwhile, 140 million Americans, or 43% have now had COVID, according to a new assessment from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That estimate comes from a surveillance program that tested nearly 72,000 blood samples that were sent to commercial labs from late December to late January. The samples were checked for antibodies from infection, and were distinguishable from antibodies that came from vaccination.

More than 947,000 people in the U.S. have died from the virus according to the CDC.

Wednesday's White House announcement follows Biden's Tuesday night State of the Union speech, in which he pointed to progress against the pandemic since last year, with a dramatic reduction in cases, along with readily available vaccines and the likelihood of new tests and therapeutics soon becoming more accessible.

"This plan lays out the roadmap to help us fight COVID-19 in the future as we move America from crisis to a time when COVID-19 does not disrupt our daily lives and is something we prevent, protect against, and treat," the White House said. "We are not going to just 'live with COVID.' Because of our work, we are no longer going to let COVID-19 dictate how we live."

That tracked Biden's speech statement, "Tonight, I can say we are moving forward safely, back to more normal routines. It's time for Americans to get back to work and fill our great downtowns again."

COVID-19 cases have fallen to their lowest level since last summer in recent weeks, after a winter spike from the highly transmissible omicron variant. Deaths, though, which lag cases by weeks, are still elevated, with an average of nearly 1,700 people dying in the U.S. each day. Officials emphasize that most instances

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of serious illnesses and death in the U.S. occur among those who are unvaccinated or who have not received a booster dose of vaccine.

The White House's strategy comes days after the CDC loosened its guidance for when face masks should be worn in public indoor settings, placing more emphasis on local capacity to treat serious disease than overall case counts. Now more than 70% of the country can safely remove masks indoors, the CDC says, and the percentage is expected to grow as cases continue to decline.

While most states and localities moved to relax their mask requirements even before the CDC change, many have kept mandates in place for schools, and the federal government continues to require face masks on public transportation, including airplanes. The federal mandate is to expire on March 18, and health officials did not provide any indication whether it would be extended.

Meanwhile, businesses across the country are struggling to navigate employees' lingering concerns about COVID-19 and desire for the flexibility of working from home. Many companies' would like to get workers back into offices.

A key component of the administration's plan to convince American that it is safe to resume normal activities is the increasing availability of an antiviral pill from Pfizer that has been shown to reduce the risk of hospitalization from COVID-19 by 90%. By the end of the month, the administration says, 1 million pills will be available, with double that ready for use in April.

A White House official said the "test-to-treat" plan would initially roll out in hundreds of pharmacies across the country, including CVS, Walgreens, and Kroger locations, and would soon expand beyond that. Those who test positive at the sites would be able to obtain the antiviral pills for quick use, dramatically reducing the risk of bad outcomes.

One possible problem: The test-to-treat plan drew early concern from some pharmacists. Anne Burns, a vice president with the American Pharmacists Association, said pharmacies across the country have struggled with staffing issues in recent months. Pharmacists already doling out vaccines, prescriptions and health advice are worried about the extra time needed if they add more COVID-19 testing and treating.

"There's just a lot of considerations that go into this," she said. "It takes far longer than it takes to dispense most normal prescriptions."

The administration said it also stands ready to rapidly administer millions of vaccine doses for children under 5 once the vaccines are approved by federal regulators. While there had been hope for the first shots to be authorized last month, Pfizer is now waiting on the results of a study including a third dose of the vaccine for that age group, and that will likely delay approval until April.

As part of the new strategy, the administration is calling on Congress to reinstitute tax credits for businesses that provide paid sick leave for employees who are sick with COVID-19. The White House is also asking Congress for additional funding to invest in new COVID-19 drugs, including research into the development of pan-coronavirus vaccines that would prevent against multiple strains and even several different types of viruses.

Meanwhile, federal officials emphasized they have greatly improved the public health system's capacity to identify and track any potential new variants, with new investments in surveillance testing and genomic sequencing. Zients said the administration believes that if needed, it can authorize, produce and deliver new vaccines and treatments "in just 100 days rather than in many months or years."

Biden, in his remarks Tuesday night, said that in addition to starting the new antiviral initiative, his administration would allow people in the U.S. to order another round of free tests from the government. He said that starting next week, the administration would make available four more free tests to U.S. households through COVIDTests.gov, which has sent more than 270 million to nearly 70 million households since it launched in mid-January.

Juan Gallego, a 58-year-old resident of Chelsea, Massachusetts, a majority Latino city north of Boston that was one of the state's hardest hit during the pandemic, says Biden's comments were appropriate, given how far the nation has come over the past two years.

"Before, we didn't know how to treat it. We were all paranoid, we didn't know what to do," he said of the virus. "Now we know, with all the experience, all we've done with the vaccines and new treatments."



Gallego, a real estate agent who during the worst of the pandemic helped make face masks and deliver groceries and other essentials to quarantined families throughout Chelsea, said safety habits won't quickly fade, especially in cities like his that took the brunt of the pain.

Many along Chelsea's bustling main street and even children in local schools have continued to mask up, although a statewide mask mandate in classrooms was lifted this week, he said.

"He sent a message of hope, not desperation," Gallego said of Biden. "We are in a much better place. And he's right."

## **Foster, first Black student at University of Alabama, dies**

Atherine Lucy Foster, the first Black student to enroll at the University of Alabama, died Wednesday. She was 92.

University officials announced her death in a statement. Her daughter, Angela Foster Dickerson, said her mother died Wednesday morning and said a family statement would be released.

Foster in 1956 briefly attended classes at the then all-white university. She was expelled three days later after her presence brought protests and threats against her life. Foster, a graduate student studying education, had faced hostile crowds hurling racially charged threats and debris.

The university later celebrated Foster's legacy, her role in desegregating the institution and her bravery.

Her death comes less than a week after university officials dedicated the campus building where she briefly attended classes in her honor. During the ceremony, she was also proclaimed a "master teacher."

"If I am a master teacher, what I hope I am teaching you is that love will take care of everything in our world, don't you think," Foster said at the dedication ceremony last week.

"It's not your color. It's not how bright you are. It's how you feel about those that you deal with," Foster said.

In 2019, she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the university, where she had returned and earned a masters degree in education in 1992.

"Dr. Foster will always be remembered as one who broke barriers, reminded us of the respect due to every individual and lived a life of strength in steadfast service to her students and community," University President Stuart R. Bell said in a statement.

After criticism, trustees abandoned a plan for the building to also keep the name of a one-time governor who led the Ku Klux Klan and to rename it solely for Foster. Rather than Lucy-Graves Hall, the classroom building will be known as Atherine Lucy Hall, trustees decided.

Foster's family wanted to use her maiden name since she was known as Atherine Lucy while originally on campus.

After Foster left the campus in the 1950s, African-American students did not return to the campus until 1963 when Gov. George Wallace made his infamous stand in the school house door.

## **Powell expects a quarter-point Fed rate hike this month**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chair Jerome Powell said Wednesday that he supports a traditional quarter-point increase in the Federal Reserve's benchmark short-term interest rate when the Fed meets later this month, rather than a larger increase that some of its policymakers have proposed.

But Powell did open the door to a bigger hike in the event that inflation, which has reached a four-decade high, doesn't noticeably decline this year, as the Fed expects it to.

"I'm inclined to propose and support" a quarter-point rate hike to fight the acceleration of inflation that has engulfed the economy in recent months, Powell told the House Financial Services Committee on the first of two days of semiannual testimony to Congress.

Most other Fed officials have in recent weeks supported a similar modest rise, while a few have said they back a half-point hike or are at least open to such an increase. Higher Fed rates typically lead, in turn, to

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higher borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, including for homes and auto loans and credit cards.

"We have an expectation that inflation will peak and begin to come down this year," Powell said. But he added: "To the extent inflation comes in higher ... then we would be prepared to move more aggressively" by raising rates by more than a quarter point later this year.

The stock market rose in response to Powell's support of the smaller increase. The S&P 500 jumped 1.7% in mid-day trading.

The Fed chair cautioned that the economic consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the resulting sanctions by the U.S. and Europe, are "highly uncertain" and said "it's too soon to say" how they might affect the Fed's policies.

Before Russia's invasion, the Fed planned to carry out "a series" of rate increases this year, Powell said, potentially at each of the remaining seven Fed meetings. For now, the Fed will "proceed carefully along the lines of that plan."

Economists have forecast that the Fed will implement five to seven quarter-point hikes this year.

Powell spoke a day after President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address that "my top priority is getting prices under control."

This month's increase would be the first since 2018. And it would mark the beginning of a delicate challenge for the Fed: It wants to increase rates enough to reduce inflation, now at a four-decade high, but not so fast as to choke off growth and hiring. Powell is betting that with the unemployment rate low, at 4%, and consumer spending solid, the economy can withstand modestly higher borrowing costs.

The Fed's rate is now pegged near zero, where it has been since the pandemic struck in March 2020 and the Fed responded by slashing interest rates to help support the economy.

Powell acknowledged that consumer price increases have jumped far above the Fed's target of 2% — inflation hit 7.5% in January compared with a year earlier — and that higher prices had persisted longer than expected. He also pledged to use the Fed's tools to bring inflation back down to its target.

"We understand that high inflation imposes significant hardship, especially on those least able to meet the higher costs of essentials like food, housing, and transportation," the Fed chair said.

Under questioning by Rep. Roger Williams, a Texas Republican, Powell said he believes the Fed can reduce inflation without tipping the economy into recession. One reason he thinks so, Powell said, is that the economy is strong now, with solid growth and the unemployment rate at a low 4%.

The Fed chair added that the central bank expects inflation to gradually decline this year as tangled supply chains unravel and consumers pull back a bit on spending. Many economists agree with him but nevertheless think inflation will stay elevated. Rising prices are spreading beyond items that were disrupted by the pandemic — autos, electronics, furniture and other household goods — into broader categories of spending, especially rental costs.

Goldman Sachs has raised its forecast for inflation and now predicts that prices, according to the Fed's preferred measure, will still be rising at a relatively high annual rate of 3.7% by year's end. That is far above the Fed's own most recent projection, issued in December, of 2.7%.

Powell said the Fed will also begin reducing its huge \$9 trillion balance sheet, which more than doubled during the pandemic when the Fed bought trillions of dollars of bonds to try to hold down longer-term rates. He said the central bank's policymakers will likely agree on a plan for how to shrink its bond holdings when it meets in two weeks but declined to say when the plan might be implemented.

Oxford Economics, a consulting firm, projects that the Fed will reduce its holdings by about \$400 billion this year, which it estimates would have the effect of rates hikes adding up to roughly one-half of a percentage point.

The invasion of Ukraine has driven up oil prices by about 18% to roughly \$110 a barrel, which will make gas more expensive. Some economists have forecast that average gas prices could soon reach \$4 a gallon, up from a national average of \$3.66 Wednesday.

Costlier energy will send inflation even higher than it otherwise would have been in the coming months, bolstering the case for Fed rate hikes. But more expensive gas also deprives consumers of money to spend on other things. This, in turn, will likely hold down consumer spending and potentially weaken the

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economy — a scenario that would usually discourage the Fed from raising rates.

Powell warned that the war could lead to shortages of such commodities as neon gas and palladium, which are used to produce semiconductors. A lack of computer chips last year slowed production of cars and electronics and contributed to high inflation.

But the Fed chair also suggested that the war's overall effect on the U.S. economy may be limited as long as the conflict doesn't significantly escalate. Only about 0.5% of U.S. trade is with Russia.

"Our financial institutions and our economy do not have large interactions with the Russian economy," he said. "And it's gotten smaller and smaller in recent years."

## 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.

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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 somersault 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."

## **New Dr. Seuss-inspired books to feature diverse creators**

By MARK PRATT Associated Press

Sketches of fantastic creatures by Dr. Seuss that have never before been published will see the light of day in new books being written and illustrated by an inclusive group of up-and-coming authors and artists, the company that owns the intellectual property rights to Dr. Seuss' works announced Wednesday.

The new line of books will include original stories inspired by previously unpublished illustrations selected from the author's archives at the University of California San Diego, Dr. Seuss Enterprises said in a statement on the late writer's birthday.

The announcement comes exactly one year after the business founded by the family of Dr. Seuss — whose real name was Theodor Seuss Geisel — announced that it would stop publishing six Dr. Seuss titles because they include racist and insensitive images, a decision that drew both condemnation and praise.

In "And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street," an Asian person is portrayed wearing a conical hat, holding chopsticks and eating from a bowl. "If I Ran the Zoo" includes a drawing of two bare-footed African men wearing what appear to be grass skirts with their hair tied above their heads. The other books affected were "McElligot's Pool," "On Beyond Zebra!," "Scrambled Eggs Super!," and "The Cat's Quizzer."

The new authors and illustrators will represent a diverse cross-section of racial backgrounds to represent as many families as possible, Dr. Seuss Enterprises said. Company officials were not available to comment, a spokesperson said.

"We look forward to putting the spotlight on a new generation of talent who we know will bring their unique voices and style to the page, while also drawing inspiration from the creativity and imagination of Dr. Seuss," Susan Brandt, President and CEO of Dr. Seuss Enterprises, said in a statement.

The books, under the banner Seuss Studios and published by Random House Children's Books, will be geared toward readers ages 4 to 8.

"The original Dr. Seuss sketch that serves as the inspiration for each of the new Seuss Studios books will be included in the book, along with a note from the creators explaining how they were inspired, and their process," the San Diego-based company said.

The images include a catlike creature with enormous ears and a series of colorful hummingbirds with pointy noses.

The goal is to continue Geisel's legacy, started in 1957 with the launch of the Beginner Books imprint at Random House, of inspiring young readers and supporting writers and artists starting their publishing



careers, the company said.

The company seems genuine in its efforts to address inclusiveness, said Pamela Good, president of Beyond Basics, a Michigan-based nonprofit that promotes literacy.

"We believe that literacy is for everyone," she said. "And as you try to find solutions that really are thoughtful and are heartfelt, they really do embrace everyone and allow everybody to be celebrated. And I think that what they're doing right now is a step in the right direction."

Dr. Seuss Enterprises has not yet disclosed the writers and illustrators who will work on the new books because contracts are still being ironed out.

The first of the new books is expected to hit shelves next year, and the goal is to publish at least two new books per year.

Dr. Seuss books such as "Green Eggs and Ham" and "The Cat in the Hat" remain popular more than 30 years after Geisel's death in 1991.

He earned an estimated \$35 million in 2021, making him the fifth-highest paid dead celebrity of the year, according to Forbes. Roald Dahl is No. 1, followed by Prince, Michael Jackson and Charles Schulz.

Geisel, who was born and raised in Springfield, Massachusetts, was No. 2 on the list in 2020 with \$33 million in earnings. His books have been translated into dozens of languages, as well as in Braille, and are sold in more than 100 countries.

## Heart-wrenching reaction to Russian athletes in Paralympics

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

A decision by the International Paralympic Committee on Wednesday to allow Russians and Belarussians to compete as "neutrals athletes" generated a heart-wrenching reply only hours after it was announced.

Russian athletes had already been slated to compete as RPC, short for Russian Paralympic Committee, as punishment for the state-sponsored doping scandal at the 2014 Sochi Olympics and a subsequent cover-up.

The IPC added more restrictions on the Russians when the Paralympics open on Friday. Belarus was sanctioned for its part in aiding Russia with the invasion and war against Ukraine.

But there was no expulsion. And that hit a nerve.

At a news conference in Beijing hours after the decision, a reporter who said he worked for the Kyiv Post asked IPC president Andrew Parsons what he would say to the family of young biathlete Yevhen Malyshev.

Malyshev was killed this week in Ukraine, but the exact circumstances of his death are unclear. The International Biathlon Union said Wednesday he "died this week serving in the Ukrainian military."

The Kyiv Post reporter held up the young man's photograph as he questioned Parsons.

"I cannot even start to imagine the pain that his family is feeling at the moment," Parsons said. "I can only tell them that my deepest thoughts are with them. This is absolutely not fair. It is disgusting. It is against humanity."

Parsons repeatedly defended the decision not to expel Russian and Belarusian athletes, saying the rules of the IPC did not allow it. The IPC is based in Germany, and he said any expulsion "would be overturned in the German court of law."

"The principle of political neutrality and the genuine belief in the transformative power of sport must be our North Star, our strength or perhaps our lifeboat," Parsons added.

The Ukraine-based reporter said he was the only journalist from the country that had managed to reach Beijing, and he pressed Parsons again to explain why Russians and Belarussians should be allowed to compete — even as neutral athletes. He repeatedly identified them as being from the "aggressor nations."

"I cannot even imagine how painful it is to be a Ukrainian right now," said Parsons, a Brazilian. "I try to sympathize and try to empathize. It's difficult. My country is not at war and my family is not hiding themselves in the subways of the capital of my nation."

IPC spokesman Craig Spence acknowledged the distaste many feel for allowing Russians and Belarussians to compete.

"We have the world's eyes on us right now, and they may not be agreeing with the decision," Spence said.

Nadine Dorries, a British minister who is responsible for sports, called it "the wrong decision."

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"They (IPC) must join the rest of the world in condemning this barbaric invasion by banning Russian and Belarussian athletes from competing," she said.

Parsons said the decision was not unanimous among his dozen board members, but he said the majority favored it. He did not give a voting breakdown.

Both delegations will be excluded from the medal table, and the IPC said it would not hold events in either country "while the present situation continues." Parsons called it the "harshest possible punishment we can hand down within our constitution and the current IPC rules."

Athletes from Russia and Belarus will instead compete under the Paralympic flag and use the Paralympic anthem. The RPC delegation must cover the "RPC" symbol on uniforms in all events and ceremonies. The Belarus delegation must cover its national flag on uniforms.

The IPC said it would also withdraw the "Paralympic Honor" given to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

It said "Paralympic Orders" were also withdrawn from: Dmitry Chernyshenko, president of the Sochi organizing committee (now Russia's deputy prime minister); Dmitry Kozak, deputy prime minister of Russia (now deputy chief of staff of the presidential executive office); Oleg Syromolotov, chief of the Interagency Security Command Centre for the Sochi Games (now deputy foreign minister); Alexander Gorovoy, deputy chief of Interagency Security Command Centre (now first deputy interior minister).

The International Olympic Committee on Monday pushed sports bodies to exclude Russian and Belarussian athletes from international events, but it left the final decision to individual governing bodies. The IOC has been slow to crack down on Russia, allowing its athletes to compete in the last four Olympics following the Sochi doping scandal.

The IOC said the action was needed now to "protect the integrity of global sports competitions and for the safety of all the participants" but left sports bodies with a way around the exclusion by adding that Russians and Belarusians could compete as neutral athletes or teams if expulsion was not possible because of short notice.

The move by the IPC comes as Russia is being barred from competing in a long list of sports including ice skating, skiing, soccer, hockey, basketball, track and field, and some tennis events. Some sports like swimming haven't followed the recommendation from the IOC to ban Russians, instead allowing them to compete as neutral athletes.

The IOC, however, has not removed the membership or leadership positions from Russians in its own organization.

Dozens of Ukrainian athletes wrote an open letter to the IOC and IPC asking for the Russian and Belarussian Olympic and Paralympic committees to be suspended.

"Your lack of action will send a message to every athlete and the world that you have chosen Russia and Belarus interests over athlete interests," the letter states. "Your legacy will be defined by your actions."

Parsons acknowledged the possibility that some Paralympic athletes might refuse to compete against their counterparts from Russia. He also had said the options for the IPC were "limited" because of the possibility of legal challenges from Russia or elsewhere.

IOC President Thomas Bach will not attend the Paralympics and has designated Parsons — an IOC member — to represent the body. IOC vice president Ser Miang Ng was to attend, but has tested positive for COVID-19. The IOC said Ng had only mild symptoms.

Paralympic officials say 648 athletes and 49 delegations will take part in the Winter Paralympics. There were 2,900 athletes at last month's Winter Olympics with 91 delegations.

Officials say 71 Russian athletes are expected to compete in the Paralympics, joined by 20 from Ukraine. The entire Ukrainian delegation was expected to arrive in time for Friday's opening ceremony. The Paralympics close March 13.

## **US, allies weaponizing sanctions to curb Russian aggression**

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and U.S. allies in a matter of days weaponized the global

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economy against Russia for invading Ukraine, and the resulting destruction has been devastatingly fast. The sanctions almost instantly put Russian President Vladimir Putin on the defensive against skyrocketing inflation. Russia's central bank, unable to tap foreign reserves, tried to use what resources it had to slow the ruble's steep decline.

It goes unchallenged among economists that Russia's \$1.5 trillion economy, previously about 7% the size of the U.S. economy, will shrivel further in ways that could be unprecedented for a nuclear power.

There is a push for even greater financial penalties. Ukrainian parliament member Oleksandra Ustinova met with U.S. senators on Tuesday to advocate for more sanctions immediately if Ukraine is to hold off Russian attacks.

"It works," Ustinova said of the sanctions while sitting in the offices of Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey. "In Ukraine, people are standing in line to get guns. In Russia, people are standing at the ATM machines because they understand they might not be able to get this money in two days, or, it will be like twice as less."

The U.S. and its allies have retaliated against Russia with a series of financial attacks, reflecting a massive change in how conflicts can be waged in a world that is globalized, digital and highly dependent on accessing money.

There have been economic targets in the past that depended on military maneuvers such as factory bombings, blockades and the capture of strategic resources. But the waves of sanctions unleashed over the past week have demonstrated how financial markets can respond faster than setting up conventional weapons.

The sanctions also are a substitute for direct military action against Russia by the U.S. and its allies. Biden has repeatedly said there will be no U.S. troops on the ground, even as weapons and materiel are provided to Ukraine.

The impact of the sanctions likely depends on the pace of the fighting and whether Russia takes Ukraine or finds itself in a slog in which the pain of any sanctions becomes more acute over time. But the value of the ruble has fallen about 35% since Friday, according to the financial data firm FactSet. The sharp decline of the currency has triggered higher inflation, higher interest rates and shortages of goods that hurt regular people in Russia.

"Ordinary Russians will no doubt suffer, but if Ukraine succumbs quickly, and its government is overthrown, Putin is unlikely to face enough internal political pressure to force him to back down," said Benn Steil, director of international economics at the Council on Foreign Relations. "If the conflict settles into an extended bloody stalemate, however, the sanctions may force him to withdraw and declare victory."

But Steil cautioned that the sanctions and the freezing of Russian central bank assets could cause other countries to move away from using the U.S. dollar in international transactions, making it easier for them to resist the kind of pressure now being put on Russia. That could possibly weaken the dollar's prominence in the world economy.

"The moves will also accelerate movement away from the U.S. dollar as the dominant settlement currency for international transactions," Steil said. "China will take the sanctions as a warning that it, too, must take firmer steps to reduce dollar dependence."

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire went so far as to say during a Tuesday radio interview that there was "a total economic and financial war against Russia."

Le Maire later walked back those remarks in a written statement that said the term "war" was inappropriate. Yet the words were provocative enough for Dmitry Medvedev, a deputy head of Russia's Security Council, to respond on Twitter: "Watch your tongue, gentlemen! And don't forget that in human history, economic wars quite often turned into real ones."

Toomey, the top Republican on the Senate Banking Committee, defended the sanctions and the need to extend them to the oil and natural gas sector — something the Biden administration has resisted to keep gasoline prices lower for U.S. consumers. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday on MSNBC that the administration is "very open" to sanctioning Russia's energy sector, though any sanctions would be weighed against costs for U.S. drivers.

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Oil prices are a politically sensitive issue, and there's been an effort to keep prices from rising too much. The International Energy Agency said Tuesday that 31 member countries, including the U.S., agreed to release a combined 60 million barrels of oil from reserves.

Russian banks "will continue to do transactions unless and until we actually put direct sanctions on oil and gas," said Toomey, who added that sanctions should also be placed on financial institutions that continue to do business with their Russian counterparts.

"Is that weaponizing the economy? Yep, you could say that," Toomey said. "But you know what? Putin has weaponized, like, an entire society against an innocent country."

Following Saturday's sanctions against the central bank, Putin placed Russian nuclear forces on high alert, a serious escalation and a sign of heightened tensions in trying to stop the Ukrainian war and contain Russia through economic penalties.

"His shaking of the nuclear saber, the saber-rattling that we've heard over the past couple days, is a sign that the sanctions are getting under his skin," said Jim Townsend, a former U.S. Defense Department official who is now a fellow at the Center for a New American Security. "These sanctions really, in fact, matter to him."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, March 3, the 62nd day of 2022. There are 303 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 3, 1974, a Turkish Airlines DC-10 crashed shortly after takeoff from Orly Airport in Paris, killing all 346 people on board.

On this date:

In 1791, Congress passed a measure taxing distilled spirits; it was the first internal revenue act in U.S. history.

In 1845, Florida became the 27th state.

In 1849, the U.S. Department of the Interior was established.

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed a measure creating the National Academy of Sciences.

In 1931, "The Star-Spangled Banner" became the national anthem of the United States as President Herbert Hoover signed a congressional resolution.

In 1943, in London's East End, 173 people died in a crush of bodies at the Bethnal Green tube station, which was being used as a wartime air raid shelter.

In 1945, the Allies fully secured the Philippine capital of Manila from Japanese forces during World War II.

In 1960, Lucille Ball filed for divorce from her husband, Desi Arnaz, a day after they had finished filming the last episode of "The Lucille Ball-Desi Arnaz Show."

In 1966, death claimed actors William Frawley at age 79 and Alice Pearce at age 48 in Hollywood.

In 1969, Apollo 9 blasted off from Cape Kennedy on a mission to test the lunar module.

In 1991, motorist Rodney King was severely beaten by Los Angeles police officers in a scene captured on amateur video. Twenty-five people were killed when a United Airlines Boeing 737-200 crashed while approaching the Colorado Springs airport.

In 2020, in a surprise move, the Federal Reserve cut its benchmark interest rate by a half-point, its largest cut in more than a decade, to support the economy in the face of the spreading coronavirus.

Ten years ago: Mitt Romney rolled to a double-digit victory in Washington state's Republican presidential caucuses, his fourth campaign triumph in a row.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump toured St. Andrew Catholic School, a private religious facility in Orlando, Florida, praising it as an ideal institution for "disadvantaged children" while re-emphasizing that his education agenda would focus on school choice. The Nintendo Switch, a hybrid game machine that works as both a console at home and a portable tablet on the go, made its debut.



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One year ago: Officials testifying at a Senate hearing said Defense Department leaders had delayed sending help for hours on Jan. 6, despite an urgent plea for reinforcement from police protecting the U.S. Capitol building. Video showed a dramatic escalation of violence by security forces in Myanmar against opponents of a February military coup; a U.N. official said 38 people were killed. The manager of the Texas power grid was fired following February's deadly blackouts that left millions of people without electricity and heat for days. A man who admitted using a van to kill 10 pedestrians in Toronto in April 2018 was found guilty on charges including first-degree murder, bringing an automatic life sentence. Former NFL player Kellen Winslow II was sentenced in California to 14 years in prison for multiple rapes and other sexual offenses against five women.

Today's Birthdays: Singer-musician Mike Pender (The Searchers) is 81. Movie producer-director George Miller is 77. Actor Hattie Winston is 77. Singer Jennifer Warnes is 75. Actor-director Tim Kazurinsky is 72. Singer-musician Robyn Hitchcock is 69. Actor Robert Gossett is 68. Rock musician John Lilley is 68. Actor Miranda Richardson is 64. Radio personality Ira Glass is 63. Actor Mary Page Keller is 61. Olympic track and field gold medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey is 60. Former NFL player and College Football Hall of Famer Herschel Walker is 60. Actor Laura Harring is 58. Contemporary Christian musician Duncan Phillips (Newsboys) is 58. Rapper-actor Tone Loc (lohk) is 56. Actor Julie Bowen is 52. Country singer Brett Warren (The Warren Brothers) is 51. Actor David Faustino is 48. Gospel singer Jason Crabb is 45. Singer Ronan Keating (Boyzone) is 45. Rapper Lil' Flip is 41. Actor Jessica Biel is 40. Rock musician Blower (AKA Joe Garvey) (Hinder) is 38. Musician Brett Hite (Frenship) is 36. Pop singer Camila Cabello is 25. Actor Thomas Barbusca (TV: "The Mick") is 19. Actor Reylynn Caster is 19.